

RALPH'S WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS – 2004

Wildlife diary and news for Dec 27 - Jan 2 (Week 53)

Sun 02 Jan

A. Stansted Forest west of road

The sun was shining brightly throughout this second part of my New Year's Day birdwatch - yesterday I worked the shoreline and today the woods to give me a species total of 76 birds for the two days.

I walked up the east side of the Forest from the Middle Lodge (across the road from the Main Avenue carpark) to the field edge south of Lodge Farm, then came back via Forestside church and the Forest track just in from the west side of the road.

By the drive to the house the trees were full of Chaffinches and around the Rough Avenue I found a good number of Redwing in the trees with the sounds of Nuthatch, Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker and other woodland birds. Here I also added Marsh Tit and Bullfinch to my list and as I walked north I began to see and hear Fieldfare making their way south along the Ladies Walk (Wood Pasture area) which I crossed to walk up the outside of the woodland to the top of Rosamunds Hill where I re-entered the trees in the Wythy Piece area (hoping to put up Woodcock or Hare, but no luck with either). One surprise here was to find much Heath Groundsel in good health, several plants having flower buds with some flowers open.

On the open fields north of the Forest and south of Lodge Farm Rooks were searching the ground for food and a couple of Mistle Thrush were spotted while sweeping the ground with my bins (I also glimpsed what were probably Skylarks dropping to the ground where they became invisible leaving me to speculate if they might have been Woodlark which are not unknown in this general area).

Nothing special seen on the way back to the car but in the carpark the noises of several Jackdaws in South Coopers Wood gave me species number 76 for my year list!

B. Latest News and Reports

BIRDS

1. Black-necked Grebe: One on sea well south of South Parade Pier at Southsea on Dec 30 seen from Puckpool (IoW)
2. Slavonian Grebe: Peak count of 9 on sea off Church Norton on Dec 27 (John Reeves); Two off Seaview/Puckpool Point IoW on Jan 2 and one seen by Peter Raby off Black Point in Chichester Harbour on Jan 1
3. Bittern: one reported 'booming' at Yarmouth IoW on Jan 1??? A more certain report from Dan Houghton of one seen in flight near the flooded fields north of Titchfield Haven on Dec 29
4. Bewick's Swan: 38 on Arun floodplain at Warningcamp/Wepham near Arundel (Pete Hughes Jan 1)
5. Black Swan: One at Keyhaven on Dec 30 (Paul Matthews) - presumably the bird which arrived in the Lymington area on Nov 14. The Gosport Cockle Pond bird was still there on Dec 29
6. Black Brant: One is now being seen in the Gosport area (both in Haslar Creek and in the MoD playing fields by Military Road) since Dec 29 (found by Trevor Carpenter) and Jason Crook saw one at Farlington Marshes on Dec 31 (Note that the Pagham Harbour North Walls bird has not been reported since Dec 18)

7. Pale-bellied Brent: One at Newtown Harbour on loW on Dec 30 and one was at the Gosport MoD playing fields on that same day
8. Barnacle Goose: Richard Carpenter could only see eight of the normal complement of nine Baffins Gang birds at Titchfield Haven on Dec 31
9. Mallard: Female with 8 ducklings at Arundel WWT on Dec 27 (Sharafin Gardiner)
10. Pintail: December peak of 392 in Pagham Harbour (with 960+ Wigeon) (Owen Mitchell)
11. Ferruginous Duck: An anonymous report of one on Sinah gravel pit on Jan 1 - not seen on Jan 2
12. Spotted Redshank: One on fields near Church Norton - also Goosander in Harbour mouth and 3 Slav Grebes on sea (Robert Watson 31 Dec)
13. Whimbrel: One in Bosham Channel south east of Chidham (John Swallow Jan 1)
14. Common Sandpiper: One at Budds Farm on Jan 1 (Peter Raby) George Spraggs saw one there on Sep 16 and I saw one there on Oct 4 but I have heard of no other sightings there this winter until now.
15. Green Sandpiper: 3 were in the Alresford area on Dec 29 (Steve Mansfield) and one Dec 28 Martin Hampton saw one by the River Rother just east of Petersfield (at Rotherlands). There was also one at the Lower Test on Dec 30
16. Iceland Gull: The second winter bird which has been at Gosport Cackle Pond from Dec 29 to at least Dec 31 also visited Titchfield Haven on Dec 30. This is almost certainly the same bird that was at Gosport last winter when it was seen at Gosport on many dates from Jan 31 to May 4 but probably arrived in our area in mid-Dec 2003 (seen on loW)
17. Ring-billed Gull: The Gosport Cackle Pond bird was taking bread on Dec 30 (Graham Osborne)
18. Black-headed Gull: Leucistic bird off Springvale loW on Dec 28 (On Jan 1 I saw one near Langstone with well developed black head still white around bill)
19. Sandwich Tern: The adult plus first winter birds still off Black Point on Jan 1 (Peter Raby)
20. Razorbill: Two in the Chichester Harbour mouth on Dec 30 (seen off the Lifeboat Station by Graham Osborne)
21. Wood Lark: Seven seen in Shedfield area near Wickham by Will Walmsley on Jan 1 (five were there two weeks ago) and John Clark had two singing on Jan 1 (probably in the Fleet/Aldershot area)
22. Wood Pigeon: Probably nesting in Eastbourne area - carrying sticks into conifer on Dec 26. (David Jode) I found what looked like a newly hatched egg by the roadside in Racton on Jan 1.
23. Water Pipit: Probably four present at the Lower Test Marshes on Dec 30 (David Holland)
24. Waxwing: 10 near Newport loW on Jan 1
25. Great Grey Shrike: The bird in the Pitts Wood area of the NW New Forest was heard singing by Mike Rafter on Dec 30
26. Blackbird: I have heard one singing in my garden before first light on Jan 1 and 2 and it may well have been doing so before I was up to hear it for some time as Richard Carpenter first heard one singing in the Hill Head area on Dec 26
27. Hawfinch: One seen at the Romsey Mercer Way site on Dec 30

28. Snow Buntings: 3 at East Head on Dec 29 and 30
29. Corn Buntings (with single Tree Sparrow) in game cover on Kithurst Hill above Storrington south of Pulborough (Chris Corrigan Jan 1); also an anonymous report of them on the IoW on Jan 1 (no name, no location)
30. Escapes: Ring-necked Parakeet at Shanklin IoW on Dec 30 (said to be a resident in the area)

PLANTS

1. Hazel: More catkins were fully open by the Hayling Billy trail in Havant (end of Grove Road) on Dec 30
2. Sweet Violet: One flower open on plants in Langstone Mill Lane on Dec 30
3. Cow Parsley: Newly flowering plants have been found at the top end of Wade Lane at Langstone and at the New Lane end of the Hayling Billy line in the past few days.
4. Giant Butterbur: Several of the *Petasides japonicus* plants beside the Langbrook Stream at Langstone were up above ground on Dec 30 with their pale green bracts forming small cabbage shapes (no flowers yet) but something (maybe Wood Pigeons) had eaten out the heart of these 'cabbages' to leave just a bowl shape which is unlikely to flower.
5. Lords and Ladies: The first leaves started to push up above ground in the Havant area on Dec 30
6. Heath Groundsel: Many fresh looking plants among newly planted trees in Stansted Forest on Jan 2 - at least one plant had flowers starting to open.
7. Field Madder: Just one flower open on plants by the Langbrook Stream on Dec 30
8. Blue Fleabane: Still flowering on the A27 embankment above the Chalk Dock shore of Langstone Harbour on Jan 1

INSECTS

1. No news

OTHER

1. Water Vole: These are not often seen in the winter but Colin Bates saw one by the Itchen at Winchester (St Cross) on Dec 29
2. Common Seal: One of the Chichester Harbour animals was seen by George Spraggs from Black Point on Dec 28

Sat 01 Jan

A. New Year's Day Birdwatch

Best bird of the day was number two on my list - a Blackbird in full song before there was any light to see it by, singing among the Robins that had been heard ever since I woke.

I set out on my bike at 07:40 when it was light enough to see where I was going and I headed west via Bedhampton towards Broadmarsh. At Bedhampton Mill pond I found my first good birds - four Gadwall, and after heading downstream to the Broadmarsh slipway I had my first of four Kingfisher sightings - one flew down the Hermitage stream as if heading out into the harbour but it changed its mind and flew back up stream.

The tide was at its lowest and there were thousands of birds spread out across the mud of the Chalk Dock channel area, giving me most of the common waders and wildfowl including several Pintail and bringing my list up to 42 species.

I now headed east with the wind behind me and added Grey Wagtail (with a second Kingfisher sighting) by the Brockhampton stream before reaching Budds Mound from

which I could see Teal, Shoveler, Pochard and Tufted Duck (with a couple more Gadwall) on the pools - plus a pretty flock of Goldfinches. Looking out into the harbour with good visibility and a calm water surface I picked out the six Black-necked Grebe in the distant Cockle Rithe area (with a single Great Crested Grebe to confirm the size of the smaller birds with their long straight necks). There were plenty of Merganser on the water but I could not see any Goldeneye, but to make up for this I had a nice male Stonechat close to me on the mound and both Turnstone and Ringed Plover on the mud below me.

Next stop was the north pier of the old rail bridge where two birders from Surrey pointed out a Goldeneye for me and where two Bar-tailed Godwit flew over me heading into Chichester Harbour (where there were plenty more). From the carpark of The Ship on the other side of Langstone Bridge I had good views of Golden Plover over on the Northney shore and saw my third Kingfisher at Langstone Mill.

At the old mouth of the Lymbourne stream (between Langstone Mill Pond and the south end of Wade Lane) I met the party led by John Gowen and stopped to search for Stock Dove in the trees along the new course of the stream ('new' since it was diverted over 100 years ago to work the wheel at Langstone Mill). No Stock Doves here (and I did not see the Mistle Thrush that was in the pony field yesterday) but I found a small flock of them in one of the Warblington Farm fields as I continued along the shore to Emsworth with no more ticks on my list.

My last stop before the promised rain became imminent was on the northwest shore of Thorney Island where I was lucky enough to see three Bearded Tits half way down the reed stems to which they were clinging - the luck was that a party of birders already there had seen them fly in and were able to point me accurately to the spot (only twenty yards into the reeds). Down at the Great Deeps I added the Greenshank I had been hoping for, plus a Skylark, before I headed home and got my last bird - a Goldcrest - in the Billy Line behind my house.

I did not go out of my way to look for flowering plants but I did enjoy finding Blue Fleabane still out on the A27 embankment at Chalk Dock and also among the 19 flowering plant species I saw was Cow Parsley.

My count was 63, not bad for a trip that did not visit any woods or arable farmland (no Chaffinch, Rook or Jackdaw on my list) and of the shore birds the only two that I would have expected to see (but did not) were Rock Pipit and Knot. They say that tomorrow will bring a sunny morning and maybe I will be heading to the woods!

Fri 31 Dec

A. A walk down the Langbrook stream

This morning I walked down the Langbrook stream from the A27 to its mouth and came back along Mill Lane through Langstone to return via Wade Court and the Billy Line.

The first surprise was to find Doves Foot Cranesbill flowering in Juniper Square and by the Langbrook Stream Field Madder still had flowers. Redwings were in the trees along the path behind the Langbrook Close houses and a colourful Grey Wagtail was in the stream while more colour was provided by Tripe Fungus on some old logs. Down below the Mallards housing I thought I would look to see if the Giant Butterbur (the white flowered *Petasites japonicus*) had started to push up through the damp ground. Surprisingly many of the plants were well up but sadly it seemed that something (Woodpigeons) had a taste for the pale green leaf like bracts and had eaten the centre out of the top of many of the plants.

At the mouth of the stream there was a normal show of Wigeon, Brent, Shelduck and waders, and just as I was about to turn back the unmistakable sound of Canada Geese came from a flock of birds approaching me over Langstone village. I waited while they flew past and I counted around 30 birds of which number 27 was only half the size of the

others, so I am now waiting to hear of sightings of the 'Cackling Canada Goose' (the minima race bird) from Farlington Marshes or points west. What was almost certainly this same bird was at Farlington Marshes in January and February of 2004, made a brief appearance at Lymington in April, then was at Sinah Lake on Hayling at the end of July before re-appearing at the Chichester gravel pits in November (last seen by Brian Fellows on Nov 16).

Walking along Mill Lane a single Sweet Violet flower was open on the pavement edge outside the house on the corner of the entrance to Harbourside and just off Langstone Mill I have super views of at least 150 Lapwings and 50 Golden Plover in the air low overhead, gliding down onto the mud south of the Royal Oak.

From Wade Lane I watched a Mistle Thrush in the meadow south of Wade Court (where the owner of the "Granary" - the house opposite the Old Farmhouse - has recently seen a pair of Bullfinch in the garden), and at the top of the narrow lane one of the Cow Parsley plants has just started to flower.

Over by the Lymbourne stream two flowers of Lesser Celandine were fully open, and where the Billy Line passes the end of Grove Road several small Hazel trees had fully open catkins. A few yards further south of these trees my first new Lords and Ladies (Arum) leaves had just pushed up through the damp soil.

Thu 30 Dec

A. Flowers in central Havant

A pleasant surprise while rushing around doing some shopping was a large plant of Fool's Parsley (the taller subspecies) in full flower in St Faith's churchyard, flanked by two fresh plants of Nipplewort. Also seen on this trip was the Wall Lettuce still flowering in East Street, plus Hairy Bittercress, Thale Cress (in pavement cracks) and Ivy Leaved Toadflax on walls, while there are still flowers on Smooth Hawksbeard, Creeping Buttercup and Scarlet Pimpernel in my garden

B. Latest News and Reports

BIRDS

1. Red-throated Diver: On Christmas Day 8 flew west past Hengistbury Head at the mouth of Christchurch Harbour in Dorset and on Dec 27 there were two feeding in Portland Harbour and another 32 were counted passing Portland Bill going west.
2. Black-throated Diver: On Christmas Day a single bird flew east past Goring (Worthing area)
3. Great Northern Diver: On Christmas Day one was seen passing Portland Bill, maybe the same bird that was also seen from Hengistbury Head that day, along with 5 other unidentified Divers.
4. Little Grebe: Walking from Portchester Castle along the north shore of Portsmouth Harbour to Fareham Creek on Dec 27 counted 21 Dabchick along with many other birds listed below and including 29 Great Crested Grebes.
5. Great Crested Grebe: More than 23 were seen by John Clark on Dec 27 in the Fox Lane gravel pits at Yateley (just across the Berkshire border from the Moor Green pits. On Dec 28 John found 39 of them on the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood.
6. Slavonian Grebe: The only bird reported from Hampshire during the Christmas break was one off Normandy at Lymington seen on Christmas Day though there were at least two off the north east of the IoW on Dec 27 and 28.
7. Black-necked Grebe: On Dec 29 Jason Crook pointed out to me six of them fishing in the Cackle Rithe area south of the Hayling Oysterbeds and Jason told me there were at least 14 in Langstone Harbour by that date - 10 of them had been seen together off

the Oysterbeds by Simon Wright on Dec 27. This winter the number of Slavonian Grebes on the sea off Church Norton seems to be less than usual - there were 28 there for one day on Nov 24 but the count dropped to 12 on Nov 27 and I have not seen any reports of them there since a count of 9 on Dec 11, and the only current count of Grebes there is of three Black-necks seen on Boxing Day (with one other count of 2 there on Nov 24).

8. Cormorant: On Dec 25 there were 50 on St Helen's Fort at the mouth of Bembridge Harbour (IoW) but it looks as if Cormorants prefer to spend their Christmas inland - on Dec 27 Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes watched 103 fly north up the River Test at first light and on Dec 28 John Clark found 88 of them on the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood after seeing 87 on the Moor Green gravel pits just north of Yateley on Dec 27.
9. Shag: Just one single bird reported recently - seen in the Bembridge Foreland area on Dec 25
10. Great White Egret: The ringed bird was still at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 along with a total of 49 Little Egrets and on Dec 27 Paul Matthews saw 22 Little Egrets roosting on trees at Sowley Pond (I think this was well after sunrise and was a high tide rather than a night roost though it supports other evidence that the mild winter so far has kept a good number of Egrets at coastal sites rather than at more sheltered in land waters)
11. Mute Swan: John Clark counted 223 in the Ibsley section of the River Avon plus the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 (on Dec 19 he had a total of 234 when he walked from Avon Causeway to Ibsley Bridge so I don't think the number there has changed significantly)
12. Bewick's Swan: Ignoring the odd report of an unspecified number arriving at Ibsley very early (on Oct 15) which was not corroborated by any other reports I see that Bewick's have been in the Ibsley area since four were seen on Ibsley Water by Simon Ingram on Nov 27, and the flock size has remained at six birds (four adults and two young) since Dec 21 up to Dec 28. In Sussex there are probably not more than the count of 27 given by Peter Hughes for the whole Arun Valley on Dec 9, though though seem mobile in the valley from Burpham (just north of Arundel) up to the Billingshurst area north of Pulborough, and it looks as if the Arun is the only site for them in Sussex (no further reports of 4 seen near the Adur in the Henfield area on Nov 18)
13. Greylag Goose: No significant counts of these in the Christmas period, just 11 at Eastleigh Lakeside and 13 at the Testwood Lakes (both on Dec 27). On Sept 26 John Clark saw around 450 fly south from Ibsley Water (where I think they had been roosting overnight) and on Dec 19, when he walked the full stretch of the Avon from Avon Causeway to Ibsley Bridge, John came on a total of 299 Greylags but on Dec 28 he saw none in the Ringwood area (though he did not check south of Ringwood). Other than a few small groups of less than 10 it seems probable that the only other significant collection of Greylag in Hampshire is in the Fleet area where counts of up to 55 have been reported from Tundry Pond and 25 from Fleet Pond.
14. Canada Goose: Around 100 were at Titchfield Haven on Dec 26 (along with the 9 Barnacles and one hybrid Bar-head of the Baffins Gang) and 67 were in the north of Portsmouth Harbour on Dec 27.
15. Pale-bellied Brent: Simon Wright reports seeing one on Dec 27 at the north end of the Coastal Path on Hayling Island (either near the Oysterbeds or in 'Texaco Bay') and Jason Crook tells me that there is one there accompanied by two juveniles (though the juveniles will not be obviously Pale-bellied until the end of the winter). In 2003 a pair of Pale-bellieds were in the Oysterbeds area and Jason thinks the current birds (one adult plus two young) may be the offspring of the 2003 pair with one parent missing -

possibly the missing bird is the one that was seen both at Farlington Marshes and on Portsea Island by Alan Lewis on Dec 12?

16. Brant: No further sightings of the bird that was on the north Hayling fields between Dec 21 and 24 but that may well have returned to Thorney Island though it is unlikely to be the West Wittering bird (which was reported from Wittering again on Dec 27)
17. Ruddy Shelduck hybrid: Peter Raby was at the Kench on Hayling Island on Dec 28 and saw what he thought was a hybrid between a Shelduck and a Ruddy Shelduck. This could well be the hybrid that was seen several times in Langstone Harbour last winter (when there was probably a different hybrid in the Lymington area). If it is last winter's bird this is the first sighting of it in Langstone Harbour this winter - in 2003 it turned up at the Kench on Dec 18.
18. Shelduck: Trevor Carpenter had a good count of 65 Shelduck during his walk from Portchester to Fareham on Dec 27 (35 of them in Cams Bay)
19. Wigeon: Trevor also had 383 Wigeon in Cams Bay on his Dec 27 walk, and at the Moor Green complex of gravel pits on that day John Clark counted 688 (all those that would otherwise have been feeding on nearby fields had been driven back to the safety of the water by shoots in that area). On Dec 28 John counted 1580 Wigeon on the Blashford Lakes complex where he had only seen 802 on 14 Dec 2003 .
20. Gadwall: On Dec 27 John Clark had a total of 329 Gadwall on the Moor Green pits and on Dec 28 he found 803 at the Blashford Lakes (his equivalent count at Blashford on 14 Dec 2003 was only 701)
21. Pintail: There have been significant increases in numbers at both Pulborough Brooks and at Lymington recently - at Pulborough there were around 100 on Dec 22 and more than 100 at Lymington on Dec 25, though in both cases there had been higher counts of passing birds earlier in the autumn (Oct 26 brought 155 to Pulborough and at Lymington Russell Wynn reported a massive maximum count of 342 in the last week of November)
22. Shoveler: John Clark's count of these at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 was 201
23. Pochard: John Clark had 129 of these at the Moor Green lakes on Dec 27 and 162 of them at Blashford on Dec 28
24. Tufted Duck: John Clark's counts of these were 405 at Moor Green and 387 at Blashford
25. Lesser Scaup: The long staying drake was still at Scotney Court (Rye) on Dec 26 where it arrived on Nov 17 as a first for the Sussex list.
26. Eider: Two young males were in the entrance of Chichester Harbour seen by Peter Raby from Black Point on Dec 28
27. Goosander: I have already remarked that this winter is unusual in apparently having more Goosander in south Hampshire than in the north but the balance has now been restored with a count of 48 coming to roost on Grove Lake in the Moor Green complex north of Yateley on Dec 27 (prior to that the biggest count I had seen was of 8 or 9 on Tundry Pond back on Nov 25). At Blashford 27 came to roost on Dec 28. Dec 28 also brought the first report of Goosander in Langstone Harbour for this winter - Peter Raby saw three redheads fly north over the Kench and these three were almost certainly the same that were seen on the sea off Southsea that same morning.
28. Ruddy Duck: John Clark found 6 on the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 (he saw 7 there on Nov 28).
29. Red Kite: One was over the West Dean woods north of Chichester on Dec 23

30. Goshawk: Mike Russell saw one head northwest over Kingley Vale (north of Chichester) on Dec 22.
31. Escaped Falcons: On Dec 23 a Lanner was reported over the West Dean woods north of Chichester (could be the same bird that was seen over Titchfield Haven on Dec 5 and reported as a 'possible' Lanner). On Dec 26 Richard Ives watched a Saker hunting over Amberley Wild Brooks (south of Pulborough) and on Dec 26 Bob Marchant saw a Saker with jesses fly north over Titchfield Haven and land in a tree at the north end.
32. Buzzard: A couple of Havant area local sightings may be of interest. On Dec 27 Simon Wright watched one fly north over Mill Rythe on the east side of Hayling Island (where Buzzards are relatively uncommon) and on Dec 28 I watched one in level flight about 200 feet up over the fields between Racton Folly and Sindles Farm (north of Emsworth) - it was calling persistently and rolling from side to side in what I assumed was some sort of territorial display flight. On the same day Peter Raby saw six Buzzards in the air from Portsdown Hill.
33. Peregrine: One indicator of how relatively common these falcons have become is that Peter Hughes (warden of the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve) on Dec 22 reported that five different individuals had been seen over the reserve recently.
34. Avocet: 13 were still present at Farlington Marshes on Dec 28
35. Golden Plover: The first report of a flock back in a regular wintering area (by the Roman Road immediately west of Basingstoke) comes from Mike Wall who saw 100 birds there on Dec 25. A couple of interesting local sightings were of around 24 on the north Hayling fields on Dec 26 (first report at that site this winter) and of a similar number on the Wicor fields just west of Portchester at the mouth of Fareham Creek (presumably the Fareham Creek birds which have been around since mid-October). The most impressive local sighting was of 245 seen by John Shillitoe in the Hambledon area on Dec 27 (one flock of over 200 at Big West End Farm and another 40 by Long Road at Soberton). On Hayling Island Simon Wright saw more than 60 in the Verner Common area, also on Dec 27, but these may well be part of the flock that has been on Thorney Island for a long time (140 on the airfield on Sep 30)
36. Lapwing: David Taylor reports a recent increase in numbers in the Christchurch Harbour area where he estimated there were 2000 on Dec 25
37. Knot: Peter Raby found 141 at the Kench on Hayling Island on Dec 28 - the first significant count there this winter though two were there as early as Oct 18.
38. Ruff: We normally see these birds in ones or twos in the Hampshire area so I was interested to see that at Sandwich Bay in Kent they had 14 on Dec 11 and 28 on Dec 14. There was also a count of 12 at Pulborough Brooks on Dec 2.
39. Woodcock: One was flushed by Bernie Forbes in the West Dean woods (north of Chichester) on Dec 23 but a more exciting report of one comes from Steve Copsey who on Boxing Day put one up from Oxleys Copse (a small woodland beside a busy road along the southern perimeter of Fareham)
40. Bar-tailed Godwit: Back on Dec 19 Kevin Stouse saw one in full summer plumage on the Warblington shore east of Langstone and on Dec 26 Mike Collins saw a similar bird at the Northney marina slipway. Since then Jason Crook has told me that he recently found three such summer plumaged birds in the Northney/Langstone area and knows of at least one in Langstone Harbour. Of more interest to me was his theory that such birds have somehow got their biological clocks out of sync and moulted in the reverse to normal sequence (wearing winter plumage in the summer and vice versa). He has some evidence for this in having seen adult Dunlin in winter plumage in the summer but I would be very interested to hear other evidence (could it be that some birds are

always in summer plumage, others always in winter plumage?). I think most people would agree that this is not the result of a failure to moult - any bird that failed to moult once or twice a year would soon have very tatty plumage and might lose the ability to fly or maintain its body heat.

41. Spotted Redshank: Simon Wright saw one in the Hayling Oysterbeds Redshank roost on Dec 27 and Jason Crook tells me it has probably been roosting there for a couple of months. On the Normandy Marshes at Lymington 5 of these birds were present for the week prior to Dec 27 (and there had been four there earlier).
42. Greenshank: Trevor Carpenter suggests that if anyone needs this species for their New Year's Day list they could almost certainly tick it from the A27 roadside in the Delme Pool at the head of Fareham Creek where it has been present for weeks.
43. Sandpipers: Four Green were at the Testwood Lakes on Dec 22 and six were at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 when two Common were at Curbridge on the Hamble River and one was by the Medina River south of Cowes (IoW) on that day. Since collecting info for this report I have heard of one on the River Rother in the 'Rotherlands' area just east of Petersfield.
44. Great Skua: One was lingering off Portland Bill from Dec 26 to 28, harrying the many gulls feeding there.
45. Ring-billed Gull: The regular bird was at the Gosport Cackle Pond on Dec 25 and on Dec 29 I thought I had seen one at the Hayling Oysterbeds when I found what looked to be an adult plumaged gull with pale grey mantle, narrow tertial step, and bright yellow bill with a very prominent broad black band around it. Luckily Jason Crook was nearby and while he did not see the gull I had been looking at (it flew off while my back was turned before I could reach him so I did not get a chance of seeing its wingtip mirrors) he pointed out that an adult Ring-billed Gull would at this time of year have small black dots or smudges on its head and neck where the bird I saw had a clean white head and just a little light brown smudging on its neck - Jason had earlier seen what was probably the gull I saw and said it was probably a fourth or fifth year Herring Gull having the black band on its bill as the last sign of its 'immaturity'.
46. Lesser Black-back Gull: John Clark found more than 400 night roosting at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28 (but only 2 Great Blackbacks there)
47. Yellow-legged Gull: John found at least 10 of these in the gull roost at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 28
48. Iceland Gull: One or more of these were in the Solent area in the early months of 2004 giving rise to at least 30 reports of single birds between Jan 24 and May 4 - probably just one bird but it was seen at Gosport Cackle Pond and Forton Lake, Titchfield Haven, Lymington and at the Lynbottom tip on the IoW. This autumn there was an isolated report of one flying over Pagham Harbour on Oct 24 but nothing else until now when Ian Calderwood saw one at the Gosport Cackle Pond on Dec 28.
49. Great Blackback Gull: On Dec 28 I estimated there were 200 among the collection of around 4000 gulls on the Southleigh Farm fields between Havant and Emsworth (close to the Southleigh Forest rubbish tip)
50. Kittiwake: A large number of mixed gulls and Gannets were feeding on fish off Portland Bill before Christmas and I have already reported 300 Kittiwake there on Dec 23 but I now see that on Dec 24 there were more than 600 there. Possibly stragglers from the huge flock at Portland were 11 Kittiwake seen from Hengistbury Head (Christchurch Harbour) on Dec 25.
51. Sandwich Tern: Mike Collins saw one perched on a buoy off Langstone village on Dec 26 and on Dec 28 Peter Raby saw an adult with a first winter bird from Black Point on Hayling,

52. Commic Tern: One was reported off Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 by Christopher Parker - presumably it was seen well enough to be sure that it was not one of the Sandwich Terns that are wintering here.
53. Auks: A stream of at least 6000 flew past Portland Bill on Dec 25 (reported as passing at a rate of up to 150 per minute for an hour).
54. Waxwing: A probable sighting of 5 in a Stubbington garden near Titchfield Haven on Dec 26 - the observer was a non-birder who picked these unusual birds out from a bird book. On Dec 27 a flock of 10 were at the village pond in Falmer (north of Brighton) but do not seem to have stayed there.
55. Stonechat: For local interest John Shillitoe found two near Big West End Farm north of Hambledon on Dec 27 and on Dec 29 I saw one on the southern bund wall of the Oysterbeds lagoon on Hayling.
56. Fieldfare: A total of 2410 was reported from the New Forest on Dec 18 by the various people conducting the Shrike survey. More recently around 100 were seen along the Titchfield Canal path on Dec 26 and more than 300 came to roost at the Testwood Lakes site on Dec 27 with smaller numbers reported almost everywhere.
57. Redwing: The total seen in the New Forest on Dec 18 was only 780 but on Dec 27 Colin Allen reported 'many everywhere' in the New Forest and from north Hampshire John Clark wrote of 'very large numbers everywhere recently'.
58. Mistle Thrush: On Dec 28 I heard at least two singing strongly in the Havant area
59. Firecrest: On Dec 27 Mark Rolfe found one in Oxleys Copse - a small urban woodland just south of Fareham near the road to Stubbington and on the same day Paul Winter had one pass through his garden at Rownhams on the edge of Southampton.
60. Bearded Tit: Rosi Woods found 15 when she visited Thorney Island on Dec 27 and on that day George Spraggs saw 7 at Titchfield Haven.
61. Marsh Tit: On Dec 28 I watched one on the ground by the side of the road running through Stansted Forest and saw it tug up a beakful of moss or grass and fly off with it - nest building already?
62. Coal Tit: I heard these singing strongly on both Dec 26 and 27
63. Nuthatch: I think I am not the only person to note a significant 'springtime' increase in Nuthatch noise recently - I heard them in several places in both the Hollybank Woods and Stansted Forest on Dec 28.
64. Treecreeper: Steve Copsey was lucky enough to see two of these in Oxleys Copse south of Fareham on Dec 26 and other sightings are reported from the Isle of Wight and the New Forest - I wonder if these are showing themselves more as they feed up prior to breeding?
65. Great Grey Shrike: It would seem that the November search for these Shrikes in the New Forest on Nov 21 only managed to find two birds and on the weekend of Dec 18/19 it was much the same. From the survey and other reports I think there may be Shrikes wintering in the Black Gutter/Pitts Wood area, at Cranes Moor, on Broomy Plain, at Holm Hill west of Rhinefield, at Buckherd Bottom (between Roe Inclosure and the A31), and at Holmsley Walk (south of Burley), so the upper limit for the number in the Forest is probably six birds.
66. Magpies: Trevor Carpenter has recently noticed what seems to be a regular nightly Magpie roost in trees by the southwest quadrant of Junction 11 on the M27 (main junction for Fareham) - he estimates at least 20 birds using it but has so far only seen them from a moving car,

67. Raven: reports from the New Forest Shrike survey give a count of 7 birds seen on Nov 21 and 8 on Dec 18. Other recent reports are of one over the West Dean Woods (north of Chichester) on Dec 23 and of two over Parkhurst Forest (IoW) on Dec 26, while on Dec 27 Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes site at Totton saw 4 (all calling at each other) on the electricity pylons which cross the River Test there.
68. Tree Sparrow: I see that a flock of 13 were seen at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Dec 18 but I also see that the large flock that was in the Rye area in November has not been mentioned since Nov 27
69. Brambling: 40 were seen in Eartham Wood (by the Chichester to Petworth road) on Dec 23 when a few more were in the West Dean woods. On Dec 28 there were still some in Mark Ash Wood (New Forest)
70. Siskin: Although a few have been seen in the New Forest there is a notable absence of these birds everywhere at the moment though a few more Redpoll are starting to be reported.
71. Bullfinch: Several reports of small groups (max count of 14 in the Eartham Woods north east of Chichester on Dec 23) seem to indicate an influx of continental birds - locally I was told of two suddenly appearing in the grounds of Wade Court at Langstone where they are not normally seen.
72. Snow Bunting: Up to seven birds were regularly reported from the East Head area at the mouth of Chichester Harbour between Nov 11 and 30 when they vanished. One bird was seen in the Chidham area on Dec 5 but on Dec 27 three were seen back at East Head by Cliff Oakley (and another report of at least one there on that day seems to have got onto Birdline)
73. Corn Bunting: The big flock at Rye Harbour which had a peak count of 165 birds in November has not been mentioned since Dec 8 but on Dec 27 we are told there were still more than 120 birds there.

PLANTS

1. Treacle Mustard: On Dec 28 I was excited to find at least a dozen plants with flowers, seeds, and their distinctive strap shaped leaves in a field close to Stubbermere Pond (west of Stantsted Forest Sawmill). This is the first time I have seen this species in 2004 and never expected to find it in December.
2. Field Pennycress: This was also present with flowers and seeds in the field at Stubbermere.
3. Lesser Stitchwort: Brian Fellows reports that this is still flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - I have not seen it anywhere else.
4. Dog's Mercury: I found the first fresh plants on Dec 28 at two places in the Ems valley - one by Woodlands Lane at Walderton had its male flowers showing if not yet open for business.
5. Fool's Parsley: A big plant of this (the large sub-species) was in full flower in St Faith's churchyard in central Havant on Dec 30.

INSECTS

1. No current news

OTHER

1. Common Seal: One was seen on the Isle of Wight side of the Solent going west of Fishbourne on Dec 27

2. Fallow Deer: A big buck led 19 does across the open fields of the Stansted East Park towards Oak Copse as I was cycling over the newly resurfaced cycle track in bright sunlight on Dec 28.
3. Roe Deer: These are listed among the species seen on Hayling Island in Pete Durnell's book on the Island's wildlife but they are certainly not regular residents of the Island and I have no records of them there in the present century so a sighting of two on the large open north Hayling fields by Simon Wright on Dec 26 was noteworthy - he doesn't say if they were a buck and doe pair that could stay and breed ...
4. Red Squirrel: Nine of these were seen in Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight on Dec 26 and two more were seen in the Dodnor area of the Medina River valley south of Cowes on Dec 28

Wed 29 Dec

A. Hayling Oysterbeds

On my way back from a visit to people on Hayling Island I paid a quick visit to the Oysterbeds at the time when the tide was just starting to fall, and this gave me good views of many small waders eagerly starting to feed on the small area of newly exposed mud at the north end of Stoke Bay (immediately south of the Oysterbeds area). The majority were of course Dunlin but there were at least 50 Ringed Plover and a good number of Turnstone there. Behind them, on the south bund wall of the Oysterbeds, a male Stonechat was perched on tall grasses.

Several Merganser and Little Grebes were the only birds on the lagoon water other than a single medium sized 'Herring' gull which turned sideways to show me a bright yellow bill with a broad black band around it. In other respects it seemed to be a fully adult gull with white head, neck and underparts, pale grey wings and mantle, and a narrow white 'tertial step' between the wings and tail. This combination immediately made me think it might be a Ring-billed Gull, and as I had seen Jason Crook settling down on the other side of the lagoon I decided to disturb him and ask for 'professional advice'. Before I reached him I turned back and saw that the gull in question had taken off and was disappearing into the gloom of the western sky, but Jason was able to set my mind at rest by saying that if it had been a Ring-bill it would have had a head and neck 'speckled' with black markings, and that what I saw was probably a bird he had seen earlier and classed as a fourth or fifth year Herring Gull.

Jason had been watching six Black-necked Grebe in the Cackle Rithe area well south of the Oysterbeds on the east side of the Langstone Channel, and I had a good if distant view of them before I returned home.

Tue 28 Dec

A. Stansted and Walderton

Having seen Celandines and Hazel catkins already flowering I thought that I would enjoy this morning's sunshine by cycling via the Stansted estate to Walderton to see if the Green Hellebore plants could be found in Woodlands Lane. When I got there I could find no sign of the Hellebores but I did find my first fresh Dog's Mercury and en route I came on a plant that I have not seen anywhere this year, and found it in flower - Treacle Mustard.

Before setting out, stepping out into the garden with the bird's breakfast before I had my own, I was greeted by Mistle Thrush song - not the first of the Stormcock's autumn season which started in November (one was heard in north Hampshire on Nov 11 and on Nov 17 Mike Collins told me he had heard one signing for several days at Goodwood House) but today I heard song not only around my garden but also in the Southleigh Farm area between Havant and north Emsworth.

Also on the Southleigh Farm fields I saw the expected assemblage of gulls resting between visits to the Southleigh Forest rubbish tip - I can only guess at a total number approaching 5000 in several 'encampments' out on the plain of growing winter cereal but I did scan the nearest group which had around 200 Blackbacks in it (mostly Greaters).

Entering Hollybank Woods the first thing I heard was a noisy Nuthatch before I picked out Coal Tit song to add to the Blue and Great Tits, Robins and Dunnocks, Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves that I had already heard singing - strangely the Song Thrushes have recently fallen silent.

Diverting from my route to visit the Holly Lodge 'open space' I soon saw Redwings furtively snatching Holly Berries which cascade down many of the Holly trees that give Hollybank Woods their names, and while I was enjoying the brilliant red and green of these trees in the bright morning sunlight I was also inhaling the perfume of the place - the strong scent of methane wafted from the rubbish tip by the northerly wind.

Next stop was at the much more pleasantly smelling dung heap in the fields across the track from Stubbermere Pond as I headed towards Stansted Sawmill. I always stop here to check for 'arable weeds' and I was not disappointed today. Nothing special by the dung heap which is just west of the last cottage on your right (if you were coming down the lane from the sawmill) but the field on the left of the lane (just east of the pond) held much more than I expected after the frosts. Common Fumitory was still flowering and Field Penny-cress had both flowers and its distinctive seeds (like miniature versions of Honesty seeds), and there were the usual Field Speedwell, Red Deadnettle, Charlock and Shepherd's Purse. After listing these I saw an unobtrusive yellow flower which did not look like Charlock so I went to check it out and found Treacle Mustard in flower and seed, clearly identified by its long thin strap-shaped leaves and long thin slightly curly seeds. Having seen one I looked around and discovered at least a dozen plants of this species, and if anyone wants to see them go into the field by the fence gap near the gate, turn left and walk about 15 paces parallel to the road, then turn right and go about four paces into the field where you should find a prominent specimen with many others widely scattered as individual plants further along the field.

On the roadside outside the Stansted 'Main Avenue' carpark I stopped to have a good look at a Marsh Tit which was apparently searching for food on the ground but before I went on I saw it pull up a beakful of moss or grass and fly off with it - could it already be nesting?

Crossing the Stansted East Park by the newly resurfaced track leading to Woodlands Lane I had a great view of a Fallow buck leading his harem of 18 or 20 does across the open fields towards Oak Copse (near the road to Broadreed Farm), and at the top of the hill leading down to Walderton I stopped outside Lordington Copse to search for the Hellebores - no sign of them and no flowers on the Lesser Periwinkle but the buds on Spurge Laurel looked as if they would soon be open and I found one tiny male plant of Dog's Mercury not yet old enough to hold itself erect but nevertheless bearing the buds of its male flowers.

In the Racton area I stopped to look at the River Ems flowing under the road to Funtington, but despite recent rain there was just one small pool of water, the stream bed being quite dry as far as I could see (the water that should flow here is pumped out at Walderton and held in a hilltop reservoir to supply the village of Walderton and surrounding district - more water is pumped up at 'Deep Springs' just before the river reaches Westbourne and it is this which flows through Emsworth!)

Turning right onto the single track road from Racton to Aldsworth I found quite a few more fresh Dog's Mercury plants and as I reached the top of the steep hill at the start of this road I saw a flock of around 100 Lapwing flying slowly north from the coast - perhaps looking for local feeding? As they drifted north I heard the cries of a Buzzard above me and saw it rocking from side to side (like a fighter plane signalling that it had just downed an enemy plane) as it called - maybe an early proclamation that this was its territory and that it was

thinking of nesting there? This reminded me that at the roadside as I left Racton I had seen what appeared to be a freshly hatched Wood Pigeon's egg! While here I also saw a Kestrel working its way up the valley of the Ems. regularly turning into the wind as if about to hover but never doing so - perhaps it could find no sign of potential prey in the fields below it?

At Aldsworth Pond I could at first see only three Coot on the water, now quite deep, but a group of half a dozen Gadwall must have seen me as they took off in panic and shot over me.

Hogweed was still flowering healthily near the pond, and back at home I saw flowers on one of the thousand small plants of Hairy Bittercress growing along the footings of the walls, and several flowers on Ivy Leaved Toadflax further up the walls - in my garden there is a fresh flower on Creeping Buttercup and several red but unopen flower buds on Scarlet Pimpernel.

Wildlife diary and news for Dec 20 - 26 (Week 52)

[Sun 26 Dec](#)

C. Warblington

This morning I walked to Nore Barn along the Warblington shore, coming back across the fields. While still close to home I saw three or more Redwing in trees outside Fairfield School, and by the path from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane I heard Coal Tit song to add to that of several Great and Blue Tits heard earlier (along with Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Song Thrush, Wren, Dunnock, Robin and Starling).

On Pook Lane south of the A27 the big patch of Wavy Bittercress was still flowering unharmed by the frost, and at the southern end of the lane I found that the flock of Brent and Black-tailed Godwits that is normally in the Warblington farm fields east of Pook Lane was today in the Wade Court Farm fields to the west of the lane.

On the harbour the tide was nearly up and there were many birds roosting on the Northney saltings, among them what I took to be more than 250 Golden Plover though I was looking into the sun and could not be sure.

The best bird was a Spotted Redshank seen first on the Nore Barn shore before it flew towards the Maisemore Gardens creek. - **Possible first sighting of the Nore Barn Spotted Redshank.**

While I was watching this I was overtaken by people from Emsworth who told me that there has recently been a number of Pintail off the west Emsworth shore where I saw just one on my last walk along it.

Going back via Warblington Church I found a flock of 20 Pied Wagtail in the field east of the church after seeing a flock of around 25 Skylark in the air over the fields and a couple of Stock Dove.

At the A27/A259 junction Black Knapweed was still in flower and further west along the Emsworth Road into Havant I found Stone Parsley still flowering.

D. Latest news and reports

BIRDS

31. Divers: On Dec 23 Bob Marchant saw both a Great Northern and a Red-Throated Diver fly in and land in the mouth of Southampton Water between Fawley and Hook,

and on Dec 24 Andy Johnson saw a Black-throated Diver in the mouth of Chichester Harbour off Black Point where one had been seen on Nov 20.

32. Great Crested Grebe: No substantial flocks in the Solent area but these birds seem to enjoy the Kent coast - in addition to the flock in Rye Bay which numbered 586 on Dec 3 I have recently seen that there was another flock of 118 on the north Kent coast (off Reculver between Herne Bay and Margate) on Dec 5, and another 41 in Sandwich Bay on Dec 6 - by Dec 9 the Reculver flock was up to 148 birds.
33. Black Necked Grebe: There were at least 8 in Langstone Harbour on Dec 19 when Andy Johnson saw three in the harbour 'Deeps' area off the Oysterbeds and saw another 5 further south down the Langstone Channel - sounds as if they were in the same area where Barry Collins saw 10 together on Nov 27.
34. Little Egret: With the tide high in the late morning of Dec 24 I came on at least 16 Egrets in the meadow on the north side of Northwood Lane on Hayling (south end of the footpath running south from Bridge Farm to Middlestoke Farm)
35. Bewick's Swan: On Dec 21 Geoff Dicker saw 6 at Ibsley (four adults plus two first winter birds) topping the count of 4 seen there on Nov 27 by Simon Ingram. Those six are the only ones I know of in Hampshire, but in Sussex there were at least 15 on the River Arun - 12 in the Burpham/Wepham area down near Arundel in two flocks of 7 and 5, and three much further north on flooded fields by the A272 between Billingshurst and Wishborough Green
36. Bean Goose: In my notes for Dec 23 I reported the story of the 23 Bean Geese on the north Hayling fields as I understood it at that time but since then I have discovered that the person who actually found this record breaking flock was Andy Johnson and the date of the find was Dec 21. I see from Andy's own account that the Bean Geese, and a flock of 1800 Brent plus one Brant, were 'moved on by the farmer and his gun' and flew off south west soon after he found them on Dec 21 but the Bean Geese returned to be seen on Dec 22, 23, and on the morning of Dec 24 when they were again disturbed at around 10am (a little over an hour before I went there and field to see them) by what seems to have been a birder stalking them, probably to get close up photos. No one seems to have seen them since then but I would be very interested to know how confident Paul Winter was in his identification of a flock of '23 Greylag Geese' flying north over the Lower Test reserve at 10:41am that morning (I guess the flock could well have flown west along the Solent and then north up Southampton Water in a little over 40 minutes). Perhaps they stopped off at Bransbury Common? The only possible flaw in this theory is that Simon Ingram, who seem to have been the last to see them on Hayling, says they flew north, but they could easily have turned to fly west over Langstone Bridge...
37. White Front Goose: Another good goose record for Hampshire which may have escaped the knowledge of those Hampshire birders who do not check the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website 'Wildlife News' which appears under the Wildlife Reserves tab of their home page is that Graham Dennis, the warden of Pamber Forest reserve north of Basingstoke, reports that on Dec 19 a flock of 30 White-fronts were seen to fly over Pamber, and unless hard weather does bring these geese south later this winter this may well be the biggest flock to be seen in Hampshire this winter. This is the first mention of the species in Hampshire this winter, and in the Jan to March period of 2004 I only heard of six records of White-fronts - all of them ones or twos in Greylag flocks. In Sussex a flock of 59 was in the Cuckmere Valley on Dec 22 (and there could well be another 60 or more in the Rye area plus a few at Pevensy levels).
38. Greylag Goose: See my notes on Bean Goose above for my conjecture that the flock of 23 which Paul Winter saw flying north over the Lower Test reserve on Dec 24 where actually the 23 Bean Geese disturbed from Hayling some 40 minutes before Paul saw them.

39. Brent Goose: Of local interest in Havant I came on a flock of around 60 (with 100 Black-tailed Godwit) on the shore field west of Pook Lane (and between the Lane and Wade Court Farm). These birds have been regularly seen on the Warblington Farm fields west of Pook Lane, and I do not recall seeing Brent on this new field ever before (plenty of Curlew and other waders use it).
40. Brant: Large numbers of Brent regularly feed on the north Hayling fields each winter but Andy Johnson, a newcomer now living on the island, has just discovered that a Brant is sometimes among them and it has been seen there on Dec 21, 23 and 24 by various birders coming to see the Bean Geese - one person who saw it was Barry Collins who says he has seen the same bird on Thorney Island but gives no details of dates - maybe it is the same bird that has been seen at West Wittering from Nov 9 to 28 but has not been reported from there since then.
41. Teal: On Dec 22 a flock of more than 60 were back on the flooded Wade Court south meadow for the first time this winter - with them were around 40 Mallard and the usual Moorhen. When the Teal are feeding on this wetland their lovely 'belling noise' is much louder than when they are on Langstone pond or on the sea - perhaps it is a sign of their excitement in find so much food on the newly flooded land where the water has brought all the worms to the surface?
42. Mallard: On Nov 3 two newly hatched broods of Mallard ducklings were reported - a family of six at the Eastleigh Lakeside site and one of 13 'somewhere in Sussex' - and since then I have seen a pair of Mallards mating so it is not entirely surprising that John Shillitoe should find a female Mallard with 11 tiny ducklings in his garden near Wickham in the Meon valley on Dec 22.
43. Smew: None of these have so far appeared anywhere west of Rye Harbour but on Dec 24 the total there got into double figures for the first time with 9 at Castle Water and 2 at Scotney Court (5 drakes in the total)
44. Sparrowhawk: A male was hunting up the Billy Line behind my garden here in Havant on Boxing Day morning.
45. Avocet: By Dec 21 a flock on the north Kent coast at Oare Marshes near Faversham had built up to 73 birds - maybe the hard frost since then will have persuaded them to join the thousand or more that are by now probably present in Poole Harbour.
46. Golden Plover: Looking into the sun without my telescope on Boxing Day morning I had the impression that the flock on the Northney saltings numbered 250 or more but I am not totally confident that the birds I was looking at were Golden Plover.
47. Lapwing: Paul Winter found a flock of 550 at the Lower Test Marshes on Dec 24, more than doubling the count of 212 at the Testwood Lakes on Dec 12.
48. Snipe: A count of 85 seen on Dec 23 near Burpham village by the River Arun (a mile or so upstream from Arundel) must have been an impressive sight.
49. Whimbrel: A wintering bird was seen by Paul Winter in the Eling Great Marsh area at the top of Southampton Water on Dec 24 - this seems to be a new arrival as none have been reported from Southampton Water since the passage birds left.
50. Spotted Redshank: One was off Nore Barn at the west end of the Emsworth shore at high tide on Dec 26 to give me a Boxing Day bonus. There is often a Greenshank in this area and my first distant sight of a very pale wader immediately made me assume it would turn out to be a Greenshank but I had to revise this opinion when it took off and flew showing long red legs and no white trailing edge to its wings. Before it took off I had seen that it had shining white underparts and a silvery grey back, and I feel confident of its identity although I could not get a decent view of the long stilleto bill nor did I hear the 'Chewit' call. The bird seemed restless as if newly arrived and unaware of

the best place to roost during the high tide, and I could not refind it after it flew towards the Maismore Gardens stream creek.

51. Sandpipers: Green Sandpipers seem to be in short supply this winter with the only likely place to see one in Hampshire being the Lower Test area where at least one has been present through December, increasing to 2 there on Dec 24, when there were also 2 Common Sandpipers at that site (there are probably still others on the Itchen in Southampton and on the Hamble at Curdridge though I have no recent reports of them)
52. Little Gull: Up to Oct 30 these were to be seen in numbers along the south coast but since then I have heard of just two reports. One was of three adults off Nettlestone Point (north east corner of the IoW) on Nov 24, and now Andy Johnson has seen one adult at Black Point on Hayling on Dec 20
53. Ring-billed Gull: It may well be that the Gosport Cockle Pond bird is still there but has ceased to be newsworthy - the last I heard of it was on Dec 5. In the latest news is a report of one at Ferrybridge (where Portland Bill is joined to the mainland) seen on Dec 20 by 'Anon'.
54. Yellow Legged Gull: Ian Watts saw four at the mouth of the River Itchen in Southampton on Dec 21 and Paul Winter saw 2 at Eling Great Marsh, a few miles further up Southampton Water, on Dec 24
55. Kittiwake: The Portland Bill website records, on Dec 23, that 'a substantial feeding flock of gulls and Gannets has been building up around the tide race off the Bill lately, with 300 Kittiwakes, 70 Gannets and 2 Mediterranean Gulls among larger numbers of Herring and Common Gulls there today'. Another 12 Kittiwake were over the sea off Ventnor, also on Dec 23.
56. Razorbill: One was seen in the mouth of Chichester Harbour from Black Point by Andy Johnson on Dec 21 - there have been several sightings of a single Razorbill here since Nov 13
57. Pied Wagtail: The first flock which I have seen this winter was of some 20 birds in the field immediately east of Warblington Church and farmyard, seen on Dec 26
58. Waxwing: On Dec 24 Martin Orchard-Webb had one in his garden at Grayshott, just in Hampshire a short distance west of the infamous traffic lights on the A3 at Hindhead. On Dec 23 5 were at Reculver near Margate on the north Kent coast.
59. Blackbird: Although most people notice an increase in the Blackbirds in their gardens in winter they probably fail to think of them as major migrants arriving in large flocks like Redwing and Fieldfare but it seems that flocks of newly arrived Blackbirds are not uncommon along the east coast. I see that on Dec 2 there was a flock of 80 at Reculver near Margate. and on Dec 6 one of more than 100 at Sandwich Bay, Further west on Dec 19 a large mixed thrush flock on Newmarket and Castle Hills just north east of Brighton contained at least 100 Blackbirds
60. Redwing: It would seem that the large flocks of Redwing may now be breaking up and spreading out over the countryside in search of food. On Dec 21 Doug Muntz had the first in his West Wellow garden and on Dec 22 my gaze was drawn up to a party of three flying over Soberton in the Meon valley when I heard their thin whistles, while on Dec 26 in bright sunshine those same whistles and 'gup' sounds led me to another very small party in trees here in Havant. We have not seen the last of big newly arrived flocks - on Dec 24 the warden at the Lower Test reserve reported that around 2000 flew up the Test Valley early that morning.
61. Firecrest: On Dec 21 Andy Johnson found two in the brambles which flourish on the North Common open space at Northney on Hayling Island.

62. Marsh Tit: A count of 14 seen on Dec 23 comes from Eartham Woods by the A285 Chichester to Petworth Road
63. Coal Tit: Both Great and Blue Tit have become fairly regular songsters recently, and on Dec 26 I heard a Coal Titi singing from conifers in the built up area of Havant.
64. Raven: On Dec 21 one flew noisily northwest over Doug Munts' garden at West Wellow (near Romsey) to give him a new garden tick and on Dec 23 one was over the West Dean woods north of Chichester.
65. Bullfinch: In Botley Woods on Dec 19 Richard Carpenter counted a total of 14 Bullfinch - possibly continental birds newly arrived here for the winter? Whether they flew east to Eartham Woods between Chichester and Petworth I do not know but another count of 14 Bullfinch comes from there on Dec 23
66. Hawfinch: Around 10 were in the Eartham Woods on Dec 19 and two were seen there on Dec 23
67. Snow Bunting: A count of 30 was reported from Reculver on the north Kent coast near Margate on Dec 23
68. Corn Bunting: A flock of 22 was at Reculver on Dec 5 with 13 there in Dec 9 while up to four have been seen at Oare Marshse near Faversham in December.
69. Lanner Falcon: One was seen over the West Dean woods north of Chichester on Dec 23 - presumably an escaped Falconer's bird.

PLANTS

9. Lesser Celandine: The first flower bud seen by me on the banks of the Lymbourne stream in Havant on Dec 19 had opened to full flower on Dec 22.
10. Hairy Violet?: On Dec 21 John Goodspeed found at least one flower on a patch of Violets growing on Portsdown near Fort Widley and reported them as Sweet Violets which they may well have been but on the chalk hill they could have been Hairy Violets which also flower early in the year (though last year my first record of them was not until Mar 16!)
11. Hazel: In the early sunshine on Christmas Day I found the first Hazle Catkins open for business by the main road in Langstone village where one overhanging the bus shelter in the layby near the end of Mill Lane is always out before the others.
12. Stone Parsley: On Dec 26 I was not surprised to find that the plants which have been flowering at the A27/A259 junction east of Havant have now ceased to do so, but walking a short distance west along the Emsworth Road into Havant i found them still in flower across the road from the One Stop store. (Black Knapweed is still in flower at the A27 junction and Cow Parsley at Nore Barn, both seen on Dec 26 by myself).
13. Winter Heliotrope: This is now flowering in large numbers and on Christmas Day morning I smelt its vanilla scent for the first time at Wade Court.
14. My count of plants seen flowering in the week from Dec 20 to 26 was 47 species

INSECTS

2. Nothing of significance reported since my last bulletin

OTHER

3. Sea Trout: Some time in the week before Christmas the HWT warden at the Blashford Lakes (Jim Day) watched several large Sea Trout laying and fertilising their eggs in the tiny Docken Waters stream which flows down from the Fritham area of the New Forest through the Blashford area and on into the Avon. Jim has a photo of one of the fish on the HWT website and says that they measured up to 75cm in length - longer than the width of the water in this narrow Forest stream and much larger than the Brown Trout

which are their cousins of the same species but which for some unexplained reason never chose to go to sea. Unlike Salmon, which die after spawning and never return to the sea, the Trout can spawn more than once, returning to the sea between each visit to the spawning beds, and Jim says that the next time they return to Dockens Water they should find their journey from the River Avon to the spawning beds much easier after a major project, scheduled to start in the New Year, to improve the stream channel and surrounding habitat

Sat 25 Dec

B. Langstone village

I took a short cycle ride to the north pier of the old rail bridge to Hayling in the bright morning sunshine which had caused many birds to sing - Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon, Great and Blue Tit prominent among them - but today's big surprise was not a bird but the sight of the first open Hazel catkins on the tree which overhangs the bus shelter on the main road through Langstone (in the layby adjacent to the end of Mill Lane).

Coming back past Wade Court I had my first scent of vanilla from the mass of Winter Heliotrope flowers beside Wade Lane, and further up the road Herb Robert was still flowering by South Close.

Fri 24 Dec

B. North Hayling fields

After finishing the last shopping this morning I went to see if the Bean Geese were still on the north Hayling fields. I failed to find them but enjoyed a circular walk around the northern half of the fields during which I came on 27 plant species in flower including Common Fumitory.

In the central part of the open plain more than 100 Brent were feeding and a dozen or more Skylarks got up from the weedy fields that have not yet been ploughed, while in the south west corner of the area (just north of Middle Stoke farmhouse) a group of 18 Egrets were feeding.

At the end of my walk a female Kestrel gave an aerobatic display as it circled over the marina area in the strong west wind

Thu 23 Dec

C. Bean Geese on Hayling Island

I was in Romsey for much of the day but returned home to find a message from Alistair Martin on my answerphone (I first mis-spelt this word as anserphone but corrected it as as I thought people might not appreciate the appropriateness of this 'pun' spelling) telling me that, sometime between midday and 2pm, he had been watching a flock of Bean Geese on the Hayling Island north fields after hearing of them from Tim Lawman who had himself heard of them from other birders including Jason Crook and Barry Collins (I think they were originally found by Martin Gillingham and that they have been present on Hayling for several days).

Alistair was told that he could see the geese from St Peters church at Northney by looking west across the flat open fields but when he got there he could not be sure of their identity as they were some 700 metres west of the church at approx SU 723033 which is very close to the gardens of houses on the Queensway road in the Stoke Common housing estate. Alistair drove to this road and tells me that he got to a sort of 'farmyard' at the end of this road and could from there see the geese at about 100 yards range but with his view of them badly hampered by the branches of trees which made it impossible for him to be sure of the exact number of geese though he could see enough of the dark heads and orange on legs and bills to be sure he was looking at the flock which had been identified as Tundra Bean Geese by the previous viewers. Alistair also tells me that the bill pattern on

the birds which he saw was typical for the Tundra race (a substantial black tip, then a small orange band occupying less than a third of the total bill, with the black base taking up about half the bill length).

Perhaps the most significant thing about this find is that there are at least 23 birds in the flock (count by Jason Crook I think) which is the biggest flock ever recorded in Hampshire, the previous record being a flock of 21 seen at Pennington on 3 Feb 1979. The other significant factor is that an influx of Bean Geese seems to be inevitably associated with very hard winter weather - if that association is continued the large number of birds and earlier than usual arrival suggests we are in for a very cold and prolonged winter!

I think that the most recent previous record of the species in Hampshire was of 3 at Farlington Marshes on 16 Feb 2001, but just across the Emsworth Channel from Hayling a group of 5 were on Thorney Island from 26 Feb to 2 Mar 2003. I have not checked all the records but I did look at Pete Durnell's 'Wildlife of Hayling Island' and see that he lists the species as having been seen on the island (no details) while 'Birds of Hampshire' mentions a group of 8 flying over Black Point on 1 Feb 1964 and another group of 17 overflying that point on 2 Mar 1969.

I think I am right in saying that this new sighting brings the total of Bean Geese recorded in Hampshire to 148 and of these 88 have been identified as Tundra race birds with only five positively recorded as Taiga race (leaving 55 'not separated') In Sussex (according to an article by Richard Fairbanks in the 1999 Sussex Bird Report) there had been 369 Bean Geese recorded in Sussex up to the end of 1999 of which only 25 birds had been definitely of the Taiga race, confirming that the birds of the Taiga race are very uncommon in the south of England

From what I read the major factor helping to separate the two races are their calls - Richard Fairbank gives the call of the Tundra birds as a high pitched 'ayayak' recalling the noise of Pink-foot Geese while the Taiga birds are usually silent (that helps a lot!) but when they do give voice you hear a 'gang gang' call. The other feature that separates the races is the neck length - Tundra birds have small, short necks reminiscent of Pink-foot while Taiga have big, long necks like a Greylag. Head shape is also helpful - Tundra have rounded heads, Taiga wedge-shaped - and while bill colour and pattern vary and overlap between the two races the bill shape is helpful - Tundra have short, blunt, deep-based bills while Taiga have long, thin, sharp pointed bills with a concave upper mandible.

Finally I would like to re-iterate a couple of points which I have raised several times before in connection with the Hampshire Bird Reports, and which is relevant to searching past records for a particular species such as Bean Goose which does not occur every year. Flicking through a pile of annual bird reports to find relevant records would be that much easier if (a) Hampshire adopted the Sussex practice of putting the Euring number with the species name in the systematic lists to help quickly find the species in each year's report and (b) if each report had an entry in the systematic list for every species that has been recorded in the county in (say) the past 50 years - in years when the species was not reported this would be a simple one line entry giving the last year in which there were records for the species, enabling anyone searching for information on a particular species to follow a chain of meaningful entries back without having to search through every single report. Another advantage of doing this would be to enable everyone to see, in each and every annual report, the complete list of all birds recorded in the county (with the latest year in which each species had been seen).

D. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

74. Red-throated Diver: One was in Sandown Bay off the Isle of Wight on Dec 18 and six were seen off Ventnor on Dec 20 but the big numbers are still coming from Dungeness with counts of 175 on Dec 18, 134 on Dec 14 and 70 on Dec 13

75. Great Northern Diver: The only recent reports are of two flying past Portland Bill on Dec 18 and another one on Dec 19
76. Black-necked Grebe: Another sighting of two south of Budds Mound in Langstone Harbour on Dec 19 by Kevin Stouse's party walking from Warblington to Budds Farm and back. This is the third sighting of what I presume are the same two birds in this part of Langstone Harbour since Nov 28 but so far there have been no other reported sightings of the remainder of the flock of 10 that were south of the Hayling Oysterbeds on Nov 27. Another single Black-necked Grebe was off the Seaview area of the loW (across the water from the Langstone Harbour entrance) on Dec 19 and 20 but my guess would be that this may be the loner which was first seen off Hook/Warsash on Dec 13 and has probably remained on the open waters of the Solent since then
77. Shag: One was off South Parade pier (Southsea) on Dec 19, seen by Roger Webb. This is the first Shag that I have heard of in the Portsmouth area this winter (in previous years they have been fairly regular off Southsea Castle, in the Langstone Harbour entrance and in Hayling Bay). Reports from the waters east of the Isle of Wight this autumn include three significant counts with 12 in the Nettlestone Point area east of Ryde on Nov 15, 8 there on Nov 27, and another count of 8 perched on St Helen's Fort in the sea off the mouth of Bembridge Harbour on Nov 14. St Helen's Fort is the southernmost of four similar forts located in the shallow waters between the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth, built in the nineteenth century to guard the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. The other three are No Man's Land Fort not far off Nettlestone Point (the north east corner of the loW), Horse Sand Fort (just over 3 km due south of South Parade Pier on the Southsea seafront), and Spitbank Fort (one kilometre off Southsea Castle and due south of the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour). The newly published 2003 Hampshire Bird Report has an article by Jason Crook describing his discovery, on 28 January 2003, of a night roost of 73 Shags (plus 115 Cormorants) on Horse Sand Fort at dusk. Two further visits to Southsea by Jason gave him counts of 55 Shags on the fort on Jan 30 and at least 30 there on Mar 14. No further counts of Shag on this fort have appeared on Hoslist during 2004 but I expect that there may at times in each winter be even higher numbers to be found if it were possible to keep all four forts under nightly surveillance! Jason's article has evidence that the birds roosting here in the winter are not just those that breed on the Isle of Wight but at least some come from the northern isles of Scotland and from the west coast of England - certainly the waters of the Solent are more sheltered than the west and north coasts of Britain in the winter months.
78. Bittern: A new update to the Titchfield Haven website indicates that there have probably been two Bitterns there from at least Dec 15, and that sightings of them have been aided by cleance work done in the reedbeds by a mechanical ditch digger.
79. Little Egret: The December roost counts in Chichester Harbour were carried out on different days but we now have the details from each known roost site. I have already passed on Barry Collins count of 33 on Thorney Island made on Dec 8, and I now have Mike Collins count of just 8 in Tournerbury Wood on Hayling Island on Dec 18 (a disappointing total made worse by having to spend an hour standing in the rain). Jason Crook had better luck on the evening of Dec 20 when he counted 91 entering the Wade Court roost at Langstone. Looking back over the past year the peak roost counts for each month at the Wade Court site (according to the data I have so far) are:- Jan 39; Feb 52; Mar 41; Apr 57; May 17; June 31; July 70; Aug 127 on Aug 14 and 144 on Aug 27; Sep 176; Oct 129; Nov 73; Dec 91
80. Mute Swan: On Dec 19 John Clark counted a total of 234 in the 12 mile stretch of the River Avon north from Avon Causeway to Ibsley. Locally a cygnet on the Slipper Mill pond at Emsworth had to be rescued by a human onlooker when the resident pair that breed on Peter Pond decided to attack it - maybe this is a sign that the adult pairs are already thinking of nesting and are starting to drive off last year's young?

81. Bewick's Swan: Three adults were on the River Avon at Ibsley when John Clark checked out the stretch of river north from Avon Causeway to Ibsley on Dec 19 (these three were just north of Ibsley)
82. Bean Goose: A flock of 8 were in fields west of the village of Northwood which is just southwest of Cowes in the north of the IoW. These may well be a second flock on the Island in addition to the flock of 7 that have been in the Atherfield area near St Catherine's Point in the south of the Island from Dec 3 to 14 (maybe longer).
83. Pink Footed Geese: A flock of 53 were at the Weir Wood reservoir east of Crawley in Sussex on Dec 20 - they were seen to fly south but have not yet been reported from the coast.
84. Greylag Goose: On Dec 19 John Clark found a total of 229 in the Avon Valley where there were also 206 Canada Geese
85. Shelduck: A count of around 100 made by Brian Fellows on the west end of the Thorney Island Great Deeps Dec 19 indicates a new influx of these duck. Over 100 were there in Feb this year and more than 200 were there in mid-April but since Sept 1 the highest count I have heard of in Chichester Harbour was of 40 on the Warblington shore on Dec 7. Another indication of a new wave of migrants moving along the channel was a sighting of three flying past Ventnor - this is the first report of this species south of Bembridge on the IoW since May.
86. Wigeon: John Clark counted 570 during his Avon Causeway to Ibsley walk up the Avon valley on Dec 19 when he also found 307 Teal, 220 Mallard and 40 Pintail but only 19 Tufted Duck, 17 Pochard, 5 Shoveler and 3 Gadwall
87. Mallard: 315 Mallard, 53 Pochard and 15 Tufted Duck came to the evening feed in the Titchfield Haven reserve on Dec 18
88. Pintail: 16 flew east past Southsea on Dec 19 - presumably birds that intended to settle in this area but were going 'the wrong way' in a search for a suitable place to spend the winter.
89. Eider: 79 Eider were in the east Solent between Hill Head and Hook on Dec 15 - this is the highest count there so far this winter though there were 102 there in February and 126 in May
90. King Eider: On a recent visit to Norfolk Derek Mills saw this species of Titchwell to add a 'life tick' to his bird list.
91. Long Tailed Duck: What was possibly the bird which has been seen in the Emsworth Channel of Chichester Harbour on Dec 3, 5 and 9 was seen again off Pook Lane between Warblington and Langstone by the walk party led by Kevin Stouse on Dec 19. Kevin says that, by co-incidence, this bird was in the same place at which the equivalent walk that he led last year encountered two Long Tailed Ducks.
92. Goosander: On Dec 19 John Clark found 10 on the River Avon during his 12 mile walk from Avon Causeway to Ibsley, and at dusk a total of 25 came to roost on Ibsley Water (5 of them being males).
93. Marsh Harrier: During the summer what was probably the same bird (variously described as a female or an immature) was seen at Titchfield Haven on 23 days between July 30 and Sept 8. What was probably a different bird was there from Oct 9 to 13, and another bird made a one day stand there on Nov 27. Another bird, again described as a female or immature, was seen on Dec 8.
94. Osprey?: An intriguing report of a very large raptor with white underparts seen on Dec 19 over the M3 by a party of birders who are familiar with raptor species comes from Marcus Hebbes (who did not see it himself). Some support for its being an Osprey comes from the great Lee Evans, who told us that there had been another recent

report of an Osprey from Surrey. Birds of Hampshire shows that there had been at least two December records of this species prior to 1991, and in 1999 one stayed around the mouth of the Beaulieu River from Dec 4 - 11.

95. Coot: On Sep 12 John Clark estimated there were 1200 Coot on the Blashford Lakes but during his long walk up the Avon Valley on Dec 19 he only noted two birds! I suspect that, despite visiting Ibsley Water in the evening, he was too tired after the 12 mile walk to maintain an interest in counting Coots!
96. Avocet: 16 were seen by Alan Lewis at Farlington Marshes on Dec 19
97. Lapwing: On Dec 15 Richard Carpenter reports that there were more than 350 Lapwing at Titchfield Haven with another 200 near the mouth of the Hamble - the previous highest count at the Haven this winter was of 210 on Dec 5. Another good flock of Lapwing was seen by Kevin Stouse who estimated 200 on the shore east of Langstone village on Dec 19, when Brian Fellows found another 130 at west end of the Thorney Great Deeps (and there were probably more in the central section of those Deeps). Another total of 543 were recorded in the Avon Valley that day by John Clark.
98. Black-tailed Godwit: Despite Stephen Piggott's report of 'many' in a flooded field at Keyhaven on Dec 12 my hopes of a repeat of the huge number in the Avon valley during the 2002/2003 winter (when there were 600 there by Dec 10, building to 3000 in Feb) have been put on hold by John Clark's count of just 18 birds there on Dec 19
99. Bar-tailed Godwit: The generally low numbers continue to be reported but on Dec 19 a single bird seen by Kevin Stouse on the shore east of Langstone Village was in full summer plumage.
100. Spotted Redshank: By Dec 19 the number on the Normandy Marshes at Lymington had increased to 5 birds
101. Greenshank: At least nine could be seen at the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps when Brian Fellows was there on Dec 19
102. Great Skua: The only records of Bonxie that I have heard of for the current month have been of singles at Dungeness of Dec 10 and 14 followed by an unexpected local sighting of one passing South Parade Pier at Southsea on Dec 19, seen by Roger Webb and, like the Pintail he saw there on the same day, also heading east. This direction may well have been due to the strong easterly wind blowing on that day which caused a notable movement of gulls heading east into the wind along the south shore of the Isle of Wight
103. Kittiwake: A good number of these were among the gulls heading east along the south coast of the Isle of Wight on Dec 19 and on Dec 20 17 Kittiwake were seen off Ventnor.
104. Auk species: On Dec 14 an estimated 1300 flew past Dungeness and on Dec 20 a 'steady stream' of them were passing Portland Bill but none seem to have stopped off in the Solent area.
105. Barn Owl: When visiting Norfolk in the past week Derek Mills heard of and saw many emaciated Barn Owl corpses and believes that the population in that county has been decimated by a shortage of voles.
106. Short-eared Owl: What may have been one of the two or three that have settled in the Hamble disused airfield area was seen hunting over the Hook Links area on the other side of the Hamble river at 11am on Dec 20 (I hope that does not mean they are finding a shortage of food here).
107. Kingfisher: There have been several reports of two Kingfishers perched on neighbouring posts overlooking the Lymbourne stream outflow under Langstone Mill buildings (I myself saw them there on Dec 20 after hearing them 'squeaking' to each

other) and I see that the walk party led by Kevin Stouse saw the two there on Dec 19 before one of the two flew off across the water towards North Hayling. This observation was of some interest to me as I have a theory that birds seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds are based at Langstone and this observation is a second very tenuous bit of evidence in support of that theory - the previous evidence came from Michelle Ayling who, on Oct 31, saw a Kingfisher flying north from the Oysterbeds area over the old rail bridge towards Langstone.

108. Water Pipit: In past winters there have been occasional records of this species from the Langstone South Moors and on Dec 19 the walk party led by Kevin Stouse saw the first bird(s) there for this winter. Kevin says he is only certain of one Water Pipit but others in the party thought there were up to four there.
109. Firecrest: One was seen at the Eastleigh sewage farm by Ian Watts on Dec 20 with several Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests. Ian had seen a Firecrest there on Dec 15 so there is a reasonable chance that one is winter resident there.
110. Willow Tit: Two were seen on bird feeders in the carpark of the Weir Wood reservoir carpark (east of Crawley) on Dec 19
111. Jackdaw: Simon Ingram records a total of 345 flying east over the Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park towards dusk on Dec 19 and I would be very interested to know where they were going - could they have been heading for the massive corvid roost in the Elson area of Gosport (approximately 15 mile south east of the Lakeside site)? Richard Carpenter has already told us of a constant stream of corvids flying west from Gosport over the Titchfield Haven area each morning recently and an equivalent eastward stream each evening, and the Titchfield Haven website gives an estimate of 350 mixed Rooks and Jackdaws passing over the reserve at dusk on Dec 8.
112. Hawfinch: In addition to the well known roost sites in the New Forest and on the Sussex/Kent border I see that a group of more than 8 were reported (on Dec 19) as being seen feeding around a large Yew in Earham Wood (by the A285 north east of Chichester) at approximately SU 945108

PLANTS

6. Lesser Celandine: In my notes for Dec 19 I reported seeing a single flower bud on a plant by the Lymbourne stream just south of the A27 in Havant, By Dec 22 there were flower buds on at least four plants and one flower fully open (the water which flows past the roots of these plants is warmer than the surrounding ground as it has only just come up from deep underground).

INSECTS

2. Red Admiral: The latest sighting I have heard of was of one in Fareham on Dec 15 and before that three were seen in the Gosport area - on Dec 9 one was in the Grange Farm area of the town, and on Dec 11 one was at Carters Copse, also in the Alver Valley area close to Grange Farm, and a second was in the Anns Hill cemetery area of Gosport.
3. Moths: Of the few reported in the past few days the majority have been Winter Moth and December Moth, appropriate to the time of year, but there have been three reports of Silver Y (from Bishopstoke near Eastleigh on both Dec 13 and 14 and from the Lymington area on Dec 8). Silver Y is not normally seen after the end of September but this year it seems that there has been a widespread appearance of an extra generation - hopefully not to the detriment of next year's population.

[Wed 22 Dec](#)

B. Wade Court area of Langstone

After plenty of rain in the past 24 hours the flooded area of the meadow to the north of Langstone Mill Pond had filled with water and for the first time this winter attracted well over 60 Teal and 40 Mallard which were all feeding enthusiastically with the Teal still finding time to raise a chorus of their lovely 'belling' calls.

On the mud of the harbour nearby I counted at least 46 Shelduck and estimated a count of 40 Golden Plover among the commoner shorebirds, and at the Lymbourne stream outflow the two regular Kingfishers were perched on adjacent posts and 'squeaking' to each other.

Coming back from Langstone up the Billy Line I found the first Lesser Celandine flower fully open, with buds on four plants, and near the Lymbourne springs both Red and White Campion are still flowering alongside Ox-eye Daisies.

Wildlife diary and news for Dec 13 - 19 (Week 51)

[Sun 19 Dec](#)

E. Local walks

We had visitors today but I still managed to get out for a short walk in the morning and for another in the afternoon. In the morning I went down the Hayling Billy Line to the bridge over the Lymbourne stream and found a single Lesser Celandine bud about to open at the edge of the stream. In the afternoon I went to the Warblington shore where the tide was rising and a good variety of waders could be seen. Among them were at least 15 Ringed Plover, and out in the main water channel ten Merganser were fishing

F. Latest News and Reports

BIRDS

70. Red-throated Diver: I have not seen any reports of Red-throated Diver (supposedly the commonest of the diver species) in Hampshire waters during December but a look at the Dungeness bird observatory website shows that these divers have been seen there on 8 dates during December with counts peaking at 500 birds on Dec 10, 229 on Dec 5 and 184 on Dec 9, Since the numbers at Dungeness fluctuate widely (with none reported on at least six days and 'only' 40 on Dec 6) I assume that these counts of up to 500 are of birds entering the channel and carrying on westward but pursuing a course that takes them out of sight of the coastal counties (even the Isle of Wight has only seen a total of six birds on four days in December, and Portland Bill has only reported 8 birds spread over four days). If we assume there is no double counting among the birds reported from all sites (Kent to Dorset) we get a total of 1360 birds passing through the channel from Dec 1 to 14 with none seen from Hampshire. Just one group of 16 birds were seen from the West Sussex shore (Owen Mitchell on the shore at Climping - west side of the mouth of the River Arun - saw them distantly on Dec 10 and could only report them as 'Diver species' but he thought they were all possibly Red-throated)
71. Black-throated Diver: This is a much rarer bird with only four reports seen by me for the first half of December. All four sightings were of two birds and three of them again coming from Kent plus one (which I have already reported) of two fishing in Portland Harbour at Weymouth.
72. Great Northern Diver: Only three reports of these for Dec 1 to 14 but all three in our general area (one at Selsey Bill and two on the north east of the Isle of Wight - very possibly all three sightings being of the same bird).

73. Black-necked Grebe: Since Barry Collins saw a group of 10 in Langstone Harbour on Nov 27 there have been three further reports of them in the harbour on Nov 28 and 30, and now on Dec 12, but all three of these subsequent sightings have been of just two birds and all were in the Broad Lake area south of Budds Farm and the South Moors. Still no Slavonians in Langstone or Chichester Harbours (nine off Church Norton on Dec 11) but one was seen off Titchfield Haven on Dec 13 and on that same day Richard Carpenter saw a single Black-necked Grebe off the Solent Breezes caravan site a mile or so west of the Haven. Two Slavs were off the Hersey nature reserve on the Isle of Wight on Dec 16.
74. Cormorant: A couple of interesting sightings this week. The first was of 38 fishing the water of one of the Testwood Lakes using a very effective co-operative technique. Ian Pibworth describes this as follows .. 'The birds start at one end of the lake in a line. Then about half of them dive and drive the fish ahead of them. The remaining cormorants then overfly the submerged birds before diving to trap the fleeing fish. The sequence is then repeated until the end of the lake is reached. Today's hunt was very successful, with most cormorants surfacing with a catch in their bill'. There is another interesting aspect to this report and that is that, while Ian has previously reported up to 49 Cormorants overflying the Testwood Lakes as they head north up the River Test, this is the first time he has mentioned them this autumn in his weekly sightings list so I assume they are new there (at least in significant numbers). Another site which has suddenly been inundated with Cormorants is the the Eastleigh Lakeside country park where Simon Ingram has reported Cormorant regularly but never with a count of more than 9 until Dec 10 when 21 appeared there.
75. Great White Egret: In Hampshire the 'resident' bird remains at Mockbeggar Lake near Ringwood but there may be a second bird in the Alresford area where one was seen almost daily from 13 Dec 2003 to 6 Feb 2004. The only evidence for this comes from Ron King who writes that while he was at Alresford on Dec 14 someone who lives by the River Alre spoke to him and said that the Great White had been seen in the area of Drove Lane near the Fish Farm - as this person was not a birder there may be confusion with Little Egret but this is the time at which last winter's bird arrived...
76. Bittern: I have heard nine reports of one at Titchfield Haven since Oct 10 this autumn, and on Dec 17 Richard Carpenter tells me that there are now thought to be at least two there.
77. Mute Swan: 112 were counted in the Fishbourne Channel neat Chichester by Paul James on Dec 16
78. Bewick's Swan: In a summary of birds at the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve written on Dec 9 Pete Hughes (the warden) reported that there were currently 27 Bewick's somewhere in the Arun Valley (with 7 juveniles among them)
79. Bean Goose: The group of seven that have been in the Atherfield area near St Catherine's Point on the IoW since Dec 3 were seen by the Kingston reservoir north east of Little Atherfield Farm on Dec 14.
80. White-front Geese: Although there have been up to 60 at Rye Harbour and 16 at Pevensy Levels since the beginning of December (and three on Thorney Island from Dec 4 to at least Dec 9) I have heard of none in Hampshire or Dorset until four of them arrived at Portland Bill on Dec 13 (having bypassed Hampshire!)
81. Canada Goose: A flock of 59 were on Farlington Marshes when Cliff Oakley was there with his Petersfield Wildlife Group on Dec 15. On Dec 17 at Titchfield Haven the count was 177 (including the 'albino') and a new report from Tony Polley is of a flock of 40 at the Anton Lakes (Andover).

82. Brent Goose: During the Dec 11 WeBS count Brian Fellows had well over 500 along the south east shore of Hayling Island but just across the mouth of Chichester Harbour I see that Ewan Urquhart's count for the West Wittering area was 1300.
83. Pale Bellied Brent: On Dec 12 Alan Lewis saw one with Brent on Farlington Marshes and believes he saw the same bird again later that day on Portsea Island (Sixth Form College fields). Maybe this bird flew on west as I have heard no more of it and on Dec 13 one turned up at Ferrybridge (Weymouth). So far this autumn I have only heard of two other sightings - George Spraggs had one at the Kench on Hayling Island on Oct 19 and there was another on the Isle of Wight on Nov 7.
84. Brant: The bird which was being reported from the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour from Nov 6 to at least Dec 8 may have moved as one is now being reported from 'Yeoman's Fields at Sidlesham' (but I am not sure where those fields may be!). The Wittering bird has also been restless recently, flying across from Wittering to Black Point on Hayling on Dec 10 - it was seen flying back to Wittering on that day but there have been no reports of it since then.
85. Egyptian Goose: The lone bird which occasionally shows up at Titchfield Haven was there on Dec 13
86. Shelduck: Cliff Oakley counted 111 when going round Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 and as these birds are easy to see I suspect he saw a good proportion of the total currently in Langstone Harbour and if so it looks as if the number of birds wintering here is still declining. The peak winter count in Langstone Harbour was 4000 birds in 1968 but the newly arrived 2003 Hampshire Bird Report shows a maximum count only 616 in the harbour last winter, down from 700 in 2002. These peaks generally occur after Christmas, but I can remember expecting 300 - 600 to be in the harbour in December during the last ten years.
87. Wigeon: On the same visit to Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 Cliff Oakley recorded 752 Wigeon - no problem with their numbers! On Dec 16 Paul James counted 520 in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester.
88. Gadwall: More than 20 were on Alresford Pond when Ron King was there on Dec 14 (and for local interest I saw two males on Bedhampton Mill Pool on Dec 16)
89. Pintail: Cliff Oakley found 32 at Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 and there are still 38 at the Hook Links scrape near Warsash (where a site record count of 48 was made on Nov 23). On Dec 16 there were 22 in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour
90. Scaup: The first double figure count I have heard of for this winter was of 11 at Rye Harbour on Dec 12. The group of 5 immatures which have been at Worthing Brooklands since Dec 3 were still there on Dec 16 and the Lesser Scaup remains on Scotney Gravel Pit at Rye,
91. Eider: With Eider becoming a more and more common sight along the south coast during the summer months it is perhaps not entirely surprising that the 2003 Hampshire Bird Report has a picture of the first ever Eider nest to be found in southern England - the nest, containing six eggs, was photographed 'somewhere in Hampshire' in June of 2003 but we are told that it was subsequently washed out and no young were hatched. The east Solent flock on the water from Hill Head to the mouth of the Hamble numbered 79 on Dec 15 (highest figure there so far this winter),
92. Long Tailed Duck: The Chichester Harbour bird was still in the Emsworth Channel on Dec 9 (it arrived on Dec 3), and the Lymington area bird was still there on Dec 12
93. Common Scoter: A flock of up to 120 birds was in Rye Harbour during most of November but seems to have moved to the Dungeness area where there were 144 on Dec 1 and 295 on Dec 4.

94. Smew: On Dec 12 the count at Rye Harbour was up to 7 birds (including 3 males). So far none seem to have ventured further west...
95. Red-breasted Merganser: Brian Fellows had a good count of 32 in a single 'flotilla' (they always remind me of destroyers steaming in line ahead!) off Tournerbury Wood on the south east Hayling shore during the Dec 11 WeBS count (when Ewan Urquhart had another 15 across the water in the East Head area), and a couple of days later Owen Mitchell counted 85 off Climping beach (just west of the mouth of the R Arun)
96. Goosander: Seven of these birds were on the Anton Lakes at Andover on Dec 12 with 5 there on Dec 18 and the 'pair' which has been at the Hersey nature reserve on the north east loW coast since Nov 14 are still there with an extra redhead joining them on Dec 16 (when the group of 8 were still in Pagham Harbour).
97. Red Kite: Nine were seen in the air together at Faccombe (half way between Andover and Newbury) by Mike Rafter on Dec 11 - I think this may be a Hampshire record for a group of these Kites, but at the rate they are spreading and numbers increasing it probably won't last for long. Also in the Faccombe area that day Mike saw 6 Buzzards. On Dec 19 John Chapman had a good local sighting of one Kite low above the A27 north of Bosham as he was being driven back from Pagham Harbour to Havant - a single bird flew right in front of the car he was in.
98. Hen Harrier: In Hampshire one was at Bransbury Common near Andover on Dec 11 and three males were seen in the Leaden Hall area of the New Forest on Dec 12 while on Dec 14 a male was seen in the Holly Hatch area of the New Forest (less than five kilometres south of Leaden Hall). Also on Dec 14 a ringtail was hunting over Warren Hill to the north west of St Catherine's Point and a long way from the Brading Marshes where one has been resident for some time
99. Kestrel: Driving into Emsworth on Dec 12 Mike Collins watched a pair of Kestrels copulating on a telegraph pole - maybe the pair that often nest in Warblington Castle tower?
100. Merlin: An interesting local report comes from Richard Ling who lives in the King St area of Emsworth and thinks he has twice in the past couple of weeks had a female sitting on his garden wall (which happens, I think, to overlook the harbour or the Dolphin Lake area) - unfortunately on both occasions he has only had a back view of the bird which is more interested in the harbour than the garden!
101. Peregrine: Also showing strong signs of early breeding were a pair of Peregrines seen in the New Forest on Dec 11 by David Holt - after a female was seen to perch in a tree a male flew up towards here holding a food offering and tempted her with it till she flew down to join him amongst the heather (sadly out of David's sight). Another fascinating account of Peregrine behaviour comes from Jason Crook who, on Dec 15, watched one make a successful kill over the Kench in Langstone Harbour. Jason says that instead of the falcon flying high and stooping on its prey this Peregrine flew in circles low over the waders which it had put up, herding them into a tight flock as a sheep dog would do with sheep. After doing this for some time one or two of the waders panicked and broke off from the flock, and the Peregrine selected one of these - a Knot - to become an easy kill. At Titchfield Haven on the same day John Shillitoe saw a juvenile Peregrine having less luck when chasing Lapwing in level flight - although its flight was faster than that of the Lapwing the plover's manouverability enabled it quite easily to evade the Peregrine and the Lapwing got away without flying especially fast - John seems to think it was even enjoying 'teasing' the falcon.
102. Escaped raptor at Titchfield Haven?: Ian Watts recently told us on HOSLIST that when he was at Titchfield Haven on Dec 5 he saw "a falcon twice which came as far as the south scrape and then headed off north, low over the reeds. This bird was large peregrine size but with evenly brown upperparts....not peregrine colour at all". I

think there was a suggestion that it might have been a Lanner and I wonder if it is the same bird that was seen at the Haven on Dec 18 by Heather Mills and the Havant Wildlife Group who saw a raptor diving into distant trees with jesses on its feet.

103. Sora Crane: It seems that one has been at a Nottinghamshire site since Dec 12 and some Hampshire twitchers have recently been to see it (and a nearby Ring-necked Duck).
104. Avocet: The birds that have been in the Farlington Marshes area since the end of November are still there and on Dec 12 Alan Lewis counted 13 there (another 11 were in Pagham Harbour that day). On Dec 13 a different group of 10 were seen by Bob Marchant swimming on the water several hundred yards off Hook spit at the mouth of the Hamble. They were apparently quite happy to be there as after they were put to flight by a sailing boat coming too close for comfort they soon settled back on the water.
105. Ringed Plover: At least 15 were off the Warblington Shore on Dec 19. There have also been recent counts of 30 at Farlington Marshes and 34 at Titchfield Haven.
106. Lapwing: Numbers are increasing at most sites as the weather turns colder. On Dec 15 Richard Carpenter reckoned there were more than 350 at Titchfield Haven with 150 at Hook and another 50 at the Bunny Meadows further up the Hamble River, and on that day Cliff Oakley estimated there were 800 at Farlington Marshes
107. Knot: Also on Dec 15 Cliff Oakley estimated a count of 700 Knot at Farlington Marshes.
108. Jack Snipe: The first Hampshire report of one of these for this winter came from Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven on Dec 16
109. Black-tailed Godwit: The newly arrived 2003 Hampshire Bird Report reminds us that the highest ever site count of these birds was a flock of 3000 in the lower Avon valley in Feb 2003, and some of the birds of this flock were sometimes to be seen in flooded fields beside the Avon Water stream flowing south to Keyhaven. A report on Dec 12 from Stephen Piggott of "many Blackwits in a flooded field at Keyhaven" made me wonder if another huge flock was starting to build there - so far this is wishful thinking on my part but you never know
110. Bar-tailed Godwit: Back in mid October a sizeable flock of several hundred could be seen in the Langstone area but from Nov 20 to Dec 15 I heard no reports of more than 3 birds, Now, on Dec 15, Cliff Oakley reports a total of 150 around Farlington Marshes so maybe the birds are about to re-appear?
111. Whimbrel: It seems that there are at least three wintering birds in our area. On Dec 16 the Pagham Harbour bird was seen again at Church Norton and one was seen on Chichester Harbour (Fishbourne Channel) and I doubt the Langstone Harbour bird has left though the last sighting of it that I have heard of was on Dec 5.
112. Spotted Redshank: On Dec 11 one was at West Wittering and on Dec 18 one was at Ashlett Creek near Calshot, but the best site for them is currently the Normandy Marshes at Lymington where four were present on Dec 12 (with 3 Greenshank).
113. Common Sandpiper: Two were seen by the Itchen in Southampton on Dec 10 - one at Riverside Park and one at St Denys.
114. Turnstone: Plenty of these around at the moment and I learnt from Bob Chapman's latest contribution to the HWT website that they are locally known in Langstone Harbour as 'Tanglepickers' from their habit of searching for food among the tangled masses of seaweed.
115. Great Skua: None of these Bonxies have been reported locally since Nov 21 but two were off Dungeness on Dec 10.

116. Mediterranean Gull: One was at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Dec 12, lifting the tone at that site! Alan Lewis, who saw the Baffins bird, counted 18 at Tipner Lake on the other side of Portsmouth on the same day.
117. Black-headed Gull: In support of his claim of a very considerable increase in the number of gulls at Emsworth this winter (since the closure of the Paulsgrove tip at Portsmouth) Brian Fellows on Dec 14 counted around 3500 of these gulls in the combined area of Emsworth Harbour and the Slipper and Peter Ponds.
118. Common Gull: These are becoming more common here as winter progresses but a single flock of 90 birds, seen by Owen Mitchell on Dec 13 at Climping beach near the mouth of the Arun, was exceptional for the coast. Another sign of the return of these birds was Ron King's sighting of a flock of more than 800 of them in fields near Alresford (these inland fields are the preferred winter habitat of these gulls).
119. Caspian Gull: On Dec 10 one of these was reported at Dungeness (with up to 65 Kittiwake there).
120. Sandwich Tern: John Chapman tells me he saw a tern off the Kench a couple of days ago.
121. Auk species: Looking back through the Dungeness website I see that a day total of around 1500 Auks was recorded there on Oct 8, and more recently 245 were logged there on Dec 6 with 1000 on Dec 9 and 1100 on Dec 10. The count fell to 600 on Dec 11, and this was followed by 620 on Dec 12 and 950 on Dec 13.
122. Short-eared Owl: The count at Bransbury Common was up to 4 on Dec 11 and there were at least 3 at the disused Hamble airfield on Dec 13
123. Great Spotted Woodpecker: A friend living at Shillingstone in Dorset tells me that he has heard a woodpecker drumming in the past few days ...
124. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: With most leaves off the trees and the birds having less feeding time in the short winter days the chances of seeing these elusive birds are on the up - one was seen in Parkhurst Forest on the IoW on Dec 11 and one was in Doug Munts West Wellow garden west of Romsey on Dec 18
125. Shore Lark: One was reported from the Glyne Gap (close to Bexhill) on Dec 11 and what was presumably the same bird was on the Bexhill shore at Galley Hill on Dec 12
126. Water Pipit: These have been seen at three sites since Dec 10 - 3 birds were at the Lower Test Marshes on Dec 10, two were at Brading sewage works on the IoW on Dec 12 and on Dec 15 one was seen at Farlington Marshes by Cliff Oakley.
127. Waxwing: On Dec 10 one was reported at Holteye Common (east of East Grinstead), on Dec 11 a group of six were by the River Adur south of Henfield, and on Dec 12 two were seen to fly southwest over the village of Rookley (on the road to Godshill south of Newport on the IoW)
128. Fieldfare: The largest recent flocks have been 300 at Brading Marshes on the IoW on Dec 12 and 400 near Lewes on Dec 15 with 'many' in the New Forest.
129. Redwing: Fewer in number than Fieldfare but now widespread. On Dec 14 Ron King watched one in a very marshy area by the River Itchen at Ovington apparently trying to beat the life out of what he thought was a small (15cm) eel (but could have been a Slow Worm). Maybe it was intending to eat the reptile, maybe it was re-acting to a 'snake'? If anyone has seen similar behaviour tell us about it
130. Pallas's Warbler: One was seen on Dec 4, 5, and 6 near New Romney in Kent
131. Great Tit: These are starting to sing more regularly now but the main interest in them comes from a report of a very melanistic bird seen near Haywards Heath in

Sussex - its plumage was a dull sooty colour all over the what should have been white cheeks were black.

132. Rook: On Dec 16 I was standing on the railway bridge taking Mill Lane at Bedhampton to the Bedhampton Mill. Looking north west towards Lower Road I was surprised to see well over 100 Rooks with a smaller number of Jackdaws feeding on a newly ploughed (and sown?) field. At first I thought there were Hooded Crows among them until I looked closely and saw that any Rook turning away from the wind was having its feathers lifted by the fresh wind to reveal a silvery grey 'down'. On Dec 14 I saw at least 1400 Corvids coming to roost in Old Park wood on the shore of the Bosham peninsula in Chichester Harbour - a very impressive sight.
133. Tree Sparrow: To break the monotony of reports coming solely from the Rye Harbour area I see that just three birds were seen at the Sandwich Bay bird observatory on Dec 11
134. Serin: One flew over Dungeness on Dec 5.
135. Greenfinch: Many people (including myself) are currently experiencing a dearth of these and other common birds in their gardens, but in central Winchester there is currently a regular night roost of more than 250 Greenfinch in the cathedral grounds (and no shortage in nearby gardens during the day). On Cheesefoot Head to the east of the city Dave Pearson saw a flock of 270 on Dec 12 - maybe they commute between their city roost and the luxuriant crop of seeds in the Warren Down area. On Dec 14 another report of 40 in the Holly Hatch area of the New Forest beside the Dockens Water shows that there are others ...
136. Linnet: Also on Cheesefoot Head Dave Pearson saw an estimated 540 Linnets - another flock of up to 160 Linnets has been at the Eastleigh Lakeside site recently.
137. Twite: Not local but a flock of up to 21 has been seen at Sandwich Bay around Dec 6
138. Hawfinch: Up to 12 have been seen coming to roost at their Rhinefield site in the New Forest recently
139. Snow Bunting: A flock of more than 64 was at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Dec 1 and 54 were still there on Dec 6
140. Reed Bunting: Ewan Urquhart found a flock of more than 30 at East Head in Chichester Harbour during the Dec 11 WeBS count, and on Dec 14 the 'first of the winter' arrived in a North Baddesley garden east of Romsey.

PLANTS

15. Lesser Celandine: Just one flower bud was about to open on the banks of the the Lymbourne Stream by the Billy Trail just south of the A27 on Dec 19
16. Sweet Violet: Two plants were flowering in the churchyard of St Thomas at old Bedhampton pn Dec 16 (piles of recently raked up leaves nearby showed that the plants may have been 'forced' by a warm blanket of leaves until just before I saw the flowers)
17. Pellitory of the Wall: Much of this was freshly flowering on old walls around the same churchyard
18. Hairy Bittercress: One plant was flowering in Havant on Dec 17 (joining Wavy Bittercress and Thale Cress which have also been out this month)
19. Ox-eye Daisy: Still flowering by the Lymbourne Springs with both Red and White Campion
20. Wall Lettuce: Still flowering from gravel fronting flats in East Street at Havant

INSECTS

3. December Moth: One came to a light in Richard Carpenter's Hill Head garden on Dec 13

OTHER

4. Dolphins: On Dec 13 a Dolphin of unknown species was reported by the captain of a boat coming up Southampton Water, and the port authorities passed his message on to the Marine Oceanography centre from where Russell Wynn put out a message on Hoslist asking birders to keep an eye out for it and to try to get a photo or give it a species name. Much staler news comes from the Dungeness website which reported (on Oct 8) a group of 7 or more White-beaked Dolphin feeding offshore - I noted this as White-beaked Dolphin is a species that I have not previously heard of along the south coast, but on looking it up I see that it is a common species in the North Sea, and we are unlikely to hear of it in the English Channel where Common, Risso's and Bottle-nosed are the most likely species to be seen.
5. Common Seal: One was seen off Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 by the Petersfield Wildlife Group.
6. Roe Deer: Eleven were feeding on fresh cereals growing in the Southleigh Farm fields between Havant and Emsworth in broad daylight on Dec 18. I had been watching a group of five deer when a dog walker near the farm put up two more groups to give a total of at least 11.
7. Yellow-necked Mouse: On Dec 13 one or more of these were still visiting Richard Carpenter's bird feeders in his Hill Head garden.
8. Water Vole: I think these are not often seen in the winter months from the end of October until March, and the last record of a sighting at Emsworth's Brook Meadow that I have noted was dated Sep 16 this year, but in the Sussex bird news there is a reference to one being seen on the Chichester Lavant (where it passes the Apuldram sewage works before entering the Fishbourne Channel) as late as Nov 16.

Sat 18 Dec

C. Havant and Emsworth

In the afternoon I cycled around the Emsworth area delivering Christmas cards. Although the weather was dull I heard Collared Dove, Dunock, Robin, Starling, Great Tit and Song Thrush in song.

One thing that caught my eye as I cycled up Redlands Lane on the east side of north Emsworth was that the abandoned fields between it and the village of Westbourne had a strange addition to the usual plant growth - scattered across a large area were many plants of apparently well established Pampas Grass.

Coming back along Southleigh Road with a good view over the flat fields of the Southleigh Farm area which fill the Havant-Emsworth gap I saw the usual flock of more than 1000 mixed gulls, and as I was scanning them I noticed a bunch of five Roe Deer not far from me, seemingly eating the growing cereal crop. I then spotted a dog walker on the far side of the fields and as he and the dog came towards me they put two more bunches of Roe to flight giving a total of at least 11 deer in the fields.

Thu 16 Dec

E. Bedhampton and Broadmarsh

The return of the sun this afternoon enticed me to cycle down to Broadmarsh and gave me a list of 44 flowering wild plant species, chief among them being Sweet Violets flowering in the church yard of St Thomas at Old Bedhampton - I think these flowers have been 'forced' to flower early by a covering of fallen tree leaves which someone had just raked up

to expose the flowers. Nearby on the ancient wall Pellitory of the Wall was also fresh flowering but most of the other flowers were late survivors of a season that should have ended long ago - such as the Meadowsweet still boasting blossom at the Langbrook stream. Not yet flowering, but probably going to do so before Christmas, were Hazel catkins along the south side of the A27 which had already lengthened to more or less full size and turned yellow.

An unexpected bird sighting was of over 100 Rooks with perhaps 50 Jackdaws feeding on what I assume was a newly sown arable field just north of the railway and west of the stream running south through Old Bedhampton (the one you see along Brookside Road). At first glance I thought there were several Hooded Crows among them until I realised that when any of the Rooks were feeding with their backs to the wind their black feathers were blown forward to reveal almost silvery grey 'underclothes'. Nothing else special in the way of birds, but I did see a couple of male Gadwall on Bedhampton Mill pool and found the usual show of Shoveler, Teal, Pochard and Tufted Duck at Budds Farm. In St Thomas' churchyard, perhaps encouraged by the raking of leaves, I had a very close view of a Song Thrush on the ground.

[Tue 14 Dec](#)

B. Egret roost count at Salterns Copse near Chichester Yacht Basin

The title 'Egret Roost count' is a misnomer for this visit to the Chichester Channel in Chichester Harbour as I was not expecting to see any Egrets in Old Park wood, across the water from Salterns Copse, and did not do so, but this was the scheduled day for the mid-month count. Although I saw 53 Egrets enter the trees of Old Park wood on the night of July 14 and 45 on the night of Aug 12 none have used the wood since then and Pete Carr tells me this is normal at places where the Egrets have bred - once the juveniles have flown neither they nor the adults return to use that site as a night roost.

On this evening the tide was falling and had only just started to expose the mud of the channel so I did have fairly close views of quite a few hungry waders arriving from their high tide roosts to get a meal. As well as the Oystercatchers, Redshank, Curlew and Grey Plover more than 20 Turnstone flew in to scuttle up and down the tideline and with them came at least half a dozen Ringed Plover. Not seen, but heard 'wheezing' somewhere nearby in the saltings, were one or two Rock Pipits.

On my November visit there was no sign of the great mass of Corvids that normally roost in Old Park wood (just one group of about 250 birds came in at the very end of my visit) but this time at least 1400 birds arrived, mostly settling on the shore but a few heading straight for the tree tops where their silhouettes could just be seen against the darkening sky. As there was not an Egret in sight and it was nearly dark I soon headed back along the shore, and as I did so some 250 Brent and a few Shelduck flew south past me to start feeding on the mud near the Yacht basin entrance

[Mon 13 Dec](#)

A. Local news

In my garden this morning both Dunnock and Collared Dove were singing and a fresh flower had appeared on Scarlet Pimpernel.

In the evening, cycling past Langstone Mill when it was nearly dark, I was surprised to see the two Kingfishers on posts either side of the Lymbourne Stream outflow on the seaward side of the Mill buildings, but only six Egrets could be seen in the roost trees.

[Sun 12 Dec](#)

G. Latest News and Reports

BIRDS

141. Red-throated Diver: These are becoming more frequent along the coasts (mainly heading past us) with four reports this week on Dec 6, 7, 9 and 10 (two seen from the IoW, two from Portland Bill)
142. Black-throated Diver: None locally since one was seen from East Head (Chichester Harbour) on Nov 20 but two were fishing in Portland Harbour on Dec 7
143. Great Northern Diver: One was off Puckpool Point (north east corner of the IoW) on Dec 7 and another (only possible - recorded as a Diver species) was off Ventnor on Dec 10
144. Great Crested Grebe: Maybe the beginnings of a small flock off Ryde (IoW) with 20 seen on Dec 7 (two separate groups of 11 and 9). The two 'resident' birds were on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth for the Dec 11 WeBS count.
145. Slavonian Grebe: Although one has been seen occasionally in the Lymington area since Oct 26 there have only been two other reports for Hampshire so far - one was that interesting report from Ibsley Water in the Avon valley on Nov 20 and the other (only just now brought to my attention) was on that same day, seen off Titchfield Haven - did it fly on to the Avon Valley? More locally 8 were seen off Pagham Harbour by Owen Mitchell on Dec 4.
146. Cormorant: Richard Carpenter tells me there is a regular night roost of these birds within Titchfield Haven, but whether the number of birds using it corresponds to the count of 30 that normally fish the Titchfield Haven to Hamble river stretch of the Solent shore is an unanswered question. Of the five Cormorants at the IBM Lake in Portsmouth for the WeBS count on Dec 11 at least one adult was already showing the beginnings of a breeding plumage 'white roundel' on its thigh.
147. Bittern: I have now seen 8 reports of Bittern sightings at Titchfield Haven from Oct 10 to Dec 1 but there is no proof of more than one bird being present. At Rye Harbour Bitterns have been present since Oct 21 and the latest report on Dec 9 is one of three which claim that two different birds are present (since Nov 13)
148. Little Egret: A night roost count made by Barry Collins at the Thorney Deeps west on Dec 8 found 33 birds spending the night there. One other roost count made this week was at Rye Harbour where 40 were counted at dawn leaving the night roost there. Locally I was pleased to see one back on the Portsmouth IBM site for the Dec 11 WeBS count - it may not stay as (while one was present regularly from the beginning of April until July) I have only one record from that site for last winter (Kevin Stouse saw one on Nov 28)
149. Little Egret nocturnal behaviour: On Dec 9 Jason Crook made an observation affecting night roost counts - he happened to be on the east seawall of Farlington Marshes that evening and was watching 9 Egrets feeding in Russell's Lake (between the Marshes and the Islands). As it got darker three of them took off and headed towards the Wade Court roost but despite waiting until it was quite dark (when any counter at Wade Court would have gone home) the other six remained (trying to feed or roosting on the mud?). In the past I have heard rumours that Egrets probably migrate by night, and in case anyone interested in their nocturnal behaviour has forgotten what Jason wrote on 21 Feb 2001 it was ... Something interesting occurred with the egrets at Farlington Marshes this evening. A group of seven flew west from their feeding place in Russell's Lake, Langstone Harbour, passed over the Deeps

seawall behind me and then, to my surprise, instead of continuing on their flight line (which would have taken them to Horsea Island in Portsmouth Harbour) they dropped down into the back of the Deeps. This was at 1745 hrs. After walking to the Point and counting the Pintail and Goldeneye in Russell's Lake (102 and 21 respectively - with a further 10 Pintail on Farlington) I turned northwards again along the Deeps seawall and found that the egrets were still there, clearly settled in for the night, at 1820 hrs (ie, almost dark). I have only seen them night-roosting in trees before. The birds this evening were stood on a grassy bank beside water. Has anyone else noted egrets night-roosting on the ground before?

150. Mute Swan: Owen Mitchell walked the riverbank path of the Arun from Ford north to Arundel on Dec 6 and counted 136 Swans plus one Black Swan. In Portsmouth Brian Fellows found three Swan families of which we have not heard for some time - the pair with one cygnet were still on Baffins Pond, at Eastney Lake he saw a pair with four cygnets and at the Southsea Canoe lake he saw a pair with 3 cygnets (don't know where they would have nested - maybe one of the Milton Lakes pairs?)
151. Bewick's Swan: A single bird was spotted by Paul Stevens on Dec 6 among Mutes on the Amberley Wild Brooks - this is the first report from that site this winter.
152. Black Swan: On Dec 9 I saw the two Black Swans on the West Ashling pond (west of Chichester). On New Year's Day in 2003 they had two downy cygnets but no cygnets were visible on 6 Jan 2004. As both birds were present on the water I assume they do not have a nest this season..
153. Bean Goose: A flock of 48 were reported at Rye Harbour on Dec 7
154. White-front Goose: On Dec 7 flock of 60 were at Rye (and a flock of 59, presumably the same flock?) were in the Cuckmere valley
155. Canada Goose: Richard Carpenter tells me that the resident flock at Titchfield Haven now numbers around 100 birds
156. Barnacle Goose: Richard also confirms that all nine of the Baffins Gang birds plus the hybrid Bar Head of the same gang are currently at Titchfield Haven.
157. Black Brant: The Pagham North Walls bird was still present on Dec 8 and on Dec 10 what must have been the Wittering bird seems to have flown across the Chichester Harbour entrance to be seen at Black Point on Hayling (but was seen to fly back east).
158. Wigeon: Richard Carpenter estimates the size of the current flock at Titchfield Haven at greater than 270 birds.
159. Gadwall: What looked like a pair of Gadwall seemed to be the only birds present on Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) when I passed on Dec 9 - the pond now has a water depth of only about 1 foot but is re-filling much earlier than in recent years after drying out later than usual at the beginning of Oct.
160. Teal: Richard Carpenter estimates the current population at Titchfield Haven is in excess of 350.
161. Mallard: The number coming to the evening feed of grain provided for the wildfowl at Titchfield Haven was 312 on Nov 27, and Brian Fellows provides recent counts of 182 on the Emsworth Town Millpond with another 102 at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth. Although the feeding at these two sites may not be as generous or healthy as they would get at Titchfield Haven it is a lot better than anything they would get at the IBM Portsmouth lake which may explain why only 17 were present there for the Dec 11 WeBS count!

162. Pintail: 37 were on the Links scrape at Hook (Warsash) on Dec 7 (numbers there have almost doubled since the count of 20 on Dec 5). On Dec 8 Owen Mitchell reported that numbers at Pagham Harbour had greatly increased in the preceding few days (but he gave no count)
163. Shoveler: The count at Titchfield Haven had grown to 37 on Dec 5 (with more than 35 there on Dec 10) and there are still at least 20 on Budds Farm Pools (plus one pair on the IBM Lake on Dec 11. In Portsmouth there were 42 at Baffins Pond on Oct 19 and that had only increased to 52 on Dec 9. At Rye Harbour there are now 103 and at the Blashford Lakes there has probably been an increase since the count of 105 on Nov 28
164. Tufted Duck: Numbers are increasing at last with 20 on the Emsworth Millpond on Dec 8 and 50 on Baffins Pond on Dec 9
165. Scaup: The count at Rye Harbour was up to 7 on Dec 8 and the 5 were still at Brooklands Lake (Worthing) on Dec 9
166. Eider: On Dec 7 John Norton counted 72 off Titchfield Haven - the highest count this autumn (though there were 66 there in mid October)
167. Long-tailed Duck: Also on Dec 7 John Norton thought he saw one distantly off Titchfield Haven but could not be certain.
168. Common Scoter: The only large number in the current news is a flock of 60 on the sea just east of Portland Bill.
169. Red-breasted Merganser: One was brave enough to venture onto the Emsworth Slipper Millpond on Dec 8 where it was seen on one of the rafts.
170. Marsh Harrier: There was another sighting of one at Titchfield Haven on Nov 27 and on Dec 5 two were seen at Pagham Harbour and a first winter bird was over the Lewes Brooks (south of the town).
171. Buzzard: On Dec 9 as Colin Bates was driving along the M27 where it crosses over the River Test he saw a raptor with what seemed to be a pure pale white breast sitting in a tree. More than one person has commented that male birds are often paler than females.
172. Merlin: These are a fairly regular sight on the coast during the winter months but Richard Hallett had a very pleasant surprise when, on Dec 9, one shot along a hedgerow close to him when he was walking in the Creech Woods west near his Denmead home.
173. Golden Plover: Owen Mitchell found 460 in Pagham Harbour on Dec 4 and on Dec 7 Bob Marchant estimated more than 600 at Hook/Warsash.
174. Lapwing: The Lapwing flock on Pagham Harbour was estimated to have 1500 birds on Dec 4. At Titchfield Haven the flock is around 210 and at Hook along the shore there are another 125
175. Knot: More than 30 in the Warsash Bunny Meadows area on Dec 10 (you should get good close views of the birds at this site)
176. Purple Sandpiper: Brian Fellows found 4 at Southsea Castle on Dec 6
177. Ruff: Six were seen flying with a Lapwing flock over Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 6
178. Snipe: A good count of 50 were at Hook / Warsash on Dec 7 and more than 20 may be seen at Titchfield Haven now
179. Woodcock: One was seen at Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 6

180. Bar-tailed Godwit: Still very few being reported - on Dec 4 there was just one (with 10 Blackwits) at the Warsash Bunny Meadows, and the highspot was a count of 6 at Pagham Harbour on Dec 5
181. Common Sandpiper: A single wintering bird was by the River Arun south of Arundel on Dec 6
182. Black-headed Gull: On the Hayling Bay shore on Dec 12 one was still showing a full black head...
183. Sandwich Tern: A single bird was off Ryde esplanade on the loW on Dec 7 and maybe the same bird was off Titchfield Haven on Dec 10
184. Wood Pigeon: Reports of large flocks on the move have now tailed off but a walker in Stansted Forest on Dec 12 was amazed when an 'immense flock' suddenly took off close to her, the noise of their wings totally drowned the sound of a nearby chain saw.
185. Little Owl: I am not quite sure of the detail but I believe that these birds can again be seen at both sites in the Hoe Cross area west of Hambledon (one near the crossroads, the other in a row of trees east of the road going north through the East Hoe area)
186. Short Eared Owl: One of the Thornham Marshes birds was seen by Brian Fellows close to Thornham Point on Dec 9. In the Hamble area two birds continue to be seen over the disused Hamble airfield (where they spend much of last winter). The site was misleadingly identified in reports of earlier sightings recently as being Hamble Common.
187. Skylark: Another flock of more than 100 birds was seen over the Lewes Brooks near Rodmell village on Dec 9
188. Sand Martin: Not another sighting but a clarification. The Titchfield Haven website has at last been updated and shows that one bird was regularly seen over the reserve from Nov 13 - 19.
189. Swallow: One spent 20 minutes feeding around a pony paddock at Peter Raby's home in the Bridgemary area of Gosport on Dec 6 but the latest so far is one seen at Portland Bill on Dec 7
190. Water Pipit: Rather late news but I see that one was at the flooded meadows north of the Titchfield Haven reserve on Nov 6
191. Waxwing: Thanks to Mike Easterbrook I hear that a group of 9 were feeding on Rowan berries at Larkfield near Maidstone in Kent on Dec 7
192. Black Redstart: It seems that there has been another sighting on Dec 10 of the bird at the extreme east end of the Eastoke promenade on Hayling (close to Sandy Point) - Simon Wright picked this news up from Bird Guides.
193. Fieldfare: Geoff Dicker reports huge flocks of both Fieldfare and Redwing on both Broomy and Ocknell Plains in the New Forest on Dec 6. On that day Owen Mitchell saw 100 Fieldfare by the Arun near Ford south of Arundel.
194. Redwing: Many were present at Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 6 and it seems that a new wave flew in over Portland Bill during the night of Dec 9/10 with plenty still around on the morning of Dec 10
195. Blackcap: By no means the first of the winter Judith Chawner reports the return of one to the bird feeder in her Winchester garden on Dec 9 and on Dec 10 David Holland had the first in his Southampton garden (Upper Shirley area)

196. Firecrest: One in bushes behind the Lifeboat Station at Black Point on Hayling Island on Dec 10 is worth looking out for if you are in that area (but there are plenty of others around...)
197. Bearded Tit: Richard Carpenter reckons there are more than a dozen to be seen at Titchfield Haven currently.
198. Gosport area corvid roost: The first news of this for this winter comes from Richard Carpenter who says that significant numbers of both Rooks and Jackdaw can now be seen passing over Titchfield Haven each dawn and dusk.
199. Carrion Crow: You may have heard of a Parliament of Rooks assembling to determine and then administer the appropriate punishment to a Rook who has violated the rules of the rookery but I have never heard of anything like the Crow behaviour which Peter Raby witnessed at Gilkicker Point (Gosport) on Dec 6. Peter writes Using the car as a hide, I was trying to take photos of a Med Gull amongst the Common Gulls, when alas it was flushed by dog walkers, so I turned my attention to the very tame Carrion Crows (about 10 were present close to my position). All was well. Suddenly the Carrion Crows started calling with this spooky "horror movie-like" call and when I looked up from my camera a dead Carrion Crow was being attacked by the crows. Within just a minute some 200+ Crows had flown in from all four corners of Gilkicker and the sound of their calls was really loud and spooky!! For about 5 minutes they all had a peck at the dead crow, as if trying to revive it. Then, when they all realised the bird was indeed dead, the calling stopped and the birds slowly dispersed. The dead crow was not there when I started taking photos. It had obviously just died and all its mates mourned its demise!! Weird!!! I've never heard Carrion Crows call that way before.
200. Greenfinch: Another story comes from Paul Lidster who heard it from James Lidster (Dorset Bird Recorder). James says that greenfinches in his area have been dropping dead with a mysterious illness. It seems they become unable to swallow, causing them to "spit out" the seed they were eating. This is then eaten by other birds and the disease is then passed on. James has forwarded some corpses to a lab somewhere, and the early diagnosis is that its a form of salmonella.
201. Corn Bunting: Maybe the flock at Rye Harbour is splitting up and the birds spreading to other areas. The very slender evidence for this is the latest count from Rye is of 50+ birds (on Dec 8) while just 3 of the birds were seen at Rodmell by the River Ouse just south of Lewes on Dec 9

PLANTS

21. There were still 81 species in flower in the week ending Dec 5 and walking round the IBM Portsmouth site on Dec 11 I found more than 20 Bee Orchid leaf rosettes looking very healthy

INSECTS

4. Red Admiral: One was seen in Gosport on Dec 29, extending this year's latest date by three days from Nov 26
5. Bloxworth Snout: One of these unusual moths was found in the Ventnor area on Dec 5
6. Dark Arches: Not an uncommon moth for which I have reports in all months from May to August - but one taken in the Totland area of the loW on Dec 2 was very unusual
7. Willow Beauty: As with Dark Arches there were plenty of reports of this species from May to September followed by two odd sightings on Nov 7 in Eastleigh and now Dec 2 on the loW
8. Cypress Carpet: One of these was found at Ferring (Worthing area) on Dec 5

OTHER

9. Red Squirrel: Four were seen in Firestone Copse (near Wootton Creek on the IoW) by Derek Hale on Dec 7. Red Squirrels are not too difficult to find on the IoW but this mention of them reminds me of two outstanding questions in my mind. The first concerns the Grey Squirrel reported to have been seen in Walters Copse near Newtown Harbour on Nov 11 - hopefully no further mentions of the species entering the Island as illegal immigrants means that it has been 'dealt with', but I am sure I am not the only person wanting re-assurance on that matter. The second concerns the Red Squirrels - have they, like the Greys, ceased to hibernate nowadays?
10. Common Frog: Richard Carpenter tells me that some at least are still active in garden ponds in the Titchfield/Hill Head area. They, like the Squirrels, are supposed to hibernate, but with warmer and warmer winters I wonder if they too are giving up the habit. I can certainly recall occasional reports of Frog spawn in December ...
11. Fungi: In the Sling area of Stansted Forest two magnificent examples of the Verdigris toadstool (*Stropharia aeruginosa*) can be seen at the same spot that the Birds Nest fungi (*Cyathus striatus*) were found some time back - and can still be seen if you clear off the fallen leaves with a type of Eyelash fungus growing nearby. Not far away, on a huge fallen trunk lying alongside the main path going uphill from the Forestside Road entrance to the west end of the Main Avenue, the rare and colourful *Panellus serotinus* has just appeared and near it (but 'off track') the even rarer *Phyllostopsis nidulans* is still looking good. Less exciting, but adding interest to my walk around the IBM Lake at Portsmouth counting birds on Dec 11, was a patch of colourful *Stropharia aurantiaca*, and close to where I parked my car a single example of *Tricholoma cingulatum* was in prime condition.

[Sat 11 Dec](#)

D. WeBS count to the IBM Lake at Portsmouth

Nothing special in the way of birds other than a single Little Egret with 5 Herons, and the first sight of breeding plumage (white 'thigh roundel') on one of the Cormorants. I also had a good but brief view of a hunting female Sparrowhawk, one Chiffchaff and one Goldcrest. Towards the end of the visit I enjoyed the sight of a Goldfinch singing enthusiastically.

Both of the Great Crested Grebes were on the water with just two Pochard, a pair of Shoveler and one Tufted Duck. Also seen in flight were a couple of Teal and just one Canada Goose - presumably unable to fly!

Even the Mallard were down to just 17 birds but Coot (52) and Moorhen (37) were in roughly normal numbers, as were 5 Little Grebe.

A few more gulls were using the water for a wash - max estimates were of 40 Black-headed, 8 Common and 10 Herring gulls

Among the 19 flowering plant species on the site were Perforated St John's Wort, Blue Fleabane, Winter Heliotrope, Thale Cress and Thyme-leaved Speedwell. A number of fresh plants of Sticky Mouse-ear were seen but none of the flowers were open.

On the wood chipping mulch in one of the flower beds there was a colourful clump of *Stropharia aurantiaca* fungus and in another flower bed I saw one example of *Tricholoma cingulatum*.

[Thu 09 Dec](#)

F. Christmas shopping in Chichester

There is always something of interest to be found wherever you go and today I found Pellitory of the Wall in full flower when in Chichester, and by making a slight detour on the way home I was able to confirm that the pair of Black Swans are still present on the West

Ashling Mill pond - as both were seen I assume they are not nesting this winter though I may have happened to be there when the female was briefly off the nest. I also stopped to look at Aldsworth Pond which, as I reported recently, has water in it but not yet deep enough to encourage wildfowl - I think there was one pair of Gadwall present but I did not have my binoculars with me and did not stop long enough for a thorough look round.

In the afternoon I cycled down to the Brockhampton area for a quick check on the 'White Ramping fumitory' beside Harts Farm Way where I found that a few flower heads had begun to develop fruits - sadly none were showing any signs of having recurved pedicels, almost certainly disproving its identity as genuine White Ramping Fumitory. There is still some hope though as I think the expert botanists who write the text books do not look at the plants until they are well and truly dead and have had the life pressed out of them, and the examples which I brought home earlier and left to die did have recurved pedicels when dead!

While in that area I went to Penner Road where I had recently found another potential candidate plant (on which Brian Fellows did find some seeds with recurved pedicels) but today those plants were in a very sorry state and had either suffered severe frost or been sprayed with weed killer (perhaps causing the pedicels to bend as death set in when Brian found them?)

On this trip I included the Budds Farm Pools where there were a few more Tufted Duck (but only around a dozen) and fewer Pochard (I only saw three) with perhaps 40 Teal and 10 Shoveler.

Going along the Budds Farm shore I found one plant of Hemlock starting to flower and by the Brockhampton stream found yet another plant of Cow Parsley in full flower.

[Wed 08 Dec](#)

C. Latest News and Reports

BIRDS

1. Little Grebe: A flock of 30 found in Fareham Creek on Dec 5 did not set a record (counts of 40 have been made there 8 Nov 2003 and 6 Jan 2002) but does mark a significant arrival of birds at the coast. Looking at previous counts these birds will probably not stay as a single flock but I suspect the counts of 20 or 30 may be made there through to February.
2. Great Crested Grebe: The winter flock in Rye Bay which numbered 117 on Nov 20 and 285 on Nov 27 was up to 586 on Dec 3
3. Bittern: One flew north over the Testwood Lakes and up the Test Valley in the early morning of Dec 5 - maybe heading for the same (unknown) destination as the one which flew north over Romsey on Nov 29
4. Cattle Egret: The bird which I think arrived in the Salisbury area on Nov 24 is I think still there - Ian Calderwood says he saw it at Firsdawn on Dec 5 but I cannot find Firsdawn anywhere on my map of the Salisbury area so it may now be in a different area.
5. Great White Egret: The Blashford Lakes bird near Ringwood was seen by Roger Webb on Mockbeggar Lake on Dec 4
6. Bewick's Swan: It looks as if at least two have settled in the Ibsley area north of Ringwood - four birds appeared there on Nov 27 but only 2 were seen on Nov 28 and two were again seen there on Dec 5.
7. Black Swan: The bird on the Gosport Cackle Pond was still there on Dec 5 and I think there may still be one at the Lymington Marshes (no one has mentioned its presence but one person who has been there recently referred to 'the Black Swan pond' as if the Swan is still on it).

8. Bean Goose: The seven birds which arrived in the Atherfield area (near St Catherine's Point on the IoW) on Dec 3 were seen again on Dec 4 and 5. Another group of four arrived on the Pevensey Levels between Eastbourne and Hastings on Dec 4 and one or more were at Scotney Court at Rye on Dec 5.
9. White-fronted Goose: No more news of the flock of 19 reported to be at Pagham Harbour on Dec 1 but much nearer Havant a group of three adults arrived in the fields just north of the Little Deeps on Thorney Island on Dec 4 and were still there next day. Another 11 Whitefronts turned up at the Pevensey Levels on Dec 4 and 5, and a flock of 40 arrived at Rye Harbour (Scotney) on Dec 5 (though only 10 were reported there on Dec 6). None have been seen in Hampshire yet this winter as far as I know...
10. Black Brant: One arrived at Ferrybridge (joining Weymouth to Portland Bill) on Dec 1 but may be an 'intergrade' bird as the photo of it shows a neck band not much bolder than that on a normal Brent and its flanks are not the 'Persil White' that you sometimes see.
11. Shelduck: The November 13 WeBS count found 89 In Portsmouth Harbour which was the third highest pre-Christmas count for the Harbour in recent years and now Trevor Carpenter reports a record count of 31 of them in Fareham Creek, In the Havant area there are at least 40 currently to be seen along the shore east of Langstone (though I can remember expecting counts of 100 there on winter days not too many years ago).
12. Wigeon: 346 were in Fareham Creek on Dec 5 - well exceeding the normal flock of around 50 in Cams Bay. Last winter the high count there was 325.
13. Gadwall: A count of 50 made by Cliff Oakley on the Chichester Lakes on Dec 5 is the highest made there so far this winter but I see that on Jan 31 this year Brian Fellows found more than 150 there.
14. Pintail: A single male was on the Emsworth western shore on Dec 7 (first back there I think) but on Dec 5 John Faithfull found 20 on the Links scrape at Hook/Warsash.
15. Pochard: Two males were an unexpected find on the Chidmere Pond at Chidham in Chichester Harbour on Dec 3 but a total of 106 on the Chichester Lakes on Dec 5 was more impressive (and double the count made there a month ago)
16. Tufted Duck: Numbers of these have also doubled on the Chichester Lakes between Nov 6 and Dec 5 (going up from 76 to 135)
17. Scaup: So far none have been reported in Hampshire but they are coming our way. One was seen offshore in Rye Bay on Nov 6 and 2 are now regularly seen on the Scotney gravel pit there. On Dec 3 a group of 5 arrived on Brooklands Lake at Worthing and were still there on Dec 4 when a different group of 6 were seen on the Arlington reservoir near Beachy Head.
18. Long Tailed Duck: In addition to the long staying bird in the Lymington area (present from Nov 4 to at least Dec 5) one was in the Emsworth Channel from Dec 3 to at least Dec 5
19. Common Scoter: The flock in Rye Bay has now grown to 200 birds and another flock has recently built to 57 birds off Portland Bill but I have not heard of more than 21 being seen together in the Solent area this winter.
20. Velvet Scoter: On Dec 5 an impressive flock of 15 was reported off the west fields at Selsey
21. Smew: The first drake that I have heard of this winter was at Rye Harbour with five redheads on Dec 3
22. Goosander: These, it would seem, remain more numerous in south Hampshire this winter (north Hampshire normally has far more of them than we see in the south). On

Dec 5 David Thelwell watched 12 fly north over Broadlands and up the Test Valley with another remaining on the Test .

23. Ruddy Duck: One was again seen on the Chichester Lakes on Dec 5
24. Marsh Harrier: Two were seen in Pagham Harbour on Dec 5 when 3 were seen at Rye.
25. Hen Harrier: On Dec 2 a ringtail was quartering fields near Lower Chidden Farm (north of Hambledon and south east of Old Winchester Hill). Reports of ringtails have come in during the past week from the Brading Marshes, Bransbury Common near Andover, and from Rye Harbour and Arlington reservoir in Sussex but it would seem that the frequency of males is increasing - only 4 of the first 45 reports of this species that I have seen this autumn up to the end of November have been males, but of 12 reports in December three have been males (one at Brighton and two different sites in the New Forest - one of these producing 2 males at the same visit).
26. Merlin: Your chances of seeing one around north west Hayling (without having to trek to Farlington Marshes) seem to have increased this week. Since John Chapman saw one at the Oysterbeds on Dec 3 Tom Bickerton and Dennis Crassweller both saw one on Dec 5 (Tom's was at the Oysterbeds but Dennis saw his as he drove over Langstone Bridge and nearly crashed into another car as a result)
27. Peregrine: Sightings of these are common nowadays but I was amused to hear how Colin Bates saw one catch a Jackdaw over Bishopstoke and later watched the Peregrine eating it on it favourite perch on an electricity pylon near the Itchen with an audience of 15 Cormorants on the next pylon in the line.
28. Avocet: Latest sighting in Chichester Harbour was of 13 birds seen by Barry Collins in Prinsted Bay on Dec 3 and in Langstone Harbour Stephen Piggott saw 13 in the Shutt Lake area west of Farlington Marshes on Dec 5 (where John Goodspeed had almost certain seen 20 on Dec 4 - two groups of 12 and 8 birds seen separately)
29. Dotterel: Bob Willows gives a clear description of a juvenile bird which he saw in the channel emptying the Sidlesham Ferry Pool into the main Pagham Harbour on Dec 5. I will be interested to find out if this is the first ever December record for Sussex - they did have one winter record when a bird was present in Jan and Feb of 1992. As far as I know there has never been a winter sighting in Hampshire.
30. Golden Plover: There seems to have been a significant increase in numbers of Golden Plover along the south coast in the last few days, perhaps starting on Nov 29 when 250 were in the area south of Eastleigh (previously the highest count there had been 140 on Nov 9). That count, however, is puny compared to the 2800 seen by John Clark on Dec 4 at Badshot Lea on the A324 road from Farnham into Aldershot - I have no previous reports from that site though John says that the number there had dropped to 1030 on Dec 5. On Dec 5 there were 450 on the Lymington Marshes (highest count for the year there though there had been 356 on Nov 14) and 375 at Hook/Warsash, increasing to 645 (year max for the site) on Dec 6. Also on Dec 6 Trevor Carpenter found some 550 off north Hayling seen from Northney (and presumably visible from Langstone or Warblington if anyone had been looking). Looking at these coastal increases I would guess that the 2800 at Badshot Lea was a mass 'transit camp' of birds heading south... Lapwing numbers have also increased along the coast in the past week but less dramatically.
31. Knot: Not so many years ago if I wanted to see Knot or Bar-tailed Godwit in Langstone Harbour I would head to The Kench to see a mass of the Godwits and Knot in a high tide roost there - both species seemed to be restricted to the sandy areas around the harbour mud, totally avoiding the mud further north in the harbour. Nowadays both species seem to have changed their feeding habits and are much more likely to be seen in the area east of Langstone Bridge (though they still mass in

the southern part of Chichester Harbour). One illustration of this can be seen in recent reports of Knot with counts of 28 seen by Trevor Carpenter off Northney on Dec 6 (matching my estimate of 30 on the north side of the water there on Dec 3) as against just 8 seen by Trevor at the Kench on Dec 6. The only other Knot I have heard of at The Kench this winter were just 2 seen by George Spraggs on Oct 18 (and the peak count for this year there was just 20 in January). More Knot have recently arrived in the Hook/Warsash area with a count of 32 there in Dec 6 (though some may have escaped attention further up the Hamble - on Nov 15 Richard Carpenter unexpectedly found 15 in the Bunny Meadows area).

32. Jack Snipe: Several of these elusive birds may have recently arrived in our area as a group of 4 were at Thorness Bay on the north west coast of the loW on Dec 5 (only the second report from the loW this year). Jack Snipe have been reported from Rye Harbour since Oct 2 this autumn (six different dates) and there was one report from Newhaven on Nov 3. Across the Solent in the Hook area there has been a big influx of Common Snipe with counts of 41 on Dec 4 and 64 on Dec 6 and some Jack Snipe may well have come with them.
33. Woodcock: One seen on Dec 4 by John Faithfull at the Curbridge nature reserve on the Hamble River north of the M27 may have been a local bird but could have been a new arrival.
34. Bar-tailed Godwit: There seems to be a strange absence of these this winter. Back in October I made several counts of up to 300 birds off Northney on Hayling Island and I was still able to see 30 there on Nov 13 but since then the only reports of them that I have seen have been seven reports of single birds at widely separated locations, one report of two birds at Black Point on Hayling and one of three birds at Tanners Lane near Lymington. Is it just that people have become bored with them and are no longer reporting big flocks, or have they really vanished from the scene?
35. Whimbrel: Stephen Piggott saw a wintering bird in Langstone Harbour on Dec 5. I suspect a single bird is wintering in the harbour but no one has mentioned its presence since Sep 21 when Brian Fellows saw it in the south west of the harbour off Milton Common,
36. Greenshank: Five were present on the Hamble river at Curbridge on Dec 4 and two were at the Lymington Marshes on Dec 5 when one was in Fareham Creek. I suspect a good number are wintering around Thorney Island but the only recent evidence I have is a count of four made by myself between Langstone and Emsworth on Dec 7
37. Sandpipers: Two Common Sandpipers were on the River Hamble at Curbridge on Dec 4 and one Green Sandpiper was at the Testwood Lakes on that day. At the Lower Test marshes up to 9 Greens were present in mid September but the last news from that site was of 5 birds on Nov 13.
38. Gulls: In my notes for my trip to Emsworth on Dec 7 I have mentioned the large number of gulls seen in the fields south of the Southleigh Forest Rubbish Tip, and Brian Fellows thought that there has been a significant movement of gulls from Portsmouth to Chichester Harbour following closure of the massive Paulsgrove rubbish tip in the north east corner of Portsmouth Harbour.
39. Ring-billed Gull: The Gosport bird remains present up to Dec 5
40. Sandwich Tern: Two were seen off the Ryde Esplanade on Dec 6.
41. Razorbill: On Dec 6 Richard Creer watched one within five metres of where he was standing on the Black Point shore (mouth of Chichester Harbour) and this provoked one Hoslister to ask whether Richard was walking on water at the time (or words to that effect) but the deep water channel carrying all the water in and out of Chichester Harbour runs within a few metres of the causeway leading out to Black Point while

another more artificial deep water channel runs around the north of the point to serve Sparkes boat yard and moorings. This is a very good place to get close views of divers and auks and I can vouch for similar close sightings in the past (beside the causeway shore) of Great Northern Diver (swimming north under water against the ebbing tide, hoping for fish being carried out to sea, then surfacing to drift back beside me to give perfect close up views, repeating the cycle several times) and of Little Auk even closer in. Over on the other side of the harbour entrance at East Head I recall seeing a Razorbill almost swimming between the legs of holiday makers paddling there one August day - perhaps it was a young bird which had never seen a human before and knew nothing about their bad habits.

42. Short-eared Owl: I have already reported Jeff Goodridge's sighting of two hunting the Thornham Marshes on north east Thorney Island on Dec 3, and since then I see that Barry Collins has known of their presence there since Nov 29 so it does seem likely that they have settled in for the winter. On Dec 4 Barry saw three of these owls there, and on that day two were hunting the RSPB reserve at Brading Marshes on the IoW. Dec 5 brought another report of two, maybe three, hunting the Hamble Common area on the Hampshire mainland, and of another bird over the west fields at Selsey.
43. Skylark: In response to my excitement over hearing of a flock of more than 100 Skylarks in Hampshire (see my last batch of news) Brian Fellows tells me that he probably saw well over 100 in fields on the north east shore of the Cobnor peninsula (top of the Bosham Channel) on Dec 4 - the misty conditions may have 'grounded' a migrant flock there or they may be resident for the winter. Another big flock was seen by an SOS outing by the River Adur in the Beeding area on Dec 1
44. Swallow: The latest report is of one seen at the Portland Bird Observatory on Dec 5
45. Pied Wagtail: So far this winter we have had no reports of massive Pied Wagtail night roosts but to get us started Roger Webb tells us that when he was at Godshill (north west edge of the New Forest above Fordingbridge) on Dec 4 he saw more than 100 in the air against a sunset sky.
46. Waxwing: A possible sighting of one in Hampshire came to my attention when I was in the Havant Tourist Info office on Dec 6 - I was told that someone had been in earlier and had mentioned that someone in Rowlands Castle had seen a strange bird in their garden in the past few days, and when shown a bird book the sighter pointed to the picture of a Waxwing and said 'That's what I saw'. Much better evidence for their having reached Hampshire comes from John Clark who tells us that Graham Stephenson and Pete Gammage saw a flock of twelve at Woolmer Pond near Alton on Dec 5. Another confirmed sighting is of one eating Rowan berries at East Grinstead in Sussex on Dec 4.
47. Fieldfare: The biggest flock seen in the past few days was seen by David Thelwell on the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Dec 5 - his estimated count was 600 birds
48. Redwing: In general there seem to be far fewer of these than of Fieldfare at the moment. The biggest count in current reports comes from Alan Lewis at Bransbury Common near Andover where he saw more than 50 on Dec 5. Colin Bates also estimated 50 over Bishopstoke near Eastleigh on the same day - there may be been more in the New Forest but I cannot put an accurate figure on Ian Calderwood's 'many' in the Pitts Wood area on Dec 5
49. Mistle Thrush: Cliff Dean heard his first song from one in the Pett area near Hastings on Dec 3 - he thought this was an early date for song but Steve Mansfield had heard one singing in north Hampshire on Nov 11.
50. Blackcap: I see that one or two are wintering in the garden of the Portland Bill bird observatory - perhaps ready to be off if the winter gets too cold?

51. Bearded Tit: Barry Collins suggests that this is a good time to look and listen for these at the Thorney Little Deeps where he found more than 20 on Dec 3
52. Great Grey Shrike: Birds have now appeared in five separate areas of the New Forest, the last of these having been seen at Holm Hill (west of Brockenhurst) on Dec 5 by Judith Chawner
53. Brambling. Also on Dec 5 Judith found many Bramblings with Chaffinch in Mark Ash Wood (New Forest)
54. Linnet: A flock of over 200 had built up at Eastleigh Lakeside country park by Dec 4 and on Dec 5 there was a flock of 100 at Fareham Creek.
55. Twite: It seems that the Twite and at least one Snow Bunting from East Head may have moved north to the Chidham area in Chichester harbour. On Dec 5 Tom Bickerton found them with many Linnets, etc, in a newly ploughed field near the pub in Chidham village - I think he saw them from the southern of the two paths going west from Cot Lane to Nutbourne Bay but the instructions are not very precise - there are two other field paths starting near the pub (one going south east to Chidmere Pond and another going north south to the east of the pub.
56. Lapland Bunting: A juvenile was seen on Dec 4 in the Atherfield area just west of St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight (where a different individual had been seen on Nov 17)
57. Snow Bunting: Just one seen by Tom Bickerton at Chidham on Dec 5 (see Twite above)
58. Reed Bunting: Two seen by myself on the Warblington Farm shore near Nore Barn were a surprise addition to my list (I haven't seen a Reed Bunting for ages!) but were clearly not staying there as they flew off over the harbour towards Thorney Island
59. Corn Bunting: A count of more than 130 at Rye Harbour on Dec 4 probably means that the total of 165 seen there in November are still around. Other than a one off sighting of three birds flying over Hastings on Oct 26 and another of twenty birds in the Sompting area of Worthing on Nov 5 the only reports of Corn Bunting since the start of September have come from Rye Harbour.

PLANTS

1. Polypody Fern: I have described in my notes for Dec 6 below how I found this growing on an old wall in the centre of Havant to give four fern species growing together on the wall (with Maidenhair Spleenwort, Wall Rue and Hart's Tongue fern)
2. Thale Cress: Just one plant flowering by the roadside in Havant
3. Lesser Stitchwort: Still flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth this week
4. Upright Hedge Parsley: Brian Fellows found this flowering on the Chidham peninsula of Chichester Harbour this week - this is the third local site at which this plant has been found flowering this winter (Ivy Lake at Chichester and Church Lane at Warblington being the other two). Flowering Cow Parsley is now becoming commonplace and more flowers are appearing on Hemlock.
5. Pepper Saxifrage: Flowers can still be seen on one plant at Brook Meadow in Emsworth.
6. Black Knapweed: Another flowering plant was found by Brian Fellows at Chidham.
7. Plants flowering in December: My count of species found in flower so far this month is 82

INSECTS

1. *Acleris ferrugana*: An uncommon micro moth found by Tim Walker at Winchester on the night of Dec 5
2. Pale Brindled Beauty: This moth normally appears in January so one taken in the Lymington area on Dec 4 by Russell Wynn was an early first for next year. Russell also continued the saga of a locally bred 'extra generation' of Silver Y moths this year by taking one on the same night.
3. Wasp: One was still on the wing and able to detach itself from a spider's web outside a window of my Havant house on Dec 8.
4. Stag Beetle: Tony Gutteridge has just had to cut down an old apple tree in his Havant garden and he tells me that many Stag Beetle larvae were discovered in its rotten stump.

OTHER

1. Velvet Shank toadstool: This colourful fungus seems to enjoy winter frost and I am not surprised to hear that it was found on Dec 2 on a dead elm in Emsworth's Brook Meadow
2. Rats: On a couple of recent visits to the Warblington Farm fields I have seen Rats out in the open in daylight and it has been pointed out to me that this is probably an indication that they have been poisoned and are feeling 'proper poorly'.

Tue 07 Dec

C. Havant, Warblington and Emsworth

This morning I cycled along the shore from Warblington to Emsworth and returned via the Horndean and Southleigh roads.

On the seawall at Warblington I found the Brent (around 160 with 27 juveniles) and Black-tailed Godwits (more than 80) with Curlews and Starlings feeding in the second shore field east of Pook Lane. This field has a well established oak tree out in the centre of it and as I was scanning the godwits around its base I found I was looking at a Jay which was right at the base of the tree - a strange bird to have in the middle of a flock of waders.

On the mud offshore at low tide I saw that b were still present (more than 50) and above them flew a flock of 150+ Lapwing. A single Greenshank was calling here and, going east to where the main Warblington farm stream flows out, I counted at least 40 Shelduck and 60 Teal with lots of Wigeon. At the far end of the farm shore where the seawall turns north towards Nore Barn I was surprised to find two Reed Buntings searching for food in the saltings but they flew off towards Thorney Island soon after I started watching them.

In the Nore Barn area the Cow Parsley went on my flower list along with the Tamarisk blossom which I had occasionally passed all along the Warblington shore.

Continuing along the Emsworth Western Parade I found one Lesser Blackback gull among the Black-headed and watched two Greenshank fly noisily along the Nore Rithe channel. Half way along this stretch (near the Beacon Square path) I spotted one male Pintail on the mud - first back here as far as I am concerned.

Yet another Greenshank was in the Town Millpond outfall channel before I headed through Emsworth to Brook Meadow where I stopped to have a close look at the southern interpretation board - not to see the pictures but to try to determine the identity of the many small specks on the plastic cover. At first glance I thought they were the remains of small midges which had succumbed to damp and cold but a close look with my x15 lens could not resolve the remains of their bodies. What appeared to be their translucent wings, forming an oval 'bowl' around what might be bodies lying on their backs, were well preserved but they could just as easily have been the exterior sheaths of some fungus

(like a Birds Nest fungus). Inside them the material looked slightly 'moss-like'. If anyone can tell me what they are I will be grateful!

I did not spend any time looking around the meadow (where Brian Fellows tells me I might have seen Pepper Saxifrage still in flower) but as I was making my way up the streamside path I spotted two Winter Heliotrope flower heads among the leaves on the river bank.

Brian Fellows thinks that there has been a notable increase in the number of gulls in the Emsworth area, particularly Herring Gulls, since the closure of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip at Portsmouth last September - this winter the birds have moved to the Southleigh Forest rubbish tip just north of Emsworth. On my way home I had some proof of this when I found three rather than one of the large open fields around Southleigh Farm in the Emsworth-Havant gap were full of gulls resting between trips to forage at the rubbish tip about half a mile from them.

Each winter for many years large numbers of Black-headed, Herring and Blackback gulls (both Great and Lesser) regularly use the fields west of the Horndean Road and south of Southleigh Road, and over 1000 were there today so I was surprised to find, after cycling west to the other side of the old farm, almost as many gulls there (adjacent to the Denvilles houses near Locks Farm), and looking north to the fields east of East Leigh Road I could see another large roost half hidden by houses. I would not have been surprised (had I made an accurate count of the birds in all three places) to have reached a total of 5000 gulls without going on to count gulls actually at the tip or in fields alongside the railway line north of Barton's Road.

Taking a short cut to Fourth Avenue via Swallow Close I looked up when a flock of what may have been 20 to 30 or more Collared Doves flew overhead, and in the same area I added Feverfew to my flower list

[Mon 06 Dec](#)

B. Havant area

The birds were active in my garden this morning with song from Collared Dove, Woodpigeon, Robin, Dunnock and possibly from a distant Mistle Thrush. Both a Grey Wagtail and a Great Spotted Woodpecker appeared briefly.

In the afternoon, when walking along the path south of the church in the centre of Havant from South Street to Homewell, I noticed Polypody Fern growing in a damp patch on the old wall which lines the path. This patch seems to retain its dampness throughout the year and as a result has much Wall Rue and Harts Tongue fern on it plus a plant of Maidenhair Spleenwort - I don't recall seeing Polypody here before but now it has arrived it is likely to remain.

Masses of Chickweed has been present everywhere (seemingly year round), and I often look at clumps to see if any of the many flower buds are open, which they normally are not at this time of year, but certain weather conditions suddenly cause all the flower buds to open and today was such a day.

Another plant still brightening the Havant street scene is Wall Lettuce - at least one of the plants growing in the gravel 'garden' in front of the flats which replaced the cinema in East Street is still covered with small bright yellow flowers.

While in Havant today I heard two interesting snippets of news from the staff at Havant Tourist Info office. The first item was a report of a Waxwing seen eating Berries in Rowlands Castle during the past week - I cannot vouch for its accuracy (it was one of those reports from a non-birder who had seen an unusual bird, looked through a bird book, and said 'That's the one' when a picture of a Waxwing came up) but in the current circumstances it seems quite likely that there was one there.

The other item I can vouch for, as it was seen over the weekend by one of the staff, is that Aldsworth Pond is once more full of water. Each year this pond dries up in the late

summer and remains dry until February or March. Why it should have re-filled now (when there has been little recent rainfall) is a bit of a mystery.

There was perhaps more rain than usual in September and October which has now filtered through the aquifer, and this pond is also affected by water abstraction by Sindles Farm, and maybe the damp autumn has both increased the input and reduced the abstraction of water....

Wildlife diary and news for Nov 29 - Dec 5 (Week 49)

Sun 05 Dec

H. Havant and Warblington

Song Thrush, Dunnock, Robin and Collared Dove were all singing when I went out in my garden before breakfast and later in the morning I heard Woodpigeon and Blue Tit (but not Great Tit though I have heard it several times this week). Walking around the Billy Line cycle track behind my house after breakfast I watched a large Tit flock getting their breakfast - many of them were Long-tailed and Blue Tits but there was at least one each of Coal Tit and Goldcrest.

On this morning walk I listed 40 plant species in flower including a new example of Cow Parsley, Black Medick, and (outside Havant rail station) both Storksbill and what I am pretty sure was Round-leaved Cranesbill though I did not have my lens with me. I also saw what I call Lesser Periwinkle flowering in a hedge bottom close to the one time site of Havant Farm (now the Health Centre) and noted the single plant of flowering Thale Cress in Prince George Street.

In the afternoon we walked around the Warblington Church area with a non-birding friend and from the seawall path saw a flock of Golden Plover in their usual winter day roost area south of Wade Lane. This is the first time I have seen them there this winter and my estimate of numbers was well over 50 - probably at least 80.

I. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

202. Black-throated Diver: None seen in our area since one was reported off East Head on Nov 20 but an SOS field trip to Sheppey saw one off north Kent on Nov 27

203. Great Northern Diver: One seen by Russell Wynn off the Lymington Marshes on Nov 30 - first report from the west Solent since Mike Rafter saw one near Hurst Castle on Oct 13

204. Red-necked Grebe: One off Seaview on the north east shore of the IoW on Nov 30. Probably the same bird had been seen there on Nov 27 but there may be a second bird in the Solent as one was also at the mouth of Southampton Water at Ashlett Creek on Nov 27

205. Slavonian Grebe: Variable numbers still being reported from the sea off Church Norton. I have previously reported a peak count of 28 there on Nov 24. Latest sightings are of 3 on Dec 1 and of 9 on Dec 2

206. Black-necked Grebe: Two were still on the water of Langstone Harbour to the south of Budds Wall on Nov 30, seen by Brian Fellows who found that it was once more possible to drive under the height barrier at the south end of Southmoor Lane and up onto Budds Mound - beware that the height barrier has been lowered to just 5ft 6 inches.

207. Sooty Shearwater: An undated report via Russell Wynn that one had been seen in the west Solent sometime during November.
208. Leach's Storm Petrel: as above - another undated report of one in the West Solent during November
209. Cormorant: Tom Bickerton tells me that Cormorants have been seen in the trees above the Leigh Park Gardens lake for at least four years and presumably use the trees as a night roost at certain times of year.
210. Bittern: John Shillitoe passes on a report of one having been seen by Anon at Titchfield Haven on Dec 1
211. Great White Egret: Owen Mitchell passes on an unconfirmed report of one having been seen in Pagham Harbour recently (probably Dec 1)
212. Bean Goose: A flock of 9 were reported to have been in fields at Atherfield near St Catherine's Point on the IoW on Dec 3
213. White-front Geese: A flock of 19 were reported to have been at Pagham Harbour on Dec 1.
214. Canada Goose: Brian Fellows saw 76 in Emsworth Harbour on Nov 30. Although there is almost certainly a small flock based on Thorney Island I think these must be strangers newly arrived in this area. The only report of a large number on Thorney Island this autumn was of around 150 there in the week preceding Sep 25.
215. Wigeon: At dusk on Dec 4 there were at least 100 on the sea off the Langstone South Moors (but none off the Budds Farm shore) - this is the highest total I have heard of for this area.
216. Pintail: A total of 342 at the Lymington Marshes on Nov 30 was reported by Russell Wynn
217. Red-crested Pochard: A female was on the Waltham Brooks near Greatham Bridge over the Arun on Nov 28
218. Pochard: During November the peak count at Rye Harbour was 139 - no date given
219. Scaup: Also at Rye Harbour the November peak count was 8. More recently 5 were on the Brooklands Lake at Worthing on Dec 3
220. Eider: Singles had been reported in Chichester Harbour on Sep 16 and 30 but a count of 22 off East Head was unexpected - maybe a much larger flock will build up there (I can remember one year in which around 70 summered in the harbour and could be seen on Stakes Island). Another single Eider was off Farlington Marshes on Nov 30 (one had been a regular sight in Langstone Harbour from Jan to Apr this year and was again reported in late August but this is the first news of one there since August).
221. Red-breasted Merganser: Russell Wynn reports a roost of up to 45 birds off the Lymington Marshes at the end of November reminding me that not many years ago any Mergansers seen fishing in Langstone Harbour during the day would fly out to sea to roost well away from lane (and could be counted flying back into the harbour by early birders in the Hayling Ferry area). Nowadays they seem to have lost their fear of the land.
222. Goosander: The party of 8 were still to be seen at the mouth of Pagham Harbour on Dec 2 (six have been there since Nov 13, increasing to 8 on Nov 24)
223. Red Kite: One has been seen 'hovering' over the A24 just south of Ashington (north of Worthing) on Nov 6 and 25, and one was flying north in the Freshwater area

of the IoW on Nov 28. The most recent report is of 2 in north Hampshire on Dec 1 just west of the A34 in the Litchfield area

224. Marsh Harrier: A party of SOS members visiting the Isle of Sheppey on Nov 27 estimated that they saw 12 different Marsh Harriers there during the day (but they missed a reported Rough Legged Buzzard)
225. Rough Legged Buzzard: Russell Wynn's summary of sightings on the Lymington Marshes during November includes a report of one of these birds seen there but with no name or date - could it have been the bird reported as heading west from Beachy Head on Nov 5? or was it the bird seen on Sheppey on Nov 27?
226. Merlin: In addition to the regular reports from Pulborough Brooks, Farlington Marshes, Brading Marshes and Rye Harbour John Chapman was impressed by good views of one at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Dec 3
227. Avocet: No more news of the 8 birds seen from Farlington Marshes on Nov 28 or of the flock of up to 22 in Chichester Hbr but in Pagham Harbour Owen Mitchell tells us that up to 12 have been seen recently (just beating the count of 11 there on Nov 28).
228. Golden Plover: While out for a quick walk around the Warblington area on the afternoon of Dec 5 I had my first sight of Golden Plover back on the Langstone east shore south of Wade Lane - from a distance I estimated there were 80 birds roosting on the mud. In the November summary of birds at Rye Harbour the peak count there is given as 3500 and on Nov 30 Cliff Oakley saw 1000 in the East Head area of Chichester Harbour. More recent news comes from Jeff Goodridge who saw at least 20 among Lapwings at Thornham Marshes on Dec 3 while a similar small flock of 25 were at Pulborough Brooks on Dec 2
229. Lapwing: The November peak count at Rye Harbour was 3000 birds
230. Knot: The first substantial flock of these that I have seen off the Warblington shore this winter was at least 30 seen on Dec 3
231. Little Stint: At least one was seen at East Head in Chichester Harbour by Cliff Oakley on Nov 30 (5 had been reported there on Nov 13)
232. Purple Sandpiper: 15 were at Brighton Marina on Nov 29 and on Nov 30 the count was up to 18.
233. Ruff: A single bird has been reported from the East Head area of Chichester Harbour on Nov 28 (seen by Tom Bickerton) and on Nov 30 (by Cliff Oakley) - these are the first two reports for this site this winter. At Pulborough Brooks Pete Hughes estimates a current count of 12 Ruff.
234. Black-tailed Godwit: On Dec 3 I found at least 94 (probably well over 100) feeding in Field I of Warblington Farm (see my map of Warblington for the letters which I allocate to the fields included in our CBC patch). Anne de Potier recently made a similar high count but complains of what she describes as regular disturbance by dog walkers in this and other fields which have no normal public access. Having myself seen one dog walker in Field I (see my notes for Nov 13) I would be interested to hear from anyone else noticing people exercising a 'right to roam' on any Warblington Farm fields that do not have a public footpath so that we can bring it to the attention of the farmer. In previous years I have never seen flocks of more than 30 Godwits on these fields and this sudden increase in numbers could mean that these Warblington fields are about to become a major winter feeding area for the Godwits and if so it would be a pity if dog-walkers drive them away - especially as the fields concerned can be viewed from roads, paths or the shoreline without entering them
235. Whimbrel: The single wintering bird in Pagham Harbour was seen again on Dec 2

236. Spotted Redshank: Russell Wynn tells us that three were still to be found on the Lymington Marshes at the end of November, and on Dec 2 singles were seen at Pagham Harbour and Bembridge Harbour (strictly speaking the Pagham bird was said, by Owen Mitchell on Dec 2, to have been seen by others 'recently'),
237. Greenshank: A single bird was sleeping in the sunshine at the water's edge just south of Nore Barn at Emsworth on Dec 3 and on Dec 1 John Shillitoe reports seeing one at Titchfield Haven - the first I have heard of there since Oct 23 (but maybe that is because the Haven website has not been updated since Oct 24!). On the Isle of Wight wintering birds are still at Bembridge Harbour and the Hersey Nature reserve near Seaview.
238. Grey Phalarope: Russell Wynn's November summary for the Lymington Marshes tells us that Anon saw one there on an unspecified date during the month - at a guess it was the same bird reported at Pagham Harbour on Nov 17 (??)
239. Ring Billed Gull: Still at the Gosport Cackle Pond on Dec 1. (The last sighting of the Broadmarsh bird seems to have been on 16 Mar 2003 and I have only one sighting for Langstone Harbour in 2004 - but that was of a first winter bird on Apr 24)
240. Sandwich Tern: The latest report of this species is of an immature bird flying past Worthing seafront on Nov 30
241. Barn Owl: Barn Owl sightings came regularly from Titchfield Haven in every month this year up to Aug 13 but since then I have heard of none there until John Shillitoe saw one on Dec 1
242. Short-eared Owl: On Dec 3 Jeff Goodridge saw two hunting over Thornham Marshes - hopefully they will stay and once more be a regular sight around the old airfield landing lights through this winter. Although there were a couple of sightings of these owls elsewhere on Thorney Island in September this new sighting is the first since Jeff saw one over the Marshes on Mar 29.
243. Skylark: A flock of over 100 was seen by John Eyre in the Ashley Warren area north of Whitchurch east of the A34 on Dec 1 With the decline of this species this is only the third report I have in my database of a flock exceeding 100 this year (Tony Gutteridge had at least 110 near Pulborough on January 4 and Paul James reported a flock of 200 in the Worthing area on November 5)
244. Sand Martin: On Nov 30 Ray Bradbury saw two Sand Martins fly through his garden at Lancing (close to Worthing), closely followed by a Waxwing. I am not sure if this Ray Bradbury is the famous Science Fiction writer but I have some difficulty in 'suspending disbelief' about the Sand Martins - no doubt he saw two hirundines but I prefer to think they were the two Swallows which Beryl James saw in Selsey Village that same day (not having seen the birds this is of course just my personal opinion based on the late date)
245. Swallow: see above re Sand Martin
246. Water Pipit: The first to be seen on the Lymington Marshes this winter was reported by Russell Wynn to have been there between Nov 26 and 30. Since then (on Dec 1) there has been another sighting of the two birds that have been at Brading Sewage Works on the IoW since Nov 5.
247. Waxwing: A large picture of one of these was printed on the front page of The Guardian on Dec 4 to attract attention to an article predicting that we will have a hard winter. The article did mention that large numbers of Waxwings have appeared in Britain, but gave no details, and all I know is that one made a brief appearance at Rye Harbour on Nov 19 while more recently there have been equally brief sightings of single birds at Lancing on Nov 30 and at Pagham Harbour on Dec 1.

248. Black Redstart: No further news of the bird seen on the Eastoke Promenade area of Hayling Island (near Sandy Point) on Nov 28.
249. Ring Ouzel: An interesting report on the SOS website claims that a male was seen pecking at pavement cracks in Nicholson Drive at Shoreham on Dec 2 ... I look forward to confirmatory reports from gardens in that area.
250. Blackbird: While clearing up rubbish under a laurel hedge in my garden on Dec 4 I heard Blackbird subsong coming from the hedge - not sure if the bird was my 'tame Blackbird' wanting to have a chat with me or if it was a bird that would have been singing quietly, unheard by anyone, even if I had not been there.
251. Fieldfare: More than 300 were seen on Bransbury Common near Andover on Dec 1 and Dec 2 brought reports of around 200 on the loW Brading Marshes and of more than 100 in Pagham Harbour.
252. Redwing: The only new reports have come from Brading Marshes where 20 or 30 birds were present on Nov 30 and Dec 1
253. Blackcap: A female was found dead in a Havant garden (with no obvious cause of death) on or just before Nov 29. The only thought that this provokes in my mind is how rarely we find dead birds when (with their relatively short lives and immense numbers) there must be dead birds falling to the ground daily. Of course most birds when feeling sickly will hide away in places where we are unlikely to see them but nevertheless nature's recycling and disease avoidance procedures are remarkably effective.
254. Golden Oriole: Along with the report of the Shoreham 'pavement pecking' Ring Ouzel the SOS website carries a report for Dec 3 of a Golden Oriole seen in the Felpham area of Bognor by a Mr Bond.
255. Great Grey Shrike: The first of the winter for the Pulborough Brooks reserve turned up there on Dec 2 - I wonder if we will get one back in the Arundel area this winter?
256. Raven: The presence of two in the Lymington Marshes area at the end of November is hardly newsworthy nowadays but I was interested to read that John Eyre had seen one at Wormley Copse just east of Litchfield near the A34 on Dec 1
257. Twite: Two were still at East Head in Chichester Harbour on Nov 30 (no reports from anywhere since then)
258. Snow Bunting: As with the Twite the last report of the six at East Head was dated Nov 30 and interestingly the first of the winter for Hurst Spit turned up there on Nov 30 (a female or immature at the famous Post 17) - maybe the East Head flock has split up?
259. Corn Bunting: Other than a report of 20 in the Worthing area on Nov 5 and of 3 flying over Hastings on Oct 26 the only reports of this species this winter have been from Rye Harbour. There have been 19 reports from Rye since 11 birds appeared there on Sep 11 and I have already reported a count of 148 there on Nov 3 but in the November summary from Rye Harbour I read that the peak count so far has been of 165 birds.

PLANTS

22. In a couple of my recent reports I have given figures for the number of different plant species seen in flower during each week. I was surprised at how high some of these counts were and have since spotted the error in my program recording the counts (I had left out one line of code in the routine putting plant finds into my database - the line was there for bird and insect records and the logic was impeccable!). Nevertheless the correct counts for the past four weeks are impressive for the time of year (and without

any plant 'twitching' expeditions). In the week ending Nov 7 I saw 66; in the week to Nov 14 I had 106 species (mainly due to my visit to the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth); up to Nov 28 the count was 77 and in the past week to Dec 4 the count has been 58.

23. White Clover: A very healthy looking plant with many flowers seen on Dec 4 after an absence of any sightings of it in flower since Nov 12 is an example of the regrowth and fresh flowering occurring with many plant species at this time.
24. Common Vetch: Freshly in flower at Warblington on Dec 3 (first since Oct 22)
25. Hedge Bedstraw: A fresh plant covered with fresh flower beside the Langbrook Stream in Havant on Dec 4 was the first example of this species for a whole month.
26. Musk Thistle: John Chapman found this still flowering on Portsdown on Nov 29

INSECTS

9. Large White butterfly: On Nov 30 Brian Fellows went to check on the caterpillars which I first noticed feeding on Charlock in Harts Farm Way here in Havant on Nov 16 when I counted 5 of them. By Nov 28 they looked full grown and one had vanished, then on Nov 30 Brian Fellows could only find 2 caterpillars so maybe they are now pupating ... to appear as butterflies on Christmas Day?
10. Silver Y: In the days when Latin and Greek was taught in schools and this moth was called the Gamma Moth its flight period ended in September but this year I have heard of ten sightings of it during November, the latest being one trapped on the loW at Ventnor on Nov 27. Interestingly Derek Mills commented that one coming to his trap at Farnham on Oct 30 was in immaculate condition and he guessed it was a locally bred offspring of a migrant arriving earlier in the year. I wonder if there is any official comment on this late showing from the moth experts?

OTHER

12. Common Seal: At the end of November when Russell Wynn returned to his home at Pennington after a sea trip he found a Seal in residence off the Lymington Marshes
13. Brown Rat: Two more were seen when walking the church path from Emsworth across the Warblington fields on Dec 3 - one was clearly a rat, seen out in the field beside the main stream north of the path just before reaching the church, the other might have been a Water Vole as it was swimming down the eastern stream just below the footbridge in the first field west of Nore Barn but I could clearly see ears (which would, I think, not be visible on a swimming Vole)

Sat 04 Dec

E. Havant to Budds Farm via Langbrook Stream

I set off fairly late on this dull afternoon to get some fresh air by walking down the Langbrook stream with the aim of seeing the 'White Ramping Fumitory' in Penner Road on which Brian Fellows had spotted some fruit with recurved stems after I had discovered the plant there last week (the recurved fruit pedicels are diagnostic of the species, but the plant on Harts Farm Way seems to be 'frozen in flower' and never likely to show fruit - though the original specimen I took home from there did develop recurved pedicels when it was so old that I had to throw it out).

When I reached the place to branch off from the stream and walk down the footpath north of the Autoliv factory I was greeted by two pieces of bad news - the path was closed by the temporary metal fencing around the factory building site on the north side of the path having been moved across the path in order to let the site developers clear the edges of the site to the path edge. This meant that I could not get to the Fumitory site without a long detour, and also meant that the Perennial Wallrocket plants near the path edge would soon be eliminated and replaced by more artificial planted vegetation or maybe a

wall or permanent fence to protect the site from intruders.

Having got the bad news out of the way I will get on with the good news. First, in the stretch of the stream immediately south of the A27 the lovely deep red flowers of Water Figwort were once more to be seen, as was the white froth of Meadowsweet blossom. Also here was fresh growth of Hedge Bedstraw covered with fresh flowers, while on the grass bank Field Madder was still flowering. Back in Havant on the roadsides I had already seen the pretty red petals of Mugwort flowers on new growth, plus a big patch of White Clover (now rare in comparison with Red Clover).

Also seen on dead wood by the streamside path was a pretty purple patch of Tripe Fungus, and at the extreme east end of planted trees lining the approach to the South Moors from Southmoor Lane (on the north side of, but well beyond the end of the gravel path) I found a patch of *Melastiza chatteri* on the ground among the wood chipping mulch (this fungus might be mistaken for Orange Peel fungus but is a duller orange colour and has thicker, less curly, flesh).

Nothing special to be seen on the Budds Farm pools where Shoveler remain the dominant ducks, but coming back along the South Moors shore with the tide more or less high and its surface smooth as ice, there was an impressive show of Brent and Wigeon spread out across the surface (maybe settling down to spend the night there away from prowling foxes on the shoreline, but more likely waiting for people like me to go home and allow the duck to fly in to graze uninterrupted during the night).

[Fri 03 Dec](#)

C. Havant to Nore Barn at Emsworth

The thick freezing fog had not yet cleared when I set out as late as 11am but before midday the sky was clear and the sun warmly shining.

The fog could not hide the Ox-Eye Daisy and Red and White Campion still flowering with Green Alkanet at the Lymbourne Springs, nor a show of Corn Marigold planted in a North Close garden. Beside the 'twitchel' path leading to Pook Lane I noted Common Inkcap and in Pook Lane just south of the A27 the big patch of Wavy Bittercress was still flowering.

The first of the Warblington Farm fields that you come to as you continue down Pook Lane past the Old Rectory was once more full of feeding Black-tailed Godwits (I counted 94 but there were more when the flock took off). At least 30 Curlew were with them in the field plus a large flock of Starlings and a few Wood Pigeon. In the hedges of the lane a Great Tit was singing strongly.

Down on the shore with the tide well out the mud was covered with waders which included at least 30 Knot but only 5 Shelduck. Around 300 Brent were grazing in the middle shore field between Pook Lane and the one crossed by the public path to the church.

Off Nore Barn a single Greenshank was snoozing with its bill under its wing and I had to disturb a couple of Redshank (which flew over the Greenshank calling loudly and waking it) before I could be sure of its identity. On the north side of Nore Barn a dozen of more Blackbirds and a couple of Song Thrushes were feeding on Hawthorn berries, and I thought I heard the 'gup' call of a Redwing but never saw it. In the stubble field north of the wood I found Scented Mayweed in flower.

Entering the Warblington Fields a large brown rodent was swimming downstream in the first field - it disappeared as soon as it saw me (I think it swam back and hid under the footbridge) but I had to put thoughts of Water Vole out of my mind as, while I could not see the nose and the fur looked a rich brown, I could see two distinct ears and I think the ears of Water Vole cannot be seen when it is swimming while those of a Rat can be seen - though if it were a Rat I am surprised that it should choose to swim when it could more

easily have run along the stream banks. When I reached the main stream near the church there was a definite Rat out on the field near that stream...

Heading up Church Lane the Cow Parsley was flowering outside the entrance to the Farmhouse (the plant on the Nore Barn shore was still in flower but now the worse for wear). Near the A259 roundabout the Upright Hedge Parsley was still flowering and near it were flowers on Common Vetch which I had not seen on my previous visit. Black Knapweed and Stone Parsley were still flowering near the A27 underpass and in the grounds of Denvilles House I could see white berries on the Mistletoe high on the trees. A little further west I looked north again and could see the evergreen leaves of one of Havant's neglected special trees - the Cork Oak in the cul de sac called Pine Grove off Oaklands Road.

Wed 01 Dec

D. Seals on the south coast

This afternoon I have been checking through reports of Seal sightings along the central south coast which have reached me during the past five to eight years. This was prompted by two sightings in Langstone Harbour last Monday (Nov 29) coming from John Gowen (who saw two Seals within 70 metres of the Budds Wall shore in Langstone Harbour Little Lake) and from Heather Mills who saw one in the Bridge Lake area south of the South Moors on the same day.

The earliest reports which I have of Seals in the Langstone area come from 1997 when one was seen in November from the Langstone shore among a frenzy of gulls (presumably also feeding on the same shoal of fish), and another was seen in December by someone rowing off the village. In February 98 Bob Chapman told me that one Seal in Langstone Harbour had developed a taste for duck and was regularly targetting them, coming up from below to catch them on the surface and then tossing them in the air, like a cat playing with a mouse, before eating them. Bob said he had recently heard of a Seal exhibiting similar eating habits at the mouth of Chichester Harbour. At the beginning of that month Brian Fellows had seen a Seal more than once near the Hayling Ferry (but he had not seen it killing ducks though on one occasion it surfaced close to a Guillemot).

Another aspect of Seal behaviour was once described to me by Pete Durnell who, before he left Hayling Island, once saw a fisherman (using nets) standing up in his dinghy and beating the surface of the water with an oar. Later Pete learnt that the fisherman was trying to drive off a Seal that was taking the fish out of his net.

In the summer of 1998 there was already a colony of at least five adult Seals off Thorney Island, and in July of that year Barry Collins told me of what he described as a 'sickly pup' on Pilsey Sands - later Barry said the pup had died but that birth was not a one off event as when, in June 1999, the BBC sent a TV reporter to look into another report of a pup born to the Chichester colony they found it alive and well - they used the Portsmouth Harbour police launch to visit the site and Geoff Culbertson (the Hampshire county Wildlife Policeman) was on board so maybe we can question him about Seals on the Hampshire coast when he comes to talk to the Havant HWT group on January 26.

Another pup probably born somewhere on the Hampshire shore was seen at Dibden Bay in the summer of 2000 - it must have swum in at high tide and hauled out on a concrete structure where it dozed while the tide ebbed, and when Colin Allen came across it and disturbed its siesta there was an eight foot drop onto rocks below the place where it had been sleeping - luckily Colin did not panic it into jumping! While on the subject of pups Radio Solent (on 22 Aug 2003) carried a report that drinkers at a Langstone pub had on the previous day seen a Seal pup 'washed up' on the mud and had called the RSPCA in their concern for its welfare. So far I have not come across anyone with a first hand account of this news.

A couple of other anecdotes from the year 2000 were of a windsurfer, becalmed off the Hayling Oysterbeds, getting a close look at a Seal which came up within twenty yards of him. Less pleasant was Rosemary Webb's discovery, on Hayling Bay shore in the winter, of a badly decomposed Seal carcass.

Prior to 2001 I never heard of more than ten Seal sightings in a year but in 2001 I was beginning to hear more reports via the internet and in that year one such report was of a peak count of 8 Seals on the Thorney Island shore, another came from Langstone Harbour and nine more came from places all along the south coast from Rye Harbour and Brighton to the east and Titchfield Haven, Browdown and Keyhaven to the west.

In 2002 I only recorded 5 reports but that apparent drop was probably caused by the people becoming accustomed to seeing Seals and no longer reporting them as being of special interest, but in 2003 the number of reports reaching me shot up to 23 and these included two counts of 14 at Thorney Island (where there were also two counts of 13 and others of 12, 11, 10 and 8 Seals). Probably in addition to the Thorney counts a man who keeps a boat in Mill Rythe on the east shore of Hayling Island told me that he regularly saw a Seal in that 'bay' whenever he visited his boat, and the Feb 2003 edition of the Hayling Islander reported how the outright winner of a fishing competition held on the Northney shore in January was a Seal who was seen to consume more fish than any of the anglers caught.

So far this year the overall total of reports has gone up to 25 including sightings of up to 10 Seals off Thorney and up to 3 together on the Sword Sands south of Farlington Marshes in January (plus the two together in the north of the harbour this week). Elsewhere this year there have been seven reports from the Lymington marshes area and four reports of a single Seal in Pagham Harbour. As December is a popular time for seeing them I expect this year (which already has 25 sightings against the previous highest annual total of 23 sightings in 2003) to set another record. While this has a large element of observer coverage and interest in it I am sure this increasing total of sightings does reflect a growing Seal Population (despite the epidemic of Phocine distemper which decimated the North Sea population in the summer of 2002)

An interesting report in the summer of 2004 came from Southsea where a dog walker encouraged her dog into the sea and the next thing she saw was that it was 'playing with a Seal' in the water - in the previous summer another dog walker on the Budds Farm shore of Langstone harbour saw her dog chase a Seal off the concrete casing of the sewage outfall pipe and noticed that the Seal had a yellow tag on its tail.

To my mind the most intriguing reports of Seals have been of the animals swimming up rivers to be seen well inland. I think they have been seen more than once up the Sussex Ouse well above Newhaven but the record distance inland is held by one seen in the R Arun at Pulborough Brooks. Another report was of one outside the Green Dragon pub at Bursledon on the R Hamble.

One other aspect of the Seal reports that reach me is that a minority of them state that Grey Seals were seen, but from what I have heard Grey Seals are very uncommon along the south coast (they are abundant on the rocky shores of the west country but hardly ever come up the Channel) so, unless the report includes a supporting description or comes from a 'Seal expert', I assume the Seals involved are the rounded headed Common Seals rather than the long-snouted Greys. This opinion is supported by the following extract from my notes for the summer of 2003 when, commenting on a sighting by Cliff Dean of what Cliff thought was a Grey Seal in the sea off Pett (Rye Bay east of Hastings), Paul Troake (warden of the Rye Harbour NNR) confirmed that he had recently seen a Grey Seal there and says .. 'Grey Seals are seldom recorded along this stretch of coast, and I'm not aware of any breeding sites closer than Norfolk or Cornwall, whereas Common Seals pup as near as Chichester Harbour and the Baie de Somme and are much more frequent

here' - an interesting remark about Chichester Harbour coming from an authoritative source!

E. News and Reports

BIRDS

60. Red-throated Divers: 10 were in or passing through Rye Bay on Nov 27 and three were off Ventnor on the following day
61. Great Crested Grebe: On Nov 20 Cliff Dean reported the start of the regular winter flock in Rye Bay with a count of 117. By Nov 27 the flock had grown to 285 birds (and may well still double in size).
62. Slavonian Grebe: Two were seen off Park Shore to the east of Lymington on Nov 28 - he thought one was a youngster.
63. Bittern: A sighting of one at Rye Harbour on Nov 27 was hardly news but on Nov 29 David Thelwell was very surprised to hear one calling 'like a strangled goose' as it circled above Fishlake Meadows at Romsey before flying north up the Test - maybe heading for Bransbury Common or further on to Overton?
64. Swans: At Ibsley in the Avon valley on Nov 28 John Clark found two adult Bewick's among 105 Mutes
65. Wigeon: John Clark found wildfowl numbers in the Avon Valley around Ringwood were lower than expected when he was there on Nov 28 but nevertheless estimated 600 Wigeon in the Avon Causeway area (on that day Ian Pibworth counted 200 flying south over the Testwood Lakes at dawn, presumably leaving overnight inland grazing south of Romsey for the safety of Southampton Water by day.
66. Goldeneye: 7 were well inland on Ibsley Water on Nov 28 (and a female was on Tundry Pond on Nov 25)
67. Goosander: Numbers in North Hampshire are at last starting to increase with 8 or 9 at Tundry Pond on Nov 25. In the Avon Valley John Clark saw at least 6 (maybe double that number) on Nov 28 but he does not mention breeding in the Avon valley this year.
68. Ruddy Duck: John Clark also found 7 of these on Ibsley Water on Sunday.
69. Avocet: George Spraggs found 8 to the east of Farlington Marshes on Nov 28 (not on the reserve but in, I think, the Shutt Lake area)
70. Little Stint: At least one was in the West Wittering/East Head area, seen by Tony Wilson on Nov 28
71. Black-tailed Godwit: In February of 2003 more than 3000 were feeding in the Avon Valley but on Nov 28 John Clark only saw 14 there
72. Ring-billed Gull: One still at the Gosport Cackle Pond (with that Black Swan) on Nov 28
73. Caspian Gull: A single second winter bird is reported to have been at the Northpoint Gravel pit at Rye on Nov 28
74. Glaucous Gull: Another anonymous report of a first year Glaucous Gull at the Pett Level pools near Hastings on Nov 28
75. Wood Pigeon: A count of 4070 flying west to the north of the Testwood Lakes early on Nov 28 shows they have not all settled down for the winter yet.
76. Short-eared Owl: John Goodspeed watched one flying over the Sandy Point reserve on Hayling Island, mobbed by a Crow, on Nov 28. Maybe that same bird was seen in the Bembridge Foreland area later that day and another report came from Rye Harbour on Nov 27

77. Kingfisher: It is clear that many of these which nest and fish on inland waters in the summer make their way to the coast in winter but they are hardly ever seen doing so - on Nov 29, however, Giles Darvill watched one flying high over open heathland at Holmsley Ridge in the south west of the New Forest
78. Grey Wagtail: The night roost in trees overhanging the Kings Pond at Alton which Steve Mansfield found on Oct 9 was still in use on Nov 27 when Steve counted 20 birds settling there for the night. They uttered normal calls as they arrived but made strange quiet clicking noises as they settled in the roost (Steve could not be sure if these were vocal or mechanical noises)
79. Black Redstart: What is I think the first report for this winter of one back in the Sandy Point reserve area comes from John Goodspeed who saw it on the shore groyne in front of houses immediately west of the reserve.
80. Fieldfare: On Nov 28 a flock of around 150 were in the Brading Marshes area of the loW and more than 77 were seen by Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes.
81. Dartford Warbler: A sighting of a young bird on Nov 27 at a landfill site at Faygate (close to Crawley) sounds unusual
82. Tree Sparrow: On Nov 20 Cliff Dean reported a total of 185 birds in the Pett Level area near Hastings but on Nov 27 he found more than 185 in just one of three flocks present in that area
83. Linnet: On Nov 27 Simon Ingram was very pleased to find a flock of over 120 at the Eastleigh Lakeside site - a record count for his patch there.
84. Corn Bunting: Although there have been higher counts (of 148 and 136) at Rye during November at count of 100 was still impressive on Nov 27.

PLANTS

8. Wood Aven: This was flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth during the past week - one that I have not seen anywhere else recently.
9. Thyme-leaved Speedwell: Still flowering in my lawn on Nov 29

INSECTS

5. Ichneumon stramentarius: On Nov 24 John Goodspeed found a strange insect on his rucksack when out working with the Friends of Portsdown Hill and took a photo of it which, when I saw it, brought to mind that memorably named insect Ichneumon suspiciosus. John got a better name for it as given here!

OTHER

3. Seals: On Nov 28 Tony Wilson saw one near the mouth of Pagham Harbour and on Nov 29 John Gowen was delighted to get a close up of two together in Langstone Harbour south of the Broadmarsh slipway in the Little Lake area west of Budds Wall while Heather Mills saw a single nearby in the Bridge Lake area between the South Moors shore and the Oysterbeds. Both John and Tony suggested that the Seals were Grey rather than Common, but the long-snouted Greys are very uncommon in the central south coast area and (in default of a good description) I assume they were the friendly looking round faced Common Seals.
4. Moles: Brian Fellows comments on the recent appearance of many fresh Molehills in the Emsworth Brook Meadow area and I too have noticed them in other places. Maybe some Moles are already thinking of breeding and are making tunnels which intersect with others in the hopes of meeting a partner (Moles spend all their lives alone in their own tunnels and can only tolerate the briefest of meetings for essential purposes) but I have not heard yet of the appearance of the large 'castle' molehills under which the breeding chamber is constructed. More likely the new tunnels are the result of a

combination of circumstances - the need to escape from waterlogged ground - easy digging conditions - and perhaps a shortage of active worms in the cold weather (do worms go further down in the soil and hibernate as they do in hot summers when the ground becomes too hard to tunnel through and the worms go deep underground into cool damp crevices where they 'aestivate' (the summer equivalent of hibernating).

Mon 29 Nov

C. Langstone Wade Court

At the end of my regular Monday delivery round with John Goodspeed's Nature Notes posters I came home via Langstone Mill Pond after sunset but while it was still just light when the Egrets were heading for their night roost at Wade Court (a flight of seven flew low over my head as I was passing the Mill Pond). When the normal roost trees came in sight I saw wood smoke curling up through them and could see no Egrets anywhere in those trees but scanning south down the trees lining the Lymbourne stream to the back of the Mill Pond I found a total of 40 in the tree tops there. These trees are often used as a pre-roost assembly point but on this occasion it was late enough for the birds to be in their final roost area, and as I watched them I saw they were dropping from the higher branches into the lower denser trees some ten feet above the water of the stream where they almost certainly stayed for the night. Anyone wishing to count them into their night roost should check this area as they may now use it regularly (though it is just as likely that they will return to the normal roost after the clearance and burning of wood in the Wade Court property ceases).

Wildlife diary and news for November 22 - 28 (Week 48)

Sun 28 Nov

J. Budds Farm and Brockhampton area

A pair of Mallard were on the Langbrook Stream just below the A27 this morning feeding beside each other with no others in sight. For much of the year this would be a normal sight and I paid no attention to it at the time but when I reached the shore of Langstone Harbour and watched a pair of Mallard mating I realised that both the pair feeding together and the pair mating were behaving abnormally for the time of year when Mallards, like Coot, have abandoned thoughts of breeding and are concentrating on surviving the winter for which the best technique seems to be to form large flocks in places where food is likely to remain available through the bad weather (such as in the Emsworth Mill Ponds or on Langstone Pond where free handouts of bread are available daily). We have already heard of two families of newly hatched Mallard ducklings appearing on Nov 3, and I will be watching out for more ducklings in December and January.

Also beside the Langbrook in the section from the A27 south to the old IBM approach road I found that the streamside vegetation had been cut but, because they are growing from the waters edge and leaning out low over the water, two plants of Meadowsweet are still in full flower.

Heading down Southmoor Lane I thought I would cycle along Penner Road and look at the new factories and as I did so I found another example of the dubious White Ramping Fumitory growing by the roadside, and at the far end of the road I went on down the narrow footpath leading to the Langbrook stream to check on the Perennial Wallrocket, finding that the plants were still there but with no flowers.

Coming back to Southmoor Lane and turning south I was delighted to find that the earth barrier across the road had been removed, allowing people to drive down and park as far as the height barrier at the start of the Budds Mound area (and half a dozen cars were already there). I cycled up onto the mound where a male Stonechat was perched on the old thistles. On the pools Teal and Shoveler were in the majority with 15 to 20 birds of

each species - other rough counts were 10 Mallard, 7 Pochard, half a dozen Tufted Duck and at least two Little Grebe with a few Coot.

Going a short distance along the South Moors shore there were lots of Brent at the waters edge with some 20 Wigeon but nothing much on the still water with the tide still high. Scanning the surface I picked up a couple of Great Crested Grebe and close to them for size comparison were my first two Black-necked Grebe (in view of Barry Collins' sighting of 10 of these in Langstone Harbour yesterday I suspect that these will now remain in the harbour for the winter, unlike the two previous sightings of birds passing through). One Goldeneye was also here.

Going west around the foot of Budds Mound I found many more Brent along the Budds Farm shore with another 31 Wigeon and singles of Turnstone, Merganser and Oystercatcher. Over by Broadmarsh slipway the Swan pair still had all seven cygnets with them.

Heading up the Brockhampton stream there was no bird interest but I added Black Horehound, Storksbill, Common Mallow and Winter Heliotrope to my flower list, not forgetting the few flowers still to be seen in the forest of Guernsey Fleabane, and a few yards before reaching Harts Farm Way I found a large fresh bush of Cow Parsley in full flower.

Checking the 'White Ramping Fumitory' I could see no indication of it setting seed to give further clues to its identity but I did find my five Large White caterpillars still eating the Charlock leaves.

K. News and Reports reaching me this week

BIRDS

260. Red-throated Diver: One flew east past Ventnor on Nov 27. This is the thirteenth report of this species since one was off Ryde on Sep 23.
261. Great Northern Diver: Four reports last week and four more this week could all be of the same bird but there are probably at least two in our area. This week Richard Hallett saw one off Hill Head on Nov 25 and the same bird could well have caused two reports off Seaview on the Isle of Wight, both on Nov 27, but is less likely to be responsible for a sighting off Selsey Bill on that day (Nov 27). Last week sightings on Nov 16 off Pagham Harbour (by Brian Fellows) and by John Shillitoe off Hayling Coastguard tower on that day could have been the same bird, and it could have gone on to appear off the Isle of Wight on Nov 21 but is unlikely to have been at both Ventnor and Newtown Harbour on the same day (Nov 21)
262. Great Crested Grebe: Late news from Rye Harbour of a large flock starting to build there - Cliff Dean reports a count of 117 off Pett Level on Nov 20. (In Jan 2003 Cliff gave up counting the flock there when he got to 454 - he estimated there were at least 500)
263. Red-necked Grebe: One was off the Seaview area of the IoW on Nov 27 and one was seen in the Calshot area on the same day - probably the same bird.
264. Slavonian Grebe: An impressive count of 28 off Pagham Harbour on Nov 24. 7 had been seen there on Nov 23 and 12 were reported there on Nov 27. Some of the 28 may be heading our way as there were two reports of a single (probably the same bird) off the Seaview and Ryde areas on Nov 27. No more news of the bird seen on the Blashford Lakes on Nov 20 nor of the bird in the Lymington area from Oct 26 -31 (and none so far in Langstone Harbour)
265. Black-necked Grebe: Although two had been seen off the Langstone South Moors as early as Sep 25, and one had been seen there on Oct 26, there have been no more sightings in Langstone Harbour until Nov 27 when Barry Collins saw 10 together

in the Cackle Rithe area (south of the Oysterbeds), and on Nov 28 I was lucky enough to see two distantly (in the Broad Lake area) from the South Moors.

266. Cormorant: A total of 40 were seen on Nov 24 perched on St Helens Fort guarding the mouth of Bembridge Harbour. They are probably a daily unreported sight there but here in Havant I was interested on Nov 25 to hear from a fisherman at the Leigh Park Gardens lake that he had been seeing Cormorant perched in the trees above the lake early on several recent mornings with a maximum count of 26 birds which sounds to me as if a new (?) night roost is developing there.
267. Shag: A count of 8 off Seaview on the Isle of Wight on Nov 27 could be an indication that we will soon be seeing them off Southsea or in the mouth of Langstone Harbour. (Last year the first sighting of one near the Hayling Ferry was on Nov 15)
268. Cattle Egret: One was reported to have been seen somewhere near Salisbury on or before Nov 24
269. Little Egret: I think these normally feed on small fry in the water though they will no doubt (like any Heron) have 'a stab' at anything that comes within range. I was interested to see that one had been seen in the Seaview (IoW) area on Nov 24 'eating a large fish' (but with no clue as to how large - perhaps it was as long as a piece of string?). Another sighting of some interest was of the 'first of the winter' well inland at Mapledurwell cress-beds near Basingstoke
270. Great White Egret: The bird that has been at the Blashford Lakes since Nov 6 was seen on Nov 25, 26 and 27 and the rings on its leg have been seen well enough to tell that it is not the same bird that made a long stay there last winter.
271. Bewick's Swan: Four were seen on Ibsley Water by Simon Ingram on Nov 27. This seems to be the first report from the Ringwood area since the anonymous report of an unspecified number there on Oct 15 - maybe these four will stay.
272. Black Swan: The bird which arrived at Gosport Cackle Pond on Nov 19 was reported again on Nov 22 and is probably still there as I have since then had a call from a local newspaper asking for comments on this 'most unusual' bird - I was able to tell the reporter the story from many years ago of the Black Swan which was released on the Emsworth Town Mill Pond (after treatment at Brent Lodge Hospital) and watched over by an Emsworth resident who was a 'friend of Brent Lodge'. On three or four occasions this bird flew off and was each time tracked down to the Gosport Cackle Pond, whereupon the man from Emsworth would drive down there in his Austin 7 (tiny vintage car), tell the Swan to get into the back of the car, and drive it back to Emsworth (I even saw it in flight on one occasion, when it revealed large white wing panels that are normally hidden). I also told him that, this being the antipodean springtime, the bird could well commit sexual indiscretions to add interest to his story, which reminds me of the female that spent several years on the Test at Romsey and would make a nest and lay infertile eggs at this time of year - is it still there? and is it nesting?
273. Black Brant: The bird at the Pagham North Walls was still there on Nov 27 but the last report of the West Wittering bird was dated Nov 21
274. Shelduck: The Portsmouth Harbour WeBS count on Nov 13 recorded 89 birds in that harbour and Dennis Bill says this is the third highest ever count for the Oct-Dec period he is aware of (the highest was in Dec 85 when the total was 125), and I also found a very good count of 67 in the main pool of the Hayling Oysterbeds on Nov 27
275. Gadwall: The number to be found on Tundry Pond in north Hampshire is normally well below 100 but on Nov 26 someone only known as Jeff S reported over 200 birds there (in 2003 the peak count there was 138 on Nov 15 and this year the highest count prior to this one had been of 75 on Nov 6).

276. Green-winged Teal: A bird seen by David Holland at the Lower Test on Nov 24 sounds (from his detailed description) to be of this American race but so far there is no confirmation from other sightings.
277. Mallard: A pair were mating on the sea off Budds Farm when I walked along the shore on the morning of Nov 28. This year we have had already had two reports of newly hatched ducklings in November, maybe we will have more in December?
278. Pintail: A count of 48 on the Links Scrape at Hook (Warsash) on Nov 23 was thought to be a record count for that site by Bob Marchant
279. Lesser Scaup: The drake which arrived on Scotney Gravel Pit at Rye on Nov 17 was still there on Nov 27
280. Long-tailed Duck: The Lymington Marshes bird was still present on Nov 25
281. Velvet Scoter: Two were off Seaview (IoW) on Nov 24
282. Smew: The first of the winter on the south coast, a single redhead, was at Rye Harbour on Nov 24
283. Goosander: Two redheads on Alresford Pond on Nov 21 were the first there this winter and on that day a male turned up on the River Itchen near Eastleigh. In Pagham Harbour 8 were seen on Nov 24 (there have been 6 or 7 there since Nov 13), and in north Hampshire the single male seen on Tndry Pond on Nov 21 has now increased to four birds on Nov 26
284. Hen Harrier: The 'resident' bird is still on the IoW Brading Marshes and on Nov 24 a ringtail flew over the West Dean Woods near Chichester.
285. Merlin: These are now regular at several sites but one over Hamble Common on Nov 26 may be of local interest
286. Partridge: A single bird seen near the River Test south of Romsey (at the hamlet of Lee) on Nov 21 puzzled Mike Rafter - he thinks it may be a hybrid between a Grey and a Barbary Partridge.
287. Avocet: Barry Collins saw 21 together in Chichester Harbour on Nov 21 and then found 22 in Nov 24 (I think these were in the Thorney Channel/Nutbourne Bay area). Another 11 were reported from Pagham Harbour on Nov 27
288. Ringed Plover: Brian Fellows had a very impressive count of 420 in a high tide roost at Black Point on Hayling on Nov 25
289. Lapwing: The estimated count of the flock at Puborough Brooks had by Nov 24 reached 1000
290. Knot: On Nov 21 Brian Fellows counted 42 in Fishery Creek (between Black Point and Tournerbury Woods on Hayling). On Nov 13 he only counted 16 in that area but on Nov 15 Owen Mitchell estimated there were 100 just across the water in the East Head area.
291. Purple Sandpiper: On Nov 21 Tim Doran watched a flock of 11 fly out from the Southsea Castle shore to perch on a red buoy near the Spitbank Fort
292. Ruff: A few continue to be seen occasionally at Pulborough Brooks where up to three seem to have been present since Oct 5
293. Whimbrel: A single wintering bird continues to be seen in Pagham Harbour - it was in the Church Norton area on Nov 23
294. Spotted Redshank: Single birds remain at Bembridge Harbour and at Ashlett Creek on Southampton Water

295. Pomarine Skua: A juvenile was reported to be on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Nov 27 - if confirmed this will be a very unusual winter record.
296. Little Gull: Three adults seen off Seaview on the IoW on Nov 24 were the first reported anywhere on the south coast since Oct 30.
297. Ring-billed Gull: The last report of the Gosport bird was made on Nov 22 but I guess it is still present there.
298. Herring Gull: Closure of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip in September resulted in a nil count of Herring Gulls for that site in the November WeBS count!
299. Yellow Legged Gull: Simon Ingram found at least six on Ibsley Water near Ringwood on Nov 27.
300. Great Blackback Gull: 52 were roosting on the shingle bar on the east side of the Chichester Harbour mouth channel when the Havant Wildlife Group were at Black Point on Nov 27.
301. Kittiwake: 24 were off the Bembridge Foreland on Nov 21 and 32 were seen in Sandown bay on that day - of the 23 reports I have for this species since the start of September the highest count (other than these two) was of just 8 birds.
302. Guillemot: A single bird seen by Jason Crook off Black Point was only the second report from Chichester Harbour this autumn following Brian Fellows' sighting of one in Emsworth Harbour on Sep 30
303. Razorbill: A single has been seen off Black Point on Nov 16, 23, and 27 and there have been up to three seen off the north east Isle of Wight on Nov 24, 25, 26 and 27 (when there were at least four, maybe five, there)
304. Little Auk: One was seen briefly from Selsey Bill on Nov 21
305. Short-eared Owl: One has been seen on Thorney Island recently and on Nov 21 there was one in the Bembridge area and another hunting fields near Alresford Pond, while on Nov 26 Mark Litjens saw one over Hamble Common. Two were seen regularly over the nearby Hamble disused airfield from Jan to March this year so it may be worth re-visiting that site.
306. Swallow: One over Shanklin on Nov 27 - last of the year?
307. Water Pipit: One was still to be seen at the Sidlesham Sewage Works on Nov 27 (several reports of three birds there throughout November). One was still at the Brading sewage works on the IoW on Nov 27.
308. Dunnock: Singing regularly in my garden each day this week.
309. Black Redstart: Only one report this week - the male was still in the Ashlett Creek area near Fawley Power station on Nov 27.
310. Blackbird: Brian Fellows heard subsong from a bird near the Thorney Island Marina farm on Nov 21.
311. Fieldfare: Plenty to be found throughout inland Hampshire now including a flock of around 300 in the Mogshade Hill area of the New Forest (between the A31 and Bolderwood) on Nov 21 - around 200 Redwing were in the same area on that day.
312. Song Thrush: Now singing daily in the Havant area (and at Hastings!).
313. Dartford Warbler: Following the closure of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip at Portsmouth in Sept one was seen on that site near Horsea Island on Nov 13.
314. Willow Warbler: Reports of this species ended in mid October but on Nov 24 one was reported at Church Norton (seen with a couple of Chiffchaffs)

315. Firecrest: Reports this week from Church Norton (Nov 21 and 24), Hook/Warsash (Nov 23), Titchfield Havan Canal Path (Nov 24), Ventnor (Nov 25), Southampton Common (Nov 26) and both Ryde and Brading Marshes on Nov 27. Up to four birds in the Church Norton area and three in the Ventnor area.
316. Bearded Tit: 16 seen around the Farlington Marshes lake on Nov 25 and at least 2 at the Brading Marshes on Nov 27.
317. Great Grey Shrike: No summary yet of the New Forest survey on the weekend of Nov 20/21 but there have been individual reports of single birds at Mogshade Hill (SU 2309), Broomy Plain (SU 2110), and Buckherd Bottom (SU 2008).
318. Magpie: I have two daily in my Havant garden but was surprised when on Nov 23 a loose flock of at least 16 were in the tree tops nearby before moving off west.
319. Jackdaw: A total of 820 moved east over Eastleigh on Nov 21.
320. Starling: Around 2000 came to roost at Alresford Pond on the evening of Nov 21.
321. Tree Sparrow: Cliff Dean reports a flock of 185 birds at Pett Level near Hastings on Nov 20.
322. Chaffinch: A flock of around 500 were in the West Dean woods north of Chichester on Nov 23.
323. Brambling: More than 100 were in the West Dean Woods with the Chaffinches on Nov 23.
324. Siskin: A mixed flock of 30 Redpoll and Siskin were in the Rhinefield Arboretum (New Forest) on Nov 26.
325. Twite: Two were still at East Head on Nov 27.
326. Snow Bunting: Six were still at East Head on Nov 21 but only 3 were seen there on Nov 25.
327. Corn Bunting: 60 were still at Rye Harbour on Nov 23.

PLANTS

27. I still managed to record 75 plant species in flower during the past week.
28. Among them were Bulbous, Meadow and Creeping Buttercup, Lesser Spearwort, White and Red Campion, Lesser Stitchwort, Corn Spurrey, Musk Mallow, White Melilot, Meadowsweet, American and Square-stalked Willowherb, Cow Parsley and Hemlock, Stone Parsley, Rhodendron ponticum, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, Black Horehound (just flowering!), Black Knapweed, and Wall Lettuce.
29. Heading down Southmoor Lane I thought I would cycle along Penner Road and look at the new factories and as I did so I found another example of the dubious White Ramping Fumitory growing by the roadside.
30. Of special interest were Corn Spurrey (flowering the Staunton Country Park carpark), Spurge Laurel (not yet in flower but with large flower buds), and Upright Hedge Parsley (several fresh plants in flower at Warblington Church Lane).

INSECTS

11. Brimstone: One was flying at Pamber Forest north of Basingstoke on Nov 11.
12. Large White: The five caterpillars were still munching Charlock at Harts Farm Way in Havant on Nov 28.
13. Holly Blue: One looking battered was still flying in Gosport on Nov 12.
14. Red Admiral: Three were seen in Gosport on Nov 26.

15. Painted Lady: One in Pamber Forest on Nov 11.
16. Speckled Wood: One still flying at Gosport Wildgrounds on Nov 13.
17. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: One flying in Somerset on Nov 19.
18. Northern Winter Moth: One seen by Paul Boswell at Greywell in north Hampshire on Nov 24 was a first ever for my records.
19. Duponchelia fovealis: This moth found in a house at Lower Froyle near Alton was only the second record for Hampshire (but an unwelcome addition to the Hampshire list as it is a severe pest in warmer countries). It probably arrived as a pupa in an imported plant pot and is unlikely to survive here out of doors as an adult.
20. Wasps: The nest in the ground of my Havant garden was still active (just) on Nov 26.

OTHER

14. Common Seal: One off East Head in Chichester Harbour on Nov 25.
15. Brown Rat: One seen on Church Path crossing the Warblington fields in which there was a Sweetcorn crop - the field edges have just been ploughed up making it difficult for the rat to find any few remaining corn cobs - the rat stood in the open and looked at me as if I should feed it.

[Sat 27 Nov](#)

F. Langtone village and Hayling Oysterbeds

At least two Collared Doves, two Dunnocks and a Woodpigeon were singing in my garden this morning and I had my second flyover Sparrowhawk of the week.

In the late afternoon I got on my bike and headed for the Oysterbeds where I was pleased to see a total of 67 Shelduck on the main pool before finding Barry Collins scanning the harbour south of the Oysterbeds from the southern bund wall of the lagoon (on which there were four Little Grebe). Barry had already seen 7 Black-necked Grebe in the harbour (and later told me that there was a total of 10 there).

Also on this southern bund wall the White Melilot was still in flower, and on the north pier of the old railbridge a fresh plant of Hemlock was newly in flower with a few flowers still on the Black Horehound there. On my way back up the Hayling Billy track from Langstone I checked the Lymbourne Stream banks for early flowering Celandines (in recent years they have been flowering here in mid-December) and found large fresh leaves but no flower buds.

[Thu 25 Nov](#)

G. Staunton Country Park

Dunnock song greeted me in the garden again this morning and I not only heard Collared Dove song but saw several making display flights while what I presume was a male Woodpigeon was chasing a presumed female around - every time she landed he would sidle up to her, sending her off to another perch as she obviously was not interested in his advances.

I then went for a walk in the Staunton country park starting from the Middle Park Way park centre. In the carpark area Song Thrush was singing and over by the wall at the north end of the overflow carpark I was surprised to find many plants of fresh Corn Spurrey, several of them in flower.

At the lake I talked to a fisherman who told me that he had recently seen a Kingfisher there (not surprising) and had also found up to 26 Cormorant perched in the trees in the early mornings recently (perhaps a new night roost here?).

Near the lake *Rhododendron ponticum* was in flower and nearby I found both Clouded Agaric and *Clitocybe geotropa* fungi. Later in my walk (in Havant Thicket) I saw the Earth Fan fungus still in good health by the northernmost of the carpark area pond and across the broad forest track west of the pond I saw a cloud of what I presume were Fungus Gnats around a cluster of partly decaying Fairies Bonnet type toadstools. Other fungi seen in the Thicket included Blushing Bracket, 'yellow *Russula*', Amethyst Deceiver, *Bjerkandera adjusta*, Sulphur Tuft and Glistening Inkcaps. The large *Phaeolus schweinitzii* could still be seen in an advanced state of decay!

Out on the Gipsies Plain area I saw a Kestrel, a female Stonechat, a Pied Wagtail and a few Meadow Pipits plus the usual large flock of perhaps 80 Rooks and 20 Jackdaws. The 'orchid ditch' track and ditch had been close mown (good for next year's flowering) but I could still see Lesser Spearwort flowers in the ditch bottom and Lesser Stitchwort flowers sheltering under the trackside wire fence.

Coming back through Hammonds Land Coppice I heard and saw Marsh Tit and found a healthy Spurge Laurel plant with large flower buds that will open soon.

Tue 23 Nov

D. Havant and Warblington area

The morning seemed to hold little promise of excitement when I first looked out but very soon a small Sparrowhawk came over with a steady flap and glide about 100 feet up, causing no concern to the few birds in the garden. A few minutes later I heard the chatter of Magpies and spent at least ten minutes trying to determine how many there were and what they were doing.

Two Magpies frequent the garden regularly but on this occasion my count kept increasing until I was sure of a minimum of 16 birds before they moved off to the west. Magpies are usually restless and noisy when in a large group and these seemed attracted to a particular tree-top, but as soon as ten or so were there the tension between them caused them to fly off in all directions only to gravitate back to this tree. When they split up they would mostly head for neighbouring trees but several of them would often fly up high above the trees in much the same way that Bearded Tits do when summoning up courage to set out on one of their long distance journeys and my guess was that this party might be doing the same, preparing themselves for a long journey (or perhaps setting out again on a journey that had already brought them from the continent which they had broken to spend the previous night in this area but were now ready to continue) - if anyone who knows more about Magpie behaviour can give me a better reason for their behaviour I would love to hear it.

As the day was dry and still (with rain and wind forecast for later in the week) I took a morning walk to Warblington, going via Pook Lane and along the shore to Nore Barn at the west end of Emsworth and back across the fields past the church before coming home along the main road from Emsworth.

As I left my garden I noticed a big ornamental Cherry in a neighbouring garden was already in flower and soon heard both Dunnock and Song Thrush song. Dunnocks are certainly singing more frequently than usual for this time of year, and from hearing at least four different Thrushes singing during this morning's walk (and then having one singing continuously in the late afternoon as I finished some outdoor house painting) I think the Thrushes will probably be singing daily from now on unless the weather changes dramatically. Before I had gone any distance I also heard Wood Pigeon song again and saw one making a display flight.

In the 'wildflower meadow' by the Lymbourne springs both Red and White Campion were still flowering along with Green Alkanet and (more surprising) Musk Mallow. Beside Pook Lane south of the A27 Herb Robert was in full flower as was a big patch of Wavy Bittercress and at the south end of the lane I saw an unexpected Jay in the trees.

With the tide nearly high there were fourteen Wigeon, three Mergansers, two Goldeneye, two Teal and one Great Crested Grebe on the water but most birds were in high tide mode - a good 450 Brent were in the middle shore field of the three between Pook Lane and the church and among them were at least 40 Curlew and 30 Black-tailed Godwit (plus a couple of hundred Starlings) with one Oystercatcher. Many other Oystercatchers were roosting on the Northney saltings with the gulls, half a dozen Egrets and the odd Cormorant. Of some interest I watched a good twenty Mallard flying west towards Langstone Pond where the numbers have increased recently -presumably these were more new arrivals from afar.

At Nore Barn another Song Thrush was singing loudly and the Cow Parsley that has been in flower there for over a month was still in good condition. Interestingly there were no Swans on the outfall of the Maisemore Gardens stream (and no Shelduck anywhere along the shore - have they all moved to join the big flock that normally builds up off Farlington Marshes to give counts of 300 to 500 in December?)

Starting back through the Warblington fields I stopped by the eastern stream where many Goldfinch were feeding in the Alders. No Siskin among them but the Goldfinch flock numbered over 30 when they all took off. With them were half a dozen Greenfinch and a few Blue and Great Tits.

Heading on west past the Butchers Broom guarding the next 'kissing gate' and past the fields which had had a crop of Sweetcorn I not only noticed that the field edges have been ploughed but also watched from a distance a Rat pausing on the path ahead of me - I guess he has been living on left over Sweetcorn cobs and is puzzled by the ploughing that has deprived him of his winter food. At the far end of this large field, in the shallows of the main stream of the farm, a solitary Grey Wagtail looked very much at home (though I think it was only last winter that they were first seen on this stream).

Reaching the eastern gate into the churchyard I could see seven Egrets in the field east of the church that is to become the cemetery extension, but for the moment it is undisturbed and a big flock of perhaps 50 Greenfinch with a dozen Chaffinch were feeding under trees overhanging from the church yard (normally finch flocks of this size or larger are a common autumn sight along the seawalls but this winter this is the first substantial flock I have seen anywhere locally and the first time I have seen any flock of Greenfinches). While watching the birds I noticed a small tuft of mushroom like fungi growing on Elder in the hedge and found this was the edible but uncommon *Agrocybe cylindracea*. Yet another Song Thrush was singing in this area.

Heading north past the farm up Church Lane I passed a couple of Pied Wagtail (no sign yet of the winter flock of these birds that in the past have been a regular sight on the farm fields) but saw nothing else of interest until the gateway of the farm house where a fresh plant of Cow Parsley was in flower (with a second flowering across the road). More surprising, as I neared the main road, I found several fresh plants of Upright Hedge Parsley with newly opening flowers. I have in the past remarked on the microclimate around the A259 where it passes under the A27, caused by the warmth from passing cars and the shelter of the A27 embankment, and today the Stone Parsley was still flowering there along with Black Knapweed and other plants which included a handsome Bulbous Buttercup (I already had Creeping and Meadow Buttercups on my list). Further along the Emsworth Road in Havant I added Square Stalked Willowherb to my flowering list (yesterday in central Havant I had a fresh specimen of American Willowherb)

[Sun 21 Nov](#)

L. Bedhampton, Broadmarsh and Chalk Dock

On this dull and damp morning I cycled west down Solent Road and along the Wayfarers Way path passing the Brockhampton springs, Hermitage Stream and Bedhampton Mill.

I had already heard strong Song Thrush song from my garden and I passed several more en route (including two perched together with a Blackbird on a low hedge between the grass fields east of Bedhampton Mill - not typical Song Thrush habitat!) providing good evidence for a recent invasion of Thrushes from the continent.

On Bedhampton Mill Pool there were four Gadwall in addition to the normal Mallards, Coot, Moorhen and Dabchick, and after continuing downstream to the mouth of the stream at Broadmarsh two more Little Grebe on the open sea were evidence of the start of these Dabchicks moving to the sea for the winter. Following the Broadmarsh shore towards the A27 I found the tided fully out and the exposed mud everywhere packed with birds. Brent and Wigeon formed the majority but all the usual suspects were present (Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Grey and Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Turnstone though no Knot that I could see). Some of all these species were feeding right up to the foot of the seawall on which the path runs so even those without binoculars could enjoy the spectacle.

Two species in short supply were Shelduck (I only saw about half a dozen) and Little Egret (I thought they had all moved inland but just as I was leaving the area just one appeared!).

I went as far as the outlet of the stream coming under the A27 and from here I had my best birds of the day - a group of 17 Pintail - and the west of the outfall there was the usual winter flock of Lapwing which today numbered around 140.

Coming back I stopped at the small shore carpark and watched an unexpected flock of Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits working the bushes with Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Goldcrest among them.

Later I paused by Harts Farm Way to look again at the Fumitory growing on the rubble and earth bank debarring travellers from invading the now disused Council Workers carpark and near it I found the group of Large White butterfly caterpillars still munching at the Charlock on which I had seen them on Nov 16 - then they measured 25 mm long, today they were nearly full grown at 40 mm.

Other plants found flowering on this trip included lots of Blue Fleabane and some Chinese Mugwort by the A27 embankment, more Winter Heliotrope near the Ranelagh Road allotments, and at the end of the trip both Meadowsweet and Water Figwort flowering by the Langbrook Stream just south of the A27.

M. News and Reports reaching me up to today

BIRDS

328. Divers: A single Red-throated was off the east coast of the IoW on Nov 16 and 21 and the first Black-throated of the winter was off East Head on Nov 20 while single Great Northern (possibly all the same bird) were off Pagham Harbour and Hayling Bay on Nov 16 and Newtown Harbour on Nov 21 (when what was almost certainly a different bird was off Ventnor). The Black-throated was the first and so far the only one of its species to be reported this winter hereabouts.

329. Grebes: A Red-necked was on the sea in the Bexhill area between Eastbourne and Hastings on Nov 16 and on Nov 20 a Slavonian Grebe was on Ibsley Water near Ringwood (according to John Clark this is probably the first at this inland site since 1976)

330. Cormorant: The flock roosting at the mouth of Pagham Harbour (where the Petersfield Wildlife Group saw 75 on Nov 2) had risen to around 100 when Brian Fellows was there on Nov 16. The inland roost at Chichester Ivy Lake had held 76 birds on Nov 6 and on Nov 19 a roost on the River Ouse just south of Lewes had 46 birds.
331. Great White Egret: The bird which appeared at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Nov 6 but has not been reported there since Nov 7 was seen again on Nov 20 but no one has yet confirmed that the colour rings on its left leg match the bird that stayed there last year.
332. Bewick's Swan: Six adults with three young were at Pulborough Brooks overnight on Nov 14 and a group of four were by the R. Adur near Henfield on Nov 18 - no more news of the single bird that was with the Mutes in Fishbourne channel on Nov 13
333. Black Swan: In addition to the four which turned up at Lymington on Nov 10 there have now been reports of one at Titchfield Haven on Nov 14 and one at Gosport Cockle Pond on Nov 19
334. Brent Geese: A small group of 8 landed on Sinah Pond (South Hayling) on Nov 16 to be the first reported on 'inland fresh water' this winter, and of minor interest I saw that on Nov 19 some were feeding on one of the Warblington Farm fields which had had a crop of Sweetcorn this year - the crop was cleared early in the autumn and I wondered at the time if this was to attract Brent to it and thus help to reduce damage to fresh winter wheat in other fields - if that was the intention the offer has now been taken up by the geese (though the great majority on the Warblington fields still prefer the cattle grazing meadows).
335. Black Brant: The bird in the East Head carpark at West Wittering was still there in Nov 20 but there has been no report of the one at Pagham North Walls since Nov 13 though it may well still be there.
336. Egyptian Goose: One turned up in Ashlett Creek near Fawley at the mouth of Southampton Water on Nov 20 - a first for that site?
337. Wigeon: An estimated 3000 were at Pulborough Brooks on Nov 14 (with 1200 Teal, 245 Mallard and 120 Shoveler) and they are very numerous everywhere along the coast.
338. Gadwall: On Nov 16 Brian Fellows found 42 at New Lake, Chichester (and on Nov 21 there were four on Bedhampton Mill Pool here in Havant).
339. Pintail: 30 were in Nutbourne Bay on Nov 19 and I had my first of the winter on Nov 21 (17 in the Chalkdock area of Langstone Harbour)
340. Pochard: More than 8 were back on Sinah Lake (Hayling) on Nov 16
341. Tufted Duck: These now seem to be returning to the south coast at last but in small numbers
342. Scaup: A female was reported at Rye Harbour on Nov 20 where just one had been reported offshore on Nov 6,
343. LESSER SCAUP: A drake, the first ever to be recorded in Sussex, was on the Sussex end of Scotney Court Gravel Pit (which extends into Kent) on Nov 17 and has been seen daily there up to Nov 20 so far ...
344. Common Scoter: One or two were in Langstone Harbour on Nov 16 when John Shillitoe saw one at the harbour entrance and then another off the Oysterbeds
345. Velvet Scoter: Four were off Ventnor on Nov 16 and a single was off Selsey Bill on Nov 20 with two at Ventnor on Nov 21

346. Goosander: A party of seven were off Pagham Harbour on Nov 15 (six redheads had already been reported there on Nov 13) and Brian Fellows saw seven birds there on Nov 16 (but dismissed them as distant Mergansers while distracted by the sight of a Great Northern Diver!). The pair at Hersey Nature Reserve on the loW were still there on Nov 21 (and an additional male was offshore in that area on Nov 17). A break with tradition is that this autumn we have had 20 reports of Goosander from the south coast before the first from north Hampshire (where Paul Hope saw a single male at Tundry Pond on Nov 21) - in the past Goosanders always seem to have arrived in the north before any reached the coast but this year a report of 10 seen on Nov 13 flying in from the sea near St Catherine's Point on the loW may hold a clue to this change of arrival direction...
347. Ruddy Duck: A single bird was on Ibsley Water near Ringwood on Nov 14 - the first for the Blashford Lakes area since last March.
348. Merlin: My database now has 82 reports of Merlin this autumn and usually these are a frequent sight at Farlington Marshes but I see that although the first to be seen anywhere along the coast was at Farlington on Aug 22 there have been no other reports from there until now (when Bob Chapman reports a juvenile there on Nov 10) I suspect that this absence of reports is partly due to Merlins being 'too common to be worth reporting'. Bob's report is of interest as he describes the hunting habits of the Merlin (see the Wildlife News under the Reserves tab on the HWT website) from which I learnt they will on occasions select a prey item from a distance and instead of charging straight at it they will fly at head height through a flock of grazing geese - this puts the geese up and the Merlin quickly changes direction, flies back under the geese and takes the prey by surprise while it is distracted by the noise and flapping of the geese.
349. Red-legged Partridge: On Nov 16 Brian Fellows watched a group of seven near the Pagham Harbour Ferry Pool (where Cliff Oakley had seen 5 on Nov 2). On Nov 20 a group of 17 were in the Whale Chine area of the loW
350. Avocet: A party of 18 were in Nutbourne Bay on Nov 19
351. Knot: Around 100 were in the West Wittering area on Nov 15 and 60 were in the Yarmouth area of the loW on Nov 12
352. Purple Sandpiper: Up to 15 have been seen under the pier at Newhaven (Nov 18) and Roger Webb saw at least three (maybe four) at Southsea Castle on Nov 20
353. Ruff: One has been seen at Pulborough Brooks several times recently.
354. Spotted Redshank: Four were in Yarmouth harbour (loW) on Nov 19 with a fifth (juvenile) bird on the Island at Bembridge that day.
355. Greenshank: One was in Nutbourne Bay on Nov 19 and three were in Bembridge Harbour on Nov 17. The latest report is of one at Tanners Lane, east of Lymington, on Nov 20
356. GREY PHALAROPE: One was seen for just 10 minutes at West Wittering (Snow Hill) on Nov 17 by Tony Deleiros.
357. Great Skua: The first two reports since Oct 30 came from the east coast of the loW on Nov 21 (probably one bird seen at Ventnor and Sandown).
358. Ring-billed Gull: The Gosport Cockle Pond bird, which has not been seen since the end of October, was back on duty on Nov 19 and 20.
359. Black-back Gulls: Looking from the Northney shore on Hayling I estimated that at least 100 Lessers were off the Warblington shore among a total of just over 200 Blackbacks coming to roost on the afternoon of Nov 19. The count of Greaters almost

certainly exceeded the impressive roost at the mouth of Pagham Harbour where Brian Fellows saw around 60 on Nov 16

360. Caspian Gull: There has been another report of a single bird at Brighton Marina where one was previously reported on Nov 8
361. Kittiwake: A flock of 32 in Sandown Bay on Nov 21 may indicate the arrival of bigger numbers on the Hampshire coast. (The largest count previously reported this autumn was just 8 birds off St Catherine's Point on Oct 28)
362. Little Auk: Two reported off Rye Harbour on Nov 14.
363. Wood Pigeon: The first song I have heard from these birds since Oct 3 was heard in my garden on Nov 20.
364. Collared Dove: A record for Brian Fellows garden in Emsworth was set on Nov 18 when a flock of 46 Collared Doves descended on it. On Nov 20 and 21 I heard strong song again from these birds (which ceased to sing between Sep 17 and Oct 18 but have since then been very intermittent songsters until now)
365. Long-eared Owl: The first to arrive on the south coast this winter (ignoring the resident birds on the IoW) arrived at Rye Harbour on Nov 19 when at least 4 roosted there.
366. Sand Martin: Following the bird seen at Titchfield Haven on Nov 14 (exceeding the lateness of the previous 'latest ever' in Hampshire which had been 12 Nov 1985) there have been reports of two there on Nov 17 and one on Nov 19 (though that is not confirmed)
367. Swallow: The latest report so far is of two flying north over Shanklin on Nov 18
368. WAXWING: The first of the winter made a brief stop at Rye Harbour on Nov 19 but then disappeared.
369. Song Thrush: Several reports of both Blackbirds and Song Thrushes arriving along the south coast recently. On Nov 21 one sang loudly for up to two hours in my garden (first strong song heard briefly on Nov 20). There have also been several reports of Redwing.
370. Mistle Thrush: The first autumn song from these has already been reported on Nov 11 in north Hampshire and recently Mike Collins tells me that one had been singing for several days on the Goodwood estate at Chichester prior to Nov 17
371. Dartford Warbler: An unusual report of one seen on seaweed came from Paul Winter at Calshot on Nov 20
372. Blackcap: Two reports of new arrivals of winter birds in gardens come from Mike Rafter (male eating grapes in his Romsey garden on Nov 18) and from Geoff Rogers (one eating Honeysuckle berries in his Harestock garden at Winchester on Nov 19)
373. Brambling: On Nov 18 several were in the Bolderwood area of the New Forest and a few more were seen at Cadman's Pool (not far north of Bolderwood across the A31). Some could still be seen at Cadman's Pool on Nov 19
374. Linnet: Around 400 were feeding on a game crop of sunflowers in the Longwood Warren area east of Winchester on Nov 17 (with Goldfinches, Greenfinches and a few Yellowhammers)
375. Hawfinch: Five were seen going to roost in a regular New Forest site on Nov

376. Lapland Bunting: Following the sightings of one at Rye Harbour on Nov 15 a single bird was seen on the loW on both Nov 16 and 17 (Whale Chine area near St Catherine's Point)
377. Snow Bunting: There were seven at East Head on Nov 15 and 17 but only 6 on Nov 20, On Nov 20 two were at Rye Harbour
378. Chinese Pond Heron: I expressed some doubt about the photograph taken of the bird seen at East Dean on the River Dun west of the Test in Nov 14 (not doubting the sighting of the bird but wondering if the photo showing it in full breeding plumage was actually taken on that date) but I have since heard from Ed Griffiths that the new issue of 'Birdwatch' mag has an account of a Chinese Pond Heron being seen in Norfolk on Oct 31 and that was also in breeding plumage (and thought by some to be a genuine vagrant) Maybe the East Dean sighting was of the same bird.

PLANTS

31. The number of different species which I found in flower this week was 64.
32. Surprises for the time of year include Water Figwort, Meadowsweet, Mugwort and Blue Fleabane.
33. Plants found which are normally expected to flower in November included Winter Heliotrope, Butcher's Broom, Ivy and Chinese Mugwort

INSECTS

21. Red Admiral: Three further sightings this week on Nov 17 in Gosport
22. Large White butterfly caterpillars: The caterpillars which I found on Nov 16 (and have mentioned below) were still munching away at the Charlock plant beside Harts Farm Way in the Brockhampton area of Havant on Nov 21, and in five days had grown from about 25mm in length to near full size at 40 mm
23. Moths: 19 different species recorded at moth traps this week including the first Winter Moth of the season (we have already had November and December moths) plus late news of three records of an Oak Rustic moth at Freshwater on the loW - this species has yet to be recorded in Hampshire and these sightings (all since Oct 30) hold some promise of a Hampshire record before too long.
24. Common Wasp: The nest in the ground in my Havant garden is still active up to time of writing on Nov 22

OTHER

16. Fungi on Hayling Island: Found on Nov 21 were *Stropharia aurantiaca* (like a small gilled Mushroom but with an attractive orange coloured cap) and *Cyathus olla* (one of the Bird's Nest fungi that is very small, drab coloured and not at all easy to spot but quite distinctive when found on account of its bowl shape with several packages of spores nestling in the bottom of the bowl where they look very like miniature eggs in a bird's nest). Both species can be found on wood chippings in a flower bed on the north side of Station Road in West Town, South Hayling by the roadside outside the Tesco Store not far from the Manor Road junction.
17. Fungi in Stansted Forest: Found on Nov 14 in the area where the ground slopes steeply down from the west end of the Main Avenue to the grassy 'flood plain' of the Lavant stream on the Woodberry Lane side of the 'Ornamental Drive' were a number of unusual fungal species which are not listed in my books but which will probably be recognised as of interest by Fungus enthusiasts, If I have the names spelt correctly they were *Phyllotopsis nidulans*, *Ganoderma pfeifferi*, and *Ramaria abbieintum*. More common species found there were *Neobulgaria pura*, *Crepidotus mollis*, *Panellus serotinus*, *Bisporrella citrina* and *Ramaria stricta* (these commoner species appear in Roger Philips excellent book on Fungi). Most of the finds were on fallen tree trunks

lying in a tangle of brambles and regenerating trees to the north of the path leading down from the south side of the Main Avenue.

Fri 19 Nov

D. Mid-tide Count at Hayling North Common

I spent the early afternoon sitting for an hour and a half on the promontory at the east end of the North Common open space (due south of Conigar Point on the Warblington shore) counting the waders and wildfowl in four areas on a map approved by Anne de Potier for her Chichester Harbour counts of where the birds feed as the tide rises or falls.

In this case the tide was rising and there was little to see when I arrived at 13:30 though I noted that at least 50 Teal heads popped up from the vegetation of the old holiday camp boating lake when something disturbed them as I was passing on my way to the view point. Also seen on the way out was another Dog Rose bush with a few flowers on it.

On settling down and starting to scan with my scope I found my first Knot of the winter (only three - later six was the maximum count) and with them were small numbers of most of the species to feature in my score sheet - Dunlin, Redshank, Grey Plover and Curlew, with Cormorant and Merganser (max 4) on the water, and 16 Lesser Black-backs among the gulls already coming to roost on the saltings north of Sweare Deep (off Warblington). Just seven Brent were at the water's edge.

In the second 20 minute count period numbers went up considerably as at least 220 Brent flew off the Warblington fields and around 200 Black-headed Gulls flew in from afar to join the roost. Scanning this roost again I found a total of 146 Black-back Gulls (my impression was that the majority were Lessers but it was impossible to be sure which were Greater and which were Lessers in the more distant part of my field of view which extended to the shore of western Emsworth)

In the third period the first Teal flew out of the old boating lake onto the rising water in the channels close to the outer wall of the lake, and Mallard also emerged to sample the incoming water. On the mud nearest the North Common seawall I spotted a single Ringed Plover (three were there by the time I left). Across Sweare Deep a few more Lapwing became visible as they roused themselves from low tide lethargy and became birds rather than lumps of mud.

In the last half-hour there were probably 600 Dunlin in view - highly mobile and difficult to associate with any one sector of my map for more than a few minutes at a time. Other newcomers were a single Grey Heron and a single Egret, while in the distance the count of Black-backs went up to 206. One other thing that went into my notes was my first sight of Brent feeding ashore on the Warblington Farm field immediately behind Conigar Point where there had been a Sweetcorn crop in the late summer (I think this was specially cleared early in the autumn to attract the Brent but so far they seem to have ignored it, favouring the rich grass of the cattle grazing meadows).

E. A frosty morning in my Havant garden

Although a hard frost had been predicted it had hardly affected my garden - only a hint of ice on one of four water containers - but it seemed to have had an effect on the birds as I heard clear Song Thrush song from nearby and by chance a flock of half a dozen Long-tailed Tits came through the garden when I was out. With them was a Goldcrest, a Chiffchaff and some Blue Tits.

The frost had had the opposite effect on the other birds I normally see - the House Sparrows were silent and absent and the only song other than the Thrush was from a Wren, though several Robins were singing when I later walked around the Hayling Billy line behind the garden

[Wed 17 Nov](#)

F. News and Reports reaching me since Nov 14

BIRDS

85. Red-throated Diver: I have already reported a group of seven off Rye Harbour on Nov 13 and now have a report of six off Seaview on the Isle of Wight on Nov 15 with what may have been the seventh of the same group passing St Catherine's Point on Nov 14 (perhaps eager to be first back in the waters off Cornwall (I believe that one of the south Cornish bays regularly has winter flocks of over 100 Divers - can anyone update me on this?))
86. Slavonian Grebe: One was on the sea of Seaview (north east of IoW) on Nov 15. Although up to 3 have been off Church Norton since Sep 24 and one has been off Lymington since Oct 26 this is the first reported from the Isle of Wight. I have not yet heard of any in our three local harbours.
87. Cormorant: 52 flew north up the Test over the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Nov 14 when there were 47 (plus 8 Shag) on St Helens Fort which guards the entrance to Bembridge Harbour on the IoW)
88. Shag: As well as the 8 on St Helens Fort on Nov 14 there were 12 of them off Seaview at the north east corner of the IoW on Nov 15
89. Little Egret: Barry Collins had 49 coming to roost at the Thorney Island Great Deepes site on Nov 13, Jason Crook counted 73 at the Langstone Wade Court site on Nov 15 and Mike Collins could only see 4 coming to the Tournurbury Wood roost on Nov 14. Although there was no October count for Thorney Island in October this month's count of 49 was close to the September count of 54 but the Wade Court count has fallen from 176 in Sep to 129 in Oct and now 73 in Nov and the Tournurbury totals have gone down from 34 in Sep and 40 in Oct to just 4. I suspect that one factor in these falling numbers is the normal movement of Egrets from coastal to inland sites as winter approaches, and a report of 31 in the Alresford area at dusk on Nov 13 confirms this (none have been recorded as roosting there since March but roosts of 50 or more can be expected in the winter), but another factor that is less easy to quantify is the continuing spread of Egrets in Britain as a whole. One illustration of this spread comes from Pete Car who this spring put colour rings on the young Egrets in two nests at the Elson Wood heronry on the Portsmouth Harbour shore - he has recently had sightings of two of these birds, one from Wales and another from Kent..
90. Bewick's Swan: A single Bewick's was among 100 Mute Swans in Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on Nov 13, seen by Richard Williamson (ex-warden of Kingley Vale)
91. Black Swan: A group of four arrived at the Lymington Marshes this week on Nov 10 and have settled in among the Mute Swans there.
92. Greylag Goose: 25 were on Fleet Pond this week and an unspecified number (probably less than half a dozen) were seen on the Chichester Lakes.
93. Cackling Goose: This single 'half size' Canada Goose was still with normal Canadas on the Chichester Lakes on Nov 14
94. Bar-headed Goose: A group of 8 were also on the Chichester Lakes on Nov 14 - maybe on an outing of 'tame geese' from the Trout Farm lakes just north of the railway and south of Priorsleaze Lane between Nutbourne and Hambrook
95. Mandarin Duck: Eleven were on Fleet Pond on Nov 7
96. Teal: The WeBS count at West Wittering on Nov 13 recorded 662 Teal together with 177 Wigeon, 750 Brent (plus the single Brant), 500 Golden Plover, 1585 Dunlin, 14

Knot, 60 Redshank (and a Spotted Redshank) and 3 Greenshank not to mention the 2 Twite and 6 Snow Buntings.

97. Mallard: A total of 200 were on the Emsworth ponds on Nov 9 and 300 were on the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Nov 14
98. Tufted Duck: I have remarked before that numbers of these seem lower than usual so far this winter and I see that only 16 came to roost on the Testwood Lakes on Nov 14 - this has been one of the few places reporting good numbers recently (max of 78 on Oct 10)
99. Long-tailed Duck: The only bird on the south coast, which arrived at Lymington on Nov 11, was still there on Nov 15
100. Goldeneye: The first to reach Hampshire this winter was seen from Langstone Bridge on Nov 1 and I saw my first, also off Langstone village, on Nov 16, later seeing another 2 in the Broadmarsh slipway area that day.
101. Red-breasted Merganser: I saw my first of the winter, a flotilla of 8, in the Chichester Channel of Chichester Harbour on Nov 14. A total of 28 were in the Chichester Channel area (off Cobnor Point) on Nov 13 and I think that was the day on which these duck began to settle down in our harbours rather than just passing along the coast. There had been previous sightings in Langstone Harbour on Oct 26 and 30 but they were not followed up until Nov 13 after which, on Nov 14, there were 28 in The Kench in Langstone Harbour, more than 30 in the Keyhaven area and 10 off Church Norton as well as my 8. I have since seen nine off Langstone village on Nov 16 with another two off the South Moors shore later that morning.
102. Goosander: Latest sightings have been of two which stayed around the Hersey nature reserve on the north east coast of the IoW on both Nov 14 and 15 (at one point coming close to the hide their to be photographed), one seen on the River Test at Broadlands (Romsey) on Nov 14 before roosting downstream at the Testwood lakes, On Nov 15 two were seen at the mouth of the River Hamble but these could well be the first two to reach us, seen further up the Hamble at Curbridge on Nov 6.
103. Ruddy Duck: A female was seen at the Chichester Lakes (probably on Ivy Lake) on Nov 14 - this was the first I have heard of the species anywhere since Sep 25, and may well mark the end of their moult period so we can expect to see more of them from now on. I have not heard any reports of them at Chichester this year until now but the 2002 Sussex bird report shows that they were present there in seven months of the year with peaks of 10 in Sept and 6 in both Oct and Jan. So far I have not heard of any sites at which the population has been noticeably reduced by the widely proclaimed national cull (and I see that the first entry in my database for this year is of more than 100 seen on Staines Reservoir in London by Derek Hale on Jan 3, with 24 following reports including a count of 24 on the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood in March and 9 at Alresford Pond in August.
104. Red Kite: Trevor Carpenter walked around the Preshaw estate (north west of East Meon) on Nov 14 and reports seeing a "Red Kite soaring with two Buzzards and a higher Sparrowhawk all in the same field of view south east of Preshaw"
105. Marsh Harrier: A female/immature bird was at Brading Marshes on the IoW on Nov 14 alongside the more regular Hen Harrier there.
106. Peregrine: On special offer for visitors to Titchfield Haven on Nov 14 was the hour-long sight of a Peregrine catching, plucking and then eating its prey in full sight of the Knights Bank hide.
107. Grey Partridge: Another 50 were released on the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Nov 14 - we hope a few will survive!

108. Water Rail: I hear that members of John Goodspeed's walk party on Nov 16 saw one at the Budds Farm pools.
109. Coot: A total of 64 were on the Emsworth Slipper Mill pond on Nov 9. There had been 72 there on Sep 22 but no more than 8 at any time earlier in the year. Some of these will be birds that were on Aldsworth Pond before it ran dry at the beginning of October. Before long I expect the majority of them will move from the Slipper pond to the Little Deeps on Thorney where the reeds provide more shelter from frost and the nearby grassland ensures their food supply even if the water is frozen.
110. Ringed Plover: George Spraggs found more than 150 at The Kench in Langstone Harbour on Nov 14 - checking the latest Hampshire Bird Report for 2002 I see the total of Ringed Plover in Langstone Harbour as a whole ranged from 260 in Sept to 394 in Dec with lower figures in other months (but there is probably movement of these birds between Langstone and Chichester Harbours which may cause the totals in one harbour to fluctuate from day to day).
111. Golden Plover: The flock in the Eastleigh area was up to 140 on Nov 9 (the next highest count there for the whole year was only 63 on Oct 28. Elsewhere in Hampshire there were 356 at the Lymington Marshes on Nov 9 and in the West Wittering area there were still 500 (in the East Head carpark area) on Nov 13.
112. Knot: In addition to Brian Fellows count of 16 in the south east Hayling sector of Chichester Harbour for the Nov 13 WeBS count I see that Ewan Urquhart had another 16 across the water at East Head. Up to 9 were in the Lymington area all week and Richard Carpenter was surprised to find 10 on the Bunny Meadows mud just north of Warsash on the Hamble (not a normal site for them)
113. Little Stint: Ewan Urquhart found 4 (among 1585 Dunlin) at East Head in Chichester Harbour on the Nov 13 WeBS count but Ian Barnard reports a total of 5 there on the same day though he gives a figure of 4 there on Nov 14.
114. Woodcock: Four were seen at Bransbury Common near Andover on Nov 15
115. Curlew: When I visited Copperas Point on the Chichester Channel on Nov 14 the high tide was only just falling to expose the mud and I noted a roost flock of around 100 Curlew still on the shore of Oldpark Wood
116. Spotted Redshank: One was at Snow Hill marsh (West Wittering) for the WeBS count on Nov 13. The only other one being currently reported is a single that has been at Normandy Marsh (Lymington) throughout the week Nov 8 - 14.
117. Greenshank: No doubt there are more present in Chichester Harbour but the only current reports of them are of 3 at Snow Hill on Nov 13 plus the two I saw on the Warblington shore that day while another three were seen at Bembridge on the IoW on Nov 14
118. Kittiwake: The only report of this species for November so far is of one following the ferry which took Derek Hale from Fishbourne to Portsmouth on Nov 13
119. Razorbill: Nov 14 brought sightings of three on the sea off Pagham Harbour, one at the mouth of Bembridge Harbour on the IoW and another off the Lymington Marshes
120. Little Auk: Another of those frustrating reports of 'one that got away' - George Spraggs says that he did not see anything of a Little Auk reported to have been in the mouth of Langstone Harbour on Nov 12 but he gives no detail of that report and I have heard nothing of it.
121. Short-eared Owl: Kelvin Pearce was at Bransbury Common near Andover on Nov 15 and had a good list of raptors starting with 3 Short-eared, 1 Barn and 1 Tawny Owl plus singles of Merlin, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard

122. Wood Pigeon: Reports continue to be given of large numbers of birds moving in random directions. In the past I have thought of these autumn movements as being a stream of birds arriving from the continent but I am beginning to think they are more like the 'suppressed migration' wanderings of Canada Geese in the autumn. New reports are of 700 going north over Fleet Pond on Nov 6, 2400 going south over Fleet Pond on Nov 7, 1500 going west along the top of Portsdown on Nov 11, 800 south over Eastleigh on Nov 11, 500 west over Eastleigh on Nov 13, 2050 west over Romsey on Nov 14 and 16100 west over the Testwood Lakes, down stream from Romsey, also on Nov 14 when Trevor Carpenter recorded a total of 10000 going round in circles over the Preshaw estate to the north west of East Meon and John Clark saw 8160 going north over Fleet Pond.
123. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: On Nov 15 Bob Marchant heard two calling around 'Christmas House' by the path leading down beside Hook Lake to Hook Spit south of Warsash
124. Shore Lark: The two birds which appeared at Rye Harbour on Nov 13 were still there on Nov 14 and there may have been a third there on Nov 15
125. Sand Martin: A single bird seen by John Shillitoe at Titchfield Haven on Nov 14 was the latest ever for Hampshire (previous latest was 12 Nov 1985)
126. Richard's Pipit: The bird seen at Whale Chine (near St Catherine's Point on the loW) on Nov 13 was still there on Nov 14 but has not been seen since. As there was a rumour of one in that area on Oct 29 it could still be lurking thereabouts.
127. Black Redstart: The male which arrived at the Selwyn Court flats at St Helen's (near Bembridge on the loW) around the beginning of November (and is thought to be the bird that spent last winter at the same site) was still there on Nov 14 and appears to have been joined by a female/immature bird which was seen there on Nov 15
128. Fieldfare: More than 200 were seen in the Faccombe area north of Andover on Nov 14 when 15 were at Fleet Pond and two were at the Eastleigh Lakeside site. Nov 15 brought another sighting of around 200 at Bransbury Common which is just east of Andover (could well have been the flock that was at Faccombe on the previous day) - with them were many Redwing.
129. Chiffchaff: It would seem that they have not abandoned the Budds Farm sewage works at Havant as one was calling repeatedly from the vegetation on the earth bank running inside the fence separating the pools from the shore when I walked past on Nov 16.
130. Firecrest: Three were again reported from Church Norton on Nov 14 - this is the seventh report of them here since Oct 26,
131. Raven: Bob Marchant claimed a new 'patch tick' for the Hook/Warsash site when he found one perched in a tree beside Workmans Lane on Nov 15
132. Corvids: The roost of thousands of corvids spending their nights in Oldpark Wood beside the Chichester/Fishbourne channel, which has entertained me at dusk on each of my visits to Copperas Point from July onwards, seemed to have moved away when I was there on the evening of Nov 14 but just as I was leaving a flock of around 250 corvids flew over the wood from the south (on previous occasions the birds have come from the east).
133. Brambling: The first that I have heard of since Nov 3 flew south over the Lakeside country park at Eastleigh on Nov 14 without stopping.
134. Siskin: Still no major influx of these on the south coast.
135. Twite: Two were still at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Nov 13, 14 and 15 (along with six Snow Buntings)

136. Lesser Redpoll: Unlike the Siskin there were 85 Redpoll at Fleet Pond on Nov 7 but that remains an isolated occurrence.
137. Hawfinch: A couple were seen in the West Dean woods north of Chichester on Nov 14 according to Ian Barnard.
138. Lapland Bunting: Ian Barnard also reports one of these having been seen at Rye Harbour on Nov 15
139. Snow Bunting: The two Snow Buntings which were first seen at East Head in Chichester Harbour on Nov 11 had increased to six on Nov 13 and were all still there on Nov 14, and of interest to those in the Havant area one was seen by Peter Bulfield at Chidham Point (just south of Nutbourne Bay) also on Nov 13 but this may have flown south to East Head as the total there had gone up to 7 on Nov 15.
140. Corn Bunting: Around 50 birds were still at Rye Harbour on Nov 14
141. Chinese Pond Heron: John Clark (Hampshire Bird Recorder) has just been told of one which spent a few hours in a garden at East Dean (beside the Romsey to Salisbury rail line, in Hampshire but near the Wilts Border) before it flew east towards Lockerley (further in to Hampshire along the River Dun). The report was accompanied by an excellent photo of the species in full breeding plumage (I wonder if there is any proof that the photo was taken in this garden at this time of year?). I seem to recall several other sightings of unusual birds in this general area and believe there is some sort of exotic birds collection in the Awbridge area between East Dean and Romsey. As an aside I already have map references for two sets of East and West Deans in my computer (one near Beachy Head, the other north of Chichester) and I have now added this third set!

PLANTS

10. Field Scabious: A plant of this was still flowering in Stansted Forest on Nov 14. Although I noted just over 100 plant species flowering during the week from Nov 8 - 14 I have not come across this one since Oct 10

INSECTS

6. Dragonflies: A Migrant Hawker was still flying in the Gosport area on Nov 4 and single Common Darters were in Portsmouth (at the Admiral Lord Nelson School near the Eastern Road golf course) in Nov 11 and at Gosport on both Nov 12 and 14 (with a pair in tandem on the latter date)
7. Butterflies: A Clouded Yellow was at Gosport on Nov 13 while four (including a helice form female and another female still egg-laying) were seen in the Southbourne undercliff area of Bournemouth where the species has established its first year round residential colony in Britain. Also in Bournemouth a Large White was seen flying on Nov 14 while on Nov 16 I found a cluster of six of their caterpillars munching Charlock leaves beside the Harts Farm Way in Havant - the caterpillars were about two thirds grown (25mm long out of a full length of 40mm) and if we do not have too much frost we could be seeing white butterflies on the wing on Christmas Day (more likely, if the creatures do survive, they will delay their emergence from their pupae until the first sunny day in the New Year?). During the past week I have heard of some 16 individual Red Admirals being seen, including 8 at Gosport on Nov 14 and others on that day in Greywell (north Hampshire), at two places Stansted Forest (seen by Brian Fellows and Adrian Hoskins). The latest Speckled Wood sighting is now at Gosport on Nov 12.
8. Moths: Adrian Hoskins had a micro call *Eudonia angustea* fly in through the bathroom window of his house in Bedhampton (Havant) on Nov 14 and on the same night both a Mottled Umber and a December Moth were trapped in Greywell (north Hampshire)
9. Common Wasp: these are still to be seen everywhere and the nest in the ground of my garden is still active as I write on Nov 17.

10. Hornet: An unusual find made by a fungus hunter when probing a decaying tree trunk in Stansted Forest on Nov 16 was to discover a Queen Hornet which was revealed when a piece of the wood was accidentally broken off. The Hornet was presumably already hibernating but hopefully was not too deeply 'asleep' to be able to find another place to hide away.

OTHER

5. Fallow Deer: Little news of these which should now be in rut. Brian Fellows reminded me of this with a sighting of a 'bunch' (technical term) of 8 Fallow (presumably all does or young) on the east side of Stansted Forest. It is now a month since the last report of Fallow (a buck with 50 does/young at Leaden Hall in the New Forest on Oct 17)
6. Grey Squirrel: Reports of albino squirrels continue to reach John Goodspeed since they were featured in THE NEWS last week. One from Gatcombe Park in Hilsea (north Portsea Island) could be the same one that was there in July 1999 and one in Southwick village (north west of Portsdown) might be the one that was captured in Cosham in November of 1999 and dumped in the Boarhunt area in the hopes that it would not return to Cosham! Reports also come from Southsea and Waterlooville.

Tue 16 Nov

E. Langstone and the South Moors shore

I normally deliver the Nature Notes posters for the Havant area on Monday afternoon but as I did not receive them until late on Monday evening I used them as an excuse for an extended circuit of the Langstone shoreline starting from the shore seen from Langstone pond.

Here I saw a flotilla of eight Mergansers and my first three Goldeneye of the winter (a male and two females). There were plenty of other birds on the shore but nothing of special interest. On the pond the resident Swan pair still had their five cygnets with them and there seemed to be more Mallard than usual (reflecting the increase Brian Fellows has found on the Emsworth Ponds in the past week). One local Kingfisher noisily flew over the pond and shot over the roof of the Mill buildings but did not stop to fish at the Lymbourne stream outlet.

At the mouth of the Langbrook stream there were around 40 Wigeon, and both Dog Rose and Sea Campion were flowering on the shore. I looked for Twite along the shoreline where we had three last winter but with no luck. At the far end of the South Moors shore I met the walk party led by John Goodspeed and heard that they had seen a Water Rail in the Budds Farm pools area to which I was heading.

I did not see the Rail but found the Pochard had increased to 8 and there was a similar number of Shoveler but still few Tufted Duck (certainly not more than ten).

Heading along the Budds Farm shore towards the Hermitage Stream I saw another two Goldeneye and around 40 Wigeon with the expected Swan pair still accompanied by seven cygnets. More interesting than these was a very noisy Chiffchaff working its way along the vegetation within the Budds Farm site and calling continuously and loudly (I did wonder if it might be a Yellow-browed but checked my tape when I got home and found that agreed with my memory of the bird that was by the Brockhampton stream a few winters back - at the time I likened the Yellow-browed's call to a high pitched dog whistle, nothing liked the lower pitched Chiffchaff call)

My final stop was on Harts Farm Way to check the development of seed on the White Ramping Fumitory (a fully mature specimen is wanted for the records). While there I was surprised to find half a dozen part grown Large White caterpillars munching away at one of the large Charlock plants - I wonder if they will escape hard frost and successfully pupate? Another discovery was of Black Bindweed flowering here.

[Mon 15 Nov](#)

D. Garden Birds

I did not get out anywhere today but did find more birds than usual in my garden at breakfast time. Not only was the full complement of over 20 House Sparrows present but there were 5 Woodpigeons and 5 Collared Doves, both of which have been absent for some time. I also had a couple of Greenfinch on the nut feeder - the first time I have seen any in the garden for several weeks and to cap the list a full grown Crow landed on the lawn to join the regular two Magpies.

Wildlife diary and news for Nov 8 - 14 (Week 46)

[Sun 14 Nov](#)

N. Copperas Point on Chichester Channel in Chichester Harbour

No Egrets seen to roost in Oldpark Wood at dusk this evening but I did see my first Mergansers of the winter here

O. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

379. Red-throated Diver: A group of 7 were seen off Rye Harbour on Nov 13
380. Little Grebe: Winter flocks are now building up on the sea - Brian Fellows saw seven off the south east shore of Hayling Island during the WeBS count on Nov 13 and on Nov 14 I had more than a dozen in the Chichester Channel of Chichester Harbour.
381. Great Crested Grebe: More than 25 in Rye Bay on Nov 13 - more than twice the previous high count there this autumn but less than the count of 45 there in Dec 2003. Also on Nov 13 there were 25 on Fleet Pond in north east Hampshire
382. Bittern: At least one has been at Rye Harbour since Sep 5 but Nov 13 brought the first record of two there this winter.
383. Little Egret: I do not yet have any details of the Egret roost count made on the evening of Nov 14 (other than my own expected nil count at Oldpark Wood near Chichester) but Dave Pearson saw 31 Egrets in the Alresford area on the evening of Nov 13 (two at Alresford Pond and 29 in a pre-roost gathering in nearby Arlebury Park - these flew off west, perhaps to the roost trees used sometimes last winter near Borough Farm which is less than 2 km west of the Arlebury heronry). 45 Egrets were at Alresford for the 14 Jan 2004 count (with 36 in Feb and 25 in March, after which none roosted there up to the Sep 14 count - Pete Carr has not yet published the Oct 14 figures)
384. Greylag Goose: 3 were on Fleet Pond on Nov 13 and at least one was at Titchfield Haven on Nov 12
385. Canada Geese: A flock of 110 were on Fleet Pond on Nov 13 when I only found 15 at the Portsmouth IBM Lake and Brian Fellows had just 9 in his count for south-east Hayling. Surprisingly Richard Carpenter does not mention this species in his note of what was seen at Titchfield Haven on Nov 12.
386. Brent Goose: Brian Fellows saw a flock of 450 on a Hayling Island field sown with winter wheat on Nov 13 - of interest as neither he nor I recall Brent using this field in the past. The field in question is east of the main road to south Hayling and west of Mill Rythe (immediately south of the road serving the Mill Rythe boatyard). This flock

was part of a total of 696 Brent seen by Brian in the south east Hayling area, among which he found 29 juveniles which is a very similar proportion of young to adults as I found on the same day at Warblington where I had at least 25 juvs in a flock of 650 Brent.

387. Black Brant: The bird at Pagham North Walls was still there on Nov 13
388. Wigeon: A count of 202 in the Hook area at the mouth of the Hamble River was the highest count there this year. The peak count there in the early year was 176 in Feb but we now have counts of 180 on Nov 7 and 202 on Nov 13. I suspect this peak is due to birds passing through as I see that there was a count of 209 on Nov 9 last year with no other count in 2003 exceeding 150 (in March 2003)
389. Red-crested Pochard: A single male was on Vinnetrow Lake at Chichester on Nov 13
390. Long-tailed Duck: The bird which arrived in the Lymington marshes on Nov 4 was still there on Nov 13
391. Red-breasted Merganser: 24 were off Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour on Nov 13 (and further up the Chichester Channel I had my first of the winter on Nov 14 (but not more than 8 of them).
392. Goosander: Since they started to reach the Hampshire coast on Nov 6 they have been seen near the mouth of the Hamble and the Test. Now comes news of a single redhead at Titchfield Haven on Nov 12 and a party of six feeding near the mouth of Pagham Harbour on Nov 13. Also on Nov 13 a party of 10 flew in off the sea at Whale Chine (near St Catherine's Point (could these be coming from the continent? or even from Scandinavia?
393. Red Kite: The HOS walk party which went to the extreme northern end of the Wayfarer's Walk at Inkpen Beacon (near Newbury in Berkshire) saw three Kites in the air together at Coombe Gibbet on Nov 13
394. Hen Harrier: A ringtail was over Titchfield Haven on Nov 12
395. Spotted Crake: One reported at the Lower Test reserve on Nov 11
396. Golden Plover: A flock of 500 was seen on Nov 13 by the Petersfield Wildlife Group at Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour on Nov 13 (presumably the same flock that was seen at West Wittering on Nov 9)
397. Lapwing: A flock of 800 Lapwing was also seen at Cobnor on Nov 13 (other than an estimated 1600 Lapwing in the Pagham Harbour area last January this is easily the biggest flock in the Chichester area this year - nearest contender was a count of 547 from Thorney Island in Feb 2004.
398. Knot: A flock of 100 was in Pagham Harbour on Nov 11 (one of the birds had yellow plastic rings on both legs)
399. Purple Sandpiper: Two were at Southsea Castle on Nov 13
400. Greenshank: Two were off the Warblington shore on Nov 13.
401. Green Sandpiper: Five were at the Lower Test reserve on Nov 13
402. Common Sandpiper: Five were by the R Adur in the Beeding area on Nov 13 when a single was seen in Chichester Harbour near Cobnor Point.
403. Razorbill: Brian Fellows saw one close to the Hayling shore in Fishery Creek (which runs east north of Black Point) on Nov 13) This seems to be the first in Chichester Harbour this autumn.
404. Wood Pigeon: John Clark counted more than 3145 going north over Fleet Pond in 90 mins on the morning of Nov 13. This is the highest count since this

autumn's mass invasion of continental birds started with a count of 2170 over Hastings on Oct 26

405. Skylark: A count of 21 seen over the Cobnor peninsula on Nov 13 seems likely to have been of continental birds but so far there have been no reports to match the 200 seen near the shore at Worthing on Nov 5
406. Shore Lark: The first two of the winter were at Rye Harbour on Nov 13.
407. Swallow: Two in the Bembridge area of the IoW on Nov 13 were the latest so far ...
408. Richard's Pipit: Kris Gillam saw one fly in off the sea at Whale Chine on the IoW (near St Catherine's Point) on Nov 13 - there had been one tentative report of one on the IoW for Oct 29.
409. Water Pipit: In addition to two or three now resident at the sewage works just west of the Pagham Harbour visitor centre Paul Winter reports four seen at the Lower Test Marshes on Nov 13
410. Fieldfare: 6 were seen over the Cobnor Peninsula in Chichester Harbour on Nov 13
411. Song Thrush: One heard singing on the Isle of Wight on Nov 12 (when I heard snatches of song from two different birds in the Langstone area)
412. Redwing: Up to 300 were flying south over Blackfield village near Fawley on the early morning of Nov 12
413. Willow Tit: Dave Pearson found one by the River Itchen north of Winchester (at Chilland east of Martyr Worthy) on Nov 7. This is only the sixth report of Willow Tit in Hampshire that I have heard of this year.
414. Raven: Two were over the Lower Test on Nov 9 and another two were over Coombe Gibbet at the north end of the Wayfarer's Walk (just into Berkshire south west of Newbury) on Nov 13
415. Twite: Two (maybe three) were with Linnets at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Nov 13. They seem to have been there since Nov 3
416. Snow Bunting: Two were at East Head on Nov 11 and the number there had risen to 6 by Nov 13. Even closer to us in Havant a male was seen at Chidham Point (south of Nutbourne Bay) on Nov 13 by Peter Bulfield. Far to the north two more were seen (down to 4 metres from a HOS walk party) at Coombe Gibbet (north end of the Wayfarer's Walk)

PLANTS

34. WHITE RAMPING FUMITORY: Martin Rand, the plant recorder for south Hampshire, has now seen the plants flowering on Harts Farm Way in Havant (near the old incinerator site) and is satisfied they are the species claimed. Apparently this is only the third find of the species in south Hampshire in the past 25 years.
35. Cut-leaved Cranesbill: Flowering at Portsmouth IBM site on Nov 13
36. Tamarisk: One of the shoreline trees at Warblington had fresh flowers on Nov 13
37. Cow Parsley: The single plant at Nore Barn (west end of Emsworth shore) was still flowering on Nov 13
38. Strawberry Tree: I have at last seen the tree in the garden of Slipper House at the north end of Slipper Mill Road at Emsworth and agree that it is a magnificent specimen with flowers and fruit.

39. Yellow-Wort: Two fresh plants covered with flowers at the IBM Portsmouth site on Nov 13 (where Small Scabious, Field Madder and Blue Fleabane were also flowering)
40. Heath Speedwell: A most unexpected fresh flowering at the IBM Portsmouth site on Nov 13 (also flowering there were Thyme-leaved Speedwell and Wall Speedwell)
41. Green Field Speedwell: I found flowering specimens in Havant on Nov 12 (Town Hall Rd), at the IBM Portsmouth site on Nov 13 and again in Havant (East Pallant) on Nov 14
42. Henbit Dead Nettle: Several fresh plants with flower buds about to open at the IBM Portsmouth site on Nov 13 were the first I have seen this year!
43. Winter Heliotrope: Flowering at a third site - this time near Lumley Mill at Emsworth on Nov 13

INSECTS

25. Common Darter: Up to 4 seen in the Gosport area on Nov 10 with a single there on Nov 11
26. Clouded Yellow: One near Rye on Nov 10 and a total of seven seen on Nov 11 (3 at Gosport, 2 in Bournemouth and singles at Portland Bill and near Reading)
27. Small Copper: A very late single in the Bournemouth area on Nov 11
28. Holly Blue: The latest ever for Hampshire was a very fresh male at Gosport on Nov 10
29. Red Admiral: A total of 13 seen in Gosport on Nov 10 with another there on Nov 11 and a single in Havant on Nov 14
30. Speckled Wood: Singles seen in Gosport on Nov 10 and 11.
31. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: One in the Eastbourne area on Nov 5

OTHER

18. Grey Seal?: Among the things seen by the Petersfield Wildlife Group during a visit to Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour on Nov 13 was what they reported as a Grey Seal but as they give no evidence for its identification (head shape) and as there is a resident colony of Common Seals in the harbour (while Grey Seals are rare along the south coast) I reserve judgement on this sighting.

Sat 13 Nov

G. WeBS Count at the IBM Portsmouth Lake

Cloudless skies and a chill northerly wind made this a perfect winter's day and there was a hint of winter in the presence of a single male Pochard on the lake, while Teal had increased from 5 at the October count to 13 today and the number of Herons was up from 5 last month to 6 this month, but any excitement to be derived from seeing them was outweighed by the absence of the gulls which in past winters have been present in hundreds (sometimes topping 1000) as a proportion of the thousands of gulls feeding on the Paulsgrove rubbish tip would at any one time be on the lake for a drink of fresh water, a wash or just a rest. (The tip closed in September, and you may remember that last month was memorable for a zero count of gulls on the tip). Inevitably there were a few gulls bathing in the fresh water of the lake today, as there might be on any such stretch of fresh water, but my count was of just nine Black-headed and six Common gulls.

Going back to the ducks it seemed that the Mallard had vanished in sympathy with the gulls - where I expected around 50 at this time of year I saw just 10, but the Coot and Moorhen numbers were as expected with 46 and 28 respectively. Unusually I saw both the two Great Crested Grebes fairly close to each other and I was not surprised by a count of 7 Little Grebe. Other birds to go on the WeBS list were 15 Canada Geese and 6 Cormorant but other birds around the site were also out on strike with the gulls - compared

to last month's Yellow-browed Warbler, Redstart and Blackcaps there was nothing - even the Green Woodpecker and Pied Wagtail was absent.

If the birds were disappointing there were some real surprises among the plants I found in flower. Some plants that might not be seen elsewhere but were not surprises here included Small Scabious, Blue Fleabane, Field Madder and Wild Parsnip but others were real surprises - Heath Speedwell was one and my first Henbit Deadnettle of the year was another - and lesser surprises came from Yellow-wort (two fresh plants covered with flowers), Cut-leaved Cranesbill and three more Speedwells (Thyme Leaved, Wall and Green Field). On the other side of the coin I found the Kingcups which had been in flower had vanished and there was no sign of flowers among the Winter Heliotrope leaves

H. Langstone to Emsworth along the shore and back via Westbourne

This afternoon I set out to check for the presence of Brent feeding on the Warblington farm fields and then to find the Strawberry Tree on the edge of the Slipper Mill pond which has so impressed Brian Fellows.

The first target was easily achieved - coming over the A27 by the Pook Lane footbridge I found a large flock of Brent in the first field I came too (immediately south of the Old Rectory) and counted 650 before they all flew off as a result of what I could only interpret as a Wildfowler training his dog not to rush at such a flock. There was no apparent reason for anyone to be walking a dog in this field and when I first saw the man (dressed in wildfowler like camouflage jacket) he was walking round the edge of the field in full sight of the geese and within a hundred yards of them. As the geese became more and more wary I saw the man getting his dog to sit but soon after that the geese could bear the tension no more and all flew off onto the nearby sea. With the geese were 22 Black-tailed Godwit (we often see Curlew feeding on these fields but Godwits are unusual in the meadows), and among the 650 geese I made a count of at least 25 juveniles though there were probably more on the far side of the flock.

Reaching the shore at the end of Pook Lane I turned east to follow the shore to Emsworth, passing large numbers of gulls already reserving their positions for the night roost (among them were at least 40 Great Blackbacks) and around the freshwater stream flowing out from the stream just east of Warblington church there were some 300 Dunlin, 50 Wigeon and more than 20 Shelduck plus at least one Greenshank and other waders (mainly Redshank, Black-tailed and Barwits). One thing that caught my eye was a violent argument between a Redshank and a Grey Plover with the Redshank chasing the Plover around and having a good 'go' at it.

Near Conigar Point I noticed fresh flowers on one Tamarisk, and at Nore Barn the Cow Parsley which I had first noticed in flower on Oct 3 was looking a bit worn but still holding flowers aloft.

At the other side of Emsworth I turned down the Slipper Mill Road and found the Strawberry Tree (it is a magnificent specimen) in what I assume was the southern end of the Slipper House garden (the house is the first thing on your right as you leave the main road and its garden straggles on down the west side of the road - between the road and the pond - for perhaps a hundred yards before it ends to give you an unobstructed view of the pond. Today the best view of the tree was from the south, coming back up the road, as on that side there is just one really red 'Strawberry' in the centre of the mass of white blossom. On the north side there are more fruits but they are pale in colour and do not really look like Strawberries.

On my way home I rode up Lumley Lane passing another display of Winter Heliotrope flowers near the Mill, and at the very top of the Mill Lane at Westbourne (from the short section of 'tow path' connecting the lane to the road outside Westbourne Church) I was surprised to see a single Egret perched in a large bare-branched tree (by its patchy bark I think it was a Plane Tree). It may have just been keeping an eye on the pond which I know to be behind

the houses east of the tow path although it is currently invisible from the path, but as dusk was approaching I did wonder if one or more Egrets spend the night here.

Fri 12 Nov

F. Langstone South Moors and Budds Farm

Walking down the Langbrook Stream from the Tesco store in Havant there were two surprises before reaching the South Moors. One was a single fresh plant of Meadow Sweet in full flower just before reaching the old IBM approach road and the other was the sight of a Wild Primrose plant in flower in one of the gardens recently planted up on the path side of the stream (I'm sure the plant had been planted). Another thing I noted here was that the Perennial Wallrocket was still flowering on the edge of the factory building site near the Autoliv factory staff carpark.

On the South Moors both Meadow and Hairy Buttercups were flowering and a male Stonechat was on the fence line south of the 'orchid field'. Both here and later over Budds Mound a very smart male Kestrel was seen lit by the sun as it perched and then hunting for its supper. Also in this area I heard brief snatches of Song Thrush song (though I never saw the bird) and later I disturbed a Song Thrush from the outer slopes of Budds Mound which flew high over the Moors before settling - I suspect both birds were newly arrived migrants, the latter having to fly high to spy out an unknown landscape before picking a place where it seem safe to land.

At Budds Farm pools the number of Pochard was up to 16 and a similar number of Shoveler were present. There were also at least 8 Tufted Duck and around 30 Teal. Coming back along the South Moors shore the tide was too far out to let me see the many birds in the much diminished Bridge Lake channel but I was pleased to hear the gentle calls of Ringed Plover and to see four fly past (not the first I have seen this autumn but the first I have seen here).

As I turned up the side of the Langbrook stream I passed a couple of Dog Rose bushes with another four flowers open, and later, beside Langstone Mill Pond. noted Hemp Agrimony in fresh flower. By this time it was almost sunset and I was surprised that there was not a single Egret to be seen anywhere in the Wade Court area (though I had just seen a few out in the harbour taking advantage of the very low tide which had probably isolated some fish in pools that would normally have been submerged).

G. News and Reports reaching me since Nov 9

BIRDS

1. Red-throated Diver: Two seen off the west fields at Selsey on Nov 11
2. Red-necked Grebe: The bird which appeared on the sea off Titchfield Haven on Nov 8 was still there on Nov 9
3. Greylag Geese: Flock of 49 on Tundry Pond in north Hampshire on Nov 11
4. Canada Goose: Flock of over 300 on Tundry Pond including 5 with orange plastic rings. Steve Mansfield dutifully noted the letters on these rings but then found that he should have recorded the colours of these letters in order to identify the birds.
5. Pale-bellied Brent: In my last 'news summary' I reported one seen near Yarmouth on the IoW and said there had been only one other sighting of this race this winter (passing Selsey on Sep 27) but I have been reminded that one was seen at the Kench on Hayling Island on Oct 19
6. Black Brant: One has been at Pagham North Walls since Nov 6 and on Nov 9 a second bird was seen at West Wittering (Bernie Forbes saw both it and the North Walls bird on the same day). The Wittering bird was still there on Nov 11 in the East Head carpark

7. Egyptian Goose: A couple of these were seen at Tundry Pond on both Nov 6 and 11. Egyptian Geese are regularly seen in this part of north Hampshire and across the border in Berkshire - back on Sep 9 John Clark recorded a new Hampshire record count of 34 coming to roost on the Eversley gravel pits.
8. Gadwall: A total of 75 flew from Tundry Pond when disturbed by shooting there on Nov 6. In the Chichester area there were 35 Gadwall on the Drayton-Portfield pits east of Chichester on Nov 11 which were almost certainly in addition to the 12 seen on New Lake south of Chichester by Brian Fellows on Nov 6 (and no doubt there are more there now)
9. Teal: Bernie Forbes saw an impressive 400 of these in the West Wittering/Snow Hill marsh area at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Nov 9 while another 200 were at the Drayton-Portfield pits east of Chichester on Nov 11
10. Pochard: The number of these on the Budds Farm pools at Havant had risen to at least 16 when I was there on Nov 12 (along with a similar number of Shoveler and at least 8 Tufted Duck)
11. Common Scoter: The highest count reported this autumn prior to Nov 5 was 32 off Ventnor on Oct 29. On Nov 5 more than 45 were off Rye Harbour and on Nov 8 the species was reported from four locations (more than 120 at Rye, 39 off Titchfield Haven, 16 flying past past Selsey Bill and 4 at Bembridge Foreland)
12. Goldeneye: One or more was off West Wittering on Nov 9 and a pair were in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Nov 11 with 13 Merganser.
13. Red Kite: A juvenile was seen over Cheesefoot Head east of Winchester on Nov 11
14. Hen Harrier: Two ringtails gave a great flying display over Amberley Wild Brooks before settling in long grass for the night on Nov 9, and another female was over Cheesefoot Head near Winchester on Nov 11
15. Ringed Plover: A group of four flew along the Langstone South Moors shore on Nov 12 - the first I have seen there this winter.
16. Golden Plover: At West Wittering on Nov 9 Bernie Forbes saw a flock of more than 400
17. Lapwing: An impressive flock of 234 birds was roosting on the saltings in Northney Marina on Hayling Island on Nov 11
18. Little Stint: A small group of these often spends the winter in the West Wittering area and the first to be seen there this winter was reported by Bernie Forbes on Nov 9
19. Woodcock: At least six birds have been seen in unusual places along the south coast since Oct 29 (all presumed to be migrants just arriving from the continent) but the seventh such report was more unusual than the others - as Tony Gutteridge drove past the small roundabout on the Havant side of the A27 underpass taking you to Emsworth on Nov 10 he saw a Woodcock fly out of some trees and make two circuits of the roundabout as if checking its map to decide which exit to take!
20. Black-tailed Godwit: A flock of 62 was unusual inland on the Drayton-Portfield pits east of Chichester on Nov 11
21. Spotted Redshank: A single bird was at West Wittering on Nov 9
22. Redshank: Not unusual was a high tide roost of 105 in the old Holiday Camp boating lake on Hayling's North Common on Nov 11
23. Caspian Gull: One reported off Brighton marina on Nov 8 (and a single Yellow-legged Gull was in Pagham Harbour on Nov 6)

24. Sandwich Tern: Mark Cutts saw the latest to be reported in our area off Southsea Castle on Nov 10
25. Short-eared Owl: Mike Rafter saw 3 over Bransbury Common near Andover on Nov 9. Other recent reports are of one in the Newhaven area on Nov 7, one near St Catherines's Point (IoW) on Nov 9 and another near Bembridge on Nov 11
26. Skylark: A flock of some 200 was seen by Paul James in the Sompting area east of Worthing on Nov 5
27. Swallow: These continue to be seen daily with 16 being seen at Sandown (IoW) on Nov 9, 8 there on Nov 10 and 2 there on Nov 11
28. Water Pipit: Three were seen at the Sidlesham sewage works west of Pagham Harbour on Nov 11, and one seems to be resident at the Brading sewage works on the Isle of Wight (seen on Nov 5 and 8)
29. Grey Wagtail: Back on Oct 9 Steve Mansfield discovered a dozen Grey Wagtails roosting on low branches overhanging the Kings Pond at Alton while a much larger number of Pied Wagtails flew over to their own separate night roost elsewhere in the town. There was at the time some discussion of previous finds of Grey Wagtail roosts but it was clear that they were very much less common than Pied Wagtail roosts (perhaps because Pied like to flock in hundreds to the warmth of town buildings and industrial sites whereas Greys are much fewer in number and seemingly prefer waterside sites where few people are likely to notice them in the dusk). The current news is that Steve found half a dozen at the Kings Pond site on Nov 11, so that probably is a regular event.
30. Wheatear: A late bird was at St Catherine's Point on the IoW on Nov 10 (one had been in the Needles area on Nov 7) which is not out of line with the average last date (Nov 9) for seeing them in Hampshire. A few birds do occasionally winter with us on the south coast.
31. Ring Ouzel: Nothing has been heard of the Leaden Hall birds in the New Forest since Oct 28 (maybe no one has been to look for them?) but there have been records of them elsewhere on Nov 31 (one at Ventnor and two at Fawley power station); Nov 2 (Fawley again); Nov 5 (one at Rye Harbour and two at Beachy Head); and on Nov 10 there were possibly three (definitely one) near Bembridge.
32. Fieldfare: It would seem that another wave of winter thrushes has recently flown north over the channel bringing reports of 100 Fieldfare from the Brading marshes on the IoW and many Fieldfare and Blackbirds on the Sussex/Surrey border, both reports relating to Nov 10.
33. Mistle Thrush: The first report of one singing this autumn comes from Tundry Pond in north Hampshire on Nov 11
34. Chiff Chaff: I suspect that a lot of these have now chosen their winter quarters in this country but what may be the first definite sign of this is the presence of more than 7 at the Brading sewage works on the IoW on Nov 10,
35. Raven: Two (described as a pair) flew over the village of Steyning (north of Worthing) on Nov 10
36. Twite: Two were reported at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Nov 11 after previous sightings there on Nov 3 and 4. At Rye Harbour three were still present on Nov 7 after first appearing there on Nov 3
37. Snow Bunting: Two of these were also reported to be at East Head on Nov 11 but I have not heard of any reaching Hampshire so far.
38. Yellowhammer: Bernie Forbes found a flock of 40 in the West Wittering area on Nov 9. These birds are rarities nowadays and I have only heard of 11 sightings since the

start of October and none of the other ten mentioned counts of more than 5 birds so a count of 40 stands out as very exceptional (could it be that Bernie actually reported 4 and that an extra 0 has been added by some gremlin when typing the record?)

39. Corn Bunting: Paul James found a flock of more than 20 in the Sompting area at the east end of Worthing on Nov 5. Of the 17 reports I have seen since the start of September this is the only one from West Sussex (all the rest are from Rye Harbour with just one from nearby Hastings). Maybe the flock at Rye (which reached a count of 148 on Nov 3) is now spreading out as current counts from Rye are of just 50 and 55 birds)

PLANTS

1. Common Dog Violet: A single flower was open on a plant growing accidentally in a paving crack in a Havant garden - seen on Nov 11
2. Hedgerow Cranesbill: A single flower was seen on the bund wall of Emsworth Marina on Nov 10
3. Dog Rose: Four more flowers were seen on bushes at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at Langstone South Moors on Nov 12
4. Meadow Sweet: Another surprise on Nov 12 was to find a fresh plant of Meadow Sweet in full flower by the Langbrook Stream on Nov 12
5. Primrose: Also seen by the Langbrook Stream on Nov 12 (albeit planted) was a wild Primrose plant in full flower (I had seen another in flower in Northney Churchyard on Hayling on Oct 31)
6. Honeysuckle: Still flowering at Emsworth Marina on Nov 10
7. Winter Heliotrope: After the appearance of the first flowers in the Wade Court area of Langstone on Nov 8 Brian Fellows reports seen 20 flowerheads by the main road through Emsworth on Nov 10

INSECTS

1. Red Admiral: Reports of butterflies are now petering out but one Red Admiral was seen at Barton on sea on Nov 7
2. Peacock: A single specimen was on the wing at Chandlers Ford on Nov 10

OTHER

1. Grey Squirrel: One reported from Walters Copse near Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight (where Red Squirrels thrive in the absence of Greys - hopefully if this report is true the Grey does not find a mate) Earlier this week the Portsmouth NEWS had a two page spread on the White (albino Grey) Squirrels which have for at least 20 years been widespread in the Portsmouth area and surrounding countryside.

Thu 11 Nov

H. Hayling Island North Common

I have been asked to make some 'Mid Tide' Wader counts of birds feeding on the mud east of the Northney Marina on Hayling Island and today I went to the North Common open space to select a view point and to look for markers to be used as sight lines for dividing the mud into separate sections in which to plot any birds seen during the counts.

The tide was still very high when I arrived and the saltings behind the marina were crowded with 234 Lapwing and 70 Brent plus a few Mallard, Redshank and Grey Plover. Inland, in the meadow east of the North Common carpark, four Egrets were sitting out the tide, and east of the marina, in what was once a triangular boating lake when there was a thriving holiday camp here, there were many more birds. The earth and rubble walls (which once retained water in the boating lake when the tide went down) have long ago

developed breaks making the 'lake' into just another bit of tidal mud and saltings, and these breaks prevent people walking out along the old sea wall, making that wall a safe place for waders to roost undisturbed. Today I counted 105 Redshank roosting with a couple each of Oystercatchers and Turnstones plus one Curlew and a single Egret, and in the water of the lake were another 63 Brent (with 6 juveniles), 35 Teal and 20 Shelduck.

Tue 09 Nov

F. Nutbourne and Prinsted

The highspot of this circuit came at the end when my wife and I reached the Nutbourne Bay stream mouth after walking the shore from Prinsted - here, among many Wigeon, Teal, Brent and other waders, was a group of 5 Avocet showing extremely well both on the mud and fishing in the water (one was even swimming at one time). After we had first spotted them and thought we were lucky to see three of them we walked on to find Anne de Potier watching them from a different viewpoint and she not only pointed out the other two but told us that at least one of them was colour ringed though she had not been able to see the colours with confidence. While talking to Anne a Cetti's Warbler shouted from the nearby reed bed.

Before seeing the Avocets we had watched Oystercatchers, Redshank, Grey Plover, Little Egrets, Turnstones and Black-tailed Godwits along the shore (not a single Ringed Plover nor Pintail), and along the landward side of the seawall had watched a male Stonechat plus Goldfinches, Meadow Pipits, Greenfinches and House Sparrows. Earlier, in the orchards, there were a dozen or more Blackbirds and one Green Woodpecker, and in the garden near the seaward end of Prinsted High Street where Chickens, Geese and Ducks are kept there was a total of around 20 Collared Doves.

I had hoped to see a last flower on the Dwarf Mallows in the orchards but there was no trace of the plants (they had seemingly died back naturally) but beside the footpath along the north side of the field west of the orchards I found Black Bindweed freshly flowering and at least one large plant of Fumitory with tight flower buds. At the far end of this path (before entering the narrow path leading to Prinsted High Street) we saw the bushes of Lesser Burdock still in flower (as John Goodspeed had reported seeing back on Oct 31).

Right at the end of the walk, beside the narrow path along the west end of the old farm buildings just before we reached Farm Lane, the plant of Cow Parsley which Brian Fellows had seen in flower on Nov 1 was still flowering.

G. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Red-necked Grebe: One was seen by Dan Hughton on the sea off Hill Head on Nov 8. Dan remarks that it still retained much of its neck colour, and while I cannot comment on what he saw and I didn't, I am reminded of a bird which turned up on the IBM Lake in Portsmouth in Aug of 1995 and which I assumed was an adult because of the red on the neck, only to learn that it was a juvenile and that juveniles have more of this colouration than do returning adults.
2. Slavonian Grebe: Three were reported off the Church Norton shore on Nov 8 (none have been reported there since two early passing birds were seen on Sep 24)
3. Great White Egret: Paul Winter reports that the bird, spotted at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Nov 6 by Tim Doran, was seen again on Nov 7 and is colour ringed but not well enough seen to be sure of the detail. Last year a juvenile was at the Blashford Lakes from 21 Aug 03 through to 20 Jan 04 and was marked with Green over Yellow over Red rings on its left leg (with a metal ring on the right leg) and had been ringed as a chick in France. The current interest in the rings is to see if this is the same bird returning here.

4. Mute Swan: The Portsmouth Harbour WeBS count on Oct 16 found the Gosport Cockle Pond flock numbered 69 where there had been 58 (plus a single Black Swan) on the Sep 18 count
5. Pale Bellied Brent: One was on the Western Yar (the river running between Yarmouth and Fresh water on the IoW) with 100 Dark Bellied birds on Nov 7. I have only seen one other report of this race this autumn - one flew past Selsey Bill on Sep 27.
6. Black Brant: The bird that was first reported in the Pagham Harbour North Walls area on Nov 6 was seen again on Nov 8, this time both in the harbour and then flying (presumably with other Brent) to fields inland of the North Walls (and thus indicating that the Brent there are already coming ashore to feed).
7. Tufted Duck: More of these are now arriving in our area - the number roosting at the Testwood Lakes had gone up from 40 on Oct 31 to around 55 on Nov 7, and at Yarmouth Harbour a count of 8 on Nov 6 had become 20 on Nov 7 (also on Nov 7 a group of 3 at Sandown boating lake were reported by Kris Gillam, who seems to live in that area, as 'new arrivals')
8. Goosander: Following the sighting of two at Curbridge on the R Hamble on Nov 6 five redheads were at the Testwood Lakes on Nov 7
9. Avocet: A group of five (probably newly arrived) were at Nutbourne Bay in the outfall of the Ham Brook stream on Nov 9
10. Golden Plover: The flock in the Normandy area of the Lymington marshes had risen from over 243 on Oct 29 to over 300 on Nov 4
11. Purple Sandpiper: Five were at Barton on sea on Nov 7 after previous sightings of two there on Nov 1 and 1 in the nearby Hurst area on Oct 24. One in the Bembridge Foreland area on Nov 8 was the first for the IoW this winter.
12. Whimbrel: The wintering bird in Pagham Harbour was seen at Church Norton on Nov 8
13. Spotted Redshank: After having two present at the Normandy marshes in mid-October a single was there on Nov 1, 2 and 7
14. Black-headed Gull: With the closure in mid-September of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip (by the M27 north of Portsmouth) the Portsmouth Harbour WeBS count on Oct 16 recorded the first 'null count' of these gulls in the tip area for some 20 years. The September WeBS count at the tip was 5000 (a typical winter figure though I see that the October count in 2003 was of only 2148).
15. Sandwich Tern: One was still at Barton on sea on Nov 7 (flying east) and one (possibly the same bird) was off Titchfield Haven on Nov 8
16. Collared Dove: These remain scarce in Havant though a snatch of their song can be heard on most days, but at Prinsted village on Nov 9 there were more than 20, many of them sharing grain put out for chickens, ducks and geese in a small holding
17. Long-eared Owl: Although these are no rarity on the Isle of Wight (where Tawny Owls are non-existent) I have not seen any reports of them from the Island since June 26 until Nov 7 when one was in the West High Down area. Presumably, like the Tawnies on the mainland, these are now establishing winter territories or even pairing in advance of next spring.
18. House Martin: In addition to the single House Martin seen in the Pulborough area on Nov 7 (which I have already reported) there was another seen on that day at Sandown on the Isle of Wight.

19. Water Pipit: One was seen at the Pagham Harbour North Walls Breach Pool on Nov 8 - the first for Sussex this winter after two in Hampshire on Oct 16 and 24 and one on the loW on Nov 5
20. Black Redstart: Late news of a young male on the Hollow Lane area of south west Hayling on Nov 2. This was a first for this winter on Hayling Island as far as I know
21. Wheatear: One on the loW at West High Down on Nov 7 was the first I have heard of anywhere since Oct 30.
22. Fieldfare: A single flock of 90 birds flew west over the Eastleigh Lakeside site on Nov 6, presumably part of the movement which brought more than 250 over the Needles area of the loW as already reported.
23. Yellow-browed Warbler: One at Shanklin (loW) on Nov 8 was the third for the Island this autumn after one at West High Down on Oct 7 and another at Culver Down near Bembridge on Oct 16
24. Goldcrest: More than 25 were reported from the Church Norton area of Pagham Harbour on Nov 8 (and I was recently asked if a similar crowd of small birds seen at Langstone Pond during the past week could have been Goldcrests)
25. Firecrest: Four were seen in the West High Down area of the loW on Nov 7, and more than three were at Church Norton on Nov 8.
26. Bearded Tit: Two were at the Pagham Harbour North Walls Breach Pool in conjunction with the Water Pipit and Black Brant sightings there.
27. Jay: Seven were seen at the Testwood Lakes on Nov 7 - more than usual there but nothing like the thousands recently moving through the Netherlands across the Channel.
28. Siskin: A flock of around 30 seen south of Newport on the loW on Nov 8 was the first flock reported from the Island this winter and the highest count I have heard of anywhere so far (the only other contender was a flock of around 25 at the Testwood Lakes on Oct 10)

PLANTS

1. Cow Parsley: A single plant was flowering on Nov 9 at Nutbourne on the shore of Chichester Harbour (the same plant had been seen in flower on Nov 1)
2. Wild Angelica: Still flowering at Emsworth on Nov 5
3. Pepper Saxifrage: Also still flowering at Emsworth on Nov 5
4. Black Bindweed: I was surprised to find this in a field at Nutbourne on Nov 9
5. Rhododendron ponticum: One bush flowering in a Havant garden on Nov 9 (I had previously seen one starting to flower in the Staunton Country Park north of Havant on Oct 18). I think I heard on the radio that this species is the original host of some newly discovered fungus which is thought to be able to wipe out all British Oak trees so maybe we are due for a massive campaign to eliminate Rhododendrons from Britain?
6. Strawberry Tree: Brian Fellows tells me that a specimen bearing both flowers and fruit can be seen on the east side of the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth - although I have visited that area many times I have never noticed it and must have a good look next time I am there. Another specimen which I have seen in previous autumns in the Denvilles area of Havant seemed to have vanished when I looked recently - maybe I got the site wrong?
7. Weasels Snout (or Lesser Snapdragon): Still flowering in the Havant New Lane allotments on Nov 9

8. Lesser Burdock: A row of these plants in a sheltered position in the Nubourne area had been seen in flower on Oct 31 and they were still flowering on Nov 9
9. WINTER HELIOTROPE: The first flowerheads had appeared on plants beside Wade Lane at Langstone when I passed on Nov 8

INSECTS

1. December Moth: The second of these for this winter was taken by Peter Hooper at Bishopstoke (Eastleigh) on Nov 6 (the first was near Basingstoke on Oct 31)
2. Mottled Umber: This is another common moth which only emerges at the end of October and after the first had been taken by Dan Houghton at Liss (near Petersfield) on Nov 5 two more were trapped on Nov 6 in Bishopstoke and Southsea.
3. Rush Veneer: This is a common moth in summer months (May to Sept) and this year there were plenty of records up to Sept 14 but a report of one in the Farnham area on Nov 6 seems well out of season.
4. Willow Beauty: One of these was trapped at Eastleigh on Nov 7 - the season for this species also normally ends on Sept and my last previous record was for Sep 9.

OTHER

1. Harvest Mouse: Although Brian Fellows has not yet seen a live Harvest Mouse for certain in the long grass of Brook Meadow at Emsworth, where what seemed to be one of their winter nests had been found on Oct 17, he has now had several probable/possible sightings. In the week when the nest was found a live mouse was seen scurrying away in the grass and this week he has witnessed the death of what may have been two more. The first of these was a very mangled corpse that was difficult to identify - it had probably been caught and killed by a cat or fox and dropped on the ground where it had been trodden on by one or more human boots. The second was a mouse seen distantly to have been seized by a Carrion Crow and probably swallowed whole (I still have memories of how a pair of Crows dealt with baby Ringed Plovers desperately running from an exposed nest among the carpark bays at the Portsmouth IBM site, swooping from tree tops to pick off these babies before they could reach cover at the edge of the carpark)

Mon 08 Nov

E. Local finds in Havant and Langstone

Last Friday (Nov 5) I had heard Dunnock song in my garden for the seventh time since they resumed song on Sep 30 and had seen a group of three wing-flicking as if in courtship. One sang again on Saturday but the dismal weather on Sunday dampened their enthusiasm, only for them to revive it again this morning with two again wingflicking (though not singing).

I did hear Collared Dove song briefly but the high spot of my short after breakfast visit to the garden was a distant view of a Sparrowhawk being chased north by two Crows.

Later in the day a short walk gave me one or two bursts of Dunnock song from trees along the Billy Line before I reached Langstone on my Monday poster round. At the far end of Mill Lane I checked the bush of Butcher's Broom on which I had seen the first flowers of the autumn season as early as Aug 27 (and have found one or two flowers each week since). In previous years I had formed the impression that this plant did not start to flower until November, and when I checked the bush today it certainly had more flowers than in the previous weeks.

One winter flowering plant which never flowers until winter has set in (usually not until after the first frost) is Winter Heliotrope but when I was passing Wade Court on my way home I found at least half a dozen flower heads with opening flowers sticking up above the bank of fresh leaves that has been growing for some time.

Before getting to Wade Court I had made a diversion along the beach to Pook Lane to check the many birds on the mud at low tide and as I was turning back I noted yet another 'winter first' as a flock of over 100 Brent came flying off the Warblington farm fields to join those I had seen on the shore. I did not see which fields they came from, but as I was going up Wade Lane I fell into conversation with a resident there who told me he had seen them recently in the fields near the Old Rectory (i.e. in the second line of fields back from the shore along the road which connects Church Lane to the old part of Pook Lane).

Wildlife diary and news for Nov 1 - 7 (Week 45)

Sun 7 Nov

P. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

417. Red-throated Diver: Robert Watson saw on close in off East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on both Nov 3 and 4
418. Storm Petrel: Further evidence that there are lots of these out in the English Channel comes from Emmanuel Chabot who reports that he saw 130 during one there and back trip between Caen and Portsmouth on Oct 16 while a friend of his estimated 250 seen from a similar trip on Oct 2
419. Cormorant: Brian Fellows saw a total of 90 roosting in trees at the Chichester Lakes on Nov 6 (So far I have heard no reports of them being shot there or elsewhere in response to the government target of taking out 3000 of them in the year)
420. Great White Egret: One seen by Tim Doran at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Nov 6 (In 2003 one was there from Aug 21 to 20 Jan 2004 and could be identified by rings on its legs - Tim was unable to see any rings but is not certain that it was not ringed). At Rye Harbour, where a ringed bird was present from July 31 to Oct 12, another unringed bird was seen on Nov 7.
421. Canada Goose: The half-size 'minima race' bird was seen by Brian Fellows at Ivy Lake (Chichester) with 91 normal Canadas on Nov 6 and the leucistic 'white' Canada was back in the Hook/Warsash area on Nov 6 and 7 with up to 123 normal Canadas and one Greylag
422. Black Brant: One was with 300 Dark Bellied Brent near Pagham Harbour North Walls on Nov 6 - this is the first back in our area this autumn.
423. Gadwall: Numbers now starting to build locally after a wave of them passed through in September. On Nov 6 there were 14 in the Hook/Warsash area and a dozen on New Lake at Chichester
424. Mallard: Nov 3 brought a surprising hatch of young ducklings - a family of 13 newly emerged ducklings was seen 'somewhere in Sussex' (no location given) and on the same day Simon Ingram saw a family of 6 at Eastleigh Lakeside
425. Pintail: The Havant Wildlife Group saw a dozen on the grass around the Deeps at Farlington Marshes on Nov 6 and a flock of 35 were in the Hook/Warsash area (Links scrape) on both Nov 6 and 7
426. Pochard: A count of 58 on New Lake at Chichester, and at least 10 on the Thorney Little Deeps, both on Nov 6 shows that a lot more of these have just arrived in our area. The count of 58 is by far the highest reported locally this autumn - next highest was just 15 at Titchfield Haven on Oct 23.

427. Tufted Duck: Although Ian Pibworth has reported up to 78 coming to roost at the Testwood Lakes near Southampton (where they appear mysteriously at dusk and fly off again at dawn) on Oct 10, and Brian Fellows counted 40 on Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Oct 19, these ducks have been scarce in most of their regular sites. This may be about to change as Brian Fellows found 76 on New Lake at Chichester on Nov 6 (and on that day Matthew Silk saw one flying over his home at Wivelsfield Green - Haywards Heath area - in the middle of a large flock of migrant Woodpigeon!)
428. Scaup: Nov 6 brought the first report of one of these for this winter from Anon at Rye Harbour (bird was offshore)
429. Long-tailed Duck: The bird which arrived on the Lymington marshes on Nov 4 was still moving around there on Nov 6. This also is the first bird of the winter.
430. Common Scoter: More than 45 were on the sea in Rye Bay on Nov 5 with a single Velvet Scoter (seen offshore on Nov 5 and 6)
431. GOOSANDER: The first two (redheads) of the winter were at Curbridge on the River Hamble on Nov 6
432. Marsh Harrier: One was at Pulborough Brooks on Nov 6 - hunting and then landing there.
433. Hen Harrier: A ringtail was over the Cheesefoot Head area east of Winchester on Nov 6 - possibly the same bird that was in the Bembridge area (IoW) on Nov 4 and 5?
434. Rough-legged Buzzard: One was reported flying west over Beachy Head on Nov 5
435. PURPLE SANDPIPER: First one back at Southsea Castle on Nov 6 seen by Richard Ford
436. Woodcock: What sounds like another bird newly arrived from the continent was at Seaford on the Sussex Coast on Nov 5
437. Whimbrel: A single presumably wintering bird was calling repeatedly as it flew over the Curlew roost at Rye Harbour on the evening of Nov 4
438. Turnstone: A flock of more than 300 were roosting on the beach at Hastings (St Leonard's end) on Nov 4 - probably a large flock on the move and maybe heading our way.
439. Sandwich Tern: One still off Hook/Warsash on Nov 7
440. Razorbill: One just off Southsea Castle on Nov 6 (and one off Sandown IoW on Nov 7)
441. Wood Pigeon: Large numbers still on the move along the south coast - on Nov 6 a total of 700 flew south over Wivelsfield Green near Haywards Heath and a total of more than 741 flew west over the Needles.
442. Short-eared Owl: One drifted slowly east over the Eastleigh Lakeside and Southampton airport area on Nov 6
443. Sand Martin: A very late bird flew over Titchfield Haven on Nov 6 - these have normally all left Hampshire by mid-October and the latest ever sighting was on 12 Nov 1985.
444. Swallow: A total of ten birds were reported from five sites on Nov 5 and singles were seen on the IoW on Nov 6 and 7.
445. House Martin: A single was seen near Pulborough on Nov 7 (the first reported anywhere since Oct 25)

446. Water Pipit: One at Brading sewage works on Nov 5 (two previous reports this winter - one on Oct 16 near Fareham and three on Oct 24 at the Lower Test)
447. Dunnock: More song than usual this autumn - in my Havant garden I have heard occasional song each day from Oct 31 to Nov 6.
448. Black Redstart: One back on the Selwyn Court flats (where one was regular last winter) at St Helen's (IoW) on Nov 6 - said to have been there for several days. Nov 7 brought the first back to the Hook/Warsash area (paddock north of Workman's Lane.
449. Ring Ouzel: On Nov 5 one was at Beachy Head and another at Rye Harbour - no reports from Hampshire since Nov 2.
450. Fieldfare: Plenty on the IoW in the last few days - 200 north over Brading Marshes on Nov 5, more than 252 flew west over the Needles on Nov 6
451. Redwing: 117 flew west over the Needles on Nov 6
452. Blackcap: Three reports of newly arrived birds in gardens seem to mark the arrival of wintering birds. A female arrived at Four Marks near Alton on Nov 3, another reached Rownhams (Southampton) on Nov 5 and a third at Dibden Purlieu on the west bank of Southampton Water on Nov 6. Also on Nov 6 a male was sitting on an IoW hedge near the Needles and singing.
453. Twite: Since reporting the arrival of 3 at Rye Harbour on Nov 3 I hear that there were possibly two at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Nov 3 and one definitely there on Nov 4
454. Snow Bunting: Four were at Rye Harbour on Nov 6 and a single was seen on the beach near the Portobello sewage works (I think this is in the Brighton area?) on Nov 5

PLANTS

44. Prickly Lettuce: I was surprised to find a number of fresh plants - one of them in flower, the others with buds, in the Emsworth marina area on Nov 6
45. Dog Rose: On Nov 5 I found a third bush with fresh flowers, this one on the east shore of Thornham Marshes
46. Mistletoe: With the leaves of the trees you can now see the 'bushes' of Mistletoe high on the trees where they are established beyond reach of people - driving into Emsworth along the Havant road one is now very visible above the start of the westbound cycle-lane,
47. Pepper Saxifrage: Brian Fellows found a plant still flowering on Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Nov 5 - also still in flower there was Wild Angelica
48. Upright Hedge Parsley: Still flowering near Ivy Lake at Chichester, seen by Brian Fellows where he had seen it on Oct 2
49. Cow Parsley: Brian also found this in flower at Nutbourne on Nov 1

INSECTS

32. Migrant Hawker: The latest to date was one at the Lower Test on Nov 6
33. Common Darter: Three in the Gosport area on Nov 4
34. Common Blue damselfly: A very late one at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) on Nov 2
35. Clouded Yellow: 5 were in the Gosport area on Nov 4 when a pair (male + female) were at the Southbourne Undercliff in Bournemouth on the same day (this is where the first British resident colony is now established and where fresh butterflies can be expected to emerge next April)

36. Small Copper: Three were still flying at Magdalen Hill Down east of Winchester on Nov 3
37. Holly Blue: A very fresh third brood specimen was seen at Browndown (west of Gosport) on Oct 31
38. Painted Lady: One was released from a conservatory in the Alverstoke area of Gosport on Oct 30
39. Wall Brown: A fresh third brood male was seen in the Gosport area on Oct 26
40. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: Yet another was seen at Dungeness on Nov 3
41. Grey Shoulder-Knot: On Nov 6 Adrian Hoskins saw four of these moths resting on tree trunks in Stansted Forest where they were easy to see.
42. The Sprawler: This is another late autumn moth that flies until December and the first for this year was taken by Paul Boswell at Greywell in north Hampshire on Nov 3.
43. Yellow Dung-fly: James Wheeldon was clearing up a smelly 'compost heap' of old grass cuttings at the Portsmouth Grammar School Playing Fields in Hilsea on Nov 4 when a host of these appeared from nowhere and started mating. He was surprised to see them at this time of year and wonders if it was unusual - looking in Chinery's book of Insects (which normally gives the months in which each species can be seen) I find that he gives no dates so perhaps this is a species that can be seen year round?

OTHER

19. Fungi: A great specimen of Meadow Waxcap now mature on my lawn (Nov 7) Cap 9 cm across and the colour of a fresh crab. Also several Goat Moth waxcaps up to 5 cm across. On north west Thorney on Nov 6 there was a troop of *Volvariella speciosa* by the Great Deeps and what may have been one *Melanoleuca melaleuca* by the sluice gate at the south end of Emsworth Slipper Mill Pond. On Nov 5 I found a few Field Blewits at the east end of Thornham Lane on Thorney
20. Pointed Snail (*Cochlicella acuta*): The colony on the seawall at the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps had several specimens of this snail still alive and clinging to plant stems on Nov 6
21. Pipistrelle Bat: One hunting actively at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) an hour before sunset on Nov 11

Sat 6 Nov

I. Trip Title

Dummy text paragraph

Fri 5 Nov

H. Trip Title

Dummy text paragraph

Thu 4 Nov

I. Bedhampton and Broadmarsh

This morning a noisy loose flock of at least 30 Jackdaws flew east over my house in the early morning, maybe migrants on a long journey or maybe birds from the large corvid roost which forms each winter in the Gosport (Elswood?) area - so far there have been

no reports of great flocks of corvids streaming into this roost at night and out again in the early morning. I have heard that these sometimes travel as far as Southampton Water and across it into the New Forest on their daily foraging trips while others head north over Portsdown Hill, but I have never heard of them flying east along the coast in search of food.

Later in the morning I cycled west from Havant towards Bedhampton where my first stop was at the Hermitage Stream to check if the Buttonweed (which has its only Hampshire site on the edges of the stream bed) was still flowering. Just before reaching the site I was amused to watch an aggressive Shetland Pony, bored by only having a couple of larger ponies to annoy, chase a large, shaggy cat up across the field and up a tree!

At the stream there was very little Water Crowfoot left flowering in the overflow sluice from the Bedhampton Water Works springs and equally little Buttonweed further downstream (though enough to get a tick on my plant list).

Bedhampton Mill pool was strangely devoid of waterfowl - nothing at all beyond three or four Moorhens - but in the trees above it a flock of more than 30 Carrion Crows had gathered (not usual here though much bigger flocks of Crows are a daily sight along the Warblington shore).

At the Broadmarsh slipway I had my first surprise plant - Round-leaved Cranesbill in full flower, catching my eye with the white centres to its pink flower petals and confirming its identity with a great mass of even length glandular hairs all up the flower pedicels.

Where the path along the Broadmarsh shore meets the foot of the A27 embankment and turns into the new cycleway I found the target of this trip, what used to be a large colony of Chinese Mugwort now sadly depleted by clearance of the ground to create the motorway width cycleway, and with the plants now outside the un-necessary fence (presumably there to save drunken cyclists from falling into the sea!). I am pleased to say that the few plants that are left were in flower - they never flower earlier than October and in some years do not flower at all.

Coming back over the Broadmarsh grassland I found a large plant of Wild Parsnip in the best of health, covered with yellow flowers, and making a full circuit of the western carpark at the water's edge I found not only some flowering White Melilot but also a great show of Pot Marigolds bearing unusual yellow flowers (not the normal orange colour which I had seen earlier by the A27 roadside when crossing the footbridge at Bedhampton).

Taking the quick route home along Harts Farm Way I had just passed the entrance to the old incinerator site and was passing the now abandoned council workers car park when I noticed that a new bank of earth had been dumped along this carpark's road frontage (to deter Travellers), and that a good selection of weeds was growing on this fresh disturbed soil. The first thing that caught my eye was a magnificent tall plant of Red Goosefoot standing erect at least a metre high and with many side branches giving the plant the conical shape of a Christmas tree. To add to the impressiveness of its size and form the whole plant (stem and leaves) was a Beetroot red (to find the slightest tinge of green you had to look under its leaves).

Having looked at this I walked back a few yards to check something else which was what had first made me stop here but which I assumed I would find to be Common Fumitory. I'm glad I bothered to check it as I found it had flower heads much larger than the Common species, and that the flowers were mainly white, though partially rose tinged and with very dark tips. There were many of these flowerheads so I took one home to check it out and, after discovering the strange detail of the flowers of the Fumitories from the illustrations in the BSBI Plant Crib I became confident that this could only be White Ramping Fumitory and thus, despite being a casual that is unlikely to persist here, probably of interest to other botanists.

J. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

113. Cormorant: 75 were roosting at the mouth of Pagham Harbour when the Petersfield Wildlife Group were there on Nov 2
114. Bittern: Recent news from the Rye Harbour area includes sightings of single birds at the Rye reserve on Oct 26 and Nov 3, and on Oct 31 Cliff Dean seems to have seen two separate birds, one on the Pett Levels and one flying in the Pannel Valley.
115. Spoonbill: At least one was at Rye Harbour on Nov 3 but no news since Oct 24 of the bird at Pagham Harbour
116. Mute Swan: The herd of Swans on the Ryde Canoe Lake reached an autumn high count of 68 birds on Nov 2
117. Bewick's Swan: The birds anonymously reported to have arrived at Ibsley on the River Avon on Oct 15 have not been mentioned again by anyone but a party of six were at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 31 with a family party of 3 there on Nov 1 - the presence of the birds on Nov 1 was confirmed by the warden but those on Oct 31 were again just 'reported'.
118. Ruddy Shelduck: One was seen at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Oct 30. Not knowing how well it was seen I wonder if it could be the hybrid that was wandering around Hampshire last winter (seen at Langstone Harbour in January and February, then in the Lymington area in March before appearing in Chichester Harbour on March 30).
119. Mandarin: A drake turned up at the Ventnor Botanic Gardens on Oct 31
120. Pintail: Following the news of more than 150 at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 26 the biggest local count has been of 15 in Pagham Harbour on Nov 2 and of at least one in Nutbourne Bay on Oct 31
121. Ferruginous Duck: The female bird which arrived at Baffins Pond on Oct 19 was still there on Oct 30 awaiting the rush of twitchers that would be competing with each other to identify it had it turned up a mile away on Farlington Marshes. Brian Fellows is still uncertain as to whether it is a true Ferruginous Duck, a hybrid, or a Rosybill but says the bird was feeding with Mallard in the north west corner of the pond and was distinctively smaller than a Mallard but larger than a Tufted Duck
122. Long-tailed Duck: The first report from the south coast for this winter comes from Marcus Ward at Normandy on the Lymington Marshes on the morning of Nov 4 (he could not refind it at lunchtime that day but it may still be around)
123. Common Scoter: A total of eight were in Pagham Harbour when Cliff Oakley was there on Nov 2
124. Goldeneye: Other than the single bird seen on Brooklands Lake at Worthing on Oct 19 (possibly not wild?) the first on the south coast seem to have been a group of three (including one male) seen by George Spraggs off Langstone in Chichester Harbour on Nov 1. This was followed by the appearance of a single female seen by Cliff Oakley on Petersfield Heath Pond on Nov 3.
125. Red-breasted Merganser: I have now seen 21 reports of these since the first flew past Selsey Bill on Oct 4, including a group of 9 off Langstone on Nov 1
126. Avocet: Two were in Pagham Harbour on Nov 2, the latest in a series of reports of up to four birds in that harbour in all months since April (other than May and June when reports of potentially breeding birds may well have been suppressed) which suggest to me that we may eventually have official confirmation of breeding there (and at Titchfield Haven!)

127. Golden Plover: The count of 2200 birds at Rye Harbour on Oct 30 shot up to 3200 on Nov 2 though only 2500 were seen there on Nov 3
128. Knot: After counts in Pagham Harbour of 32 on Aug 28 and 50 on Sep 8 the passage birds have moved on with only one Knot seen there on Nov 2, but in the Lymington area numbers are beginning to build and reached 10 at Normandy on Nov 4 (a peak of 23 had been there on Sep 24)
129. Sanderling: The first report of these in the Portsmouth shoreline this winter comes from Richard Hallett who counted 23 on the Eastney shore on Nov 4 but I suspect these may be an offshoot of the flock that has been in the Ryde area on and off since Aug 5 (when 56 were present - on Sep 25 the count was 173 and on Oct 10 it reached an estimated 180). We can however expect to see more all along the coast following a sudden increase in numbers at Rye Harbour where a report of 11 birds on Sep 11 became 129 on Oct 29 and then 210 on Oct 30 - one indication of this is a first count for this winter of 18 at Widewater in the Worthing area on Nov 3,
130. Little Stint: It looks as if at least one is intending to stay for the winter in the Rye area - there have been four reports of a single bird there from Oct 31 to Nov 3. Another single was at Normandy Marsh (Lymington) on Oct 29
131. Purple Sandpiper: Two or more were on the west Hampshire shore at Barton on sea on Nov 1 following Paul Winter's report of one in the Hurst Castle area on Oct 24
132. Jack Snipe: A report of 2 at Rye Harbour on Oct 31 is the third report of these birds at that site since Oct 2 but so far there have been no reports from anywhere else.
133. Woodcock: What was almost certainly the first bird arriving from the continent was seen on the outskirts of Brighton on Oct 29 and that has been followed by reports from both the west and the east of the Isle of Wight (both on Oct 30). The first for Hampshire comes from David Thelwell at Bransbury Common on Nov 3 (two birds seen).
134. Spotted Redshank: Paul Winter saw one at Ashlett Creek near Calshot on Southampton Water on Nov 1
135. Mediterranean Gull: Their favourite winter resort seems to be the loW coast from Bembridge to Sandown and on Oct 31 I see that 56 were seen around Bembridge Foreland.
136. Great Black-backed Gull: The impressive winter roost near the mouth of Pagham Harbour had 45 birds on Nov 2 when the Petersfield Wildlife Group were there (and also saw 75 roosting Cormorants)
137. Terns: Nov 1 brought reports of both Sandwich and Arctic Tern from George Spraggs on Langstone Bridge, and of a Common Tern near Calshot from Paul Winter
138. Wood Pigeon: Andrew Grace counted 1480 birds moving over Hastings on Oct 31 following his count of 2170 there on Oct 26
139. Collared Dove: These seem to be having their annual holidays at the moment - where I had been having half a dozen in my garden each morning up to mid-October I am now lucky to see one. A report of 39 seen on Nov 1 at the Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on the loW may indicate their holiday preference.
140. Tawny Owl: Cliff Dean tells us that they these have been very noisy since Oct 21 and other people have also commented on an increase in their calls. At least one person referred to this as being the start of their breeding season, and while I know that Owls do nest early in the year I am uncertain as to whether this regular annual event is actually courtship or (as with Robin song) part of the process of defining individual winter feeding territories.

141. Short-eared Owl: The number of reports of these has increased recently with sightings on Oct 29, 30 (two sites), 31 (two), Nov 1 (one) and Nov 3 (three). The last three of these included one at Bransbury Common near Andover and one seen high over Horsham town from an office window. There were two reports from Thorney Island in Sept but none from there or anywhere else in the Havant area since then.
142. Kingfisher: These have been seen regularly (almost daily) at Langstone since Aug 30 but I have only heard one report of one at the Hayling Oysterbeds (on Sep 3), and I have formed the impression that birds seen there are actually based at Langstone Mill Pond but make occasional day trips to the Oysterbeds. This theory gets some dubious support this week from a sighting on Oct 31 of one which was 'visible for about a minute as it flew towards and around the large round rusty thing in the middle' of the old Hayling rail bridge. Without any indication of where it came from or went to I can only plot this sighting as being between the Langstone Pond and the Oysterbeds!
143. Wryneck: Hampshire's latest ever Wryneck continues to be seen around the Fawley power station on Southampton Water, The previous 'latest ever' date was 18 Oct 1990 but this one was not seen until Oct 31 and was still there on Nov 2
144. Swallow: Three were still to be seen in the Ryde area (IoW) on Nov 2
145. Richard's Pipit: A vague report from the Isle of Wight says that one was seen 'recently' on St Catherine's Hill (a mile or so north of St Catherine's Point) with a suggestion that the date was Oct 29.
146. Grey Wagtail: A report of one in a Hayling Island garden on Nov 2 (with a Black Redstart in the same garden) was almost certainly one of many migrants that have been moving along the coast since the end of August.
147. Black Redstart: In addition to the Hayling Island bird mentioned above one was still at the Fawley power station on Nov 2.
148. Whinchat: One was seen at Brading Marshes on the IoW on Oct 31 and maybe the same bird was seen on Portsdown on the same day by John Goodspeed
149. Ring Ouzel: In addition to the birds that may still be at Leaden Hall in the north west New Forest (last report from there was on Oct 28) one was seen at the Fawley power station on Southampton Water on Oct 31 and was still there on Nov 2, and another late bird was seen at Ventnor on Oct 31
150. Blackcap: Graham Roberts study of wintering Blackcaps in his garden at the southern foot of Portsdown Hill, published in the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report, indicated that most summer birds had left by the end of October and that winter birds do not arrive until mid to late November but it is possible that a female Blackcap seen in a garden at Four Marks near Alton on Nov 3 could be an early arrival from the east.
151. Pallas's Warbler: Latest sightings are from the Ovingdean area east of Brighton on Nov 3 and from Culver Down near Bembridge on the IoW on Nov 2 (where it was first seen on Oct 31)
152. Yellow-browed Warbler: One was in the carpark near the Pagham Harbour visitor centre at Sidlesham on both Nov 3 and 4.
153. Firecrest: On Oct 31 singles were seen at Whitehawk Hill and Birling Gap (both east of Brighton) and more locally at Farlington Marshes, and on Nov 2 two were seen at Church Norton.
154. Tree Sparrow: Two more presumed migrants from the continent flew over Beachy Head
155. Linnet: On Oct 31 Kris Gillam reported a count of 435 Linnets flying east over Culver Down near Bembridge (IoW)

156. Twite: The first three for this winter were at Rye Harbour on Nov 3
157. Lapland Bunting: One flew north east over Church Norton on Nov 2
158. Corn Bunting: The count of 84 at Rye Harbour on Oct 30 had already exceeded the peak of 82 there last winter but on Nov 2 the count there went up to 136 and on Nov 3 to 148.

PLANTS

7. White Ramping Fumitory: I have never knowingly seen this plant before but am pretty confident that this is what I found on Nov 4 on a fresh earth bank dumped to prevent Travellers entering an old council workers car park immediately east of the old Havant incinerator site.
8. Buttonweed: This still had a few plants in flower along the edge of the Hermitage stream just north of Bedhampton Mill where it has appeared annually since July of 1997 (first flowering there this year on July 25). I think this remains the only site for the plant in Hampshire.
9. Chinese Mugwort: The colony at the east end of the section of the Solent Way path between Broadmarsh and Farlington Marshes (much decimated by the construction of the new cycleway along this path) had plants in flower on Nov 4 (it always flowers very late in the year).
10. Cockspar Grass: This has grown for years along the north edge of the carriageway of Harts Farm Way road opposite and east of the west entrance to Broadmarsh and quite a lot had flowerheads showing on Nov 4 despite mowing and traffic.
11. Round-leaved Cranesbill: I was surprised to find one plant of this in flower on Nov 4 on the landward side of the Hermitage Stream 'towpath' where it leaves the Broadmarsh slipway.

INSECTS

4. Clouded Yellow: In addition to several sightings already reported from the Langstone and north Hayling areas on Oct 31 I see the Rupert Broadway walked from Langstone to Emsworth on that day and saw two or three more specimens.
5. Small Copper: Also on Oct 31 Rupert Broadway saw one of these on his Langstone to Emsworth walk, helping to confirm my sighting of one in flight at Northney Church on Hayling Island that day.
6. Holly Blue: Since David Tinling saw a fresh 'third brood' specimen at Gosport on Oct 18 I have not heard of any subsequent proven sightings but have heard two reports of 'Common Blues' from people who are not necessarily butterfly experts. One came from the Petersfield Wildlife Group at Pagham Harbour on Nov 2 and the other from an SOS party visiting the Rainham Marshes near London on Oct 30
7. Speckled Wood: A very faded specimen was seen by me at the west end of the Stansted Forest main avenue on Nov 3 and others have been reported from Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Oct 30 and from Hayling Island (with a Comma) on Nov 1
8. Small Tortoiseshell: One was reported to have been seen at the Rainham Marshes on Oct 30 (again by the SOS party of birders).
9. December Moth: The first for the year was seen at Sherborne St John (north of Basingstoke) on the evening of Oct 31
10. Scarce Bordered Straw: One seen in the Sholing area of Southampton on Nov 2 - the normal season for these is from June to October but we get occasional immigrants from the continent at other times of year (e.g. one seen on the coast at Worthing on Feb 11 when a mass of varied migrant insects crossed the channel)

11. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: two more reports of these come from Kent on Oct 30 and Surrey on Nov 2
12. Maple Pug: A moth trapped at Sherborn St John on Aug 7 and recorded as a Slender Pug has now been re-identified as a much rarer Maple Pug
13. Cluster Fly: This species of Blow Fly gets its name from its habit of hibernating in great masses in attics and out-houses and is in the news now as a result of a mass of them being seen at Bishopstoke near Eastleigh on Oct 30.
14. Hornets and Wasps: Wasps are still to be seen in good numbers everywhere and James Wheeldon tells me that this year he has found eleven nests in a small area of the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea (where there was only one last year). James also tells me that he has seen a lot of Hornet activity around an old Beech tree at the same site and this suggests to me that they have a nest there - the first I have heard of away from 'proper' woodland.

OTHER

5. Fungi: A visit to the Sling area of Stansted Forest on Nov 3 gave me Bird's Nest (*Cyathus striatus*) and Eye Lash Fungi plus a good show of Horn of Plenty and one small cluster of Golden Spindles.

Wed 3 Nov

G. The Sling area of Stansted Forest

The main reason for this morning's visit to The Sling was to see for myself a couple of unusual fungi of which I had been told by various people, in particular Rosemary Webb, but while I was there I had one of those 'magic moments' when I found myself watching eleven different bird species all bathing in one puddle.

The first surprise came within a couple of moments after I had entered the Forest from the Finchdean Road entrance. Just before reaching the 'Ornamental Drive', under the first Beech tree where the ground was thick with fallen Beech mast, a small bird took off right under my feet and shot up into the tree tops, never to be seen again despite a lengthy search, leaving me with less than one second's view of lots of white and the distinct impression that I had almost trodden on a Brambling.

Turning left (east) along the Ornamental Drive (once it had a tarmaced surface to speed a horse drawn carriage from Stansted House to Rowlands Castle village and railway station) I walked a short distance (at most 50 yards) until I came near to a newly dumped pile of low quality timber on the left (north side) of the track, and about ten yards before this was the remains of a large and old sawdust heap where a previous wood pile had been sawn. This patch was surrounded by nettles and had two 'entrances' where people had walked through the nettles to reach the sawdust (which was only a yard or so from the track). The eastern entrance (nearest the new wood pile) took you to a massive patch of Bird's Nest Fungi - which you could easily tread on if you entered without looking where you were putting your feet - and the western took you to an exposed tree root with a cracked top surface in which a cluster of Eye Lash Fungi were growing. Where the Bird's Nest Fungi were within a yard of the Ornamental Drive, and well camouflaged by the dirty brown substrate of old wet sawdust as well as being partly hidden by nettles, the Eye Lash Fungus was three or four yards in, near the back of the west end of the patch, and showing clearly with its red colour contrasting with the grey of the tree root.

Rosemary Webb had told me that when she was there none of the Eye Lash Fungi had developed their 'eye lash' hairs but I was luckier and found that just one of the many still developing young specimens had fully expanded its shallow red 'dish' and had long hairs sticking up all round the edge of the dish, where the others were densely crowded into a narrow crack in the root's surface and looked more like some unknown type of Peziza (but having the same red colour as the expanded specimen).

The Birds Nests had originally been identified as *Crucibulum laeve* (Common Birds Nest) but now (over a week after that first find) they showed the characteristics of *Cyathus striatus*, in particular the hairy outer surface and the 'fluted' internal surface of the cup (which gives the 'striated' look to this species). Rosemary Webb also saw them as *C. striatus*.

To appreciate both species you will need to take some waterproof material on which to kneel to get a close view of these tiny fungi growing on wet ground, and a hand lens to see the detail

From this site I climbed the steep bank on the south side of the Ornamental Drive to reach the west end of the grassy Main Avenue and then walked east towards the very distant Stansted House, keeping to the north side of the Avenue where I had been told that lots of Horns of Plenty were growing near the foot of the Beech trees but I never saw them. Keeping on east past the area devoid of mature Beech I reached the point where the mature trees resume and there (near the foot of the fifth Beech from the start of this section - going east - and just before reaching one Beech out of line with the others and intruding into the grass of the Avenue) was a mass of the Horns of Plenty.

Continuing east I soon reached the south end of the Broad Avenue which runs north at right angles to the Main Avenue. Turning left to go up the Broad Avenue I very soon (just before crossing the Ornamental Drive) found a Hawthorn covered with Haws on which many birds were feeding (Chaffinches, Blue and Great Tits, Blackbirds and at least one Goldcrest). North of the Ornamental Drive as I was passing a block of Larch (its needles now turning gold and thinning) I found a patch of Golden Spindles in the grass where Lesser Stitchwort was still flowering (along with one fresh plant of Wood Sage). Soon after this I turned left again and made my way back towards my starting point, rejoining the Ornamental Drive a little east of the sawdust site. Walking downhill towards that site I noticed several birds on the open ground of the Drive some thirty yards ahead of me, so I stepped to one side to have a look at them without frightening them off.

The first thing I realised was that the birds were around a large puddle and some were bathing in it. The majority were Chaffinches but as I watched them a Song Thrush landed and plunged into the water, soon to be joined by another. This was enough for me to be certain that the partial song which I had heard shortly before did come from a Thrush. The next bit of excitement came when a female Blackbird took exception to these Thrushes using 'her bath' and flew in at high speed, landing near the edge of the water and charging in to have a punch up with the Thrushes. The latter were not to be intimidated and stood their ground when the Blackbird went breast to breast with one Thrush which responded by opening its beak to show a bright red inside to the mouth (I thought it was only nestlings that had these coloured mouths as indicators of where their parents should put food!). As tempers cooled other birds arrived - one Greenfinch, one Marsh Tit, several Blue and Great Tits, one Dunnock, one Coal Tit and last but not least three Goldcrests (one male flashing its crest, maybe in response to the prospect of seeing the two females in the bath).

Perhaps even more birds would have joined in but the party was broken up when a dog walker came by - his dog caused no fuss but when I spoke to the man I realised he was wearing headphones and had to remove one to hear what I said. I could not help contrasting my own enjoyment of the Forest with his total oblivion to everything around him, How sad....

Just one other thing to mention was the sight of a single Speckled Wood butterfly - extremely battered and almost without any pattern on what was left of its wings. Later in the day, back at home, a single Red Admiral flew over the garden.

Sun 31 Oct

A. Around the North Hayling fields

This morning I parked in the North Common carpark and walked west to Bridge Farm, then south over fields and through the Stoke Common housing estate to Northwood and Castelman's Lane before turning east into Copse Lane and along the shore north of the Verner Common. I returned via Woodgason Lane, across the fields towards Northwood Farm and then along the broad track across the open fields to Northney Church and then along the road back to the carpark.

In the carpark I was sorry to see that the edges had been close mown, eliminating all but one of the lovely Hedgerow Cranesbill flowers, but to make up for this I heard a Red-legged Partridge in the field east of the carpark. From here I walked west to the stables at the back of Bridge Farm passing a field full of Sun Spurge and other 'weeds' plus a few Shaggy Inkcaps. Turning south I found a couple of small Blewit toadstools but nothing else special until I came to Middlestoke Farmhouse which is being re-thatched - here a Fig tree protruded over the wall into Castleman's Lane bearing several small fruit that were blackening and I picked one that seemed ripe and found that it was - the first time I have come across ripe figs in England since my childhood when we had a big Fig tree that had delicious fruit each year. (I also ate one big and juicy if not very sweet Blackberry - a late date for them!)

Beside the path from Copse Lane to the shore north of Verner Common I came on another toadstool - *Lepiota leucothites* - which is totally white (including the gills) and this may be what George Spraggs found recently on the South Moors shore (though I cannot really imagine finding it on wave washed shingle as he did). Further along this shore a Dog Rose bush had a single open flower plus a bud.

Nothing much more of interest until I was approaching Northwood Farm where the arable fields were full of weeds, among them lots of Green Nightshade (mixed with the common Black Nightshade) and a mass of Small Nettle still in flower plus one plant of Scented Mayweed. A few of the crop of Peas were still flowering.

In Northney churchyard there was a huge mass of Honey Fungus but far more exciting was a wild Primrose plant with three fresh flowers - no doubt planted years ago on a grave but clearly surviving there. At the east end of the church the Strawberry Tree was covered with white bell flowers (normal at this time of year).

A short distance up the road I was passed by a Clouded Yellow butterfly going strongly south west, and after passing Northney Farm (where a troop of what I think were Yellow Stainer Mushrooms grew by the roadside) I turned left past the cottage garden which often had unusual herbs growing in it - today both Borage and Feverfew were on show.

B. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

455. Black-necked Grebe: One flew east into Solent over Hurst Spit on Oct 30
456. Leach's Petrel: Three reports for Oct are on Ian Barnard's Sussex Birds web site - at Selsey Bill on Oct 2 and 21 and at Brighton Marina on Oct 12
457. Sooty Shearwater: Two new reports taken from Ian Barnard's website - one flying west at Selsey on Oct 3 (same day that George Spraggs had his first seen from Hayling Island) and another, also seen from Selsey Bill, on Oct 21
458. Spoonbill: Two flew west from Rye Harbour on Oct 28. Also the single bird that was first seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 12 was still there on Oct 24

459. Mute Swan: The five cygnets at Langstone Pond were showing a lot of white through their brown plumage on Oct 29 but the seven cygnets in the Broadmarsh slipway area all looked brown from a distance on the same day.
460. Brent Geese: The first sizeable flock on the Warblington shore of 57 birds on Oct 29 contained my first juveniles (but only 5)
461. Shelduck: Also on the Warblington shore on Oct 29 the flock had increased to 43
462. Carolina Wood Duck: Two males turned up at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 28
463. Gadwall: Five on Budds Farm pools on Oct 29 were the first I have seen back there
464. Pintail: Although a total of 200 flew over Pagham Harbour on Sep 27 a count of 155 at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 26 is the first large flock apparently settling hereabouts
465. Ferruginous Duck: Back on Budds Farm pools on Oct 29 - sleeping as usual!
466. Velvet Scoter: A single that flew along the south east coast of the IoW on Oct 19 was the first of the autumn and on Oct 29 a couple of birds flew east through the Solent being seen over Hurst Spit and then settling on the water with Common Scoters off Hill Head.
467. Common Scoter: A flock of 32 were off Ventnor on Oct 29
468. Red-breasted Merganser: Although a total of 25 had flown past Selsey on Oct 9 a group of 21 going west over Hurst Spit were the biggest number so far in Hampshire waters (though it would seem they were just passing)
469. Red-legged Partridge: Arriving at the North Common carpark at Northney on Hayling Island I heard one calling from the field east of the carpark, and Alistair Martin tells me there is still a substantial flock at the north end of the large open West Lane fields.
470. Golden Plover: The flock at Rye Harbour has increased from just over 1000 on Oct 26 to 2200 on Oct 30 so maybe we will be seeing more arriving in Hampshire soon.
471. Lapwing: Numbers at Rye rose from 900 on Oct 29 to 1650 on Sept 30
472. Sanderling: Also at Rye, where there were only 11 on Sep 11, there were 129 on Oct 29 and 210 on Oct 30. The only local count was of just 39 off Gilkicker Point on Oct 29
473. Woodcock: What was probably the first bird to arrive from the continent was flushed on Whitehawk Hill (just inland of Brighton Marina) on Oct 29
474. Little Gull: At least 16 flew east through the Solent on Oct 29 (seen at Hurst, Hill Head and Gilkicker) and 18 went east over Hurst Spit on Oct 30
475. Ring-billed Gull: The Gosport Cockle Pond bird was coming to bread on Oct 29 (and giving a hard time to any Black-heads that tried to get a share)
476. Iceland Gull: One flew east over Church Norton on Oct 24
477. Glaucous Gull: An adult is reported to have flown east off Selsey on Oct 7
478. Long-tailed Skua: A single juvenile was reported off the Sussex coast on Oct 2 (Selsey), Oct 12 (Brighton Marina) and Oct 23 (back at Selsey)
479. Kittiwake: Three first winters were at Hurst Spit on Oct 29
480. Terns: At least two Sandwich were in the Solent on Oct 30 with at least 5 Common Terns on Oct 30, and one juvenile Arctic Tern was seen well on the sea off Hill Head on Oct 29

481. Black Tern: Ian Barnard's web site reports one off Worthing on Oct 23, a week after the previous last report (at Ivy Lake on Oct 16)
482. Collared Dove: Very few are to be seen in the Havant area at the moment but after a month without hearing their song (from Sep 17 to Oct 18) I heard one sing briefly again on Oct 29
483. Cuckoo: A very noisy escaped bird was flying over Havant near my house on Oct 30
484. Barn Owl: Three were reported to have been hunting together over the mouth of the Ham Brook at Nutbourne on the evening of Oct 29
485. Pallid Swift: Two more reports - one over the Weir Wood reservoir in the north of East Sussex on Oct 29 and another from the Needles area of the IoW on Oct 30
486. Skylark: One or more were singing in the Nutbourne Bay area of Chichester Harbour on Oct 30
487. Swallow: 8 were feeding for 20 minutes over Peter Raby's garden in the Bridgemy area of Gosport on the evening of Oct 29 and at least one was over the IoW on Oct 30
488. Yellow Wagtail: With no reports that I have heard of since Oct 7 I was a bit dubious of a report of an unspecified number over the Pevensey Levels on Oct 30 (could they have been Greys?) but I see the latest ever in Hampshire is Nov 20 (and Nov 3 in Sussex) so must give this report the benefit of the doubt although the observer does not express any surprise at the date.
489. Dunnock: One sang briefly in my garden on Oct 31 and later that day one was singing strongly at Northney church.
490. Black Redstart: A count of more than four near the Needles on the IoW on Oct 30 may indicate a wave of new arrivals and this could be the reason for a newly arrived bird flying into a Bridgemy house at Gosport when the back door was open at 11 pm on Oct 29 (it took more than half an hour to get it out again!)
491. Whinchat: A second hand report of one in the Seven Sisters country park near Beachy Head on Oct 29 was not the latest for Sussex but was the first I have heard of since Oct 16.
492. Blue Rock Thrush: Ian Barnard reports a female or young bird landing on the shore at Selsey Bill on Oct 13 after flying in off the sea and before flying inland.
493. Fieldfare: A report of 'many' in the Ashdown Forest on Oct 30
494. Redwing: A dozen were seen near the Needles on the IoW on Oct 30 were the first I have heard of since Oct 24
495. Dartford Warbler: One at Sandy Point on Hayling on Oct 30
496. Pallas's Warbler: One seen by several people at the Sandy Point reserve on Hayling Island on Oct 30 (with a couple of Firecrests and a Dartford Warbler). Also this week Pallas's Warblers were seen at Church Norton on Oct 29, at Whitehawk Hill east of Brighton on Oct 29 and at Belle Tout Wood on Beachy Head on Oct 27
497. Dusky Warbler: One is reported to have been seen briefly at Church Norton on Oct 30
498. Snow Bunting: One was seen closely on the shore at Aldwick in the Bognor area on Oct 28
499. Corn Bunting: The count at Rye Harbour shot up to 84 on Oct 30, exceeding the total of 82 there in Jan this year.

500. Yellow-fronted Serin: This escapee, seen again on Oct 29, seems to have been present in the Gilkicker area of Gosport since Aug 21 but has been variously named as *Serinus mozambicus* and Yellow-fronted Serin. In mid September it was accompanied by a Yellow-crowned Bishop though that was only seen on Sept 18 and 19.

PLANTS

50. Hedgerow Cranesbill: On Oct 31 the area around the North Common carpark on Hayling still had one flower despite close mowing of the whole area.
51. Dog Rose: A bush in Church Lane at Warblington had three new flowers on Oct 28 and 29 and one in the Verner Common area of Hayling had two flowers on Oct 31.
52. Small Nettle: This seems to be flourishing in many places currently. On Oct 31 there were masses on the north Hayling fields near Northwood Farm
53. Strawberry Tree: The specimen at the east end of St Peter's church at Northney on Hayling Island was covered with flowers today (it normally flowers in the autumn)
54. Primrose: What looked to be a normal wild Primrose had three flowers on an old grave in St Peter's Churchyard at Northney on Oct 31
55. Green Nightshade: Lots of this was freshly flowering in the stubble immediately east of Northwood Farm on Hayling Island (north of the path to the Tye area) on Oct 31 - there was also lots of Black Nightshade there and you can see the difference in the calyx teeth length, the hairiness, and the green of the stems and leaves (in contrast to the black tints on the Black Nightshade)
56. Borage: Flowering on Oct 31 in a cottage garden at Northney on Hayling Island where it has been planted as a herb.
57. Scented Mayweed: One or two plants on the north Hayling stubble fields on Oct 31
58. Wall Lettuce: One fresh plant, covered with flowers, in Havant town on Oct 30

INSECTS

44. Clouded Yellow: Latest reports are of singles on Oct 26 (Pulborough Brooks), Oct 28 (Great Funtley Farm by the Meon north of Fareham). Oct 30 (Rye Harbour) and Oct 31 (at Northney on Hayling Island seen by myself)

Sat 30 Oct

J. Around Havant

A windless and relatively dry morning brought Dunnock song to my garden and I heard another one as I walked the 'temporary' dog around Havant, and this unexpected addition to the current chorus of Robin, Wren and Starling reminded me that I have not heard Woodpigeon song since Oct 3 while Collared Dove has been quiet since Sep 9 (other than three odd occasions on Sep 17, Oct 18 and yesterday - plus an unexpected single display flight over Havant during the past week).

Although there is as yet no dearth of colour from wild flowers the only three species which caught my eye this morning were a large fresh plant of Wall Lettuce covered with small yellow flowers on an intricate lattice of 'black' stems, the bright Storksbill flowers at Havant station, and the bright yellow of Black Mustard in Solent Road - not really flowering but bearing fresh green, long awned flower heads, was a cluster of Wall Barley plants.

Fri 29 Oct

I. Langstone South Moors and Warblington

Intrigued by a report from George Spraggs of a 'white toadstool' growing on the shingle shore of the South Moors I cycled down Southmoor Lane to search that shoreline and then continued via Langstone Mill and Pook Lane to come back along the main road from Emsworth.

At the Budds Farm Pools I found at least five Gadwall and a second Pochard had arrived. The Fudge Duck was also present (asleep as usual!) and more than 25 Wigeon were enjoying the sheltered water. Several Shoveler were present but Tufted Duck are still rarities (no more than three or four to be seen). A young Cormorant was an unusual visitor to the pools but was probably, like the Wigeon, sheltering from the exposed harbour conditions.

Making a circuit of the now disused car track around the top of Budds Mound before descending to the shoreline I found several large clumps of Weeping Widow toadstools but on the patches of shingle above the high tide mark along the South Moors I could not see any trace of fungus.

At the mouth of the Langbrook stream I counted 42 Wigeon and 12 Brent with half a dozen Turnstone on the shore with a couple of Redshank and at least 20 Oystercatcher. A couple of Skylark (maybe newly arrived) flew up from the dry shingle here and at the west end of the shore I had good view of a single Rock Pipit.

At the Langstone Mill the tide had just fallen far enough to expose a perch for the Kingfisher above the outflowing Lymbourne Stream and on the pond all five remaining cygnets - now showing a significant amount of white through their brown - were on the water away from the rough sea (earlier I had seen all seven cygnets of the Hermitage Stream family at the Broadmarsh slipway).

Continuing along the shore to Pook Lane I saw my first juvenile Brent of the winter (just five among 57 adults) and with them were 43 Shelduck.

Nothing more in the way of bird interest but I did get another view of the Dog Rose flowers beside the north end of Church Lane (and had earlier seen the young Hemp Agrimony plant in flower beside Langstone Pond)

J. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

40. Bittern: The Titchfield Haven website has just been updated showing that there were reports of a Bittern there on Oct 10, a week before Mark Rolfe's sighting on Oct 17 which I at that time reported as the first for Hampshire - that title passes from Mark to 'Anon'
41. Teal: Also from the Titchfield Haven website is news of a sudden increase in numbers at the Haven on Oct 24 when more than 200 were present.
42. Eider: The flock off Titchfield Haven had reached 50 by Sept 25 and then 66 by Oct 15. The latest report is of 'more than 60' there on Oct 24
43. Common Scoter: Although 80 had been seen at Rye Harbour on Sep 30 (and there had been a count of 25 off St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight on Oct 11) a count of 20 off Titchfield Haven on Oct 24 is so far the highest for Hampshire this autumn (just beating John Norton's count of 19 off Stokes Bay on Oct 13)
44. Hen Harrier: Geoff Dicker had three different birds at Leaden Hall in the north west of the New Forest on Oct 27 (one ringtail and two males, one of which was wing tagged). This is the first report of more than one seen in Hampshire this autumn,

45. Montagu's Harrier: A late report of a possible seen at Pagham Harbour on Oct 16 comes from Derrick Robinson on the SOS website. He says that others at Pagham that day noted the bird as a ringtail Hen Harrier but he considered it's slim body and active agile flight made it more likely to be a Montagu's. If this is true it would seem to be a very late passage bird - looking at the latest six Sussex bird reports the latest date I can see is Sep 7 with all but two autumn sightings being in August.
46. Golden Plover: Sam Smith (one the Rye Harbour wardens) reported 960 there on Sep 30 but the count had dropped to 500 bu Oct 5. Now Cliff Dean tells us that he saw over 1000 there on Oct 26 (the same day on which the count at Lymington shot up to 159
47. Ring-billed Gull: The bird which returned to the Gosport Cockle Pond on Oct 18 was still there on Oct 27 (and likely to stay right through the winter).
48. Terns: Three Arctic and one Sandwich were off Fishbourne (IoW) on Oct 2 but there have been no reports of Common Tern since one in Chichester Harbour (Black Point) on Oct 25.
49. Wood Pigeon: I have previously reported Paul Winter's sighting of around 600 passing over the Lower Test Marshes on Oct 26 as the first indication of a mass influx into this country. This is now confirmed by two further reports for Oct 26 when Andrew Grace recorded 2170 passing over Hastings and Kris Gillam had around 180 over Culver Down near Bembridge Foreland on the Isle of Wight. Other species seen arriving over Hastings on Oct 26 included 210 Jackdaws, 130 Stock Doves, 4 Rooks, a Collared Dove and a Crow (plus other species noted under Starlings below)
50. Swallow: Oct 26 brought a report of 150 from the Beachy Head area and of 3 at Rye Harbour
51. Wheatear: Two were seen on the Isle fo Wight on Oct 25 and on Oct 26 there was one in the New Forest and another at Rye Harbour
52. Ring Ouzel: One at Beachy Head on Oct 26 was presumably a departing migrant but the group at Leaden Hall in the New Forest, first seen there on Oct 11, have been seen again on Oct 26, 27 and 28 (with a count of four seen on Oct 26) and look set to stay the winter
53. Pallas's Warbler: What looks like a fourth bird for this autumn was seen on Beachy Head on Oct 26 (it could of course be the one that was in a Peacehaven garden near Brighton on Oct 24)
54. Yellow Browed Warbler: One seen on Beachy Head on Oct 26 may be the sixth of this species on the south coast this autumn (a Firecrest was also at the same location on Oct 26)
55. Subalpine Warbler: Thanks to Andy Horton I now know a little more about the bird which I reported on Oct 26 as having been seen 'somewhere in the Pagham Harbour area' on Oct 24. Andy has kindly forwarded to me the following message sent by Ian Barnard to the Sussex equivalent of Hoslist (Sussexbirds@yahoogroups.com) which says "A Subalpine Warbler, possibly of the eastern race albistriata, at Pagham Harbour near the Severals until dusk on Oct 24. Images of the bird have been loaded on my web site (www.thebirdsofsussex.co.uk). The bird is very pale sandy above and very white below. The bird also shows a long primary projection and quite a thick bill."
56. Long Tailed Tit: There do seem to be a lot more than usual about at the moment and if Goldcrests and Bearded Tits can cross the channel there is no reason why these birds should not do so. There is some evidence for their long distance mgration from a sighting by Cliff Dean on Oct 26 who heard and saw a party flying high over the beach shingle at Rye Harbour - although they were heading east when he saw them.
57. Starling: Andrew Grace at Hastings counted 1353 of them coming in across the sea as migrants on Oct 26. The Starlings were just one of 22 different species saw arriving

on that morning, his list included 19 Tree Sparrows, 85 Chaffinches, one or more Brambling, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Siskin, Yellowhammer, 27 Reed Bunting and 3 Corn Buntings plus 22 Skylarks, 21 Pied Wagtails, 45 Meadow Pipits and a Grey Wagtail.

PLANTS

8. Dog Rose: The last time I saw a Dog Rose in flower this summer seems to have been Aug 1 so I was quite surprised to see three fresh flowers on a bush in Church Lane at Warblington on Oct 28
9. Stone Parsley: I was also surprised to find this still flowering and looking in good health on Oct 28 - this seemed to be a result of a car-induced microclimate at the junction of the A259 and A27 east of Havant (the plants were growing in the shelter of the A27 embankment close to the A259 which passes under the A27 at this point)
10. Weasel's Snout: Still flowering on Oct 27 in the New Lane allotments at Havant where I also spotted Small Nettle flourishing.

INSECTS

3. November Moth: On the evening of Oct 25 Paul Boswell at Greywell in north Hampshire had the first 'November Moth' of the autumn but could not distinguish which of five closely related species it was. The five all belong to the genus *Epirrita* and their English names are November Moth, Pale November Moth, Autumnal Moth and Small Autumnal Moth. I think November Moth is by far the most likely as I have not seen any Hampshire records of the others in the past few years.

OTHER

2. Common Seal: What was almost certainly one of this species was seen by George Spraggs in Bridge Lake of Langstone Harbour (off the Langstone South Moors) on Oct 26

Thu 28 Oct

K. A walk to Warblington Church

With the next band of rain holding off until well after lunch I took a walk down Pook Lane to the shore to check the effect of today's high tide and to see if any Brent had started to use the Warblington farm fields before returning by a different route up Church Lane and back into Havant via the Emsworth Road.

On the way out I passed Greater Periwinkle and Pellitory of the Wall in flower and after crossing the bridge over the A27 I found the large field south of the Old Rectory full of gulls sheltering from the strong wind and among them I estimated some 30 Curlew took off noisily to fly back to the shore on which the tide was rapidly ebbing. I looked for Egrets and Herons in this field but saw none - the only Egrets I came across were five around the ephemeral pond in the grass field south of the cemetery. I also looked for Brent in this and all the other fields I passed but only saw two bobbing on the rough water just offshore.

Heading north up Church Lane I had the biggest surprise of this trip when I found three fresh flowers on a Dog Rose bush - the first flowers I have seen since the beginning of August.

Coming back along the main Emsworth-Havant Road there must be a significantly warmer micro-climate, especially where the road goes under the busy A27, and here Stone Parsley was still flowering prolifically with lots of other much commoner plants including Red Clover, Black Knapweed and both Common Mouse-ear and Common Chickweed. Three other plants seen elsewhere on this walk that are worth a mention were Musk Mallow, Square-stalked Willowherb and Creeping Cinquefoil.

Also seen today were two clumps of Honey Fungus - one at the foot of a neighbour's ornamental Plum Tree (which must be at least fifty years old) and the other on a hidden tree stump in the roadside grass.

Wed 27 Oct

H. The origin of Dutch Elm disease

In answer to a question at the end of the monthly HWT evening meeting (at which the speaker had come to give a talk under the title of 'The Wild Wood' but which turned out to be a commercial for the Woodland Trust delivered with all the enthusiasm and regard for truth to be expected from a Jehovah's Witness on your doorstep or a rabble rouser in the current American elections) I learnt something that I had not heard before about the origins of Dutch Elm disease which has ravaged our countryside for quite a few years. I had thought that the disease originated in Holland but apparently it comes from North America and the Dutch connection arises from the fact that it was Dutch scientists who discovered what was going on as a result of their country's geography.

It seems that the beetle that spreads the fungus which kills the trees was in the past well established in America and bred in a species of Elm that is native to America but not found in Europe. This American species (I think it was called Rock Elm) had all the qualities which have made Elm the preferred wood for coffins - its strength and ability to resist decay even when buried for years in waterlogged soil - but as with every thing American it was 'bigger and better' than its European counterparts. Consequently this American Rock Elm wood has for many years been shipped across the Atlantic for use in building docks and in Holland for constructing the Polders (for both purposes water resistant timber able to take great strains was vital for piles to drive into wet soil and stout baulks of timber that would survive the impact of heavy ships and storms as dock quays and wharves).

This trade is over 100 years old but for most of that time the timber came over the Atlantic as deck cargo on relatively slow ships, getting a thorough soaking in salt water which killed the beetle larvae and the fungus in the timber before it reached Europe. Only recently, with the shipping trade needing to increase the turn round time of ships in order to make bigger profits, has the deck cargo of ships been put into huge metal containers. Protected from the salt air and water, and speeded by faster ships, the timber started to reach Europe without anything happening to kill of the larvae - in fact when the containers are opened nowadays they often let out a noisy swarm of beetles which have hatched out in the 'incubator' environment of the sealed container. As each beetle flies out it carries with it, on special barbs which are part of the beetle case, minute amounts of the fungus which kills the elms. No doubt, now this is known, the timber is fumigated before leaving America, but that cannot undo the arrival of the beetles and the fungus which are now self-perpetuating in Europe

Tue 26 Oct

H. News and Reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Divers: One definite Red-throated Diver was in Hurst Narrows on Oct 24 seen by Paul Winter who also saw a second unspecified diver there, and two more unspecified divers were seen off Hayling Bay on Oct 25 by John Shillitoe
2. Slavonian Grebe: Two were off Church Norton as early as Sep 24 but there have been no more reports of them on the south coast until Oct 26 when Marcus Ward had the first for Hampshire this autumn close in off Normandy Marshes (Lyminster)
3. Black-necked Grebe: George Spraggs had one in Langstone Harbour close to the South Moors shore on Oct 26 (a month after Mike Collins saw two there on Sep 25.
4. Storm Petrel: Mike Rafter may have seen one distantly from Hurst Castle on Oct 23

but is not claiming it as more than a possibility. Last year there were just two reports of this species, both seen from Selsey Bill on unexpected dates (May 20 and July 17). This year the only previous sighting, again from Selsey Bill, was on June 24. Maybe there is some major unknown factor causing sightings from Selsey to occur in the summer whereas in Hampshire we stick to the tradition that these birds only appear after autumn gales (Birds of Hampshire only records one spring sighting, but a total of just 16 records totalling 18 birds over the 40 years from 1950 to 1990 is not much to go on!) Since 1990 the number of these birds seen in Hampshire has shot up to over 150 though 55 of those were seen on one day (30 Oct 2000 after a great gale), and among the others there have been several seen in May.

5. Red-breasted Merganser: Four were seen off Langstone Mill by George Spraggs on Oct 26, the first of this winter for Chichester Harbour. These birds were probably just stopping off on their passage westward as Merganser are not a regular sight in any of our local harbours.
6. Golden Plover: These are still arriving on our coast - on Oct 24 16 flew southwest over the Itchen near Eastleigh and on that same day 16 arrived at Normandy Marsh at Lymington where by Oct 26 the local flock numbered 159
7. Sanderling: On Oct 25 John Shillitoe found a flock of 69 on the shore of Hayling Bay but gives no clue as to whereabouts they were or whether they were feeding or roosting (for which they often choose shingle rather than the sandy beaches on which they prefer to feed)
8. Purple Sandpiper: Paul Winter had the first (a single bird) to return to Hampshire at Hurst Castle on Oct 24. Surprisingly this is the only report that I have seen for the south coast this autumn other than one bird at Hastings Harbour on Sep 30
9. Arctic Skua: A single very dark bird was blown up Southampton Water as far as the M27 where it was seen by Ian Pibworth during his all day watch at the Testwood Lakes on Oct 24. It was also seen heading back south by Paul Winter over the Lower Test Marshes on that day.
10. Little Gulls: Recent Hampshire sightings have been of two adults and a first winter off Hill Head on Oct 23, a total of six passing Hurst Castle also on Oct 23 with up to ten in the Hurst area on Oct 24 and two more at Black Point on Hayling on Oct 25
11. Caspian Gull: Paul Winter tells us one had been reported at the Lower Test Marshes shortly before Oct 24 but I have no more detail.
12. Great Blackback Gull: Around 1000 Black-headed and at least 85 Great Blackbacks were resting on the Southleigh Farm Fields between Havant and Emsworth when I passed on Oct 26. I suspect this is a regular daily sight as these large open fields (currently with an autumn cereal crop just a few inches high) make an ideal resting place for the gulls during the daytime in between foraging trips to the Southleigh Forest landfill site.
13. Herring Gull: On Oct 26 George Spraggs had the unpleasant sight of a dying Herring Gull for which he could do nothing as it had flown into one of the power lines crossing the water above the old Hayling railway bridge and was left dangling by a broken wing, flapping the other more and more faintly as its life ebbed away but unable to free itself (and well out of reach of any human help). I did not see this bird but, years ago, suffered equal frustration at being unable to help another Herring Gull which had been feeding on the Paulsgrove rubbish tip and had put a leg through the handle of a plastic shopping bag and flown off with the bag hooked to its leg. When I first saw the bird it was not in serious trouble, just flying along slowed by the bag acting as a 'wind sock' trailing behind it. Unfortunately the bird chose to land in the middle of the IBM Lake and the bag filled with water, becoming too heavy for the bird to take off. It is just possible that it eventually drifted ashore and was able to extricate its leg, but when last

seen it was firmly anchored to the water by the weight around its leg and was exhausting its strength in vain attempts to take off.

14. Arctic Tern: Paul Winter had one or more in the Hurst area on Oct 24 and elsewhere in Hampshire both Sandwich and Common Terns were seen up to Oct 25
15. Wood Pigeon: The first indication of the expected massive westward movement of these birds comes from Paul Winter who watched at least 600 going west over the Lower Test Marshes on Oct 26
16. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: One was seen in the Leaden Hall area (in the north west of the New Forest) by Simon Josey on Oct 26 - interestingly it was low down apparently feeding on the stems of burnt gorse.
17. Swallow: Regular sightings continue up to Oct 25 when 24 were over the Alverstone nature reserve on the Isle of Wight
18. House Martin: Just one over the Ryde area of the Isle of Wight on Oct 25 was the only one to be reported since one was near Beachy Head on Oct 20
19. Tree Pipit: One over the Farnborough area on Oct 26 was the latest ever for Hampshire (previous latest was 25 Oct 1979)
20. Water Pipit: Three were back in traditional winter quarters at the Lower Test Marshes on Oct 24 following the first of the winter south of Fareham on Oct 16
21. Wheatear: Now getting near the end of their passage - just one was at the Testwood Lakes on Oct 24, the first report since Oct 19
22. Ring Ouzel: The chances that the small group of these that have been in the north west of the New Forest at Leaden Hall since Oct 11 may stay the winter is increasing - they were still there on Oct 26
23. Fieldfare: A flock of around 50 were seen gathering for a night roost in the Leaden Hall area on Oct 26 (when another 60 were at the Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on the Isle of Wight). Maybe these are birds that have reached the end of their journey and will settle for the winter (or until local food sources run out) but I think it more likely that these are just transit camps for birds making their 'long way round' journey from Scandinavia via north Germany and France to get to the Midlands or northern England (or wherever they meet competition from others that have taken the shorter route across the North Sea). Later in the winter that competition will no doubt drive large numbers of them back to the south coast! Also seen (by Colin Bates on Oct 24) were 42 Redwing in two flocks by the Itchen near Eastleigh, and locally I saw just two Song Thrushes behaving like new arrivals among the bushes in the rough meadow adjacent to the Hayling Oysterbeds.
24. Cetti's Warbler: Confirmation that at least one is still resident at Langstone Mill Pond came with a couple of bursts of song heard on Monday evening (Oct 25)
25. SUB-ALPINE WARBLER: I recall the throng which gathered in May 1984 on the Hayling Coastal Path by the 'Hoopoe Field' (the one with the big puddle surrounded by Dyers Greenweed between the Oysterbeds and the pillbox guarding the path to West Lane) when the first Subalpine Warbler for Hampshire briefly appeared there, and I see that there have subsequently been two more Hampshire records (at Farlington Marshes in May 1995 and on Old Winchester Hill in May 2000), so one at Pagham Harbour on Oct 24 was not only a very rare vagrant but also appeared at the 'wrong time' of year. (My Shell Guide tells me that there had been only 90 records of this species in Britain before 1980, mostly in May or June but with a spread from April to November so this is not unprecedented). Perhaps next May I will be lucky enough to see a male in all his glory looking like an overdressed Dartford Warbler with a white 'sub-cilium'? separating the dark head from the reddish breast - one can always dream... I am grateful to Pete Ryder for putting out the briefest hint of its presence on

Hoslist (no detail of where around Pagham Harbour it was seen) - no doubt I could find out more if I were able to visit the Birdguides site but I still refuse to sell my name to them for their commercial advantage by registering to use their site (to my mind birding and commerce do not mix).

26. Pallas's Warbler: One seen by Adrian Thomas in a garden at Peacehaven (east of Brighton) on Oct 24 seems to have been the third on the south coast this autumn after a probable at Crowlink near Beachy Head on Sep 15 and two reports (presumably of the same bird) at Church Norton on Oct 17 and 20.
27. Firecrest: Will Walmsley was lucky enough to have one in his garden at Shedfield (just west of Wickham in the Meon Valley) on Oct 24 after having a Brambling over the garden on the previous day
28. Jay: Two seen at Rocken End (part of St Catherine's Point on the southern tip of the Isle of Wight) on Oct 26 may be a sign that the great logjam of birds on the near continent has broken - watch this space. Maybe the gale force south east winds across the English Channel associated with the great storm hitting the west country this week will bring lots more birds across (such as the Woodpigeons noted above)

PLANTS

1. Field Pennycress: Probably my best find this week was of this plant with flowers and 'Honesty-like' seed cases in an arable field near Stubbermere Pond (along the lane running west from the Stansted Forest sawmill). In the same field Common Fumitory was also freshly flowering on Oct 26,
2. White Melilot: This was still flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds, along with Vipers Bugloss, on Oct 24
3. Dark Mullein: In fresh flower in the Ems Valley at Racton on Oct 26
4. Japanese Honeysuckle: Following Brian Fellows' find of this at the eastern gate into Brook Meadow (Emsworth) on Oct 23 he has found more of it at the west end of the Nore Barn woodland on the Emsworth/Warblington shore.
5. Butterbur: Cycling down the Ems valley past the road junction at Racton where Butterbur flowers emerge in profusion each spring I was surprised to see fresh leaves of this plant sprouting all along the roadside site - maybe I have missed this in previous year's but I cannot recall seeing new Butterbur leaves in autumn before
6. Italian Rye-grass: Several common grass species are in flower at this time of year but I was surprised to see Italian Rye-grass showing its long awns in several places this week.

INSECTS

5. Butterflies: A Brimstone, three Red Admirals and a Comma were all seen by Ieuan Lewis in his Clanfield garden (by the A3 north of Waterlooville) on Oct 24 and since that date just one Red Admiral has come to my notice (seen by myself in North Emsworth on Oct 26)
6. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: The latest of 40 reports of this large migrant moth that I have heard this year was a particularly lucky sighting by Peter Craddock and Doug Yelland made when they were playing tennis under floodlights at the Avenue Tennis Club in the Warblington area of Havant on the evening of Oct 26.
7. Dewick's Plusia: I can never resist a chance to mention the proper name of this moth (*Macdunnoughia confusa*) as it always conjures up in my mind a picture of an inebriated Scotsman, and a slight adjustment to the English name re-inforces this by making me think of an overdose (Plus-ia) of Dewar's whisky. So far this year I have only heard of this insect managing to stagger across the channel twice (July 29 and Oct 24), on both occasions getting no further than Kent

OTHER

2. Grey Seal: One seen off Beachy Head on Oct 24, positively identified by John Gowers thanks to the animal spending long periods with its head above water to show its characteristic 'long' rather than 'round' profile.
3. Fungi: Maurice Pugh has confirmed that the small fungi found on horse droppings in the New Forest were *Poronia punctata* as I had guessed.

Mon 25 Oct

F. Langstone and Wade Court

My afternoon 'poster delivery run' to Langstone this afternoon had as its highlight two bursts of Cetti's Warbler song heard from the reeds around Langstone Mill Pond while watching a lame Curlew on the mud - the Curlew looked healthy enough but clearly suffered pain when it put any weight on its left leg. Quite a few shore birds seem to suffer damage to their legs and I am aware of three causes of such damage. The first is that shore birds have to feed when the tide allows them to do so and this often means feeding at night - unfortunately nature has not equipped them with night vision and they can easily get a foot caught in rocks or stones and thus 'twist their ankle'. The second reason is that there are many creatures which resent having a foot placed on them (or which see the foot as a means of grabbing prey) - examples range from a clam which can close on the foot and sever it to a seal making an underwater grab at prey floating on the water surface and the prey getting airborne in time to save its life but not its foot. The third cause of damage occurs in hard weather - shore birds have a 'valve' in their blood veins at the point at which the long bare legs leave the warmth of the body feathers and while e.g. sleeping through a frosty night these valves close to cut off circulation of blood through the exposed legs. Overnight the bird's foot can freeze to the mud, and when the bird wakes in the morning it may be forced to pull off its own foot in order to get away (either to escape a predator or the rising tide, or just to be able to move in order to feed)

Wildlife diary and news for October 18 - 24 (Week 43)

Sun 24 Oct

A. Recent reports received today

BIRDS

1. Ferruginous Duck: I see that I had a bad attention lapse when writing about the possible Ferruginous Duck which Brian Fellows saw at Baffins Pond on Oct 19 concerning which I suggested it might be the same bird that regularly winters on the Budds Farm pools - Brian points out that he did say that what he saw was a female whereas the Budds bird is a male. Brian has also tracked down a description of Rosybill (which was suggested as the id of the Baffins bird). This duck is native to South America but is common in European wildfowl collections and its plumage is very like what Brian saw except for one important detail - its size. What Brian saw was about the size of a Coot (probably no more than 42 cm in length) whereas the smallest Rosybill is at least 53 cm long.
2. Razorbill: One seen in the mouth of Langstone Harbour on Oct 24 from the Hayling-Portsmouth ferry
3. Crossbill: 4 in Ashdown Forest - maybe an indication of an influx? (but a male was seen here in June so maybe they've just been keeping their heads down?)
4. Swallow: Two at Beachy Head on Oct 20. One over A272 north of Brighton on Oct 22 and up to five over the Isle of Wight (where they are still a daily sight) on Oct 23

5. House Martin: One over the Cuckmere River on Oct 20
6. Grey Wagtail night roosts: We are all aware that there are several large roosts holding hundreds of Pied Wagtails scattered across Hampshire but I had not heard of Grey Wagtail communal roosts until Steve Mansfield reported finding at least 10 Grey Wagtails coming into low tree branches above Kings Pond at Alton on the evening of Oct 9 (larger numbers of Pied Wagtails also coming over the pond continued to their own separate species roost elsewhere in Alton). John Clark says that such roosts are uncommon but he saw a roost of nine Grey Wagtails at Fleet Pond a couple of years ago and HOS has two old records of much larger roosts from the past. These were of birds roosting reeds in mid-winter:- 81 at Lower Test Marshes on Jan 5th 1967 and 180+ with 100 Pieds at Fullerton on Jan 28th 1978, but recently counts have only just reached double figures.

INSECTS

1. Holly Blue: A fresh specimen at Gosport on Oct 18 (a third generation at this time of year is very unusual and this is the only report of one so far - last of second brood was seen on Sep 5) Interestingly the latest seen in 2003 was also in Gosport on Oct 31 (with a possible later sighting on Nov 6). In 2002 there was one on the IoW on Oct 26.
2. Small Copper: What was almost certainly one of these was flying near the Hayling Oysterbeds on Oct 24 but would not settle for identification
3. Clouded Yellow: 10 males seen at Gosport on Oct 18
4. Figure of Eight moth is now nationally scarce - Maurice Opie had Hampshire's first of the year on Oct 17 and just two more have been seen in the county so far
5. Merveille du Jour: A fourth for this year was seen at Farnham on Oct 21
6. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: These are still coming in from the continent - one arrived at Durlston at 2:30am on Oct 19 in pouring rain. Another was seen in Gosport on Oct 21 at Haslar hospital (but in sunshine!)

PLANTS

Japanese Honeysuckle is a garden escape that has long established itself in a very few localities in southern Britain, and is described in the Hants Flora as 'very local but becoming rampant in a few untrimmed hedges and places where garden rubbish is discarded, mostly near the coast'. Brian Fellows thinks that the Lumley Road area immediately east of Brook Meadow at Emsworth is one of these places as he has just found a mass of a black-berried Honeysuckle there (our native Honeysuckle is always red-berried). Another honeysuckle of some interest can be found at the junction of Ferry Road with track leading to the fishermen's entrance into Sinah Lake on south Hayling - this is Tartarian Honeysuckle which is a shrub rather than a climber but does have small tubular flowers of a pretty pink - and even less like our native Honeysuckle is Wilson's Honeysuckle looking more like a box hedge than a climber. Masses of the latter can be found in the Hollybank Woods if, when going north up the main Hollybank Lane track you turn right at the cross-track junction where the left turn would take you to the Holly Lodge site - look on the south side of the track heading east where it once formed a garden hedge around the site of an old hut or habitation that has long been erased (like Holly Lodge). I have never seen flowers or berries on Wilson's Honeysuckle and Stace says that it rarely flowers when cut as a hedge.

FUNGI

From Maurice Pugh I hear ...

Following the report of *Clathrus ruber* in Winchester recently its relative *Clathrus archeri* has been found in the New Forest (three specimens, one very fresh) and can also be seen this year in Kew Gardens.

Also found in the New Forest were some unidentified small disc fungi on horse droppings - I wonder if these could be

PORONIA PUNCTATA which is a tiny, narrow stemmed and broad, flat-headed fungus, and which appears on balls of horse dung only when that dung drops from animals which have no 'added elements' in their feed, e.g. New Forest ponies, grazing on vegetation which has never seen any chemical treatment, and passing it through a digestive system that has never swallowed a vet's bolus (one of those slow release anti-biotic pills which prevent any living organism leaving the back end of the animal - goodness knows how their digestive systems continue to function). From the shape of the fungus it has a common name of 'NAIL FUNGUS' though the nails are at most 2cm high and 1.5cm across the cap (most specimens much smaller) and it is in the news today as it has been discovered in a new site on Dorset heathland. (That was a quote from my own notes for the autumn of 1999!)

Also seen by Maurice in the New Forest on Oct 24 was a small Adder (presumably this year's young and needing to feed up a little more before going in hibernation)

Jim Berry tells me that despite heavy rain on Saturday morning (Oct 23) the Havant Wildlife Group made some good fungal finds in the Sling area of Stansted Forest. He tells me 'The highlight was a group of Common Bird's Nest Fungi (*Crucibulum laeve*) and large numbers of Magpie Fungus (*Coprinus picaceus*) including some young ones with white caps which it took us some time to identify. Others of note included Parrot Wax Cap (*Hygrocybe psittacina*), *Mycena crocata* and White Coral Fungus (*Clavulina cristata*) but there were many more.'

In my own garden in Havant a couple of white waxcaps (probably Goat Moth) have just appeared (on Oct 24) and on that day I saw a troop of *Volvarellia speciosa* at the Hayling Oysterbeds with an excellent show of Plums and Custard near the main road onto Hayling opposite the Texaco garage.

B. Havant to Hayling Oyster Beds

At the foot of the brick gatepost of a house in my road, growing from the smallest crack between the pillar and the brick paved driveway, a plant has just appeared which has me very puzzled.

It is currently a small 'bush' of green leaves, about 15 cm high, with a single large 'daisy' flower with yellow disc florets and white ligule rays (2.5 cm across). Below the flower there seem to be three layers of phyllaries, all three layers fairly long and broad with most of them black edged from their tips to their base. There is no aroma from any part of the plant and it appears to be totally hairless. Many leaves cover all the multiple stems of the 'bush' and I think it will eventually have many more flowers (like Feverfew) at the end of each stem. All the leaves are what might be called 'spatular pinnate' (they have short well separated pinnules at the base but the pinnules become longer at towards the tip to give a rounded 'spoon shape' to the overall look of the leaf which has a straight midrib some 3 mm wide making the leaf fairly rigid). The outermost pinules are themselves pinnate (with multiple tips that are almost scratchy like the teeth of a saw). Although the whole plant looks to be hairless there may be some pubescence on the underside of the leaf tips - barely detectable with a x10 lens.

My first impression on seeing the plant was of Corn Chamomile, then of a relative of Feverfew, but I have come to the conclusion (until someone tells me what it is) that it is either a totally alien garden plant that I have never seen before or is a new hybrid between a Mayweed and a Ragwort. Can anyone suggest what it might be?

Leaving this question unanswered I cycled on to the Hayling Oysterbeds to be greeted by a winter plumage Sandwich Tern over 'Texaco bay' and by a large and varied wader roost plus Brent (30+), Wigeon (25+) and Shelduck (20+) as well as several Egrets. None of the

Brent were juveniles and I have still to see my first youngster - also still to come is my first sight of Merganser or Goldeneye. The main components of the wader roost were Grey Plover, Redshank and Oystercatcher with a few Turnstone but no Ringed Plover that I could see. The few Dunlin that I spotted were probably accompanied by many hundreds more on the outer side of the outer bunds or hidden among the larger waders. Just one Great Crested Grebe was in the big tidal pool and there was nothing - no Little Grebes - in the lagoon.

In field west of the coastal path a couple of Song Thrushes flew between the scattered bushes - presumably newly arrived migrants - and on the exposed rocky areas around the main tidal pool a group of three or four pipits had me puzzled. They seemed noticeably larger than Meadow Pipits which I had seen in the 'brick field' east of the old Billy track but too brightly coloured (rich brown with pale bellies) to be Rock Pipits - two of them at one point started a high speed chase with tight turns - this again seemed unlikely for Rock Pipits - and one was a greyish colour with a hint of Wagtail which suggested Water Pipit.

At the Hayling Halt carpark I am almost certain that I saw a Small Copper butterfly - the size and colour were right, as were a couple of attempts to land on bare ground in the sun but it never did settle to give me a proper view.

On the scrub land north of the carpark there was one troop of *Volvariella speciosa* toadstools and on one of the two roadside pine tree stumps just across the road south of the Texaco garage there was a lovely display of Plums and Custard. Back on the track around the landward side of the pools there was much of what I recently described as 'Landweed' (as opposed to Seaweed) which I think is an alga called Nostoc forming long folded strips of brown-green rubber on the seaward side of the southern most of the series of 'finger pools'.

Also in that area near the southwest corner of the rough meadow Vipers Bugloss was still flowering, as was the White Melilot on the southern bund of the lagoon and the Common Comfrey by the main Billy track (that is now down to its last few flowers). Further up the Billy track, opposite the steps up to the northern entrance to the Oysterbeds, Greater Knapweed was also still flowering and on the seawall across the road from the Texaco garage there were a few flowers on Golden Samphire with more flowers on the 'White' Valerian on the other side of the road.

Fri 22 Oct

A. Havant to Budds Farm via the South Moors

Despite a strong wind the forecast of worse to come persuaded me to go for a walk in the morning while there was still some sunshine so I headed off towards the Langbrook Stream and the South Moors. Stopping to enjoy the deep blue flowers of Green Alkanet in Juniper Square I heard Goldfinch song nearby and then Starling song before reaching the stream in which a fresh growth of Water Figwort was topped by deep red flowers. Further down stream a tiny shrew scuttled out of my way and a Grey Wagtail flew over before I reached the path going west through the new factory area in which the large bushes of Perennial Wallrocket are still flowering. Coming back to the stream I had close views of a single Chiffchaff (last time I walked down here several Chiffchaff were moving south but this one looked as if it had decided to stay by the stream through the winter) and there was little new to see on the South Moors (even the cattle had been taken in) but the cluster of Small Nettle was still flowering freshly among the death and destruction wrought by weedkiller along the new path to Southmoor Lane.

On Budds Farm pools the single male Pochard was still present but I could not pick out the Fudge Duck among the few Tufties, Shoveler, Teal and Mallard - no proof that the Fudge Duck had left and gone to Baffins Pond but at least it did nothing to disprove the likelihood of that move. On the Budds Farm shore both Wigeon and Brent were back at least a dozen Wigeon and twice that number of Brent with many Redshank and Oystercatcher

and up the Hermitage Stream I could see the local Swan pair with what seemed to be their full complement of seven cygnets still with them.

On the exposed shore Black Horehound was flowering as it seems to be doing all along the coast this autumn and just above the bridge over the Brockhampton stream (among the great forest of Guernsey Fleabane) a single fungus (past its best) seemed likely to be *Volvariella speciosa* which is probably putting on a good show at this time of year in arable fields. Also flowering by the Brockhampton stream was much Scarlet Pimpernel together with Lesser Swinecress and fresh Weld. In the muddy edge of the east side of the Gravel Quay pool, below the lip of the Brockhampton stream, what looked like extra tall (almost 2 metres high) Cord Grass caught my eye but I have not yet checked the alternative possibilities for its id.

Coming back into Havant along Solent Road the variety of flowering plants increased noticeably with, among others, Field Madder, Annual Mercury, Oxford Ragwort and Black Mustard alongside Solent Road and in Twittens Way (off South Street) the pavement cracks held American Willowherb with its very pale flowers and broad toothed leaves, Hedge Mustard and Ivy Leaved Toadflax, while the gravel gardens of the new flats on East Street where the cinema once stood had freshly flowering Herb Robert and Wall Lettuce.

Thu 21 Oct

A. News and reports reaching me up to today

BIRDS

1. Red-throated Diver: First of autumn was off Ryde on Sept 23, then two off Ventnor on Oct 12, now one more off Selsey Bill on Oct 20
2. Red-necked Grebe: One flying west past Selsey Bill on Oct 20 - only previous autumn record was one off Church Norton on Sept 27
3. Bittern: Mark Rolfe saw one flying, then dropping into reeds at Titchfield Haven, from the Canal Path on Oct 17 - first autumn record for Hampshire. (No more has been heard of the one at Ivy Lake, Chichester on Oct 1)
4. Little Egret: Passing the Wade Court area at Langstone on the evening of Oct 19 I found 25 feeding in fields north of Wade Court pre-roost with only five in the pre-roost trees south of the actual roost. I also watched two flying in from the north and conclude that a large number are now feeding inland rather than in the harbours.
5. Spoonbill: One seen by John Chapman in Pagham Harbour on Oct 17 is probably the one that was there on Oct 12 - maybe long staying?
6. Mute Swan: More evidence of cygnets leaving their parents comes from Eastliegh Lakeside where six unaccompanied cygnets flew in together on Oct 16, my own sighting of a single cygnet without its parents on the Leigh Park Gardens Lake (Havant) on Oct 18, and various reports from the Emsworth ponds.
7. Bewick's Swan: An anonymous report of an unspecified number of birds back on the River Avon at Ibsley on Oct 15 would be the earliest ever return to Hampshire.
8. Greylag Goose: 4 were in Emsworth Harbour with a flock of Canada Geese on Oct 17 - possibly presaging an influx of Greylags into our local area to add to the hundreds of Canadas. The nearest regular winter site for them has been the Chichester Lakes (but only up to 10 there last winter unlike the 170 at Pulborough Brooks or the 450 at the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood this autumn)
9. Brent Goose: On Oct 16 Brian Fellows counted 776 in two flocks off south east Hayling, on Oct 17 Trevor Carpenter had 317 on the north west shore of Portsmouth Harbour and on Oct 19 George Spraggs had 273 in the Kench (south of Langstone Harbour).

Another significant event occurred on Oct 19 when the first few families came to feed ashore on Farlington Marshes (the first to come ashore were 36 seen on the HMS Sultan

- playing fields in Gosport on Oct 13). Bob Chapman tells us that this has been a poor year for Lemmings and he assumes that the overall percentage of juveniles is likely to be low although some flocks already seen have contained a good proportion of young.
10. Wigeon: A major influx seems to have occurred on Oct 17 when there were 262 in Fareham Creek, 120 at Titchfield Haven and 105 were seen at the Testwood Lakes. Highest previous counts were of 150 at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 5 and 161 in the Hook/Warsash area on Oct 8
 11. Mallard: More of these seem to have arrived on Oct 17 giving a total of around 200 on the Emsworth Ponds on that day (and 122 on Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Oct 19)
 12. Shoveler: 42 were on Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Oct 19
 13. Red-crested Pochard: A female or immature bird of unknown origin was on Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough on Oct 17
 14. Ferruginous Duck?: A bird seen on Baffins Pond in Portsmouth by Brian Fellows on Oct 19 sounds very like the hybrid Ferruginous Duck that arrived back at Budds Farm in Havant on Oct 4 (in the past it has moved between Farlington Marshes and Budds Farm and could well have accompanied other duck such as Shoveler from Budds to Baffins). I cannot comment on a suggestion that it is a Rosybill as I have never heard of that species and it does not feature in any of my books.
 15. Tufted Duck: A dearth of these birds on local waters does not apply to Baffins Pond in Portsmouth where Brian Fellows found 40 present on Oct 19
 16. Eider: A flock of 61 in the Solent off Titchfield Haven on Oct 17 is the highest count in Hampshire since May 13 (when there were 126 there). Among the flock were 31 males.
 17. Velvet Scoter: One was seen from Sandown and from Ventnor on the Isle of Wight on Oct 19 (presumably the same bird). This is the first seen on the south coast since May.
 18. Goldeneye: One male was on Brooklands Lake in Worthing on Oct 19. Although this is the time they should be arriving I wonder if this bird (preferring an urban pond to the open sea) might be an escape used to humans?
 19. Marsh Harrier: One over woodland near Crowborough on Oct 15 and another seen from Selsey Bill on Oct 20 were presumably departing birds.
 20. Hen Harrier: A single female was in the north west of the New Forest on Oct 17 and 18 - possibly settling in for the winter? A juvenile seen over Brading Marshes (IoW) on Oct 18 was presumably still wandering.
 21. Golden Plover: A flock of 61 seen at Fareham Creek on Oct 16 were the first at that site this autumn but 45 of them were later seen further west south of Fareham (and only 17 were left at Fareham Creek on Oct 17). Another influx of 82 arrived on Normandy Marsh at Lymington on Oct 17 and an odd single bird was seen in the Finchdean area north of Rowlands Castle on Oct 16
 22. Spotted Redshank: Two stopped off at Normandy Marsh on Oct 11 and stayed to Oct 13
 23. Greenshank: A couple of press cuttings concerning Greenshank have just reached me from Anne de Potier in connection with a new project by Chichester Harbour Conservancy for which they have received money from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project involves setting up another internet website to track migrant birds - in this case it seems it will focus on the movements of colour ringed birds associated with Chichester Harbour, though it may have a wider remit to record all birds ringed or recorded by the Solent Shorebird Group. I have no further details but I guess there will already be something about it on the Chichester Harbour website (www.conservancy.co.uk).

The specific Greenshank prompting the press cuttings was ringed at Farlington Marshes in 1991 (with a normal BTO metal ring) and was re-captured on Thorney Island in 2002 and given colour rings. Since then this particular bird had been sighted at least 20 times at

various places between Chichester Harbour and the mouth of the Hamble River where it was last seen in April 2004 before heading for its unknown breeding ground.

It then made history and hit the headlines as the first British ringed Greenshank to be found in Russia when it was shot by a Russian university researcher on the shores of the White Sea (off north west Russia) during the past summer. Those who regularly sign petitions to be sent to the Prime Minister of Malta in protest against shooting of birds there will have to wait for details of how to protest to President Putin - who will no doubt respond with statement copied from the responses which the Japanese government make in justifying the necessity for killing whales in the interests of scientific research.

24. Little Gull: In most years far more of these are seen in April on spring passage than in the autumn but this may be because the returning birds fly through the English Channel too far out to be seen from the shore (last autumn the only big count was of 167 seen by Simon Boswell from a ferry in mid channel on Sept 30 whereas the biggest count from the shore was of just 15 off Brighton on Oct 17, with the runner up being Jason Crook at Sandy Point with a count of more than 9 on Oct 23 - for comparison the highest spring count in 2003 was of 369 off Brighton on April 21 and the runner up had 172 off Worthing on April 26). Strong southerly winds this autumn may still bring large numbers to Hampshire shores and one indication of this is that on Oct 20 Owen Mitchell saw more than 30 from Selsey Bill on Oct 20 (and I have already reported counts of 9 at Hurst Castle and of 10 off Gosport, both on Apr 13 and probably the same party)
25. Ring-billed Gull: The bird that was a regular sight at the Gosport Cackle Pond last winter from Nov 20 to Mar 29 this year arrived back there on Oct 18 and was still present next day (no subsequent news but I guess it is still there)
26. Arctic Tern: Both Sandwich and Common Terns were still being seen regularly up to Oct 20 but it was perhaps of more interest to hear that an Arctic Tern was lingering off Selsey Bill on Oct 20 (and two juveniles had been seen off Brighton on Oct 17).
27. Barn Owl: Of local interest I see that John Simons saw two hunting in the Finchdean area when he took a brief evening walk around his home area (Dean Lane End) on Oct 17
28. Short-eared Owl: On Oct 17 two were seen to fly in off the sea at Bembridge Foreland (and what may have been a third bird was over Luccombe Down above Ventnor on the same day). Another was seen at Beachy Head on Oct 18. Maybe all were arriving from the continent rather than coming south from northern Britain or Scandinavia?
29. Swifts: The flock seen over Farlington Marshes on Oct 12 may have had difficulty getting back to Iberia as single Common Swifts were seen over the Isle of Wight on both Oct 16 and 17, the bird seen on Oct 16 being accompanied by a probable Pallid Swift.
30. Wryneck: One at Beachy Head on Oct 18 was a good week later than last year's last bird (on the Isle of Wight on Oct 11) and was the fifteenth bird I have heard of this autumn.
31. Swallow: Large numbers still moving through - more than 100 over Brownwich west of Titchfield Haven on Oct 17, around 50 over the Isle of Wight on Oct 18 and 38 over Worthing on Oct 19
32. House Martin: Surprisingly no reports of these after Oct 17 when there were 'many hundreds' over Hastings
33. Black Redstart: One at Church Norton on Oct 20 seen by Owen Mitchell
34. Ring Ouzel: One of the few Ouzels that I have seen was the bird which wintered in the New Forest from Dec 1983 to April 1984, and I am wondering if the party of up to four birds that have been at the Leaden Hall site (near Godshill) from Oct 11 to 19 may be intending to stop over for this winter. Another small party seems to have been on Culver Down (near Bembridge, IoW) from Oct 12 to 16, and maybe both these and the New Forest party are just waiting for favourable and lighter winds - normally Ring Ouzels on passage do not

stay in one place for more than two days. Another Ring Ouzel has been at Church Norton from Oct 18 to 20....

35. Pallas's Warbler: One was at Church Norton on Oct 17 (found by unknown birders who showed it to John Chapman who in turn told me of it) and perhaps this bird was still there on Oct 20 when it was seen by Owen Mitchell (the only person so far to report its presence on the SOS website)
36. Yellow-browed Warbler: The bird found by Tim Doran at the Portsmouth IBM site on Oct 16 was still present on that site when Kevin Stouse came in to work on Oct 18.
37. Firecrest: Four were in an Isle of Wight garden at Nettlestone (east of Ryde) on Oct 18 and two were at Church Norton on Oct 20
38. Willow Tit: A single bird (with four Marsh Tits in the same area) was reported from Pippingford Park (south of Ashdown Forest near Crowborough) by Matthew Silk when on a military expedition (school CCF party) from Brighton College on Oct 18
39. Great Grey Shrike: Following reports of one on the Downs behind Hove and at Leaden Hall in the New Forest (both on Oct 15) one has been seen in the Ashdown Forest by Bob Johnson on Oct 18 (but was told it had been there for several days before that).
40. Tree Sparrow: The first report of this species since Aug 3 (when one flew over Sway near New Milton) comes from Cliff Dean at Hastings where he saw 5 fly in off the sea on Oct 17 (presumably continental birds). Perhaps their numbers are also diminishing over the channel as I see that last year's first report of winter arrivals on the south coast also came from Hastings with an earlier date (Sep 7) and higher count (estimated 12 birds).
41. Brambling: The first to reach Hampshire this winter was the bird (already reported here) seen by Paul Winter over the Test just north of the M27 on Oct 16 which could have been the same bird which flew over Culver Down on the IoW on Oct 15 (probably heading north from the continent). At least three more flew in from the sea at Hastings on Oct 17 and an arrival of continental birds on that day may have also brought in one that was seen by Mark Rolfe in the large open fields west of Peak Lane which goes south from west Fareham to Stubbington. Possibly also part of that influx was one seen at Crawley on Oct 18.
42. Greenfinch: Many of these were also coming north across the channel to Hastings on Oct 17, and this movement from the continent could have been the origin of a large number of Greenfinch seen at Leaden Hall by John Shillitoe on Oct 18 (an unexpected place to see large numbers of Greenfinch unless they were on passage). It could also have accounted for the large mixed flocks of Linnet and Chaffinch seen with a Brambling by Mark Rolfe south of Fareham on Oct 17.
43. Lesser Redpoll: At least 18 seen coming in off the sea at Hastings on Oct 17 and continental arrivals may also have accounted for a sighting of an estimated 12 at Bembridge on the IoW on Oct 18
44. Snow Bunting: The bird seen by a dewpond on the Sussex Downs between Woodingdean (east of Brighton) and Kingston (south west of Lewes) on Oct 17 was still there on Oct 18.

B. INSECTS

1. Southern Hawker: I had very good view of one at rest enjoying sunshine in Havant Thicket on Oct 18. I also had at least one Migrant Hawker there that day.
2. Clouded Yellow: More indications of attempted reverse migration come from three sites along the coast. On Oct 17 Paul Winter had one at Brownwich (west of Titchfield Haven), on Oct 18 Brian Fellows saw two on the north west shore of Thorney Island, and on the same day three were seen in the Bembridge Foreland area.

3. Brimstone: Sunshine on Oct 18 brought a male into my garden and gave me a second in Havant Thicket while Adrian Hoskins had another in the Kings Somborne area of the Test valley.
4. Small Copper: Mike Duffy saw 17 on Stockbridge Down on Oct 18 but there must have been others there as one of the 11 seen there by Adrian Hoskins was a very fresh female not seen by Mike.
5. Red Admiral: At least three seen on Oct 17 and another three on Oct 18
6. Comma: At least three seen on Stockbridge Down on Oct 18 and another seen by myself in Havant Thicket on that day.
7. Speckled Wood: Oct 18 gave me one in Havant Thicket and another single to Adrian Hoskins in the New Forest
8. Meadow Brown: A late single was seen at Noar Hill by Rob Edmunds on Oct 17
9. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: Two more seen recently - one in Kent on Oct 15 and one on the Scillies on Oct 11
10. Death's Head Hawkmoth: Another find on Oct 14 of three partly grown caterpillars in a potato patch in Kent
11. Fox Moth: Another two reports of caterpillars - one at Bartley Heath near Fleet in north Hampshire on Oct 17 and the other at Stockbridge Down on Oct 18
12. Merveille du Jour: Paul Boswell caught the third of these beautiful moths to be reported in Hampshire this autumn at Greywell (near Fleet) on Oct 18 - the first was taken by Derek Mills at Farnham (actually in Surrey) on Oct 5 and the second was taken by Tim Norriss in the New Forest on Oct 9
13. Caddis Flies: I think these normally appear in May and can be seen through to November, but I was surprised to see that Tim Walker when running his moth trap near the River Itchen (at St Cross in Winchester) had large numbers of them at the beginning of this month (all of the species *Limnephilus lunatus*). On Oct 2 he counted 72 and on Oct 10 he had 36 (with a couple more on the evening of Oct 7) - I wonder if mild weather has brought next year's insects out early?

C. PLANTS

1. Deodar Cedar: On Oct 18 when walking through the Leigh Park Gardens in Havant I was surprised to find the ground below a couple of these trees was completely covered with newly fallen male flowers looking like large catkins (though I believe they grow erect on the branches, not hanging like e.g. Hazel catkins) This is the normal time of year for the Cedars to be flowering.
2. Rhododendron ponticum: One bush of this was starting to flower beside the lake in the Leigh Park Gardens, also on Oct 18
3. Common Chickweed: On Oct 22 I was a little surprised to find Chickweed flowering wherever I went
4. Betony: I was also surprised to see two or three plants in flower when visiting Havant Thicket on Oct 18 (where Lesser Skullcap was still in flower)
5. Water Figwort: New growth by the Langbrook stream in Havant had fresh flowers on Oct 22. Wall Lettuce and Weld both had newly flowering plants on that day.

D. OTHER WILDLIFE

Harvest Mouse: A 'Five Star' find made by a working party of the Emsworth Brook Meadow volunteers on Oct 17 was almost certainly of this species. While clearing tall rough grass they noticed a small mouse like creature scuttling for cover in the grass, then later found what may well have been the nest in which this creature was hoping to pass

the winter until the volunteers quite unknowingly cut down the grass supporting it. Brian Fellows tells me the nest was 'round and slightly flattened' and measured about 10 cm across, which may show that it was a winter nest rather than a breeding nest - my book tells me that breeding nests are normally between 6 and 7 cm in diameter but winter nests are more loosely woven (and maybe bulkier to keep out the winter cold?).

I had thought that Harvest Mice were now rare, and the only place where I have heard of them being found locally is Titchfield Haven (where I gather they nest in reeds and will readily swim across patches of open water) but my Readers Digest book published in 1984 says that they are fairly widespread in southern England among large areas of coarse vegetation. It would seem that they are unlikely to be found in cereal fields on modern farms and have suffered from loss of much of their traditional habitat but the book goes on to say that they are now likely to be found in large areas of rough grass like those alongside motorways (or at Brook Meadow). Should the Brook Meadow group want to make amends for evicting this little creature they could try something my book suggests - putting a stake into the ground among tall rough grass and fixing to it, about 45 cm off the ground, an old Tennis Ball after cutting a small round hole into the ball to act as an entrance for the mice. How to fix it to the stake in such a way that there is no sharp object left inside the ball where it might scratch a mouse is not explained but there is an illustration showing the hole in the side of the ball when it is in place. One advantage of this is that the stake would act as a reminder of where a potential nest is when it next comes to tidying up the grass!

One other thing that I learnt when looking up this information is that the summer breeding nests are held up by leaving several of the grass leaves used in its construction still attached to the plants on which they grow so that the grass holds up the nest without special 'support ropes',

E. FUNGI

1. A note from Maurice Pugh, sent on Oct 17, tells me ...

Here are just a few of the fungi we saw this afternoon in the New Forest

- a) *Hericium coralloides*, now 5 fruiting bodies, largest is about 10" high
(Second tree in another area is showing two very small clusters)
- b) *Craterellus cornucopioides*, horn of plenty, group of 40/50
- c) *Ramaria stricta*, lots
- d) *Mutinus caninus*, dog stinkhorn, group of 12
- e) *Ramaria botrytis*, group of 6 on roadside verge
- f) *Clavulinopsis fusiformis*, golden spindles
- g) *Gymnopilus junonius*, golden flame caps, several
- h) *Meripilus giganteus*, giant polypore, group of 4, 2 very large, almost 2ft high and 2ft across
- i) *Clavulina cristata*, patch about 12" across

And the best of the day.....

- j) *Clathrus ruber*, red cage stinkhorn, 4 specimens on bank, on side street at St Cross, Winchester. A friend told me about them and we went to check them out. Very large specimens, but they had collapsed and were each lying in a small heap, still showing the bright red colouring and the empty white egg. You could still smell them.

2. In addition to these finds see my personal notes for my trip to Havant Thicket on Oct 18 when I found the uncommon Pine Fire fungus and Black *Helvella* which the Havant

Wildlife Group had seen there earlier. In addition I found a fresh Earth Fan, Rooting Shank, Orange Peel and old examples of *Phaeolus schweinitzii* and *Calvatia excipuliformis* which the group had not seen (plus some specimens, including a nice orangey brown milk cap, which I passed on to Jim Berry for identification)

Tue 19 Oct

A. Havant to Langstone and back

An easing of the rain in the late afternoon gave me time for a short walk to Langstone via the footbridge over the A27 slip roads to the Langstone roundabout and the path leading straight through the Southbrook Road estate towards the Royal Oak on the shore. South of the Billy Line where this path crosses what I believe is called Russell's Field (after the important local family of past times who also gave their name to Russell's Lake along the east side of Farlington Marshes) I found several tall flowering Meadow Buttercups (I did check their sepals as in the spring this meadow is a great mass of Bulbous Buttercups).

There was little to be seen on the water at high tide but as I came north up Wade Lane I could see five Egrets and a couple of Herons in the pre-roost trees near Langstone Mill pond. North of Wade Court the number of Egrets increased by another 24 which were feeding in the pony fields, showing that the majority of these birds have now switched from summer feeding the the harbours to winter mode feeding in inland fields - not necessarily in these particular pony fields but using them as a pre-roost area as they approach the main roost from the north (during my walk I saw at least two flying south over the A27 from unknown inland fields or ponds)

To end this brief circuit I passed the Lymbourne Springs wildflower patch in which both Red Champion and Musk Mallow are still flowering and the patch outside the Museum where a great show of weeds has recently been treated to weedkiller (to which Fools Parsley seems very resistant!)

Mon 18 Oct

A. Staunton Country Park

In strong contrast to the days before and after it this Monday was a glorious day of dawn to dusk sunshine, light breeze and no hint of rain. Early morning brought a female Blackcap into the garden and before lunch a male Brimstone flew across the lawn and settled on a sunlit shrub near where an underground Wasp nest continues to have non stop traffic coming and going. At dawn Collared Dove song reminded me that it was now some time since that song was to be heard daily, and a check on my database showed that they had ceased to sing after Sept 17. While checking that I also looked up Wood Pigeon and see that they have not been heard by me since Oct 3.

After an early lunch I drove to the Staunton Country Park carpark off Middle Park Way in Leigh Park (no charge and, unlike the Havant Thicket carpark off Manor Road at Rowlands Castle, not currently occupied by 'travellers') for a walk north through the Leigh Park Gardens and round the lake to the Gipsies Plain and Havant Thicket.

In the grassy edges of the carpark one of the plants in flower was Lesser Hawkbit and across the public road beside path parallel to the main drive into the gardens (but west of it alongside the cattle field edge) I was puzzled to find the ground under a couple of well grown Deodar cedars completely covered by fairly fresh 'catkins' (but unlike the male flowers of other trees such as Hazel these male flowers of Cedars do not hang down but stand erect on the branch, and flower in the autumn rather than the spring).

On the lake the pair of adult Swans which nest here could not be seen but their single cygnet was still present (perhaps the parents could not persuade it to leave them and had themselves flown off as a hint that it was time for the youngster to live its own life!). Turning from the water to the shrubs around the lake I was surprised to find one bush of the common *Rhododendron ponticum* had several flowers just opening. Leaving the water

and walking through the woodland of Hammonds Piece Coppice both a Comma and a second male Brimstone flew by.

Coming out on the open grassland of the Gipsies Plain I walked up the path beside what I call the 'orchid ditch' which always seems to have interesting flowers - this time among the mass of Devils Bit Scabious and Lesser Spearwort I found two or three flowering plants of Betony. Looking north towards the Furzy Plain area of Havant Thicket I watched a couple of Roe Deer bounding over the rough grassland towards the shelter of the trees, and on reaching the track which runs north past the carpark I added Speckled Wood and Common Darter to my insect list.

Just north of the carpark area I first turned left to check the large *Phaeolus schweinitzii* fungus that I had seen on my previous visit (still in fairly good shape) and then turned back across the main track to the path leading north from the carpark beside which I found a great show of Black Helvella where Rosemary Webb had found it recently - nearby were the first Rooting Shank fungi I had seen this autumn. Coming to the open area south of the northern pond I was very pleased to find a fresh small clump of Earth Fan where it grew a few years ago.

Continuing north across the main forest track that comes in from the Castle Road area I followed a well used footpath through the trees, starting opposite the north end of the main track I had walked up beside the carpark area. Where the trees stop and you emerge into a bracken covered glade caused by a previous fire I found the main object of this walk - the uncommon Pine Fire fungus (*Rhizina undulata*) which grows on plant debris in places where conifers have been burnt (and which causes the aptly named 'Group Dying Disease' of conifers). I had been told to look out for what would look like a pile of dog faeces on the ground under the bracken but for anyone using that description to search for this fungus I would add that the dog concerned must have eaten a lot of something that disagreed with it and caused very loose droppings that covered the ground with a brown, undulating mass that could also be described as a large cowpat. Don't be put off by this as the fungus is quite firm and dry (and not smelly) and its undulations seem to be caused by variations in the height of the plant debris it covers. In this same open area was my first find of Orange Peel fungus for the autumn.

Still in the Thicket I added Ling and Cross-leaved Heath, plus Lesser Skullcap, to my flower list and near the latter I watched a Hawker dragonfly which obligingly settled in sunlight to give me an excellent binocular view showing that it was a Southern Hawker by the pattern of blue on its last three segments and by the green and brown pattern on the front of its thorax just behind its large eyes.

On my way back I found one of the large brown stalked puffballs (*Calvatia excipuliformis*) had escaped trackside mowing and I heard both Bullfinch and Marsh Tit.

Wildlife diary and news for October 11 - 17 (Week 42)

Sun 17 Oct

News and reports received today

BIRDS

1. Bittern: One seen briefly in flight near the Titchfield Canal path on Oct 17 by Mark Rolfe.
2. Bewick's Swans: An unspecified number back at Ibsley on Oct 15 - earliest record for Hampshire
3. Swift: One over Ventnor Downs on Oct 17 and another seen near Bembridge on Oct 16 with other hirundines including a probable PALLID SWIFT - could this be the flock that was

over Langstone Harbour on Oct 12 still hanging around?

4. Snow Bunting: One on downs east of Brighton on Oct 17
5. Brambling: One over Bembridge area on Oct 15 and one in the open fields between Fareham and Stubbington on Oct 17 - the Oct 15 bird was the first for the winter just beating the one in the Test Valley on Oct 16 (see below)
6. Water Pipit: First of the autumn seen by Mark Rolfe in the fields between Fareham and Stubbington with Pied Wagtails and Meadow Pipits
7. Hen Harrier: Another sighting in the Leadenhall (near Godshill) area of the New Forest on Oct 17 - this one a female. Several Ring Ouzels still there.
8. Short-eared Owls: Two flew in off the sea at Bembridge Foreland on Oct 17, probably a third near Ventnor that day
9. Eider: 61 (including 33 males) on the sea off Brownwich area on Oct 17 with 7 Common Scoter
10. Wigeon: Big increase in local numbers. 262 in Cams Bay on Oct 17 and at least 120 at Titchfield Haven on same day. Only previous Hampshire sighting of more than 100 this autumn was a count of 161 at Hook/Warsash on Oct 8
11. Brent: a total of 776 seen by Brian Fellows on the water between Black Point and Pilsey on Oct 16, a good number of juveniles among them
12. Golden Plover: 61 seen at Cams Bay on Oct 16 and 17 there on Oct 17. On Oct 16 a flock of 45 over fields between Fareham and Stubbington may or may not have been in addition to those over Cams Bay
13. Common Tern: One still at Cams Bay on Oct 17
14. Yellow-browed Warbler: One on Bembridge Down on Oct 16
15. Swallows: More than 100 seen in the Brownwich area on Oct 17
16. Linnet: Flock of 200+ in the Brownwich area on Oct 17
17. Chiffchaff: song heard in Emsworth on Oct 16

INSECTS

1. Clouded Yellow, Red Admiral and Migrant Hawker dragonfly - singles of each at Brownwich on Oct 17
2. Another two Red Admirals at Cams Bay on same day

OTHER

1. Fallow Deer: Start of rut? Single buck seen in Leadenhall area of New Forest with 50 females + young

Sat 16 Oct

- A. News and reports received up to today

BIRDS

1. Great Northern Diver: First of the winter seen by Mike Rafter from Hurst Castle in the west Solent on Oct 13
2. Little Egret: Local night roost counts on Oct 14 were 129 at Wade Court (Langstone), 40 at Tournerbury Wood (Hayling Island) and none in Oldpark Wood (opposite Chichester Yacht Basin). No news yet from the Thorney Island roosts
3. Spoonbill: One seen in Pagham Harbour by Martin Hampton on Oct 12 (roosting on Tern Island near the harbour mouth during high tide)

4. Canada Goose: Only 5 at the Portsmouth IBM Lake on Oct 16. No reports have yet reached me of a large flock back in the Titchfield area for the winter but last year there were some 300 there from Oct 6 rising to over 400 for the WeBS count at Titchfield Haven on Oct 24. Last year there was also a large flock at Farlington Marshes from the beginning of October through to January of this year, peaking at 327 there on Nov 16
5. Brent Goose: George Spraggs saw around 500 in the south east of Langstone Harbour on Oct 13 and more than 200 within the Kench on Oct 14 but these may be birds passing through so numbers in Langstone Harbour have probably not yet settled down. The most significant news this week was of the first birds already coming ashore (36 on the HMS Sultan palying fields beside the Military Road in Gosport seen by John Norton on Oct 13). No more news of juveniles since Mike Collins sighting of 23 young birds in a flock of 150 off the Langstone South Moors on Oct 10.
6. Wood Duck: Two of these were at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 15 - presumably local escapees.
7. Wigeon: First report of 'hundreds' at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 15. This is in line with last autumn when the WeBS counts there were 350 on Oct 13, 1200 on Nov 17 and 2900 on Dec 15.
8. Pintail: These are also now arriving in force with counts from Pulborough Brooks of 10 on Oct 13, 30 on Oct 14 and 85 on Oct 15
9. Red-breasted Merganser: Although the first of these was reported from Selsey Bill on Oct 4 and small numbers had been reported from Titchfield and Newtown Harbour on Oct 10 and 11 the first to be seen in Langstone Harbour seem to have been 3 seen in The Kench by George Spraggs on Oct 13
10. Honey Buzzard: Martin Hampton had a 'probable' in the Church Norton area (Greenleaze Farm) on Oct 12
11. Hen Harrier: Three new reports in the last few days are of a female over Brading Marshes (IoW) on Oct 14, a male in Ashdown Forest on Oct 15 and an unsexed bird in the Godshill area of the New Forest on Oct 16
12. Hobby: Two were hunting over Pulborough Brooks on Oct 10 and there were reports of singles passing over the Isle of Wight on both Oct 13 and 14
13. Quail: A single bird (presumably on the point of leaving us) was flushed in the St Catherine's Point area of the IoW on Oct 12
14. Lapwing: The flock at Pulborough Brooks was estimated to number 300 on Oct 15
15. Snipe: I had my first back at the Portsmouth IBM Lake on Oct 16
16. Grey Phalarope: The first of the autumn was at Frensham Great Pond in Surrey on Oct 16
17. Little Gull: There have been occasional sightings of Little Gulls in every month this summer but there seems to have been a surge of passage birds going west on Oct 12 and 13. On Oct 12 Martin Hampton saw at least two in Pagham Harbour and Kris Gillam had 3 at Sandown on the IoW. On Oct 13 John Norton had 10 off Stokes Bay in the east Solent while Mike Rafter saw 9 (maybe the same group) passing Hurst Castle in the west Solent. John and Mike also each saw 3 Kittiwakes on that day the first in Hampshire waters since Sep 14.
18. Black Tern: One was to be seen over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Oct 14, 15 and 16. Common and Sandwich Terns remain regular sights and on Oct 13 Chris Ball reported an Arctic Tern over Arlington Reservoir in the Cuckmere Valley near Beachy Head.
19. COMMON, PALLID and ALPINE SWIFT: On Oct 12 one of the large flocks of House Martins we have been seeing recently had at least one Alpine Swift with it over Farlington

Marshes and three or four Pallid Swifts mixed with a similar number of Common Swifts seen over nearby Budds Mound. This news comes from Bob Chapman who says that he personally failed to see the Alpine Swift but implies that someone else who was with him (presumably Jason Crook) saw all three species - a pretty good tick for one day in mid-October! The other interesting thing that Bob points out is that these Swifts had presumably been wind blown from Iberia in the unusual weather conditions and the House Martins seem to have come with them, so the large numbers of House Martins seen all along the south coast recently may well also have come north over the channel rather than being birds coming south from northern Britain and deterred from crossing the channel by the wind (as I had assumed). This news ties in with the sighting which I have already reported of two Swifts over Sandown on the IoW on Oct 12.

20. Wryneck: A late departing bird was in Belle Tout Wood on Beachy Head on Oct 13 (about a week later than the recent average last date for Sussex, but the latest ever in the county was on Nov 2)
21. Skylark: A count of more than 35 passing over Black Point at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Oct 16 may signal the start of a winter influx of continental birds into Britain
22. Possible Tawny or Richard's Pipit: A large Pipit seen briefly over Culver Down near Bembridge on the IoW by Derek Hale on Oct 13 might have been either of these species.
23. Dunnock: A bird was singing repeatedly in the Havant New Lane allotments on Oct 14 but I do not expect to hear regular song from the majority of these birds until mid-January
24. Black Redstart: The bird seen near Fort Gilkicker at Gosport on Oct 11 was still there on Oct 13 but elusive.
25. Common Redstart: One seen by Tim Doran at the Portsmouth IBM site (with two Blackcaps) on Oct 16
26. Whinchat: Latest sighting so far was of one in the Sheepcote valley east of Brighton on Oct 13
27. Wheatear: Latest sighting so far was of one at Black Point on Hayling on Oct 16. (Of local interest I see that Ian Julian who lives on Hayling Island has had a letter published in the new issue of the RSPB BIRDS magazine describing how - like Doctor Doolittle - he enjoys a chat with a Wheatear and finds the species particularly well disposed to conversational approaches from friendly humans)
28. Ring Ouzel: A small flock of up to 4 of these birds has been at the Leaden Hall site (in the New Forest south east of Godshill) from Oct 11 to 16.
29. Fieldfare and Redwing: The northwest corner of the New Forest is probably the best place to see these winter thrushes at the moment with up to 35 Redwings and 20 Fieldfare seen there on Oct 16
30. Cetti's Warbler: Song was heard at Langstone Mill Pond on Oct 16 and at the Chichester Lakes on the previous day
31. Lesser Whitethroat: A late sighting reported at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 12
32. Common Whitethroat: Two in the Sheepcote Valley east of Brighton on Oct 13
33. Yellow-browed Warbler: Tim Doran heard the call of one at the Portsmouth IBM site on Oct 16 where several Chiffchaffs were also present, as were Common Redstart, Blackcap and Firecrest
34. Goldcrest: On Oct 12 Martin Hampton had six at Church Norton and Derek Hale had more than ten on the IoW at Culver Down while Bob Eade had 'many' on Beachy Head. Oct 13 brought a report of many in Brighton and Oct 13 saw a count of 20 in St Anne's Well gardens at Hove. On Oct 15 there were many at Pulborough Brooks and on Oct 16 at least two were in the Wade Court area at Langstone.

35. Firecrest: Singles were at the IBM Portsmouth site and at Pitts Wood in the north west New Forest on Oct 16 and seven other reports for the period Oct 12 to 14 included 5 near St Catherine's Point on the IoW and an estimate of 6 at Beachy Head.
36. Pied Flycatcher: One in Hove on Oct 14 was not the latest ever for Sussex (that date is Nov 1)
37. Great Grey Shrike: Oct 15 brought the first two reports for this winter - Tony Wilson had one on the West Hove Golf Course in Sussex and Brian Cozens had one at Leaden Hall in the New Forest where it was still present on Oct 16
38. House Sparrow: What sounds to be a very leucistic bird moving around with other Sparrows based on the long row of houses along the north end of Thorney Road east of Emsworth has been seen by Lynn Davies - she says it has brown bars on its wings.
39. Brambling: The first report for this winter is of one seen by Paul Winter from the Test Way between Moorcourt Farm and the hamlet of Lee (just north of the M27)
40. Hawfinch: Six seen by Mike Rafter in Pitts Wood in the north west New Forest on Oct 16
41. Corn Bunting: Further good news from Rye Harbour is that the flock there had risen to more than 50 birds on Oct 13.

INSECTS

1. Dragonflies: At least three Migrant Hawkers and a couple of Common Darters were seen by me at the IBM Portsmouth site on Oct 16
2. Butterflies - Clouded Yellow: One seen in the Gosport area on Oct 14 by David TInling who had seen two there on Oct 9 and five on Oct 7 (including a mating pair). The following sightings are also by David TInling unless specified ...
3. Small White: Two at Gosport on Oct 14
4. Green-veined White: Also at Gosport David TInling had the latest of the year (?) on Oct 7
5. Small Copper: One at Gosport on Oct 9
6. Common Blue: One at Gosport on Oct 7
7. Red Admiral: Twelve at Gosport on Oct 14
8. Painted Lady: One at Gosport on Oct 14
9. Meadow Brown: One at Gosport on Oct 7
10. Small Heath: One at Gosport on Oct 7
11. Moths - Feathered Thorn: First of the year taken by Russell Wynn at Pennington Marshes on Oct 12
12. Common Wasp: The nest in my garden is still active on Oct 17

PLANTS

1. Common Flax: The large blue flower of a single plant was to be seen on the north of Thorney Island on Oct 15 - presumably the result of a wind blown or bird carried seed coming from a farm field earlier in the summer.
2. Trailing St John's Wort: Several plants in flower on the grass banks around the foot of the IBM buildings at North Harbour in Portsmouth on Oct 16 were an unexpected second flowering.
3. Greater Sea Spurrey: This too was indulging in a second flowering beside the Chichester Channel near the Yacht Basin on Oct 14
4. Common Centaury and Yellow-wort: Both were still flowering at the IBM Portsmouth site on Oct 16

5. Hedge Bedstraw: Still in flower in the old Havant cemetery off New Lane on Oct 14
6. Lady's Bedstraw: Still in flower at the IBM Portsmouth site on Oct 16

OTHER WILDLIFE

1. Common Seal: One seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 12 by Martin Hampton
2. Adder: One at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 12 was thought likely to be the last seen this year.

B. WeBS count visit to the Portsmouth IBM site

I arrived at the IBM site about an hour before the high tide time and was greeted at the main reception lake by a noisy pair of Canada Geese and an equally noisy Heron but as I went round the lake there were remarkably few other birds though I did put up a single Snipe from the islands and saw five Teal - the first winter wildfowl for the site.

There were just three more Canada Geese on the lake and even Mallard were in short supply (just 22 of them) but there were 8 Cormorant and a group of four or five more Herons. At the east end of the water was a single Great Crested Grebe (though I was told that a second had been seen at the west end. Gulls were especially thin on the ground (or water!) with just ten Black-headed and one or two Common - I guess this will continue to be the case now that the huge rubbish tip across the motorway has closed down.

The only unexpected bird seen by myself was a Great Spotted Woodpecker but just after seeing it I met up with Tim Doran who had been around the site long before I arrived and had found two Blackcaps, a Common Redstart, a Firecrest and a Yellow-browed Warbler. My own sightings away from the water were mainly of Wood Pigeons though there were several Chiffchaffs and a flock of up to 20 Magpies.

I did slightly better with flowering plants than I did with birds - in particular there were two large flowers open on a Marsh Marigold (Kingcup) plant in the shelter of the canal just north of main reception, and several flowering plants of Trailing St John's Wort on the grass banks which surround the foot of the buildings (the ground floor of which is six feet above the surrounding land to reduce the chance of flooding should the seawall surrounding the large northwest corner of Portsmouth Harbour reclaimed in order to build the M27 ever be breached).

I also found a few fungi including some boletes which appear each year on the grass of the 'Twin Peaks' mounds and which I have never identified - I took two fresh specimens and subsequently left them with Rosemary Webb who was due to meet the Hampshire Fungus recording group at Creech Woods in Denmead tomorrow and who may be able to find someone in that group who knows what they are. Another fungus which caught my eye was a good show of *Stropharia aurantica* growing on wood chippings in a flower bed. Elsewhere around the site were *Pleurotus cornucopiae*, Field Mushrooms, Common Inkcaps and *Lepiota cristata*. I also found one of the specialities of the site which I call 'Landweed' as it looks just like a Seaweed (it is an alga) but grows on dry ground (maybe it thrives here because the soil is still more saline than normal). Back in 2000 Phil Budd told me the name for this alga was *Nostoc* but as I do not have any reference books covering Algae I am none the wiser. What I found today (and had found at the IBM clubhouse site - long abandoned and now covered by Havant Borough's dustcart depot off Southmoor Lane - in 2000) can best be described as lines of rubber ears appearing from bare ground - the lumps of algal jelly are roughly the size and shape of human ears, dark green or brown in colour.

Thu 14 Oct

A. Around Havant

A short morning walk around Havant just north of the railway station, returning via the New Lane allotments, gave me another burst of Dunnock song as its highlight with a reasonable list of flowering plants and a discovery that amused my warped sense of humour - a tombstone

in the now disused Havant cemetery bearing the name Alf Garnett (as one who enjoyed the TV series 'Till death do us part' it came as surprise to know that loud mouthed Alf had at last departed this life but the amusement came from the fact that his name appeared below that of his wife on the tombstone - presumably she had died first and Alf's name had been added later). I sincerely hope that no surviving members of the local family concerned read this and feel offended

The first plant of any interest was Common Storksbill once again flowering brightly as a weed in flowerbeds south of Havant station, by the steps leading down to Market Parade. Earlier in the summer there was a great mass of both Storksbill and Corn Salad in these beds, both far more cheering to look at than the dull ornamental shrubs and trees planted there and, according to what I read in this week's New Scientist, probably far better for the environment. To quote the magazine "Industry has dramatically cut its emissions of pollutants called Volatile Organic Compounds but those cuts have been more than offset by the amount of VOCs churned out by trees. This revelation challenges the notion that planting trees is a good way to help clean up the atmosphere." Reading on I learn that these emissions react with nitrogen oxides and sunlight to form poisonous ozone in the lower atmosphere (I thought we wanted to generate more ozone but it seems that it is only 'good' when much higher in the atmosphere).

Having mentioned the New Scientist this is a good opportunity to go on to the subject of exploding geese and seagulls which comes up in the Last Word section to which readers contribute their comments on strange happenings that have been reported in the magazine. This week the question on which comments had been invited was that of whether birds are ever struck by lightning. Three letters in answer to this question were printed - the first was a rather prosaic response from a professional 'Biometeorologist' (bet you have never come across one of those in your pub) saying that while the gusty winds associated with thunderstorms would normally deter birds from entering the storm there was a record from north America of 52 migrating geese being killed by lightning as they flew in a tight flock, refusing to be diverted from the path of their migration by hell or high water. The second letter came from someone well known to Hampshire birders - our very own Simon Woolley who teaches at Winchester College - who outdoes the American record with one from Norfolk here in Britain. Simon tells us that on 3 January 1978 a total of 140 geese were killed in a 50 mile corridor of thunder squalls over East Anglia. He is careful to say that the cause of death could not be determined precisely but 'the bodies showed injuries consistent with violent decompression or blast trauma, and a fall from a great height'. All good stuff but my prize for the best story goes to Ali Brotchie who was at Pontin's holiday camp on the Camber Sands (Rye Bay) this summer and was watching a thunderstorm from the shelter of a chalet when he/she saw a seagull perched on a telegraph pole explode with a loud bang when it was hit by lightning.

Wrenching myself back to today's walk I have to report that a Chiffchaff sang briefly and both Weasel's Snout (Lesser Snapdragon) and Sticky Groundsel were still flowering

B. Chichester Yacht Basin and the Chichester Channel of Chichester Harbour

Despite finding no Little Egrets roosting in Oldpark Wood during last month's count I went there again this evening but, after seeing seven Egrets feeding along the shore of the Chichester Channel before sunset, did not even see them depart as they did so during a heavy rain shower at sunset.

The shortage of Egrets and the rain by no means made the trip a waste of time. On arrival, while cycling from the marina carpark to the shore, I disturbed at least 20 Pied Wagtails which had stopped off on their flight to their night roost to investigate the puddles on the wide tarmac area between the road and the water's edge. I rather suspect that they were then close to their destination and anyone with regular access to the yacht basin at this time of year could well discover a large night roost of Wagtails thereabouts. Reaching the shore I found 18 Shelduck back on the mud and saw several small parties of Brent flying by. Also in the air

were at least six Cormorant heading for their Ivy Lake night roost, and on the mud the number and variety of waders was up on previous months though the total of corvids that I saw was well down on the estimated 5000 there in September I doubt I saw more than 500 tonight, but as I cycled back on the footpath along the north of Salterns Copse in the dark I put up a very noisy group of Pheasants that had been settling there for the night (and almost ran over one that refused to fly but ran along the path just in front of me).

One other unexpected bird encountered this evening was a Condor - not actually seen but described in convincing detail by someone with whom I sheltered from the rain under trees who told me of a back-packing trip he had made to Peru. And finally I noted freshly flowering Greater Sea-Spurrey on the shore.

Wed 13 Oct

A. Latest news and reports

BIRDS

1. Red-throated Diver: Two (maybe three) off Ventnor (IoW) on Oct 12 [Derek Hale].
Second report of the winter for the central south coast after one off Ryde on Sep 23
2. Cormorant: Large numbers flying north up Test valley at dawn are a regular winter sight. In 2003 they started to do so on Oct 5 when 51 flew over the Testwood Lakes. The number grew to 76 on Dec 7 but dropped back to just 14 in Feb 2004 after which the next sighting was of 23 on July 25 (this summer date seems to have been an oddity) with this winter's inland fishing season starting with 49 on Oct 10.
3. Little Egret: These too are now in winter mode and starting to feed inland rather than in the harbours. On Sunday Oct 10 I noted three on the Bosmere School playing fields close to Havant town centre, on Oct 11 five were feeding in the pony fields north of Wade Court, and on Oct 13 there were 13 feeding in a field adjacent to the Warblington Castle Farmhouse and an estimated 30 in a high tide roost huddle on the ground in the 'Southmere' field just north of Mill Lane at Langstone (seen from the road to Hayling).
4. Great White Egret: The bird at Rye Harbour was still there on Oct 9
5. Mute Swan: A total of 62 on the Emworth village centre ponds looks to be a considerable increase on the summer counts of between 30 and 40 birds but I see that on July 30 (when I counted only 34 on the Town Millpond) there were also 29 on the western shore of the village off Nore Barn so I suspect the total of non breeding birds in the area does not vary very much through the year.
6. Brent Goose: Although the first arrivals were later than usual this year they have settled in along the north shores of Langstone and Chichester Harbours earlier than usual (in the past early arrivals were wary of areas where they would be close to human activity) and the first juveniles have been seen a week earlier than last year. Both events were noted by Mike Collins on Oct 10 when he saw a flock of around 150 Brent (including 23 juveniles) close to the South Moors shore at Langstone. That flock may have been part of a total of around 2000 geese flying west past Dungeness on the previous day (Oct 9). While the flock of 150 seems to have dispersed quickly parties of up to a dozen birds have been a daily sight around Langstone village since Oct 10. Coinciding with this arrival Bob Chapman has put out a request on the HWT website for anyone regularly in the urban south Hampshire coastal area to record all counts (including null returns) of Brent seen feeding on land this winter. Details of the id numbers used in the survey to designate regular feeding sites, plus recording forms showing the detail required for each observation, can be obtained by contacting Bob on RobertC@hwt.org.uk
7. Shelduck: A flock of 38 seen at Rye Harbour on Oct 9 seems to have been a second wave of birds returning from their moult on the Dutch coast though there have been no reports of new arrivals in Hampshire since the first came back in mid September

8. Pintail: A count of 16 in the Normandy area of the Lymington marshes during the week ending Oct 9 was a tripling of the highest previous count there this autumn (only 5) and the first double figure count for anywhere in Hampshire
9. Marsh Harrier: The bird which had been regularly seen at Titchfield Haven through the summer was not seen after Sep 8 but a female was seen there again on Oct 10 when two others were reported from the Amberley Wild Brooks area south of Pulborough (a female or juvenile) and Pagham Harbour (a male). The three sightings on the same day may give the impression of a wave of departing summer birds but interestingly the one seen at Titchfield by Mark Litjens flew off to the north.
10. Hobby: One seen in the Haywards Heath area of Sussex on Oct 9 but none in Hampshire or the Isle of Wight since Oct 5
11. Red-legged Partridge: A group (family?) of 11 birds were seen in the west Hayling fields near the coastal path by Alistair Martin on Oct 10, close to where I had been told of a sighting of 16 on Sep 24. Last autumn Alistair Martin saw a group of 12 in the same area where several people have seen one or two in the spring, and as there is no shooting on these particular fields I conclude that these are probably feral birds (a pair raising a dozen or so young each summer) rather than birds introduced for shooting (as they are in other parts of Hayling Island)
12. Golden Plover: The Southampton airport/Lakeside Country Park area of Eastleigh normally has a flock of up to 500 Golden Plover each winter and Simon Ingram has just reported the first two back there on Oct 6
13. Sanderling: A flock of around 180 was on the Ryde sands on Oct 10 - probably the same flock that was seen there on Sep 25 and which is probably now resident there for the winter.
14. Little Stint: Two were seen with Dunlin at the Kench on Hayling Island on Oct 10 and a single juvenile was at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Oct 11.
15. Bar-tailed Godwit: A flock of up to 300 is now a regular sight in the Warblington/Northney area of Chichester Harbour.
16. Little Gull: Three were seen over the Canoe Lake at Sandown on the IoW on Oct 12
17. Terns: Common and Sandwich Terns are still a daily sight in the Solent with several occasional sightings elsewhere but a party of three Little Terns at Rye Harbour on Oct 6 was a late surprise. No Black Terns have been seen since Oct 2 and no Roseate since Oct 3.
18. Auks: One or two Guillemot and Razorbill were seen in the water between Hayling and the IoW on Oct 10
19. SWIFT: Two over Sandown (IoW) on Oct 12 were a good week past the average last date given for Hampshire (where the last I know of this year was seen on Sep 10, and the last reported from Sussex was on Sep 5)
20. Woodlark: One was seen in the north west of the New Forest on Oct 11.
21. Hirundines: A single late Sand Martin was over the Testwood Lakes near Southampton on Oct 10 but on the same day Dave Unsworth estimated there were 900 Swallow and 1500 House Martins over the Barton on sea golf course across the water from the Needles. Elsewhere Swallows have been a regular sight but in small numbers whereas exceptional numbers of House Martins have been seen all along the south coast daily since Oct 9 (presumably held up by strong easterly winds). There were still at least 150 feeding around cows in a Warblington shore field on Oct 13 but with the easterly winds then veering to the south west I suspect they will not be there tomorrow. No other reports were of flocks as big as 1500 (though a report from Bob Marchant's daughter Wendy of 'a valley full' of them over the Meon at Titchfield Haven on Oct 12 could be a contender) but

there were estimates of more than 600 over Brighton and over 500 at West Wittering (mouth of Chichester Harbour) both on Oct 9, and of more than 400 over Stokes Bay at Gosport on Oct 10

22. Yellow Wagtail: Late singles have been reported from St Catherine's Point (IoW) on Oct 6, Beachy Head on Oct 8, and Eastleigh Lakeside country park on Oct 9.
23. Pied Wagtail: Numbers have increased everywhere recently but I am not sure where they are coming from. On Oct 9 Jim Weston at Selsey Bill counted 107 coming from the south west and on Oct 11 Kris Gillam counted 194 heading east past St Catherine's Point area when he was at Whale Chine. Are these pelagic birds from mid-Atlantic? or are they coming on an anti-clockwise coastal route around the British Isles?
24. Black Redstart: Two were at the west end of the Isle of Wight on Oct 9 and one was in the Gilkicker area of the Gosport shore on Oct 11.
25. Common Redstart: A late bird was on the Isle of Wight on Oct 11
26. Whinchat: Two still on the IoW on Oct 11
27. Stonechat: John Faithfull found 16 in the Hook/Warsash area on Oct 8 and Chris Meaney reported 13 in the Bembridge/Culver Down area of the IoW on Oct 10.
28. Wheatear: Plenty of recent sightings of ones and twos up to Oct 13 when I saw one at Warblington.
29. Ring Ouzel: From Hastings on Oct 10 Andrew Grace reported 8 females heading west (hitting our coast en route from Scandinavia to Iberia?) and on Oct 11 David Thelwell saw two in the New Forest (at Leaden Hall near Godshill). Also on Oct 9 and 10 there were two reports from the IoW and one of a female landing in a hedge at the Testwood Lakes near Southampton.
30. Fieldfare: A total of 981 were seen flying over Hastings (from the continent) by Andrew Grace on the morning of Oct 10 when 345 flew in over St Catherine's Point on the IoW. Seven other reports of smaller numbers have come from all along the south coast in the period Oct 8 to 11.
31. Song Thrush: With the waves of other thrushes arriving on Oct 10 Andrew Grace noted 59 Song Thrushes over Hastings and Kris Gillam had at least 32 arriving on the Isle of Wight.
32. Redwing: Among 17 reports reaching me for the period Oct 8 to 13 two stand out (both on Oct 10) - Andrew Grace had 2107 over Hastings and Ian Pibworth had 866 going north over the Testwood Lakes at Southampton.
33. Firecrest: Nine reports for the period Oct 6 to 11 with a group of four birds seen together on the IoW being the most numerous
34. Siskin: A flock of 25 feeding in Alders at Testwood Lakes near Southampton on Oct 10 is the first news of a winter flock in Hampshire
35. Finches: Linnets remain numerous with a flock of 500 on the IoW on Oct 10 and around 250 at the Barton on sea golf course on that day though a count of 1060 Goldfinch passing over the Isle of Wight in less than three hours on Oct 5 is reminiscent of the huge passage seen last autumn. Both Chaffinch and Greenfinch remain scarce.
36. Corn Bunting: The flock at Rye Harbour had increased to 33 birds on Oct 9 - it will be interesting to see if the winter flock here gets anywhere near the peak of 82 recorded there in January of this year. (No reports from anywhere else since Aug 15 this year, and only four counts in double figures from anywhere in Hampshire or Sussex this year - 40 on the downs north of Brighton on Jan 25, 36 roosting on Thorney Island on Feb 10, 50 on the downs east of the Adur valley on April 4 and 11 in the Hambledon area on July 6)

PLANTS

1. Perennial Wall-rocket: Two large 'bushes' in flower on Oct 10 in disturbed ground where factories are being built north of the Langstone South Moors (very close to the footpath continuing Penner Road towards the Langbrook Stream)
2. Cow Parsley: In view of the find of Upright Hedge Parsley being found in flower on Oct 2 I have just rechecked the flowering Cow Parsley which I found at Nore Barn (Emsworth) on Oct 3 and see that I did identify it correctly (bracteoles but no bracts, hollow stem etc)

INSECTS

1. Common Darter: Five reports of them in widely separated locations on Oct 10 shows that they remain common (I saw a pair in tandem on that day and on Oct 7 Brian Fellows saw 9 different pairs in tandem at Emsworth's Brook Meadow)
2. Clouded Yellow: Singles seen on the coast near Brighton on Oct 9 and again on the coast at Barton on sea on Oct 10 - possibly attempting return migration?
3. Brimstone: One fresh specimen seen at Hook in north Hampshire on Oct 10
4. Red Admiral: Four reports on Oct 10 and one on Oct 11
5. Comma: One report for Oct 11
6. Speckled Wood: Inevitably these were still being seen up to Oct 11
7. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: One caught by a cat in Kent on Oct 9 and two reports from the Scillies on Oct 7 and 10
8. Death's Head Hawkmoth: Yet another report of a caterpillar found recently in Devon
9. Fox Moth: The 'woolly bear' caterpillars of this moth are a common sight in the autumn as they go walkabout in search of somewhere to hibernate and I was asked to identify one captured on Hayling Beachlands this week
10. Hornets: Following my previous reports of seeing them everywhere in Stansted Forest on Oct 7 and watching another two at Langstone (far from any known nests) on Oct 10 I see that Peter Vaughan also noticed many flying in north Hampshire (at Bartley Heath near Hook) on Oct 10.

OTHER WILDLIFE

1. Natterer's Bat: An email reaching me from Tony Wilson on Oct 9 told me "Rather old news but I had two medium sized bats flying around my garden in Hove at dusk on 29th Sept - by a process of elimination I identified them as Natterer's Bats. I've only ever seen Pipistrelles here before". For those who like myself know little about bats and who think any smallish bats flying in their gardens are Pips it might be worth making a mental note that Natterer's are common throughout the British Isles (other than extreme north Scotland) and fly slowly at rooftop height soon after sunset. If the light is good enough you can pick them out by the white colour of the underside (juveniles are greyish brown all over) and by their habit of flying more slowly than a Pipistrelles and with their tails often curved down (presumably as a net to catch small insects?). With a wingspan of 28 cm they will look bigger than Pipistrelles (22 cm) but much smaller than Noctule or Serotine (both have a wingspan of 36 cm and fly much higher and faster). There should be no confusion with the other common species (Brown Long-eared - wingspan 25 cm) as that flies very slowly, sometimes hovering, around trees and bushes from which it picks insects when they are resting, but there could be confusion with Whiskered Bat (24 cm wingspan) which also flies fairly slowly around buildings or trees.

A walk to the Warblington shore

Out in the garden before breakfast there was more evidence of passerine migration with three different species passing over - the only one whose identity I was certain of was House Martin. One of the other two was probably more Redwing to judge from their size and speed

though they were silent in the two seconds that it took them to cross my sector of the sky very low down, of the other I can only say that they were probably finches - one of several parties heading east low and fast did give some calls which I did not recognize as coming from Siskin, Redpoll, Linnet or any of the bigger finches.

After breakfast I set off along the path which once connected Havant church to Warblington church but which now has to make its way between many houses and over the A27. Before getting to this main road I had Ox-eye Daisy, Musk Mallow, Large-flowered Evening Primrose and Pellitory of the Wall on my flower list with more Greater Periwinkle that is now starting to flower everywhere, and from the bridge over the A27 I could see at least 8 Egrets in the grass field next to Warblington farmhouse (when I passed that field later there were 13 Egrets in it - admittedly the tide was high but these birds were feeding actively, not just roosting, and mark the start of winter inland feeding in cattle and pony fields as the Egrets foresake the cold wet and windy harbours).

Nearing the sea as I went down Pook Lane I could hear Greenshank calling before I could see any water, and when I did reach the shore I could see some 300 Bar-tailed Godwit roosting on the Northney Saltings and a total of around 30 Brent Geese, some on the Langstone shore, others flying along the North Hayling shore. A single Wheatear was on the seawall south of Warblington church and at least 6 Cormorant were scattered around on posts and mud banks. A couple of Swallows flew low over the water, and after climbing the seawall to take the field path to Warblington cemetery I found myself surrounded by at least 150 House Martins that were criss-crossing the field around, below and above the grazing cattle (presumably the birds were feeding on small flies that I could not see).

In the cemetery Field Forget-me-not was still flowering with Creeping Cinquefoil and Thyme Leaved Speedwell (plus the brightly coloured Slender Vervain - *Verbena rigida* - which has established itself here in an area of old graves). Moving on to the Churchyard a small flock of Chaffinch were around one of the old Yew trees and seemed to be eating the mass of red arils (last year I found my first Fieldfare here also enjoying these sweet seed covering). Heading back home I was a bit surprised to find a patch of Stone Parsley still flowering by the roadside.

Going back to the Yew arils I learnt something from Alan Titchmarsh's Natural History of the British Isles which I had not appreciated before - that the Yew Aril was a great evolutionary leap in plant fruiting. Previously the conifers had relied on their bare seeds falling to the ground or being blown by the wind to spread their species in a time when there was little competition for living room among the few plant species. As Britain warmed up and more plants appeared and the device adopted by the Yew for getting its seeds widely distributed for free (i.e. putting a highly coloured and very sweet coating around the seed so that birds would flock to pick the arils, eat the sweet covering, and then carry the hard and poisonous seed inside their digestive system far from the tree which produced it before 'planting' it together with the package of first class fertiliser that is a bird dropping) was an immense success.

Tue 12 Oct

A. A summons to Hayling Island

Today's rain and wind kept me indoors during the morning but after lunch the phone rang with a call from the Havant Borough Beachlands office on Hayling Island asking for help in identifying a caterpillar one of their outdoor staff had found. From the description given over the phone of a large brown hairy caterpillar I suggested it was a Fox Moth but, with nothing else to do while the weather remained miserable, I volunteered to drive down to check out the beast.

As I had guessed Fox Moth was a close fit and maybe the journey was worth while as I learnt from my Caterpillar book that I was wrong in suggesting that the reason the caterpillar had been found was that it would have been en route from its food plant (where it would probably not have been noticed) and on its dangerous journey in search of somewhere to pupate (during which they are often spotted crossing roads or other places where they have no cover

and their camouflage is totally ineffective). In fact I see that the caterpillars of this moth are amongst those which overwinter as a larva, emerge briefly in March or April before pupating to emerge as a moth in May, so I should have said it was going walkabout in search of a hibernation site!

My book (the Collins Field Guide to Caterpillars) does not say where they hibernate but it does say that they pupate above ground, making a silk cocoon (mixed with the body hairs of the caterpillar) low down in the food plant (heather, bramble or the like).

One other question that I was asked was whether the hairs of the beast would cause a rash if it was handled, and my answer was that I had never heard of anyone suffering from this particular creature (unlike the dreaded Browntail moth), but the books say that it can be an irritant. (I hope the person who found it and who picked it up in his bare hand does not add to my council tax bill by suing the council for injury damages).

Mon 11 Oct

A. Garden birds

With many reports of departing summer and arriving winter migrants over the past weekend I was not surprised to see Swallows heading east overhead this morning, nor to see my first single Redwing - alerted by its thin whistle I looked up to see this small thrush coming from the east and then, without apparently slowing its high speed, make a steep diving turn to disappear into the treetops across the Billy Line from my back garden. With my luck being in I soon spotted a Lesser Blackback gull among the others streaming inland to feed in farmland, and a little later, as I was standing quietly in the garden next to the trees in which I have a nut feeder, I suddenly found myself in the centre of a Tit flock landing in these trees with many Long-tailed Tits passing within a few feet of my head on either side.

Later in the morning, working indoors, I suddenly heard a loud crashing of glass and rushed downstairs to find that a whole pane of window glass (48x80 cm) had shattered and the pieces were strewn all over the room - some having been hurled a good 3 metres by the impact. I expected to find some evidence of what caused this major impact but we never found anything to account for it. That ruled out a stone, a football, and gunshot (we searched everywhere for bullet marks or an airgun pellet) and left us a choice of 'act of god' or bird impact. I suppose it must have been the latter but there was no injured bird or even a feather to be found (and with the glass coming right into the room I would have thought the bird would also have ended up indoors).

Wildlife diary and news for Oct 4 - 10 (Week 41)

Sun 10 Oct

A. South Moors, Budds Farm and Langstone Village

Low cloud, a little drizzle, and a fresh east wind seemed likely to get worse as I set off on what was likely to be a brief morning walk but the sun then came out and I was not back at home until close on four hours later after a pleasant walk.

In Juniper Square the Small Flowered Cranesbill once again had a few flowers and for the first time this winter three Egrets were back on the Bosmere School playing fields right outside the school building. Passing the old IBM site Green Field Speedwell was flowering beside the Langbrook stream and as soon as I was south of the site approach road I began to hear the calls of Chiffchaff (which turned to full song later in the morning when I reached Mill Lane).

Coming to the first stile into the South Moors area I did not climb it but turned right towards the Autoliv factory over which some 20 House Martins were actively feeding, and as I did so I realised that the metal frame of yet another industrial building was being erected at the

extreme east end of the new development site. This encouraged me to walk further to the footpath which connects with the new Penner Road serving the new factories and by doing so discovered two large clumps of Perennial Wallrocket flowering just within the metal barriers around the construction site - I suppose they have a chance of surviving when the building work is complete but only if the owners of the new development do not get fancy ideas about beautifying their surroundings with landscaping!

Back on the path south beside the stream I came out onto the South Moors and realised that there were a lot more than 20 House Martins in the air - maybe 80, maybe 100 - and they remained in sight for an hour or more as I pottered over to Budds Farm and then back along the South Moors shore. Interestingly I only saw one Swallow during the whole morning.

On the Budds Farm pools the single male Pochard was still visible but the Fudge Duck (see yesterday's notes) was not though the strong north east wind was forcing all the wildfowl to stay in the lee of the west facing banks where a lot became hidden in the overhanging vegetation. By now the sun was quite warm and a single female Migrant Hawker gave me close views as it chose a place to rest within the shelter of a bramble bush where it was still in sunlight but out of the wind.

Heading back east around the seaward side at the base of Budds Mound there was nothing to see on the wind lashed harbour at high tide but as I crossed the broken tarmac at the seaward end of Southmoor Lane I found several *Agaricus bitorquis* mushrooms pushing up through the muddy, stony ground to get trapped under the mesh of Knotgrass stems - typical of the really dry, dirty and dusty places where this large and edible mushroom grows.

Other than the ever present House Martins and a few Skylark passing overhead the only bird seen along the South Moors shore was a single Rock Pipit but at the mouth of the Langbrook stream two Brent were on the sea. I assumed these were a couple of the summering birds that were still being excluded from the flocks of returning migrants on grounds of being lazy cowards who had 'chickened out' of the arduous migration journey, but when I got round to the north pier of the old railway and looked back to the mouth of the Langbrook I could see there were ten Brent and seven Wigeon on the water. The Wigeon were there earlier in the week but the Brent were notable as my first migrants brave enough to return close to the north shore (albeit probably driven there to escape the strong wind beating the open surface of the harbour where they would otherwise have been).

On the north pier I was surprised to see a Grasshopper still in business but the only other note here was of another Rock Pipit. Earlier, while passing the West Mill, I stopped to look at the insects on the flowering Ivy - mainly Honey Bees and Common Wasps but with them was a fresh Red Admiral. Crossing the main road to the Ship Inn I found another 7 Brent out of the water close to the busy pub carpark but the wind was too strong to see much of the many other waders sitting out the high tide on the saltings - there were lots of Bar-tailed Godwit and fewer Black-tailed with many Redshank and a few Dunlin already feeding at the waters edge. Surprisingly I did not see a single Lapwing though I did find five Herons and two Egrets on the saltings off the mill pond with plenty of Teal on the small amount of mud just starting to be exposed.

I stopped to chat with Nik Knight over the gate of the Old Farmhouse (opposite Wade Court) and while doing so we saw a Large White, a pair of Common Darter in tandem, and two separate Hornets that were probably making the most of their autumn 'death leave' to fly far from the nest where they had been labouring through the summer. Nik told me that the large number of House Martins had been around yesterday as well as today, presumably pinned down in this area by the strong north east wind.

Many years back, as I was passing through old Bedhampton on a frosty but sunny morning in October, I watched a large flock of House Martins rousing themselves from overnight sleep clinging to the vertical but rough front of the old Squash Club building just south of St Thomas church. The rays of the rising sun were just reaching their roost as I passed and you could almost see them thawing out for a few minutes in the sunshine before taking to the wing

again. I mention this because I was ** recently asked if House Martins (which have been seen in the Wade Court area for a couple of weeks now) were resident there, nesting on the building. The answer to that is, as far as I know, negative but I am reminded that the birds currently in the area could be using the walls of this large isolated building as a night roost (though I can also remember in the past once seeing a smaller group rousing themselves on an autumn morning from the sloping tiled roofs of houses in Langstone High Street).

B. Undigested news received this evening

BIRDS

1. Wigeon: Flock of 161 at Hook/Warsash on Oct 8
2. Red-breasted Merganser: 25 past Selsey Bill on Oct 9
3. Brent: First flock of over 100 was one of 115 birds off Ryde on Oct 10
4. Marsh Harrier: A female flew north from Titchfield Haven on Oct 10 (seems to have been the first sighting there since Sep 8)
5. Little Stint: Two seen at the Kench (south side of Langstone Harbour) on Oct 10
6. Wood Sandpiper: A juvenile was briefly at Normandy Marsh (Lymington) on Oct 9
7. Little Tern: 3 seen off Rye Harbour on Oct 6
8. Razorbill: One on the sea off south Hayling on Oct 10
9. Short-eared Owl: One flew west along the Solent shore past Gilkicker Point on Oct 10
10. Kingfisher: At Langstone on Oct 8 George Spraggs noted three separate birds heard and seen in quick succession.
11. House Martin: More than 500 at West Wittering on Oct 9 and 600 to 700 over Brighton that morning. More than 200 were in the Gilkicker area of Gosport on both Oct 9 and 10
12. Fieldfare: 30 flying west over Brighton on Oct 8 and one flying north over Brighton on Oct 9. Also total of 34 over West High Down on IoW on Oct 9
13. Redwing: One flying north over Brighton on Oct 9 and a small flock on the downs near Storrington (east of R Arun) on same day. More than 82 over West High Down (IoW) on Oct 9 and another 57 over Shedfield near Wickham in the Meon valley that day. On Oct 10 up to 40 in the Itchen valley near Bishopstoke.
14. Ring Ouzel: One at West High Down (IoW) on Oct 9
15. Siskin: A single migrant flew over Titchfield Haven on Oct 1
16. Redpoll: One flying north over Brighton on Oct 9 (One had been seen at Titchfield Haven on Oct 1)
17. Yellow-browed Warbler: One at Beachy Head on Oct 9
18. Black Redstart: Two (maybe three) near the Needles (IoW) on Oct 9
19. Linnet: Flock of 300+ in the Chilling area (between Warsash and Titchfield) on Oct 8

INSECTS

1. Clouded Yellow: One at Peacehaven (east of Brighton) on Oct 9
2. Small Copper: Following Mike Duffy's find of more than 40 at Stockbridge Down on Oct 6 comes news of 43 on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Oct 4
3. Moths: New for the year at Pig Bush in New Forest on night of Oct 9 were Flounced Chestnut and *Emmelina monodactyla* (a Plume Moth?). Also new for the year was Ling Pug of which 3 caterpillars were collected.
4. Also new for the year at Sherborne St John near Basingstoke on Oct 7 were The Brick, Yellow-line Quaker and Green-brindled Crescent

5. In the Scillies the first Red Sword-Grass moth of the year arrived on Oct 7
6. A huge moth found in a Winchester garden on Oct 8 was an escaped Argentinian Silk Moth species said to be easy to breed in this country.
7. Minotuar Beetle: I think these can be found in sandy heath all year round but one was noted at Pig Bush in the New Forest on the evening of Oct 9

Sat 9 Oct

A. News and reports reaching me up to Oct 8

BIRDS

1. Brent Goose: Still no reports of a major arrival but Peter Bateup has just reported an early sighting of 16 flying past Rustington (Worthing area) on Sep 14 (the day on which the first substantial flock of 66 were seen at Rye Harbour). On Oct 1 another group of 15 were resting on the sea off Rustington.
2. Ferruginous Duck hybrid: Jason Crook has now confirmed the identity of the bird on Budds Farm Pools as being the long term regular winter visitor to Langstone Harbour. Jason saw it (and the single male Pochard) on the pools on Oct 4, the same day that I saw the two birds there. This so called 'Fudge Duck' was first seen at Farlington Marshes in Nov 1999 when it was still in its first year, so it is now five years old and has spent each of those five past winters in the north of Langstone Harbour. As it is deemed to be a Ferruginous x Pochard hybrid I wonder if the male Pochard that arrived back at the Budds Farm pools on the same day could be its father still keeping an eye on it???
3. Golden Plover: At Newtown Harbour on the IoW a flock of around 220 put in a first appearance on Oct 7 and 16 were seen in Gosport on that same day - presumably these are new arrivals, and not the birds which have been on Thorney Island for well over a month, but none have been seen on the Langstone shore so far.
4. AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER: Also on Oct 7 there was a Birdguides report of one of these in the Sway area near New Milton - perhaps that too was part of an influx of British birds?
5. Green Sandpiper: Of local interest only Aldsworth Pond (south of Stansted Forest) has dried up since I was last there in mid August but on Oct 7 I flushed a Green Sandpiper from a tiny remaining pool in a depression in the bed of the pond.
6. Arctic Skua: Last autumn a long staying Arctic Skua was a regular sight over Farlington Marshes and the Broom Channel which runs along the west side of the reserve and on Oct 5 this year Jason Crook saw a dark juvenile Arctic Skua in the southern half of Langstone Harbour and wonders if it too will stay in the harbour.
7. Great Skua (Bonxie): On Oct 6 Jason Crook had the extremely unusual sight of one of these flying north up Langstone Channel (in Langstone Harbour) past his view point at the Oysterbeds to the South Moors where it circled briefly before continuing north overland.
8. Sandwich Tern: On Oct 8 I watched one fly east over Langstone Bridge and this bird may well stay for the winter - last year I noted 25 reports of Sandwich Tern later than Oct 8 with birds being regularly seen in December on both Langstone and Chichester Harbours with further regular sightings in Jan and Feb of this year.
9. Common Tern: A flock of more than 25 in the Solent off Gosport on Oct 7 are much less likely to stay beyond the end of October.
10. Pied Wagtail: No reports of large night roosts have yet reached me from places like Basingstoke Town Centre or Southampton airport but each night for the past week or so I have noticed small evening flights going over my part of Havant heading towards Budds Farm (or perhaps the now deserted Texaco garage on Park Road South in Havant - if passing the bushes around the old car wash area at dusk it may be worth a look for birds

settling there)

11. YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER: Oct 7 brought two reports of these birds - one was feeding with Chiffchaffs near Cissbury Ring on the downs north of Worthing and the other was reported from the West High Down near the Needles on the IoW.
12. Bearded Tit: In my notes for Oct 2 I mentioned new arrivals of these birds at Farlington Marshes and now a second report of their long distance autumn movements comes from Peter Raby who found a male and female in reeds around the lake at Fort Gilkicker in Gosport on Oct 7
13. Jay: In my notes for Oct 6 I reported large scale movement of Jays taking place on the continent but when I was in Stansted Forest on Oct 7, although I heard Jays in half a dozen places, I could see nothing to suggest that any were moving through there. However a note of more than 5 being seen in the Gilkicker area on the Solent shore, also on Oct 7, does suggest that some are on the move as I do not think any are normally seen there.
14. Raven: A report of three at Castle Hill just east of Brighton on Oct 7 is the first from that area since one was seen there on Mar 17 this year.
15. Chaffinch: A dispersed flock of perhaps 20 in Stansted Forest on Oct 7 was my first sighting of more than two or three this autumn.
16. Goldfinch: Much less surprising than the Chaffinches was a flock of more the 50 Goldfinch in the Stansted Forest larch trees on Oct 7 - both Martin Hampton and John Simons have remarked on large numbers there since Sep 26

PLANTS

1. Common Dog Violet: Rosemary Webb found some in flower in the Main Avenue at Stansted Forest on Oct 8
2. Hedgerow Cranesbill: On Oct 8 great display of these was flowering in and around the small carpark for the North Common open space at Northney on Hayling Island.
3. Cowslip: A single freshly flowering plant was in roadside grass at the southern end of the Forestside Church frontage on Oct 7
4. Pink Water Speedwell: I have seen plenty of the blue flowered hybrid Water Speedwell this year but a single plant of Pink growing on the dried up bottom of Aldsworth Pond on Oct 7 was my first for the year.
5. Guernsey Fleabane: In recent years this has become abundant along the coast in the Havant area but a cluster of plants on the north west edge of Stansted Forest (near the path to Warren Down) was unexpected and may be part of a movement inland. Seen on Oct 7
6. Greater Knapweed: Black Knapweed is still commonly in flower but flowers on Greater Knapweed were a surprise at the Haying Oysterbeds on Oct 8.
7. Orange Hawkweed: Driving back from Stansted Forest on Oct 7 I could not help noticing the bright colour of two of these flowers in grassland outside houses on East Leigh Road (just north of Locks Farm in the Denvilles area)

INSECTS

1. Butterflies: At least seven species still flying this week (Small White, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown)
2. Small Copper: More than 40 were seen by Mike Duffy on Oct 6 at Stockbridge Down, among them an unusual colour form and a couple of extremely small specimens. In 2001 the last sighting was not until Nov 11 though they usually disappear at the end of October.
3. Meadow Brown: At least 2 were seen by Mike Duffy on Stockbridge Down. In recent

years the last sighting has varied between Oct 12 and 27.

4. Moths: A Grey Shoulder-knot taken by Derek Mills at Farnham on Oct 5 was only the second to be reported this year
5. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: Two more new sightings, both on Oct 4, one in a Langstone garden here in Havant, the other in a garden at Bramdean on the A272 near its junction with the A32
6. Hornet: Walking around Stansted Forest on Oct 7 I saw these in ones and twos everywhere - probably on their autumn 'death leave' after finishing their domestic chores for the year and now being free to wander until the frost kills them off.

B. Fungi in Havant Thicket

This morning's outing by the Havant Wildlife Group took them to Havant Thicket in search of fungi and gave them one species which none of them had ever seen before but which turned out to be Pine Fire Fungus (*Rhizina undulata*) which looks like large dollops of dog excreta on the ground where Pine trees have been burnt. The fire concerned was not very recent as bracken had grown up over these fungi but not thickly enough to conceal them.

Another good find, close to the car park, was the first Black Helvella of the season, and other notables on the outing included Hedgehog Fungus (*Hydnum repandum* - not the Hedgehog Puffball), a patch of the highly edible Chantarelle, an uncommon *Clavulinopsis* species and the much commoner (but new for this season) yellow Stagshorn fungus *Calocera viscosa*

Fri 8 Oct

North Common and the Hayling Oysterbeds

This afternoon I cycled via Wade Court and Langstone village over the bridge to Hayling where I visited both North Common and the Oysterbeds before returning.

Passing Langstone Pond on the way out I heard the call of a Med Gull overhead but all I could see as I glanced up was a white gull with a prominent black spot on its head behind the eye. Looking down again I found the mud at low tide crowded with both gulls (around 800, mostly Black-headed) and with waders of which Bar-tails were dominant with at least 200. Crossing the bridge to Hayling I passed under a noisy Sandwich Tern - possibly one that will stay here for the winter.

At the North Common carpark the lovely flowers of Hedgerow Cranesbill were out again and on the common was a new interpretative board put up by Chichester Harbour conservancy. After looking at that I turned left to explore the ground behind the houses at the west end of the common where new paths have been opened up to permit a circuit of the area (previously the area behind the houses was a cul de sac with dense blackthorn enclosing all but one entrance). In this botanically rich area the seed heads of Wood Small Reed waved invitingly and a mass of Pepper Saxifrage had several plants still in flower. As I was leaving a single Small White butterfly flew over and settled to show me its wingtips but the wind was too strong for others to fly.

Moving to the east end of the common I found a sizeable flock of Ringed Plover on the shore - at least 25 but maybe 40 (the wind was too strong to pick out the collars on those furthest from me) and while watching these a male Kestrel flew by low over the mud (probably keeping low out of the wind as it did not disturb the waders. Three Swallows also flew over.

At the Oysterbeds I saw single Rock Pipit and Wheatear, plus three Little Grebe on the lagoon and a small flock of what could have been Swallows or House Martins flying distantly over Stoke village. Along the south bund the White Melilot was still flowering as was the Goat's Rue in the carpark and the Russian Comfrey by the main rail track. Also flowering (on the earth mound by the lagoon) were both Storksbill and Common Centaury, and on my way back to the bridge I was surprised to see Greater Knapweed in flower.

Over on the north pier of the old rail bridge I counted seven Wigeon in the mouth of the

Langbrook stream and found some Sea Lavender still in flower.

[Thu 7 Oct](#)

A. Circuit of Stansted Forest

A perfect autumn morning saw me in the Main Avenue carpark just after 9am and not back there until three hours later after a walk west to the southern end of the Broad Avenue, north up that avenue and then through woodland north of the Rough Avenue and across the grass field to Warren Down. Now heading east past the stables and Forestside Church I continued east and then south down the Rosamund's Hill edge of the woodland before completing my circuit through the Wood Pasture section of the Ladies Walk and the main drive away from Stansted House to the public road and the carpark.

A Jay was the first bird heard on getting out of the car but despite hearing them in perhaps half a dozen places on my walk there was no evidence for a mass invasion from the continent (see yesterday's entry re a massive passage of Jays through the Netherlands). Also while still in the carpark I heard a Crow utter its strident 'motor horn' call - said by some to be its song. Not much song from other birds except the Robins and Wrens but I did hear Great, Blue and Coal Tit.

Heading along the 'ornamental drive' parallel to the main avenue I came on a small flock of Chaffinches (perhaps 20 at most) but did not find them elsewhere. Going up the Broad Avenue I came on a much larger flock of Goldfinch (at least 50) in Larches and heard Marsh Tit. Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were seen and both Rook and Jackdaw went on the list with a single Skylark passing over and an unseen party of Long-tailed Tits shaking their football rattles but there were none of the Siskins, Redpolls and Crossbills that will hopefully turn up in the Forest before the winter is out.

****Going up the Broad Avenue Parasol Mushrooms were scattered freely along its length, with one cluster of Horse Mushrooms and a single Fly Agaric.** By now I had over 20 flowering plants on my list including Eyebright, Lesser Stitchwort and Wood Sage (some remarkably fresh). At the top of the Broad Avenue I found a little of the Ling Heather still flowering in the Rough Avenue and on the northern edge of the woodland I was quite surprised to find Guernsey Fleabane a fair distance from the coast where it has become very common in recent years. On Warren Down Wild Basil was flowering in profusion as was some Marjoram, but the big surprise came when I had passed the stables and reached the Forestside road. Turning north along the road I was passing the house entrance immediately south of the church frontage when I diverted to check some Green Alkanet flowering just outside the garden gate and as I returned to the road over the roadside grass I almost trod on a single small but freshly flowering Cowslip.

In the eastern half of the forest I noticed individual Hornets flying among the trees (I had already seen at least three beside the Broad Avenue) and with the day becoming warmer I began to see more and more of them (a count of at least twenty by the time I got back to the car). Also in the warmth on the east side of the Forest I came on both Common Darter and a single Comma nectaring on Ragwort near where Common Centaury was still flowering.

On my way home I diverted to look at Aldsworth Pond which I had last seen full of water on Aug 19. It normally dries out in the late summer and does not refill until perhaps February but with the heavy rain we have had recently I thought it would still be wet. When I got there it was dry as a squeezed sponge and the bottom was firm enough to allow me to walk all round it to check the plants that are normally growing in at least a couple of feet of water. The great mass was of course Water Mint but the Mare's Tail plants were still standing rigid and around them leaves of what I assume ****** was the aquatic form of Amphibious Bistort were abundant - the dry land form of this plant has rigid stems, though not always erect, but these plants obviously relied on the water to float their leaves on the surface, and now that the support had been taken away they trailed limply on the ground.

One plant of interest to me was Pink Water Speedwell (with just two flowers left showing the

colour!) - there is plenty of hybrid Water Speedwell with blue flowers in the Havant area but this is the first Pink species I have seen this year. The other item of interest was a single Green Sandpiper which I disturbed from one of two tiny remaining pools of water in depressions in the pond bed (the other pool had a Heron).

Wed 6 Oct

A. New and reports reaching me yesterday

(Including some items for Oct 7 and others put out earlier as 'undigested news')

BIRDS

1. Little Grebe: Birds maybe now starting to form winter flocks at the coast and some inland waters with a count of 23 at Rye Harbour on Oct 5 (and 23 at Eversley in north Hampshire on Sep 12. Last year the main arrival at the coast seems to have been in early Nov but there were 48 in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 11 and 36 at Blashford Lakes on Sep 28
2. Great Crested Grebe: These are also probably moving to winter quarters. 20 were on the Ivy Lake complex at Chichester on Oct 2 and more than 50 in the Bridge Lake area of Langstone Harbour on Oct 3
3. Black-necked Grebe: We have already reported a juvenile arriving in the Solent on Sep 9 and two in Langstone Harbour on Sep 25 and now another has arrived at Arlington Reservoir in East Sussex on Oct 2
4. SOOTY SHEARWATER: One has twice been seen off Hayling Bay (near the Horse Sand Fort) by George Spraggs on Oct 3 and 5, George gave a good description of his first sighting and although this species is rare on the Hampshire shore Owen Mitchell has already recorded three sightings from Selsey Bill this autumn (two on Sep 14 and singles on both Sep 20 and 23)
5. Gannet: A count of 420 seen by Jim Weston in a four hour watch from Selsey Bill on the morning of Oct 4 was the highest count I have seen this year but will no doubt be easily exceeded when autumn passage sea-watching day counts have been co-ordinated - in 2002 the autumn peak day count at Selsey was 1025 going west on Oct 13 (though that was noted as exceptional)
6. Shag: One seen in the Hurst Castle area by Mike Rafter on Oct 5 was the first Shag that I have heard of in the Lymington area since January and only the second Hampshire record for this autumn.
7. Great White Egret: the bird which turned up at Rye Harbour on Sep 26 is still there, last seen on Oct 4
8. Brent Goose: I had my first (very distant) sighting of an estimated 30 in the extreme south east of Langstone Harbour when looking from Budds Mound on the north shore at high tide on Oct 4 and counts of 50 were made in the Ryde Sands area on both Oct 3 and 4.
9. Shelduck: On Oct 3 I found 13 adults on the Chichester Harbour mud off Warblington (plus the two juveniles I had seen there during the summer keeping well apart in the Nore Barn area). These were almost certainly in addition to a group of 14 seen by myself on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour (to which I think they returned around Sep 19 when I saw 9 in the Oysterbeds).
10. Wigeon: On Oct 3 an estimated 150 were at Pulborough Brooks and that day brought my first to the mouth of the Langbrook Stream west of Langstone, and also the first to Hythe on Southampton Water, seen by Colin Allen
11. Gadwall: Still in short supply in our area. On Oct 2 Brian Fellows found just five in the Ivy Lake complex at Chichester (where he could only see 1 on Sep 28)
12. Teal: On Oct 4 I saw the first one with a complete green 'eye stripe' (on Langstone Pond) and on Oct 5 an estimated count of 500 were at Pulborough Brooks.

13. Pochard: A male was back on the Budds Farm pools on Oct 4 when I was there and Mike Collins saw one again on Oct 5.
14. Ferruginous Duck hybrid?: On Oct 4 I had a clear close look at a single bird sleeping in the south west corner of the Budds Farm Pools (a corner favoured by the so called 'Dodgy Fudge Duck' in past years) but I could see no distinguishing features - in particular, although it never turned tail on to me, I could see no hint of under tail white from a side view. The only point indicating it was not a Tufted Duck was the complete absence of a tuft on its head. On Oct 5 Mike Collins saw what was probably the same bird but in failing light in the evening - he suggests that it was the returning Fudge Duck but was by no means confident. If it is the hybrid it presumably has some way to go in its moult before we can be sure of its id...
15. Red Breasted Merganser: Jim Weston noted the first returning bird passing Selsey Bill on Oct 4 but so far there have been no other reports. (Last year Bob Chapman recorded the first back on Langstone Harbour on Oct 5 but there were no substantial flocks until the last week of Oct)
16. Honey Buzzard: Last year the last regular sighting was on Sep 29 (with one 'probable only' on Oct 16), so one seen gliding over the Chichester to Bognor Road and heading for Pagham Harbour on Oct 3 this year may have been the last for the year
17. Osprey: One still at Brading Marshes, IoW, on Oct 2 must be one of the last for this year (last year the last was seen on Oct 5)
18. Merlin: One was seen by John Simons in the Finchdean area on Oct 4 harrying large flocks of Linnet and Meadow Pipit
19. Hobby: Singles seen at Hurst Castle and Pulborough Brooks on Oct 5 may be the last of the year - last year just two were seen on later dates (Oct 10 and 14)
20. Harris Hawk: a tame bird with jesses was seen by John Simons perching in a Beech tree in the Dean Lane End (Finchdean) area north of Rowlands Castle on both Oct 2 and 3
21. Avocet: the winter flock at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour numbered around 200 birds when Ian Watts visited to see the Western Sandpiper on the weekend of Oct 2,3.
22. Golden Plover: 79 were in the Normandy Marsh area at Lymington on Oct 1 and more than 50 were seen in the Hurst Castle area on Oct 5
23. Pectoral Sandpiper: Keith Coward found one at Normandy Marsh, Lymington, on Oct 4 but it does not seem to have been seen by anyone else.
24. Common Sandpiper: One at Budds Farm Pools seen by myself on Oct 4 seems to have been the only sighting there this autumn other than one on Sep 16 seen by George Spraggs.
25. Arctic Skua: Two passing Selsey Bill on Oct 4 seen by Jim Weston
26. Great Skua: One in the Hurst Narrows seen by Mike Rafter on Oct 5 (only the second Hampshire Bonxie this autumn after one in the Lepe Beach area on Aug 17).
27. Little Gull: One immature seen (with a couple of Kittiwake) by Jim Weston passing Selsey Bill on Oct 4
28. Roseate Tern: One seen by Ian Calderwood fishing with Common Terns in the Solent off Gilkicker Point (Gosport) on Oct 3
29. Black Tern: Two at Ivy Lake, Chichester, seen by Brian Fellows on Oct 2
30. Razorbill: Auks are becoming fairly frequent along the south coast now but Hampshire so far has only three sightings of Razorbills - one flying west past Titchfield Haven on Sep 18 and two at Hurst on both Sep 21 and Oct 5
31. Wryneck: One seen well by Simon Curson at the Pagham North Walls on Oct 5 and late

news of one (ringed?) at Beachy Head on Sep 30.

32. Dunnock: Song heard by Brian Fellows at Ivy Lake, Chichester on Oct 2
33. Whinchat and Stonechat: I have seen no reports of Whinchat since Oct 1 but I have six reports of Stonechat in winter quarters on Oct 3 and 4
34. Wheatear: These are still passing through. I had one on the Langstone South Moors shore on Oct 4 and there were 4 at Hurst Castle on Oct 5 with another on Culver Down (IoW) that day.
35. Ring Ouzel: One was at Beachy Head on both Sep 30 and Oct 1 and another was on West High Down (IoW) on Oct 2
36. Song Thrush: I heard partial song from two different birds at the Staunton Country Park in Havant on Oct 1 (maybe indicating newly arrived migrants)
37. Redwing: After a single bird was heard passing over Winchester by night on Sep 15 there have been two new sightings by day of 9 birds over the Eastleigh Lakeside on Sep 30 and 3 over the Testwood Lakes near Southampton on Oct 3
38. Lesser Whitethroat: A late bird was in the Climping shore area east of Bognor on Oct 3
39. Common Whitethroat: Less unexpected were sightings of this species on Oct 1, 2 and 3 - the latest date recorded last year was also Oct 3
40. Blackcap: 250 were trapped at Beachy Head on Sep 30.
41. Chiffchaff: 100 migrants were trapped at Beachy Head on Oct 1 and 80 on Oct 2
42. Firecrest: Two were at Rye Harbour on Oct 5
43. Jay: I have not yet seen any evidence of an influx into Britain but in the Netherlands totals from some 50 sites monitoring migration indicate a large and increasing movement since Sep 24. The total of birds recorded since then (up to Oct 3) is 8078 and some day totals going to make up this overall figure are Sep 30 = 1186, Oct 1 = 237, Oct 2 = 2118. and Oct 3 = 3169. Thanks to Simon Woolley for this news.
44. Raven: A sighting by Mike Rafter of 2 in the Hurst Castle area on Oct 5 is no surprise but a report from Bob Relph of two on and over the chalk cliffs where the Sussex Ouse cuts through the downs at Lewes is unusual and interesting (one Raven was seen there by Charlie Peverett on Sep 11).
45. Linnet: A flock of 400 had been found on the Sussex downs near Storrington on Sep 19 and another of 190 recorded on the IoW on Sep 28 but numbers seem to have stepped up recently with Oct 4 bringing counts of 460 from the Hambledon area and 200 from Finchdean near Rowlands Castle, then Oct 5 bringing a count of 300 at Rye Harbour and around 50 from the Isle of Wight.
46. Corn Bunting: The flock at Rye Harbour had increased to 29 on Oct 5 (from 18 on Sep 28)
47. Escapes: In addition to the Harris Hawk noted with the raptors above Mike Rafter had a Saker (or similar) over the Hurst Castle area near the Needles on Oct 5

INSECTS

1. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: Thanks to Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website I am aware of at least 33 sightings of this impressive moth this year, the first being a dubious one in June with certainties from July 12 onwards. 22 of the 33 have been seen since Sep 14 when Russell Wynn had one at Pennington, and the number of arrivals seems to have peaked last week with three sightings on Oct 3 (singles in the Scillies, Cornwall and Suffolk) and another on Oct 5 in the Ferring area of Worthing
2. Death's Head Hawkmoth: I have only seen 14 reports of this moth this year but six of them have been of caterpillars so maybe it will not be many years before the species can be

regarded as a British resident (though I read that pupae rarely survive the winter and I have not heard of adults attempting hibernation). The two reports in the current news are of a pupa found by an allotment holder in Wrecclesham (a district of Farnham in Surrey) when digging his potatoes - the finder had dug up the pupa a couple of weeks ago and was expecting a moth to emerge in the near future. The other new find was of a moth, sadly found dead in a shop window in Weymouth.

3. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: 92 records of these in my database for this year starting with one actively flying and feeding in Southampton on Jan 10 - the latest four records are dated Oct 1, 3, 4 and 5 and the locations were Winchester, Bishopstoke (Eastleigh), Langstone village here in Havant, and Four Marks near Alton in East Hampshire.
4. Pearly Underwing: In contrast with the Hawkmoths noted above this migrant moth only seems to have been recorded twice in Hampshire this year - one was found at Portchester below Portsdown on Sep 4 and the second has just been trapped at Sherborne St John north of Basingstoke on Oct 4
5. Red-line Quaker: This moth does not appear on the scene until September and is on the wing until November. The first was taken at Titchfield Haven on Sep 25 and the other two, both in the current news, were both taken by Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John on Sep 30 and Oct 4.
6. Common Wasp: These are still flying in and out of a nest in my garden (hole in the ground), though I rarely see them elsewhere
7. Hornet: I think these have started their autumn holiday (or should that be 'pre-death leave') after completing domestic chores for the year - on Oct 7 I found them in ones and twos everywhere in a three hour walk all round the main woodland of Stansted Forest.

PLANTS

1. Cowslip: A very unexpected find on Oct 7 was of a fresh, flowering plant of Cowslip in roadside grass outside the church at Forestside - if anyone wants to see it go to the southern end of the church's roadside frontage and look close to the road near the entrance to a house called Hookers
2. Pink Water-Speedwell: I have not visited Aldsworth Pond since Aug 19 when it was full of water but when I went there on Oct 7 it was totally dry and I could walk out over the bed finding a last flower of this plant (which I have not seen elsewhere this year) as well as seeing the Mare's Tail plants close up, and finding what I assume to be the aquatic form of Amphibious Bistort (neither of these was in flower)
3. Cow Parsley: Although I did not make a detailed examination of the plant to be sure I had the right id I am pretty sure that a full grown plant with many flower umbels which I found in a sheltered spot in the Nore Barn woodland on the shore west of Emsworth on Oct 3 was this species (which regularly produces winter flowering plants)
4. Upright Hedge Parsley: A plant which the Havant Wildlife Group found on Oct 2 at the Chichester Ivy Lake complex was carefully examined by Brian Fellows and pronounced to be Upright Hedge Parsley (a species which I think very rarely has a second flowering)
5. Hemlock: I have already mentioned that on Sep 28 I found at least two examples of fresh flowering plants of this species at Broadmarsh on the shore of Langstone Harbour.
6. Lesser Skullcap: See my notes for my walk around the Staunton Country Park on Oct 1 during which I found Lesser Skullcap flowering in Havant Thicket (a 'a dry ground' form of the plant looking unlike the plants I have previously found in wet and shady areas)
7. Hoary Ragwort: Until very recently I had assumed that Hoary Ragwort succeeded Common Ragwort in midsummer and had regarded any late summer plants that were not Oxford or Marsh Ragwort as being Hoary. I now realise that **** Common Ragwort is still widespread in late summer and often has a fair amount of matted hair under its leaves and**

on its stems, and I have discovered that a better test for the species is the length of the outer phyllaries (phyllaries are the green strips which form the cup shaped 'involucre' below the actual flower - the inner phyllaries form the 'cup' but a few extra outer phyllaries grow outside them, usually not reaching the top of the cup). With Hoary Ragwort the few outer phyllaries are only just long enough to reach above the base of the cup, with Common Ragwort they always grow to a length that takes them at least half way up the outside of the cup and often right to the top.

8. Sneezewort: On Oct 1 a few plants of this were still flowering in the ditch beside the track going south from the main east west track across the Gipsies Plain fields (immediately south of Havant Thicket). This north south track has a permanently closed gate at its southern end (close to the entrance to Hammond's Land Coppice) but it is well worth climbing over it to enjoy an excellent display of Common Spotted Orchids in the spring and other plants during the rest of the year - currently lots of Devils Bit Scabious.
9. Sweet Chestnut: Plenty of empty fruit cases littering the ground in Stansted Forest on Oct 7 - presumably the work of Grey Squirrels.

OTHER WILDLIFE

1. Pipistrelle Bat: It is some time since I have seen one in my garden but one was very active at dusk on Oct 4.
2. Fungi in Stansted Forest on Oct 7:

Parasol Mushrooms were abundant being found along the full length of the Broad Avenue and in a massive cluster immediately inside the southern still giving access to the Ladies Walk 'wood pasture'.

Fly Agaric: My first found on the edge of the Broad Avenue

Horse Mushroom: One cluster of three or four good specimens again on the Broad Avenue.

Mon 4 Oct

A. Budds Farm and Langstone

Walking round Havant today I noticed both Thale Cress and Greater Periwinkle in flower, both of which have been very scarce for some time, but the real interest today came when I visited Budds Farm at high tide in the late afternoon. Looking south over Langstone Harbour from Budds Mound I could just make out thirty or so tiny black dots bobbing on the water in the extreme south east corner of the harbour and am convinced they were Brent Geese. Closer to me I could see hundreds of Oystercatcher roosting on the RSPB islands and on the Oysterbeds where I am pretty sure there were at least a thousand Dunlin. Also on the islands I could see 14 Shelduck, 18 Cormorants and 21 Egrets. Even closer, right at my feet, was a tight cluster of large Weeping Widow toadstools.

On Budds Farm Pools I could be certain of a single male Pochard - the first back here - but less certain of the identity of what looked like a female Tufted Duck sleeping in the south west corner of the pools where in previous winters the famous hybrid Ferruginous Duck (aka Dodgy Fudge Duck). In favour of this being the Fudge Duck was the absence of any hint of a tuft on the birds head, but against it was the equally total absence of any white under the tail of the bird (though it never turned fully stern on to me). Quite a few Shoveler were present and a single Common Sandpiper could be seen at the foot of the concrete wall on the north west side of the pools where the Mallard and Tufted Duck were hauled out.

Passing Langstone Pond on the way home I noticed that one of the Teal had almost completed its moult and was showing its green eye stripe (not yet visible on the others).

Back at home I had a phone call from someone living in Langstone village who had watched a Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding in his garden before shooting up and over the house to carry on its high speed journey.

Finally, in my garden at dusk, I watched a Pipistrelle bat going round and round in search of moths.

Wildlife diary and news for September 27 - October 3 (Week 40)

Sun 03 Oct

Langstone to Emsworth along the shore

With the promise of gales and rain later in the day I cycled down to the old railway pier at Langstone on a dull but almost windless morning to find the tide at its lowest and the mud crowded with waders and gulls - the latter seemed to be taking a Sunday morning lie-in rather than flying inland to feed. Just one Sandwich Tern flew by making a slightly unusual call (explained when I spotted it by the presence of some largish object held in its bill, so speaking with its mouth full).

One of the first things I saw from the rail pierhead was a group of three Wigeon in the mouth of the Langbrook stream - my first of the autumn - while out on the water there were at least 50 Great Crested Grebe within view, no doubt lots more in the harbour as a whole. On the bushes along the pierhead a female Stonechat was flitting about, maybe on an outing from winter quarters on the nearby South Moors, maybe still journeying on to find a winter home that suited her needs.

At Langstone Mill, as I headed east along the shore, the Kingfisher was on its usual fishing post above the Lymbourne stream outfall, and when I got to the Warblington fields east of Pook Lane I found thirteen Shelduck back on the mud (later I saw the two juveniles which have been here during the summer keeping to themselves off Nore Barn). Grey Plover were calling loudly, as did one Greenshank, and the tideline was crowded with Bar-tailed Godwit. At the east end of this stretch, south of Warblington Church, a good dozen smart adult Great Black-back gulls were an imposing sight with one British race Lesser Black-back looking pale and insignificant in comparison.

Climbing the seawall steps I came in view of the fields just as a Fox had come out of a hedge and was making a leisurely dash across the open grass - I don't think it saw me though I was only about 50 metres from it (but to the rear). In the marshy SSSI field to the east one of the calving cattle had a very healthy looking calf, but in the field south of the cemetery, well away from the others, another cow was lying awkwardly and very still - when I got round to the farm I found that the farmer had already gone to check on it.

Continuing east I was surprised to find that the Sweetcorn crop in the shore fields had already been harvested (presumably for animal feed and perhaps as part of a scheme to open these fields to the returning Brent geese). As last year there was a flock of at least 40 Linnet based on these harvested fields and at least 60 of the great Crow flock had moved in. They were no real surprise but as I was watching them I was excited to hear full Skylark song coming from the sky - I saw just one bird flying around and singing some 100 feet up. After this the only birds to go on my list were a single Goldfinch and a small group of seven Lapwing.

Turning to flowers I had one really good find at Nore Barn as I turned inland away from the Lapwing on the shore - this was a single plant of Cow Parsley in full flower. Other flowering plants of some interest were Common Toadflax, Blue Fleabane, Dogwood and Tamarisk, and as I was coming back along the 'twitchel' path from Pook Lane to Wade Lane Pellitory of the Wall was flowering among a mass of leaves of the Shining Cranesbill which I do not expect to flower until next spring.

Undigested news received this evening

BIRDS

1. Sooty Shearwater: At Hayling Bay today (Oct 3) George Spraggs was looking towards the Nab Tower when he saw a Sooty Shearwater - he admits this is the first he has ever seen but gives a good description of it gliding between the wave tops with slightly drooping wings and being an overall dark colour.
2. Roseate Tern: One fishing with Common Terns in the Solent off Gilkicker Point seen by Ian Calderwood on Oct 3. The average last date for this species in Hampshire is given as Sep 9 with the latest ever being on 10 Oct 1999.
3. Black Tern: The Havant Wildlife Group saw two over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Oct 2. In my last bulletin I commented that the last record of this species locally in 2003 was on Sep 16 but I have since seen that the average last date in Sussex is Oct 8 with a latest ever on Nov 21 while the equivalent Hampshire dates are Oct 9 and Nov 15.
4. Ring Ouzel: A third of the autumn on West High Down (loW) on Oct 2
5. Redwing: Simon Ingram at Eastleigh had 9 flying south on Sep 30 (presumably by day). The only prior Hampshire Redwing that I have heard of was the one that flew over Winchester by night on Sep 15
6. Dunnock: One was singing at Ivy Lake at Chichester when the Havant Wildlife Group was there on Oct 2

PLANTS

1. Upright Hedge Parsley: A plant still flowering at the Chichester Lakes found by the Havant Wildlife Group on Oct 2 was determined to be this species after close examination (solid, rough stem with both bracts and bracteoles)
2. Cow Parsley: A plant found by myself flowering at Nore Barn on the Emsworth west shore was thought to be Cow Parsley by myself, though I did not give it a close examination. I will check it out again if possible but it did not have the tall upright look and small umbels of Upright Hedge Parsley,

INSECTS

1. Lesser Common Rustic: One found by Richard Moore at Catherington on the night of Sept 29. A first for the year. This species appears in my moth book published in 1991 but not in my Bradley and Fletcher list for 1979 so I assume it was 'split' from Common Rustic between those years. With the date of the find in mind I see that the flight date for Common Rustic is given as July to September but the Lesser is only supposed to fly in July and August.

FUNGI

Another long and enticing list of finds by Maurice Pugh in the New Forest on Oct 2. Perhaps his best find was *Sprassis laminosa*, a rare relative of the Cauliflower Fungus (*Sprassis crispa*). In total he found five examples on two tree stumps. all in good condition with the largest some 10 inches across. *S. laminosa* does not appear in my fungus id books but is listed by Gordon Dickson in his *Fungi of the New Forest* - he gives only three areas in which he knows of it, and he says it is to be found on the ground under Beech trees though Maurice's specimens were on a dead stumps (species not given).

Sat 02 Oct

A. On the way back from the bottle-bank

I spent today in the house and garden but did make one short expedition to the bottle bank at the end of the road. Rather than come straight back I went around the section of the Hayling Billy Line that runs behind my house and found Common Vetch newly in flower, also Annual Wall Rocket still hanging on. The verges of this old railtrack (now cycleway) had been drastically cut back a month ago and I thought we had lost a nice clump of Field Scabious so

I was pleased to see a fresh and healthy looking clump of basal leaves to show that the plants will regrow.

B. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Bittern: One seen briefly in flight over reeds on east side of Ivy Lake at Chichester - David Potter - Oct 1
2. Previous south coast records this summer were at Rye Harbour on July 31 and at nearby Pannell valley on Sep 5.
3. Great White Egret: In addition to the sighting at Rye Harbour on Sep 26 one was seen again there on Sep 30
4. Greylag Goose: Peak count at Rye Harbour for September was 307
5. Canada Goose: Peak count at Rye Harbour for September was 223. Locally, on Sept 28, Brian Fellows found 184 on Ivy Lake at Chichester with one 'half size' bird of the race 'minima' (aka Cackling Goose)
6. Cackling Canada Goose: The bird noted above at Ivy Lake is probably the one which was at Farlington Marshes from 15 Oct 2003 to Feb 14 this year, being next seen at Lymington Marshes on Apr 4 before flying to Sinah Lake on Hayling for the period July 27 to Aug 1. In 2003 it was in Emsworth Harbour on Sep 8 and at Farlington Marshes.
7. Brent Goose: In addition to reports noted in my previous update new reports have come in of 66 flying over Rye Harbour on Sep 14 and of 19 off the Point at Farlington Marshes seen by Bob Chapman on Sep 25 (the day after Kevin Stouse saw 8 land in Langstone Harbour - they remain the first I know of in Langstone Harbour).
8. We also have a new report from Steve Mansfield of 9 near the mouth of Chichester Harbour (north of Black Point) on Sep 26 (the same day on which Barry Collins saw 13 off Pilsey Island and the day after Barry saw the first two newcomers to the harbour).
9. Other new reports come from Mike Collins (a single off Langstone South Moors on Sep 28 - probably a summer bird), from Bernie Forbes (12 near Stakes Island east of Thorney on Sept 30), Sam Smith (15 more over Rye Harbour also on Sept 30) and one more report for Sep 30 of 12 going west past Hastings. No one has yet seen 100 or more and the latest report is from David Potter at Climping near the mouth of the R Arun with 6 going west on Oct 1.
10. Gadwall: Although John Clark had 70 at the Blashford Lakes in the Avon valley on Sep 12 he says few were there on Sep 26, and on Sep 28 Brian Fellows could only find one on the Chichester Lakes so maybe a wave passed through early in September but they are still relatively scarce in Hampshire.
11. Pochard: These too have still to arrive in any numbers - Bernie Forbes noted just two as the 'first back' on Brooklands Lake at Worthing on Sep 29 but I have not heard of any newcomers to Hampshire.
12. Tufted Duck: These too seem to be scarce at the moment although Brian Fellows found 50 on the Chichester Lakes on Sep 28
13. Osprey: One that arrived at Brading Marshes (IoW) on Sep 12 is apparently still present - one was seen perched in the favoured tree on Sep 28.
14. Dotterel: The bird which has been seen with Golden Plovers at Rye Harbour since Aug 21 was still there on Sep 30
15. Golden Plover: The flock at Rye Harbour numbered 960 on Sep 30 and on that day Bernie Forbes saw 140 over the Thorney Island airfield though I gather that a similar number has been there for some time (unfortunately no dates or counts available)

16. Sanderling: George Spraggs saw more than 50 on the south Hayling shore on Sep 30 and on that day Bernie Forbes had a good number of them on the Pilsey Sands in Chichester Harbour (with a good number of Knot)
17. Little Stint: One was at Farlington Marshes on Sep 29 with six Curlew Sandpiper.
18. Purple Sandpiper: First of the winter on the south coast was at Hastings Harbour on Sep 30.
19. WESTERN SANDPIPER: This is possibly the rarest of the American small waders which occasionally arrive on British shores and so there was much excitement when one was seen at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Sep 30
20. Whimbrel: The Pagham Harbour presumed wintering bird was seen at Church Norton again on Oct 1 by David Potter.
21. Great Skua: After four unusual reports of Bonxies off the south coast in August I only know of one in September. This is noted in Barry Yates September report for Rye Harbour but no date is given.
22. Black Tern: In my last news bulletin I said that two of these off Titchfield Haven on Sep 18 might well be the last of the year but that has been proved wrong by Bernie Forbes (who saw one in the Emsworth Channel area of Chichester Harbour on Sep 30), and by David Potter who was watching one over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Oct 1 when he was distracted by the Bittern mentioned above.
23. Guillemot: The number of Auks along the south coast is rapidly increasing but one worth a mention was a Guillemot seen in Emsworth Harbour by Brian Fellows on Sep 30 as he was on the Emsworth Marina seawall at high tide.
24. Razorbill: Three were close inshore off the Widewater Lagoon at Lancing (east of Worthing) on Sep 29 and two were off Pagham Harbour on Sep 30, both sightings by Bernie Forbes.
25. Tawny Owl: This species is extremely uncommon on Farlington Marshes and one seen by Bob Chapman there on Sep 26 seems to have been related to a Short-eared Owl (though in this case the special race of Short-sighted Owl) as the owl, perched low in a tree, did not seem to notice Bob, nor Bob the owl, until they were within one metre of each other. Both were much surprised by the close encounter!
26. Short-eared Owl: I don't think any have settled down for the winter in our area yet but there was another sighting of one on the Thorney airfield on Sep 30, seen by Bernie Forbes who said it flew off to the south (presumably leaving Thorney Island).
27. Great-spotted Woodpecker: I think several of these may have arrived with other migrants from the continent recently. Two bits of evidence for this come from Kris Gillam on the Isle of Wight who saw one fly in from the sea when he was at Whale Chine near St Catherine's Point on Sep 28, and from Andrew Grace at Hastings who reports finding one in gorse near the sea on Sep 29
28. Hirundines: The size of the Swallow population currently on the move south can be judged not only by the sightings which we have all been having for several weeks but more strikingly from a count made by Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes on Sep 28. At 10:15 in the morning he noticed a large number coming down the Test Valley and started to count those crossing a stretch of the M27. At 10:30 the stream of birds began to dry up but in just 15 minutes he had counted some 7500 Swallows crossing the road, taking no account of others passing over on a broad front but outside his fixed counting strip. Adding in those passing at other times during the day the total passing through a circle of perhaps half a mile radius around his watch point must have exceeded 10,000. With the Swallows were a good number of House Martins but Ian does not report any Sand Martins and at the moment the last of these were seen on Sep 27 when half a dozen went over Sandown on the Isle of Wight.

29. Meadow and Rock Pipits: Meadow Pipit passage seems to have trailed off in the past week but ten reports in the past week of Rock Pipit from widely separated places along the coast from Hastings to Lymington shows that they are now back in winter quarters everywhere.
30. Ring Ouzel: One seen by Steve Keen at Tanners Lane east of Lymington on Sep 29 was only the second to be reported from the coast this autumn - the other was on the Isle of Wight on Sep 16.
31. Goldcrest: Since my last news bulletin showed that many Goldcrest had already arrived for the winter Bernie Forbes has found 30 in the Brooklands area of Worthing on Sep 28 and of half a dozen at Church Norton on Oct 1
32. Bearded Tit: Bob Chapman reports a count of 21 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 29 and concludes that new birds must have flown in to swell the local numbers. Commenting on the distances which these tiny birds manage to cover he reminds us that the UK long distance record is held by a bird which arrived (at some past date) at Farlington wearing a ring which had been put on it in Norway. So far this autumn no one has reported the sight of these birds climbing into the sky above their reed beds before summoning up courage to set out on one of their long trips.
33. Linnet: These are now on the move and Sep 28 brought a report of 190 passing west over the Isle of Wight while Andrew Grace at Hastings noted flocks of these birds going west along the Hastings shore on Sep 29.

INSECTS

1. Painted Lady: On Sep 30 Bob Chapman reported signs of some migrant butterflies moving south again over Farlington Marshes, specifically mentioning Painted Lady, Red Admiral and Large White.
2. Cypress Pug: First of year taken by Tim Norriss when visiting Freshwater on the Isle of Wight
3. Death's Head Hawkmoth: Three more caterpillars found in a garden at Forest Row north of Ashdown Forest on Sep 29
4. Feathered Brindle: This coastal moth was found by Tim Norriss at Freshwater on Sep 25 - the only other one reported this year was at Rye Harbour 'sometime in September'.
5. Red-line Quaker: Another first of year taken at Titchfield Haven on Sep 25
6. Square-spot Dart: The only one reported this year though at the end of its season - taken by Tim Norriss at Freshwater on Sep 25
7. Wood Cricket: One found outside Peter Allen's moth trap at North Gorley in the Avon valley on Sep 29

PLANTS

1. Lesser Skullcap: Found at two locations in Havant Thicket on Oct 1 - see my notes of my visit to the Thicket.

FUNGI

See my notes of my visit to Havant Thicket on Oct 1

ANIMALS

1. Common Seal: One off the Langstone South Moors munching flounders seen by Mike Collins on Sep 28

Fri 01 Oct

A. Staunton Country Park

A notable event in the garden this morning was something that would have passed totally un-noticed when I was young. It was the chup chup call of a Chaffinch passing over, something that I have not heard from the garden since the end of July when a small wave of passage birds moved through the area. In the first half of the year Chaffinch were an almost daily sight and their song could be heard from Jan 25 to July 6 after which these birds (which in my youth were regarded as the commonest of all British birds) vanished except for the passage on July 30.

Today's Chaffinches were presumably newly arrived continental birds, and this was perhaps confirmed when I arrived at the Staunton Country Park carpark off Middle Park Way in Leigh Park before walking from there to Havant Thicket. Getting out of my car in the carpark I twice heard the beginnings of Chaffinch song from the trees, and nearby I heard scraps of Song Thrush song from two different birds and I am pretty sure this out of season song was associated with the birds' travels - maybe a song of thanks at reaching the end of their journey safely, maybe a sort of rallying call to re-unite birds which might have become separated during their overnight journey, maybe just a way of letting off surplus energy left over after completing the trip. Part of the 'evidence' from making this assumption is that I heard the same sort of tentative song from several of the birds passing through on July 30 (when their normal song period had ceased). While on this line of thought I guess that the Dunnocks which I heard singing yesterday may also have been newly arrived continental birds asserting their right to a winter territory here....

Leaving such speculation aside I made one good find before leaving the carpark - a troop of more than 40 Horse Mushrooms and another of some medium sized yellowish capped boletes that I could not identify (not the bright yellow Larch boletes which I found later in Havant Thicket). Also in the grass here was a good specimen of the Yellow Cowpat toadstool (*Bolbitius vitellinus*). Crossing the road into the Leigh Park gardens and lake area I was duly impressed by what I regard as the 'greatest tree' in the Havant area - a magnificent mature oak growing in a space that allows it to extend its lowest branches for twenty metres or so low over and parallel to the ground on each side of its immense bole. Above these lower branches are others equally impressive in size, all forming a complete and perfect dome. To find this magnificent sight turn left immediately you come in through the gates from Middle Park Way and then turn right on the path which follows the fence of the fields with trees and bushes between you and the main gravel drive way. You will see the tree suddenly right ahead of you after the path has followed the fence around the corner of the field and the trees and bushes on your right give way to open grass. To add emphasis to this scene there is a stone grotto just beyond the tree in question, and after you have passed the tree the lake comes into sight.

On the lake today a pair of Swans had just one cygnet with them, and in this area two Mistle Thrushes chased each other noisily through the air with Jay, Long Tailed Tit, Goldcrest and Marsh Tit all present. Starting up the Long Avenue north to Havant Thicket a single Hornet flew past me but the main interest was in the fungi which I will not attempt to list or name in full but which included the common brown Deceiver and the Amethyst Deceiver, several *Russula* species, Tawny Funnel-cap, and the white wavy funnel like Miller. One which impressed me was what I can only describe as a tiny white woolly-foot pin head growing on a nasty black mass of other totally decayed fungus (the tiny white stem and globular cap forming this pin head was perhaps two or three millimetres high!).

Coming to the end of the avenue I watched a Sparrowhawk glide over the Gipsies Plain fields and found Dwarf Gorse flowering brightly in the open gap before entering the gloomy plantation of forestry pine (Corsican?) where the dim floor of pine needles was brightened in several places by troops of Spotted Toughshank fungi and yellow *Gymnopilus hybridus*. On the main track coming west from the Castle Road entrance I found the ditch along the north

side of the track had been scraped clear of clogging vegetation bringing light and fresh plant growth to the edges of the scraped area. Walking alongside this edge of the track I soon saw a single flowering stem of Lesser Skullcap and several flowering Common Centaury plants and while looking at these I could hear more than one Bullfinch in the trees north of me. Further along the ditch I thought I had made a fungal discovery when, among several whitish patches that would probably develop into the same fungal growth, I spotted what I can best describe as a small wrinkled 4 or 5 cm long strip of curly edged pink and white coral. It was in fact a resupinate firmly attached to the root of a pine tree which had been exposed and probably injured when the JCB scraped the ditch. I took a small sample but could not get anywhere with identifying it so later I took it to Rosemary Webb who was equally puzzled but with the aid of her extensive library she came up with the suggestion (based on the strong mushroomy smell, the shape and size of the whitish pores on the underside, and the wrinkly edges of the pale pink many folded upper surface) that it was a very young specimen of *Heterobasidion annosum* (Root Fomes) which afflicts the roots of pine trees (and which would turn browner with age).

A few yards to the west of where I found this fungus I came to the track running north west which marks the Havant Borough boundary (most of Havant Thicket is in East Hampshire) and in the short dead end section of this track south of the main east west track I had been walking I found a troop of very large, stalked puffballs of an overall brown colour which were *Calvatia excipuliformis*. Turning north up this Havant boundary track I found it lined with a mass of blue Devils Bit Scabious, at one point in strong contrast with the bright yellow of Larch Boletes. In the damp edges of this track a couple of tree stumps were covered with Glistening Inkcap and a fallen Willow was covered in Blushing Brackets. Turning east to start my return journey along the track crossing the north end of the 'Nightjar Valley' another fallen tree was ablaze with what I think was a *Stereum* species, and opposite that, in a drier patch, I made my best find of the day - a thick dense cluster (the size of a large dinner plate) of flowering Lesser Skullcap which looked very different from the limp, leafy specimens (with the odd flowers on one in a hundred of the plants) that I am used to finding in a shady damp watercourse elsewhere in the Thicket. These plants were rigidly upright, had small narrow leaves and many flowers arranged in twos in each leaf axil. In checking the description I learnt something which these flowers demonstrated - a small lump on the tip of the upper petal, pointing upwards and backwards (I wonder what evolutionary advantage that gives the plant!).

Coming to the Castle Road entrance I walked briefly west to the south going track which runs past the carpark area. Before turning south I found the ditches of the main track had been scraped clear, erasing the single patch of Sneezewort that I had been aware of within the Thicket - I suspect it will survive and be seen again but if not there is a lot of it in the 'orchid ditch' alongside one of the tracks across the open Gipsies Plain to the south (until that vanishes when the huge new water reservoir planned for that area is dug!). Turning south I checked the mass of pine cones around the first pond (the one with the Parrot's Feather in it) but could not find the tiny Ear Pick fungus that had once been found there in recent years. What I did find was a great mass of Slippery Jack boletes (some huge - more than 30 cm across) and just one tiny False Chantarelle. Back on the south track, before coming to the second pond, I looked under the trees west of the track and spotted what turned out to be a couple of magnificent *Phaeolus schweinitzii*, strongly yellow edged, but there was no sign of the *Palmatus rhodotus* that once flourished here. As compensation I found my first two fresh Shaggy Inkcaps and a large Blusher (*Amanita rubescens*).

Instead of following the track around the edge of the Gipsies Plain I took the path west across it then the first turning south along the section with the flower rich 'orchid ditches' (hundreds of Common Spotted in the early summer). At this time of year the dominant plant was Devils Bit Scabious with some Wild Angelica and Lesser Spearwort. In addition to the plants another regular here is a pair of Stonechat and one of these could be heard and seen distantly. At the end of this track I returned to the Leigh Park Gardens through Hammond's Lands Coppice I passed an excellent specimen of *Gandoderma adpersum* to end a very rewarding trip.

Thu 30 Sep

A. Langstone South Moors area

A walk from Havant down the Langbrook stream and around the South Moors and Budds Farm area this morning gave me one or two items worth reporting, but nothing special.

I set out as the rain ceased and before I had reached the end of my road I heard my first Dunnock song since July 23, then heard another singing equally briefly by the Lymbourne stream on the way home. Looking back to last year I see that Dunnock song was heard in different places on Sep 21 and 24 but not again until Oct 27 with only one more record of it on Dec 7 before the end of the year. Regular daily song began on Jan 15 in 2003 and Jan 4 in 2004, so don't be surprised if you don't hear this bird singing until next year.

Two plants which I could not find in flower last time I walked this way, but which had fresh flowers today, were the Small Flowered Cranesbill in Juniper Square and the Grey Field Speedwell on the earth bank separating the Langbrook Stream just south of the A27 from the Langstone Technology Park carpark. The very deep blue flowers of the Speedwell are very different from the paler blue, with one white petal. of the Green Field Speedwell that can still be found in a flowerbed on my home street. Further downstream Meadow Sweet was freshly flowering but the Goats Rue and Purple Loosestrife which had flowers last time I was here are now bereft of them.

While still on the subject of flowers I found a few still showing on the Brookweed on the South Moors, and then made a new find of Small Nettle flowering among the dead remains of plants where weed killer was liberally applied under the new planted trees beside the new footpath crossing the top of the old IBM Playing Fields. Later, walking along the seawall path south of the South Moors proper, I was surprised and pleased to see the remains of Slender Hare's Ear (when here in the last few months I have always walked on the lower ground inside the seawall, searching for and finding some Slender Hare's Ear where I have traditionally found it, so have missed that growing on the seawall top!)

Going back to birds I watched both female Blackcap and Goldcrest at the place where, as you emerge onto the South Moors, you can first turn right onto grassland after being constrained to the footpath beside the stream. The Blackcap was enjoying Blackberries and the Goldcrest searching for tiny insects, both close to where I had an excellent Firecrest sighting last winter - no such luck today. I did however hear a call note here which I could not identify - it seemed to be coming from a Chiffchaff but was much longer and 'thinner' than a normal Chiffchaff (my rendering of it would be a 'tseeee-ou') and interestingly my old Shell Guide gives a 'tseep' or 'tseoo' as the call note of the Siberian (tristis) Chiffchaff - I must try to find a recording of that note but until I do so I would prefer to think that I was listening to a juvenile Chiffchaff (my first impression of the sound was that it came from a juvenile of some species).

On the Budds Farm pools around 30 Mallard were the most numerous birds but more than ten Shoveler came second with only half a dozen each of Tufted Duck and Teal. Finally, on the seawall of the South Moors, my first two Rock Pipits of the winter flew over calling and the usual Kingfisher flew up the Langbrook under the Mill Lane bridge as I approached.

B. Guillemot in Emsworth Harbour

Speaking to Brian Fellows about other matters this evening he told me that while he was on the Emsworth Marina seawall at the top of today's tide a Guillemot came floating up the Emsworth Channel and passed close below him.

Wed 29 Sep

A. News and reports reaching me up to Sep 28

BIRDS

1. Red-necked Grebe: One seen well offshore at Church Norton - Owen Mitchell - Sep 27
2. Black-necked Grebe: First two back in Langstone Harbour - Mike Collins - Sep 25 (note that a juvenile? Black-necked was at the mouth of the Hamble on Sep 9 and two Slav Grebes were off Church Norton on Sep 24)
3. Gannet: 160 went west off Selsey Bill - Owen Mitchell - Sep 27
4. Cormorant: Maybe of interest in view of recent increase of limit on killing these birds (up to 3000 a year) is a note of 60 roosting on pylons by the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes - Sharifin Gardiner
5. Shag: two reports of juveniles - on Sep 26 John Clark walked right up to on the banks of the Avon south of Ringwood though it did not seem to be unwell; on Sep 27 Derek Hale saw another juvenile on the shore at Sandown IoW
6. Little Egret: a night roost count of 53 at Rye Harbour on Sep 27 was the highest ever there. In 2004 counts at Rye have been 27 in Jan, 26 in Feb, 20 in Mar then no more than 5 at a time until a roost of 38 in Aug followed by the current 53. In 2003 the highest roost was 35 in Jan with 31 in Nov. The only other high figure from East Sussex was a count of 44 in the Seven Sisters Country Park on 18 Sep 03.
7. Great White Egret: One at Rye Harbour seen in company of both Little Egret and Grey Heron - it was colour ringed on Right Leg (Red/Yellow/White). Seen by Barry Yates on Sep 26
8. Spoonbill: An update to the Titchfield Haven website confirms that one was present for most of the day on Sep 24
9. Greylag: Around 450 in the Avon Valley seen by John Clark on Sep 26, another 100 or so probably still at Pulborough Brooks (seen there on Sep 20) and at least 16 in the Lower Test area on Sep 26.
10. Canada Goose: A flock estimated by Barry Collins at 150 birds has been roaming the Thorney Island area in the week up to Sep 25
11. BRENT GEESE: The only summering birds (seen in June to August) that I am aware of were 5 in the Thorney Channel of Chichester Harbour, four in Langstone Harbour, two on the Lymington Marshes and one in Newtown Harbour IoW. Sightings of what are assumed to be arriving migrants have been as follows. Sep 10 - six at Pett Level, Hastings; Sep 11 - two at Pewit Island in Portsmouth Harbour; Sep 18 - three off Pewit Island and two off Black Point in Chichester Harbour; Sep 20 - six flying over IoW; Sep 24 eight seen by Kevin Stouse circling over Langstone Harbour landing near the Kench; Sep 25 - two off Pilsey Island in Chichester Harbour and three off Ryde, IoW; Sep 26 - thirteen seen by Barry Collins off Pilsey Island and three at Lymington where only two had been seen in the summer though the Newtown Harbour bird might have joined them; Sep 27 - one seen to land near Church Norton (Pagham Harbour)
12. PALE BELLIED BRENT: One flying west off Selsey Bill - Owen Mitchell - Sep 27
13. Shelduck: These are now starting to return from moult on the Dutch/German coast. A few adults were seen with the juveniles through the summer but it looks as if the nine fresh adults seen by myself in the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 19 may have been the first to return as Kevin Stouse saw seven flying west off Warblington towards Langstone on Sep 23 while on Sep 24, when I saw a dozen on the RSPB Islands in Langstone Harbour, several more were heading west over Keyhaven (with a Ruddy Shelduck among them) and were described as returning birds.
14. Ruddy Shelduck: One seen flying over Keyhaven on Sep 24 and David Taylor wrote of it - This bird was seen by an experienced CHOG (Christchurch Harbour Ornithological

Group) regular, Chris Chapleo. The interesting point is that it was seen heading west in the company of Shelduck, which seem to have been returning from their Dutch/German moult grounds in the last few days. - Other comments suggest that the bird may have been a Shelduck x Ruddy Shelduck hybrid which was seen on the Hampshire coast several times last winter.

15. Wigeon: 73 were seen in the Nutbourne Bay area on Sep 26 by the Petersfield Wildlife Group.
16. Pintail: As many as 200 were estimated to have flown west over the Sidlesham Ferry Pool at Pagham Harbour - Owne Mitchell - Sep 27
17. Eider: the flock on the sea off Titchfield Haven has grown from 5 birds on Sep 3 to 50 on Sep 25 and 26.
18. Red Kite: One passed over the Ventnor Downs on the IoW on Sep 25
19. Hen Harrier: One ringtail seen flying east over Southampton from the Itchen Bridge - Mark Rolfe - Sep 24
20. Buzzard: During his regular Sunday all day watch over the Testwood Lakes in the lower Test Valley on Sep 26 Ian Pibworth was disappointed to see no more than 16 Buzzards in the air together - he expected more than 20 at this time of year, which would be no more than five or six family groups each with up to two adults and three young. Back in the spring of 2000 I remember Russell Wynn estimating that he had seen up to 40 different Buzzards during one walk in the lower Test valley (with 18 seen in the air together), and on the same day David Thelwell reported seeing 20 over Casbrook Common a little further up the valley. Maybe the Buzzards have not had a good breeding season? maybe they are spreading out more thinly over the countryside since 2000? or maybe the thermals weren't strong enough on that day? In any case there is no shortage of them in Hampshire.
21. Coot: A count of 78 on the Emsworth Slipper Mill plus Peter Ponds was the highest of the year for Emsworth - counts in February of 62 and 51 (totals for all Emsworth Ponds including the Town Mill pond) dropped to just half a dozen pairs during the summer and this sudden invasion presumably marks the arrival at the coast of inland birds that will stay through the winter (I suspect a lot of the 78 will move on to the Thorney Little Deeps)
22. Cream Coloured Courser: One of these rare vagrants (which should be somewhere south of the Mediterranean) was found on the Scilly Isles on Sep 28
23. Dotterel: The bird at Rye Harbour which I reported in my last update as being there on Sep 26 was still associating with the Golden Plover flock there on Sep 27.
24. Golden Plover: Since reporting the flock of 50 seen in the Nutbourne Bay area by Cliff Oakley on Sep 26 I have heard from Barry Collins that he has had a few back on Thorney Island since August and now has a large flock on the old airfield on Thorney Island - probably the same birds which Cliff saw
25. Little Stint: One was seen just off Langstone village by George Spraggs and Ian Julian on Sep 24 - a good local record.
26. Black-tailed Godwit: Another good record from the Langstone-Warblington shore is of more than 120 Black-wits seen by Kevin Stouse on Sep 23 with more than 162 Bar-tails in the same area at the same time
27. Lesser Black-backed Gull: The usual winter flock is back in the Avon valley - on Sep 26 John Clark estimated more than 2800 flew north at dawn from their night roost on Ibsley Water
28. Short-eared Owl: Two at Rye Harbour on Sep 27 are probably birds that have been there since Aug 7. One was at Titchfield Haven on Aug 30 and flew west to be seen at Warsash on the next day but not since. Similarly there was a report of a passing bird on Thorney Island on Sep 5 but none seem to have settled in our area yet.

29. Skylark: Continental birds seem to have started to reach the south coast in the last few days - after many reports of ones and twos a group of 11 were seen in the Nutbourne Bay area of Chichester Harbour on Sep 26 and more than 30 were at Rye Harbour on Sep 27.
30. Siberian Chiffchaff: One heard in the grounds of Brighton College School by Matthew Silk on Sep 25
31. Goldcrest: More evidence for the widespread arrival of continental birds comes from Titchfield Haven (where 14 were ringed on the morning of Sep 25) and on that same day there were estimated to be more than 30 (with one Firecrest) in the Alum Bay area of the loW and a group of at least a dozen on the shores of Rye Bay. On Sep 27 Owen Mitchell estimated 20 at Pagham Harbour.
32. Spotted Flycatcher: I have another nine reports for the period Sep 24 - 27, including four at the Testwood Lakes on Sep 26 and one in Stansted Forest on the same day.
33. Raven: Following John Shillitoe's sighting of two over Old Winchester Hill on Sep 21 Christoph Harwood saw over over Froxfield (less than five miles north east of OWH) on Sep 26
34. Reed Bunting: A report from Andrew Grace at Hastings suggests that six Reed Buntings were part of an arrival from the continent but regardless of their origin there has been a sudden mini-outburst of reports of this species.
35. Corn Bunting: A count of 18 at Rye Harbour on Sep 27 was the highest count from anywhere since the beginning of April and may mark the start of an autumn flock at Rye (where a peak of 82 were present last winter)

INSECTS

1. Small Copper: The summer brood seems to have been last seen on Sep 9 and fresh third brood to have started to appear with one at Emsworth on Sep 24 and another at nearby Nutbourne on Sep 26. Three seen at Stockbridge Down by Mike Duffy on Sep 16 could be one or the other - as Mike does not comment on their freshness I guess they were hangers on from the summer.
2. Comma: Brian Fellows had one on Ivy in his garden in the week ending Sep 26 (with a Red Admiral also on the ivy)
3. Monarch: Three sightings of single insects (maybe the same one?) on Sep 24, 25 and 28 - not local but on the Scilly Isles
4. Grey Shoulder-knot: The first to be seen since April came to Nick Montegriffo's light near Basingstoke on Sep 27
5. Red-line Quaker: First of year came to light at Titchfield Haven on Sep 25
6. Red-green Carpet: The first since May came to Tim Walker at Winchester on Sep 24

PLANTS

1. Hemlock: A couple of fresh flowering new plants were seen on Broadmarsh, Havant, by myself on Sep 28

ANIMALS

1. Weasel: Two local reports this week come via Brian Fellows who was leading a walk around Langstone on Sep 25 when one of the party saw a Weasel cross Wade Lane near Langstone Pond and the following day Brian was leading another walk around Brook Meadow at Emsworth when another was seen there.
2. Eel: The group with Brian Fellows on Sep 26 saw a large Eel in the River Ems. Unlike the Trout taking bread Eels are not a regular sight there

FUNGI

A note from Maurice Pugh giving me a list of fungi he found in three separate areas of the New Forest yesterday (Sep 28) may be of interest to some readers of this page so here is a list of some of his finds

For those wanting even more fungal excitement than the New Forest can offer Maurice tells me he was on the net the other night looking at accommodation in the Speyside area and came across Auchendean Lodge, it may be worth your while checking out their fungi pages www.auchendean.com/fungi.htm. You will be amazed I'm sure.

1. Orange flame cap (*Gymnopilus junonius*) - good specimen
2. Brown birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) - lots around, mostly going over
3. Porcelain fungus (*Oudemansiella mucida*) - lots everywhere
4. Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) - lots still
5. *Pleurotus cornucopiae* - several specimens
6. Glistening ink cap (*Coprinus micaceus*) - one small group
7. Shaggy ink cap (*Coprinus comatus*) - several
8. Common ink cap (*Coprinus atramentarius*) - several groups
9. Magpie ink cap (*Coprinus picaceus*) - one only at Rhinefield
10. Tooth fungus (*Hericium erinaceus*) - same tree as before but now three times the size, also on another tree closeby.
11. Beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*) - two specimens on same tree
12. Cauliflower fungus (*Sprassis crispa*) - seen on conifer at Black Water car park in Rhinefield Drive, but again it had been trodden on whilst small and continued growing about a foot across. Another seen on Rhinefield Drive with lots of soil on top of the fungus.
13. *Phaeolus shweinitzii* - a couple seen on Rhinefield Drive
14. Orange peel fungus (*Aleuria aurantica*) - 7 specimens at Rhinefield
15. Puff balls (*Lycoperdon perlatum*, *lycoperdon pyriforme*) - common
16. Birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*) - common
17. Common earth ball (*Scleroderma citrinum*) - common
18. Stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*) - two only
19. Chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*) - locally common
20. Slime mould (*Fuligo septica*) - a couple of new specimens seen

Tue 28 Sep

A. Bedhampton and Broadmarsh

A short cycle ride to old Bedhampton and on to Broadmarsh gave me some extra flowering plants including the Buttonweed on the edge of the Hermitage Stream, where Purple Loosestrife, hybrid Water Speedwell, Water Forget Me Not and Stream Water Crowfoot were also still showing flowers. At Broadmarsh I found two young fresh flowering plants of Hemlock as well as the established clump of Lucerne. By Bedhampton Mill pool the meadow-ful of Vervain appeared to be all dead but a scan with my binoculars showed a few flowers left on most of the bushes while there was no doubt of fresh flowers on the Japanese Knotweed growing along the pathway.

The only real bird interest was an excellent view of Grey Wagtail on the Hermitage Stream. Interestingly one of these birds flew over my garden in the morning - the first for many months, emphasising the recent increase in numbers as migrants settle in for the winter.

Mon 27 Sep

A. Around Havant

Swallows and House Martins were both still passing over Havant today and the Kingfisher was at its usual perch above the Lymbourne stream outflow at Langstone Mill in the afternoon but the only item of special interest was probably a planted garden flower - a nice show of Pale Toadflax in a Denvilles garden east of Havant

B. More Egret behaviour

Today George Spraggs visited Langstone and watched two Egrets doing something I have not seen or heard of before. He saw them wade into the sea until they were breast deep, then stretch out their necks parallel to the surface of the water with their bill tips just immersed in it. In this position they would open and close their bills rapidly, presumably making a clatter and spreading ripples through the water. This seemed to attract fish to them and when one was close enough the Egret would lunge at it.

Wildlife diary and news for September 20 - 26 (Week 39)

Sun 26 Sep

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Slavonian Grebe: Two close inshore off Church Norton. First arrivals of winter - Chris Collins - Sep 24
2. Manx Shearwater: A very unusual report from Peter Hutchins is of one found in the middle of a playing field in the Basingstoke area on the afternoon of Sep 24 - appears healthy and is to be released that night
3. Sooty Shearwater: One off Selsey Bill (two previous sightings of this species here by Owen on Sep 14 and 20) - Owen Mitchell - Sep 23
4. Great White Egret: One at Rye Harbour (seen by warden Barry Yates with Little Egret and Grey Heron for comparison) with Red over Yellow over White on right leg (thought to be French) - Sep 26
5. Spoonbill: Second hand unconfirmed report of one at Titchfield Haven on Sep 24 - no details available
6. Greylag: Flock of around 450 at Ibsley Water near Ringwood - John Clark - Sep 26
7. Brent Goose: 5 in Nutbourne Bay, Chichester Harbour, are almost certainly summering birds (I saw five further down the Thorney Channel on Aug 1). No news yet of migrant arrivals. - Cliff Oakley - Sep 26
8. Ruddy Shelduck: Second hand rumour of one being seen in the Lymington area on Sep 25 - no details available
9. Osprey: Still a chance to see one as there was one fishing at Tundry Pond in north Hampshire on the morning of Sep 24 - seen by Steve Mansfield.
10. Montagu's Harrier: One (unsexed) at Birling Gap on Beachy Head - Phil Dunk - Sep 24 (another second hand report is of one in Dorset on same day)

11. Dotterel: At Rye Harbour with Golden Plovers - pager news - Sep 26
12. Golden Plover: Flock of 50 in Nutbourne Bay area of Chichester Harbour - first flock for the mainland Solent area - Cliff Oakley - Sep 26
13. Sanderling: Flock of 173 on Ryde East Sands, IoW. Double the previous high count of 80 on Sep 9 and 11. - Derek Hale - Sep 25
14. Arctic Skua: Three different birds seen in Rye Bay - Cliff Dean - Sep 25
15. Lesser Blackback Gull: Roost of 2800+ in Avon Valley on Ibsley Water - John Clark - Sep 26
16. Wryneck: One at Beachy Head - Tony Wilson - Sep 26
17. Yellow Wagtail: Still a few passing with one local report of at least 16 with the cattle on the Langstone South Moors - Mike Collins - Sep 24
18. Rock Pipit: One reported from Nutbourne Bay, Chichester Harbour is one of the first autumn reports from non-breeding areas of the local coastline (other reports are of 4 on the seawall of the north east IoW shore on same day - seen by Derek Hale at Hersey Nature Reserve - and of one at Keyhaven on Sep 25 with an odd report of one in the Hordle Cliffs area on Aug 30). - Cliff Oakley - Sep 26
19. Grasshopper Warbler: Normally unseen and only reported by ringers or by hearing the song there are two reports of lucky sightings. One was at Beachy Head - Tony Wilson - Sep 26. The other at Titchfield Haven - Mark Rolfe - Sep 25
20. Siberian Chiffchaff: One heard in Brighton - Matthew Silk - Sep 25

INSECTS

1. Clouded Yellow: One seen on the shore of Chichester Harbour at Nutbourne is the first report since Sep 9, prior to which reports were almost daily - Cliff Oakley - Sep 26
2. Wall Brown: Two seen on the Keyhaven shore (In recent years the last sighting seems to be expect in mid October) - Stephen Piggott - Sep 25
3. Small Tortoiseshell: One in a Farnham Garden (and a probable fly by in my Havant garden) - Derek Mills - Sep 26
4. Comma: Five at Noar Hill with six other butterfly species still flying (including Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Brown Argus) - Adrian Hoskins - Sep 24
5. Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillar: Yet another found, this time at Overton near Basingstoke - Peter Hutchins - Sep 25

[Fri 24 Sep](#)

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Red-throated Diver: First of autumn flying west - landed on sea off Ryde pier - Kris Gillam - Sep 23
2. Mute Swan: Still keeping clear of Southsea Canoe Lake after some were poisoned there in the summer. Only one pair with 3 cygnets there when up to 30 would normally be present - Brian Fellows - Sep 21
3. Osprey: No reports since one was over Brading Marshes on IoW on Sep 19
4. Red-legged Partridge: Report of up to 15 on Hayling West Lane fields but only 3 seen by Ralph Hollins - Sep 24

5. Dotterel: One juvenile on Kithurst Hill (South Downs above Storrington east of R Arun) with a Golden Plover for company - Sheena Maskell, Bernie Forbes, Tony Deleiros - Sep 21 and 22
6. Little Stint: One at Pagham Breech Pool - Bernie Forbes - Sep 21
7. Whimbrel: One on Langstone Hbr Milton shore - probably wintering - Brian Fellows - Sep 21
8. Whimbrel: Two in Newtown Hbr IoW - Derek Hale - Sep 21
9. Turnstone: Good count of 130 on Langstone Hbr Milton shore though total in Harbour is usually about 500 in Sept - Brian Fellows - Sep 21
10. Arctic Skua: This is probably the peak of autumn passage (always much smaller than in spring) with single birds on each of Sep 20 (Selsey Bill), Sep 21 (Hayling Bay) and Sep 22 (juvenile at Bembridge Foreland)
11. Common Tern: More than 200 in the Solent off Ryde may be the last large flock of the year - Kris Gillam - Sep 23
12. Guillemot: At least one off Ryde Pier - Kris Gillam - Sep 23
13. Razorbill: Sightings around the IoW on Sep 21 (Hurst narrows), Sep 22 (11 off Ryde and more off Bembridge Foreland) and Sep 23 Ryde)
14. Cuckoo: Late bird (must be a juvenile) at Cuckmere Haven nr Beachy Head - Michael Hawkins - Sep 22
15. Hirundines: No Sand Martins reported since Sep 19 but plenty of Swallows and House Martins still around up to Sep 24
16. Meadow Pipit: Widespread diurnal movement northwards everywhere throughout the week to Sep 24
17. Yellow Wagtail: Passage definitely tailing off since flocks of 40 were near Pulborough and on the IoW on Sep 19 and 20. Sep 21 brought reports of around 12 at Farlington Marshes and more than 3 at Newtown Hbr, IoW but I heard one over Langstone on Sep 24 and the last may not be seen until mid October
18. Robin: More than usual all down the Hayling Coastal Path on Sep 24 looked as if migrants had arrived
19. Blackbird: This year's juveniles are now in almost complete adult winter plumage - both male and female in my garden at Havant had only the head and neck to complete on Sep 24
20. Spotted Flycatcher: Maybe the last for the year at Church Norton - Bernie Forbes - Sep 21
21. Coal Tit: See note for Sep 23 telling of how three tits died in a Langstone garden stuck to moth band on apple trees
22. Raven: This species is rapidly increasing in Hampshire - I have 38 records of sightings this year and there will have been many more not reaching me - the latest is of two over Old Winchester Hill seen by John Shillitoe on Sep 21 making 6 reports during the year from the Meon Valley. The busiest place for them has been the Lymington area with 18 records followed by the New Forest with 6. The New Milton area and the Lower Test area (including Romsey) have 2 each while Eastleigh, Andover and Basingstoke areas each have 1 with another sighting over Horndean south of Petersfield.
23. Escapees: Two Chiloie Wigeon on Langstone Mill Pond seen by myself on Sep 20 but not seen there again were presumably birds on the run.

INSECTS

1. Common Blue: A very worn male nectaring on a Dandelion beside the busy Park Road South in Havant (near the multi storey carpark) was an unexpected 'vagrant' on Sep 24
2. Pale Clouded Yellow (*Colias hyale*): A single specimen was confidently identified in Kent on Sep 2 while nectaring on Devils Bit Scabious in the Orlestone Forest area (nr Hamstreet south of Ashford)
3. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: Steve Nash has just published 11 reports of this huge migrant moth for the period Sep 17 to 22. One of these reports (from the Scillies on Sep 17) was of 7 different individuals coming to a light on the same night, and another 4 were recorded there on Sep 19. None of these were in Hampshire but one was found at Ferring (Worthing). One of the reports was of a caterpillar found in Surrey on Sep 21
4. Death's Head Hawkmoth: A report of a caterpillar eating Lilac leaves in the Eastleigh area on Sep 19 was at first thought likely to be a Privet Hawk until Mike Duffy took a picture of the large bright yellow larva - I think this may be the first record of this insect eating Lilac in place of its favourite Potato leaves. Other caterpillars of this species have been found at Hampton in Middlesex (on Sep 12) and others recently in Somerset and in the Bath area near Bristol. On Sep 18 a moth of this species was at Blackpool airport.
5. Hummingbird Hawkmoth: One still flying near Lymington on Sep 21
6. Brindled Green: First of year trapped by Paul Boswell at Greywell nr Fleet on Sep 20
7. Blair's Shoulder-Knot: Firsts of the year taken jointly by Paul Boswell at Greywell and by Tim Walker at Winchester, both on Sep 20
8. *Eublemma purpurina*: A mini invasion of these non-British list moths with ten records between July 31 and Aug 22. News of the first of them, taken on July 31 by Peter Thompson at Bishops Sutton (nr Alresford), has only just been published.

PLANTS

1. Fan-leaved Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus circinatus*): The water crowfoot which is ever present in the Homewell Spring close to St Faith's Church in central Havant was newly flowering on Sep 24 so I took a specimen home and spent some time identifying it with the aid of the BSBI Plant Crib, and I am pretty confident that it is this species which is marked in the Hants Flora as very rare and with only a couple of records in south Hampshire (near the Rivers Avon and Test). The location, with pure but slow moving water coming straight out of the chalk, is right, and the specimen I had seemed to pass every test in the BSBI book
2. Yellow Bristle Grass: Within a stone's throw of the Homewell Spring I found another rarity (according to the Hants Flora) on the same day. This grass was growing outside the multi-storey carpark and is my second find of the species this year, the first being on Aug 22 in a patch of Sweetcorn game cover on Idsworth Down. The narrow width of the flowering spike as well as the characteristics of the bristles and the yellow colour of the flowerhead made the id pretty certain.
3. Russian Comfrey: The plant which was freshly flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 19 was still in flower on Sep 24
4. Hop: Most of the few plants scattered around the Havant area are males so I was pleased to find a large bush covered with female flowers/fruit close to my home in Havant on Sep 14. It covered a garden fence and grew up into an Apple tree in the extreme north east corner of Juniper Square.

B. Langstone and west Hayling

After several days of wind, cloud and rain the clear sky this morning tempted me out fairly early, and with the tide high I cycled down the west Hayling coastal path in search of newly

arrived Brent geese. No luck with the geese but I did see a few birds and flowering plants that may be of interest.

At Langstone Pond twenty or more House Martins were having their breakfast circling fairly high in the air and on the pond I saw more than 25 Teal but could not spot the Chiloe Wigeon (perhaps making it more likely that they were free-flying and had arrived of their own volition and not been 'dumped' there). A flock of at least 25 Goldfinch flew over, and with the tide high there were at least 9 Egrets and 6 Heron still in the Wade Court trees.

Arriving on Hayling one of the first birds seen (at the north end of the old Billy Line) was a Yellowhammer. There and all down the coastal path Robins could be seen and heard, suggesting that continental migrants had arrived, and in the large open West Lane fields (where a tractor was harrowing the earth) a flock of at least 40 Lapwing were present, possibly new arrivals, possibly just attracted to the newly turned earth. While watching them a passer by told me he had seen 15 'Partridge or Quail' at the north end of these open fields and when I went to have a look I could only see three Red-legged Partridge at the foot of the hedge separating the arable fields from the grass fields to the north - as the person who told me had mentioned that the Partridges were about the size of Wood Pigeons it is possible that there was a mixed flock of Partridge and Pigeon there, but this is the time of year when flocks of Partridge could be released into the wild it is worth keeping an eye open for more of them.

There are usually a few Skylarks in these fields but I just heard the chirrups of two passing overhead. Much more numerous were the Swallows heading into the northwest wind.

At the Oysterbeds on my way back the waders were still waiting for the tide to fall but apart from 35 Redshank and perhaps 300 Oystercatchers the only other birds present were 4 Cormorants, 1 Little Grebe and perhaps a dozen Egrets - I heard but did not see Ringed Plover. On the harbour water I could see less than ten Great Crested Grebe with ten more Egrets on the small part of the 'Mid-way' saltings that was not submerged. On the RSPB islands there were more Oystercatchers, plenty of Grey Plover, and another dozen Cormorants plus a dozen adult Shelduck.

White Melilot was still flowering on the southern bund of the Oysterbeds lagoon, as was the Russian Comfrey by the Coastal Path and the Goats Rue in the carpark. Down at Saltmarsh Lane the Lucerne was still flowering on the seawall and a few flowers were left on the Pale Flax in the open space inland of the coastal path with Common Centaury still flowering there.

Back in Havant Musk Mallow, Red Campion, and Field Scabious were still flowering at the Lymbourne Springs but I did not see any Danewort flowers.

Later in the day a shopping trip into Havant centre gave me some more interesting flowers - in the Homewell springs pools the Water Crowfoot was once more in flower and I gathered a specimen to have another go at identifying the species. This time I feel fairly confident that I could name it after twice going through the features described in the BSBI Plant Crib which all fitted Fan-leaved Water Crowfoot (*R. circinatus*). As this is described as rare in the Hants Flora (which has no south Hampshire records) I would be glad of a second opinion - the plants are very easy to access being just a stone's throw east of the multi-storey carpark on Park Road South.

Outside the entrance to that carpark I found a clump of Bristle Grass, and using Stace I was confident this was Yellow Bristle Grass (*Setaria pumila*) which is accorded the rank of 'very rare' in the Hants Flora though this is my second find of the species this year (the first was among Sweetcorn game cover on Idsworth Down).

On the way back from this shopping trip I made another nice find in Juniper Square were the female fruits of Hop were abundantly decorating a wooden fence and climbing into an apple tree in the garden behind it - in the past I have quite often found male Hop plants in this area, but very rarely female plants.

Thu 23 Sep

Birds killed by moths

Today I had a phone call from John Chapman who lives in Langstone village and who was very concerned to pass on a message which might save the lives of some garden birds after he had discovered two Blue Tits and a Coal Tit dead in his own garden.

Despite my heading no moth was directly responsible for these deaths but the indirect cause was a moth species whose caterpillars can do severe damage to apple trees and their fruit. The Codlin moth, whose caterpillars live inside apples which are not sprayed with pesticides, is the first example to come to mind but there are several others.

Before chemical pesticides became available one way of preventing the moths from infesting apple trees was to place a broad sticky band around the trunk of the tree just below the lowest branch - I used to believe that this worked because the female moths were flightless and had to crawl up the trees to lay their eggs but it seems that the females of the Codlin Moth are not wingless (as are the females of a few other moth species) so I presume the band is effective either because the moth lays its eggs in cracks of the bark leaving the caterpillars to climb up the tree (this is true of the Winter Moth - another apple tree pest) or because the moths mate on the trunk and subsequently the female, despite being winged, climbs to do her egg-laying.

Regardless of the moth species involved what seems to have happened in John's garden was that the three Tits which he subsequently found dead had somehow got their feet stuck in the sticky band (as with bird liming), had then flapped their wings and got them stuck, and had presumably died from exhaustion and or starvation.

I have never heard of such a thing before and both I and John would welcome any comments on the subject. I am particularly surprised that Tits were caught this way - perhaps they were hovering trying to pick off moths which were already trapped on the sticky band and were blown onto it by the wind?

[Wed 22 Sep](#)

A. News and reports reaching me on Sep 20

BIRDS

1. Sooty Shearwater: One past Selsey Bill on Sep 20 (Owen Mitchell)
2. Leach's Petrel: One past Selsey Bill on Sep 20 (Anon per Owen Mitchell)
3. Little Egret: 38 in Fishbourne area of IoW (possibly plus another 29 upstream at Wootton Bridge on same day) add weight to the idea of an unfound night roost in the north east of the IoW. In late July counts of 25 and 26 in the Seaview area were dismissed as coming from the Gosport Elson Wood breeding colony but I am told that Egrets move away from breeding sites after the young fledge. The only night roost known on the IoW is at Yarmouth but we have no count from there since July when there were only 15 birds (and the majority of those fed on the mainland) - maybe the Fishbourne birds come from the Sowley Pond roost on the mainland (again no recent counts available) but I still suspect that there is a roost or roosts to be found in the eastern IoW....
4. Brent Geese: Six flying south over Isle of Wight on Sep 20 could be migrants (only one summering on IoW plus 2 on Lymington marshes, but they could be the same six that were at Pett Level near Hastings on Sep 10). Two seen off south east Hayling during the Sep 18 WeBS count were probably from the group of at least 5 summering birds that I saw west of Thorney Island on Aug 1
5. Canada Geese: At this time of year these geese are mobile and a flock has apparently been seen flying north over Portsdown in the mornings of the past couple of weeks - no

detail of numbers or their departure and arrival points! In recent years the fields at the foot of Portsdown south west of Fort Nelson and west of the Portchester crematorium have been used by these geese as a major night roost in the late autumn until the birds go to Titchfield Haven for the winter, and they may be coming from there. Another major current night roost is at the Testwood Lakes where 227 roosted on night of Sep 18 but there is another roost somewhere to the east of the Test as another 324 flew west over the Testwood Lakes at dawn on Sep 19. In north Hampshire at least 443 spent the night of Sep 18 on the gravel pit lakes between Eversley and Moor Green in Berkshire.

6. Egyptian Geese: 23 were seen at the Eversley gravel pits on the evening of Sep 18 (where there had been a record flock of 34 birds on Sep 9). Just one other bird has been seen in Hampshire this month - a single at Titchfield Haven on Sep 10 (there had been two there on Aug 28).
7. Eider: A flock has been building up on the sea off Titchfield Haven recently with more than 40 seen there on Sep 19 (by Peter Hutchins) but these may not be coming from the north. In May up to 126 were off the Haven and while many of those may have flown north there were still at least 52 in the west Solent in July and 35 in August.
8. Goshawk: Juvenile over Finchdean area on Sep 19 - flew west (John Simons)
9. Hen Harrier: Male seen at Brading Marshes (IoW) on Sep 18
10. Marsh Harrier: The immature bird which has been seen at Titchfield Haven on 23 days from July 30 to Sep 8 does not seem to have been seen since the latter date despite the official Haven website having at last been updated for the period Aug 26 to Sep 19
11. Pectoral Sandpiper?: Phil Lord is understandably cautious in claiming that he saw one on the Keyhaven marshes on the morning of Sep 19 as he only heard a brief call as it flew in with a Dunlin and landed with its back to Phil - refusing to show its breast to him. He could rule out a Curlew Sandpiper (which has a similar call note) as this bird did not have a white rump.

There has been just one Pectoral Sandpiper in Hampshire earlier this year, also seen at Keyhaven by Russell Wynn and others on May 3 with just one other report from the Pannel valley between Hastings and Rye on May 5

12. Bar-tailed Godwit: 88 were on the shingle spit ('Seagull Island') just west of the Black Point sailing club on Hayling during the Sep 18 WeBS count. Maybe of interest one was feeding on grassland at Keyhaven with Curlew on Sep 19 (unlike Black-tails they are rarely seen feeding on shore)
13. Sabine's Gull: Juvenile east past Selsey Bill on Sep 20 (Owen Mitchell)
14. Little Tern: Still two off Selsey Bill on Sep 20 (Owen Mitchell). In 2003 the last was seen on Sep 15.
15. Black Tern: Two west past Titchfield Haven on Sep 18 may well be the last of this year - the last seen in 2003 was on Sep 16
16. Razorbill: One flying east off Titchfield Haven on Sep 18 was the first Hampshire report since May but two were seen off Ryde just across the Solent on Aug 15.
17. Turtle Dove: One at Titchfield Haven on Sep 16. Last year the last was seen in Hampshire on Sep 20 with one at Beachy Head on Sep 28.
18. Yellow Wagtail: 40 among cattle at Brading Marshes (IoW) on Sep 19 another 40 at Amberley Wild Brooks on Sep 20 (Pete Hughes). At Titchfield Haven there was a night roost of 30 on Sep 1 which went up to over 200 on Sep 5 coinciding with the peak count of over 200 at Crowlink on Beachy Head on Sep 4.
19. Meadow Pipit: Widespread reports of up to 50 birds on the move were made from July 20 onward but a clear upsurge in numbers occurred from around Sep 15 when Jason Crook estimated that 665 birds had flown over Langstone Harbour on that day. Sep 16 brought

an estimate of 1000 birds going west over the west of the loW and on Sep 17 the RSPB warden of Pulborough Brooks noted at least 100 over Amblerley Wild Brooks. Locally the first flocks of the autumn were noted over Finchdean near Rowlands Castle on Sep 18 and on Sep 19 there were at least 200 over the coast between Worthing and the mouth of the Arun, 196 over the Lower Test at Southampton and more than 400 over Hastings (all the recent reports have been of birds heading west into the prevailing wind).

20. Mistle Thrush: Flocks starting to be seen - one of 15 at Finchdean on Sep 18 (John Simons), another of 7 birds south of Newport on the loW on Sep 18
21. Chiffchaff: 150 ringed at Beachy Head on Sep 19 (previous counts were of 10 on Aug 31 and 20 on Sep 5). At Titchfield Haven 84 were ringed on Sep 16 and 30 on Sep 19
22. Blackcap: 150 ringed at Beachy Head on Sep 19 (where previous ringing totals were 300 on Sep 3, 300 on Sep 4, 100 on Sep 5). Ringing totals at Titchfield Haven were 44 on Sep 1, 53 on Sep 5, 33 on Sep 9, 135 on Sep 16 and now 29 on Sep 19.
23. Grasshopper Warbler: On Sep 19 one was ringed at Beachy Head and four at Titchfield Haven where six were ringed on Sep 1, six on Sep 5, eighteen on Sep 9 and twelve on Sep 16
24. Firecrest: First of autumn at Hastings on Sep 19 (previous reports of probable migrants were of singles at Titchfield Haven on Aug 15 and Sep 16, Pagham Hbr on Sep 12 and West Wellow near Romsey on Sep 18 with more than one at Shanklin on the loW on Sep 15)
25. Pallas's Warbler: Only a possible in the Beachy Head area on Sep 15
26. Dartford Warbler: The first autumn sighting of one at Titchfield Haven on Sep 19 probably indicates that autumn dispersal from the New Forest is under way, the more so as it coincides with sightings at nearby Gilkicker of one on Sep 18 and four on Sep 19. The bird at the Haven was the first there this year but there have been a few other reports from the Gilkicker, Stokes Bay, Browndown area of singles on Jan 1, May 9, June 6 and of two birds on Sept 11 so there is probably some local breeding there.
27. Finch flocks: From the West Sussex downs near Storrington Mike Hall reports "flocks of 3-400 Linnets plus lower numbers of Greenfinch and Chaffinch". This caused me to check the status of other finch species and to find ...

Linnet: Sep 1 - 46 seen on Thorney; Sep 4 - 30 on loW; Sep 9 - 42 on Budds Mound, Havant; Sep 19 - more than 15 at Gilkicker. Last year a flock of over 200 was feeding on new sown cereal fields on Hayling on Aug 11 and more than 250 were seen near St Catherine's Point on the loW on Sep 13 with another 100 at Hastings on Sep 27 and several reports of between 150 and 200 from south Hampshire and the loW during October.

Goldfinch: Sep 3 - more than 30 at Hayling Oysterbeds; Sep 4 - 50 on West High Down, loW; Sep 10 - more than 200 at Taddiford west of Milford on sea; Sep 15 - 40 at Eastleigh Lakeside. Last year several flocks of up to 70 in August but a major eastward movement - reported all along the south coast from Dorset to Kent - started with an estimate of 300 near Hastings on Sep 27 and peaked with 1000 going east over Worthing in just 30 mins on Oct 12 and another count of 668 over Hastings in one hour on Oct 16.

Greenfinch: Sep 12 - 75 just south of Fareham. Last year one flock of 50 on Aug 5 but arrival started from Sep 13 with first reports of over 100 from Oct 2

Chaffinch: July 30 - more than 10 at Warblington; Aug 1 - scattered birds singing Last year flocks started to arrive on Oct 8

PLANTS

1. Common Calamint: This has been found in flower within Portchester Castle recently and on Sep 18 I found a huge colony of it in flower on the Portsmouth IBM site (which I have known for 21 years and never seen this plant there before).
2. Cock's Eggs: This strangely named plant (aka *Salpichroa origanifolia*) is a relative of the Nightshades and is listed in the Hants Flora as having been found at just one site (Hayling beach, but no Tetrad given) by a Mrs D Wolfenden in the years 1949 to 1951, thereafter becoming extinct in the county. Stace gives its status as introduced and 'grown for ornament' but becoming naturalised in rough ground and open places at few sites on the south and south east coasts of England (among them Lowestoft in Suffolk and Abbotsbury in Dorset). For several years I have noticed a large colony of what I now believe to be this plant growing on Sinah Common on Hayling and I suspect it has been established there for a long time (possibly since 1951 - maybe it was Mrs Wolfenden and not the plant which became extinct, hence no more records of the plant). The plant is well illustrated by Marjorie Blamey in the new *Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland* by Richard and Alistair Fitter and the Hayling plants can be found on Sinah Common at SZ 708 990 immediately south of Seafront Road opposite the south end of Staunton Avenue. Look for them close to the hedge bordering the last house on the south side of Seafront Road where they can be found in abundance, some scrambling up that hedge with many more coming out into the rough grassland and standing erect above it. I suspect these plants are of garden origin but clearly love their new home and have been thriving there for at least five years. They were flowering well on Sep 19 when I last cycled through the patch.

INSECTS

1. Comma butterfly: This is normally one of the last butterflies to be seen each year and with few reports of them during the summer this year I am pleased to see that when Peter Hutchins went to Titchfield Haven on Sep 19 he found many there feeding on bramble flowers
2. Hummingbird Hawkmoth One in a garden near Beachy Head almost daily from Sep 6 to 16
3. New moths for the year list: On Sep 19 the first Beaded Chestnut was trapped in north Hampshire (Paul Boswell at Greywell) and the first Lunar Yellow Underwing was taken by Robin Worman at Colden Common near Eastleigh. Rob Edmunds at Fleet had the first Deep-brown Dart (his first since 1996!) on Sep 18. A recent update of the Titchfield Haven website for the period Aug 26 to Sep 19 shows that they recorded the first Large Wainscot on Sep 4 and on Sep 9 they also had three new micros - Rhomboid Tortrix, Meal Moth and Lesser Wax Moth. (When I visited my local Havant pet shop recently they were dealing with an infestation of Meal Moths in a batch of pet food, but the Lesser Wax Moth - which presumably eats the wax of Honeycomb in bee hives like its cousin the Wax Moth - is now I think a rarity and not a problem to Bee keepers)

OTHER

Fungi:

1. The first Fly Agaric toadstools of the autumn were reported from Exmoor sometime just before Sep 16, seen by Maurice Pugh when on holiday there. On Sept 20 Andy Brook gives them a mention on the Hollybank Woods website so they are out there and no doubt in many other places.
2. On Sep 18 Maurice Pugh was in the New Forest photographing *Hericium coralloides* (a rare tooth fungus which does not appear in Roger Phillips book but has a great photo in the back plates of Gordon Dickson's 'Fungi of the New Forest' - in which book only three sites are listed for this species). For the many who may not possess Gordon's comprehensive book the same magnificent photo heads a special article on British Tooth

Fungi in the Aug 2000 edition of British Wildlife - page 401 in issue 6 of volume 11). Maurice also came on another rare fungus which I have never seen - *Cortinarius violaceus* - but that can be seen in Roger Phillips

3. On Sep 19 Maurice Pugh enjoyed a walk in woods near Netley Marsh to the west of Totton, and his list of fungi found there includes a lovely show of Sulphur Tuft on a moss covered fallen tree. Nearby were *Lycoperdon pyriform* puffballs and False Death Caps. Oak and Birch boletes were also found but some of the best finds were of a Cep (or Penny Bun), and of the large and difficult to overlook *Gymnopilus junonius* on one tree stump and very much less obvious dark brown and hairy *Phaeolus schweinitzii* growing bracket like hidden by bracken on other stumps (this latter fungus used to be easy to find on conifer stumps beside the west side of the main road opposite the Texaco garage as you drive on to Hayling Island but those stumps have now crumbled to dust). Perhaps the best find was of the Cauliflower fungus (*Sparassis crispa*) but sadly it had been stamped on by someone afraid that it would turn into a vampire and drain his blood.
4. Giant Polypores and Amethyst Deceivers were found in Stansted Forest by John Goodspeed on Sep 20

[Tue 21 Sep](#)

A. Cormorant cull

Today's issue of the Portsmouth NEWS tells me that the government's 'Nature Conservation Minister' has raised the annual limit for killing Cormorants from 500 to 3,000. The paper gives the views Adrian Thomas, speaking for the RSPB's local office in Brighton, and of Mark Avery, RSPB Director of Conservation at their national HQ - both are opposed to shooting and want to promote non-lethal bird scaring devices where there is a problem for fresh water fishing. The paper mentions large Cormorant roosts at the Chichester lakes and on the Arun at South Stoke (where the river flows through the Downs) as being likely targets for the fisherman's guns.

[Mon 20 Sep](#)

A. Local news from Langstone

Just two observations from my regular Monday evening trip to Langstone with the weekly Nature Notes posters.

Most impressive was the sight of 74 Little Egrets standing huddled together in the wet meadow south of Wade Court - the high tide and strong wind had sent them here for shelter but it was still too early to enter the night roost trees (perhaps they feel that they will reveal its location to predators if they fly there in broad daylight?). This large crowd is almost certainly only half the total that are using the roost currently - Jason Crook's count on Sep 13 was of 176 entering the roost (and on Aug 28 he had 144 going in).

Less impressive but curious was the presence on Langstone Pond of two Chiloe Wigeon with white faces, glossy green/black crown and nape, and orange flanks. I suspect they had been dumped there but I suppose they could be escapes from some wildfowl collection which had regrown their flight feathers earlier than usual and got away before they could be caught and pinioned by their owners)

[Sun 19 Sep](#)

B. News and reports reaching me since Sep 16

BIRDS

1. Little Egrets: Since my notes last Wednesday about Egret night roosts I have heard from Barry Collins that the September roost count on Thorney Island was up from 32 in August to 54 in September, a gain of 22 birds and on Wednesday I reported a gain of 49 birds at Wade Court and a decrease of 27 birds at Tournerbury. This give a net increase of 44 birds at the Chichester Harbour night roosts, almost exactly balancing the loss of 45 birds at the Oldpark Wood site. Further to this Pete Carr tells me that the Egrets do not continue to use their breeding sites as night roosts after the breeding season, so if that breeding season did not end until after the Aug 12 count then everything falls into place.
2. Curlew Sandpiper: The first ever to be recorded in the Test Valley was at the Lower Test reserve on Spt 17
3. Ring Ouzel: The first to reach the south coast this autumn was seen on Culver Down near Bembridge on the Isle of Wight on Sept 16. Derek Hale only gives it as a probable as it was seen in flight only.
4. Redwing: A single bird, the first of the autumn, was heard fly over Winchester by Tim Walker on the night of Sept 16 (when he was checking his moth trap). Together with this news a note from John Clark reported a flock of 10 Fieldfares had been seen on Sep 3 over North Waltham (a village southwest of Basingstoke), and Trevor Carpenter tells us that a notice board at the Twyford Water Meadows (by the Itchen just south of Winchester) had a note of some having been seen but giving no clue as to when or where!
5. Bearded Tit: A group of more than 30 were seen on Thorney Island on Sept 16 as were an Osprey and, in the harbour, a female Eider.

INSECTS

1. New moths for the yearlist: On Sept 9 Russell Wynn at Pennington (Lymington) had Feathered Ranunculus and The Sallow at his moth trap and on Sept 14 he shared the first date for Pink-barred Sallow with Nick Montegriffo near Basingstoke. Sept 15 brought the first Brown-spot Pinion (to Pete Allen at North Gorley) and Sept 16 gave Derek Mills at Farnham the first Large Ranunculus
2. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: One of these migrants came to Russell Wynn's moth trap near Lymington on the night of Sep 14 but earlier that day another of these large moths was seen flying at Whitchurch in north Hampshire. Probably arriving with the same batch of migrants on that day were Hummingbird Hawkmoths seen at Ropley and at Bishopstoke (Eastleigh)

OTHER

1. Tooth fungi: Maurice Pugh found fresh examples of two of these rare and beautiful fungi in the New Forest on Sept 16 - *Hericium erinaceum* and *Hericium coralloides*. He also found lots of Porcelain fungi. Returning to the Forest on Sept 18 he added *Cortinarius violaceus* and what he thinks was an Oak Bolete, *Leccinum quercinum*
2. Giant Club fungi: On Sep 16 Rosemary Webb visited Dorton's Wood to the north east of Selborne and found Giant Club in a new site (she has in previous years seen this species elsewhere in this area). While there she also found *Ramaria stricta* and quite a few Death Caps plus some less worrying Hedgehog puffballs.

C. Langstone to Gunner Point via West Hayling

Although the winds have been from the south or west this week, rather than from the east, today is the date on which the first Brent were back in Langstone Harbour last year (according to Bob Chapman), though it was not until Sep 28 that they were widely present

(10 in Langstone, 12 in Chichester and 13 in Pagham Harbour) but by Sep 30 Barry Collins was seeing 83 off Thorney Island.

So it is not surprising that I did not see any Brent in a visit to the Oysterbeds and the Kench plus a scan from the viewpoint mid way down the coastal path.

What I did see from the Oysterbeds was a male Eider (in eclipse) at the southern tip of Long Island (close to Round Nap), presumably the bird that was reported as being in the harbour (with a single Merganser) by Bob Chapman on Aug 26. The other good bird of this trip was a White Wagtail on the Sinah Golf Course. It attracted my attention by making some chattering notes which did not sound like those of a normal Pied Wagtail, and a close look showed me a clean light grey back contrasting with a very black crown and nape, a very white face and throat with the remains of a black breast patch - unfortunately I did not check the flanks but am pretty sure it was an adult male which had only just started to moult into its winter plumage.

Also in the Sinah area I saw one adult and one juvenile Stonechat in the area north of the skateboard park, and I kept hearing and seeing small parties of Meadow Pipit coming in off the sea and heading north west.

Another group of birds which caught my attention was a party of 9 adult Shelduck seen in the main pool of the Oysterbeds - these had been seen there yesterday by the Havant Wildlife Group (I think they saw 10 of them) and when I heard of their sighting my first thought was that these birds had started to return from their moult area across the North Sea (around Heligoland) but they do not do that until mid-October at the earliest so I guess these are adults that have stayed on here when the others left and are now sufficiently well feathered to start to move about again locally.

Despite the sunshine there were few butterflies around - several Small Whites and one or two Speckled Woods - but one which flew briefly past my bicycle on the main track passing the Oysterbeds was a puzzle. I had a brief glimpse of a very small and very dark butterfly and my first thought was of Small Blue, but while these have a very dark upper surface in flight they show at least as much of their pale blue underside and both the date and place are wrong. Maybe it was a small dark female Common Blue, maybe a moth - I will never know.

Also beside the main track at the Oysterbeds a plant of Russian Comfrey was in fresh new flower though the flowers were of a delicate pale pink colour - no doubt a freak of untimely second flowering. Another colour freak was seen on Sinah Common where the one patch of Pale Toadflax was putting on a great show - among the mass of very pale flowers one plant had flowers the colour of Purple Toadflax (but the shape and spacing of the flowers was that of Pale, not Purple). Other plants seen in the Sinah area were plenty of Vipers Bugloss and Thrift and just one plant of Sheep's Bit, plus several fresh flowers on Yellow Horned Poppy (confirming the report of a good show of them on Eastney Beach which came recently via John Goodspeed - at the time I was not certain whether the person who told him of them was referring to the current time or just saying there had been a great show there in the summer).

On the north side of the Golf Course near the Kench Bell Heather was still flowering and on the east side of the Kench there was even a bright yellow flower on the Bladder Senna bush from which most of the leaves have already fallen. Elsewhere on my trip I found what I assume to be the first flower of the new season on Greater Periwinkle - a plant that helps to brighten winter walks, and thinking of that there was of course by now plenty of flowering Gorse.

[Sat 18 Sep](#)

A. Portsmouth North Harbour IBM site

I paid my usual monthly visit here to carry out the WeBS count of wildfowl but found little of note among the birds. The best thing was that I could only find 13 Canada Geese, and a significant item was that 23 or the 36 Coot that I saw were already in winter mode, amicably grazing together in a compact flock.

The only species of duck was Mallard with just over 50 present, and there were 5 Cormorant, 4 Herons, 2 Little Grebe and 1 Great Crested. Gulls were also remarkable by their absence, no doubt something we will get used to now that the big Paulsgrove rubbish tip across the motorway is effectively closed (there was a small amount of dumping taking place at one point with a flock of around 200 gulls resting nearby but the 'mountains' of rubbish have now been earthed over and will soon be the green hills of Portsmouth).

The one bird of interest was a Sparrowhawk which I first saw wheeling above trees near the lake, then saw it fold its wings back and go into a steep dive which ended in the bird perching in a tree before taking off to resume its soaring in the fresh breeze. By its small size it was a male and by its brown back a juvenile which accounted for the fact that none of the other birds took it as a threat and just ignored it.

Much more interesting were a couple of plant finds. The first was a single plant of Weasel's Snout (*Misopates orontium* or Lesser Snapdragon) with a single pink flower. This was growing on the disturbed earth where a trench had recently been dug and filled in, and I seem to remember finding this species just once before during the 21 years that I have known this site - that was after a similar trench had been filled in at least ten years ago (perhaps the seeds of these plants have persisted since the active days of allotments which were on the edge of the site before IBM acquired it in the early 1970s, but more likely they are wind blown from allotments that were in use much more recently near the Marriott Hotel visible from the site).

The other plant was a total surprise and was a quite new addition to the flora of the site as far as I am concerned. This was a large patch (perhaps 3 x 1 metres) of Common Calamint clearly well established and flowering profusely so that the patch looked at first sight like a bank of Michaelmas Daisies (though in fact my first thought was of Vervain of which I had just previously found a nice small cluster). I am pretty sure the plants have been there for several years and I have missed them as they are off my normal routes and came to my attention partly because I was investigating strange bird noises in that area and partly because the rough grass of the whole site has recently had a close autumnal cut opening up the view of these plants.

Two other plants that were flourishing around the site were Blue Fleabane and Small Scabious, but I also found Yellow-wort, Field Madder and a mass of yellow flowers on the Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil which dominates much of this site.

[Fri 17 Sep](#)

A. A walk around south east Havant

Before starting work on this dull and windy morning I took a brisk walk through the southeast of Havant and back via the Denvilles area.

An early surprise was to hear a Coal Tit singing close to my house (Great Tit, Wren, Collared Dove and Woodpigeon were the only other songsters heard) and both Swallows and House Martins went east over the area.

At the 'wild flower' meadow near the Lymbourne spring Red and White Campion, Ox-eye Daisies, Musk Mallow and Field Scabious were still flowering, as was Pellitory of the Wall in the twitchel path leading to Pook Lane but the Green Nightshade that I had seen there on my last visit had been cleared away in the course of installing a new fence.

Coming back over the rail bridge from Denvilles to Eastern Road I diverted into the old Havant cemetery and found Blue Fleabane before looking over the far wall into the New Lane allotments and spotting at least one plant of Weasel's Snout in flower. On my way out I passed the dump where old flowers from the graves are thrown and had a closer look at what, on a recent visit here, I had decided from its feel was Heath Groundsel. This time I had my hand lens with me and could see the mass of glandular hairs which re-identified the plants as Sticky Groundsel. Back in my own road I added Green Field Speedwell to my list as I passed the flowerbeds in front of Glenhurst School.

Thu 16 Sep

A. Langstone to Emsworth shoreline

This morning I cycled down to Langstone, then along the shore to western Emsworth, returning by an inland route. The sun was shining from a blue sky, the water was almost glassy with no perceptible wind and the tide was rising to almost high when I finished.

At Langstone Pond a number of Chiffchaffs were feeding up in the trees and in the reeds, and their restless activity spurred a Cetti's Warbler into song (the first time I have heard one there for months). A Kingfisher, glowing in the sunshine, shot low across the pond defecating as it did so to show that it had been feeding well, and on the water some the twenty or so Teal now there already had brilliant green speculi showing on their closed wings. Although the tide was low half a dozen Egrets were in the trees behind the pond (five more could be seen resting on the saltings offshore). Before leaving the pond area I checked the Lymbourne stream outfall where it emerges after passing under the old watermill and the driveway into the windmill, and sure enough the Kingfisher was there on its favourite post right up against the bridge carrying the driveway over the stream.

Riding past Warblington Church I could see very few waders and no wildfowl so I did not stop until I was off the field south of the cemetery in which a few cattle could be seen. No Yellow Wagtail were with them but as I was leaving one flew over low and calling, presumably looking for some of its fellows so that it did not have to make a solo cross-channel flight. Looking back to Langstone something put up around 40 Lapwing and somewhere a Greenshank was calling. Another Greenshank was off the Emsworth western parade shore, showing well close to the shore, but the only birds in any numbers along the shore were eleven Swans at the Maisemore gardens stream outfall.

Although Golden Samphire and Sea Aster were still flowering the only fresh flowers were on the shoreline Tamarisks, both the pale pink of the old trees and the bright pink of the recently planted ones that are a favourite of the Highways Agency when planting in this area - I wish someone could tell me if they are the African Tamarisks or are just unnamed cultivars which do not get a mention in the wild-flower books.

Passing the Old Rectory in Pook Lane on the way home I found at least 8 Rooks (a rarity hereabouts nowadays) among the Crows and Jackdaws in the fields, and heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Earlier, coming up the footpath from Nore Barn to the A259 opposite Selangor Avenue, I had a glimpse of a large brown backed bird disappearing into the trees above the path after I had disturbed it. It seemed possibly bigger than a female Sparrowhawk and I did not see a long banded tail so I am wondering if we have an escaped falconer's bird in the area - two small patches of down and feathers at different places along the path suggested that a raptor might be at work there.

Wed 15 Sep

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Manx Shearwater: One off Selsey Bill on Sep 12 and a probable off Gosport on Sep 14 were probably storm driven. Normally few are seen after the end of May but this year we

have had 5 August reports from the Selsey-Ventnor area, in good weather, before these two in September

2. Little Egret: Night roost counts on Sep 13 were 176 at Wade Court and 34 at Tournurbury while the Oldpark Wood count on Sep 14 was zero (thirteen birds flew by the roost but did not enter). No news yet from Thorney Island. The Wade Court count was up by 49 on the Aug 14 count but at Tournurbury it was down by 27 on last month and at Oldpark Wood by 45. See my diary entry for Sep 14 for my thoughts on the varying numbers.
3. White Stork: A stork species over Hastings on Sep 10 sounds like White rather than Black Stork
4. Greylag Goose: At the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Sep 12 John Clark found high numbers of wildfowl starting with 170 Greylag plus 98 Wigeon, 70 Gadwall, 42 Teal, 1 Pintail, 49 Shoveler and 73 Tufted Duck (not to mention 1200 Coot)
5. Osprey: Reports of these continue to run at two or three each day - I see that Peter Raby had one low over his house in Gosport (near the Fareham boundary) to give a good garden tick.
6. Kestrel: One was demonstrating its ability to hover motionless in a full gale on Sep 13 at Taddiford (west of Keyhaven)
7. Spotted Crake: One has been at the Lower Test from Sep 10 to 14 with a sighting of two there on Sep 13
8. Sanderling: A flock seems to have settled on the Ryde sands with counts of 70 there on Sep 7, 80 on Sep 9 and 80 again on Sep 11.
9. Little Stint: the number on the Lymington Marshes was up to 5 on Sep 11 and 6 on Sep 12
10. Curlew Sandpiper: These are now in double figures with 10 at Keyhaven on Sep 11
11. Whimbrel: Their autumn passage must be nearly over but two were in Pagham Harbour on Sep 12 and I had two in the Chichester Channel on Sep 14 (these could be intending to stay for the winter).
12. Red-necked Phalarope: None locally but one was at Lodmoor (Weymouth in Dorset) on Sep 13
13. Long-tailed Skua: Two were seen in May this year but the first (and maybe only) autumn bird was off Selsey Bill on Sep 14
14. Little Tern: More than two weeks after the previous report of 8 in Shoreham Harbour on Aug 27 there were reports of at least two in Pagham Harbour and a few off Selsey Bill on Sep 12 - maybe the last of the year?
15. Black Tern: Two were over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Sep 13
16. Yellow Wagtail: Their passage is not over yet - at least 121 went to roost at Titchfield Haven on Sep 14
17. Grasshopper Warbler: An SOS outing to Pagham Harbour were lucky enough to get views of one in flight on Sep 12 when one which had been seen to fly into a bush was outflanked and made to fly back towards the party of around 30 birders.
18. Firecrest: That same SOS party also saw a Firecrest at Church Norton and at least one was in the Shanklin area on Sep 15
19. Red-backed Shrike: In addition to the one still at Lower Test on Sep 13 (from Sep 10) one was at Farlington Marshes on Sep 12 - discovered I think by Steve Mansfield who pointed it out to Kevin Stouse's HOS walk party.
20. Rose Coloured Starling: A juvenile was seen briefly at the Sandown Canoe Lake on the Isle of Wight on Sep 14 with a flock of Starlings

21. Goldfinch: The biggest flock reported so far was of over 200 birds seen in the Taddiford area (shore west of Milford on Sea) sometime in the week ending Sep 12

PLANTS

1. Pepper Saxifrage: This has suddenly appeared, flowering both at Brook Meadow in Emsworth (on Sep 10) and beside the Hayling Coastal Path (on Sep 12).
2. Skullcap: Not yet over with some flowering by the Lumley Stream at Emsworth on Sep 10
3. Unidentified Bristle Grass: While shopping in Havant today I walked along Prince George St and while passing the back door of a pet shop I noticed a small clump of grass which I did not recognize. The single clump had many semi-erect three-noded culms not longer than 25cm. The leaf sheaths were inflated and the blades not more than 3 or 4 mm wide. I could not detect any ligules at all. The flower panicles were about 6cm long. Each panicle had about half a dozen branches, all on the same side of the rhacis, and the dozen or so flower spikelets were also one-side on their branches. Each spikelet stem had two or three long bristles (2 or 3 mm long) and forward pointing mini-bristles, and the two florets were 'fat and rounded'. I assume it to be a Bristle Grass species but cannot tie it to any description in Stace or Francis Rose. Can anyone help?

INSECTS

1. Hummingbird Hawkmoths: Singles seen in gardens at Lewes and Hill Head (near Titchfield Haven) on Sep 13 and 12 respectively.
2. Red Underwing: One of these large and lovely moths found it's way into the Basingstoke Civic Offices during office hours on Sep 9

OTHER

1. Leech species: Walking along Inhams Lane in Denmead on Sep 13 Richard Hallett found a leech attempting to cross the road where a tiny stream runs under it. He says the creature measured at most 6 cms long when extended and he suggested that it was a Medicinal Leech though (while knowing little or nothing about such things) I suggest it may have been the Horse Leech species. See my diary entry below for more detail.
2. *Volvariella bombycina*: In my notes for Sep 13 I have noted the fungi seen by Maurice Pugh in the New Forest on Sep 12. These included many Oyster Mushrooms, Tawny Grisette, Shaggy *Pholiota* (or a close relative), and the rare but photogenic *Volvariella bombycina*.

B. Leech crossing a road in Denmead

Richard Hallett's most unusual discovery deserves a little more comment than is appropriate in the news summary above.

I have never heard of a Leech moving about out of water before, though I am aware that if you want to see Medicinal Leeches you can do so by wading into certain ponds (particularly in the New Forest but also the Cunigre Pond in the Cams Hall golf course at Fareham) wearing wellies if you are wise. The leeches then attach themselves to your legs with the intention of biting through your skin and drawing off your blood - if wearing wellies they do not generally get through them to your skin and you can remove them from the wellies and return them to their pond unharmed but still hungry.

These Medicinal Leeches presumably survive by attaching themselves to any animal that goes into the pond - ponies, deer and (at least in the case of the Cungire pond) Toads, and it is likely that the host species will leave the pond before the leech has finished its meal. I assume that the leech hangs on until its host re-enters the water (once they have bitten into the flesh they are difficult to remove). Some may be forcibly removed before the host returns to a pond but will probably suffer irrevocable damage in the process, so I

guess we can assume that this species is a pond dweller unlikely to be found wandering on dry land.

There is another species called a Horse Leech (I think from its size rather than any association with horses) and this does not have biting teeth but lives on small invertebrates which it swallows whole. This species can be found in water but can also be found out of the water, climbing up stream banks in search of prey, and I imagine that an inexperienced juvenile of this species might climb out of the stream in search of prey, find none on the banks and continue to march on in its search - maybe this is what Richard saw?

Richard's creature was at most 6 cm long, the Medicinal Leech can grow to 15cm and the Horse Leech to 30 cm (the only other common Leech that can grow to as much as 5cm is the Fish Leech which is unlikely to be found out of water), so it seems Richard's find was a juvenile of one of these species.

My thoughts about the Horse Leech make think that the most likely species, and this is backed up by just one observation that I have come across in the past. On 29 April 2001 I described how Jane Noble, living in Rowlands Castle, found a Horse Leech out of water in her garden. It seemed to have arrived with a load of horse manure (which would be a good place for such a creature to find a supply of the invertebrates it feeds on), but the garden is not too far from an old pond and the creature might have made its way to that and then homed in on the manure rather than arriving with the manure.

Tue 14 Sep

A. Egret roost count at Oldpark Wood in Chichester Harbour

This being the scheduled day for the monthly count of all Egret night roosts in and around Hampshire, and the rainclouds having rolled away to give a fairly clear sky with sunshine, I went to the Chichester Yacht Basin on the west side of the Chichester Channel to look across the water to the wood in which 30 pairs of Egret are said to have nested this year and were 53 birds spent the night of the July count and 45 were there in mid-August.

Unlike the July and August counts the tide was low when I arrived at 18:50 so the Egrets were all likely to be still fishing (especially as they must have had problems with finding prey in the recent strong winds and rain that did not make it easy to see into the water). This was borne out by a total absence of visible birds in the trees, but looking up channel towards Dell Quay I could see one or two fishing there so I was confident that a good number of birds would fly in to roost as soon as it got too dark to see fish in the water.

While waiting I heard and saw one Greenshank and two Whimbrel (getting late for these unless they intend to spend the winter here), and watched four Black-tailed Godwit feeding - later another seven flew south with hundreds of Oystercatcher to wherever they spend the high tide period.

Apparent sunset here was at 19:15 but it was not until 19:30 that one of the Egrets that had been fishing a Dell Quay started to fly south towards the roost. At first it flew low along the water's edge but then rose above the tree-tops over the roost area, so I confidently expected it to spiral down to a branch on which it would roost but it did not - it continued south along the water's edge and went out of sight. It had clearly looked at the roost area but decided not to go into the trees and my guess is that the absence of any birds already in the trees acted as a warning of danger.

Shortly after this four more Egrets followed the same route but when above the roost they did not return to the water channel but went straight on over the trees. Then another group of four did the same, though they did circle over the far side of the woods and I had the impression that they were thinking of landing there but I could not see if they did so. With the sky darkening another group of four went over the trees but I lost them in the dim light among a huge number of Corvids by then circling above their roost in the same wood.

Those thirteen birds were the only ones that I saw, so there was not only the puzzle of why the birds passed over the normal roost without stopping but also a second puzzle of what had happened to at least 30 Egrets which had come into the roost at the August count - they had also arrived from the north as if coming from feeding in the Dell Quay - Fishbourne area but almost certainly came from a much larger area which probably included the Chichester gravel/sand pit lakes.

Past experience shows that the number of Egrets in the local harbours increases each month from July to September and remains at a high level to the end of the year, and the only two reasons for a roost to be abandoned seem to have been overcrowding and/or disturbance. Neither of these seem to have been applicable to Oldpark Wood, and I subsequently heard that while the Wade Court roost at Langstone acquired 49 more birds in September than it had in August the Tournurbury Wood roost on Hayling Island was 27 down in September compared to August. So far I have not heard the count for the Thorney Island roosts but I get the feeling that the birds from Oldpark Wood had not just moved to other known roosts in Chichester Harbour.

One possibility that occurs to me is that recent strong southwest gales might have deterred Egrets coming from the Chichester lakes area from making a long flight into the wind to reach the Oldpark roost and they may instead have either gone to the existing roost to the north of Pagham Harbour or even have set up a new roost in the Chichester Lakes area.

Another possibility is that the species as a whole has decided to move further north in Britain - we know that last year there were big roosts as far north as Norfolk on the east coast and North Wales on the west - maybe our local Egrets have decided to seek pastures new in northern England or even Scotland?

Despite the zero count of roosting Egrets my evening was by no means fruitless. During the August count I had been impressed by the sight of well over 500 corvids on the shingle shore of the west bank of the Chichester Channel across from Copperas Point. This evening a similar crowd grew there as darkness approached - maybe having a seafood supper or maybe taking in a dose of salt to help digest what was already in their crops. That was impressive enough but far more spectacular was the stream of corvids that started, at around sunset, to fly from fields out of sight to the east of the channel towards the wood in which they were to roost. This stream went on and on for at least ten minutes until there were birds filling the whole visible sky from east to west, those over the woods to the west circling to form an even denser cloud. With the birds on the shore my guess was that there were at least 5,000 corvids involved....

Mon 13 Sep

A. Local news

Blackening Waxcaps are by no means uncommon but I have never seen them on my lawn until today - in the 37 years we have lived here a number of different fungi have appeared in the grass including Parrot and Goat moth waxcaps which are almost annual through to some which I have only seen once or twice in all the years - what I think was *Trichoglossum hirsutum* (tiny black paddle shapes) have twice covered the lawn and once or twice I have seen *Verdigris* toadstools. Some other unknown small species appear quite regularly. From these observations it might be assumed that these fungi are rare visitors to the garden but in fact I think it tells us that there is a large variety of species permanently present in the ground, finding plenty of nutriment to keep themselves going, and thus only very rarely feeling the need to show themselves above the surface in the form of fruiting bodies. It is when food supplies run short or other threats to the continuing presence of the mycellium in the soil or wood that fungi really feel the need to move on and the only way they can do this is to put up fruiting bodies (toadstools) and scatter spores into the wind which will hopefully carry the species to pastures new and 'greener'.

At Langstone Mill Pond this evening the number of Teal had more than doubled from a dozen a week ago to at least 27 today. Also noted there was the now regular Kingfisher with several Egrets and Herons plus over 40 Black-tailed Godwits on the shore.

Going back to the subject of fungi I have just an email from Maurice Pugh who enjoyed a visit to the New Forest yesterday in search of fungi. He tells me that there were plenty of Oyster Mushrooms to be found, but also what appeared to be many commercial gatherers of edible species for the London restaurants - this is a real problem nowadays as they take the freshest specimens which have not yet had time to release their spores and they strip the woodland of every specimen they can find, thus threatening the ability of the fungi to reproduce themselves and possibly bringing about the extinction of the rarer species.

Among the commoner species were Tawny Grisette and a Pholiota species which was like, but probably different from, the lovely to look at Shaggy Pholiota whose dense clusters adorn the base of oak trees and the like in the autumn. A much rarer and also very pretty fungus was a large white one with shaggy edges hanging from its cap, growing on beech, which was probably *Volvariella bombycina* - something I have only seen in two past years on beech trees in Stansted Forest - maybe I should have another look there in the near future....

Wildlife diary and news for Sep 6 - 12 (Week 37)

Sun 12 Sep

A. Undigested news received this evening

A brief glance through incoming news this evening includes the following which is not a complete summary of the interesting items - that will follow!

1. BIRDS

First six Brent had reached Pett Level near Hastings on Friday Sep 10 - I think these must be migrants

A single Brent seen at Normandy Marsh on Sep 9 (with 2 there on Sep 12) sound to me to be summering birds coming out to look for the return of their friends and relations. (2 were seen at Keyhaven on June 15 by Giles Darvill). Two more Brent were seen in Portsmouth Harbour (near Pewit Island) by Trevor Carpenter on Sep 11 but again I would guess these have been lurking in the harbour through the summer

John Shillitoe saw two (perched) Ospreys and a Black Tern in Langstone Harbour when he was at the Kench on Sep 11 (when Simon Wright saw one Osprey going south over the north Hayling Fields)

Red-backed Shrike was at the Lower Test on Sep 11 and 12 and a Spotted Crake has been there from Sep 10 to 12.

A couple of other Hobby sightings in unusual places this weekend (in addition to mine at Wade Court) suggests the species is now on the move south.

A late Swift was still visiting a nest hole in Winchester on Sep 10 (in the rain)

Wigeon have now arrived back in Portsmouth Harbour - Trevor Carpenter had 70 near the mouth of Fareham Creek on Sep 11 after seeing that number fly in on Sep 9

Curlew Sandpipers have just reached double figures with 10 on the Lymington Marshes on Sep 11

A new Hampshire record was set when John Clark saw 34 Egyptian Geese go to roost at the Eversley Gravel Pit in north Hampshire (Berks border) on Sep 9

2. INSECTS

Two Grayling butterflies seen at Setley Plain near Lymington on Sep 8 were, I think, very late

3. OTHER WILDLIFE

Grass Snake in River Ouse at Lewes being 'mobbed' by a Grey Wagtail

Fungi in the New Forest - many Oyster Mushrooms (with 'commercial' gatherers!) and three specimens of what was probably *Volvariella bombycina* (a lovely fungus which I photographed many years back in Stansted Forest)

B. West Hayling shore

Last autumn the first Brent were definitely back in Langstone harbour by Sep 19, with sightings of what were probably forerunners but may have been summering birds in Chichester Harbour on Sept 24 and Langstone Harbour on Sep 18, so I thought it worth a look for them from the west Hayling shore today.

Despite a run of easterly winds in the past week none were visible in Langstone Harbour at high tide, and a strong southwest wind had made the water uncomfortable for other birds. From the Saltmarsh Lane shore on Hayling you can see the whole of the harbour other than Russells and Chalk Dock lakes (hidden by the RSPB islands), Bridge Lake (hidden by the Oysterbeds), and the top of Broom Channel to the west of Farlington Marshes, but the only birds I could spot on the water were just five Great Crested Grebes.

There were plenty of birds in the high tide roosts. Before the tide was fully up I watched at least 100 Grey Plover and perhaps 50 Dunlin on the 'mid-way saltings' close to the Hayling shore roughly half-way down the west side in the area drained by Sinah Lake (the harbour channel, not the gravel pit lake on Sinah Common!). These soon flew to the main roosts on the RSPB islands, but plenty were using the Oysterbed bunds when I got there - at least 500 (probably 700) Oystercatcher, with a small number of Grey Plover and no doubt some Dunlin (though I did not see them) as well as Turnstone which I did see. In the Oysterbeds lagoon I counted 66 Redshank with a few more Turnstone, and I had previously seen Curlew along the shoreline. At least a dozen Cormorant were also in the roost areas.

Four Wheatear were on the Oysterbeds shore and more than 100 Starling were pretending to be small waders roosting on the bunds, occasionally taking off to perform close formation aerobatics. One or two Egrets could be seen around the harbour, and when nearly home I found a high tide roost of at least 20 with four Herons in the trees behind Langstone Pond (there could have been far more hidden in the foliage) while the number of Teal on that pond had gone up to at least 12.

Best bird of the trip came as I was cycling up Wade Lane between the fields north of Wade Court when I saw a dark backed raptor speeding down the treeline along the Lymbourne stream. Luckily it perched briefly in the top of a totally dead tree near the footbridge over the stream, long enough for me to see the bold facial pattern of an adult Hobby before a Magpie caused it to resume its journey, giving me a clear view of the scythe like pointed wings.

The other unexpected star item on my list was the resumption of flowering by Common Gorse, with a few flowers on bushes near the Saltmarsh shoreline and more at the Oysterbeds (last year I saw the first flowers of the new season on Sep 15). A close second as star of the day, with several freshly flowering bushes on the Saltmarsh Lane seawall, was Lucerne, and while in this area (in the open space east of the Coastal Path beside the path to Denhill Close) was a lot of Pale Flax still flowering and a few plants of Slender Hare's Ear (all in seed). Much less welcome here were a few more flowers of Japanese Knotweed which seems to be just starting its flowering season.

Both Yellow-wort and Common Centuary were still flowering, as was the Goat's Rue in the Stoke Bay overflow carpark behind the Esso garage and a few Ox-eye Daises at Texaco Bay near Langstone Bridge (beside which Blue Fleabane was flowering at the Langstone end.

[Sat 11 Sep](#)

A. Fort Widley area of Portsdown

A walk from the carpark alongside Widley Way (between the Churchillian pub and Fort Widley) around the back of the fort and along the south face of the hillside below the fort gave me some good views and a long list of downland plants but no unexpected discoveries.

Harebells were still flowering more profusely than in recent years and it was good to see things like Marjoram, Vervain and Vipers Bugloss still in flower. Ploughmans Spikenard was still just hanging on but I was surprised to find only one Autumn Gentian and that past flowering.

Although it was warm enough for butterflies to fly the wind was too strong for their comfort and while I saw several Speckled Wood in the shelter of trees, and both Small and Large Whites around bushes, I only saw one Common Blue by chance - it was fast asleep in the grass - while the few Meadow Browns I noted were ones disturbed by my feet which flew a few yards than went to earth again.

[Fri 10 Sep](#)

A. News and reports reaching me up to Sep 9

BIRDS

1. BLACK-NECKED GREBE: This summer none seem to have stayed in Langstone Harbour and the first report of an arrival comes from the Hook shore at the mouth of the Hamble River where what may have been a juvenile was seen by Bob Marchant on Sep 9.
2. Mute Swan: On Sep 7 the pair on Langstone Pond had five of their six cygnets with them and on Sep 9 the seven cygnets of the Hermitage Stream family could all be seen from Budds Mound with no 'extras' so it does seem that one cygnet from the Langstone family has either gone off on a round the world tour or met with a sticky end. While on the subject the Portsmouth NEWS of Sep 10 says that Swans are starting to return to Southsea Canoe Lake from which they all vanished a couple of months ago following the death of several Swans there - seemingly from drinking polluted water.
3. Arrival of winter ducks: Sep 9 brought counts of 26 Wigeon, 26 Gadwall, 43 Teal, 9 Pintail and 7 Shoveler from Bpb Marchant at Hook/Warsash while Bernie Forbes wrote of 'loads of Wigeon and Pintail' in Pagham Harbour on Sep 8.
4. GARGANEY: One was seen on Sidlesham Ferry Pool by Paul James on Sep 7
5. MONTAGU'S HARRIER: A juvenile was seen well hunting over the west fields at Selsey on Sep 8 (I hesitate to suggest that a report of a raptor seen there on the previous day and reported as a Honey Buzzard - said to have been watched for 15 minutes including close views - could have been this same Harrier but the description of the bird 'quartering the fields' in mid afternoon sounds more appropriate to a Harrier than a Honey Buzzard. Can anyone put me right on this?)
6. Osprey: Sep 7 and 8 brought reports of sightings from the Sidlesham Ferry Pool, three areas on the Isle of Wight (Bembridge, Newtown Harbour and Yarmouth), the Tiitchfield Haven shoreline (west to Southampton Water) and one perched on a post in the Milton Shore area of Langstone Harbour (seen by Alistair Martin from the Hayling shore).
7. Merlin: On Sep 8 Bernie Forbes saw a male over the Selsey west fields and a female over Pagham Harbour.

8. Hobby: Several have been reported recently at Pulborough Brooks preying on the mass of passing hirundines and on Sep 7 Richard Ford had two at Woolmer Pond in East Hampshire.
9. Quail: Following on the recent reports of a group of 11 seen fleeing the harvesting of a cereal field on Churchills Farm south of Wellow (No wind farm here please!) on the Isle of Wight there is a report of one being found dead on that farm - possible one that did not get away from the combine in time?
10. Sanderling: A flock of around 70 were on Ryde East Sands on Sep 7 and at least one was in the Lymington marshes on Sep 9 where there were also 2 Little Stint and 3 Curlew Sandpiper (still no double figure counts of either of these species this autumn)
11. Ruff: One at Sidlesham Ferry Pool on Sep 8 (with a Spotted Redshank) may be the same female that was there on Sep 3
12. Swift: Late passage may be coming to an end - I have picked up 23 reports of these since Sep 1 but none since a single bird was over the Isle of Wight on Sep 6
13. Yellow Wagtails: Reports still coming in up to Sep 9 when Bob Marchant had 13 at Hook/Warsash while on Sep 8 the Montagu's Harrier over the Selsey west fields put up more than 30 which might otherwise have escaped detection. Here in Havant Alistair Martin saw at least one over the Warblington shore fields this week.
14. Grey Wagtail: Recent reports of these moving in small numbers along the coast may have brought one back to the Langbrook stream just south of Tesco's and the A27 in Havant on Sep 9.
15. Stonechat: A report of 8 in the Sheepcote Valley just east of Brighton caused me to check recent reports of this species and it would seem that there has been a substantial increase in numbers at coastal sites starting on Aug 22 when John Faithfull had a count of 9 of Hook/Warsash (and 7 were reported from the Ashdown Forest on that same day though they may have been breeding there)
16. Linnet: My first coastal flock was of 42 on Budds Mound on Sep 9 though there have been a few much bigger flocks reported in August (Steve Keen saw more than 180 near Lymington on Aug 4, there were more than 50 at Newhaven on Aug 17 and the peak count for August at Rye Harbour was given as 300). Locally Cliff Oakley found 46 on north Thorney on Sep 1.
17. Escapes/Feral birds: A Chiloe Wigeon was on the River Itchen at Woodmill (north edge of Southampton) on Sep 8 and I have been asked to see if anyone has seen a recently escaped red parakeet in the Bursledon/Swanwick area (please email me with any news of it)

PLANTS

1. Purple Loosestrife: Walking down the Langbrook Stream path on Sep 9 I found Purple Loosestrife flowering in a place that I have never seen it before (by the stile just north of the dairy farm entrance). This is where I had been puzzled by the arrival of a large bush of Goats Rue earlier this summer, and on this occasion I was able to speak to the owner of the garden adjacent to these finds. As I thought he had planted both species but the good news was that both were to be found elsewhere in his garden near the stream which runs through and he was just trying to share his enjoyment of the plants with the public using the path.
2. Ivy: After a couple of sightings of bushes with a few flowers open and attracting insects I saw my first mass flowering on a large bush overhanging the Langbrook stream just south of the bridge from Langstone Mill Lane onto the South Moors
3. Devil's Bit Scabious: Part of the Langstone South Moors 'orchid field' has recently been mown but the small area in which Devil's Bit Scabious is flowering has been spared and I

counted 18 plants where in previous years I have been lucky to see one or two (often no) plants.

INSECTS

1. Lilac Beauty moth: One of these taken by Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John (Basingstoke) on the night of Sep 8 was the only 'first for the year' species reported in current news
2. Latticed Heath moth: This moth is resident on heathland in this country but is also a migrant and there have been two invasions of Britain by this moth this summer (July 20 and Aug 19-24). Maybe another invasion is underway as the first to be recorded in Hampshire were seen at Fareham and Lymington on Sep 6 and at Basingstoke on Sep 7.
3. *Palpita vitrealis*: This small pyralid is also a migrant of which only two have been reported in Hampshire this summer - Alistair Goodall had one at Sholing in Southampton on Aug 24 and Rochard Coomber has now had his first ever at Lymington on Sep 8

OTHER

1. Grass Snake: Steve Frampton, who lives in Denmead, arrived home on the evening of Sep 6 to find a very strange looking object in his driveway. A closer look showed that it was a Grass Snake starting to swallow a Frog but the Snake was not happy to be 'caught in the act' - it ejected the Frog and shot off!

B. Emsworth Brook Meadow and environs

Brian Fellows invited me to join him this afternoon in a visit to a plot of land between the railway line and the A27 east of Emsworth rail station. A planning application has just been submitted to build a mini-industrial park on the land and Brian wondered if there was a valid case for opposing it on wildlife grounds, and I said I would join him in a search for evidence to support a valid case against development.

The land in question is only 200 metres from west to east and just over 100 metres from the railway on the south to the A27 on the north, tapering to much less than that where it abuts the North Street/New Brighton Road from which it would be accessed with new traffic lights on the existing road to allow traffic to turn in and out with safety. It has been lightly grazed by a few ponies but otherwise neglected since the demolition (back in the late 1970s? to make way for the new A27) of the maternity hospital which previously maintained the land as grounds around the house.

Scrub and brambles have taken hold on a good part of the land, aided by trees planted alongside the new road, and in the short time we were there four trains clanked past us on the south side while the noise from the A27 to the north was never ending. Despite these factors I suspect the land in question has never been ploughed, and with good management it could no doubt support a variety of plants and insects (which do not suffer from noise pollution!) to maintain bio-diversity in the area - to achieve the same biodiversity on an equivalent sized plot of land which has been subject to modern agricultural or domestic gardening management with chemicals would be a much more difficult and lengthy process, so why throw away an amenity which cannot easily be replaced?

As I suspect there will be strong objections to new traffic lights on a busy and narrow road, the only one connecting old Emsworth to its northern extension and further afield to the north, and as I think there is a good case for preserving this unimproved habitat, I feel it is well worth making the case for saving it.

From what I have said so far this case could be demolished by the argument that if you prevent the development and leave the site to nature it will soon lose all its amenity value by becoming overgrown with scrub. So we need to add a positive proposal for its long term management, and I think there is a good chance of doing so if the group of stalwarts who have

done so much to manage and enhance Brook Meadow are prepared to commit to the long term management of this site which is only just the other side of the railway from the north end of the existing Brook Meadow site. If they did so they would gain something that Brook Meadow does not currently have - a dry grassland site to supplement the wetland habitat of the current site.

Leaving the politics aside one of the first things we found on the site were several Green-veined Whites which (unlike the Cabbage Whites which roam the countryside - many coming as migrants from the continent - and damage market garden crops) do no damage to any domestic or agricultural crops and live a sedentary life in small colonies (development of the site could well destroy this colony). We also found much Black Knapweed, a typical if common inhabitant of downland, and before we left we came on a cluster of Giant Puffballs (one in fresh condition went for Brian's supper!). One prominent plant here at this time of year was not a valued native, but nothing worse than Canadian Goldenrod which probably grew in the hospital grounds, While there we also heard Chiffchaff song reminding us that this narrow belt of land is the only unbuilt green corridor connecting the Ems Valley with the open fields of the Havant/Emsworth gap and the Warblington area.

Walking back via Lumley Mill we found Skullcap still flowering by the mill stream where it passes the cottage south of the railway, and in Brook Meadow we glimpsed the Kingfisher flying downstream from those cottages. In the meadow itself we chanced on what may be the only plant of Pepper Saxifrage to flower there this year, and in the hollows of the long grass saw at least four Golden Orb (*Argiope bruennichi*) spiders still on their webs - soon they will lay eggs in containers which look like pinkish mini Chinese Lanterns hanging from the tops of grass stems that have been found together to form an arch which supports the case containing the eggs.

[Thu 9 Sep](#)

A. Langstone South Moors, Langbrook Stream and Budds Farm

Reaching the Langbrook stream just north of the A27 I watched a single fresh Red Admiral enjoying the hot sunshine on a Buddleia bush, reminding me how few butterflies, other than the migrant Cabbage Whites are currently on the wing compared to this time last year - hopefully a few more Peacocks, Commas and Small Tortoiseshells will appear before winter sets in or next spring will be equally devoid of butterflies!

Passing the Langstone Technology Park south of the A27 I disturbed a Grey Wagtail from the stream where I suspect it has just arrived for the winter, and south of the approach road to this site I found that the felling of a number of conifers had allowed a lot of welcome light back on what had become a very shady section of the stream path.

At the southern end of this section, where a stile takes you into the start of the South Moors area, I had a chance to speak to David Lockwood in the garden of his house (the most southerly of those in 'The Mallards'). He confirmed that he had planted the Goat's Rue by the stile and more recently some Purple Loosestrife near by, answering my query as to how these 'wild plants' had suddenly appeared just outside the garden. He also explained that both plants did grow wild by the stream where it runs through his property, and he was merely wishing to share their colour with the passing public - a sentiment I fully agree with, especially as I understood that he has not eliminated them from the places where they grow naturally.

On the South Moors proper I discovered one plant of Spiked Sedge growing near the stream (something I had not noticed here before) and found that the Brookweed was still flowering. Much of the 'orchid field' had been mown and this will help to control the growth of the rushes and give the Southern Marsh Orchids more 'breathing space' next spring. Interestingly the line at which the mowing had stopped coincided with the edge of the area in which Devil's Bit Scabious is flourishing this year (I counted 18 flowering plants today where in some years I have found none and in other years at most half a dozen) - this may have been co-incidental but I suspect that either George or Colin Hedley when doing the mowing spotted the colour of

the plants and allowed them to survive (in the way that farmers of old would move a Lapwing's nest out of the way of the plough)

On Budd's Mound I found a flock of 42 Linnets, my first finch flock of the autumn, and watched a much smaller group of Meadow Pipits flying up from the shore over the mound. By the steps leading down to the west I found at least three Chiffchaffs but there was no real presence of migrants here. Going back along the shore I watched a fast moving dense flock of what must have been Grey Plover high in the air - at least 100 of them - and I guessed that they were newly arrived winter visitors just flying in and checking the site from the air before landing.

Going back up the Langbrook stream I stepped onto the bridge giving access to the small hayfield on the south side of Mill Lane, and looking north upstream in the hope of seeing a Kingfisher I found that the large bush of ivy (growing over a tree overhanging the stream) was almost fully in flower.

[Tue 7 Sep](#)

A. News and reports reaching me since Sep 2

BIRDS

1. Great Crested Grebe: Flock of 45 in Langstone Harbour Chalk Dock on Sep 1
2. Cormorant: Two flying as part of a Canada Goose flock holding their places in the flock's V-formation. Seen by Ian Pibworth over the Testwood Lakes at Southampton on Sep 5 (Maybe trained by this chap who attends air shows to demonstrate how his flock of mixed geese fly in formation with his microlite after bringing the geese up to regard the microlite as their parent bird)
3. BITTERN: First of the winter flying over reeds near Rye Harbour on Sep 5 seen by Cliff Dean
4. BLACK STORK: One seen over Pagham Harbour visitor centre on Sep 7 by Tim Edwards
5. Mandarin: Two on Sowley Pond near Lymington on Sep 1
6. Wigeon: Nine records from different locations since Sep 1 including the first report from Chichester Harbour (19 birds seen by Barry Collins on Sep 5 when 10 flew south over the Testwood Lakes and another 7 were at Hook/Warsash)
7. Gadwall: Reports of these are also increasing and include a pair on Langstone Pond on Sep 7, four on the Thorney Deeps on Sep 1 and 31 at The Vyne near Basingstoke on Aug 31 - all these seem to be new at their sites.
8. Teal: Although these started to return from mid-August (54 at Titchfield Haven on Aug 18 and around 150 at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 23) there has also been a recent surge of local arrivals (150 at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight on Sep 7, with 28 on the Hamble at Bunny Meadows on that day and 35 in the Hook/Warsash area on Sep 5) Locally I found more than 7 on Langstone Pond on Sep 7.
9. Pintail: A single female at the Testwood Lakes on Sep 5 is the first reported there this year.
10. HONEY BUZZARD: One or more have been giving good views to birders at various places on the Isle of Wight from Sep 2 to 5 after one was on the Hampshire shore at Taddiford opposite The Needles on Aug 30
11. BLACK KITE: One seen over Headon Warren near Freshwater on the Isle of Wight on Sep 2 was flying northwest (towards Hants?)
12. OSPREY: Sixteen reports since Sep 1 show there are several birds around at various locations but of local interest is the first report of one over the Thorney Deeps east on Sep 5

13. Coot: A report of two at a nest on Carisbrooke Pond (IoW) on Sep 5 does not confirm continued breeding but suggests it!
14. Sanderling: Reports from the Ryde Sands on Sep 3 and 7 give counts of around 50 and 70 respectively. On Sep 4 Graham Osborne saw one in an unexpected place - Farlington Marshes lake
15. Little Stint: Up to 4 have been seen at Pagham Harbour (Ferry Pool) and counts of 2 are reported from each end of the Lymington Marshes (Keyhaven and Normandy)
16. Curlew Sandpiper: Six juveniles were seen at Farlington Lake on Sep 4 by Graham Osborne and up to four have been seen at the Pagham Ferry Pool
17. Turtle Dove: Five were seen on Thorney Island on Sep 5 with one near Hastings on the same day. Another single had been at Culver Down on the Isle of Wight on Sep 3.
18. Short-eared Owl: The first one to be seen on Thorney Island since last winter was reported to be there on Sep 5
19. Swift: 21 reports since Sep 1 indicate a widespread presence of small groups still passing south. On Sep 2 there were 27 near Freshwater (IoW) and 10 over Rottingdean east of Brighton and the next day there were 26 over Gilkicker Point (Gosport)
20. Kingfisher: Newcomers in the Havant area were seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 3 and on the Langbrook Stream by Langstone West Mill on Sep 7
21. WRYNECK: Three different birds seen recently were at Thorney Island (near the Little Deeps) and at Keyhaven, both on Sep 5, with the third at Farlington Marshes (just east of the building, where the old shed once stood) on Sep 6.
22. Hirundines: A huge movement of Swallows and House Martins going east along the south coast has continued through the past week but the biggest count of Sand Martins was only 33 on Thorney Island on Sep 1. Some Sand Martins were among an estimated total of 8000 Swallows and House Martins spending the night of Sep 4 in the Pannell Valley area between Hastings and Rye. On the evening of Sep 5 a group of 30 House Martins were over Rownhams (by the M27 north of Southampton) with two Noctule Bats among them.
23. Yellow Wagtail: Seen all along the south coast this week - several counts of around 30 or more birds and one impressive count of 'many hundreds' in a field with cattle, sheep and a dewpond near Beachy Head on Sep 4
24. Grey Wagtail: Eight reports of these apparently on passage this week from coastal observers in Hampshire, Sussex and the Isle of Wight, but none of the reports involving more than six birds.
25. AQUATIC WARBLER: One caught by ringers in the Pannell Valley between Hastings and Rye was the 100th ringed at that site (over the years).
26. Passerine migrants: A few large counts from the ringers at Beachy Head reflect the continuing mass movement south of our departing summer birds - 100 Common Whitethroats and 20 Lessers were caught on Sep 4, 300 Blackcaps on both Sep 3 and 4. Grasshopper Warblers were caught daily but Sedge and Reed Warbler passage may have almost finished. Many Redstarts, Whinchats and Wheatears were recorded everywhere and a couple of Nightingales were ringed at Beachy Head on Sep 4 (with 15 Robins there on Sep 3).
27. Chiffchaff: Song has been heard daily in my garden since Sep 5 and will probably continue for some time (I think these may be birds intending to stay and establishing winter territories). One Willow Warbler was heard singing near Lymington on Sep 1 but I guess that was a passage bird.

28. Goldcrest: On Sep 2 Tony Wilson remarked on the first of the autumn appearing in his garden at Hangleton (west end of Brighton and Hove) and two groups of up to four birds were noted at different places on the Isle of Wight on Sep 4 and 5 so we are probably seeing the arrival of winter birds from the continent.
29. Spotted Flycatcher: 15 were on the downs near Worthing on Sep 4 with 12 on downs above Ventnor on the same day with 19 other records of smaller numbers since Sep 1. In that period on one single Pied Flycatcher has been reported (from Beachy Head on Sep 3)
30. RED BACKED SHRIKE: On Sep 3 a juvenile was at Newtown Harbour (IoW) and another juvenile at Beachy Head
31. RAVEN: In addition to regular reports from the Isle of Wight (including two feeding on a dead sheep near the Needles) two were reported flying over Fittleworth in the Pulborough area on Sep 6
32. Starlings: One or two adults have been heard making their chattering song this week and many of this year's young are now in nearly complete adult plumage.
33. Chaffinch remain rarities but there have been a few reports of Goldfinch flocks (30+ at the Hayling Osyterbeds on Sep 3 and 50 on the Isle of Wight on Sep 4, with 30 Linnets there on the same day).

PLANTS

1. Many-seeded Goosefoot: I came on a good example of this at Purbrook Heath on Sep 5 with both flowers and some well developed berries
2. DWARF MALLOW: still flowering profusely at the Nutbourne orchards on Sep 4
3. Ivy: My first find of a flowering plant was on Sep 4 and my second find on Sep 7 - soon this will be a commonplace.
4. Green Nightshade: After my first find on Aug 30 I found more plants in a market garden plot at Prinsted on Sep 4
5. Lesser Snapdragon (or Weasel's Snout): still flowering in the Havant New Lane allotments on Sep 7
6. SHAGGY SOLDIER: Lots of this flowering at two sites in Prinsted on Sep 4
7. CHAMOMILE: Still abundant and flowering around the Purbrook Heath playing fields just west of Havant/Waterlooville on Sep 5

INSECTS

1. CARPENTER BEE (*Xylocopa violacea*): One of these huge black bees which are only vagrants to Britain was seen at Noar Hill on Sep 5 (first British record I have heard of).
2. SMALL RED-EYED DAMSELFLIES: Phil Lord found these at a sixth site in Hampshire on Sep 3 (at Casbrook Common north of Romsey in the Test Valley)
3. SWALLOWTAIL butterfly: To support Steve Grange's highly probable sighting of one in his Southsea garden on Sep 1 I see that another was reported from the Swanage area of Dorset on Sep 2 with a SCARCE SWALLOWTAIL in that same area on Sep 4
4. Clouded Yellow: widespread reports of small numbers, mainly along the coast, but one 'helice' female was seen at Shipton Bellinger near Andover on Sep 5
5. Brimstone: A new brood seems to have started to emerge from Sep 2, though this is only borne out by four sightings
6. Brown Hairstreak: Still being seen at Noar Hill (five there on Sep 5) but Matthew Oates found a major new site for them just in Hampshire at Shipton Bellinger near Andover. In six hours searching there on Sep 5 he came on 36 specimens, mainly associated with Ash trees - most were seeking sustenance from around next year's sticky ash buds.

7. Adonis Blue: Ten males were seen at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on Sep 4 and around 12 were found at Beachy Head on Sep 5
8. Peacock: Only two reports of this species in September and three each of Comma and Small Tortoiseshell. I hope a few more appear before the autumn is over.
9. Silver Washed Fritillary: Two very late sightings - one at Noar Hill on Sep 2 and another on a garden Buddleia at Bramdean Common by the A272 west of the A32 junction (on Sep 3)
10. Gatekeeper: Another late sighting was of more than ten of these at Noar Hill on Sep 5. (I see that over 50 Meadow Brown were still to be seen there on Sep 2 when they have already vanished from many sites)
11. Small Heath: These have had a tremendous season and Theo Roberts reports them back on Portsdown (above Paulsgrove) after an absence of three years. Near the mouth of the Beaulieu River there were still 41 on Sep 4 and 35 were counted on the Gosport shore of Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 3

MOTHS

1. Feathered Gothic: First of year on Sep 2 (Nick Montegriffo near Basingstoke)
2. Agonopterix nervosa: First of year on Sep 2 (Richard Moore near Catherington Down)
3. Autumnal Rustic: First of year on Sep 3 (Russell Wynn at Lymington)
4. Black Rustic: First of year on Sep 4 (Nick Montegriffo near Basingstoke)
5. Neglected Rustic: Firsts of year on Sep 5 (Rob Edmunds at Fleet and Derek Mills at Farnham)
6. Heath Rustic: First of year on Sep 6 (Nick Montegriffo near Basingstoke)
7. Barred Sallow: First of year on Sep 6 (Nick Montegriffo)
8. Red Underwing: First of year on Sep 2 (Mike Wall at Basingstoke - Chineham)
9. The Vestal: Although there had been three reports of migrants in Feb and Aug the effective first of year was taken by Peter Hooper at Bishoptoke (Eastleigh) on Sep 2 with daily widespread catches since
10. Pine Hawkmoth: Last of the year? One in Richard Carpenter's garden at Hill Head was the first record since Aug 10
11. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: One at Portland Bill on Sep 1
12. Large counts at moth traps: Mike Wall had 209 Large Yellow Underwing at Basingstoke (Chineham) on Sep 2 and Nick Montegriffo had 290 Square-spot Rustic at Sherborne St John (north of Basingstoke) on Sep 4

CATERPILLARS

1. Death's Head Hawkmoth: One full grown and looking for somewhere to pupate in allotments near Ringwood on Sep 5
2. Elephant Hawkmoth: Several in a garden at the foot of Portsdown on Sep 5 and a report of six in a Weymouth garden on Sep 6

B. Two outings in the Havant area

This morning I cycled to Langstone Mill Lane where I saw a Kingfisher back on the Langbrook stream near the West Mill and watched a small cloud of House Martins and Swallows moving east over the South Moors - a small part of a huge mass movement now occurring all along the south coast.

Going out on the north pier of the old railway line I came on a flock of at least 100 Starlings feeding on Elderberries and noticed how this years young have nearly completed their

moult from drab juvenile brown into the shiny sparkling black plumage of young adults. I have also noticed in the last day or so that several of the adults (who have also probably just finished their moult and are feeling fit to face the winter) have resumed their chattering song from chimney pots.

From the bridge approach embankment I watched a Sandwich Tern fishing and noted a Grey Plover, Turnstone and Dunlin among the throng of Oystercatchers and Redshank on the tideline, and later from the Langstone village shore east of the road bridge I saw Black-tailed Godwits and Lapwing and a single Pied Wagtail (still a rarity though no doubt we will soon be seeing flocks of them which have come to us for the winter heading to Budds Farm each evening for their night roost or dispersing in the mornings). At least one unseen Greenshank was calling from the harbour, and on Langstone Pond there had been an increase in the number of Teal and a pair (male and female) of Gadwall had arrived. Also on the pond were all five remaining cygnets with the two adult Swans (it does seem that one of the six cygnets which were present up to a couple of weeks ago has met some unknown fate or possibly has swapped families to join the Hermitage Stream bunch?)

I noted some 66 flowering plants on this trip but nothing of special interest - the Butcher's Broom near the West Mill was still flowering and the Rusty Back Fern on the Mill wall is copiously coated with spores, a few flowers could still be seen on Vipers Bugloss, Blue Fleabane and Sea Lavender, and the Gipsywort was in full flower by Langstone Pond.

Later in the morning I had to visit the Council Offices and took the opportunity to walk there and back via the New Lane allotments where the Weasel's Snout (Lesser Snapdragon) is still flowering and near which I came on my second flowering Ivy bush of the autumn, humming with bees and other insects.

Wildlife diary and news for Aug 30 - Sep 5 (Week 36)

Sun 5 Sep

A. Purbook Heath

This morning was too hot to spend much time out of doors but I did drive to Purbrook Heath and add Chamomile to my plant list.

This plant (the aromatic lawn grass of the Elizabethans) is not recorded in the Hants Flora for the tetrad SU 6606 but it has been established all around the Purbrook Heath playing fields for well over five years and thrives on the close mowing of the steep dry banks of the playing fields and elsewhere all around the site.

John Goodspeed reported the continuing presence of this plant earlier this summer and there was plenty still in flower although the older flowerheads had been mown off. Both Small Heath and Meadow Brown butterflies were present but showed no preference for these aromatic plants.

While there I enjoyed a good look at the magnificent Ginko tree in a garden by the road running down the west side of the area, then went on to have a look at the Pur-brook and in doing so I found a good specimen of Many-seeded Goosefoot close to the stile by the Tudor House cottage

Sat 4 Sep

A. Morning walk around Havant

The morning weather was too nice to stay indoors so I took an hours walk around the south west of Havant town looking for plants starting with the single Sticky Groundsel that has just appeared in my garden. At the bottom of the road, in a concrete forecourt of some flats, both

Wall Lettuce and Guernsey Fleabane had pushed up through the cracks and, in Juniper Square, Green Alkanet had restarted flowering. Small Flowered Cranesbill was still flowering there and I found a new site for it in the grass of the turn-round island in the road outside Bosmere School.

Along Solent Road the northside edge had been cut, removing the Black Mustard expected there but Annual Wallrocket, Large Flowered Evening Primrose and Fools Parsley had escaped devastation. Turning right into Brockhampton Lane I found a cluster of what I might call 'Dust Mushrooms' as they flourish in dry and dusty places but are very edible after cleaning up - these are properly called *Agaricus bitorquis*.

Coming back via Havant Fire Station I found the first Ivy flowers of the year in an alley leading through to the waste ground of the still undeveloped Potash Terrace carpark site, and around the edges of this open area both Large and Small Whites were nectaring on Buddleia with a Red Admiral.

The underpass brought me into Havant Park where Black Nightshade was to be seen in the flower beds and other 'flower beds' outside Havant Station had a resurgence of Storksbill flowers. The last plant noted was Round-leaved Cranesbill which still has one or two small and dusty flowers at the foot of the walls of the backs of shops along Prince George Street.

B. Nutbourne, Prinsted and north east Thorney Island

Having a free afternoon I drove to Farm Lane at Nutbourne and walked to the Thorney Deeps east end via a circuitous route starting through the orchards where Dwarf Mallow was flourishing under the apple trees near the house.

After the orchards and fields I took the path leading to Prinsted village, coming out just north of the village Square. Here I crossed the road and turned right as if going north to the A259 up the eastern of the two roads serving Prinsted. As soon as I had turned I found one of my target species growing in profusion from the pavement at the foot of a flint wall outside a house currently for sale - this was Shaggy Soldier. Going on north for less than fifty yards I turned left into a narrow and very easily overlooked path which leads to the far side of the village Square.

Almost as soon as I had entered this path I found a show of small ferns on the wall to my left. As well as Wall Rue there was another species which I can only assume was Black Spleenwort though the leaf blades (which looked correct for Black Spleenwort and had well developed oval sporangia under the pinnules) were only some 5 cm long and had no long stalk and no hint of black on the rhacis. I would welcome suggestions as to what I might have seen - I know young ferns can look very unlike their final form but surely if these were just young specimens they would not have sporangia?

Regaining the main west road through the village I continued west into the fields to look at the small market garden patch which always has good weeds. Here was more Shaggy Soldier and some Green Nightshade with flowers only - no berries yet.

A Clouded Yellow flew along the seawall of Prinsted Bay and at the east end of the Great Deeps a Kingfisher flew low over the sea into which Common Terns were plunging and catching small fish. I came back from the deeps along the bottom of the seawall and one of the first things I saw was a full grown *Argiope bruennichi* spider on her web (I don't like calling them Wasp Spiders as it makes them sound dangerous but the better name of Golden Orb spider has not caught on!). In the scrub here a family of Long-tailed Tits was moving through and on the ground I found my first Lesser Sea Spurrey of the year as well as plenty of the Greater. Everywhere here was a mass of what I think was Ray's Knotgrass but it was more erect than 'procumbent' (I think this plant normally grows flat on the ground), and while the plants were all in flower none that I saw had the distinctive brown, pointed seeds that would identify the plant though they did have the brown sheaths below the flowers). Among it was one plant of Slender Hare's Ear (I found more still in flower on the sea defence rocks at Prinsted).

Passing the would be saltmarsh north of Thornham Point I found a Whinchat perched on Wild Carrot and before I got back to Nutbourne I saw Sandwich Terns, heard a Greenshank and encountered one Wheatear

Thu 2 Sep

A. Havant area news for today

In my garden at breakfast time I watched at least 8 Blackbirds visiting a Rowan tree to take the berries. With them was a single Song Thrush which I had also seen yesterday. I suspect all these were local birds which had been lurking in neighbouring gardens until the berries were ripe but they could reflect the arrival of new birds from the continent. Also noted in the garden recently has been an increase in Great Tit song while Robin song is now very regular in the mornings.

In the evening I happened to pass the Wade Court Egret roost viewpoint just after sunset and stopped to watch 76 Egrets fly in and make their steep spiral dives into the roost with legs down and wings curved into kite shape. While watching them I was also seeing what I took to be a Serotine bat (large with pointed wingtips). hunting at or above tree top height alternating rapid fairly straight and level flight with occasional sudden steep dives. One or two Pipistrelles were also hunting in the fields nearby with much more erratic, fluttery and low level flight.

B. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Quail: These seem to have bred successfully in the west of the Isle of Wight - a group of 11 were flushed from a cornfield at Churchills Farm when harvesting on Sep 2 (farm is about 5 km east of Freshwater and about halfway between Shalborne and Wellow)
2. White Stork: One over Hinchelsea Moor (west of Brockenhurst in the New Forest) on Sep 1
3. Spoonbill: A group of four flew over Newtown Harbour on the north shore of the Isle of Wight on Sep 1 heading northwest towards Hampshire. They had been seen over Pagham Harbour two hours before the Newtown sighting.
4. Whitethroat: A significant number left us in the last three days of August when the number ringed at Beach Head was 120 on Aug 28, 50 on Aug 29 and 75 on Aug 31
5. Blackcap: Many of these also departed at the end of August. At Beachy Head 70 were ringed on Aug 28, 60 on Aug 29 and 150 on Aug 31
6. Robin: 25 of these were ringed at Beachy Head on Aug 29 - probably arrivals from the continent rather than departing birds?
7. Other departing passerines: Other birds birds ringed at Beachy Head at the end of August were 80 Willow Warblers, 15 Reed Warblers, 10 Chiffchaff, 8 Grasshopper Warblers, 3 Nightingales, 2 Whinchat, 2 Redsarts and 1 Tree Pipit. 2 Swifts went over on Aug 29
8. Willow Warbler: On or around Aug 30 a large number came down the valley in which the Petersfield to Portsmouth railway runs through Finchdean and Rowlands Castle - John Simons says that in his Dean Lane End garden there were as many as 50 at any one time with many more in the country around.
9. Spotted Flycatcher: John Simons also reports more than 10 around his garden on the Bank Holiday weekend and on Sep 1 22 were seen together on Ventnor Downs - reports of smaller numbers are widespread but only one Pied Flycatcher is mentioned in the current batch of reports (near Lewes on Aug 30)

10. Yellow Wagtail: Barry Yates monthly report for Rye Harbour in August mentions up to 400 Yellow Wagtails there on Aug 31
11. Hoopoe: One at Winchelsea on Aug 25 and 26 (first autumn record for Rye)
12. Merlin: First back at Rye Harbour on Aug 27 (later than the first Hampshire sighting at Farlington Marshes on Aug 22) There have also been sightings at Selsey on Aug 28 and a series of sighting on the southern Isle of Wight since that date.
13. Marsh Harrier: Up to three seen at Rye during the month
14. Short-eared Owl: Two present at Rye from Aug 7 (I think these breed on the north Kent coast)
15. Little Egret: Night roost peak count at Rye during August was 38
16. Golden Plover: 14 were back at Rye on Aug 9 and 102 were there on Aug 13 (with 1200 Lapwing)
17. Corn Bunting: 'Small flocks' were at Rye during the month
18. Swallows: 6480 hirundines (mostly Swallows) were counted flying east over Whale Chine (near St Catherines Point on the Isle of Wight) in two hours on the morning of Sep 1
19. Swifts: Nine were over the Isle of Wight on Sep 1 (looking up from my garden at an aircraft contrail on that day I saw one high over Havant)
20. Crossbills: Some were heard in Hastings Country Park by Cliff Dean on Aug 30 and John Simons reports a flock of 22 flying through his Dean Lane End garden north of Rowlands Castle on the same day - maybe there has been an influx and maybe some have arrived/stayed in Stansted Forest?
21. Melodious Warbler: On Sep 1 Peter Raby wrote .. "John Norton and I found an unidentified warbler this evening at Gilkicker (Solent shore at Gosport) that we had very brief views of. The annoying thing was that after it dived into the bush it was singing quietly to itself mimicing Blackbird, Song Thrush and House Sparrow" Peter is fairly sure from what they saw and heard of it that it was either a Melodious or a Marsh Warbler. I can't comment on that one but I am fairly sure that a phone call I had from Hayling Island reporting a possible Melodious Warbler on a nut feeder referred to a juvenile Willow Warbler - the description was of bright yellow underparts, a strong yellow supercilium and a greenish back - while it is true that Melodious Warbler is bright yellow underneath in breeding plumage I think it would have lost that colour by now and my books do not show a prominent eyestripe nor a green back whereas the description given would fit a juvenile Willow Warbler which is very much more likely.
22. Blackcap sub-song: Peter Raby's account of quiet subsong from his mystery warbler reminds me that when I was sitting in my garden early on Sep 3 I heard very quiet and varied song coming from somewhere within a metre of my back (which was up against a thick holly bush). I had earlier heard the 'tucc' of a Blackcap in the garden and am pretty sure that was the songster though I was surprised to hear it at this time of year rather than in the winter.
23. Thorney Island deeps west: The Petersfield Wildlife Group visited this section of the Thorney seawall on Sep 1 and among the 52 bird species they recorded were 24 Egrets (high tide roost), 36 Canada Geese, just 1 Shelduck, 4 Gadwall, 2 Teal and 8 Tufted Duck, Waders included 250 Curlew, 75 Redshank and 13 Greenshank with 12 Turnstone. Two different Kingfishers were seen plus 5 Whinchat and 5 Stonechat
24. Mute Swan: Parents which raised young this year are currently beginning to separate from their cygnets (although some of the young birds will refuse to 'leave home' until chased off next spring). This process can be seen with the Langstone Mill Pond family which had six cygnets which all survived the first few months of their lives. This week the parents are back on the pond with one cygnet which refuses to leave them but the other

five cygnets are now independent, mainly staying together as a group but sometimes separating. A very interesting facet of this process of the loosening of family bonds is that last week Heather Mills watched a different Swan family (which has been based around the mouth of the Hermitage Stream this summer and has retained seven cygnets) swimming past the South Moors shore in line ahead with nine cygnets in the line between the leading and trailing parent. Heather has confirmed that she counted the group three times and there were definitely nine cygnets. The only reasonable conclusion that I can come to is that the parents of the family of seven allowed two cygnets from a different family (probably the Langstone Mill one) to join in their group. Can anyone comment on this behaviour? (One comment I have already received is from Ros Norton who recalls seeing a large 'creche' of cygnets with a single adult on the Basingstoke canal in the past)

PLANTS

1. Rarities at Rye Harbour during August: Barry Yates' monthly report for August at the Rye Harbour reserve mentions that Least Lettuce, Lesser Water Plantain and Rottingdean Sea-Lavender all flowered on the reserve. The Sea-Lavender (*Limonium hyblaenum*) is described by Stace as a native of Sicily now established on cliffs at Rottingdean but a garden escape in East Sussex and Dorset

INSECTS

1. Swallowtail butterfly: What was very probably a migrant of this species was seen in Southsea at midday on Sep 1 by Steve Grange. He tells me .. "While in my back garden in the middle of Southsea at about 13:00 (Wednesday 1 Sep) I noticed a very large butterfly. I only had a couple of seconds of good visibility before it flew out of sight. From what I could see it was a Swallowtail, my brief view allowed me only a top and side view. The shape was definitely Swallowtail, with my only concern being the very pale yellow to white colouration with black markings and veins. I have never seen a butterfly like this in the wild in the UK, I can honestly say I am no expert, so it may have been a look-a-like of which I am unaware of, or possibly an escapee of the local Southsea museum butterfly house, which is just down the road by Canoe Lake." A Swallowtail reached the Channel Islands on Aug 27 but the only other mainland record I have heard of this year was the one at Sandy Point on Hayling Island on Aug 7.
2. Small Heath: this species is still being seen in large numbers in grassland all across Hampshire, the highest reported count being of 71 at Home Farm, Burkham (near Lasham south of Basingstoke) on Sep 1.
3. Common Blue: now vanishing at most sites but Jonathan Forsyth counted 138 at Home Farm, Burkham on Sep 1.
4. Clouded Yellow: only ones and twos being seen, mainly along the coast but Mark Litjens had one near Hursley (south west of Winchester) on Sep 1. Biggest count was of 7 on northwest Thorney on Sep 1, seen by the Petersfield Wildlife Group who also had singles of Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock among their list of 11 species.
5. Jersey Tiger moth: One was taken at Rye Harbour during the month
6. Cosmopolitan: Just one of these moths was record at Portland Bill during the influx of migrants and vagrants in February of this year and a second has now been reported at Selborne (on Aug 13). This species is not in my moth books but must be a relative of the various Wainscot species.

OTHER

1. *Amanita strobiliformis*: Rosemary Webb recently came on a couple of very good examples of this rare fungus in Chappetts Copse south east of West Meon (part of the large Hen Wood block). This is a white and very shaggy *Amanita* which appears in Roger Phillips book under the name *A. solitaria*.

[Wed 1 Sep](#)

A. Broadmarsh and Farlington Marshes

With perfect autumn weather and a full 5 metre high tide expected around 2pm I thought I would do the walk around Farlington Marshes from Broadmarsh but if anyone else is thinking of doing so in the near future (and I see a HOS Walk is scheduled for Sept 12) they should be aware that the section of the Solent Way path running along the foot of the A27 embankment from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes may be 'closed' as it was today.

This closure is for work to take place to convert the path into a full cycleway and today I found red plastic mesh barring the entry to the path from Broadmarsh with a notice saying that work on the cycleway was starting on Aug 16 but giving no end date. This gave me the impression that the path was permanently closed for an indefinite period (likely to be several months) regardless of whether work was in progress or not, but from something which Jason Crook said I think this may not be the case - he implied that they only put up the barriers when they were actually working.

As I could see no sign of any work taking place I circumvented the barrier and walked on boldly along the track from which all those gorse bushes (and all other vegetation) had been removed. Right at the far end I came on three men with whom I had to argue my 'right to roam' - their stance was that as one of them was using a chain saw he could not hear me coming and might turn round and cut off my legs by accident, but they eventually accepted that I had a modicum of intelligence and would not provoke the man with the chainsaw into attacking me, so I did get there and back!

If anyone wants more information on the path closure there is a phone number on the various notices but I foolishly did not make a note of it. You should find it on one of the low posts by the entry to the westgoing path from the western Broadmarsh carpark at its seaward end.

Coming to more interesting topics I did see a few birds of interest. At the Deeps two Yellow Wagtails flew in from the harbour and landed by the cattle and a couple of Wheatear were on the anthills. In the water was one Shoveler and a group of seven Canada Geese (the only ones I saw on the reserve), and over the main marsh fields a young Sparrowhawk flew in flap and glide non-hunting mode and a female Kestrel took one short break from sunbathing on the fence to hover to no apparent purpose. On the shore south of the reserve a flock of around 500 Starlings were alternately feeding on the exposed weed and circling above it and looking from the south west tip of the reserve I counted 23 Egrets resting on the saltings.

On the lake, with the tide rising, waders were continually arriving. Black-tailed Godwits were in the majority already there (more than 80 of them) but Dunlin, Redshank and Lapwing were increasing all the time I was there. One Spotted Redshank flew in from the Shutt Lake area but went on eastward along the stream loudly proclaiming its identity with its 'Chew-it' call. Thanks to one birder with a scope I was able to pick out a single Ruff whose yellowish plumage and unique 'long neck' picked it out, and I also ticked a single Wigeon. The calls of Greenshank could be heard throughout my circuit and Grey Plover in summer plumage could be seen everywhere.

At the lake I thought I heard a single 'ping' of Bearded Tit (others had seen them there before I arrived) and from the reeds by the stream a Cetti's Warbler sang once briefly. Sadly I did not see a single Whinchat but coming back past Chalk Dock with the tide high I counted 45 Great Crested Grebe in a tight flock.

A Clouded Yellow showed twice at the Point and everywhere around the seawall and bushes there were Small Heath - only one at a time but I must have seen over 40 in total. Common Blues were much fewer, perhaps half a dozen, and I saw only one Meadow Brown and one Speckled Wood. This last was seen as I met Chris Cockburn finishing a butterfly transect but

he could not give me a name for an insect resting on a nettle leaf close to us. I suggested 'Ichneumon suspiciosus' as I like the name, but the distinctive yellow legs with a mainly black body made it likely that this was the Ichneumon called *Amblyteles armatorius*.

At the small seawall pond in the bushes area north of the main lake I sat and scanned the surface in the hope of seeing one of the Small Red-eyed Damselflies perched on spikes of ?Spiked Water Milfoil? projecting above the surface of the pond. No luck with that rarity but I was quite surprised at the number of dragonflies that were present. Biggest and smartest were the Migrant Hawkers but equally bright were the red male Common Darters. Blue-tailed Damsels were present as were the look-alike Common Blue/Azure damsels. In my notes below for news received yesterday you will see that Phil Lord has now found at least one Small Red-eyed Damselfly at the Lower Test and Jason Crook has seen them on the Sinah Lake on Hayling bringing the number of Hampshire sites to five, and I suspect that a good many more sites for them will be found next year if not this.

I haven't said much about plants but I must mention the display of Slender Hare's Ear along the seaward edge of the seawall path in the area of The Deeps. Also worth a mention was a good display of Blue Fleabane (with one fresh flowering Common Centaury) on the A27 embankment, and one fresh growth of Hemlock. At the Broadmarsh end of the new cycleway a fragment of the colony of Chinese Mugwort has been spared the destruction wrought by the path constructors whose work reminds me of the construction of a concrete pathway along the northern side of Ports Creek east of Portsbridge which lost us a good site for *Lathyrus aphaca* and diminished many other plants in the cause of 'human convenience' (not even 'human necessity' but an un-necessary destruction of habitat because 'someone might use the path if we build it'). I wonder how many Bee Orchids will come up next year along the new cycleway route?

Tue 31 Aug

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Short-eared Owl: The first back in Hampshire was seen at Hook/Warsash by Bob Marchant on Aug 31. He flushed it from a patch of gorse but it settled again in nearby long grass - maybe it was tired, maybe it has decided to stay there for a while (though this is not a regular winter site for them). There was one earlier bird in East Sussex on Aug 24.
2. Osprey: One was briefly over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Aug 30 and a juvenile which has been in Langstone Harbour for several days came and hovered over the main lake at Farlington Marshes on that day. Another was still at the mouth of the Beaulieu River where it has been since Aug 24
3. Marsh Harrier: On Aug 28 there were two over the Isle of Wight and another over the Selsey west fields. Another was seen near Martin Down on Aug 29. At Rye Harbour, where a string of nine flew over on Aug 21, there were three more on Aug 30
4. Merlin: Two reports of sightings on Aug 28 (Selsey and IoW), one on Aug 29 and two on Aug 31 (these three all on the IoW) make it sound as if several birds had returned to the coast but all five of these sightings could have been of a single female or juvenile bird moving around the area in search of a good place to spend the winter.
5. Knot: A total of 32 were in Pagham Harbour on Aug 28, maybe indicating the return of flocks that will stay in the local harbours (there have been several reports of groups of up to six birds at various places during August, starting with a single off Thorney Island on Aug 1, and a flock of around 25 were on Ryde Sands on Aug 11 with another report of 10 in Newtown Harbour on Aug 22, but I think these were all transitory)
6. Golden Plover: Two were in the Selsey area on Aug 28 but I doubt they will stay.

7. Swift: Odd birds still moving south (including one over my own garden on Sep 1) are not yet surprising but I am surprised at three reports of birds still apparently active in nest holes after the majority of breeders left around the start of August. On Aug 18 one was seen entering a nest hole at Sandown on the Isle of Wight, On Aug 25 a pair were apparently still feeding young in a Petersfield nest, and on Aug 31 a single birds was seen to leave a nest hold in Winchester. As well as these oddities a significant movement of probably well over 66 passed over the Testwood Lakes as they flew south down the Test valley on Aug 29
8. Wryneck: Two different birds were seen on the Isle of Wight on Aug 29, one at Luccombe Down north of Ventnor and another at Niton (just inland of St Catherine's Point). Hampshire has also had two Wryneck this summer (near Romsey on Aug 13 and Farlington Marshes on Aug 22) whereas Sussex only seems to have had one (at Beachy Head on Aug 20 and 22)
9. Yellow Wagtail: Numbers are now building up along the coast. Aug 28 saw 20 at Selsey and more than 40 at Roedean, Aug 29 brought a count of 36 at Hook/Warsash. Aug 30 brought 26 to the Barton on sea area and Aug 31 gave Bob Marchant a count of 58 at Hook (including one flock of 41). Sadly when I walked round Farlington Marshes on Sept 1 I could only find two near the Deeps.
10. Rock Pipit: Steve Keen found one in the Taddiford area west of Milford on sea on Aug 30. While they do breed on the Hampshire coast this was a first dispersing bird so its worth checking other coastal sites where they regularly arrive for the winter.
11. Mallard: Trevor Carpenter was surprised when walking in the Corhampton Forest area north of Bishops Waltham to find a total of 130 Mallard on and around what I think to be a fairly recently manmade pond close to the charmingly named Betty Mundy's Cottages in a valley called Betty Mundy's Bottom. Trevor has been there before but never seen so many ducks and he wonders what brought them there. I have no idea but I do wonder if the said Betty is trying a bit of rural diversification into duck farming? Eggs? Christmas dinners? Whatever their fate I hope the ducks do not succumb to the Black Death which has left its mark on that area in the shape of the deserted 14th century village of Lomer about a mile further up the valley.

PLANTS

1. Marsh Gentian: The first to come to my knowledge this year were a group of 35 seen by Maurice Pugh flowering in the Pig Bush/Bishops Dyke area of the New Forest on Aug 29 (Since then I have seen that these flowers were out at Bartley Heath near Hook in north Hampshire by Aug 26)

INSECTS

1. Small Red Damselflies: It would seem that this species, first 'discovered' in Hampshire earlier this month, is probably widespread but un-recorded until now. I have already reported finds at three sites (Bursledon, Southampton Common and Farlington Marshes) but now Phil Lord has found at least one at the Lower Test Marshes and Jason Crook tells me he has seen them on the Sinah Lake (Hayling Island) since seeing them at the Farlington pond.
2. New moths: Best of the bunch was a Clifden Nonpareil found inside a house in Wiltshire on Aug 26. Few new for the year moths are now coming to mothtraps but Nick Montegriffo had the first Sharp-angled Peacock on Aug 27 and a trap at Titchfield Haven on Aug 21 had the first Brown China-mark and the first Brown Plume moth (*Emmelina monodactyla*) plus three other new micros
3. Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars: In my previous notes I remarked on the first report of these 'monsters of the garden' which came from Mark Litjens at Hedge End near Southampton on Aug 28, and now I hear that at least one has been up to its favourite trick

of munching prize Fuchsias in a Weymouth garden, causing an alert to go out to all gardeners in that area to arm themselves against these dreadful monsters.

OTHER

1. Fungi: On Aug 31 John Goodspeed found half a dozen Hedgehog Puffballs (*Lycoperdon echinatum*) in Stansted Forest and on Aug 30 I passed a group of Giant Puffballs (not yet full blown!) and two superb Parasol mushrooms in the Warblington area near Emsworth. After two recent finds of fresh Chicken of the Woods in Stansted Forest Maurice Pugh has found another fresh specimen in the New Forest (Denny Wood).

Mon 30 Aug

A. Havant to Warblington Farm

Today's stroll took me down the 'twitchel' path leading from the centre of Havant to Warblington Church and on to the Emsworth shore.

While still on this narrow path between houses I made one good find in the shape of a single fresh plant of what I am sure is Green Nightshade though I will not be certain until it has developed fruit which does not turn black (as it does on the common look-alike Black Nightshade) but remains green and had a persistent enlarged calyx whose teeth almost cover the fruit. Nearby Pellitory of the Wall was still flowering, and along the edges of this narrow path, where 'bushes' of Shining Cranesbill were covered with their small pink flowers in April but more recently these plants have total vanished probably due to 'Council tidying', any patches of the thinnest of soils are covered with the tiny first leaves of seedling which I feel sure are a resurgence of this plant.

After crossing the A27 by footbridge I found several fungal species had responded to recent rain and warmth, and in the grass just east of the Old Rectory I found the beginnings of a small cluster of Giant Puffballs (I wonder how large they will grow before they are destroyed by the fungal-fearing public or taken as a meal by the fungal-loving few). The biggest of them was already some 12cm in diameter and showing clearly among the longish grass. At the far side of Warblington Farm I came on several examples of the Red-cracked Bolete which were too fresh to have cracked much so I had to break the cap of one to reveal the distinctive bright red flesh under the thin dull ochre cap skin. Coming back along the main Emsworth-Havant road I had my best fungal find, a couple of Parasol mushrooms in perfect condition. One had grown to its full height (at least a foot in old money or 30cm for the young) and almost finished expanding its cap while the other was a beginner with a short stem with the tight closed knob of the unopened cap on it.

On the Warblington farm fields it seemed that a fresh growth of Giant Horsetails had been encouraged by the rain (as far as I know these plants have one growing season in the spring but the plants I saw were very fresh and green-looking). By Wade Court Road, where the roadside grass is trimmed as if it were a prize lawn, my eye caught a glint of bright yellow which on a closer look turned out to be a large mat of Yellow Oxalis studded all over with the tiny gold stars of a fresh flowering. Another find which pleased me was of American Willowherb - I have always found Willowherbs very difficult but am beginning to become more familiar with them and was able to recognize the combination of club-shaped stigma, pale well separated petals (giving a star shape to the open flower), and the dense covering of tiny glandular hairs on its upper stem.

B. Langstone Mill area

Each Monday evening I take a couple of Nature Notes posters down to Langstone giving me the opportunity to check out the village shore and pond. This evening the tide was low and as I reached the shore at the end of the High Street I could see many Black-tailed Godwits feeding on the mud but nowhere near the count of 300 made by Jason Crook on two recent occasions. My estimate was of 90 birds.

On the beach in front of the Royal Oak a tight group of Mute Swan cygnets (without their parents) were settled in the 'roadway' giving access to the Mill and used by myself as a cycleway - the birds made no sign of moving as I went around them, but despite going so close I cannot swear that I saw the five which I expected to see (later that evening Cath Cooper went by and could only see four). I did see the parents with the one cygnet that refuses to leave home on the pond, and as up to now the family has consisted of two parents and six cygnets, I assumed the other five were in the group I passed but maybe one cygnet has been lost since they have left their parents.

One reason for not checking the cygnets was that just after I had passed them, and had stopped to look around, I had my first glimpse for this coming winter of a Kingfisher on a favourite fishing post above the outflow of the Lymbourne stream emerging from under the Mill where it would once have turned the mill-wheel. On the pond there were still a couple of Teal in addition to the year round resident Mallard, Coot and Moorhens.

Wildlife diary and news for Aug 23 - 29 (Week 35)

Sun 29 July

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Short-eared Owl: One at Rye Harbour on Aug 24. This seems to be the first seen on the south coast since May 6
2. Swifts: 14 over Roedean and 3 over IoW plus 7 at Gilkicker on Aug 28. Seven over Budds Farm on evening of Aug 27. On Aug 25 two pairs were still feeding young in the Poor House, Swan St, Petersfield from which some 40 pairs had left on Aug 5
3. Yellow Wagtail: 40+ at Roedean, 25 on Isle of Wight, 15 at Gilkicker, 13 at Bishops Waltham sewage works, 26 on Hook Links and 3 at the mouth of the Beaulieu River on Aug 28. 32 were at Climping and 33 on IoW on Aug 26. At least 11 were at Farlington Marshes (with 44 Wheatears) on Aug 21
4. Nightingale: one seen well in Climping area on Aug 26 by Owen Mitchell who writes .. Best bird was a Nightingale which jumped out into the open to attack a Redstart! Both birds were close together on a fence, showing well in the same field of view, for fully half-a-minute, before the squabble ended with the Redstart chasing the Nightingale back into deep cover. It re-appeared shortly after but then resumed its normal skulky behaviour and disappeared.
5. Whinchat: 4 were at Climping on Aug 26 and 5 were on the IoW on Aug 28 when at least two were on Thorney Island and 1 was at Hook/Warsash
6. Honey Buzzard: One over the IoW on Aug 28 and among other recent sightings was one low over the M27 in the Eastleigh/Stoneham area on Aug 24
7. Marsh Harrier: One juvenile over IoW on Aug 28
8. Osprey: The first for Langstone Harbour seems to have been there on Aug 22 and since then there has been one on Aug 25
9. Merlin: One near St Catherine's Point on IoW on Aug 28 - this is the second report of one back at the coast following one over Farlington Marshes on Aug 21 (reported previously but I now see it was still around there a few days later)
10. Lanner Falcon: What was probably one of this species was over Farlington Marshes on Aug 25

11. Black-tailed Godwits: Heavy rain forcing earthworms to the surface seems to have attracted the first Godwits to feed onshore. 21 were on the HMS Sultan playing fields in Gosport on Aug 26 and 100 were there on Aug 28. There has also been an unusually high number of them in Chichester Harbour between Langstone and north Hayling - Jason Crook reckoned that around 300 were there on Aug 25 and on the evening of Aug 27 he made a count of 295 (eleven of them being colour ringed)
12. Egret roost count at Langstone: On the evening of Aug 27 Jason Crook counted 144 birds entering the Wade Court roost (this was a one off count, not part of the monthly survey). As with the Godwits, some Egrets have started to feed in wet fields - I found three doing so in a field north of Wade Court on Aug 23.
13. Black Swan: One turned up on the Emsworth Town Millpond on Aug 24. Its origin is unknown but one was on the Adur at Shoreham on Aug 23 and one was sheltering on the sea off Sandown (IoW) on the morning of Aug 27. Others reported this year have been one on Fleet Pond (attempting to mate with a Mute) on Apr 18 (seen there in Jan and presumed to be resident there), one at Arne (Poole Harbour) on July 6, two regulars in the Lower Test area from July 4 to Aug 14. Others not reported this year but probably still present are a pair on West Ashling Pond west of Chichester and at least a pair on Benbow Pond east of Midhurst plus a pair which have bred at Arundel and a female that has been on the Test at Romsey for several years. They tend to move around at this time of year as this is their antipodean springtime when they feel the need to mate.
14. Avocet: Starting to move to winter quarters in the west country? Two at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 23
15. Red-backed Shrike: The bird seen at Gilkicker on Aug 23 was still there on Aug 25
16. Eider and Red-breasted Merganser: Singles of each seen in Langstone Harbour in the week before Aug 26 (presumably both summering birds)
17. Ruddy Duck: Nine were seen on Alresford Pond on Aug 27
18. Wigeon: Possibly the first to return to Hampshire was a single at Hook/Warsash on Aug 28 where it was seen with 7 Shoveler (which have been back for some time). I have already reported the return of 50+ Wigeon to the Isle of Wight on Aug 22
19. Black Tern: Twelve were on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Aug 26 (where there had been 15 on the evening on Aug 22) and one was at Worthing on Aug 27
20. Shag: One at Worthing on Aug 27
21. Tern roost in the mouth of Langstone Harbour: On Aug 21 Bob Chapman reported that more than 2000 terns of mixed species had already been seen there on at least one evening (as expected at this time of year).
22. Little Ringed Plover: Jess Pain reports very good breeding success for this species at the Testwood Lakes site this year. Four pairs raised young successfully, one of them bringing four juveniles to the flying stage. Jess thinks that Oystercatcher and Lapwing breeding at the same site helped to protect the young plovers from predation by Crows and Buzzards (presumably by noisy warnings and by distracting the predators).
23. Curlew Sandpiper: Four were seen at Farlington Marshes on Aug 25 along with a Spotted Redshank

INSECTS

1. Small Red-eyed Damselflies: A third colony has been discovered in Hampshire at Farlington Marshes where at least five were seen on the small pond near the seawall just before you reach the main lake from the west entrance to the reserve. The colony was discovered by Phil Lord and Bob Chapman on Aug 28. This week the Portsmouth NEWS

printed a full colour close-up photo of one at the Bursledon site where they made their first known appearance in Hampshire sometime before Aug 11.

2. Clouded Yellow: What was possibly the first helice form female was seen in the central reservation of the A27 east of Chichester - id not confirmed as sighting was from a car stuck in a traffic jam!
3. Adonis Blue: Six were seen at Old Winchester Hill on Aug 25 by the Petersfield Wildlife Group - in all they saw 13 butterfly species including Peacock and Painted Lady. More than 300 Meadow Brown were still on the wing but only 40 Chalkhill Blue were recorded. Over on the Isle of Wight where the Adonis Blue does not need regular 'resuscitation' by English Nature there were well over 100 to be seen on Ventnor Downs on Aug 28
4. Wall Brown: I have not heard of any local sightings of this species since Aug 16 but there is still a faint hope of a third generation appearing in early October. (Some could still be seen in Dorset sometime after Aug 16). Good news of this species is that Ian Thornbury's sighting of both male and female at Noar Hill in the week Aug 9 - 15 has been backed up by a further report of the species at this site from Steven Meredith. These are the first sightings at Noar Hill since 1992.
5. New Moths for the Yearlist: A Pale Eggar was trapped in the Basingstoke area on Aug 21
6. Items from the national Migrant Moth website: Two more Convolvulus Hawkmoths have turned up, one at Portland Bill on Aug 25 and one in Oxfordshire on Aug 26. The second Rosy Underwing to be recorded in Britain flew in through a lighted window at Dungeness on Aug 24 and a third was trapped at Walberton in West Sussex sometime since Aug 20. A large influx of Latticed Heath moths has been reported from Essex round to Dorset in the period Aug 19 to 24. And finally another Swallowtail butterfly was seen in the Channel Islands on Aug 22 (I think the one at Sandy Point on Hayling on Aug 7 remains the only one to reach the British mainland).
7. Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar: These usually get into the news at this time of year because of their predilection for eating the leaves of Fuchsia bushes and I am surprised that we have had to wait until this week for the first report of them being found - it comes from a Hedge End garden on Aug 28 without the usual panic reaction to 'this dreadful monster that is destroying my garden'.
8. Brown Hairstreak: At least one female was still to be seen at Noar Hill on Aug 28
9. Robberfly: *Asilus crabroniformis* was seen for the first time ever at Pamber Forest (north of Basingstoke) on Aug 10.

OTHER

1. Mink: These are still actively preying Little Grebes and Moorhens at Setley Common Pond near Lymington according to Michael Boxall, warden of the HWT Roydon Woods reserve.
2. Squirrel: One of the 'albino' Grey Squirrels appeared in John Goodspeed's garden on Portsdown on Aug 26
3. Jew's Ear Fungus: The first report of this for the autumn comes from John Goodspeed who saw it on Portsdown near Fort Widley on Aug 24

MISC

I have received two requests to let people know that West Sussex County Council are reviewing their policy for the management of Pagham Harbour. Everyone with an interest in the site is encouraged to have their say by responding to a questionnaire which will help to determine any changes in the current policy, and if the wildfowlers and dog-walkers are in the

majority of those expressing their opinions we could see some very unwelcome changes in respect of the wildlife of the site.

The secretary of the Friends of Pagham Harbour writes .. If you are not already aware can I draw your attention as a lover of wildlife to West Sussex County Council's consultation document on the future of Pagham Harbour. They are potentially proposing to relax the by-laws and allow activities such as sailing, dog walking off the lead, wildfowling etc. within the Reserve - to the detriment of the wildlife.

To get your opinion included in the survey visit www.westsussex.gov.uk/content/home and follow the link under "Have your say on..." " Pagham Harbour".

Another version of this request comes from Richard Cowser who, on the SOS website, writes .. West Sussex County Council, who manage the Pagham Harbour LNR, are updating the Reserve's management plan.

As part of that process they have put out a survey seeking the public's views on how the reserve should be used - this includes questions about whether sailing, wildfowling and walking dogs off the lead should be allowed in future. (Indeed the wildfowlingers have already made a request to be allowed to recommence shooting on the inter-tidal area, which request we, together with the RSPB and the Sussex Wildlife Trust, are vigorously opposing).

The survey can be completed on the internet at www.westsussex.gov.uk/content/community-and-living/pagham-harbour-consultation-24.jsp.

If you want to ensure that Pagham Harbour continues to be managed on a wildlife-comes-first basis please make the time to complete this questionnaire.

Fri 27 July

Langbrook Stream, South Moors and Budds Farm.

The rain eased after lunch and I took the opportunity of visiting the South Moors and Budds Farm, starting from Havant down the Langbrook Stream.

Before I had reached my own front gate I noted one important find in the shape of a small plant of Sticky Groundsel in my own garden - it just had its first flower open and a quick feel of the plant told me the species (which I have previously found in two other gardens in my road despite being some distance from the sea). Small-flowered Cranesbill was still flowering in Juniper Square and roadside grass outside Bosmere School had a large capped, short-stemmed white toadstool in very fresh condition. The cap was flecked with brown, especially in the centre, and by breaking off a small segment of the cap I could see that the gills were white and that the short stem had a notable ring. My guess is that this was the *Lepiota rhacodes* var *hortensis* (a smaller, whiter form of Shaggy Parasol). Nearby another interesting plant find was of Spotted Medick in new flower.

Another very white toadstool was seen on the South Moors - *Coprinus niveus* growing in cowpats - and white flowers were still to be seen on Brookweed beside the central 'stream' draining the Moors into the 'Tamarisk Pool'. In the 'orchid field', in a small area of short grass close to the Autoliv factory, I found one of the things I was hoping for - Devils Bit Scabious in flower. Normally I am lucky to find one or two plants of this here but today there were perhaps a dozen plants. Moving away from these plants I caused a Fox to beat a retreat from the centre of the field (presumably out hunting by day after a night of heavy rain).

At Budds Farm rain discouraged lengthy viewing but I did see one Shoveler, my first of the autumn, and saw half a dozen Meadow Pipits heading south, and heading back along the seawall of the Moors I saw my first Ringed Plover of the autumn, along with a Wheatear. On the sea two Swans were in line ahead with seven cygnets so maybe my guess that this family came from Bedhampton Mill Pool was wrong (as I saw two adults back there recently without any cygnets). Perhaps this family nested on North Binness?

Reaching Mill Lane I found another plant which had just started flowering much earlier than I would have expected - Butcher's Broom - and further down this lane I met one of three Southern Hawker dragonflies which I encountered during the walk, and back in Havant I had a close view of a Holly Blue nectaring on Danewort

Thu 26 July

A. Stansted Forest north west (08:10 - 10:30)

After so much rain recently this lovely sunny morning made an excellent opportunity to answer a query as to whether some flowers seen at the far north-west end of the Stansted 'Rough Avenue' were Heather - the person who had seen them thought that Heather was an unlikely find in Stansted as much of it is on chalk, and I was intrigued as the plants were described as having blue flowers whereas I would describe the flowers of Common Heather (Ling) as pink.

I started from the roadside carpark in the middle of the Forest (halfway between the Main Avenue and Forestside) and my first surprise was to find that this no longer has open access at all times but now has the northern entry blocked by logs and the southern one restricted with chain which was open when I arrived but would not have been had I arrived ten minutes earlier - a notice says that the carpark is locked from 5pm to 8am. One reason for this was obvious when I drove in and found much evidence of a recent fire which seems to have been pure vandalism with the Stansted Forest notice board as its main target.

Also in evidence among the remains of the fire was evidence that nothing in this life is purely bad - the heat of the fire had caused fungus (that had probably been invisible inside one of the large logs when the fire singed it) to look for a new home in a safer place, and to do this it had put out a spore producing body in the shape of fairly amorphous 'billows' of bright sulphur-yellow edged with a gentle pink at least 30cm across and 20 cm from top to bottom. This was the Sulphur Polypore (or Chicken of the Woods, so named as its flesh is said to be as tasty as Chicken). Walking from this carpark westward into the woods I almost immediately came on what might have been another very edible fungus - the Cep or Penny Bun - but all the specimens growing here were completely covered with a secondary white 'mould type' fungus which made it difficult to see what the original species was and certainly made these specimens unappetising to look at! The recent rain had brought out several small fungi but the only ones that I could identify were a troop of fresh, bright yellow, Larch Boletes which are edible though their slimy coating is a bit off putting!

The path west from the carpark soon joins the wide avenue running northwest from Stansted House to the edge of the Forest overlooking Finchdean and Idsworth House (known as the 'Rough' or 'Shooting' Avenue) and as I walked along it with the sun behind me I could see and hear a large number of small birds feeding in the trees and flying across the avenue. Most were Tits (Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed) but Chiffchaffs were singing and I watched at least one yellow tinged juvenile Willow Warbler and saw a Tree Creeper working its way up one of the Larch trunks. Also on my list went Goldcrest, Greenfinch and Chaffinch, and later (in thicker woodland) I heard Bullfinch and from a less frequented block of open woodland away from the dog walkers I put up a couple of Buzzard which noisily resented my interruption of their sun-bathing.

Michael Prior, the head Forester of the estate, is hoping in the long term to rid the broad grassy rides of bracken by a combination of spraying and rolling, and he had recently rolled this Rough Avenue, exposing the wild flowers which cannot survive under the cover of bracken, and I think it was this opening up of the view which had caused my original questioner to see and ask me about the Common Heather which I found growing in a small pit near the junction of the Rough Avenue and the Broad Avenue (which goes south downhill to meet the Main Avenue). It also gave me a view of more Eyebright than I have ever seen in

one place, and also a single plant of wild Goldenrod which I have not seen in the Avenue before though it is not uncommon among the trees to the south.

While admiring the heather I was joined by a lone Hornet making a careful tour of inspection of the plants in that area in the hope of finding some smaller insect to carry home as food for the developing larvae in the nest, but it failed to find one while I was watching. After this I turned south down the Broad Avenue to where the public path from Forestside to Rowlands Castle crosses it, and here I added Common Hemp-nettle to my flower list before heading back to the car.

With a little time to spare I turned into the drive to Stansted House when I reached the Main Avenue and what is known as the 'Middle Lodge', and at the top of the slight rise I stopped among the beech trees to look for the Violet Helleborines which John Goodspeed recently reported. Within a couple of minutes I found two good examples of Violet Helleborine which had gone to seed, but I was puzzled as they did not have the wire netting protection which John had told me about. That was soon explained as at this moment Michael Prior pulled up to have a chat on the way to his office in the house - he was pleased to see the orchids which I was looking at as the ones he had protected with netting were on the other side of the road and those I had found were an addition to those he knew of. Michael also told me that he had seen a family of Spotted Flycatchers just the day before only a hundred yards or so from where we were standing but when I checked out the spot there was no sign of them.

Wed 25 Aug

A. Waders on the Warblington Church shore

With high tide at 7am I went to the shore east of Langstone at around 9am in the hope of seeing a good show of waders feeding as the tide started to fall.

One of the first birds seen at the water's edge was a colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit (normally my eyesight is not good enough to be sure of the details but this bird was within ten yards and I could see the rings with the naked eye - red over lime on the right tibia or 'thigh' and orange on the left with any scheme marker ring on its tarsus hidden under water). I was not surprised to find at least 75 Black-tails present when I scanned round but I was pleased to see at least 20 Bar-tails back.

Another welcome sight was a party of three Teal flying over the water, and with my scope I briefly saw what looked like the rounded head and 'pert' bill of a Wigeon appear above a mudbank but when I eventually got to that area and could see the water it must have been on there were no ducks left. I see that a flock of more than 50 Wigeon flew in to Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight back on Sunday (Aug 22) so there should be some around now - well worth checking the Thorney Deeps for them.

Nothing else very special but I had Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Grey Plover, Lapwing and Turnstone on my list of waders before I left.

B. News reaching me last night

BIRDS

1. Dotterel: Still none in Hampshire but Aug 24 brought one to Luccombe Down on the Isle of Wight following the one at Rye Harbour in East Sussex on Aug 21
2. Red-necked Phalarope: John Shillitoe is the only person to report the presence of one at the Farlington Marshes lake on Aug 22. While there John also saw Little Stint and Garganey but he does not mention the Spotted Crake.
3. Red-backed Shrike: A juvenile was in the area of Fort Gilkicker for at least two hours on Aug 23, seen by John Norton and Peter Raby who also saw a Nightingale nearby.

4. Wryneck: Confirmation of the presence of a Wryneck at Farlington Marshes comes from Hugh Venables who saw one there on Aug 22
5. Merlin: First bird to return to the coast seems to have been at Farlington Marshes on Aug 21
6. Wigeon: The first report of returning birds comes from the Isle of Wight where a flock of more than 50 flew in to the Newtown Nature Reserve on Aug 22
7. Firecrest: One (a departing migrant?) was among the passerines caught and ringed at Titchfield Haven on Aug 15. 'Birds of Hampshire' gives a tentative answer to my query about the Firecrest being a departing summer visitor by saying that while little is known about the movements of this species it seems likely that the birds which breed in the county arrive from the south in the spring and depart about now, whereas the birds we see in the winter probably include some forced from the continent by cold weather. Also in the catch that morning were 114 Sedge Warblers, 10 Grasshopper Warblers and 44 Reed Warblers
8. Grasshopper Warbler: Most birders regard the 'Gropper' as a rarity but I see that the ringers at Titchfield Haven caught a total of 61 in the period from July 31 to Aug 15. At Farlington Marshes 8 were caught on Aug 15 and I have seen reports of at least five more during August.
9. Aquatic Warbler: One was ringed at Titchfield Haven on Aug 13 (I have already reported one caught at Farlington Marshes on Aug 8 and another seen by Simon Woolley at Thorney Island Little Deeps on Aug 11)
10. Marsh Harrier: An immature bird was seen regularly at Titchfield Haven from July 30 to Aug 19. On Aug 22 one was over Farlington Marshes and may have flown across to the Isle of Wight as a juvenile was seen at Newtown Nature Reserve on that day. Another was over Pagham Harbour on Aug 18 (and I have already reported a string of nine which flew south over Rye Harbour on Aug 21)
11. Osprey: There may have been four on the Isle of Wight on Aug 22 when three were at Newtown Harbour and another was over Brading Marshes - this latter could be the bird that was over Farlington Marshes earlier that day and one of those at Newtown could have been the one which Lee Marshall saw fly over his Antiques shop in Brockhurst Road at Gosport in the late afternoon of Aug 21. On Aug 24 two more were at Inchmery (mouth of the Beaulieu River)
12. Black Terns: Nine could be seen from Ryde pier on Aug 22, maybe the same nine which were seen off Stokes Bay on the other side of the Solent on Aug 19
13. Citrine Wagtail: George Spraggs is convinced that he saw one at Farlington Marshes on Aug 23. He had an excellent view through his telescope only 30 feet from him and describes the features of an early first winter bird (as yet no yellow on its throat or underparts) but so far I have not heard of any further sightings. This would be only the sixth ever record of one in Hampshire but past evidence gives hope of it staying around for a day or so. The previous records are: 22 Sep 1983 - one at Titchfield Haven for one day, 15 May 1993 - one at Fleet pond stayed two days. 30 Aug 1993 - one at Farlington Marshes stayed until Sep 3. 6 July 1996 - one at Farlington Marshes stayed until Sep 6. 7 Sep 2003 - one at Pennington Marshes stayed to Sep 9.
14. Yellow Wagtail: Autumn passage is now well under way. Following the 14+ seen at Gilkicker on the Gosport shore on Aug 21 there were 15 at Hook/Warsash on Aug 22 and more than 20 there on Aug 23 (when more than 10 were seen at Farlington Marshes).
15. Spotted Crake: The bird which arrived at Farlington Marshes on Aug 20 was still there on Aug 23.
16. Yellow-legged Gull: The roost at the head of Southampton water continues to increase in number - on Aug 21 there were 174 on Eling Great Marsh.

PLANTS

1. Amphibious Bistort: Flowering at two places in the Brook Meadow area of Emsworth last week

INSECTS

1. New moths for the yearlist: Slightly belated reports of moth trap sessions at Titchfield Haven added The Chevron on Aug 2 and Dark Spectacle on Aug 7

Mon 23 Aug

A. Wade Court area at Langstone

Passing by Langstone Pond this evening with the tide high I came on a sight I have not seen since last winter - a pre-roost gathering of 30 Egrets huddled together on the ground of the field south of the Wade Court roost. During the spring and summer months any birds that came in early and did not go directly to the roost trees formed a pre-roost in trees near Langstone pond, perhaps avoiding the ground because of the dense growth of thistles over much of the field.

Another factor bringing the birds 'down to earth' could well be the heavy rain which has begun to waterlog the ground and force earthworms to the surface to avoid drowning. Three more Egrets in one of the fields north of Wade Court (where again they have not been seen for months) were clearly prospecting for supper before the time came to enter the roost.

Possibly also as a result of the rain I found Ragged Robin flowering at the Lymbourne springs 'wild flower meadow' where the very last Corn Cockle flower was still showing.

B. Migrants in the garden

Nothing to get excited about but my early morning check on the garden found at least three Chiffchaffs avidly feeding around bushes and a Blackcap 'tucc'ing out of sight while a party of around 15 House Martins moved east overhead

Wildlife diary and news for Aug 16 - 22 (Week 34)

Sun 22 Aug

A. South end of Idsworth Down (north of Rowlands Castle) (10:45 - 13:00)

I started this walk from the road passing St Huberts Chapel (SU 743 141) at Idsworth and walked under the main London to Portsmouth railway west up the slope of Idsworth Down then on in the same direction down to Wick Farm (SU 729 136) where I turned south along the road towards Finchdean but turned north on the Sussex Border Path before reaching the village. Back at the top of Idsworth Down I met the path on which I had started and retraced my steps down the hill to the chapel.

The objective of the walk was to find arable weeds on the fields which have now been harvested, and the best place for these was at the very start of the downhill path to Wick Farm where one of the first plants to catch my eye was an Amaranth (also known as Pigweed) which I at first thought was Green Amaranth but on checking a small specimen back at home I decided that its hairiness made it more likely to be Common Amaranth. Near it was a mass of both Round and Sharp-leaved Fluellen, and at the field edge one plant of Small Toadflax was still flowering.

These were all in an area of more or less bare ground on the north side of the path right at the top of the hill but as we started to go down we passed a field of Sweetcorn on the south side and this was full of 'weeds' including Marjoram and a patch of Crosswort which had started a second flowering. Further down more Marjoram had attracted half a dozen Green Veined White butterflies but other than one Large White and a few Meadow Browns we saw no other butterflies in the whole outing.

Just before we reached the Amaranth, while still climbing the east slope of the down, where there were very few plants in the harvested wheat field, I did spot a small specimen of Knotgrass which had bright red flowers and thoughts of Cornfield Knotgrass went through my mind but this had very small flowers with pale inconspicuous sheaths must have been a poor specimen of *P. aviculare* which had had an overdose of chemical spray intended for the wheat.

On the road section there were some colourful plants including fresh Musk Mallow and Dark Mullein, plus some Hop vines showing male flowers, but I found nothing of real interest until well up the slope of the down again on the Sussex Border Path. Here I first noticed Dwarf Spurge before I came on another bank of Sweetcorn with some very interesting weeds. At the very start of this crop there was more Amaranth, and at the far end of it (going uphill) was a mass of Bristle Grass and Cockspur Grass with some Millet. If anyone is in that area and wants to check them out the location is roughly SU 736 138 but in default of expert opinion I think I found Yellow Bristle Grass.

One other find that deserves a mention was made on the initial uphill section - a small furry animal sitting motionless in the centre of the path. At first glance I thought it must be a mouse but the shape and short tail were those of a Field Vole. As some runners were coming up the path behind us and might well have trodden on it I picked it up and moved it into longer grass, and in picking it up I got a good idea of its size (more like 5 cm long than the 10 cm of an adult vole). It was presumably a youngster but why it was so immobile remains a mystery.

Right at the end of the walk I heard a burst of Chiffchaff song and saw a few Goldfinch but the walk was almost birdless - a couple of Swallows at the start, a couple of Green Woodpeckers heard en route, a Nuthatch calling from Wick Hanger and one burst of Woodpigeon song was the sum of it.

Back at home I noticed some leaves had been stripped from a branch of wild Dog Rose and spotted the small caterpillars responsible for this. They looked a bit like Cabbage White caterpillars but were resting with their tails raised in the air (maybe in response to my interest in them?). I also noticed that they had more than the maximum five pairs of 'prolegs' along the underside of the body showing that they were not butterfly or moth caterpillars but the larvae of a sawfly and a quick check found they were the young of the Rose Sawfly (*Arga ochropus*)

B. News and reports reaching me last night

BIRDS

1. Spotted Crake: One first seen at Farlington Marshes Lake on afternoon of Aug 20 and seen again (including a view of it in flight) on evening of Aug 21
2. Dotterel: After just one spring bird (on downs in East Sussex on May 28) a single has appeared at Rye Harbour on Aug 21
3. Marsh Harrier: Nine seen (together?) at Rye Harbour on Aug 21
4. Black Terns: Three still over Ivy Lake at Chichester with 500+ Sand Martins on Aug 20. Nine seen flying east in the Solent at Stokes Bay (Gosport) on evening of Aug 19.
5. Wryneck: One at Beachy Head on Aug 20 (and by inference from one of the observations of the Spotted Crake one has been reported at Farlington Marshes)
6. Black Redstart: First mention of one since May comes from the Cuckmere Valley area of East Sussex on Aug 20
7. Pintail: Four returning birds flew in to land at the Hersey Nature Reserve on the north east of the Isle of Wight on Aug 20
8. Yellow Wagtail: Maybe 14 or more seen at Gilkicker Point (Gosport) on morning of Aug 21. Also seen there was a Grasshopper Warbler, two Whinchats and up to 4 Tree Pipits. Another Yellow Wagtail was seen on Culver Down near Bembridge Foreland on the IoW on the same morning.
9. Med Gulls: 265 roosting on the 'dredging lagoon' at Bembridge on Aug 20 set a new record count for one assemblage of these birds on the Isle of Wight
10. Green Singing Finch (*Serinus mozambicus*): One at Gilkicker (Solent shore at Gosport) on morning of Aug 21. This may be an escaped cage bird but could be a genuine vagrant - Trevor Carpenter comments .. "The *Serinus Mozambicus* that I had in my garden in 2001

was present from 23rd to 25th August. This is very close to today's date. One more in August and I reckon we'll have enough of a pattern to suggest genuine vagrancy and consequently admission to the Hampshire List. " I do not feel so confident - August is also the time when hot weather causes people to leave windows open and allow cage birds to escape from houses....

11. Ringed Plover: Maybe a major influx? More than 60 seen at Hayling Oysterbeds on Aug 20.

INSECTS

1. Adonis Blue: First two males seen and photographed on Old Winchester Hill on Aug 21 (summer brood were out on Beachy Head on Aug 8 and at Ventnor Downs on IoW on Aug 14)
2. Silver Spotted Skipper: 54 seen at Old Winchester Hill on Aug 21 but Ashley Whitlock thinks the count at this time of year should be over 100
3. Brown Argus: On Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley English Nature are said to be using 'potted Geraniums' to encourage these butterflies (which are welcoming the experiment!)
4. Convolvulus Hawkmoth: One came to a moth trap at Ellanore near West Wittering on Aug 18 (with it was another Oak Porcessionary moth)

OTHER

1. Red Squirrel: Birders at Ryde Pierhead on Aug 20 saw and photographed a Red Squirrel there over 600 metres from land! Maybe a youngster?

Sat 21 Aug

A. Portsdown Hill from Fort Purbrook to The George (10:00 - 11:55)

On a sunny warm morning I parked in the 'cul de sac' off College Lane opposite the road leading to Fort Purbrook, and then walked uphill past the fort to the bridge over the old A3 London Road by an indirect route exploring the open spaces in this area.

One aim was to see Autumn Ladies Tresses, of which I found eight spikes on the west side of the A3 near the Sickle Medick plant which is flourishing for at least the second year. Near it was a lot of Blue Fleabane. On the east side of the London Road I not only found a great mass of Autumn Gentian starting to flower but also found two plants of something that I did not expect to see on the chalk - Devils Bit Scabious. Everywhere there was lots of Small Scabious and one plant of Field Scabious.

Vervain was fairly common between Farlington Avenue and the London Road and a detour down the Avenue (in the hope of finding a way from it into the grassland to the west of it - which I did not) gave me a good show of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea.

Coming up the flower-rich track between the Fort and Portsdown Hill Road I was able to check the seedpods of the Melilot growing there in abundance and to see that they were, as I noted, 'hairy and smooth' - the smoothness may disappear as they become fully ripe and show a 'netted' surface but the evidence was clear that this was Tall and not Ribbed Melilot whose seedpods are hairless and noticeably ridged.

Coming back I walked along the road in front of the Fort and, at the west end of the white railings which line this part of the road, on the downhill side where a lot of 'garden waste' is dumped and enriches the soil, I was surprised to see a large bush of freshly flowering Hemlock Water Dropwort (very much out of place and out of season).

Nothing special in the way of birds but I did see a Common Whitethroat and hear another singing, and I passed some very noisy juvenile Linnets with their parents. Just one Swallow flew overhead.

Butterflies were quite plentiful with Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, Small and Green Veined White and Common Blue (including one very brown female which allowed me a good look at its upper surface to see if it might be a Brown Argus). I also saw just one Six-spot Burnet.

Fri 20 Aug

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Black Terns: First two were back at Titchfield Haven on July 20 with six there on July 31 and a juvenile in Langstone Harbour on Aug 7,8 but the main autumn passage seems to have started on Aug 12 when twelve flew past Selsey Bill. Of the 25 reports I have logged 15 have been on or since Aug 12 and these have included an inland sighting at Weir Wood near Crawley. The latest sightings were on Aug 19 and included one of three birds at Ivy Lake at Chichester in Sussex where there were also some 2000 Sand Martins.
2. Skuas: The many Common and Sandwich Terns still fishing off the Hampshire coast have attracted a few Skuas and on Aug 17 Mike Rafter saw 3 or 4 Arctic Skuas among the terns off Lepe at the mouth of Southampton Water. While there he heard that a Great Skua (Bonxie) had also been seen
3. Marsh Harrier: A female was seen at Titchfield Haven attempting to pluck a Mallard from the water on Aug 18 and on that day another was seen over Pagham Harbour - there were two more sightings at Titchfield Haven on Aug 12 and 13. Of the eleven sightings I have logged in August one was over the west side of Chidham in Chichester Harbour on Aug 10 and another was at Sidlesham on Aug 18 with a probable at The Vyne north of Basingstoke on Aug 4 and 5.
4. Montagu's Harrier: One was seen to fly out to sea from the Selsey west fields on Aug 15
5. Sandpipers: Common Sandpipers are in short supply at the moment with both Green and Wood being seen in greater numbers. Up to 30 Green Sandpipers have been seen at Pett Level near Hastings and 14 were at the Chichester Drayton pits on Aug 16 (18 were there on Aug 12). Seven were at Titchfield Haven on Aug 18 and 12 were at the Lower Test Marshes on Aug 14. A few years ago counts of more than 20 (up to 40) Common Sandpipers were an annual event at the Lower Test and at Farlington Marshes but there has been no count of more than 7 reported from any Hampshire site this week ('More than six' were at Sinah Lake on Hayling on Aug 15 and a similar number at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Aug 18) One count of 20 was recorded from the banks of the Sussex Ouse at Piddinghoe on Aug 15. In East Sussex up to 23 Wood Sandpipers have been at Pett Level this week and a count of 4 at Titchfield Haven on Aug 18 is way above the single Common Sandpiper that has been there this week (max count at the Haven this autumn has been 4 on July 24)
6. Kittiwake: A count of 19 off St Catherine's Point (Aug 19) and 2 juveniles off Gilkicker Point in the Solent (Aug 17) seems to indicate that these birds have started to disperse from their breeding areas and may appear from now on off the West Sussex and Hampshire coast.
7. Cuckoo: I have only seen four reports of juvenile Cuckoo during Aug. Two of these were from the Isle of Wight and one from East Sussex but on Aug 18 one in the Oysterbeds area on Hayling was the first reported in Hampshire
8. Swift: Five reports of sightings this week have reached me, one of them involving a bird seen entering a nest hole at Sandown on the Isle of Wight on Aug 18 (presumably the bird was motivated by curiosity rather than having offspring still in the nest).
9. Passerine migrants at Beachy Head. Reports from Bob Edgar on the SOS website list the following as ringed at Whitbread Hollow on Beachy Head on Aug 14 - 3 Redstart, 3 Sedge Warbler, 16 Reed Warbler, 80 Whitethroat, 25 Garden Warbler, 50 Willow Warbler - and on Aug 15 - 2 Tree Pipit, 2 Nightingale, 1 Redstart, 1 Grasshopper Warbler, 20 Reed Warbler, 70 Whitethroat, 20 Garden Warbler, and 125 Willow Warbler (at least 1 was acredula type - northern race). A separate list of birds seen in that area by Nick Pope on Aug 15 adds 3 Swift, 3 Yellow Wagtail, 2 Wheatear, 6 Blackcap, 3 Chiffchaff, 1 Pied and 1 Spotted Flycatcher plus a single Corn Bunting.
10. Goldfinch: Three flocks, each of 50 to 100 Goldfinch, seen in the past few days reminded me of many reports last autumn of Goldfinch on the move in southern England but on checking back I see the big numbers did not occur until October (when an estimate of

1000 birds flying east at Worthing in one 30 minute period was made on Oct 12 with three more reports of between 650 and 700 birds coming in during the following week from places as far apart as Hastings and the shore near New Milton. We will have to wait a bit to see if we get similar numbers this year. I assume these birds are not local but are on passage and if that is so I would like to know where they come from and where they are heading as all the reports last year were of an eastward flow along the south coast.

11. Jay: While on the subject of birds on passage I see that a total of 11 Jays were seen on West High Down near the Needles on the Isle of Wight back on Aug 15, and this reminds me of a much more understandable (than the Goldfinches heading east!) movement of Jays out of the continent and westward across southern England which takes place in years when the acorn harvest is poor in Europe. Maybe those 11 Jays were the outrunners of a much bigger movement.
12. Canada Geese: A flock of 222 of these geese were at Titchfield Haven on Aug 18 when the Petersfield Wildlife Group went there. Last year not more than 30 Canada Geese were at Titchfield Haven in July but numbers built up from early August onwards with counts of 120 on Aug 8, 200 on Aug 14, 300 in early October and more than 400 by Oct 24. The current count indicates that the same pattern is underway but that leaves the question as to whether the 'albino' bird will be seen with them again this year. Another flock of 224 Canada Geese roosted at the Testwood Lakes on Sunday evening Aug 15
13. A late Blackbird nest: The Brook Meadow Conservation Group's weekly newsletter reports that a Blackbird pair still have young being fed in their nest in ivy on the wall of an Emsworth house in the week from Aug 9 -15.
14. National news: Everyone has probably seen the news on TV that Corncrakes have bred in East Anglia this summer, maybe marking the start of a comeback from their extinction on mainland Britain (as far as I know they have only bred in the western isles of Scotland and maybe in Ireland for a good many years)

PLANTS

1. Violet Helleborine: These have been seen at a third site within the Stansted Forest area. In addition to the two sites towards the west end of the Main Avenue John Goodspeed has been shown half a dozen flower spikes alongside the main drive to the House (i.e. the east end of the Main Avenue) where they have been given protective wire cages to prevent deer and rabbits from eating them

INSECTS

1. Brown Hairstreak: In Sussex these were seen at Pulborough Brooks and at Ifield near Crawley during the week.
2. Wall Brown: This species seems to have had a good summer and may even have extended its range - Alan Thornbury saw both a male and a female in separate areas of Noar Hill recently and I think it is new for that site.
3. New moths for the yearlist: Haworth's Minor was taken on the banks of the Itchen on Aug 3 and a second was found near Winchester on Aug 13 with both Flounced Rustic and Dusky Thorn there on the same night. On Aug 14 Ian Thirlwell in Southsea found the first Grass Eggar of the year
4. On Aug 16 Ian Thirlwell in Southsea achieved the fourth British record of a moth called *Eublemma pupurina* which was 'new to Britain' when the first turned up in Cornwall on Aug 8 this year.
5. A *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth was seen in Suffolk on Aug 17
6. Hornets: Two contrasting attitudes towards these insects were illustrated this week. On the one hand visitors to the RSPB Pulborough Brooks reserve are being encouraged to admire them at a nest on the outside wall of the visitor centre. On the other hand, according to the Portsmouth NEWS, a farmer (Sir Christopher Musgrave) who runs an 'educational farm' in the Hoe Gate/Hipleys area west of Denmead is hoping to find someone to move an established Hornets nest from a livestock shelter where they fear that their animals may get stung. I cannot imagine how one would achieve such a move and persuade the Hornets to accept the change, nor can I imagine that the animals are in

any danger (unless they block the Hornet's flight path to and from the nest). I would suggest that, if any animals are stung, the best plan would be to move the livestock

OTHER

1. Common Seals: John Goodspeed has heard that up to three Common Seals are being frequently seen in the Sword Sands area of Langstone Harbour at the moment
2. Fungi: Rain and warmth have brought up a good many toadstools and other fungi this week but perhaps the most spectacular has been a large Sulphur Polypore (Chicken of the Woods) which Brian Fellows found on an Oak on the north side of the Main Avenue through Stansted Forest.
3. Grayling fish: Following a recent find of a dead Lesser Spotted Dogfish in the River Ems at Emsworth on July 28 another large fish was discovered in the same section of river this week. The Dogfish was almost certainly caught in the sea and abandoned in the river for some unknown reason. This time the fish involved was a freshwater Grayling some 50cm long (the largest when full grown are only 56cm) but it also is an equally unlikely natural inhabitant of the river and the fact that it had been dumped in the river, again for reasons unknown, is convincingly borne out by the fact that it had been neatly gutted. I am beginning to get the sense of a drama being played out in which an ardent fisherman has fallen deeply in love with some lady living near the river in Emsworth - the suitor brings his best catches to her as tokens of his love but she cannot bear the sight of fish and dumps them in the river as soon as he is out of sight.

Thu 19 Aug

A. Aldsworth Pond, Stansted Sling and Havant Thicket

After much rain last night and showers in the early morning I took a chance to check on the summer orchids in Stansted Forest and Havant Thicket, first calling at Aldsworth Pond where the water level was surprisingly low (perhaps because of the decrepit state of the wooden sluice gate which is all that prevents the pond from emptying).

The water surface was almost totally obscured by the mass of vegetation which grows in the shallow water encouraged by the fact that the pond is empty for about half of each year, allowing many plants to become established in the rich peaty soil uncovered during the dry season. In the slightly deeper areas from which the Water Mint, Mares Tail and other plants such as Marsh Yellow Cress are absent the water is covered by a thick green scum of algae, and the water is only visible where the Coots and other birds have been swimming and feeding. This may sound as if the pond is unattractive but in fact it was this morning reminiscent of a field of Lavender, the colour coming from the great mass of Water Mint. By next month, unless we have lots more rain, the pond will be dry and it will be possible to walk over most of the bottom checking for unusual plants and seeing the shells of many Water Snails (including Ramshorn Snails) which enjoy the environment here.

Today the only birds I could see were a dozen Coot with single Mallard and Little Grebe, but others will have been hidden in the vegetation in which I heard a couple of Moorhens.

Overhead a few Swallows were feeding and something had aroused a male Kestrel to fly rapidly around, calling continually, as they do in spring courtship.

After looking at the pond from the roadside sluice I walked east along the road towards the track leading to Sindles Farm but as soon as I got round the trees lining the pond I had a great surprise as the whole roadside fence which normally prevents access to the marshy area east of the pond has been removed and a wide swathe of the wetland vegetation has been cut so that you can walk up the east side of the pond and examine the plants growing in the wetland - hopefully this clearance does not presage some building development here.

My next stop was at the Stansted 'Sling' area to check on the Violet Helleborine which I had seen on Aug 3 with none of its flowers open - today it was in perfect condition with all its flowers (at least 31) open and none yet going over. I did not have time to walk east down the Main Avenue where, just past the south end of the Broad Avenue, Brian Fellows tells me there is a magnificent Sulphur Polypore (Chicken of the Woods) fungus to be seen on one of the trees on the north side of the Main Avenue.

In Havant Thicket the Broad-leaved Helleborines, which had also had unopen flower buds when I checked on July 23, had by now all gone to seed but near them - just inside the Castle Road entrance - a plant of Wild Angelica had attracted a host of insects. Among them were the Longhorn beetle *Strangalia maculata* and several hoverflies including the large *Volucella inanis* (not quite so dramatic as *V. zonaria*) and one with a dull orange abdomen bisected longitudinally by a broad black band which might have been *Rhingia campestris* (though I did not notice the prominent 'beak' which that should have on its face).

Heading north from the Castle Road entrance and taking the first path forking to the left I soon found all three other plants I had come to look for - plenty of Wild Goldenrod, Devils Bit Scabious and Dwarf Gorse in flower plus Ling Heather and Jointed Rush. Later I found the first flowers open on Purple Moor Grass and, when checking a favourite spot in which Adders bask but not expecting to see one on this cloudy and damp morning, very nearly trod on one curled up in an area of dry grass near thick cover. Had I not glanced down at the right moment I would have trodden on it with unpredictable consequences, but I was able to avoid it by six inches and then watched it move slowly off to cover (I doubt it would have had the energy to bite me!)

Later in the day, walking down East Street in Havant, I noticed an unusual Willowherb growing from a pavement crack and took a sample home to check. I have no doubt (from its short stemmed leaves, the very pale pink of its flowers with club shaped stigma, and the sparse glandular hairs on the ridged stem) that it was Pale Willowherb (*E. roseum*) and I was amused when I checked the Hants Flora and read that this species was very local and rare in the county, though my experience was not out of line with the note that said (after giving its habitat as damp open woodland) that it was a common weed in Basingstoke!

Tue 17 Aug

A. Havant to Bedhampton and Broadmarsh

With heavy rain forecast for later in the day I cycled in the morning sunshine west along Solent Road past flowering Evening Primrose, Oxford Ragwort and the remnants of the Black Mustard opposite the Tesco store and then the Maidenhair Spleenwort growing with Wall Rue on the wall of Jeram's Farm (threatened with demolition and development) in Ranelagh Road. At the far end of that road the leaves of Creeping Yellow Cress (the only colony of this 'pernicious weed' which I know of in Havant town area) had no flowers though there were plenty to be seen on the roadside display in Cow Lane at Wymering when I went to the IBM site on Sunday.

My first stop was at the sluice through which excess water from the Portsmouth Water Company Bedhampton springs flows into the Hermitage stream. Before going to look at the stream I enjoyed a young freshly flowering plant of Great Mullein on the pathside. In and by the water was a great display of Stream Water Crowfoot with the hybrid Water Speedwell still managing a few flowers. Purple Loosestrife was in great form and the Buttonweed was flourishing but the Common Water Plantain was all gone to seed. One surprise here was to find Brooklime starting a second flowering.

Just before reaching the bend in the stream where it turns south past Bedhampton Mill Pool I watched an Egret 'parachute' down to fish the stream and as I was watching it I heard the shrill calls of a Kingfisher heading upstream - standing quietly in the water I saw its blue back appear low over the water surface and then the reddish brown of its underside as it spotted me and banked to turn and fly back downstream. Overhead at least nine House Martins were searching for flies. Later, back on the path by the railway, I saw the Swan pair which 'own' the Bedhampton Mill pool were back on the water with no sign of the seven cygnets which have been regularly seen downstream near the gravel quay with what I assume to be this pair.

Vervain was still flowering abundantly in the poolside pony field, and on the wall of Old Bedhampton church Pellitory of the Wall was in flower with Burnet Saxifrage in the churchyard. Continuing west along Lower Road I found a good example of Equal-leaved Knotgrass but little else of botanic interest until I reached the Broadmarsh seawall and, on top of the bank separating it from the large and little used carpark, found a big bush of Lucerne in flower. Climbing the 'mountain' above the slipway I found a few flowers remaining in the Hairy

Vetchling (*Lathyrus hirsutus*) and on one stem of Amphibious Bistort. Along the road around the base of the mountain I was surprised to find Privet still flowering (one of the myriad of trees planted to screen the old rubbish tip which forms the mountain).

There was no special bird interest along the shore off Broadmarsh but Redshank and Oystercatchers were present in good numbers (over 50 of each but numbers were diminishing as the birds flew off to their high tide roosts). On some of the moored boats a number of Turnstone were sitting out the high tide.

Perhaps the most significant observation made on this trip was of a great display of flowerbuds on banks of Ivy (the first I have noticed this year were seen yesterday) still tightly closed but an important marker of real autumn being just around the corner.

Back at home later in the day I had an unexpected visit from Tony Gutteridge carrying a small plastic box in which were two almost full grown Stag Beetle larvae which he had discovered when disposing of an ancient shrub that was no longer in keeping with the elegance of his garden. Tony thought I would like to see them and would confirm his impression of their identity.

[Wed 18 Aug](#)

A. East Havant in the rain

Despite intermittent light showers I walked around east Havant to get some fresh air before starting work this morning and noted some 75 flowering plants en route as well as seeing further confirmation of the imminent arrival of autumn in the form of Ivy flower buds. Another non-flower item prominent everywhere now is the bright red of Lords and Ladies berries. Danewort is still flowering at the south end of the Havant Townend House carpark on the Billy Line below the Museum and in the Lymbourne Triangle 'wild flower meadow' Corn Cockle flowers can still be found along with Common Poppy, Red Campion, Musk Mallow, Ox-eye Daisies and Birds-foot Trefoil. Along the twitchel path between Wade Court Road and Pook Lane Herb Robert is still colourful and Pellitory of the Wall is flowering, and the close mown grass beside Pook Lane (north of the A27) had white-flowered Dove's Foot Cranesbill. Coming back over the railway from Denvilles I went into the old Havant cemetery in which I added Ladies Bedstraw, Rough Hawkbit, and Heath Groundsel to my list plus, looking over the wall into the New Lane allotments, Weasel's Snout (Lesser Snapdragon). The last two additions of interest as I neared home were Annual Wall-rocket and Green Field Speedwell. Before setting out I noted a burst of 'winter' Blackcap song in the garden and had the now rare sight of two Starlings on an neighbour's rooftop (plenty of these still in flocks roaming the fields but none now around the houses where they nested). Even more dramatic garden news was of, in fisherman's parlance, 'the one that got away' - as I was looking out of a window I glimpsed what I can only describe as a 'sparrow sized butterfly' with a prominent element of white in its generally brown colouration. I had a full 200 milliseconds to see this much before the object disappeared from sight close to the house. My immediate reaction was to go out of the backdoor to see if I could refind it, which I did, getting an equally short view of this very large butterfly (which had probably been resting on the house wall) flying away from me into my neighbour's garden with a strong, slow wingbeat and partially gliding flight. I cannot really make any claim for its identity but thoughts of Camberwell Beauty, White Admiral, or the Swallowtail recently seen on Hayling Island went through my mind.

Wildlife diary and news for Aug 9 - 15 (Week 32)

[Sun 15 Aug](#)

A. News reaching me today

GENERAL WARNING

1. On Aug 11 Martin Gillingham sent the following warning to Hoslist: 'Just to let people know that after a relatively quiet time for car break-ins at Farlington they have started to happen regularly again. I have written to Portsmouth City Council asking if they would consider putting a CCTV camera in the car park to deter the theives, and am still waiting for a reply. If any one else would like to do the same I would be grateful, as the more letters they receive the more likely it is that they might take it seriously.'

BIRDS

1. Possible immature Stilt Sandpiper by the River Hamble (Bunny Meadows at Warsash) on Aug 13: Tom Walker sent the following report to Hoslist of a bird he saw there .. 'I think it might be an immature Stilt Sandpiper. I saw it twice at 1430 and 1520 in between rain showers. First at SU489067 on the land side of the first sluice above the Pink Ferry, and secondly on the falling tide on the estuary side at SU487068 on the edge of a channel. Unfortunately I was officially working and could not spend too long gawping at it. In flight going away from me it had a square white rump with no obvious wing bar, wings contrasted dark. On ground was long legged with yellowish brown legs; long straightish bill, dun coloured darker at tip; suffuse pectoral band; white belly; did not note obvious supercilium; wings and mantle appeared scalloped. What it was not was either Godwit, either of the shanks, spot shank, ruff, or green/wood sand. I grabbed another birder at second sighting and demanded he look through my scope. He agreed it none of the above.' .. [Aug 15]
2. Wryneck: First of autumn passage was on Baddesley Common (east of Romsey) on Aug 13 - reported to be "feeding on the ground with robins and willow warblers, hopping like a small blackbird!" A flock of 34 Mistle Thrushes were also on the Common. . . [Aug 15]
3. Wood Sandpipers: Two were at Normandy (Lymington) on Aug 7 and on Aug 11 there was one at Newhaven. Aug 12 brought two at the Drayton gravel pit east of Chichester plus one at Sidlesham Ferry. At Titchfield Haven there were three on Aug 12 and one on Aug 13 which was still there on Aug 14 (when there were seven at Pett Level near Hastings). . . [Aug 15]
4. Garganey: One at Drayton pit east of Chichester on Aug 12 with 4 Teal and 12 Shoveler. . . [Aug 15]
5. Pintail: First returning bird was at Hook/Warsash on Aug 13 with 6 Teal and 14 Gadwall. . . [Aug 15]
6. Temminck's Stint: one at Sidlesham Ferry Pool on Aug 12. . . [Aug 15]
7. Little Stint: Three at Normandy (Lymington) on Aug 7 and one at Titchfield Haven on Aug 12. . . [Aug 15]
8. Black Tern: A juvenile was working the stream in front of the Farlington Marshes building on Aug 7. Twelve flew past Selsey Bill on Aug 12 when two were seen off Fishbourne and another off Puckpool (both on northeast coast of IoW). Aug 12 also brought one to Titchfield Haven (a juv) and another to Hook/Warsash (with an Arctic Tern). One was well inland at Weir Wood reservoir (east of Crawley in Sussex) on Aug 13 when Hampshire had one off Titchfield Haven and another off Keyhaven. Two adults were in Southampton Water off Hythe on Aug 14 when there were 2 adults and a juvenile off the Point at Farlington Marshes. . . [Aug 15]
9. Caspian Gull: One at White's Creek, Pagham Harbour, on Aug 12 among 20 Yellow-legged Gulls with 220 Great Black-backs nearby. . . [Aug 15]

10. Yellow-legged Gulls: 166 were counted at the Lower Test Marshes on Aug 14 (and the two Black Swans were still there). . . [Aug 15]
11. Balearic Shearwater: one past Selsey Bill with 5 Manx, a Bonxie and 12 Black Terns on Aug 12. . . [Aug 15]
12. Aquatic Warbler: One caught by ringers at Farlington Marshes on Aug 8. . . [Aug 15]
13. Swifts: Recent reports include the following .. Four seen over Billingshurst (north of Pulborough) on Aug 10 when at least 90 were over the Ventnor area on the IoW. Four over East Dean (Beachy Head area) on Aug 11 and 12. Others were over the Chailey area (north of Lewes) on Aug 12 when a group of 30 came in off the sea (from the north) at Fishbourne on the IoW. A flock of 35 were over Culver Down (near Bembridge Foreland) on Aug 14 and on that evening there were a few over Tournerbury Wood on Hayling Island. . . [Aug 15]
14. Egret roost counts: In addition to the 45 Egrets which I counted going into Oldpark Wood near Bosham in Chichester Harbour on the evening of Aug 12 the official count on Aug 14 included 127 at Wade Court here in Havant and 61 at Tournerbury on Hayling Island (no news so far from Thorney Island). . . [Aug 15]
15. A female Marsh Harrier and 11 Avocets (out of the three families which totalled 16 birds on July 8?) were still to be seen at Titchfield Haven on Aug 13. A juvenile Marsh Harrier was over the Selsey West Fields on Aug 10. . . [Aug 15]
16. Possible Montagu's Harrier (ringtail) seen near Ryde (IoW) on Aug 13. . . [Aug 15]
17. Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail have also had a few mentions this week but no significant numbers. Wood Warbler and two Egyptian Geese were noted at Pulborough Brooks. A couple of Spotted Redshank were seen at Yarmouth on the IoW on Aug 11 and Ospreys were still at Newtown nature reserve there on Aug 14. . . [Aug 15]

PLANTS

1. Sea Stork's Bill seen at Crowlink (Beachy Head) on Aug 8 along with Autumn Ladies Tresses. . . [Aug 15]

INSECTS

1. Small Red-eyed Damselflies

From the Portsmouth NEWS for 11 Aug 2004 - 'John Horne, who owns Old Bursledon Nature Reserve, has reported the first official sighting of Small Red-eyed Damselfly in Hampshire. Wildlife experts have confirmed this.'

On Aug 14 Hugh Venables announced a second find of this species in Hampshire - up to 20 of them on the model boat lake on Southampton Common

Also on Aug 14 Tony Wilson saw 6 of them at Castle Water, Rye Harbour and found 5 more in the nearby Royal Military Canal (where there were many Ruddy Darters)

For those not familiar with this species here is some background info that I wrote in July 2002... 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).

On 28 Aug 03 when the species was again in the news I wrote ... Small Red-eyed Damselfly also gets a mention in the Wildlife Reports section of the British Wildlife mag which arrived in the post just before writing this, and the news of the species (only discovered in Britain as recently as 1999) is good with the spread of this species outward from its point of origin in Essex continuing. At its most westerly outpost so far (Priory Park country park near Bedford) attempts to prove that it was breeding there failed to find any evidence by searching for larvae in the water around the edge of the pond but plenty of larvae were found when a boat was used and the Hornwort out in the centre (on which the eggs were laid) was checked. Unlike most other species of dragonfly larvae which roam the bottom of their water body in search of food it seems that the larvae of this species are content to remain on the weeds where they have hatched. This also makes the detection of their breeding success more difficult as the adults emerge, and shed their larval skins, out in the centre of the pond and not on the emergent vegetation at the water's edge (so their exuviae cannot be seen from the bank).

2. Summer Adonis Blues were out at Beachy Head on Aug 8 but none have been seen so far at Old Winchester Hill. . . [Aug 15]
3. Summer Wood Whites were seen at Witley Common in Surrey on Aug 11. . . [Aug 15]
4. A small colony of Brown Argus were discovered in The Holt wood west of Rowlands Castle on Aug 14. . . [Aug 15]
5. An Oak Processionary moth (uncommon migrant) came to Jon Stokes mothtrap at Portchester on Aug 12 and Sarah Patton had another at West Wittering on Aug 10 (where she also had a Dark Crimson Underwing). . . [Aug 15]
6. Following on David Tinling's find of a Jersey Tiger moth at Gosport recently (after it had apparently flown across the Solent from the Isle of Wight, where it is resident) another has been recorded in Suffolk - a first for that county. . . [Aug 15]

B. WeBS Count of IBM Lake at Portsmouth

I was away on Aug 14 so made the count on Aug 15 A total of 175 Canada Geese were present Gulls included some 200 Black-headed, around 20 Herring, 2 adult Lesser

Black-backs and 1 Common Gull. Two adult Great Crested Grebes were seen, one at each end of the lake - no hint of breeding. Only two adult Little Grebes were seen but one had a noisy juvenile with it.

Two Common Sandpipers were also noisy. The only ducks seen were 48 Mallard and just one possible Tufted Duck. Even Moorhen (16) and Coot (13) were in very low numbers. Three Herons (no Egret) and three Cormorant were present.

While at the site I found a trace of Sneezewort flowering despite close mowing of the grass where it is usually seen (this was the first record for this year)

Thu 12 Aug

Havant Langbrook Stream and South Moors (08:50 - 12:20)

Yesterday I cleared some weeds in my garden and this morning I noticed that doing so had exposed a large patch of Annual Pearlwort whose delicate moss like structure and petal-less flowers were the first of today's noteworthy plants. Heading from home towards the Langbrook stream I found the Small-flowered Cranesbill still flourishing in Juniper Square where, in addition to the plants which survive in the edge of close mown grass one small bush had established itself in the shelter of a small garden plant and had grown several inches tall, its identity established by its tiny pale flowers and backed up by proximity to the many plants whose pedicel hairs have been checked by me previously.

Coming under the A27 my attention was diverted from plants to birds, first by the calls of Long-tailed Tits in the streamside trees and then by a spot the bird competition as I saw that these tits were part of a flock of at least forty birds containing bright yellowish Willow Warblers and dull stubby Chiffchaffs as well as Blue and Great Tits. In the stream I disturbed one Egret which flew behind the trees to wait until I had passed.

Further downstream were other migrants, and stopping at the entrance to the Farm from which the cattle come to graze the South Moors I hoped, but failed, to see a Flycatcher on the bare branches of the many dead Elm trees above the layer of Elder bushes whose lavish crop of berries was attracting more birds among which I saw a female Blackcap and one Garden Warbler (identified by its larger, chubby body and plain grey/whitish plumage with no identifying features!) as well as several Whitethroats.

Also beside the stream I passed Water Figwort in fresh flower in the water and a patch of Stocky Groundsel on the bank where Storksbill was flourishing in the rich soil. Climbing the stile into the wild area before the South Moors there are now several bushes of Goats Rue in flower.

Coming onto the Moors the first thing I noticed was a display of small white *Coprinus niveus* toadstools growing from old cowpats and by the stream bed less than ten yards into the southernmost fenced compartment I was surprised to find Brookweed still flowering when I ventured in through the open gateway to check that I was looking at a clump of Hairy Buttercup to be ticked alongside Meadow and Celery-leaved species. Marsh (or Floating) Foxtail was flowering here and I noticed one rush with a particularly large and rigidly multi-branched flowerhead which did not have the flattened stem of Jointed Rush (which I did find elsewhere). It was probably the common Sharp-flowered Rush but I intend to search it out again and have a closer look as it looked more like Francis Rose's illustration of Blunt-flowered Rush which is much less common but is recorded for this area in the Hants Flora distribution map (I see that both Sharp and Blunt-flowered can grow to over 1 metre tall but this was much shorter).

In the 'orchid meadow' area I had a brief view of a fresh Painted Lady and a worn Small Copper as well as Common Blues, Gatekeepers, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood. Later, inside the seawall, I found my first show of Golden Orb spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) while searching for Slender Hare's Ear (of which I found one flowering plant.

The tiny remaining plant of Knotted Hedge Parsley had gone to seed but the Duke of Argyll's Teapant nearby was enjoying the start of a fresh flowering.

Over the South Moors my first Green Sandpiper of the autumn flew noisily and from Budds Mound I saw my first autumn Turnstone with several Sand Martins, while on the pools at least four families of Tufted Duck could be seen. Two Teal were on Langstone Pond and the full family of Swans from the pond were on the sea.

Egret Count at Oldpark Wood in Chichester Harbour

As I will be away on Aug 14 I went to the Chichester Yacht Basin this evening and between 19:25 and 20:40 I counted a total of 45 Egrets using the roost in Oldpark Wood across the water. As 18 Egrets arrived in rapid succession within the quarter hour after arriving I guess that others had been coming in before I arrived and this may have accounted for the total being lower than the 56 I had here in July. More impressive than the Egrets was a huge flock of at least 500 Corvids which flew down to line the waters edge just north of the wood after a Sparrowhawk had been seen circling above the area of the wood in which they roost.

Other birds noted were two Shelduck (one adult and one juvenile) which flew over, a small flock of Common Terns fishing in the water before sunset, and both Whimbrel and Greenshank were heard.

Walking up the east shore of the Chichester Channel alongside Salterns Copse I found a nice patch of Marsh Mallow flowering at the north end of the wood (Copperas Point area) and by the road alongside the Chichester Yacht Basin there was a clump of Tansy in flower.

[Wed 11 Aug](#)

News reaching me today

BIRDS

1. An Aquatic Warbler was seen today by Simon Woolley in the rough ground between the Thorney Little Deeps and the Environment Agency access road to the seawall. Simon saw it (a smart juvenile) among sedges growing east of the overhead wires. I thought the only people who ever saw Aquatic Warblers were ringers who caught them in their nets but it seems that the use of a tape recorder broadcasting their calls, plus a bit of trespassing on private land can also get them on your tick list (though I disapprove of both practices). . . [Aug 11]
2. Three Little Stints were an autumn first seen by Andy Rhodes at Normany (south of Lymington) on Aug 7, and with them were the first two Wood Sandpipers for Hampshire this autumn. . . [Aug 11]
3. Another rarity which surprisingly has not been mentioned on HOSLIST until now is a Balearic Shearwater which was at the Lymington Marshes sometime in July. Although Russell Wynn did not see it himself he says (in his summary of birds at the marshes in July) .. 'Sightings made by other locals included a long-staying Balearic Shearwater on several dates'. . . [Aug 11]
4. Russell also tells us that the first Kingfisher returned to the Lymington shore on July 10, and more locally Kevin Stouse found one at the mouth of the Brockhampton Stream (opposite Broadmarsh Slipway) on Aug 6, while George Spraggs not only tells me that the bird he has been seeing at Sinah Lake since July 26 is an orange footed adult but that a fisherman who is regularly at the lake claims it has been around since May. If the fisherman is right it could be worth checking the tall banks of the small islands at the west end of the lake for a nest hole .. the fact that George normally sees the bird at the east end

would tie in with its natural reluctance to advertise its nest site. Also on the lake on Aug 9 were two downy Tufted Ducklings with their mother. . . [Aug 11]

5. Curlew Sandpiper was seen at Pagham (Ferry Pool) on Aug 8, two at Newtown Harbour on Aug 8 and 10, one at Lymington Marshes 'sometime in July' and another there on Aug 4. . . [Aug 11]
6. Thanks to Kevin Stouse for quantifying the number of juvenile Shelduck at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool - he found more than 20 there on Aug 5 when there were 6 Knot and 5 Grey Plover in the harbour nearby (3 of the Knot were still in summer red and all the plovers were in silver and black). . . [Aug 11]
7. Pied Flycatchers seen in Ventnor area of IoW: four or five on Aug 10, at least four on Aug 9, at least eleven on Aug 8 (when one was seen at Noar Hill). . . [Aug 11]
8. Tree Pipits: two over Noar Hill near Selborne on Aug 8, three at Culver Down (IoW) on Aug 10. . . [Aug 11]
9. Swifts: 80 south over IoW on Aug 9 (flocks of 40 going south seen early and at midday). . . [Aug 11]
10. Egyptian Goose flew from Titchfield Haven to the Isle of Wight in the afternoon of Aug 10. It was previously reported at the Haven on July 22. . . [Aug 11]
11. A count of 155 Yellow-legged Gulls in the Redbridge/Lower Test area on Aug 7 shows no substantial increase from the 150 that were there on July 19 or the 158 on July 31. . . [Aug 11]
12. Somewhere in the western New Forest area on Aug 7 Giles Darvill watched 35 House Martins feeding on the flattened surface of a land-fill site (finding insects on the ground rather than in the air). Could this be the site in which that Whale was recently buried? I guess there could be a fair number of flies enjoying its meat if any bits were left exposed! . . [Aug 11]

PLANTS

1. Autumn Ladies' Tresses were flowering in a Portsdown garden on Aug 8 when the owner returned from holiday so they probably came out during the previous week. Devils Bit Scabious was also just starting to flower (with lots of Pepper Saxifrage) in the Botley Woods on Aug 8. . . [Aug 11]
2. On Aug 7 the Havant Wildlife Group were on Portsdown and found 87 flowering plants - nothing new but goodies included Lesser Centaury, Blue Fleabane, Pale Flax, Strawberry Clover, Ploughman's Spikenard and Burnet Saxifrage. . . [Aug 11]
3. Germander Speedwell was an interesting second flowering at Brook Meadow during the past week, and an unusual plant which I have in past years found flowering as a garden throw-out on the shore of Nutbourne Bay was seen in the gardens of Arundel Castle on Aug 1 by Lawrence Holloway - this is the Apple of Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*) which grows into a substantial Mallow-like bush with delightful large pale blue flowers - well worth keeping an eye open for. . . [Aug 11]

INSECTS

1. Sunshine on Aug 10 after heavy rain on Aug 9 gave Mark Litjens and Mike Duffy (at Old Winchester Hill and Stockbridge Down respectively) a combined total of 17 butterfly species including Silver Washed and Dark Green Fritillaries, Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady plus Brown Argus. . . [Aug 11]

2. Alan Thornbury is having second thoughts about the 'first ever for Portsdown Hill' Brown Argus which he saw on July 28 - having failed to refind it or another he is wondering if he was mistaken and has withdrawn his claim... Alan has also asked me to point out that I made a mistake in reporting his find of the first Silver Spotted Skipper to appear in Hampshire this summer - it was the first and it was seen on July 31 but at Beacon Hill, not Old Winchester Hill across the Meon valley. . . [Aug 11]
3. A Purple Emperor was flying around inside the Sainsbury's store at Tadley near Basingstoke on Aug 5 - probably originating from nearby Pamber Forest. . . [Aug 11]
4. White Admirals were still flying in wood below the west end of Portsdown on Aug 6 and 8. . . [Aug 11]
5. The absence of the Small Tortoiseshell from almost all current butterfly lists is worrying. After visiting Noar Hill and Stockbridge Down on Aug 7 Adrian Hoskins commented .. 'It is notable that I didn't see any Small Tortoiseshells at either site, which is highly unusual. There was a good emergence in June, but the larvae from that generation seem to have mostly perished, either due to high levels of parasitism, or as a friend suggested, predation by common wasps.' . . [Aug 11]
6. Recent new moths include The Vestal (at Portchester below Portsdown on Aug 9), Barred Rivulet and Square-spotted Clay (both near Basingstoke on Aug 7), Bordered Grey and Beautiful Yellow Underwing (both seen by day in the New Forest on Aug 8). . . [Aug 11]

[Tue 10 Aug](#)

A. Havant area plants

One of the 'improvements' to my personal database facility that I have found time to implement since I started to take some time off the work of writing up news for my website is now operational and automatically tells me the number of species which have had an entry in my database for a particular week, broken down into Birds, Plants, Insects and Animals, with separate totals for my own observations and those of others. These numbers are summed at the foot of each entry and overall totals (excluding double counting between myself and others) are shown at the right. The example below is a copy of the results for last week.

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Week 31 (B) SELF = 61 | REPORTED = 89 | OVERALL = 119 |
| Week 31 (P) SELF = 229 | REPORTED = 0 | OVERALL = 229 |
| Week 31 (I) SELF = 22 | REPORTED = 121 | OVERALL = 126 |
| Week 31 (A) SELF = 3 | REPORTED = 3 | OVERALL = 6 |
| Week 31 SUM SELF = 315 | REPORTED = 213 | OVERALL = 480 |

My reason for mentioning this facility here is that the counts give me a spur to get out and about, and to record what I see. We all need some spur of this sort and there are various ways of maintaining our interest - patch listing, rarity chasing, and photography are all valid spurs - and while I am content just to see the ordinary species I get some satisfaction from knowing that, while I only saw half the bird species that were on offer locally, and none of the moths that any moth trapper will have listed in any one week, I still managed to meet some 300 species which I could name during the week.

Excessive heat kept me indoors for most of Sunday and rain did the same on Monday so today I felt it necessary to go for a brief bike ride around Havant to see what plants were flowering. The tally was only 48 species but it did include the lovely 'Lesser Snapdragon' (aka Weasel's Snout or *Misopates orontium*) at the New Lane allotments and a couple of flowers (discovered by searching some almost dead plants!) on the Round-leaved

Cranesbill that manages to survive in the pavement edge of Prince George St near the Waitrose carpark entrance. Also on the list were the Square-stalked St John's Wort by the Hayling Billy line behind my house and the Thyme-leaved Speedwell flowering on my lawn.

Holly Blue and Speckled Wood were both in my garden alongside the Gatekeeper and Whites, and I had a surprise addition to my insect list when I noticed some Common Wasps near my feet and realised they were coming and going from a wasp nest in the ground within a few inches of where I was standing.

Wildlife diary and news for Aug 2 - 8 (Week 31)

Sat 7 Aug

A. Havant sightings

This morning I had over 20 House Sparrows feeding on the bird seed scattered on the front lawn (normally I only see half a dozen and doubt there are more than ten in the garden on any one day), and this ties in with the number of times I had to brake or swerve to avoid congregations of them on the road as I passed through various small villages early yesterday morning on my way to Harting Down. I'm not sure about their moult period but it seems normal at this time of year, when nesting duties are over, the majority of humans who provide them with food are away on holiday, and the grain is being harvested in the countryside, for House Sparrows to turn in what I call Corn Sparrows and head off into the countryside for their annual break. I guess what I saw yesterday and today is the start of this operation as they gather into large groups before heading off into the unknown. . . [Aug 7]

A single Migrant Hawker spent some time patrolling the garden in the midday heat, its short, straight body clearly and high speed zig-zag flight showing it was not a Southern Hawker. On the Buddleia I had close views of a big Volucella zonaria hoverfly (a species I have seen on and off for some time this summer) and the garden was full of Small Whites but few Gatekeepers than recently. The regular Holly Blue was also in and out several times. . . [Aug 7]

After lunch, quietly sipping a cup of tea indoors, I was startled by a loud bang as something hit the window. Whatever it was left no feathers below the window and no 'talcum powder' image on the glass so I can only assume it was a bird fleeing from a Sparrowhawk which caused the noise. There were, however, plenty of small birds in the garden shrubs near the bird feeder and I did not hear any squeals of terror from them so perhaps it was a juvenile hawk which itself hit the glass? (the sparrows that would be terrified by the arrival of an adult hawk on the hunt seem to take no notice of a juvenile hawk but just sit and laugh at its clumsy efforts). The fact that young Sparrowhawks are now flying was confirmed by Kevin Stouse who spent July 31 and Aug 1 camping near Liphook where, among other things, he watched two Sparrowhawks fly over - one presumably an adult and the other, noisily begging the first for food, a juvenile. . . [Aug 7]

This evening a visit to the shore by Warblington Church gave me a glimpse of at least a dozen Swallows perched on a wire outside the farm as I drove down to the church, and in the carpark area the Guernsey Fleabane was starting to flower a few days later than the Canadian Fleabane which is now a common sight. . . [Aug 7]

News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. On Aug 5 a Yellow Wagtail was back on the Sussex coast at Climping (mouth of River Arun) and on that day another dropped in at the Black Dam nature reserve at Basingstoke on its way south. Yet another Yellow Wagtail was back at the coast near Lymington on Aug 4, seen by Steve Keen. . . [Aug 7]
2. In an earlier comment on news from Kevin Stouse, who thought that House Martins seen over the IBM Lake at Portsmouth were already on their way south, I expressed some doubt that they would be leaving this early. Today Peter Hutchins backs Kevin's thought saying that .. 'Overton (near the source of the River Test) had a big build up, and possibly, departure of House martins and Swallows during the heavier weather late afternoon / early evening' (on Aug 5?). . . [Aug 7]
3. There is always something new to learn about even the commonest of wildlife species and the SOS website today added to my knowledge of Kittiwakes the fact that as well as taking food from the surface they will dive (or even plunge dive like a tern) for food. An entry from Joanne Chattaway relating to Newhaven on July 2 includes the following .. 'there were about 30 or more Kittiwakes, including juveniles. It was high tide and the water was deep and they were feeding within only a metre or two from the shore. We had a great view of these superb divers diving repeatedly for what I think were anchovies because at one point a large wave brought dozens of small shiny bluey fish onto the beach.' . . [Aug 7]
4. If you want to know where all the Med Gulls that were recently nesting in Langstone Harbour have gone this is what Kris Gillam reports from the Isle of Wight on Aug 5 .. 'At least 192 Med Gulls (inc. 26 juvs) in the Bembridge Harbour area in the evening with 138 on the dredging lagoon (plus a Sandwich Tern), 26 from the causeway (plus six Greenshanks and a Common Sandpiper), and 28+ at the harbour entrance (plus five Common Terns). A more thorough count of the area, taking in Foreland as well, would undoubtedly have produced 200+ which is a typical number for the time of year.' He goes on to add that there were .. 'At least 30 Med Gulls (inc. 7 juvs) at Ryde East Sands at dusk, however time only allowed for half of the gull roost to be checked before dark. Also there a group of 56 Sanderlings.' On Aug 3 Kris watched a Golden Plover fly over Sandown. . . [Aug 7]
5. I recently suggested that the Kingfishers now returning to the coast are likely to be juveniles (with black feet) and I am interested to hear from George Spraggs that seems to be resident at Sinah Lake on Hayling since July 26 has the orange feet of an adult. . . [Aug 7]
6. Two interesting recent sightings by Steve Keen were of a calling Tree Sparrow flying west over Barton on sea on Aug 3, and of a female or young Pied Flycatcher at Sowley Pond near Lymington on Aug 4. . . [Aug 7]

INSECTS

1. Hampshire's best butterfly on Aug 7 was undoubtedly a Swallowtail found at Sandy Point on Hayling in the morning by Tim Timlick and still there at 4pm according to Simon Wright who says that it could be easily seen from outside the reserve (which is not open to the general public for the very good reason that, with Hayling's holiday crowds, there would be little left to conserve if it were open!). . . [Aug 7]

2. On Aug 7 Mike Duffy had 2 Clouded Yellows and 3 fresh Painted Ladies at Old Winchester Hill with 4 Silver Spotted Skippers. Another Clouded Yellow and one Brown Hairstreak were at Noar Hill. Other Clouded Yellows have been seen at Magdalen Hill Down, Yew Hill and Ropley in the past few days and my interest in reporting each one is beginning to wane but I am still very interested in Painted Ladies and am very pleased to hear from Heather Mills that she saw a fresh one by the Brockhampton Stream alongside Budds Farm at Havant on Aug 4. . . [Aug 7]
3. A much rarer vagrant than Clouded Yellow was seen at Gosport by David Tinling on Aug 1 - a Queen of Spain Fritillary. David says it was .. 'taking nectar from knapweed with its wings wide open. I watched it for several minutes as it flitted from flower to flower, at first through 8x21 binoculars at about 4m and then at about 2m with the naked eye. It was about the same size as a Comma but paler and yellower and with a very different wing-shape. I had very good views of the upper side of its wings which were covered in black spots not squiggles, but I did not see the under side , which would have confirmed the identification. With hot air moving up from France, conditions were ideal for migration, but it could have been released or escaped.'. . . [Aug 7]
4. On the evening of Aug 4 Ashley Whitlock found more than 25 Silver Spotted Skippers on Oxenbourne Down (just across the A3 from the Queen Elizabeth Country Park south of Petersfield) so they are now out at Beacon Hill, Old Winchester Hill and Oxenbourne Down in Hampshire. . . [Aug 7]
5. Peter Hutchins, writing on Aug 5, says that there are lots of Long-winged Coneheads at The Vyne watermeadows north of Basingstoke (he adds that they are very vocal but as they do not produce their sound from a 'voice box' I think 'noisy', or perhaps 'stridulatory', would be a better word!). Also present there are Slender Groundhoppers which reminded me that Groundhoppers were mentioned on the HWT website last year as occurring at Farlington Marshes - the entry read .. 'These are a small relatives of the grasshoppers that overwinter not as eggs but as adults or large nymphs. They like bare ground, often in damp places and there are three British species. At Farlington we have the Common and Slender Groundhoppers and may have the much scarcer Cepero's as well. Slender and Cepero's are very similar and have a remarkable ability to swim, including under-water, to avoid predators as well as the more usual grasshopper technique of jumping or making short flights.'. . . [Aug 7]

Fri 6 Aug

A. Havant sightings

The only new thing in the garden today was the appearance of at least four *Pyrausta aurata* 'Mint moths' which were attracted to some Sage but did not rest on the leaves as usual - the heat was too much for them and they preferred the underside of the leaves! At one point a tiny yellow and black Ladybird appeared on one of these Sage leaves but that too soon sought shelter from the sun. . . [Aug 6]

B. Harting Down area Swallow Survey (07:00 - 11:15)

This summer's BTO Swallow Feeding survey requires participants to visit at least three of the four corners of a 2km x 2km Tetrad (plus an optional fourth point chosen by the surveyor), stopping at each point for 10 minutes during which they record the number of feeding passes made by any Swallows currently in a 200 metre circle centred on the observation point. Sounds easy but, in the case of the Tetrad I was allocated (with SU 7917, including Uppark House south of South Harting, as its south west km square) it must be borne in mind that

getting to these four points on public paths involves a walk of around 10km and getting both down and up the steep north slope of the South Downs. . . [Aug 6]

I had made the first of the required two visits on July 6 and chose this morning for the second, surviving the heat, enjoying a great display of wild flowers and butterflies, and thankfully - as on the first visit - not having any Swallows to count (on the first visit I saw five distantly and today I saw three isolated birds plus a flock of 21 all of which kept outside the designated recording area and time band). Other birds of interest were a single Red-leg Partridge running along the edge of an uncut downland barley field, singing Willow Warbler and Yellowhammer, and one Buzzard high in the air (hanging almost stationary into the westerly breeze) and seemingly trying to persuade a juvenile calling from the wood below it to take to the air. I heard Marsh Tit at two places and also on my list noted Green and Great Spot Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, and both Skylarks and Meadow Pipits on the downland. . . [Aug 6]

As with Portsdown yesterday I was amazed at the great number of Harebells on show (in one place they formed a dense 'bluebell patch' several metres across on a slope which was otherwise a sea of yellow Wild Parsnip), and in the lower ground at the northern foot of the downs the hedgerows were full of Nettle-leaved Bellflower where there had only been one or two a month ago. I only spotted one Autumn Gentian plant, its flowers still in bud, but did enjoy a good show of Rough Poppy and great swathes of Marjoram and Burnet Saxifrage. One oddity was a white flowered Wild Basil and in a shady woodland Wall Lettuce was thriving. . . [Aug 6]

One strange feature of the butterflies I saw was the virtual absence of the Whites which dominate the coastal scene (I saw one Green Veined, a couple of Large and perhaps half a dozen Small White) whereas I must have seen several thousand each of Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper. A single Marbled White was in good fettle but the only Small Tortoiseshell was threadbare. It was also strange that I did not see a single Skipper and the only other species noted were a few Speckled Wood and three fresh Holly Blues. . . [Aug 6]

Thu 5 Aug

A. Havant sightings

A Comma butterfly resting on the house wall and a male Vapourer moth on the outside of a window were additions to the normal home and garden wildlife, and in the garden a Speckled Wood and a female Holly Blue both gave me close views. In the early morning a Robin was singing fairly strongly, a passing Chiffchaff also made its unseen presence known and an adult Great Tit gave a few 'Teach-er' notes before having a snack at the nut feeder. . . [Aug 5]

A short circuit of the Billy Trail behind my house added Long-tailed Tit to the bird list and Spiked Sedge, Hairy St John's Wort and the first Michaelmas Daisy to the flowers while the bramble bushes along the trail now have an immense amount of eatable fruit - much more than usual. Coming back along the road Annual Wall-rocket and Green Field Speedwell were both flowering. . . [Aug 5]

B. Portsdown Hill (11:00 - 12:30)

I was hoping to see Wall Brown butterflies and Bastard Toadflax on this outing, and I saw two of the butterflies but none of the strange plant which is the only British member of the Sandalwood family. . . [Aug 5]

The first stop was in the carpark just east of the London Road (and west of Farlington Avenue) where I put up a Clouded Yellow butterfly from the long grass which is left unmown in the

particularly flower-rich strip (an old chalk farm track?) just below this carpark. I then thought I had found the small white flowers of the Toadflax but as soon as I got close I realised this was a patch of Squinancywort (a plant that was flowering absolutely everywhere I went). Not all was lost, though, as the next thing I saw was a great swathe of Harebells which I later found were far more numerous this year than I have ever seen before on Portsdown (I even saw one pure white bell!). Other things noted here were Burnet Saxifrage and Small Scabious, both widespread, and also Lesser Centaury (several tiny isolated plants of which all that could be seen was the upwards pointing flower). . . [Aug 5]

The second stop was in the roadside layby on James Callaghan Drive (originally the Military Road) above Paulsgrove. It is a fair walk of 500 metres west from this layby to the place above the big Paulsgrove chalk pit where I first discovered Bastard Toadflax but despite failing to find that plant the walk was well worth the effort in the heat. Almost the first thing we saw was a Wall Brown butterfly showing well on a yellow Hawkbit flower, and as soon as we ceased to admire it we had an even closer view of a fresh Small Copper, and from then on we passed through hundreds of Chalkhill Blues as well as a couple of Common Blues, many Small and Large Whites and at least one Speckled Wood. . . [Aug 5]

Among the many flowers covering the hillside (where the Portsdown Conservation Volunteers have done a great job with much scrub clearance) were Vipers Bugloss, Ploughman's Spikenard, and my first Carline Thistles. Before returning I had a cursory look for Autumn Ladies Tresses, but with no luck at this early date. . . [Aug 5]

[Wed 4 Aug](#)

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. A White-rumped Sandpiper was seen in a flooded field at Keyhaven for an hour on the evening of Aug 4 and birders there also logged Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff. The Curlew Sand was the first I have heard of since one at Pagham Harbour on June 5 which I guess was the last going north whereas this is probably the first returnee. . . [Aug 4]
2. A Bee-eater flew over Pett Level on the shore of Rye Bay on Aug 3 when two Roseate Terns were in Pagham Harbour (and five Turtle Doves plus many juvenile Shelduck were at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool). . . [Aug 4]
3. The first three days of August have brought the first returning Pied Flycatcher to Pulborough Brooks. Another Pied Flycatcher reached Old Winchester Hill on Aug 2, seen there by Bob Marchant. . . [Aug 4]
4. Bad news from Rye Harbour is that the first three Avocet chicks ever to hatch at the reserve did not survive the winds and rain, and only five Little Tern chicks fledged from 20 pairs. Unexpected birds seen there during July were a Bittern on the 13th, Garganey on the 20th, Black Tern on the 22nd, Marsh Harrier on 19th, 23rd and 24th and Wood Sandpiper on both the 10th and 24th, Up to 260 Common Scoter were offshore during the month and on July 31 the reserve had a Great White Egret. (Note that the Black Tern at Rye was not the first of the autumn - there were two at Titchfield Haven on July 20). . . [Aug 4]
5. Passerine migrants reaching Beachy Head on July 31 included 150 Willow Warblers, 20 Chiffchaffs, 2 Grasshopper Warblers plus 4 Reed and 1 Sedge Warbler. The first Sussex passage Wheatear was at Fort Shoreham on July 27 and (I think on the same day) the first passage Whinchat was in the Adur valley. . . [Aug 4]

6. On July 31 this same southward movement was noticed on the Isle of Wight with at least 45 Willow Warblers, 2 Lesser Whitethroats and a Garden Warbler at Sandown. On Ventnor Downs both Wheatear and Redstart were seen and another Wheatear was at Bembridge. Another was noted on the shore of Southampton Water near Calshot on July 31, and Trevor Carpenter had one near Hambledon, east of the Meon valley, on Aug 1. . . [Aug 4]
7. On Aug 1 a Wheatear was on the Thorney Island shore at Marker Point and three Turtle Doves were on the power lines near the Little Deeps (I wonder if one was a juvenile as one or two of these birds have been there since the start of June). Bearded Tits were heard there but not seen - perhaps on account of a Sparrowhawk working the area. Waders seen around the Island included 800 Oystercatchers, 150 Black-tailed Godwits, 50 Dunlin, 20 Grey Plover (mostly in summer plumage), 18 Whimbrel, 12 Ringed Plover and a Knot. . . [Aug 4]
8. Departing Wheatears were seen on the Isle of Wight on July 31 and a flock of 50 Swifts was high over the Testwood Lakes early in the morning of Aug 1 (maybe the last substantial flock to be seen here this year?). More likely to be seen again was a flock of 60 Goldfinch. . . [Aug 4]
9. Another species that may be starting to depart is House Martin (though the majority of these are usually among the last to leave us in October or even November). The suggestion that some are on their way comes from Kevin Stouse who noted 10 of them over the IBM Lake at Portsmouth on July 30 - these are the first he has seen there this summer. Much more welcome news from Kevis that the mass of Canada Geese have departed (175 were there for the July WeBS count). I wonder if they have moved to Farlington Marshes? Other news from the IBM Lake is that Mallards are still hatching a few new ducklings as they are at both Langstone and Emsworth ponds. . . [Aug 4]
10. Sand Martins were still active around their cliff breeding colony to the west of Milford on sea on Aug 1 - Steve Keen saw at least 30 there. . . [Aug 4]
11. A more interesting duck family was seen at Mockbeggar Lake near Ringwood on Aug 1 - a pair of Red Crested Pochard with two juveniles. . . [Aug 4]
12. A little while ago I reported a Ring-necked Parakeet sighting in the Titchfield Common area where the bird was seen on a Hawthorn tree on July 16. A suggestion that it may be 'resident' in that area (possibly even breeding?) comes from a further sighting there on Aug 2. David Wallace tells me that .. "the ring-necked parakeet which appeared in my garden in Titchfield Common a few weeks ago has reappeared at roughly the same time in terms of the light, i.e. about an hour or so before dusk. It attacked my peanut feeder before being scared off by my son, who was attempting to photograph it." . . [Aug 4]
13. I was recently reminded about a strange find of a Grass Snake discovered above head height in the branches of a Hazel tree near the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth in the middle of last winter. At the time I could only suggest that it had either been thrown there by youths experimenting with its powers of flight, or dropped by a ham fisted Buzzard, and John Collman currently provides some evidence against the likelihood of a Buzzard dropping a good meal by mistake. Writing about a visit to Warren Heath (near Blackbushe airport in north Hampshire) on Aug 2 John says .. "Over Warren Heath today I had three young Buzzards calling loudly followed by an adult (deeper call). Obvious what the excitement was when I saw another adult with a snake in its talons. Much aerial argy-bargie, then some 40m above the ground the adult passed the snake to one of young birds. There followed a frenetic chase through trees as the other two young birds tried to get the snake off the first. They flew very close to me, and I was able to see that it

was a grass snake, roughly 3' in length. Proud owner eventually dived into very dense trees, and noise of the others ceased; I guess that one bird had it all rather than they shared it out." . . [Aug 4]

PLANTS

1. Sea Heath flowered on the shingle at Rye Harbour during July and on Aug 1 the Grass Poly was in flower on Thorney Island (inaccessible to the public). . . [Aug 4]
2. Sea Heath was first recorded in Britain by John Goodyer in 1621 on Hayling Island and the Hampshire Flora records Black Point and Tournurbury Wod (both south east Hayling) and four Isle of Wight sites as the only places where it can now be found in the two counties. By chance I have just received a newsletter from the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre in which Ian Ralphs describes some highlights of his field surveying during 2003, and two of his first three highlights relate to Hayling Island. First came what he describes as the 're-find' of Sea Heath at Gutner Point (maybe he means a re-find as far as Hayling and Hampshire is concerned, rather than a re-find at Gutner as there is no mention of that site in the Hampshire Flora). The second good find was of Fan-leaved Water Crowfoot in Sinah Lake (in which he also found *Chara contraria*, no doubt an exciting find for the initiated but not for me as I cannot find any reference to the genus *Chara* in any of my books). His third special find was of Fragrant Agrimony which is also supposed to be found at Tournurbury on Hayling (and is a relatively widespread plant though I have never come across it) - in this case Ian found it at Griggs Green just west of Liphook. . . [Aug 4]

INSECTS

1. The first Brown Hairstreak(s) were out at Noar Hill on July 31 when Colin Baker managed to photograph one after Neil McFarlane had drawn his attention to its whereabouts - to be fair he had found one for himself a few minutes earlier but, just as he was getting into position to photograph it, the butterfly was disturbed by passing horse-riders whom Colin clearly thought had no right to share his planet. . . [Aug 4]
2. Also on July 31 Mike Duffy and Mark Litjens were on Old Winchester Hill among 23 different butterfly species including up to 1500 Chalkhill Blue and 8 Dark Green Fritillaries. . . [Aug 4]
3. A Clouded Yellow was at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 1 (first of the year there) and on that day 4 *Argiope bruennichi* (Golden Orb) spiders and a few Bee Wolf/Bee Killer wasps (*Philanthus triangulum*) were seen by Barry Collins on Thorney Island (these are digger wasps which make their nest burrows in sand and stock them with paralysed Honey Bees for their larvae to feed on). Also on Aug 1 Brian Fellows had a single Clouded Yellow on north west Thorney. . . [Aug 4]
4. Maybe the hoped for Clouded Yellow invasion is about to begin - the flicker of hope comes from a sighting of 12 of them by Barry Collins on Thorney Island on Aug 4. Also on Aug 4 Mike Duffy had two more Clouded Yellows, a fresh Painted Lady, and more than 10 Red Admirals at Old Winchester Hill among 25 butterfly species (a record species count for this year?). . . [Aug 4]
5. Richard Carpenter had one Clouded Yellow at Old Winchester Hill and one Painted Lady (maybe the same that Mike saw?), and across the Meon valley on the same day Simon Woolley had 2 Clouded Yellows on Beacon Hill. At Burkham Home Farm near Alton Jonathan Forsyth had another single Painted Lady. Jonathan shares my surprise at their absence this year, commenting that he recorded 52 Painted Ladies at this site on the same date last year, along with 2 Clouded Yellows. . . [Aug 4]

6. Richard Hallett had two Clouded Yellows at Beacon Hill in the Meon valley on Aug 3 and two more were seen on Portsdown by Alan Thornbury on Aug 1, when one was at Brading Marsh on the Isle of Wight, and I have also seen one on Portsdown on Aug 5. Peter Vaughan tells us that just one Clouded Yellow was at Durlston in Dorset on July 29 and there were no reports of Painted Ladies there. . . [Aug 4]
7. Adrian Hoskins spent Aug 1 in the New Forest and makes an interesting comment in view of the recent decision that it shall be managed as a National Park. After visiting half a dozen Forest Inclosures and finding relatively little in the way of butterflies he came on one small Inclosure in the Lyndhurst area where numbers of all species were much higher - he counted 21 Silver-washed Fritillaries, 23 Brimstones, 15 Large Whites, 8 Holly Blues, 1 Common Blue, 1 Small Copper, 1 Small Heath, 6 Large Skippers, numerous Small/Essex Skippers, 20 Ringlets, 70 Meadow Browns, and over 200 Gatekeepers. The reason for the high numbers was very simple - this particular inclosure is properly fenced and grazing horses and deer are completely excluded. Consequently, nectar sources and larval foodplants were in profusion and butterflies abundant. He would like to see the conservation organisations uniting to publicise the terrible decline of New Forest butterflies, and to put as much pressure as possible on the Government, Forestry Commission, and New Forest Commoners to get grazing animals completely excluded from more inclosures. (I think I have heard others in the past wondering why all the conservation organisations do not concentrate their united efforts on whatever is currently in the forefront of the speaker's mind - and in this case Adrian might well have the support of Colin Baker in the cause of excluding horseowners from the right to enjoy the countryside). . . [Aug 4]
8. Rare moths trapped during July at Rye Harbour included Pale Grass Eggar, Crescent Striped, Oblique Striped and Pygmy Footman. . . [Aug 4]
9. Another rarity turned up in Derek Mills moth trap on July 28 - the Horse Chestnut. . . [Aug 4]
10. New moths trapped by Russell Wynn at Lymington included an Antler Moth on the night of July 30, and as I do not seem to have heard reports of this moth in the past couple of years I looked it up and found that it is one of those species which can reach plague proportions in some years, destroying upland grazing. My caterpillar book tells me that the female moth flies low over grassland at this time of year, dropping her eggs regardless of where they land. These eggs lie among the grass until next spring until March or April of the following year, and if a significant number of caterpillars ensue they march across the grassland eating it non-stop by day and night before pupating in June for the next generation of moths to emerge in July. . . [Aug 4]
11. Twin-spotted Wainscot was new for the yearlist in Russell's trap on July 31 (though he was only first-equal with David Green at Fawley who caught one the same night). At Fawley David also added to the yearlist both Brown-veined, Bulrush and Southern among nine Wainscot species trapped on July 31 . . . [Aug 4]
12. A probable Ash Pug was new in Russell's trap on Aug 1 when his neighbour Richard Coomber trapped a Double Kidney and Rob Edmunds in Fleet had the first Suspected moth (can anyone tell me of what it is suspected?), . . . [Aug 4]
13. On the night of Aug 2 Derek Mills was surprised to find an Archer's Dart in his moth trap at Farnham as it's normal habitat is coastal sand dunes, though my caterpillar book adds that they can also be found on sandy heathland inland. . . [Aug 4]

14. Early Migrant Hawk on Isle of Wight at Brighstone on July 31 and Bembridge on Aug 2, and a late White Admiral at Newtown Town Copse on Aug 1. One Clouded Yellow was at Brading Marsh on Aug 1. . . [Aug 4]
15. Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website has news for Aug 2 of three moths that caught my interest - at Weymouth in Dorset a Dark Crimson Underwing came to a light, at Ferring (Worthing) in Sussex there was a Dusky Hook-tip and at Childe Okeford by the Stour north of Blandford in Dorset there was a Striped Hawkmoth (the first since a mini-invasion in early June). Aug 3 brought a Gypsy Moth to West Wittering on the shore of Chichester Harbour. . . [Aug 4]
16. Two dragonfly species which have been on the wing since early July, but get few mentions, are Brown Hawker and Ruddy Darter - both were seen in the Hook/Fleet area on July 31 by Peter Vaughan. . . [Aug 4]

OTHER

1. 10 Common Seals were in Chichester Harbour on Aug 4 and one was in Pagham Harbour on July 29. . . [Aug 4]

B. Garden sightings

Both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff song was heard at breakfast time and a chance scan of the skies revealed the presence of three Swifts too high to see with the naked eye. While looking up I also picked up a Sparrowhawk going over the garden at a medium height in 'flap and glide' cruising mode. . . [Aug 4]

An evening walk along my road found the Sticky Groundsel still flowering in one untended garden and gave me what I thought was Ivy-leaved Speedwell in the Glenhurst School flower beds - this greatly surprised me as this Speedwell species is strictly an early spring sight but all was explained when a specimen that I took home opened its flowers next day and showed it was the Green Field Speedwell that is endemic there (the closed flowers in the evening have the pale lilac look of Ivy-leaved but open they are blue with a white lower lip). . . [Aug 4]

C. Havant to Hayling Oysterbeds (16:00 - 17:30)

After a relatively high tide at 15:04 I went to the Oysterbeds and saw my first 'Silver Plover' (Grey Plover recently back and still in summer plumage) but little else other than a gathering of some 400 Starlings on power lines crossing the 'Brick Field' (maybe a pre-roost gathering, maybe birds that hoped to find something to eat as the tide dropped). Both Common and Little Terns were still around in small numbers and five Cormorant were on the lagoon island but I saw nothing of any expected high tide Redshank roost and only heard Ringed Plover. The only obvious migrant was a single Common Sandpiper. . . [Aug 4]

Cycling down the Billy Line in Havant I found the Danewort almost at an end of its flowering, and on the way back a check of the 'Lymbourne Triangle' wild flower meadow gave me what may be my last sight of Corncockle though Red Campion and Green Alkanet were in full flower. . . [Aug 4]

Near the Oysterbeds the Goats Rue flowers could still be found in the overflow carpark and the remains of the Common Centaury show on the earth mound overlooking the tern nest lagoon was not quite over. Along the south side of the lagoon the show of White Melilot was strong and the Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea was flourishing. [Aug 4]

Coming back along the Hayling Coastal Path I saw my first blue (ripe looking) sloes and realised that it must have been the stone from this fruit that were so prominent in the Badger or Fox droppings that I saw last night in Stansted Forest. . . [Aug 4]

Tue 3 Aug

A. Garden sightings

My morning ten minutes in the garden today gave me a glimpse of female or juvenile Blackcap and the sound of Chiffchaff song (presumably passing by - the local resident has ceased to sing). A Robin also song quite strongly for a period and around midday I had a chance sighting of three Swifts moving south. Holly Blue was the only alternative to the Large and Small Whites plus Gatekeepers which dominate the garden scene. . . [Aug 3]

B. Evening walk around the Rowlands Castle corner of Stansted Forest

Around 6pm, when the heat of the day had diminished enough to make walking bearable, I went with my wife to check on the Violet Helleborines in Stansted Forest. These are found in two sites some 700 metres apart and I had been told by John Goodspeed that the deer had eaten the plants at the bigger but more difficult to find location (approx SU 743 107) so I wanted to see if they were still intact at the easier site (approx SU 737 106), and they were. There are only two plants here but the taller one had a magnificent head of unopened flowers (albeit drooping from lack of moisture?) while the smaller plant, like a small child close to her mother's skirts, was also in good condition. If you want to see these plants go to the extreme west end of the main avenue and take the minor path into the trees and downhill on the south side of the avenue (not the major track on the north side). As soon as the ground on the left of the path going down opens out into more or less bare ground under the tall trees look left for a tree stump (cut down almost to ground level) with a prominent large white 'permanent' fungal growth on it (*Trametes gibbosa*?). Walk towards this from a point downhill (to avoid treading on the orchids before you spot them!) and just uphill and to the left of this stump there is a large Beech tree, and close to the left of that there is a 'weedy' twin stemmed Hawthorn. The orchids are close to the foot of the Hawthorn, slightly downhill from it and nearer the path. . . [Aug 3]

We continued east along the main avenue past the memorial (a wooden cross close to the south side of the avenue) to the Typhoon pilot who crashed here in May 1944 (?) and in the longer grass near the edge of the well worn track I noticed that one 'grasshopper' was a rather bright green - a closer look showed it was waving long antennae (thus a bush cricket type) and had no scimitar-like ovipositor (thus a male). There was a dark brown line all along the back and no obvious wings (thus a Short-winged Conehead). Until fairly recently these were, I think, only to be found in damp coastal situations or marsh land, but in recent years they have spread extensively and can be found in very dry situations such as this. Twice during the walk we saw dragonflies on patrol and I put them down as my first Southern Hawkers (they looked too large for Migrant Hawkers which also tend to have a more erratic flight than the insects I saw). . . [Aug 3]

Before we reached the south end of the Broad Avenue we took a shady short cut through the trees giving me a new tick for my yearlist when I came on Common Hemp-nettle in flower. Going up the southern end of the Broad Avenue the previous lack of birds was made up for by noisy family party of Marsh Tits (we also heard Stock Dove song and Nuthatch chatter). . . [Aug 3]

Other less common plants encountered were Rosebay Willowherb and Welled Thistle, Corn Mint and Yellow Pimpernel, Large Timothy grass and the remnants of Foxglove and Wall Lettuce flowering (plus more flowers on almost dead Garlic Mustard). . . [Aug 3]

At several points in the walk we noted animal droppings (Fox or Badger?) full of small 'plum stones' (probably from Sloes) and coming back down the official footpath from Forestside to Rowlands Castle we found a Badger latrine overflowing with droppings containing wheat grain. . . [Aug 3]

Mon 2 Aug

A. Local sightings around Havant

The first autumn Willow Warbler song was heard this morning from birds moving south down the green corridor provided by the old Hayling Billy line which runs behind my garden. One slimline juvenile Willow Warbler with yellow flushed underparts and a prominent supercilium showed briefly in the garden as did several Chiffchaffs in more drab plumage looking plumper on account of their shorter wings (also identifying themselves by more frequent tail-dipping as they searched the trees for minute insects. . . [Aug 2]

The only other song - even the Wrens were silent - came from Woodpigeons and Collared Doves, these latter making frequent energetic display flights, climbing almost vertically for perhaps fifty feet before gliding back their perches. . . [Aug 2]

Out and about later in the day I had a pleasant surprise to find that a big clump of Alsike Clover had suddenly appeared in otherwise barren ground (where thick shrubbery was removed earlier in the year) right outside Havant Museum. Taking advantage of the lack of competition this plant had grown into a small 'bush' with stems at least 20cm long, each topped by a large globular flower head in which the topmost florets are white while those below the midline are a gentle pink. At the other end of the same barren bed a tall plant of Fool's Parsley (the cynapium subspecies which can grow to a metre tall, not the agrestis subspecies which only grows to 20 cm) was in fresh flower and had also appeared in the past couple of days. . . [Aug 2]

Down at the Langstone West Mill a single Pied Wagtail was a rarity worth noting and on Langstone Mill Pond a Mallard was accompanied by at least ten ducklings hatched in the past couple of days (first reported yesterday by Cath Cooper who also saw the first Kingfisher back near the pond though it was perched on the seawall where they sometimes fish at high tide). . . [Aug 2]

Sun 1 Aug

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. A Kingfisher was perched on the Langstone Mill seawall at high tide on July 31, seen by Cath Cooper who also found a brand new family of downy Mallard ducklings on the Pond. . . [Aug 1]
2. On the evening of July 30 Jason Crook stood near the Langstone Mill seawall for an hour and a half counting the Egrets coming to roost at Wade Court. Six could be seen in the trees when he arrived at 19:55 and the score had gone up to 90 when the last one flew in at 21:35. . . [Aug 1]

3. On July 31 240 Redshank were counted at Cams Bay by Trevor Carpenter. Other birds on Trevor's list were 41 Dunlin, 10 Turnstone, 9 Ringed Plover, 5 Whimbrel, 4 Greenshank and 4 Common Sandpiper plus 6 Egrets and 30 Canada Geese. . . [Aug 1]
4. Also on July 31 Paul Winter found 158 Yellow-legged Gulls in the Lower Test/Redbridge area with 9 Egrets and singles of Greenshank, Common and Green Sandpiper and Black Swan (I think in addition to a second Black Swan still on the Testwood Lakes). . . [Aug 1]
5. Six Black Tern (all I think adults) were seen at Titchfield Haven by Graham Osborne on July 31 but he only saw 4 Avocet (1 adult with 3 juveniles). . . [Aug 1]
6. John Shillitoe was at Old Winchester Hill on July 31 and found a variety of passerines on their way south - 25 Willow Warblers, 13 Chiffchaff, 12 Whitethroat (plus 1 Lesser), 5 Blackcap, 2 Turtle Doves, 1 Redstart and 1 Garden Warbler plus a single juvenile Cuckoo. . . [Aug 1]
7. On July 30 John Shillitoe and Martin Gillingham had a very successful day in the New Forest seeking out raptors. Their list included Goshawk (seen well) and close ups of both male and female Honey Buzzard (with a wing clapping display thrown in). Also on the list were Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Hobby, Buzzard and Kestrel. . . [Aug 1]
8. One of my favourite common shorebirds at this time of year is 'Silver Plover' (i.e. Grey Plover still in summer plumage), and the first mention of their return comes from Bob Marchant at Hook/Warsash on July 31 when he saw three of them. Another winter regular for Hook - Little Owl - was also seen by Bob, plus a single Black Tern. On July 30, also at Hook, there were 9 Sanderling, and 12 Sanderling with a single Wheatear were reported by Anon to have been there earlier in the week. . . [Aug 1]

PLANTS

1. The first report of Dwarf Spurge comes from list of 102 flowering plants listed on July 31 by the Havant Wildlife Group walking a circuit with Finchdean village at its base and St Hubert's Chapel at Old Idsworth at its northern point. I suspect that the Spurge and both Sharp-leaved and Round-leaved Fluellen were found on the western half of the circuit, climbing the southern end of Idsworth Down to Oxleys Copse or descending the down via Heberdens farm. Somewhere en route, perhaps on the edges of Markwells Wood or near South Holt Farm, they came on a Spotted Flycatcher. . . [Aug 1]

INSECTS

1. The first Silver-spotted Skipper for this year in Hampshire was found by Alan Thornbury on Old Winchester Hill on July 31. Despite a lengthy search no more could be found but Alan has sent me a superb photo of this pristine specimen - it really is 'silver' spotted, not just having pale whitish splotches on its underwings as in worn specimens. Alan found 12 other butterfly species there including 5 Brown Argus and a single Small Blue. . . [Aug 1]

B. Circuit of Chidham Peninsula in Chichester Harbour (10:00 - 13:30)

This walk on a very hot day was only possible because of a fresh easterly wind. The start was from Nutbourne Farm Lane and the route around the east end of Nutbourne Bay, down the west shore of Chidham to Cobnor Point, then halfway up the east shore before taking an inland route through Chidham village back to Nutbourne Bay. . . [Aug 1]

In Farm Lane a single Chaffinch was singing repetitively from a garden - my guess is that this was a recently arrived immigrant following the newcomers I saw and heard on Friday, and this guess was re-inforced by the song being in a 'foreign accent' (in fact I had to see the bird to be sure it was a Chaffinch!). Around the farm yard/stables at least a dozen Swallows were circling - presumably local breeders and their young. . . [Aug 1]

Walking to the shore I found the large rape fields had recently been harvested and flocks of Linnet, Greenfinch and House Sparrows (perhaps 30 of each) were searching the ground for food. This is the first of the expected autumn Greenfinch flocks which are usually a notable feature of the seawalls in August, feeding on the seeds of the Sea Beet and other plants, and I suspect they too are immigrants arriving with the Chaffinch. . . [Aug 1]

On the bay, with the tide rising, there were plenty of Black-headed Gulls, a small flock of Oystercatchers and half a dozen scattered Whimbrel. Around the southeast and south shores of the bay I noted a very large amount of Lax Sea Lavender (which seems to be more abundant than usual everywhere along the coast at present). It was not only in the tidal area where there has also been a lot but a large new(?) stand was growing inside the south east seawall in the area which is flooded at some high tides. . . [Aug 1]

Along the east shore of Chidham the seawall path was not much worse than it has been for years but there was not much to see. Five Egrets and a few Curlew were preparing to sit out the tide on the spur which extends out from the seawall south of Chidham Point and further south I passed two elusive small birds that I am sure were Reed Buntings. There was one stand of Corn Parsley in flower and one Egret still fishing in the ditch inside the seawall where I watched one dragonfly for some time without being able to name it - it was slightly larger than a Common Darter and am pretty sure it was a darter species with a yellow body and large wings on which I could detect no special markings but noted that they were held out straight from the body when the insect was at rest (not hunched forward like a Common Darter). Before it came to rest it flew fairly slowly with a 'gliding' motion (no rapid wing movement). . . [Aug 1]

Nearing the Oak Wood on the shore (close to the Point) I watched a single Brent Goose swimming south to the saltings north of Stakes Island - later I saw five Brent together just off Stakes Island so there are at least five summering here - maybe six of more. . . [Aug 1]

Also at this point I began to pass clumps of the Marsh Mallow plants that were the main reason for my walk (this is the nearest site that I know around Havant - and I am only aware of the plants being found at Titchfield Haven by the Meon and along the Hamble north of the M27). They were in good fettle this year, most clumps having Lavatera-like spikes well over a metre high with grey-green hairy leaves and pale mauve flowers. They can be found all along the south west shore from north of the Oak Wood to the Point area and today I found one had established itself east of the Point beside the tarmaced 'disabled acces path' along the seawall. . . [Aug 1]

At the point some seven Greenshank flew noisily west towards Thorney and at least 15 Cormorant were perched on Stakes Island but there were few other birds - a couple of Dunlin and singles of Oystercatcher and Sandwich Tern. In the Oak Wood a single Chaffinch was trying to sing - another new immigrant? . . [Aug 1]

Heading up the east shore, with a view of Bosham across the water, I passed a young artist painting a very attractive water-colour of the scene but the only item I noted was a couple of plants of Sea Aster at last in full flower. Heading inland the recently harvested Rape fields were equally empty but I did pass a single Dog Rose flower - perhaps signalling the start of a second flowering period? - and this reminds me that I recently heard that the use of Dog in the plant's name is not just a way of saying that it is very common but signifies that its roots are

efficacious as a cure for the bite of a rabid dog (don't rely on that!). . . [Aug 1]

Reaching Chidmere Pond I was surprised to see a ornate brick and flint wall around the south east corner of the pond, retaining the water. Although it looked very new it could have been there for years, hidden by vegetation that has now been cleared in that south east section of the garden where an extensive formal garden seems to be in the process of creation.

Whatever the cause I could get better views of the lake than on past visits, but could only see Coot Moorhen and Mallard on it with one Egret roosting in an overhanging tree. . . [Aug 1]

Still left in this wet corner of the garden was a stand of Himalayan (Indian) Balsam which also grows in several areas of roadside ditch as you walk north in the centre of the village. Where the road going north turns west towards the western half of Chidham and its church there were still Medlars on the ancient tree overhanging the corner of the road which does continue north, and in the ditch on the south side lots of Water Plantain was flowering with Gipsywort nearby and a mass of Ivy-leaved Toadflax in flower, enjoying the damp shade. . . [Aug 1]

Continuing west I felt sorry for the large garden full of ducks, geese and at least one very sad looking white Turkey - between them they have stripped every vestige of greenery from the area in which they are enclosed and they did not seem to have even a saucerful of water to drink (no doubt they get sufficient food and water but it was not obvious in the baking midday). . . [Aug 1]

Where the road turns south to the church I took the field path north along the edge of 'setaside' field bearing a huge crop of what seems to be Mayweed but is in fact Stinking Chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*) as its smell soon tells you - this is the only site I know of for this path and remember finding it here almost twenty years ago. . . [Aug 1]

Crossing the west road of the peninsula I took the field path back to Nutbourne Bay, finding that the deep ditch along the lip of which the path used to go has been filled in and replaced by a new hedge - a good thing as I once had to rescue an elderly lady who had fallen into the ditch and broken her arm making it almost impossible for her to climb out with only one good arm. A few more plants went on my list here - Field Scabious, Meadow and Tufted Vetchling among them - but a few yards before reaching the inside of the seawall I found a totally unexpected gem nestling in fresh green grass which offset the bright scarlet of its tiny star-shaped flower shining up at me from the inch high plant. This was Lesser Centaury, its colour naming it immediately but nevertheless I got down on my knees with my hand lens to check that it did have a couple of millimetres of flower stalk showing above the long tubular calyx. Along the inner base of the seawall lots of Common Centaury grows, along with a patch of Dyers Greenweed, but I have never seen Lesser Centaury here before. . . [Aug 1]

Back at Farm Lane I met two early teenage lads, one with a mansize fishing net dripping wet from use in the Ham Brook stream. Jokingly I said that they looked as if they after big fish, and this delighted them as it gave them an opportunity to undo a large haversack and bring out a 'huge' Brown Trout dappled with brilliant red spots on its flanks which they had just caught. The fish only just fitted along the base of a supermarket plastic bag in which they had wrapped it, and I guess it was very close to 30cm long (one foot) while the depth of the body must have been 6 to 8 cm. I didn't ask them how or where they had caught the fish but assumed they had just netted it near the School Lane ford through the stream (opposite where I had parked), but I am aware that there is a large Trout Farm only 800 metres upstream (just north of the railway, close to Priors Leaze Lane). Possibly this was one that got away from there and floated downstream in a dazed or even dead condition. Only last week Brian Fellows found a most unlikely fish in the Ems alongside Brook Meadow - a dead Lesser Spotted Dogfish. He assumes it was discarded by some sea fisherman who had perhaps taken it home to his wife or mother and been told to 'get that thing out of here and never let me see it again!'. . . [Aug 1]

Wildlife diary and news for July 26 - Aug 1 (Week 31)

Sat 31 July

A. End of the road for the amateur naturalist ?

Two things have happened this week that caused me to reflect on the question posed above.

The first was another question, a regular one on the lips of my wife, who picked up an ancient crumpled green sweatshirt and asked "Do you really want to keep this?" in respect of my original Hampshire Naturalists' Trust sweatshirt with the Dartford Warbler emblem on the chest.

The second came in the form of a photo taken in the mid 1980s showing six men in 'country working' clothes sitting around a fire, burning fiercely in an old oil drum brazier, at the end of a hard but enjoyable day at the Curbridge nature reserve on the banks of the Hamble. One of those six, already elderly, was Chris Boulton - one of the most 'natural' of naturalists and a friend to all who shared his interest in wildlife - including myself.

The photo appears in the Hampshire section of the Wildlife Trusts' magazine which came in the post today, and the reason for its appearance is Chris's recent death. The photo may eventually go for re-cycling with the heavy pile of such magazines that we accumulate but two treasured mementoes of Chris, which I have already had for some twenty years, will outlast me - these are two walking sticks of the long type with a forked notch at the top (perhaps for catching the adders in Botley Woods which were one of Chris's interests) which Chris crafted for me - his generosity showing in that he insisted that I had two rather than one!

Below the picture of the camp fire (in which a young Phil Budd and an ageless Dave Payne also feature) is a picture of a large house close to Botley railway station in Vicarage Lane at Curbridge (also in the Hamble valley a mile or so north of Curbridge) which is, as from this month, the headquarters of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust - the sixth HQ which the Trust has had during its 40+ years, each move to a new building being forced by the growth of the staff and functions to be accommodated in it.

That growth has of course greatly increased the power of the Trust to influence what happens to wildlife, here in Hampshire and nationwide through its partnership with all the other county Wildlife Trusts and associated bodies (Wildlife Watch for children and various Urban Wildlife Trusts), but it has done so at the cost of changing from a small band of dedicated amateur naturalists into a business organisation in which there is little room for individual enterprise or enthusiasm.

I regret this change, but realise that it is inevitable, and at least I can occasionally wear my Naturalists' Trust sweatshirt and go out walking with Chris Boulton's finger stick, quietly reflecting that where Chris would have been only too glad to share his knowledge of, and joy in, wildlife with anyone of the same mind such information is now precious data to be kept under lock and key and only brought out for sale to professional ecologists who have been commissioned to undertake Environmental Assessments on development proposals and know nothing about the specific sites involved in the proposals. As for the 'joy in wildlife' that of course has become a matter of 'marketing strategies' - pictures of furry animals dangled in front of suburban housewives in order to get money from them to 'save the planet' and give their young children a view of wildlife which is a bit different from that

which I gained by roaming the countryside as a child!

With the Wildlife Trust magazine came a catalogue offering '500 ways to save the planet' though it did not go as far as to promise that if you buy all 500 products you will save our galaxy from colliding with another. Sadly we can do little to prevent galactic collisions, and it often seems to me that we can do very little to 'save our wildlife', though we can talk about it at great length and spend lots of money on studies and projects....

I am not too despondent about the fact we can do little to influence what actually happens to our wildlife when faced with rampant humanity as wildlife seems to adapt fairly well environmental change - most people's concern about loss of wildlife is actually about loss of things that they are used to seeing, such as a pleasant view or a particularly beautiful or interesting species rather than the ever changing 'wildlife organism' which provides us with a habitable planet.

One thing which we can and should do is to influence land managers (from the farmers who determine what happens in the countryside to industrial and urban site managers) to provide a place for nature in their plans and actions, and I am especially pleased to see that our Hampshire Wildlife Trust is currently proposing to undertake a major new project aimed at influencing farmers with good advice on how to allow wildlife to co-exist with farming practice, but that can only succeed if the politicians who determine the 'business climate' in which the farmers operate also get the same message. So to bring the wheel of the great dilemma on which we ride to a full circle we desperately need our Wildlife Trusts to be big and powerful enough to exercise real influence on government thinking. Roll on the day when we need our seventh new HQ.

B. News from Barry Collins

A phone call from Barry Collins (received after I had written the rest of this update) gave me a couple of items that deserve to be passed on without delay.

The first is that Barry was able to count the Egrets roosting on Thorney Island on July 14 but his computer has been out of action and he was unable to send his count to Pete Carr in time to be included in the July summary which Pete has just issued. The count for Thorney was 59 and adding this into Pete Carr's summary we get the following month totals for all the roosts in the survey - Jan 249; Feb 265; Mar 194; April 100; May 66; June 178; July 347 (including the 56 at Oldpark Wood which had not been counted in earlier months)

The second thing which Barry told me is that the Clouded Yellow which I saw on north Thorney yesterday has probably been around there for three days as he has seen one on two other days. He also saw one on the west Hayling shore (I think today but I am not good at remembering exact details from a phone conversation!)

C. Garden Birdsong this week

Woodpigeon, Collared Dove and Wren are now the only three persistent songsters and there are now very few occasionals - these include Robin trying out its autumn song (heard twice) and Greenfinch. I think Linnet, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer can still be heard if you seek them out but the Chiffchaff which seemed to be a ceaseless singer last week has not been heard since July 22, nor the Dunnock since July 23. This morning I was surprised to hear a Carrion Crow sound off its 'motor horn' twice, each time giving at least five 'honks'.

The 'garden birds' of most interest towards the end of this week have been the Swifts which will soon depart from the Manor Close nests (though Swifts will continue to move south and be seen occasionally in passing for a good month to come). Yesterday I did not see or hear them in the morning and a walk around the block to listen for them at dusk was fruitless until I was nearly home when five of them briefly screamed over the nest site. Two were still here this morning

Fri 30 July

C. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. 2 Great White Egrets on the Isle of Wight on July 29. Derek Hale reports that a Dave W, saw them from St Helen's Bridge (Bembridge area). They flew up and headed in different directions (one north, one north east) but were not seen to land and the 'Islander' who saw them fears they may have absconded to 'England'. Kris Gillam adds that there have only been two accepted records of this species for the Island.
2. Two Ospreys were at Newtown Harbour, IoW, on July 25 and one of them - a juvenile - was still there on July 29
3. Flock of 200 Swifts over Newchurch, IoW, on July 29 and on July 28 more than 100 were over South Hayling consuming flying ants - both may have been parties already heading south. Tim Walker reported a steady south west stream of Swifts over Winchester on both July 24 and 25.
4. At Baffins Pond in Portsmouth the moult flock of 124 Canada Geese are still in residence but the 'Baffins Gang' of Barnacles plus hybrid Bar-head Goose were not seen on July 27. A recent anonymous report that the Snow Goose (founder member of the gang), which has not been seen by Brian Fellows since May 17, had returned to Baffins remains unconfirmed.
5. Autumn movement by some Canada Geese seems to have brought a flock of around 15 to Sinah Lake on south Hayling where George Spraggs saw them on July 26, 27 and 28. With them George found a 'half-size' Cackling Canada Goose and this may well be the bird that was in Emsworth Harbour on Sept 8 last year, then spent the winter (Oct 15 to Feb 14) with a large flock of normal Canada Geese at Farlington Marshes before its last reported sighting at the Lymington Marshes on Apr 4.
6. A Kingfisher was also at Sinah Lake on July 26, 27 and 28 - possibly a juvenile driven from an inland nest. Juveniles are distinguished by having black, not orange, feet and by a tiny white tip to the bill.

INSECTS

1. Silver-spotted Skippers have been seen in the Thames valley but none were out at Old Winchester Hill on July 30
2. Also expected at Noar Hill any day now but not seen so far are Brown Hairstreaks
3. A Brown Argus seen on Portsdown above Paulsgrove on July 28 seems (very surprisingly) to be the first record ever for Portsdown and also seems to be the first of the summer brood (though one seen on July 22 after regular sightings ceased on June 13 could have been fresh but there was no remark to that effect with the sighting (at Stockbridge Down)
4. Chalkhill Blues are now out in force but it is worrying that only 3 females could be found in over 300 males at Old Winchester Hill on July 30
5. Despite a huge invasion of Whites over the North Sea last weekend there have been very few reports of Clouded Yellow. Richard Carpenter saw one by the River Hamble on July 29 (when one was in Cornwall) and I saw one on Thorney Island on July 30. The only other reports on Steve Nash's website are of 2 in Ireland on July 26, one in

Wiltshire on July 25, There was one other sighting in Ireland on July 25, and the Wiltshire insect seems to have been feeding at the same plant since July 23. I suspect we have all seen a great increase in Whites everywhere - Richard Carpenter recorded more than 1000 Small Whites on the east Solent shore on July 26.

6. A Jersey Tiger moth was seen well at Gilkicker (Gosport) by David Tinling on July 24 - possibly it had flown from the Isle of Wight where they are established. Jersey Tiger is similar to the Garden Tiger at a distance but a close view shows it to be very differently patterned and much less 'washed out' in colour.
7. July 29 brought the first Copper Underwing to Greywell by the Basingstoke Canal and on July 28 a White-line Snout was new for the Lymington area and the first Canary Shouldered Thorn was taken nearby on the same night.
8. Here on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour July 29 brought three new for the year moths to a Portchester trap - Tree-lichen Beauty, Marbled Green and Marbled Beauty
9. (Note that Tree Lichen Beauty was reported from Regents Park in London on July 22 - six were trapped there and two more were at Greenwich Park on the same night).
10. July 27 brought three migrant Convolvulus Hawkmoths to Dorset, Devon and the Scillies respectively. Recently another two Death's Head Hawks have been reported - one alive on the Essex coast on July 20 and one dead at a Cornish church on July 23.

OTHER

1. Grey Squirrels using ultrasound to broadcast danger warnings? A snippet of info heard on the radio this week told me that in addition to the many audible noises made by Grey Squirrels they also have the ability to transmit high frequencies which (like those made by Bats) are inaudible to our ears - they were said to use this facility to broadcast warnings of danger to other Squirrels. I would love to hear from anyone who knows more about this - or from anyone who has used a Bat Detector to pick up their sounds.
2. The *Agrocybe cylindracea* fungus is having a fresh burst of spore-producing in ancient Crack Willows by the River Ems at Brook Meadow - Brian Fellows found new toadstools there on July 30

D. Havant to Thorney Deeps (09:05 - 11:45)

This morning I set off towards the Thorney seawall at the west end of the Great Deeps in the hope of seeing a Wall Brown butterfly, and while I failed to do that I did have a very pleasant outing.

Before starting I heard the 'chup, chup' calls of three Chaffinches flying west over my garden for the first time in several months, and as I cycled down the 'Selangor Ave' footpath along the west end of the Warblington fields the return of these common birds was confirmed when I put up a flock of at least ten feeding on the ground.

A short distance further end I turned right on the Emsworth to Warblington Church path to look around the area of the stream which crosses this path, and just beyond the stream I found three freshly emerged Common Blue butterflies - the first I saw was a female and the others males. I am sure there were plenty more in this large field and I latter heard that Common Blues had also emerged in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on that same morning.

Going back to the shore I heard a Robin singing its autumn song in Nore Barn, along the shore of which Golden Samphire is now in abundant flower (though Sea Aster flowers still

have to be searched for). Going on to Emsworth I glimpsed a Little Grebe as it dived under water in the Town Millpond and later saw another (in summer plumage) on the Slipper Millpond - both had I think only just flown in from elsewhere as I have no record of them on either pond since Mar 22.

Arriving at the north end of the Thorney west seawall almost the first thing I saw was a Clouded Yellow butterfly heading rapidly south. In some years these invade southern England in thousands but this year, despite a high level of insect migrant arrivals, I only have 25 records of this lovely butterfly in England, and only two of these (on June 13 and 18) were on Thorney Island which usually attracts them. A single was seen a mile or so east in Southbourne on June 29 and one was in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden on June 8 (this last and one near Basingstoke are the only two recorded so far in Hampshire).

Reaching the west end of the Great Deeps I found two 'specials' which I was hoping for. One was a small cluster of Slender Hare's Ear plants in flower just south of where a path has been created down the seawall bank opposite the north end of the wooden guard rail which has suddenly been thought necessary to prevent people jumping in the water where it flows into the deeps from the sea. (These are not easy to spot - look at the foot of the seawall bank between two large reddish tinged clumps of Sea Beet)

The other was a massive show of the small Pointed Snails (*Cochlicella acuta*) which have been here for years but are often difficult to find hidden under leaves. In this hot weather, however, the temperature close to the sub baked ground is very much higher than that of the air even a few inches above the ground, and if the snails are not to fry in their shells they have to climb whatever is nearest to them where the temperature is lower and there is some cooling movement of the air. I have only found this species (a land snail which favours dry coastal sites) in one other place - the IBM Portsmouth site - but they are becoming increasingly difficult to find there nowadays with the influence of the sea (which used to lap the area where I have seen them) being held back by the sea wall on the other side of the M27. Here on the Thorney seawall they were spread over at least twenty yards but the place to look for them is again behind the new wooden guard rails above the Great Deeps inlet pipes.

One other minor find here was another example of a Wild Onion (Crow Garlic) with the remains of mauvish flowers on its sphere of bulbils at the top of its tall thin stem.

On my way home I put up a Common Sandpiper from the outer seawall of the Emsworth Marina, and in the evening at home I not only saw five Swifts still visiting the Manor Close nests in Havant but also found a botanic oddity in a neglected garden in my own road - a healthy flowering plant of Sticky (not Heath) Groundsel which is normally found on the seashores - I have found it in other places nearby in previous years but thought it was not going to appear this year.

[Wed 28 July](#)

A. Warblington shore

This morning I cycled to the Warblington shore to arrive some two hours after high tide, hoping to witness the exposure of the mud flats as the tide fell, but although I waited for the best part of an hour it seemed that someone had forgotten to pull out the plug and the water refused to go down! I did however get a look at some of the birds roosting on the Northney saltings (not covered as the top of the tide was a metre below the highest we can get) - I say some as although I could see most of the gulls (around 400 Black-headed) and a few Oystercatchers, Redshank, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and some Whimbrel it was amazing to see, for example, how the one or two Redshank that were visible on the

ground become nearly 100 as the edges of the harbour became exposed and the birds flew to them from the saltings.

11 Egrets were spread out around the edges of the water, again waiting for the tide to fall, and I saw singles of Common and Little Tern plus one immature Cormorant.

One thing that surprised me was that the roosting gulls also appeared to be waiting for the tide to fall, but when it started to do so and they took to the air they did not spread out around the harbour but headed far inland (which they could have done much earlier in the morning - did they imagine the inland fields were also covered by the tide?)

On my way to the shore I heard from someone that I know that she had recently been hearing shrill and persistent begging calls from trees around the Wade Court area, and had seen a the bird making these calls perched high and showing yellow legs and a brown body. She asked if the plaintive calls indicated that it was a Buzzard but I suggested that it was much more likely to have been a juvenile Sparrowhawk just out of the nest and still expecting its parents to feed it. Interestingly I was not aware of a Sparrowhawk nest in that area despite passing through it almost daily.

Back in my garden I saw my first summer Peacock butterfly on the Buddleia, along with a male Brimstone and the regular Whites (all three species seen on it during the week). Up to five Gatekeepers were in the garden and a Holly Blue passed through as it does most days now.

Tue 27 July

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. It is difficult to think of Little Grebe as flying birds but (like the Water boatman now being recorded in large numbers in moth traps as these insects fly from pond to pond overnight) we all know that flocks appear on the water in our sheltered harbours each winter and disappear before summer. I was interested to see that some are already moving, specifically a report of the first back at Testwood Lakes since the spring - that was a juvenile. They have also re-appeared at Emsworth on both the Town Millpond and the Slipper Millpond.
2. Night Heron at Weir Wood Reservoir (east of Crawley) on July 23 and 24
3. Nightjars now sitting on second brood nests - one nest found just outside Crawley on July 24
4. 13 Green and 6 Common Sandpipers at Drayton/Portfield pits, Chichester on July 26
5. 150 Common Scoter feeding off Bexhill on July 26
6. Duck-nappers strike at Eastbourne Hampden Park. Two men seen to climb a tree, lower a noose over the neck of a duck coming to food on the ground, haul in the duck and make off with it in a sack
7. A juvenile Shoveler was on Sandown Canoe Lake on July 27 - unusual in July
8. 25 Little Egrets on north east coast of IoW at Hersey Nature Reserve near Seaview - this and reports of up to 8 juveniles there on July 10 and 14 suggest local breeding near by

9. Flock of 26 Mistle Thrushes in Bembridge area of IoW on July 25 - look out for autumn flocks elsewhere now.
10. Still no official news from Titchfield Haven of the Avocets breeding there but any visitor looking at the scrapes has seen three pairs with ten juveniles recently - hopefully a report of only 15 birds there on July 24 was a miscount, but maybe one has been lost.

PLANTS

1. The first Autumn Gentian (or Felwort) was flowering on Old Winchester Hill when the Havant Wildlife Group visited on July 24 (the 50th anniversary of this wonderful National Nature Reserve). Another plant that has not been noted in other reports was Carline Thistle though it's 'flowering' is easily overlooked! Many other lovely downland species were out including Round-headed Rampion (that strangely shape Bellflower) but there is no mention of two plants that might have been there and which are not yet on my personal tick list - one is Frog Orchid (so far only reported from Noar Hill) and the other is Field Fleawort. Frog Orchids should still be detectable on the very steep slope coming up eastwards from the central woodland in the valley bottom, but the Fleawort (if it still exists here) would have ceased flowering before July - I only recall seeing it once and then it was to be seen in the northernmost section of the peripheral path around the old hill fort (approx SU 641 207)
2. At Emsworth's Brook Meadow Wild Angelica and Marsh Woundwort had started to flower by July 25 - so far I have seen neither nor heard of them elsewhere this year.

INSECTS

1. A count of 19 (probably 22) butterfly species seen by the Havant Wildlife Group at Old Winchester Hill on July 24 was considerably longer than has been reported by other butterfly enthusiasts who have visited this site recently but the group did not see the Hummingbird Hawkmoth photographed there on the same day by Colin Baker.
2. First Common Hawker seen at Lullington Heath (north edge of Friston Forest near Eastbourne) on July 24
3. First Rosy Rustic trapped near Basingstoke on July 26 and a Svensson's Copper Underwing there on July 24, also a possible Lesser Common Rustic
4. A moth trap in the Lymington area brought in four new species for the year on July 21 - Webb's Wainscot, The Crescent, Buff Footman and Small Rufous. On July 23 it added Dark Tussock and on July 26 The Olive, Oak Eggar and Rosy Minor
5. On the edge of Alice Holt Forest near Farnham a few Buff Footman (new to my year list) were taken on or before July 25

B. Sandy and Black Points - South-east Hayling (15:55 - 17:30)

As usual for a walk around the extreme south-east corner of Hayling Island I parked in Bosmere Rd, just north of Sandy Point Rd, and headed for Black Point via Bracklesham Rd. After just a few yards, opposite the north end of Treloar Rd, I noticed some small plants on bare earth below the Sandy Point Rd street nameboard and found they included both Small Flowered Cranesbill (flower pedicels thick with short glandular hairs) and Green Field Speedwell.

On the causeway to Black Point the Sea Holly was abundant flowering along the seaward side and Hare's Tail Grass decorated the landward side. Further north on the landward side, where the ground is sandy and used for car parking, I searched the very down-trodden clovers and eventually found the white flowers of Rough Clover (*T. scabrum*) among much Black Medick (only distinguishable here by the tiny point (apiculus) in the notch at the far end of the leaf.

Alkanet was still flowering at the entrance to the sailing club grounds proper (up the ramp), and down on the saltings Greater Sea Spurrey was in flower. At the west end of the higher ground the one tall plant of Cotton Thistle had one flower left but there was little left to see on the sand where it is being stabilised by hazel rod fences - all I managed to see was on plant of Saltwort - large and healthy but as yet with no flowers that I could detect.

On the sand west of Black Point a lone gull caught my attention. It had the grey mantle and white head of a summer Common Gull but did not show the normal white band (tertial step) between the back and tail and the head did not have the normal rounded shape. Furthermore, as I got closer I saw it had yellow legs and bill, and I was beginning to wonder if it could be a Kittiwake when it took off and showed it was a Common Gull after all. Another bird of interest was seen when I got back to the causeway and went to the seaward side just south of the ramp. Here I could hear the calls of a Ringed Plover but scanned the beach in vain until I put down my bins and saw movement only twenty yards from me. Looking there I found a pair of Ringed Plover with a well grown but not fully fledged juvenile - the whole family very puzzled by the arrival of the school holidays which had brought so many people to their previously deserted beach.

Returning down the causeway and past the Lifeboat Station I next looked for the Sea Knotgrass off the old hospital grounds, eventually finding ten fairly young plants further north than I expected. Leaving this search, but while still on the shingle, I put up two Grayling butterflies which I did not expect to see here - another good tick for my year list.

Around the seaward edge of Sandy Point reserve the only new plant was the mass of Bell Heather (which must have been out for some time), and leaving the seafront south of Bosmere Road I added 'wild' Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*) to my list. Some of the plants had white flowers in place of the normal mauve colour.

Mon 26 July

A. Circuit of Langstone South Moors and Wade Court

Having to take a couple of posters to Langstone I walked down the Langbrook stream, then around the South Moors and along Mill Lane to return via Langstone Mill Pond and Wade Court.

In the Parchment area off South Street I found a new growth of Wavy Bittercress flowering, and later found much more out beside the Langbrook stream. Also in flowerbeds beside the road through the Parchment estate, maybe planted - maybe wild, Betony was flowering.

Reaching the Langbrook stream where it runs past Tesco's a Holly Blue fluttered around Buddleias. Further downstream a Great Spotted Woodpecker called from one of the tall old Willows, and climbing the stile that takes you into the wild area before the South Moors I think I solved the puzzle of the huge bush of Goat's Rue which I found to the right of the stile as I climbed it a few weeks ago. This time the bush, huge, healthy and covered with flowers, was on the left of the stile and to the right was a clump of young bamboo and another shrub. It would seem that the owner of the southernmost streamside house in

'The Mallards', who has gone to great expense and effort to transform the land he has acquired on the west bank of the stream into a model garden of the sort you see at the Chelsea Flower Show, cannot bear to see any natural vegetation and has started to plant the far side of the fence and stile with large plants to screen off the view of nature in the raw.

In the damp water channel around the south of the South Moors 'orchid field' I found two Water Dropwort plants close to each other - one had the tight umbel and sparse stem leaves I associate with the common Corky-fruited species, the other had the spread out umbel and more leaves which I think my indicate Parsley Water Dropwort. I hope I can refind them when they are in fruit.

Beside the new footpath across the old IBM Playing Fields south of the Council depot I noted a flower on Common Vetch (not seen for some time!) and a patch of Parsley Piert with some Common Fumitory which has escaped the weedkiller recently applied to the ground in which trees have been planted on both sides of the path to eventually prevent walkers from seeing anything except the path ahead of them!

At the south end of Southmoor Lane the old blackthorn hedge was alive with small birds - Chiffchaffs, Whitethroats and Long-tailed Tits but with the tide up there was little to see on the harbour. Turning east along the seawall and then climbing onto the higher path beyond the old playing fields I thought it worth a stab at finding the old path inland of and below the seawall (I can remember being able to cycle along it in the past but now Sea Couchgrass has covered the path). I did refind the path (itself too well trodden for the grass to take root, but covered by the wind blown grass until you push it aside). Almost as soon as I found the path by pushing back the grass I found what I was looking for - a moderately good show of Slender Hare's Ear already flowering.

From the bridge over the Langbrook south of the Mill Lane crossing I looked down at the muddy edges of the water and saw my first fully flowering Sea Asters, and passing Langstone Mill I saw the local Swan family on the sea still with all six cygnets.

Note re new format of diary entries:

This diary has, for each day on which there is anything to record, a separate section for each outing that I make plus, where there is news from others, a section headed 'Reports' in which I list the basic facts (with minimal comment) under the headings of Birds, Plants, Insects and Other Wildlife.

One item planned for the future is to extend the MAPS page of this website (which already has maps of much of the local area that I visit) to ensure that the places I mention in the text can be found in the appropriate map.

Diary for 19 - 25 July 2004 (Week 30)

[Fri 23 July](#)

A. Havant Thicket (09:40 - 12:30)

The purpose of this visit was to find out if Dwarf Gorse and Lesser Skullcap were flowering, and both were. Common Gorse ceased flowering some time ago and its bushes have many dead flowers or seed pods on them, but the Dwarf species has only just started flowering so the presence of flowers at this time of year is a good way of identifying the species. Lesser Skullcap is more variable in its flowering time and the tiny stream by which they flower in the Thicket is heavily shaded so the plants here come out much later than, e.g. those which Richard Carpenter found at Titchfield Haven on June 9. In fact I only found one single flower today!

Working up the path beside the slightly larger stream in what I call Nightjar Valley I found one cluster of white flowered Heath Milkwort (I had forgotten that it regularly grows there and no doubt it has been out for some time) and heading back towards the Castle Road gate I saw flower buds developing on Wild Goldenrod (which should be out soon) and on Devils Bit Scabious (which will probably not flower for at least a month here). Stepping off the path to investigate these plants I disturbed a smallish Grass Snake (though I only saw it's tail as it ran for cover!).

Finally I checked the Broad Leaved Helleborines just south of the Castle Road gate and found two small plants with well developed flower spikes though it will probably be a week or more before the flowers start to open.

Brimstone butterflies were freshly out in fair numbers - I probably saw half a dozen males and at least two females - and I came across a good number of Alder Buckthorn trees that their caterpillars will feed on next spring - the plentiful berries on these trees were starting to colour. Both Green-veined (currently common) and Small Whites were out with Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns and Small Skippers. I also came on two *Strangalia maculata* longhorn beetles (distinctive black markings on a yellow base), and at the small water lily pond at the head of the 'Nightjar valley' I saw what I took to be Large Red and Azure Damselflies.

A bright yellow Slime Mould caught my eye on a pine stump, and by the bigger stream I found a couple of Brown Rollrim and one smallish dull red *Russula* which might have been *R. nitida*.

Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Robin were singing and I heard Bullfinches on three occasions but only once heard Yellowhammer song. The call of a Marsh Tit and a glimpse of Jay in flight were also noted. As yesterday I found one Goldfinch on a thistle head.

Thu 22 July

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Male Golden Oriole seen in Ashdown Forest by Dan Lingard on July 17. Seen well for up to a minute.
2. Probable Goshawk seen in Stansted Forest on July 19 by John Simons. John says "It was a huge brown Accipiter, Buzzard size which came low from trees on my left, straight in front of my car and disappeared flying low under trees to my right. Sorry not much of a description but having experience of this species in my estimation there is no doubt"
3. Adult Spoonbill roosting at Owl Point (Pagham Harbour North Walls) with 27 Little Egrets. Seen by Bernie Forbes on July 19
4. Seven Ravens (large family group?) flying over Ventnor Downs. Seen by Derek Hale on July 20.
5. First Bonxie (Great Skua) to be reported on the south coast since May 31 was seen on July 22 off Sandown (IoW) by Kris Gillam
6. Langstone Harbour WeBS count on July 17 recorded 1200 Curlew, 70 Bar-tailed Godwit, 40 Whimbrel and otehr species including 1 Ruff (no count given for Black-tailed Godwit)

7. An Egyptian Goose was at Titchfield Haven on July 22 and the first two returning Black Terns were offshore there on July 20
8. The first report of an autumn flock of Mistle Thrushes comes from Dave Pearson who saw 12 together on the lawns of The Vyne NT property north of Basingstoke on July 21. Maybe another autumn first (or maybe a local bird from the West Walk Woods) was a Spotted Flycatcher using the bird bath in John Shillitoe's garden near Wickham in the Meon Valley on the same day.
9. At the Hayling Oysterbeds the Petersfield Wildlife Group found 5 Common Sandpipers and 2 Turnstone on July 20
10. The count of Yellow Legged Gulls at the head of Southampton Water on July 19 was estimated at 150 by Paul Winter - the flock there looks set to exceed the record of 169 there on July 31 last year.
11. And finally for today Dave Tolcher looked out of his Warsash home this morning to see a Nightjar sitting on a tent in his garden - and he has a photo to prove it! Could that have been an inexperienced juvenile? (They can fly within 5 weeks of the eggs being laid so it is possible - two juveniles were seen on July 8 in the Forest of Dean by Derek Hale). This reminds me of a Hoslist message dated July 21 in which Barrie Roberts writes .. During my Nightjar survey last night I came across someone mothing who claimed to have seen a nightjar flying around carrying something in its feet. He thought that it may have been a chick. Apparently he has heard that woodcock do this, and it is a well known fact. If so its not one I've heard of. Does anyone else know about this?

PLANTS

1. On July 4 there was a great show of Marsh Helleborine, including many ochroleuca variants, at the Greywell pumping station by the Basingstoke Canal west of Fleet, seen by Maurice Pugh. Several other orchid species there included the Marsh Fragrant (densiflora)

INSECTS

1. First summer brood Brown Argus was seen on July 22 at Stockbridge Down by Mike Duffy. Also seen there were 70+ Chalkhill Blue, 19+ Small Copper, 20+ fresh Brimstones and 14+ Small Tortoiseshells. Earlier he saw Grayling at Crockford Bridge in the New Forest where Silver Studded Blues are still plentiful.
2. Following Andrew Brookes' sighting of a newly emerged Common Blue on July 15 David Tinling has confirmed the emergence of the summer brood with seven very fresh specimens at Gosport on July 18 and another on July 19.
3. More unusual was the sight of two pristine Small Blues seen on July 19 by Andrew Brookes at Castle Shore (north of Portchester Castle on shore close to the Vosper Thorneycroft 'cathedral' - where they worship Mars the god of war). This is not, I think, known as a Small Blue site (but is not too far from Portsdown) and the date is almost a month earlier than usual for a summer brood to emerge
4. Migrant Hawker dragonflies have become British residents in the past 50 years although they still travel across Europe in years when their numbers are high. Stephen Harvey at Chandlers Ford had one in his garden on July 22, still in its newly emerged 'teneral' form. At first I thought this must prove it to be a local resident but on second thoughts (knowing that most dragonflies fly away from their birthplace after emerging, and only return to it - or some other water - when

ready to breed) I wonder if these insects actually start any migratory journey immediately after emerging (and thus could have flown the channel while still in pale teneral colour form). Can anyone comment on this?. (NB Mark Litjens saw the first of this species on July 17 as noted in my reports on July 19)

5. First mention for this summer of the lovely *Argiope bruennichi* Golden Orb spiders comes from James Wheeldon at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea. Writing on July 22 James tells me that the wildlife areas he has created and protected around the playing fields are attracting a lot of grasshoppers and these distinctive spiders which feed on them. I assume this means that the lovely black, white and gold banded female spiders can already be seen on their webs (which they stretch across any hollows in the tall grass - the grasshoppers have to make a blind leap across these hollows and do not see the web waiting to catch them!).
6. The first summer brood Peacock butterfly was seen on the Isle of Wight on July 17 with more reports from the Island on July 18 but Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow in Emsworth seems to have the honour of seeing the first on the mainland - he found two flying on July 20 along with fresh Speckled Woods and his first Common Darter.
7. 14 Comma, 13 Common Blue, 6 Small Copper, 3 Ringlet and 1 Purple Hairstreak were among 15 butterfly species seen by the Petersfield Wildlife Group when they visited the Hayling Oysterbeds today. Fresh Commas have been reported in small numbers since June 16 but a count of 7 in woods near Denmead on July 12 and this count of 14 indicate a major surge in the arrival of this summer which will be responsible for the generation to emerge in the late autumn and overwinter. The Hairstreak was a good find (seen on bramble 'half-way down the Billy Line' - does that mean half-way from the old rail-bridge to West Town station, or half-way along the section visited by this group?) but the Ringlets are of even more interest as the species is not listed for Hayling Island in Pete Durnell's 'Wildlife of Hayling Island' - could they have been dark specimens of Meadow Brown or were they clearly seen to be Ringlets?

OTHER

1. A Muntjac deer was seen on July 21 by Dave Pearson at The Vyne north of Basingstoke (from the nearby Morgaston Wood?)

A. Havant to Warblington shore and the 'Selangor Ave' footpath (08:20 - 10:30)

I started off towards Langstone via Juniper Square where the Small Flowered Cranesbill is still flourishing on one close mown grass verge and just beyond the Square Marsh Ragwort continues to flower in a roadside ditch close to Bosmere School but the grass verges of the Billy Trail in Havant had just been cut when I crossed the old line into Russell's Field.

Reaching the shore by the Royal Oak I counted at least six Common Gulls now back, and on Langstone Pond I saw one Teal among 55 Mallard. Heading east along the shore I heard a Greenshank as I passed Pook Lane, and in the remaining water at low tide I counted 12 Egrets with one Heron.

Turning inland to the Warblington cemetery I found the Round-leaved *Fluellen* was flourishing and under the churchyard Yews where I had found a young, all white, toadstool and thought it to be *Lepiota leucothites* on my most recent walk here I saw today there was a small troop of these toadstools and they had rounded caps with dark

brown centres suggesting small versions of Shaggy Parasol - maybe they will grow larger.

Crossing the big field in which the Sweetcorn is almost head high and starting to flower I noted that many of the almost dead Garlic Mustard plants by the hedgerow had many clusters of new flowers to prove they have not yet abandoned the struggle to live, and as I headed north up the footpath towards Selangor Ave I saw for the first time this autumn a Goldfinch feeding from Marsh Thistle seeds.

Coming back into Havant along the Emsworth Road I passed Stone Parsley now in full flower and just outside one garden I noticed Green Alkanet growing wild and in also in flower.

Back at home I saw my first garden Gatekeepers (two of them - later we may have a couple of dozen) and the first Red Admiral to visit my Buddleia (plus the now regular Holly Blue)

B. .

Tue 20 July

A. Havant to Sinah Common (08:25 - 11:10)

Bird song is now diminishing and all I heard in my garden early this morning was Chiffchaff, Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove but heading south down the Billy Trail a Blackcap gave a strong burst of song, and on Hayling I heard Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Lesser Whitethroat, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch and Linnet.

Between Langstone Bridge and the Hayling Coastal Path, around what I call Texaco Bay after the garage which overlooks it, I found Stone Parsley in full flower and also ticked Hawkweed Oxtongue, Restharrow and Spiny Restharrow with one or two flowers on Golden Samphire. The grass near the main road was covered with Lesser Hawkbit, and between the north entrance to the Oysterbeds and the 'Brick Field' Marjoram, Greater Knapweed, Eyebright and Common Toadflax. Around the Oysterbeds I found Dark Mullein, Hoary Ragwort and Vipers Bugloss with the tail end of the Slender Thistle and Milk Thistle flowers.

Further down the track, just before the path to West Lane, a couple of plants of Pepper Saxifrage were in flower (my first of year) and at West Town station Guelder Rose had red berries. Crossing from Staunton Ave onto Sinah Common I immediately came on a mystery garden plant along the hedge of the last house on my left - I failed to identify it last year and don't expect to do so this time. It is I think a straggling climber (no tendrils but climbs snake like up other plants or trees) and has many isolated single white flowers (bell shaped and similar in size to Lily of the Valley). The leaves have stems and are 'rounded-triangular' in shape (flat base with no cordate lobes) and the whole plant is a greyish green in colour. Many of the specimens were growing away from the hedge which others were climbing and those in open grassland stood erect about 40 cm high.

On the shingle I found Babington's Orache and on the thin soil nearby Hare's Foot Clover and Sheep's Bit were flowering. Surprisingly just one flower of Childing Pink was still open (all the other plants were very dead), and interestingly nearby (close to the Duke of Argyll's Teaplant bushes) several plants of Wild Onion had flowers where all the others had the bare bulbils that I expect to see.

A little more Pale Toadflax was out, as was the Dodder on Wood Sage which I found last week. On the way home I added Pale Flax at the Denhill Close open space where I was looking for Slender Hare's Ear (none seen), and back at the Oysterbeds I was very surprised to see a bush of Common Comfrey covered with fresh white flowers.

Single Marbled White and Small Copper were on the Marjoram beside the Coastal Path in the Oysterbeds area. Everywhere were Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers and I think I saw all three common white species plus one Speckled Wood (and one Holly Blue back in my own garden in which the first two Gatekeepers of the year appeared).

B. Stansted Groves (12:15 - 12:45)

A very quick visit to the woods while my wife and her sister were in the Stansted Garden Centre gave me three views of Silver Washed Fritillary (plus one Marbled White and one Small Skipper on the adjacent grassland) together with glimpses of one Roe and several Fallow does (I think with one or more young).

My first Betony was flowering here with some late Ragged Robin and I heard both Nuthatch and Marsh Tit.

Mon 19 July

A. News and reports reaching me today

BIRDS

1. Jackdaw killing and eating juvenile House Sparrow. Bob Johnson on the SOS website (entry for July 16) describes how he saw a Jackdaw jump down from a perch onto a young Sparrow on the ground and start pecking at it. An attempt to disturb the Jackdaw and save the Sparrow caused the Jackdaw to carry its 'prey' to nearby roof and complete the killing and eating there.
2. Two more summer plumage Sanderling were seen at Ryde, IoW, and one was at Hill Head, both on July 18
3. At Titchfield Haven a summer plumage Spotted Redshank was present on July 10 and on July 8 the presence of 30 Sandwich Terns was unusual for the date. Another Spotted Redshank was at Hythe on Southampton Water on July 15, and by July 17 at the Haven Graham Osborne found 80 Sandwich and 109 Common Terns with 6 Scoter off shore.
4. Ian Calderwood today tells us that at least 25 pairs of Egrets nested at the Elson Wood (Defence Munitions) site in Gosport with 64 pairs of Grey Herons
5. On July 17 Nigel Smith counted 50 Eider off Keyhaven
6. On July 15 in the evening Ian Pibworth saw 580 Sand Martins fly south at the Testwood Lakes. 400 roosted there but 180 flew on to an unknown roost. And on July 18 Ian saw 17 Goldfinch fly over northwest (maybe the first hint of the massive Goldfinch movement we saw last autumn?)
7. On July 18 the Redshank flock at Cams Bay numbered 188 (with one Greenshank) and at the Lower Test there were 12 Greenshank and more than 48 Yellow Legged Gulls on that day. On July 17 a total of 123 Yellow Legged (including 7 juveniles) were at the head of Southampton Water, seen by Paul Winter who also saw a juvenile Egret there (where did that come from?)

8. A Hampshire record (?) count of 14 Little Ringed Plover were at The Vyne north of Basingstoke on July 17 with 222 Lapwings
9. A female Ring-necked Parakeet perched for about three minutes on a Hawthorn at Titchfield Common - seen by someone familiar with them at Esher.

PLANTS

1. Bog Orchids had probably been in flower for some time at Matley Bog (south east of Lyndhurst) when Maurice Pugh was there on July 4
2. On July 17 the Havant Wildlife Group found Rough Poppy, Creeping Jenny and Rock Rose all flowering during a walk along Huckswood Lane (north of Finchdean). Some of the Rock Rose flowers had white outer petals with yellow centres (sun bleached?)

INSECTS

1. The first Migrant Hawker dragonfly of the autumn was seen by Mark Litjens at Whiteley Pastures (Botley Woods) on July 17. Among the butterflies there was one White-letter Hairstreak
2. Maurice Pugh was among a group at Botley Woods (Tapnage area) also on July 17 and saw 3 Purple Emperors, 3 White Admirals, a Golden Ringed Dragonfly and two Southern Hawkers
3. Fresh Peacock butterflies started to emerge on the Isle of Wight on July 17 when Ian Pratt saw them at two different sites and a third was seen at Brading Marshes on July 18 by an RSPB group.
4. Also on July 17 twelve Graylings were at Millersford Bottom in the New Forest
5. A Convolvulus Hawkmoth was seen on the Scillies on July 12 (first of year) and another was found dead in Cornwall on July 18

FUNGI

1. The sought after Cep or Penny Bun (*Botulus edulis*) was found in the Creech Woods south of Denmead by Richard Hallett on July 18
2. On July 17 Maurice Pugh found four Stinkhorns and an Orange Birch Bolete in the Botley Woods

A. Fishbourne Meadows (08:40 - 10:40)

This trip was in search of plants, in particular Dittander and Corn Parsley, both of which were found in good numbers. There were three large stands of Dittander at 8304-92, 8303-99 and 8303-97. The first two clusters were along the outside of the fence separating the meadow from the saltings and the third is between the seawall path and the fence of the sewage works land around the bridge under which the Lavant flows into the Fishbourne Channel.

The Corn Parsley was found all along the seawall path around the promontory whose point is at 8304-90. Among it, half way along the northern side, was a cluster of one or two plants of Knotted Hedge Parsley now just past flowering. Unlike the plants of this which I am used to seeing on the Langstone South Moors these plants were almost reminiscent of Dodder in that they were on long thin, dark 'ropes' of stems (50 cm or so long) with tiny tight packed clumps of flowers widely separated along the stems, each flower being backed by a single, tiny, parsley type leaf.

The other bonus item was found at 8304-95 just south of the wooden gate leading into the field south of that with the stream flowing through it. Here was a large patch of Amphibious Bistort which had three plants actually flowering!

Another plant which I noted was Marestalk growing in the village pond.

Bird interest started with a pair of Swans with three very young cygnets at the village pond. In Fishbourne Channel were two more Swan families each also having three cygnets but much larger in size (one of these families had just one parent, the other had two). Also seen were 23 more adult Swans. Several Common Gulls were present along with a couple of Lesser Blackbacks, several Herring Gulls and an estimated 300 Black-headed. A single Cormorant flew over to land on the village pond and five Egrets plus one Heron remained in the channel. A couple of Greenshank and small numbers of Redshank, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew/Whimbrel were there with just one Oystercatcher.

Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Small Skipper were present in good numbers with all three whites.

B. Nutbourne Bay area (10:50 - 12:20)

Walking down the field path from Farm Lane to the shore I saw some yellow flowers in the margins of the stream and as there was a break in the fence allowing me into the meadow (a dog walker was using the 'road' though it) I was able to confirm a good stand of Monkey Flower but could not find any flowers yet on the mass of Gipsywort plants. Back on the field path one plant of Stone Parsley had flowers starting to open, and walking east round the bay to where the second path goes off through the fields I found some Dyers Greenweed still flowering.

Along the inside of the seawall east of the field path, but before it turns south, there were at least 50 Green-veined Whites, and after going south I came on four fresh Small Tortoiseshells together on thistles. Near them a single large Magpie Toadstool was a bit of a surprise.

On the seaward slope of the seawall a cluster of 15 Swallows and 8 Sand Martins were resting on the wall, regularly taking off and returning to rest. A party of four Linnets were with them on the wall. I think they may have been enjoying small flies blown to them by the southerly wind. On the water was one Great Crested Grebe, and by the Ham Brook a Reed Bunting was singing and a male Kestrel hovering (but no Corn Bunting!)

After returning to Farm Lane I had time to visit the east end of the orchards to find that the Dwarf Mallow has survived the spraying of the ground under the apple trees (look at the north end of the fourth and successive rows of trees going west after leaving the newly re-fenced section of the path through the orchards). Along Farm Lane I watched my first Common Darter of the year and enjoyed two Banded Demoiselles by the open stream running in front of one of the cottages. Also by the lane I saw my first Black Nightshade of the year.

WEEK 29 JULY 12 - 18

BIRDS

SUN 18 JULY

Today is my 73rd birthday and it is, I think, an appropriate time to start enjoying my 'second childhood'. I have therefore decided to cease the writing of these daily nature notes in their present form with four 'deadlines' each week. +++

From today I will cease to update my website on a regular basis and will cease to distribute

my notes in the various forms that I have been doing. +++

I do not intend to close this website, and I hope that by the end of September I may have established a new format for sharing my observations and hopefully encouraging more people to take a greater interest in the wildlife around them. The new format will probably not have separate pages for different species groups, so if you currently go straight to e.g. the Bird News page you may well find that that page is no longer available - if you want to continue to visit this site please go to the home page (www.havnn.net) to check its status.

SAT 17 JULY

Visiting the Portsmouth IBM Lake today for the WeBS count I found 175 Canada Geese plus four juveniles (large but still unfledged) with a crowd of perhaps 400 Black-headed and another 100 Herring Gulls as the main components. One adult British race (light grey) Lesser Blackback was with the gulls and the ducks consisted of just 24 Mallards and 14 adult Tufted Ducks. Also on the water were 23 Coot, 15 Moorhens and 5 Little Grebes (no Great Crested seen). One adult and one juvenile Heron were present and and three immature Cormorants but no Egrets. Reed and Sedge Warblers were still singing, as were Whitethroat and Chiffchaff while a Robin sang a few bars of its autumn song.

FRI 16 JULY

Last year a new Hants record was set when 116 Yellow-legged Gulls were counted at Eling Great Marsh on July 15 and that was broken on July 31 when 169 were at this site. So far this year there has been no sign of such large numbers there (highest count before today was just 8 on July 9) but today there were at least 34 present at the Lower Test Marshes (with 11 Green Sandpipers) and very much larger numbers of the gulls could pour in at any time as they move from their breeding areas (mainly across the channel but I think a few still breed in Poole Harbour). I think the big question is whether the birds will choose Southampton Water in preference to Pagham Harbour (where in the past, but not last year, flocks of around 250 have been seen in this autumn season - I recall a count of 285 at Pagham on 23 July 2000). I don't have any details for the number going to Poole Harbour but I think that attracts equally large flocks.

Peter Raby found 3 Roseate Terns at Hill Head today. Probably two of these birds had been at the site since they were reported there on July 11 (one of them had two metal rings, one on each leg) but Peter says of his sighting today that there were .. 'a pair of birds with red bases to their bills: the third had an all black bill and was keeping its distance from the other two. Too far away to see rings.' Peter also saw a single juvenile Arctic Tern, the first of this species on the Hampshire coast since May 9.

A more domestic piece of news is that recently I have been hearing Goldfinch overflying my garden in Havant with increasing frequency, and on July 14 Brian Fellows had four Goldfinch (one of them a juvenile) on a niger seed feeder in his Emsworth garden. I mention this here as I happened to cycle through Emsworth today and saw a family group of six Goldfinch in a garden not far from Brian's. +++

Hopefully Goldfinches are thriving but today's Portsmouth NEWS has an article on the death of nine Swans at the Southsea Canoe Lake at the beginning of June (hardly a scoop!). It seems that these Swans picked up some bug when drinking from a broken drain, and that after these deaths there was a mass exodus by the survivors, but I was more interested in what Peter Lucas (in charge of Portsmouth City's wildlife management) had to say. He is quoted as saying that the reason that there is always a large population of Swans at the Canoe Lake is that it is a safe haven for young Swans in the years after they have been driven away by their parents (who need them out of the way before it is time to nest again in the spring after the young were hatched) and before these Swans reach the age at which they themselves will breed.

THU 15 JULY

I notice that an entry on the HWT website contributed by Bob Chapman on July 8th is signed by him as 'Reserves Officer, Farlington Marshes' while his next contribution dated July 15th gives him the title 'Reserves Officer (Solent)'. If this represents a promotion I would like to add my congratulations to those he will already have received but at the same time the new title causes me some concern if it means that Bob will have to find time to manage other

reserves in addition to the five or more he already looks after in the Portsmouth area - especially as the part of the Keyhaven and Pennington Marshes which are managed by the Wildlife Trust (and which justify the 'Solent' title more than Farlington Marshes does) are so much nearer to his home in Christchurch, not to mention the potential distraction from his present cares posed by the potential marine nature reserve in the Solent which the Wildlife Trust has been 'angling for' (forgive the pun) for some time now! +++

Putting aside thoughts of future problems I see that Bob tells us in today's news that 18

Greenshank are now back at Farlington along with at least 200 Black-tailed Godwits including the non- or failed breeders which have already returned from Iceland. He also tells us that up to 8 Little Ringed Plovers have been seen on the reserve recently.

Finally for today I have one more Egret Roost count for last night to add to those I reported in yesterday's notes - Mike Collins went to the Hayling shore near the Mengeham Rythe sailing club and counted 25 Egrets entering the Tournurbury Woods at dusk. No news yet of counts from Thorney Island or from Horsea Island in Portsmouth Harbour (used by many of the birds feeding in Langstone Harbour).

WED 14 JULY

A brief note from Michael Hawkins on the SOS website says that a Kingfisher was back on the Lewes Brooks today. Ian Pibworth told us of the first back at the Testwood Lakes on July 11 and Richard Carpenter saw one in the Whiteley Pastures area south of Botley Woods on July 10 while Kris Gillam had one at the Hersey Nature Reserve on the Isle of Wight yesterday. I guess these are all juveniles from the first brood which have been driven off by their parents and while they are not the first to appear on the scene (I see that one appeared at Brading Marsh on the Isle of Wight as early as June 19) they probably indicate the start of arrivals all along the coast - last year reports of them at non breeding sites along the coast become almost daily from July 3 (when Bob Marchant saw one at Hook/Warsash) so I expect to hear news of one back at Langstone Pond before long.

Today was the scheduled day for the monthly count of Egret night roosts across the Solent area from Pagham Harbour through Hampshire to the Isle of Wight, and today's results will be of interest as July is the first month in which Egret numbers start to soar to an autumn peak. +++

At the time of writing the only two results which I have are from Langstone Wade Court, where Jason Crook found 70 birds, and from a new site in Chichester Harbour which has not been included in any previous counts but which probably accounts for a significant number of the birds - tonight it had at least 56, and both there and at Wade Court there may well have been birds already hidden in the roost trees before the counters arrived (due to the tide being already nearly high in the hour before darkness falls - the high tide prevents the birds from feeding in many favourite places and sends them off early to bed) +++

The new site is in Oldpark Wood on the west bank of the Chichester Channel across the water from the Chichester Yacht Basin and it can be viewed from bench seats beside the shoreline footpath going north to Dell Quay where it emerges from Salterns Copse at Copperas Point (not the path marked on maps going through the fields a couple of hundred yards in from the shore!). If you arrive at the viewing seats and cannot see any Egrets in the trees on the opposite shore look ahead of you to a green buoy in the channel, then turn 45 degrees left to where the otherwise grassy shore on the far side has a noticeable shingle slope and the birds which I saw were in the trees above the southern end of the shingle. On fine evenings when the tide is low at sunset I would expect the birds to arrive in large numbers between ten and twenty minutes after sunset but last night, with the tide high, there were already at least 11 birds in the roost when I arrived 40 minutes before sunset and only three came in after sunset. +++

While at this viewpoint a small swarm of 50+ Sand Martins flew down channel, a Kestrel hovered over the long grass close to me, and a never ending stream of gulls flew south to their night roost (perhaps on Stakes Island between Cobnor and Thorney). Should you go there and think of exploring the far shore and the wood forget it as the area is private and well guarded, and in any case you get a far better view of the Egrets looking across the water.

Other news for today includes an unexpected sighting of a single Sanderling in summer plumage by Derek Hale at Ryde on the Isle of Wight and a sighting of an Osprey fishing in Arlington Reservoir near Beachy Head (where it is reported to have been present for a week already). +++

Going back to the Sanderling Derek says that he does not expect to see autumn passage birds until mid-August, but looking at my notes for last year I see there was a first wave moving along the Hampshire coast at the end of July. 40 were seen from Sandy Point on Hayling Island on July 23, another 10 at Stokes Bay on July 25 and 4 were at the Lymington Marshes on July 26. With everything getting earlier nowadays it is worth keeping an eye out for Sanderling from now on +++

Still on the Isle of Wight Kris Gillam today saw 21 Egrets, including 8 juveniles, at the Hersey Nature Reserve on the north east shore of the island, and that suggests a breeding colony on the Island not too far away +++

At Brighton Richard Ives today saw a single Manx Shearwater and 5 Scoter heading east and a lonely Bar-tailed Godwit flying west.

TUE 13 JULY

Mike Duffy heard a Quail when he was at Old Winchester Hill on June 30 and today Richard Carpenter also heard one there - hopefully the same one settled there with a mate. +++

Elsewhere in Hampshire Bob Marchant today came on four Sedge Warblers at Hook/Warsash, of interest as they were in an area where there have been no Sedge Warblers earlier in the season and their appearance now indicates that post-breeding dispersal is underway for them as it is for a Willow Warbler which also turned up there today. Bob does not say if he detected it visually, by call note, or by its song - hearing the first quiet Willow Warbler song of the autumn is always a special pleasure for me, unlike that of the Chiffchaffs that are now singing so continuously (for no apparent purpose) that I had a phone call today asking me if the bird uttering this non-stop two note 'song' might be doing so because it was injured and in need of hospitalisation!

Last September Ian Pibworth told us of the arrival of more than 400 Canada Geese at the Testwood Lakes and at the time I wondered where they might have come from. Today, in between sipping pints of beer, Bob Jacobs took a look over Eling Great Marsh at the head of Southampton Water and remarked on the presence of a 'huge flock of Canada Geese' so I guess this could be another of their summer moult areas in which the geese are properly ignored by birders more interested in the Yellow-legged Gulls until they take wing in the early autumn and descend on places such as Testwood Lakes (less than a mile north of the marsh) where they are not wanted. +++

While in that area I see that Bob found Spotted Flycatcher at the Lower Test reserve. Last year one or two were resident in that area from May 3 to September 1 and almost certainly nested - so far this year there has been no mention of the species that has reached me until today.

Yesterday brought a report of a Spoonbill in Pagham Harbour (seen when it was put up by a low flying aircraft), and at the other end of the scale a late downy Mallard duckling was on the IBM Lake +++

More exciting was another sighting of a Hobby over central Havant, seen by Martin Hampton who thought it might be following a flock of around 30 Swifts which were also overhead +++

Martin voiced a thought which I have often expressed in previous years when the number of Swifts seen in the sky suddenly seems to increase in late July - the thought that the increased numbers represent this year's young joining the adults in the sky before they all fly south. That may or may not be the case, one worry being that it does not square with something that I have heard recently, namely that the juvenile Swifts (like young Cuckoos) do not have a family life once they have left the nest but almost immediately set off on their southward migration long before the adults leave us. +++

Another puzzle about Swifts at this time of year is illustrated by my daily observations at this time. Each morning I regularly see up to six (but usually only three) Swifts around my home, and I believe that they represent the adults of three breeding pairs nesting in Manor

Close. Then on many evenings ten to thirty birds appear in the same sky leaving me wondering where they come from and what attachment they have to the central Havant airspace. +++

If anyone knows the answer I hope they will let me know, but in the interim I have developed my own theory, which goes like this. In any one area there is a certain number of breeding pairs (in my case three) but in addition to the breeding population tied to fixed nest sites there is a much bigger Swift population in Britain for the summer, these non-breeding birds living high in the air above us out of sight of the naked eye. High in the air there is a certain amount of insect food but not enough to satisfy the needs of the birds living up there, and in the late afternoon/early evening when the insect population in the lower air is at the maximum these birds descend for a nutritious supper. Sometimes these birds come down in very large numbers over a particularly rich area, but normally there is no 'special attraction' to draw them to one spot and they come down to what might be described as 'their personal favourite take-aways'. I can see that such a division of the overall flock into smaller foraging parties helps to ensure that all the birds get a fair share of the available food supply, and I can guess that the birds have memories of places where they have fed well before - perhaps where they have been hatched or where they have bred in the past (or just happened on a good meal!), and my theory is that the birds that we see in the evenings do not have a current breeding connection with the area where we see them but do have some established connection (through past memories) which brings them back to that place to feed and not to any other.

If we assume a large population of Swifts living in the upper air with nothing to tie them to one location there cannot be a hard and fast fixed connection between each individual bird and its feeding area - wind and weather will cause them to drift for hundreds of miles - but maybe there is some form of 'roots' which instinctively brings individual birds back to favourite feeding areas. Who knows - do you? +++

While on this subject I am just as intrigued as is Jason Crook over the unknown factors governing Sand Martin movements at this time of year. Jason is particularly interested in how these Martins decide where to spend the night (having seen at least 770 of them over Langstone Harbour the other evening he wonders why only 150 or so decided to roost in the reeds at Farlington Marshes and where the remainder went). As with the Egret population I think that we are getting much closer to answers to these questions with more observers sharing daily observations through the internet....

One other subject raised by several people in today's news is what appears to be a welcome increase in Bullfinch numbers. Of course there is no hard evidence of this, and the fact that several people mention seeing Bullfinches may in fact reflect the reverse of an increase (with diminishing numbers each sighting becomes more newsworthy and thus there are more reports of fewer birds!). A couple of the reports causing these comments are dated July 12 when David Parker, living at Forestside on the northern edge of Stansted Forest, had a male Bullfinch in his garden on and off through the day. The other report is from Paul Winter who says he has had a pair of Bullfinch visiting his garden at Rownhams in Southampton daily since June 21, and on July 11 they brought a juvenile with them. Another interesting report is of a male seen by Derek Hale on July 14 in a seemingly unlikely spot - the West High Down of the Isle of Wight. Going back to May 27 Derek Mills told us that he thought four different pairs were visiting the feeders in his Farnham garden, and on that date they started to bring their young with them.

MON 12 JULY

Last Tuesday (July 6) John Shillitoe made his regular bike ride around the Wickham/Hambledon/Soberton area and found more evidence of the continuing decline of the Corn Bunting breeding population in what is one of the few remaining patches where they can still be found breeding in Hampshire. On that day he could only find six pairs plus one single bird and he commented .. 'I would guess the area holds 7-8 pairs, well down on the 11-14 of last year, which was also down on 2002 (14-19 pairs)' +++

Today Derek Hale comments even more strongly on the decline of the Corn Bunting on the Isle of Wight after coming across a single bird in the Whale Chine area - he says that in his

opinion the species is 'nearly extinct on the Island'. +++

The current status of Corn Bunting in Hampshire is probably reflected in the fact that I have only seen the species mentioned on Hoslist ten times this year and eight of those reports were from the Hambledon area (the other two were not of breeding birds - one came from Cheesefoot Head on Jan 1, the other from the shore west of Milford on sea where the bird was thought to be a wandering vagrant). I appreciate that there are probably 10 to 20 other sites in the county where Corn Bunting can still be heard but no one bothers to report the presence of the birds as they are thought of as 'common birds which have always been present' at those sites, and when they vanish from these areas their absence is not particularly noticeable except to those making a special record of them.

Following my report in last Thursday's notes (July 8) of Avocet chicks being seen at Titchfield Haven I have now heard that three pairs of Avocet nested there this year hatching ten chicks (not all of which will necessarily survive to become adults). I understand that this success was in part due to the installation of an electric fence which has deterred foxes from entering the nesting area, and that deterrent has benefitted other bird species nesting there

SUN 11 JULY

Two more species had started to move south today - one was Common Redstart (one of which was seen today on St Boniface Down by Kris Gillam and was the first to be reported on the Isle of Wight since May 2), the other was Wheatear (a juvenile is said to have been seen at Farlington Marshes, a long way from the nearest known breeding site - as far as I know the only known place where they breed in Hampshire is the New Forest). +++

Much more impressive was an estimated total of 770 Sand Martins seen at Farlington Marshes today - maybe all spending the night in the reed beds there. Another 500+ Sand Martins spent the night at the Testwood Lakes near the mouth of the River Test, and there may well have been another substantial flock in the reeds at Titchfield Haven. The first five returning Sand Martins were seen at Titchfield Haven on June 28, and the first at Testwood were a flock of around 350 on July 4. +++

Also seen off Titchfield Haven today by Ian Calderwood were the first two Roseate Terns of the autumn for Hampshire (the only other report of this species for Hampshire this year was of two also off Titchfield Haven on May 19, but in some years these terns 'hang about' at the Haven through the summer so there is not such a definite autumn passage as there is for other species) +++

Also newly back in the Hayling area were two Common Gulls seen by George Spraggs on Sinah Lake, and nearby a Turtle Dove was purring from a dead oak tree in the gorse along the north west shore of that lake - possibly one that has nested on Hayling Island where we usually hear of one or two pairs, though this is the very first report of a Turtle Dove on Hayling that I have heard of this year.

SAT 10 JULY

Today saw a major return of Black-tailed Godwits from their Iceland breeding area - a flock of 72 were new in Emsworth Harbour and 3 had colour rings acting as proof of travel (another lone Godwit in Nutbourne Bay was also colour ringed and probably newly back) +++

Also seen in Hampshire today was a Red Kite flying low over a road in the Portsmouth area. On the Isle of Wight the first autumn Osprey was in Newtown Harbour today where I am surprised to hear that there were still 50 Shelduck (no comment as to whether these were all adults or were a large creche of juveniles). Among the returning waders seen by Derek Hale were a Whimbrel, Turnstone and two Dunlin +++

Elsewhere on the Island Chris Meaney noticed that there were no Guillemots left on or around their nest cliffs below West High Down

PLANTS

SUN 18 JULY

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SAT 17 JULY

Walking round the IBM Portsmouth site for the monthly bird count I came on several newly flowering plants including Tansy and Blue Fleabane. Near the main reception entrance the ornamental grove of Tulip trees had flowers in bud and I was pleased to find some white flowered Common Centaury and to see that Hairy Bird's Foot Trefoil was still flowering as were many Pyramidal orchids.

FRI 16 JULY

A cycle ride from Havant to Aldsworth Pond and back via Westbourne and Lumley Mill this morning found the water level of the pond was a good foot lower than the top of the roadside sluice hatch with masses of plants growing up through the open water of the pond. Much of this was composed of the tall spikes of Marestails and Water Mint - one or two spikes of the mint were in flower but it is impossible to tell if any tiny flowers were present on the Marestails without wading out for some distance in the still relatively deep water. +++

Coming back through Westbourne I saw my first few flowers of Skullcap growing on the wall of the canalised Lumley Mill Stream just south of Westbourne Church and on the footpath going west over the full river Ems at Lumley Mill I found one flower still out on Greater Celandine (and nearing Seagull Lane in Emsworth I could see the red of Everlasting Pea in the edge of the Brook Meadow area).

WED 14 JULY

This morning I walked from Havant along the shore to Nore Barn (west end of the Emsworth shoreline) and back. On the relatively sheltered shore at Nore Barn several plants of Golden Samphire were in flower and among them I noticed one flower of Sea Aster. Also noted where both Sea Couch and Townsend's Cord Grass (commonly called Spartina) which have both started to flower recently. +++

Away from the shore I spotted my first Autumn Hawkbit and a tree of Sweet Chestnut covered in its long sprays of flower (last of the tree flowers for the year - recent winds have already brought down spiky Horse Chestnut fruits and well formed Walnuts)

A phone call querying my notes for June 14, when I said I had seen Pale St John's Wort flowering at the Portsmouth IBM site, has revealed a bit of carelessness on my part and I apologize if anyone else was misled into thinking I had seen a rarity. In fact the plants I was referring to were the much commoner Hairy St John's Wort.

MON 12 JULY

A quick check of the Hayling Island Pale Toadflax site at the southeast corner of the public mini golf course near the Inn on the Beach showed me that three or four plants (fewer than last year) were fully in flower, and a walk round the clump of gorse bushes by whose north side they grow discovered what looked like an unknown species of pink flowered Mint. A closer look showed that the plants were diminished specimens of the Wood Sage which is very common here while the pink flowers did not belong to the Sage (though they appeared to grow from its leaf axils) but were the first Dodder I have seen this year. Strangely none of the Dodder was on the Gorse (only a foot or so away).

SUN 11 JULY

Just one new flower today - Marsh Mallow found at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter.

SAT 10 JULY

This morning the Havant Wildlife Group met at Walderton near the source of the River Ems, and in the stream which is to become that river they found 'Blue' Water Speedwell (the

report of their finds does not make special comment about this plant so I assume it to be the ubiquitous hybrid and not the true 'Blue' species, though it may have been). Walking south over Walderton Down (I assume they took the path starting from the junction of the B2146 and the minor road to Stoughton) they found a good selection of downland flowers but not the one which I associate with that path in connection with a visit there on 13 July 1999 after which I wrote in my diary ...

'Today a fascinating and baffling new plant entered my world. The story started several days ago when a lady who is a great Rambler asked me if I could identify a flower she had seen on Walderton Down beside the footpath at around SU 791102, and today I went to see if I could solve this mystery. I found nothing corresponding to the description I thought I had been given but did find lots of Fool'd Parsley in field edges, and a mass of some species of Cornsalad among the acres of Poppies flowering at the top of the down (all white flowered and I suspect *Valerianella dentata* rather than the comoner *V. locusta* or *carinata*). What really excited me was that, lurking among the acres of Poppies, were half a dozen widely scattered examples of a plant which I had never seen before but which had such obvious characteristics that I thought I would identify it in no time when I got home to my books. These plants were erect to 50cm or more, and sometimes quite bushy with additional flowering stems arising from leaf axils on the main stem. At the end of each stem was a cluster of cymes, each uncurling like a tongue to allow flower after flower to hold pride of place while it was open. The flowers immediately reminded me of Vipers Bugloss but they were a pale lilac in colour. The leaves, however, were nothing like those of any member of the Borage family, being much more like the leaves of the Upright Hedge Parsley that lined the field edge. I must have spent an hour going through every possible plant (within the Borage tribe) in Stace's comprehensive flora before I gave up and rang Eric Clement, the authority on alien plants who happens to live in Alverstoke at Gosport. He immediately told me that I should have been looking on page 539 when I had been starting at page 540, and that the plant was called *Phacelia tanacetifolia*. He went on to say that this plant is now being widely planted by farmers as a natural form of Aphid control (and has additional advantages in enriching the soil when it is ploughed back at the end of the season) - the way the aphid control works is that this plant is especially attractive to Hoverflies, and their larvae are great eaters of aphids.' +++

In fact the *Phacelia* was the mystery plant I had been sent to identify, but I would not expect it to be still at that site as I have not refound it in the intervening years but I have enjoyed the plant in one field of Old Idsworth farm where a long line of it was planted under a telephone/power line going north-east from Old Idsworth Chapel towards Compton. It is well worth being familiar with this plant as it could be found almost anywhere on farmland. +++

Coming back to today the Havant Group did add one flower to the year list with Fool's Parsley (which I saw on the following day in Havant).

On North West Thorney, in the area between the Little Deeps and Marina Farm, Brian Fellows today found both Teazel and Fleabane in flower. The Fleabane is a good example of the difficulty of recording first flowering dates in a meaningful way as I had seen one single plant with flowers fully open (among millions not in flower!) as long ago as June 19, and I still have not seen my second example, but I guess it will not be long now. Teazels also should be 'on general release' in the next week or so (and in fact I did see a couple in flower at Budds Mound yesterday but forgot to record them).

INSECTS

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FRI 16 JULY

The first Grayling butterflies to be reported this year were seen today by Alan Thornbury at Browndown on the Solent shore west of Gosport. Alan was also the first finder of this species in Hampshire last year when they were flying at Browndown on June 28, and the butterflies which he saw today were not pristine so he suspects they have been on the wing unseen for some time.

An even more impressive find for Andrew Brookes today was a Purple Emperor on the western fringe of the Creech Woods south west of Denmead - Andrew says he saw it near the entrance to the woods from Apless Lane which runs south from Worlds End (west of Denmead) to Southwick via Beckford Bridge. I am not sure if this is a new site for the species but I have never heard of them there before, any more than I had heard of them in the Southwick Woods to the west of Purbrook where one was seen last year by Theo Roberts. This seems to be a good year for the species, and it seems it is worth keeping an eye open for them wherever the combination of mature oak and sallow occurs. +++

In Hipley Copse, to the south west of the Purple Emperor site, Andrew went on to find 20 Silver Washed Fritillaries and a couple of White Admirals, plus two very fresh Brimstones confirming the general emergence of this years new generation of that species which seems to have started on July 13,

THU 15 JULY

Andrew Brookes had another very interesting find today in the Huntbourn Woods, west of Denmead, in the form of a very newly emerged Common Blue. Several things seem to be unusual about this sighting, the first being the date which falls halfway between the time at which the first generation used to be expected to die out at the end of June and the beginning of August when the second generation appear, so is this a very late first generation or a very early second? A second oddity is that this was a female and in most species it is the males which are the first to appear in any emergence - perhaps that weighs in favour of it being late? The third oddity is that Andrew says that it was slightly abnormal (abberation 'caerulea' - which I guess means that it was bluer than most females), and that may have something to do with its date of emergence - again I am just guessing but I do know that Blues can vary greatly in size depending on the food available to each caterpillar, and I suspect that a starved caterpillar will feed for longer than its companions, meaning that the imago emerges later (but the reverse could be true - if the food runs out why not pupate early and come out small!)

Richard Addison also had some interesting finds today in the Alice Holt Forest where he saw both Dark and Roesel's Bush Crickets (presumably now fully adult). Checking what distinguishes the Roesel's I see that it has a pale edging all round what I call the 'saddle' (more properly called the 'pronotal flaps') and a pale face. +++

Richard also reports the presence of a Brown Hawker dragonfly which is probably not the first of the season, though I have some hesitation in accepting the date of May 21 on which one was reported (by 'Anon') from the Blashford Lakes. However a more reasonable early date of July 6 is now given by Jim Day (the HWT warden at the lakes) who says that Southern and Brown Hawkers, and the Southern Damselfly, were on the wing there then.

Recent moth trapping lists add twelve species to my yearlist, starting with two found tonight - a Four-spotted Footman taken by Andy Collins in Southampton and a *Pempelia formosa* in Russell Wynn's trap at Pennington (this species is not listed in my 1979 checklist). +++
Top of the bill last night (July 14) was a Bedstraw Hawkmoth found at Bishopstoke (across the River Itchen from Eastleigh) by Peter Hooper. This may well be the first migrant of this species to reach Britain this year as I have not seen any reports of it so far on Steve Nash's website, but last year there were two arrivals in June and 14 reports in total between June 6 and Aug 11 with seven of the fourteen appearing in the week from Aug 4 to 11. Only one of last year's records was from Hampshire -one taken by Nick Montegriffo near Basingstoke on Aug 4. +++

Also new for the year yesterday (July 14) were Large Emerald, Small Rivulet, Shaded Broad-bar and *Trachycera advenella* (these all taken by Nick Montegriffo) leaving Mike Wall the honour of adding *Argyresthia dilectella*. Both Nick and Peter Hooper had the first of the new generation of Early Thorn and Nick had the first migrant Diamond-back for some time (though Maurice Opie had one at Fareham in that extraordinary February migrant invasion this year). +++

On the night of July 12 Nick Montegriffo had four more micros - Gold Triangle, *Aethes rubigana*, *Agriphila straminella* and *Argyresthia brockella*

Locally Brian Fellows was pleased with a sighting on July 13 of a new dragonfly species for the Brook Meadow list at Emsworth - a male Broad-bodied Chaser. +++

One other item of local news comes from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes - on July 8 he reported unusually large numbers of Burnet Moths in the 'slip field' (north east corner of the reserve immediately south of the A27) and he tells us they were all of the Narrow-bordered Five-spot species

TUE 13 JULY

Three different people today remarked on the emergence of a fresh generation of Brimstone butterflies at two different sites - Maurice Pugh noted just three of them at Farley Mount, and at Stockbridge Down both Mike Duffy and Terry Hotten saw them (Mike reckoned he saw more than 10 there). +++

At Farley Mount Maurice also thought that 3 Small Whites which he saw were fresh, and Mark Litjens at the same site noted 4 Large Whites as fresh

Marbled Whites are still out in large numbers - Maurice saw more than 120 at Farley Mount and at Old Winchester Hill Richard Carpenter estimated there were over 100 Marbled Whites with 50+ Small Tortoiseshells, around 25 Dark Green Fritillaries and the same number of Small Heaths. +++

Following the first report of Chalkhill Blue (from Stockbridge Down yesterday - July 12) Ian Pratt saw the first on the Isle of Wight today

Paul Beckett has been out dragonfly spotting and among other species I see that today at the Itchen Valley Country Park he saw Southern Hawker, Southern Damselfly (*C. mercuriale*) and Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*). Southern Hawkets will soon be a common sight but so far this year I have only heard of one other sighting (by Peter Vaughan at Pamber Forest on June 19) whereas last year there was an odd fore-runner on June 21 with daily sightings starting on July 11. Southern Damselfly is not so easy to pick out, and although Dan Powell gives the flight period as starting in mid-May I have only heard one other report of them - by Maurice Pugh at Crockford Bridge in the New Forest also on June 19. The Emerald Damsel started to emerge more recently and Paul's is the third report following sightings on July 3 and 5.

Jonathan Forsyth always manages to record very high counts of butterflies at Burkham Home Farm across the A339 from Lasham airfield and yesterday he logged 325 Marbled Whites and 425 Meadow Browns with lower numbers for nine other butterfly species. I was interested to see that this year's Small Heath bonanza seems to be over - where Jonathan had recorded 139 at this site on June 13 (and Mike Duffy 200 at Stockbridge Down on June 12) only 10 could be found on July 12.

Turning to moths I see that Mike Duffy today (July 13) had the first Bird-cherry Ermine (at least

I assume that to be the more usual name for the species reported on the Butterfly Conservation website as Cherry Bird Ermine!) +++

Other new moths for my yearlist come from Russell Wynn's mothtrap at Pennington. On July 11 he had a Garden Tiger and on July 10 he added Small Scallop, Mathew's Wainscot and Lunar-spotted Pinion.

MON 12 JULY

The first Chalkhill Blue of the year was seen on Stockbridge Down today by Mike Duffy. I think Mike only saw one specimen and so far there have been no other reports of this species but July 12 is a good average date and hopefully these butterflies will soon be common on the downs.

SUN 11 JULY

Just two reports of 'new' moths from this evening's trapping. At Hill Head Richard Carpenter had the first Vapourer Moth of the year (presumably a winged male and not the wingless female) while in Farnham Derek Mills had the first of the second generation of Nut-tree Tussock.

SAT 10 JULY

Speckled Wood is a species that can be seen from April to October as it regularly has three broods each year - the first emerging in April, the second at the start of June and the third at the beginning of August, and July is one of the months in which this butterfly is scarce. I mention this because Ian Pratt recorded 17 of them today on the Isle of Wight, making me wonder if global warming has brought August forward by three weeks. I suspect not as neither Ian nor anyone else has remarked on seeing fresh specimens, and the 17 are a total of what Ian saw at four different sites.

Last night (July 9) Nick Montegriffo had his moth trap in operation at Sherborne St John (Basingstoke area) and added four new moths to my yearlist. Best of these was a Waved Black which is I think an uncommon moth and its larvae feed on fungi growing on wood. Number two was Small Fan-footed Wave and the other two were micros (*Phycita roborella* and *Nephopterix angustella*) I suspect the latter has changed its name recently as my 1979 list has only one *Nephopterix* species (*N. hositilis* numbered 1447 by Bradley and Fletcher)

OTHER WILDLIFE

SUN 18 JULY

Today is my 73rd birthday and it is, I think, an appropriate time to start enjoying my 'second childhood'. I have therefore decided to cease the writing of these daily nature notes in their present form with four 'deadlines' each week. +++

From today I will cease to update my website on a regular basis and will cease to distribute my notes in the various forms that I have been doing. +++

I do not intend to close this website, and I hope that by the end of September I may have established a new format for sharing my observations and hopefully encouraging more people to take a greater interest in the wildlife around them. The new format will probably not have separate pages for different species groups, so if you currently go straight to e.g. the Bird News page you may well find that that page is no longer available - if you want to continue to visit this site please go to the home page (www.havnn.net) to check its status.

WED 14 JULY

On Catherington Down this evening Jim Berry found *Agrocybe praecox* - a relative of the Field Mushroom but with a relatively much longer stem and smaller cap (which has a yellowish/brown tinge to its whiteness) growing in the grass, and at Brook Meadow in Emsworth Brian Fellows yesterday found a fresh show of *Agrocybe cylindracea* growing on one of the old Willows by the River Ems. +++

In Warblington churchyard, under the yew trees, I thought I had found a young Field Mushroom today but when I picked it I found the stem had a prominent ring and the gills were as white as the cap making it a *Lepiota* (probably *leucothites*). In the Nore Barn area I had earlier found a couple of large examples of the Yellow Cowpat toadstool (*Bolbitius vitellinus*) in grass and (on wood chippings) a 'past its best' specimen of something like *Coprinus lagopus*

WEEK 28 JULY 5 - 11

BIRDS

FRI 09 JULY

The first Common Gulls which I have heard of since May 9 were seen today by Kris Gillam on the Isle of Wight - four at Ryde and another one in the Bembridge area. Kris also found Med Gulls en masse back at (or heading for) their favourite summer/autumn resort centred on the Bembridge area. He counted 103 between Ryde and Seaview with another 20 (plus one juvenile) at St Helens, so I guess there will be a marked diminution in the numbers we see in Langstone Harbour from now on. +++

Also at Bembridge a recently flooded section of the ponds had attracted 8 returning Dunlin, and a juvenile Great Blackback gull had flown in from (presumably) a fairly local nest site. +++

Going back to the Med Gulls Kris found 54 of them roosting at the Hersey Nature Reserve on the coast near Seaview last night.

In Langstone Harbour we heard reports of a pair of Ringed Plovers having a nest on the ill-fated Little Tern nest island at the Hayling Oysterbeds and being seen with at least one chick on June 21, just a couple of days before the 'great storm' of June 23. No more was heard of that chick or nest, but today George Spraggs gives us the good news that they seem to have made another nest in a slightly safer place and have at least two if not a full clutch of four to five eggs in it

This morning Keith Coward was waiting for a ferry at Southampton's Town Quay when he spotted two Shags on posts in the water. Shags breed on the Isle of Wight but are hardly ever seen on Hampshire shores in May, June or July, and when they do turn up they do not normally go up Southampton Water (Birds of Hampshire says that Shags are very rare at inland sites but are occasionally seen in Southampton Water in the winter).

By the start of July the great majority of adult Shelduck have normally flown away to the places where they congregate for their summer moult (and for those on the south coast I think this means a trip to Heligoland on the north German coast). A few adults stay as 'baby sitters' with the juveniles, and if you do come across Shelduck in the summer you

would normally expect to see no more than one or two adults with a much larger number of juveniles (most of which are not the offspring of those adults). +++

I was therefore quite surprised today to see six adult birds (all with orange chest bands where the juveniles are in black and white only) at the mouth of the Langbrook stream off the Langstone South Moors. Going on from there to the Budds Farm pools I found a more normal sight of two adults with five juveniles +++

My records only show reports of a single juvenile at Budds Farm earlier this year (though two pairs of adults were present) so I assume the extra four well grown juveniles have just flown in there for company, and these may be birds which George Spraggs saw at the Oysterbeds yesterday (he reported 2+ Shelduck juveniles and did not mention any adults)

THU 08 JULY

Although Terns are a common sight in the English Channel through the summer the majority of them have until very recently been centred on one or two breeding colonies but a couple of reports in today's news seem to indicate the start of the autumn season during which the Terns spend their days fishing in the open sea, gathering in large flocks where fish are to be found, and roosting at night just within the local harbour mouths. One thing that drew my attention to this was a report from Derek Hale of more than 50 Common Terns fishing together in the Solent off Fishbourne today, and last Monday (July 5) Owen Mitchell recorded more than 60 Sandwich and more than 30 Common Terns seen from Selsey Bill along with more than 80 Gannets. +++

Derek Hale was at Fishbourne to catch a ferry to the mainland for a birding trip to the Forest of Dean, but en route he called in at Titchfield Haven where he saw four juveniles with five adult Avocet (news that I have been expecting to hear, especially since the announcement of their first breeding at Rye Harbour was published on July 2).

Brian Fellows went to Baffins Pond today and found that the nine Barnacle Geese (which with one hybrid Bar-Head and one Snow Goose, had formed the well known 'Baffins Gang') were all back together for the first time since February (the Bar-Head was with them but the Snow Goose was not). He also found that the Swan pair there still had all three cygnets, but the Canada Goose flock had decreased from 140 on June 29 to 124 today (moult already complete for some?). Another surprise was to see the Embden Goose still had her three white goslings but her Canada Goose mate and the two yellow goslings which represented his parentage were not to be seen

At the Hayling Oysterbeds today George Spraggs saw a collection of waders indicative of the advancing autumn season - Redshank were in excess of 94 and there were 4 or more Common Sandpiper, 3+ Grey Plover, 2 Dunlin and 2 Whimbrel +++

Another flock of 94 Redshank was in Fareham Creek last Sunday (July 4), and a couple of other wader reports today are of a flock of 30 Lapwing in a field by the Chichester to Bognor main road (seen by John Simons on his way to work this morning) and rather more odd report of a Whimbrel flying north up the A23 from Brighton..

WED 07 JULY

At Pulborough Brooks today Tony Deleiros not only had the luck to see a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but also saw six juvenile Great Spotted and fourteen young Green Woodpeckers. Also present was a Snipe, another early returning wader (last year the first returning birds were not reported from this site until Aug 9). Less unusual was the presence of seven Little Egrets - last year they returned on July 18 after the winter birds left in April, this year (with more Egrets everywhere) one was at the reserve on June 28.

News for yesterday (July 6) includes a sighting of two Storks flying over Glyndebourne at 8pm, presumably seen by an opera goer taking a fresh air break during the interval. The lady who saw them says they were .. 'Huge birds, white bodies and black wings, rather like a heron but not the grey heron we get round here.' +++

Less unusual (nowadays) was another Red Kite sighting in the Chichester area +++

Also in West Sussex Bernie Forbes was on the downs north of Lancing in the early morning of July 6 and saw six Golden Plover flying west (towards Hampshire!). More expected was the call of a Quail. +++

With the Antipodean spring getting under way we have already heard of Black Swans on the

Lower Test in Hampshire and in Poole Harbour in Dorset. Bernie this morning added one for West Sussex on the River Adur. I wonder if the regular birds are still on West Ashling pond near Chichester and Benbow Pond near Midhurst?

On July 5 Mike Rossor saw at least one Tree Sparrow at the Pevensy Levels and this seems to be part of a trend giving glimmers of hope for a return of these birds to the south coast. We know the birds are still hanging on in the far corner of East Sussex - in news dated yesterday Matthew Denny who lives in the Brede valley tells us that at least seven (and maybe fourteen) pairs have nested thereabouts this year, but in addition to that colony of breeding birds this summer has seen at least four reports of birds at well separated places along the south coast (no hint that they were breeding but they were perhaps exploring and seeking new sites to colonise?). The first of these four was at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight on May 15, then on May 24 one was in the Bill House garden at Selsey Bill. June 1 saw one in Hampshire in the New Milton area and now the current report comes from Horse Eye Level at Pevensy (between Eastbourne and Hastings)

July 4 was exciting for Matthew Denny in the Brede valley as he found a smart Cinnamon Teal drake on a small pond, still in good plumage and giving no sign of being a recent escape as it was both unringed and shy (but Matthew accepts that it is unlikely to be other than an escapee).

TUE 06 JULY

Kevin Stouse took a quick lunch time look around the IBM Portsmouth site today and found more than 100 Canada Geese still present, among them a pair with four downy goslings hatched surprisingly late in the year. +++

In the BGW years (before global warming) Canada Geese hatched their young in May and the adults moulted during July, and by the end of July both young and old birds were ready to fly at the same time (prepared for that long migration which they would make in their native New World). +++

This year the first young appeared roughly on schedule (first reported from Baffins Pond, the Isle of Wight, and the IBM Lake on May 4,,6,and 7 respectively) but the birds started to moult as early as June 11. When I made my WeBS count at the IBM Lake on June 19 I found a total of 196 birds, all apparently flightless, including a number of young which had already grown adult plumage and could only be distinguished by their smaller size - I saw no downy young then but a family could easily have been hiding away from the main crowd. So surprise number one is that the birds seemed to have advanced their calendar by two to three weeks. +++

Suprise number two came from Baffins Pond where, on June 9, a 'mixed race' family was found by Brian Fellows. One parent was a Canada Goose, one a white farmyard Embden Goose, and while two of their downy offspring were in the standard yellow down three of them were in the white down of the Embden. I'm not sure how old they were when Brian saw them but they must have hatched since his previous visit on May 17. +++

The biggest surprise however is Kevin's find today of what seems to be a family quite out of synch with the annual cycle of these birds. The still downy young are unlikely to be ready to fly when the main flock has completed their moult and would, in north America, be setting out on their long flight south. Luckily for them in this country there is no need to fly or die before the onset of arctic winter!

Turning from Geese to Swans it is clear that Mute Swans have abandoned the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour as a summer moult site - where a few years back there would have been 70 to 100 Swans there are now just two plus the Bedhampton Mill family group with their seven cygnets. +++

While it is unlikely that the Swans missing from Langstone Harbour have chosen to move to Southampton Ian Watts tells us today that 81 Swans are spending the summer on the Itchen in the Riverside Park area downstream from Swaythling. Ian says this is a notable increase over the normal winter Swan population there and I have not heard of it as a summer moult site in previous years. +++

Also on the subject of Swans Paul Winter tells us that the single Black Swan which he saw on the River Test/Southampton Water off Redbridge on July 4 was one of two which had been

there a week earlier, and it may be that the Black Swan reported on the Testwood Lakes by Ian Pibworth on that same day is the other of the two. It is unlikely though not impossible that the second bird is now in Poole Harbour where Rosi Woods has just seen one in the Arne area.

A couple of interesting reports for July 4 which have only just appeared on the SOS website are of an adult Spoonbill seen at Pett Level by Cliff Dean (who also noted more than 50 Common Scoter offshore there in Rye Bay), while on the other side of Hastings (near the Ashburnham Lake west of Battle) a visiting birder from Kent watched an Osprey fly over - the second autumn passage Osprey for Sussex this year after one at Rye Harbour on June 29.

MON 05 JULY

Although the season for monitoring common birds by the CBC mapping method should end in June there have been various reasons for delaying our last visit to Warblington farm so we did not make our tenth and final visit for this year until this morning. One reason for delay was the weather, which has not been good since the 'great storm' of June 23, but this morning was perfect and brought me the highspot of the season when an adult Hobby, perfectly lit by the early morning sun, gave me a prolonged view as it flew over four fields (with no intervening trees to block the view) and made a couple of abortive passes at Swallows around the half-way point. +++

The other highspot was an unusual congregation of birds near the mouth of the main stream where I think they had come for a morning bath. As well as many Greenfiches (family parties were everywhere today) and the resident Reed Warblers, Reed Bunting and an unseen 'clucking' Moorhen, Blackcap was alternately singing and 'tucking', at least two Chiffchaff were present and one Lesser Whitethroat. Least expected was a Great Spotted Woodpecker which flew in from some distance to join the fun. Elsewhere it was good to hear Goldcrest song from the Churchyard Yews, and in the farmyard a smart looking Pied Wagtail was feeding around the cattle until what I assume was its male parent arrived and left it in no doubt it was no longer wanted on his patch.. +++

Out on the mud at low tide small numbers of Redshank and Curlew were feeding with at least 30 Starlings in the saltings, and around the remaining water two Herons and ten Egrets were searching for fish. As well as the Black-headed and Herring Gulls there was one adult Great-Blackback and one adult Lesser. +++

A much larger number of Redshank are now back at Fareham Creek where Trevor Carpenter counted 94 today

A lunch time walk down the Brockhampton Stream today gave Heather Mills the first two Common Sandpipers that I have heard of back in this area near the Broadmarsh gravel quay. Also in the Brockhampton stream on the rising tide was a Swan with seven cygnets - Heather comments that she could not see the other parent but I suspect it is still around as I saw this family group in the main Hermitage Stream on July 2 and later saw a second adult Swan 'steaming' up stream to join them. I believe this is the family from the Bedhampton Mill Pool nest and suspect it is the same family which Kevin Stouse saw in this area back on June 2 (though he only counted 5 cygnets on that occasion).

SUN 04 JULY

In Sussex Bernie Forbes was at Church Norton today seeing an newly arrived adult Roseate Tern along with more expected returning waders which included Dunlin, Turnstone, Grey Plover and Common Sandpiper. +++

Here in Hampshire Paul Winter went to Redbridge Park to see if more Yellow-legged Gulls had come back to Southampton Water. Not much luck there (just one seen) but he did have six Common Sandpiper and a Black Swan (maybe the lone female who has been further up the Test at Romsey for many years, but it could have been a bird from anywhere feeling the stirrings of spring in the antipodes - I think they still nest in our winter giving any cygnets that hatch a chilly childhood). +++

At the Testwood Lakes, not far upstream from Redbridge, Ian Pibworth watched an Osprey fly south, then later return to the Lakes area before heading west - this is the first autumn

Osprey seen in Hampshire this year. In the evening some 350 Sand Martins were over the lakes in a pre-roost gathering - possibly before spending the night in the reeds at the Lower Test Marshes. Also in the evening Ian noted three Egrets flying west, also presumably to roost. Ian suggests that they might be intending to spend the night at Paultons Park - if so that may be a new Egret roost site as there are no sites in that area currently being recorded for this year's Egret Roost Survey.

A news item reaching me today came from Matt Coumbe who was passing on the gist of an article concerning the behaviour of Swifts in the new issue of IBIS which he had just received. +++

When I was younger the only source of information on Swift behaviour was the famous study of them carried out at Oxford and published for the general reader in the book 'Swifts in a Tower', and from this (and the various bird books which repeated the findings of this study) I was aware that Swifts are the most aerial of all birds, virtually spending their whole lives on the wing and only touching down on a solid surface when they needed one on which to lay their eggs. Young Swifts leaving the nest, we were told, immediately severed all links with their parents and flew off south to Africa, remaining totally airborne for two or even three years (feeding and sleeping on the wing) until they felt the need to breed and were forced to enter an enclosed nest site in the roof of a building or a crevice in a cave (even then mating on the wing rather than at the nest site). We were aware that some Swifts emerging from their nest with no experience of flying occasionally crashed onto the ground where their tiny legs and long wings combined to make it impossible for them to take off, and if one found a young bird in this predicament you were supposed to pick it up, hold it aloft and let it fly off. +++

Other facts about this strange bird were that it was the only passerine to incubate its eggs from the moment that they were laid so that, like raptors and owls, the eggs hatched at staggered intervals - the first bird to emerge getting first pick of any food, and the last to emerge being doomed to die of starvation if food was in short supply. Furthermore (since the species is totally dependent on gathering airborne insects in its large gape, and such insects are just not available in periods of bad weather that may last for several days) the birds (both chicks and adults) have the ability to go into a 'suspended animation' mode and sleep through these periods - no such problem for non-breeding adults as they would not be put out by having to fly 500 miles or more to avoid areas of bad weather. +++

I have not read the IBIS article but I understand from Matt that its author (based in Sweden), and other ornithologists scattered through Europe, have written up what they know about an occasional phenomenon whereby some Swifts (probably mainly youngsters) which get caught up in bad weather will 'ride out the storm' by flying into trees and clinging to them in order to go into 'suspended animation' (a state presumably somewhere between deep sleep and the almost total shut down of the metabolic system that occurs in full hibernation). The fact that this is exceptional behaviour seems to be borne out by two cases in which the behaviour was seen - one involved 118 birds, the other only 34 - trivial numbers compared to the thousands of birds that reach Britain each summer, let alone the whole of Europe which this study purports to cover. I repeat that I have not seen the article and if I have got the facts wrong I apologise for misleading anyone - perhaps someone who does know the facts will put me right?

Maybe of interest is news from Christoph Harwood in East Meon who writes of House Martins nesting under the eaves of the Isaac Walton pub in the village (for those not familiar with this pleasant village the youthful River Meon runs alongside the main street of the village and past the pub). Up on the steep hill north of the village Turtle Dove could be heard.

SAT 03 JULY

Pete Carr has just issued a update to the results of this year's Egret Roost Counts so that we now have figures for the first six months of the year. Unfortunately coverage has not been complete and though there have been counts for each of the months Jan to June from the major sites some counters seem to have lost interest during the 'low season' so we have no counts from Pagham for May and June and none from the Itchen Valley Country Park area for the last three months. There has also been difficulty in getting counts from

Tournerbury Wood on Hayling Island and from Sowley Pond near Lymington but I have just heard that Mike Collins will be counting Tournerbury this month and I suspect that the possibility of very high counts in the autumn months will attract more interest from the counters. +++

Bearing in mind that coverage has not been complete the sums of all counts for each month so far are 249 in Jan, 265 in Feb, 194 in Mar, 86 in Apr, 66 in May and 142 in June. +++

A point of more general interest is that several young Egrets have been ringed in their nests this spring and some have colour rings. Pete gives no details of the colours used nor to whom sightings should be reported but he does say that .. 'nestlings have been colour ringed in Hants as well as other English counties. Most have been ringed on the tibia, at least four have colour rings on the tarsus.' For the layman tibia = 'thigh' and tarsus = 'ankle' .

Reports of Willow Tits in south Hampshire are nowadays few and far between so it is good to hear that one was heard at Emer Bog near Romsey today by the birder whose forename is Kelvin and whose surname appears to be 'Andjenny' +++

Another sighting in today's news is of a Common and four Green Sandpipers, seen today by Owen Mitchell at the 'old Drayton pit' at Chichester.

Yesterday (July 2) was a day of celebration at Rye Harbour as, for the first time ever, a pair of Avocets hatched three chicks there +++

Other news which caught my eye in Barry Yates' summary of the month of June at Rye Harbour was that both Wheatear and Yellow Wagtails are now into second broods. At the beginning of a month a Bee Eater was there on the 5th and during the month there have been sightings of up to three Roseate Terns on odd days plus an unexpected Arctic Skua on the 17th.

PLANTS

FRI 09 JULY

A walk from Havant to the South Moors this morning gave me an unexciting addition to my flowering list with Knotgrass but it also gave me some more interesting finds if not first flowerings. The first of these came beside the stile which takes you from the 'ornamental gardens' into the wild area as you walk south beside the Langbrook stream. On the south side of this stile (in the wild area and with no other examples of it anywhere in the vicinity) a large 'bush' of Goat's Rue was in flower, the first time I have found this plant on mainland Havant. +++

Following the stream path south to the brand new kissing gate at the end of Langstone Mill Lane I was pleased to see a faint hint that Knotted Hedge Parsley has not been eliminated by the building of the new gate (one tiny leaf could be seen among the introduced stones, though in a place where it is likely to be much trodden on). Even more pleasing was to see two or three plants flowering normally in their only remaining natural site where they have a chance of survival. +++

Along the inside of the South Moors sea wall I had a vain look for Slender Hare's-ear among the mass of Sea Couch Grass which has overgrown the area - I will try again as this is an early date for the plant. +++

Along the north pier of the old Hayling Billy line bridge I found flower buds on both Tansy and Golden Samphire (neither anywhere near flowering) +++

Finally I had a quick walk through the 'orchid field' which less than a month ago had over 5,000 flowering Southern Marsh Orchids. Today I had difficulty in finding half a dozen 'dead heads' but in my search I came across one isolated example of what I think may be Parsley Water-dropwort rather than the Corky-fruited species which is 'common' in our area. The things that made it seem different were the wide separation between the flower heads (not the compact umbel of Corky Fruited) and the larger stem leaf with slightly broader leaflets. It also differed in being a single isolated specimen - Corky-fruited tends to appear in clusters of many plants. I hope I can refind it and check the fruits.

WED 07 JULY

Walking the Titchfield Canal Path today Richard Carpenter came on the first Purple Loostripe

in flower. Also newly out there were Hemp Agrimony and Great Willowherb.

TUE 06 JULY

Today Richard Carpenter was in the Botley Woods and found Lesser Centaury in flower - the first time he has found it at this site - along with more Betony. The first find of Lesser Centaury which I heard of this year was made by John Goodspeed on June 19 at Portchester Common, a lovely piece of downland with lots of goodies including the Basil Thyme which I was delighted to discover there on June 15. I mention this as the dreaded 'travellers' broke through a hedge to set up camp on this site last week and there are fears that there may cause serious damage to the wildlife there.

Today John Goodspeed led a walk around the Rowlands Castle corner of Stansted Forest and was especially pleased to find the white flowered version of Common Centaury which is not very uncommon and is just as beautiful as the normal pink colour.

MON 05 JULY

Two good first flowerings found by Richard Carpenter today in the Botley Woods (Whiteley area) were Pepper Saxifrage and Sneezewort. Upright Hedge Parsley was also newly flowering there +++

Today's sunshine found me walking the Warblington Farm fields on the last of our ten Common Bird Census visits for this year's breeding season, and in the marshy SSSI field east of the cemetery I found Wild Celery newly out in the wetland with Spiny Restharrow in full flower on the dry seawall. Along some of the farm tracks Marsh Cudweed had started to open its flowers (only detectable with a lens!), and in the farmyard a few plants of Prickly Lettuce had flowers open. Most interesting to me was to discover that the large colony of plants growing around the rim of the now dried out 'pond' near the western kissing gate of the field immediately west of Nore Barn (beside the main footpath) were all Pale Persicaria despite the great majority of them having pink flowers (very few had the usual pale flowers) - I confirmed this by checking for the tiny glands which were present on the flower stems in varying numbers.

SUN 04 JULY

Christoph Harwood followed his regular nature walk route today from his East Meon home over the hills north of the village, then down past Rookham Copse to return home via green lanes and beside the headwaters of the Meon. Among his plant finds were the first flowerings of Nettle-leaved Bellflower, Corn Spurrey and Wild Angelica. +++

I too took a morning walk around Havant despite rain, finding Traveller's Joy now out along the Hayling Billy Trail and seeing my first examples of Upright Hedge Parsley and Hoary Ragwort flowering in a roadside ditch at Warblington. Coming back along the Emsworth Road into Havant I got out my hand lens to check some plants of Stone Parsley but I could find no flowers open on the tiny developing umbels.

SAT 03 JULY

Today the Havant Wildlife Group took their morning 'field study' walk at Oxenbourne Down, the southern foothill of Butser. Among their finds were Upright Hedge Parsley, Common Valerian, Ploughman's Spikenard, Wild Basil and Hemp Agrimony.

Today's input also brought me Barry Yates' wardens report for June at Rye Harbour. The first of the two things which caught my eye in this was news of Red Hemp Nettle in flower - looking in the Hampshire Flora I see that two of the first records of this lovely plant were in my home area (one at Coulters Dean near Petersfield and the other at Bedenham, south of Fareham), and I gather that the plant can still be found in tilled but unsprayed areas of chalk (both in fields and in places like chalk pits or road cuttings) but I have never come across it nor heard of any recent local finds. +++

The second thing which he mentions is Autumn Hawkbit in flower at an early date. I usually overlook this plant among the thousands of other yellow daisies, and normally do not see it until the end of July or early August, and despite keeping an eye open for the distinctive way in which its involucre tapers into the flower stem I have not seen a single example yet though I have found more Lesser Hawkbit than usual.

INSECTS

FRI 09 JULY

Walking in the Langstone South Moors area this morning Gatekeepers were at last out in force - outnumbering Meadow Browns. Other butterflies seen on a relatively dull morning were both Large and Small White (quite a few of the latter), one Small Skipper, one Red Admiral and a single Marbled White - strangely enough I saw just one in about the same place near the Langbrook Stream on July 6 last summer though I am not aware of a regular colony anywhere nearby, probably both were wind blown from Farlington Marshes or North Hayling. In the South Moors 'orchid field' I also saw a strangely shaped Comma with even narrower fore-wings than usual - when at rest with wings open there was a noticeable gap between the rearedge of the forewing and the front of the rear wing.

The gale force winds of Wednesday (July 7) must have given tree living butterflies a hard time, and at Bentley Wood a party of people in search of Purple Emperors had difficulty in finding any of them, and even more difficulty in seeing Purple Hairstreak though a few of the latter (thought to have emerged yesterday or today) did show in the late afternoon +++ Perhaps the storm was less hard on the butterflies in Botley Woods where Mark Litjens today saw 76 Silver-washed Fritillaries, at least 25 Purple Hairstreak and 2 White-letter Hairstreaks which sat together in a tree top as if mating

THU 08 JULY

James Andrews had a good find today at Old Basing when attempting to lure Clearwings with pheromones. He had no success with the target species but did attract a more exciting relative of theirs - a Lunar Hornet moth. I'm not sure how common this species is but I read that it has a two year larval stage chewing away on wood within the trunk of a Willow Tree before emerging for a brief couple of weeks on the wing disguised as a Hornet.

Another very good find was made recently by Les Stride at the Testwood Lakes - this was a Scarce Chaser dragonfly and Les says he has a photo to prove its identity but he was unable to find it on several visits after the sighting so he assumes it was a stray from a breeding colony somewhere in the lower Test valley or not far afield +++

If such a colony could be found I think it would please a lot of people as the only sites from which I have heard reports of this species last year or this are by the River Stour in Dorset and the River Rother near Pulborough in West Sussex and Coombe Haven near Bexhill in East Sussex. +++

Les says that his specimen was 'fresh male' though I doubt it was newly emerged as the flight period for this species is from late May to late July and this is one of the species in which the emergence of the adult insects after a two year under-water larval stage is synchronised by some mysterious means so that they all appear on the same day.

The hot sunshine last Tuesday (July 6) gave Lawrence Holloway two large and exciting hoverflies. In his home garden at Bognor he saw *Volucella zonaria* and in the West Dean woods north of Chichester he added *V. bombylans* (and saw a Hornet).

Also on July 6 - the day on which the Death's Head Hawkmoth was found in Southampton - a second specimen of this huge moth turned up in Cornwall and a Clouded Yellow butterfly was seen on Portland Bill +++

On the evening of July 6 Russell Wynn at Pennington added four smaller moths to my yearlist with July Highflyer, Festoon, Scallop Shell and Dingy Footman. On the previous night (July 5) he added a Grass Emerald and on July 3 a Lappet moth

WED 07 JULY

Yesterday I put out the bare fact that a Death's Head Hawkmoth had been found on a washing line in Southampton - that was exciting enough but I have since heard more detail which makes the story even more interesting. +++

Monday night was hot and dry and some of the family washing was hung out overnight, then brought indoors on the Tuesday morning to have a final dry in a Tumble-dryer, but as the clothes were being put into the machine faint squeaks could be heard coming from a pair of jogging trousers. Investigating the cause of this squeaking led to the discovery of the moth and probably saved its life. (I believe that both the caterpillar and adult moth of this species can give out quite loud squeaks by squeezing air out through their breathing tubes

(spiracles) when threatened with danger, and I think this is the only moth species to have this ability but I have not been able to confirm this). +++

The other interesting thing that I was told was that the moth looked to be in very fresh condition, and that - coupled with the fact that it did not fly off when the washing was taken off the line, nor when it was being unwrapped in the house - strongly suggest that this could have been an insect that had only just emerged from pupation, was still in the process of drying its wings, and had never flown before. +++

Typically other hawkmoths are often found on walls and fences on this first day of their adult lives - they emerge from the pupa overnight, crawl up the nearest vertical object, dry out their wings, remain motionless through the first day then fly off at high speed as soon as night falls. +++

I am told that the washing was not brought indoors until around 9:30 am and with dawn five hours earlier followed by bright sun from a cloudless sky the 'drying out' operation would have been complete before the moth was moved. This, however, leaves two difficulties - firstly, how did the moth get from the ground to the washing (presumably up a pole supporting the washing line, so were the joggers hanging close to such a pole?), and secondly, was the said pole near to some soil in which the moth could have pupated? I see no difficulty in imagining that the moth could walk some distance from where it emerged from the soil until it 'bumped into' a vertical object, and last year there was a report from Rob Edmunds in Fleet on Oct 11 of a Death's Head Moth caterpillar found burrowing into gravel (maybe a driveway?) in its attempt to pupate - we never heard the end of that story.

TUE 06 JULY

Summer brood Holly Blues were seen today by Andrew Brookes in Portchester east of Fareham and by Richard Carpenter at Hill Head on the coast south of Fareham +++

Also 'fresh out' today seem to have been Green-veined Whites and Small Copper. The Whites were seen at three sites - by Lynn Fomison at Ropley and by Mark Litjens at both Crab Wood near Winchester and Lee Ground Coppice on the southern fringe of the Botley Woods north of Fareham. +++

The Small Copper was seen by Mike Duffy at Stockbridge Down where he also noted 5 fresh looking Brimstone which could mark the emergence of this years generation though that usually does not appear until the end of July or early August. Admittedly no Brimstone sightings have been reported for a week but there was an equally long gap between sightings from June 19 to 27, and when a new brood does emerge there is usually a rash of sightings from several locations rather than just one (and that thought seems also to rule out the Small Copper as being a first - in any case Jim Berry saw one on July 3) +++

Another butterfly species of which I have been expecting to hear for some time (since the first Small Skippers were reported from June 10 onwards) is the Essex Skipper but the first definite report of this species did not come until yesterday (July 5) when Patrick Fleet found a few at Magdalen Hill Down. Hard on the heels of that news Brian Fellows tells me that Martin Harvey of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust came to have a look at Brook Meadow in Emsworth today, finding several Essex Skippers there which may have been present for some time without anyone picking out the black tips of their antennae to separate them from Small Skippers.

Many butterfly enthusiasts have by now made special trips to sites where Purple Emperors are known to appear and, since June 27, they have not been disappointed. Today, however, the tables were reversed and an Emperor made a special expedition to show itself to someone who had never seen one in his life before and was busy at work out of doors (as the person in charge of maintenance on the Goodwood estate - nice work if you can get it!!). The shadow of a large butterfly caught his eye causing him to look up and have a good but brief view of a sunlit Purple Emperor, giving him a lifetime first. +++

Also at Goodwood today were three Hummingbird Hawkmoths, one of them having a rest on bare chalk.

Turning to moths the nights of July 3, 5 and 6 have added ten new species to my yearlist. Starting with the night of July 3 Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John had three new

micros - the Ghost moth, Grey Tortrix and Flax Tortrix. +++

Last night (July 5) Richard Carpenter at Hill Head had a Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing, Peter Hooper at Bishopstoke near Eastleigh had the first Dun-bar (and the first V-Pug of the second generation for this year) while Nick Montegriffo had another specimen of the Dun-bar plus Small Emerald, Double Lobed (whose larvae live in the stems of Reed Canary Grass) and the micro Caloptria pinella. +++

This evening (July 6) gave Richard Carpenter two more firsts in his trap at Hill Head - Fen Wainscot and Lesser Yellow Underwing.

One item of news arriving after my normal Monday cut-off for weekend news reached me today and will I am sure be of interest to many - this was a report of a Death's Head Hawkmoth found by Helen Stuart in Southampton on her garden clothes line. She does not say if it was discovered on some item that had been left hanging on the line overnight from Monday, and I do not know if these long-distance migrant moths only fly at night, but this is not the first time a moth has been found resting on items hanging out to dry. +++

I was slightly surprised to hear of its arrival on a night when the wind, albeit light, was from the north rather than a good south east wind which normally brings cross-channel migrants into this country, and there is always the possibility that the moth was the offspring of a migrant arriving in this year's unprecedented wave of migrants that reached us in February. No Death's Head Hawks were reported to have arrived in February to my knowledge but that by no means precludes the possibility that some did turn up. So far as I know from Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website there has been only one previous find of this species in the UK this year - seen on June 14 near Par on the south coast of Cornwall near St Austell Bay. Last year Steve reported ten occurrences of the species either as moths or caterpillars.

MON 05 JULY

Although the first Purple Hairstreak of the year was seen on June 21 it seems that yesterday (July 4) was the real start of their season with Peter Vaughan estimating that hundreds were on the wing at Bartley Heath. Today Peter Eeles confirmed this with a report of well over 200 seen by him at Pamber Forest. +++

While Peter was at Pamber he photographed a Hornet apparently devouring a large fly which it had just caught and I take this as evidence that hungry young larvae are now needing food in their nests. As I understand it adult Hornets (like all true Wasps) are charming, friendly creatures which live on a diet of nectar and other sweet things, but their larvae are carnivorous and are fed on scraps of meat and it is these feeding habits which differentiate the Wasps from the Bees (which as we know gather pollen for their young). +++

Another piece of evidence that young Hornets are now growing in their nests is the discovery of a Hornet nest in a fallen hollow tree in the Southleigh Forest area. I suspect that a lot more nests will be in the news in the next few weeks as they are easy to spot, either visually or audibly, when a non-stop stream of workers are bringing food for the young to the nest. The foraging workers travel quite long distances and it is likely that we will also be hearing reports of these magnificent insects in urban gardens.

Another very attractive, but much less easy to spot, insect was seen for the first time today by Richard Carpenter in the Whiteley Pastures area of Botley Woods - this is the small, metallic green, dragonfly called *Lestes sponsa* (the Emerald Damselfly).

I am very surprised at the late emergence of Gatekeepers this year. As I have previously reported the first to be seen was reported by Barry Collins from Thorney Island on July 1 and I only heard of the second for the year today - seen this morning in the Warblington Farm fields by Tony Gutteridge. I was also at Warblington this morning (covering a different set of fields to those Tony was in) and between us we saw ten butterfly species including a good show of Small Tortoiseshell, a couple of fresh Comma, a fresh Red Admiral and a worn Painted Lady plus Large and Small Skippers, Meadow Browns and both Large and Small Whites

SAT 03 JULY

Despite a series of torrential showers Mark Litjens found a good show of butterflies at Bentley Wood today, chief among them being a couple of Purple Emperors which did not seek

shelter from the torrential rain - just sat it out on leaves of the oak trees or on the ground, then flew around as if in a courtship chase as soon as the rain stopped and the sun came out. At one point one of the Emperors landed on Mark's jeans before moving to his boots.
+++

It seems from various reports that rain will bring tree-living butterflies like the Purple Emperor or Purple Hairstreak down to the ground and that the few moments after rain has ceased offer a good opportunity to get a close view of one of these beauties while they spread their wings to dry out and regain energy from the sun prior to flying up to the tree tops once more.

Last Thursday (July 1) brought out the first Ruddy Darter of the year, seen by Peter Vaughan at Bartley Heath near Hook in north Hampshire.

OTHER WILDLIFE

TUE 06 JULY

Jim Berry has sent me a good list of fungi seen in an afternoon walk today at the Rowlands Castle corner of Stansted Forest (including the area known as The Sling). *Ganoderma adspersum* could probably have been found on any day of the year but Oyster Mushroom, Honey Fungus and Brick Caps were good finds (there was also an unidentified *Russula* species). +++

The big find of the day, however, was a rarity belonging to the Tooth Fungi group called *Creolophus cirrhatus* (maybe known to some as *Heiricium cirrhatum* or even as *Hydnum cirrhatum*), and while it is one of the commoner species of the Tooth Fungi group I see from Gordon Dickson's 'Fungi of the New Forest' it is most commonly found in October and has never been recorded as early as July, at least in the New Forest prior to 1996. +++

This fungus has been found at least once before in this part of Stansted Forest (on 18 Nov 2001) and while I think it has been refound in the intervening years Gordon Dickson, in an article on Tooth Fungi which he published in *British Wildlife* magazine (August 2000 issue), says that this species hardly ever appears on the same cut Beech log in two consecutive years.

WEEK 27 JUNE 28 - JULY 4

BIRDS

FRI 02 JULY

More news of autumn passage comes from the Isle of Wight today with the first Common Sandpiper back there since the last went north (from Thorness Bay) on May 26. Both the Sandpiper and two Sand Martins were seen today at the Hersey nature reserve at Seaview. +++

Here in Havant I saw my first Grey Wagtail for some time by the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton

THU 01 JULY

When Richard Carpenter saw two Barn Owls out together at Titchfield Haven on June 29 I suggested that maybe one of the young was already on the wing but in today's news on the SOS website I see that the four Barn Owl chicks in the 'public viewing' (by webcam) nest box at Pulborough Brooks were only ringed last week and will not be flying for some time. Another report of two Barn Owls hunting together at Lymington this morning comes from Juliet Gaselee, and while I realise that some Barn Owl families may be well ahead of others in the progress of the young towards fledging, I now incline to the idea that sightings of two Barn Owls out hunting are a sign of both parents being forced to work overtime to gather sufficient food for a nestful of hungry young rather than early flights by youngsters +++

Still with Owls it is usually at this time of year that Little Owls suddenly cease to be elusive and can be seen openly in their territories. Perhaps a first indication of this comes today from Derek Hale on the Isle of Wight - he set out this evening on an Owl hunt and soon found two Little Owls perched openly on poles at 21:30 well before dark.

Yesterday (June 30) brought the first ever Little Bunting to the Isle of Wight where it was found in a ringer's trap in the Haseley area south of Newport (presumably leaving little doubt

about its identification - though I was amused by something I read in the BTO News which arrived yesterday suggesting that a future database of all ringed birds could help to correct mis-identification of e.g. Willow Warbler for Chiffchaff by giving the ringer instant displays of the known history of each ring number. Before I read that I thought that all ringers were perfect and never made misidentifications of birds in the hand!)

Another noteworthy sighting on June 30 was of the first autumn Osprey to reach the south coast - at Rye Harbour.. The previous day (June 29) brought the first news of a Honey Buzzard heading south over Pulborough Brooks and of the first Little Ringed Plover back at Pagham Harbour (North Walls) - it was it seems the first of the year at Pagham as I can see no spring records there. +++

Another two Little Ringed Plover and a Common Sandpiper turned up at the Lymington Marshes on June 27 (first of the autumn for that site)

Finally for today Ron King passes on news of a second Quail in Hampshire this summer following on the news of one at Old Winchester Hill in yesterday's notes below. In fact this one, heard at Becket's Down on the Wayfarer's Walk route where it passes north west of Chilton Candover (south of Basingstoke), was the first in Hampshire as it was first heard on June 26. There may in fact be three Quail in Hampshire as on June 27 there was another pager report of one roughly 500 metres east of the first position, but I suspect this was the same bird moving around in search of company!

WED 30 JUNE

This seems unlikely to be a Quail year, but that makes it all the more exciting for those few who hear the whiplash call coming from an invisible and apparently highly mobile bird. Normally that call is heard during an evening outing but today Mike Duffy heard one in a setaside field near the ancient fort at Old Winchester Hill during the heat of the day when he was butterfly watching. +++

This is only the seventh Quail I have heard of this summer - the first was at Seaford near Beachy Head on June 2 and the second was at Titchfield Haven on June 5. June 12 brought one to Martin Down in Hampshire and one to the Powdermill Reservoir area north of Hastings in Sussex, and on the following day one was heard on the downs behind Lancing (Worthing) where two were detected on June 16 - I have heard of none since then until today.

The list of shore birds returning after the breeding season gets two more ticks today. At the top of Southampton Water Paul Winter saw five Yellow-legged Gulls where the late summer flock built to a peak of 169 on 31 July last year, and Whimbrel are reported by Trevor Carpenter (2 at Cams Bay) and Steve Keen (4 flying along the Lymington area shore). +++

The Yellow-legs are not the first to be seen this June - Bob Marchant had an odd one at Hook on June 4 but I have heard of none since. There have been six reports of single Whimbrel spread through June (three at Titchfield Haven, one at Hook and one each in Langstone and Chichester Harbours) but I suspect they were summering birds.

TUE 29 JUNE

A daytime walk along the Canal Path at Titchfield Haven today gave Richard Carpenter sight of two Barn Owls out hunting - during May and June I have seen eight reports of single birds being seen there but this is the first time two have been seen, making me wonder if one of this year's young birds was getting a bit of flying experience? +++

During the same walk Richard saw a Hobby and heard a Grasshopper Warbler (the fourteenth report of this species from the Haven this year and the sixth since the beginning of May - maybe there will soon be an official announcement of breeding there)

Brian Fellows went to Baffins Pond today and found that the Baffins Gang is not a thing of the past - six Barnacle Geese and the hybrid Bar-head were there but not the Snow Goose which has not been seen by anyone since May 17. He was also, I think, pleased to see that the farmyard Embden Goose (which has been idling its life away at the pond for years) still has five goslings in tow after mating with a Canada Goose (three goslings are white and take after her, two are yellow and get it from him). The total of Canada Geese spending their flightless moult period there is only 140 - Brian says this is a more normal figure for

this pond that the high total of 273 there in June last year.

At the Hayling Oyster Beds Ian Julian found around 100 rather nervous Little Terns back on the nest island from which the majority of them were evicted by the great storm of June 23. As John Goodspeed could only find half a dozen there on June 26 and as Ian today saw the whole flock regularly taking off and showing no attachment to nests I very much doubt there will be further attempts at breeding this year.

Over in Southsea Matt Coumbe had a hint of better news when he drove along St Andrews Road (going north from Elm Grove at the east end of that major shopping street) and saw 20 or so Swifts weaving among the house tops. Although I don't know the area well I think there are a lot of large Victorian houses around there which could well provide nest sites for Swifts - if anyone can confirm this I would like to hear from them.

MON 28 JUNE

Following the flight of a single juvenile Sand Martin south over the Isle of Wight last Friday five more Sand Martins were seen today by Richard Carpenter at Hook/Warsash. +++

Here at Langstone the first flocks of Redshank and Lapwing were on the saltings in the evening - at least 16 Redshank and 10 Lapwing. I was also pleased to see the Swan pair from Langstone pond out on the sea with all six cygnets. +++

Later in the evening the Havant Wildlife Group abandoned their Monday evening classroom for a walk in Havant Thicket where they heard at least two Nightjar and saw three Woodcock

More autumn passage waders were at Pulborough Brooks today. The warden, Peter Hughes, reported the presence of 5 Green Sandpipers, 50 Lapwing and one or more Greenshank. Also present was an early returning Egret (last year they were not back until July 18 after leaving in April - as they did again this year) and what Pete Hughes describes as that 'leucistic Black-headed Gull' - a description (though no doubt technically correct as no one has seen the bird to have pink eyes and thus be a true albino) that seems to downgrade its status from the 'startling white' described by others but for the moment I am assuming there is only one such bird in our area and this is the same one that has been reported from various places between Lymington marshes and Pulborough Brooks since May 1, the latest sightings being at Pulborough on June 9, then at Portsmouth railway station on June 23, and now back at Pulborough today. +++

One other sighting of interest comes from the Isle of Wight where Derek Hale reports a White Wagtail at Bembridge. I have always thought it strange that we get lots of reports of White Wagtails in the spring but very few in autumn - the most likely reason for this is that the birds are difficult to separate from Pied Wagtails after they have started to moult in the autumn, but this year with autumn passage apparently starting earlier than usual maybe this bird has turned up before starting to moult.

SUN 27 JUNE

A substantial flock of 44 Redshank were at Cams Bay on Fareham Creek today, seen by Trevor Carpenter who says that he does not normally expect to see any in June (though last year 38 were back there by July 3 and 52 on July 5 so they are not all that early) +++ These were by no means the first Redshank to return to our area as John Goodspeed had a good half dozen at the Hayling Oysterbeds yesterday and I am pretty sure that Barry Collins high tide count of 68 at the Thorney Deeps on June 17 included some early returnees. Also at the Oysterbeds yesterday were around 5 Turnstone, and while they could be birds that have remained in Langstone Harbour through the breeding season I think they too were early passage birds - last summer passage did not start here until July 15.

SAT 26 JUNE

Paul Bennett, assistant warden at Pagham Harbour, reports .. '1 Marsh Warbler singing in the visitor centre car park most of the morning and into the afternoon.' Unfortunately this bird seems to have been a one day wonder and I have heard no second opinion on its identity but I well remember the Pagham bird of July 1999 which, after being acclaimed as a Marsh Warbler, was subsequently down-graded to a "mega-mimetic Reed Warbler". +++ Another unusual bird vocalist heard today by Derek Hale in Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of

Wight was a hooting Long-eared Owl. I say unusual as I was under the impression that these birds were normally silent and were only likely to be heard in the early spring (but things may be different on the Isle of Wight where Tawny Owls do not exist and Long-eared are the normal woodland owl). +++

Going back to Sussex James Havers offers more evidence for early autumn passage with a sighting of 6 male Pochard on Ifield Mill Pond at Crawley. As a few Pochard do breed in Sussex they may not have travelled far... +++

At the east end of Sussex Cliff Dean reports a single Ruddy duckling at Pett Pools near Hastings (actually seen on June 27), and at Rustington on the Worthing shore Peter Bateup saw an immature Little Gull, probably a storm driven first year bird though Peter describes it as a juvenile (but would one hatched this year have already flown here from Denmark or further east - or alternatively do they now breed closer to southern England?) +++

Here in Hampshire Trevor Carpenter expressed surprise at seeing a female Scoter off Hook/Warsash this evening. While it certainly was an unusual bird for the time of year it seems that large numbers of Scoter continue to be seen in the channel through the summer in most years (this summer there were 73 off St Catherine's Point on May 31 and 58 seen from there on June 4 with 10 more seen from Milford on Sea on June 24, and last summer 56 were off Selsey Bill on June 4 and another 40 on June 14) What's more 7 Scoter were off Titchfield Haven on May 31 and 3 were seen there on June 4 this year with 9 there on June 13 last summer and 8 on July 2. When I looked at these figures I began to wonder if they were a reflection of disruption to the traditional life-style of Scoters caused by the arrival of large numbers of wind turbines off the Danish Baltic coast (I remember reading that it was not just the presence of these new monsters and the occasional bird being killed by the blades, but the major disruption to the Scoters was caused by lots of small boats scurrying about to service the turbines in the previously undisturbed shallow waters) but a look at Birds of Hampshire seems to show that it is not new to have the occasional large flocks (up to 200 birds) in our part of the channel or even in the Solent in June.

Yesterday (June 25) Woodlark song could still be heard at Stanley Common (close to Liphook but in Sussex) and also at Bolnore on the outskirts of Haywards Heath +++

On the previous day (June 24) Lawrence Holloway at Aldwick in Bognor wrote in his online diary .. 'Opening the up-and-over garage door this morning, I noted a cock Wren which flew across in front of me. He was carrying a bill-full of nesting material and singing at the same time!' I doubt any more Wrenlets will appear as a result of his efforts as male Wrens are renowned for their efforts in constructing several 'cock nests' in their attempts to seduce a female into using one of them. He may still have an excess of testosterone in his system but I guess the females will be less eager to take on the production of another brood of youngsters! +++

A more uncommon sighting was made by Bob Marchant (plus Tim Edwards and Dave Francis) at Selsey Bill on Thursday morning (June 24) when they picked out two distant Storm Petrels - one was seen to fly west about half a mile out, the other appeared a couple of hours later around a mile offshore. Presumably these were birds that had been blown up channel by the previous day's storm force winds, now making their way back to the open Atlantic or to breeding places in the western isles. +++

Finally a note from Richard Ives who was out in the storm on Wednesday (June 23) and watched six Swifts fly in off the sea at Worthing. He was as surprised to see them out in such weather as I was on hearing a similar report of 20 Swifts coming in from the sea at St Catherine's Point in the same storm (see my notes for June 23)

PLANTS

FRI 02 JULY

With an hour to spare before lunch I set off on my bike to check the Buttonweed site in the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton but when I got there it was the very top of the tide and too deep to wade across the stream to where the plants grow. Nevertheless I headed on

along the Wayfarer's Way path and found Traveller's Joy (or Old Man's Beard) flowering very appropriately beside this long distance path, then saw that the field between Bedhampton Mill Pool and the path I was on (beside the railway) was full of flowering Vervain. +++

Following the stream down to Broadmarsh Slipway I passed my first Hoary Ragwort and Mugwort in flower (I did check that it was showing its brown petals) before finding several upright stems of Hawkweed Oxtongue out. Sadly, just beyond the slipway, I could find no sign of the Lucerne that has been a feature there for years.

WED 30 JUNE

On the Solent shore in the Brownwich area west of Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter today saw Betony in flower for the first time, along with Restharrow (which should be abundant by now - I had a first flower on Hayling on June 4)

SAT 26 JUNE

The Havant Wildlife Group took a trip to the New Forest today and found Wild Gladiolus in flower in the Denny Wood area after crossing the low lying boggy areas in which Bog Asphodel, Bog Pimpernel and Lousewort were in flower. +++

Less exciting news comes from East Sussex where a party of birders visiting Rye Harbour found the masses of red and white valerian which had looked glorious at the start of the week were brown and withered after Wednesday's storm had blasted them with salt. Cliff Dean at nearby Pett also comments on the ugly look of the coastal vegetation just as Ian Julian did here at the Hayling Oysterbeds.

INSECTS

FRI 02 JULY

I have little news for today other than that a Common Darter was out at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight and that Mark Litjens found 63 Silver Washed Fritillary with 8 White Admirals, 40 Ringlets and 6 Commas amongst other butterflies in the Botley Woods before a thunderstorm broke (no news of whether Mark got wet). +++

Another count of 8 White Admirals was made yesterday in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth, and a message today from Andy Brook (who maintains an internet Woodland Diary reflecting all aspects of wildlife in this part of the Southleigh Forest) says .. 'There are now many sightings of White Admirals in Hollybank, and it seems at this stage, that this is the best year yet for them, at least over the last five years in Hollybank. Is this a trend across the county I wonder?' +++

I am in no position to give an authoritative answer to that question but from the reports that I have seen on the internet so far I can say that the season started a few days earlier than it did last year, that records continue to pour in from all over the county with most of the best sites giving higher counts this year than last. +++

The first report I heard of for this year came from Colin Baker at Pamber Forest on June 13 compared to a first date of June 17 last year according to the Hampshire Butterfly Report (HBR), and June peak counts from Pamber were 26 this year against 17 last year. Other 2004/2003 peak comparisons for June are of 30 / 14 in Walters Copse on the Isle of Wight, 8 / 2 in Botley Woods, 15 / 3 in Huntbourn Wood near Denmead but 9 / 13 for Bentley Wood to show that there are exceptions. +++

Two other comments are, first, that Matthew Oates in the 2003 HBR describes last year as the best White Admiral season in the county since 1996 and, second, that 2003 produced an uncommon second brood of the butterflies in the autumn. My fear was that the second brood would have diminished the number of butterflies emerging in 2004 since each one that emerged in the autumn was one less to come out next spring, and with relatively few of them flying in the autumn their chances of mating and producing replacements to emerge this spring were not good. +++

Matthew Oates says that the key to White Admiral success is the weather during June, and while we have had a few days of cloud and rain we have had twice as many days of clear skies - the temperatures have been consistently high and there has been no lengthy period of bad weather this June

THU 01 JULY

Today, later than expected, brought the first report of a Gatekeeper from Barry Collins on Thorney Island. Maybe there was also one out here in Havant as while I was having lunch I had a brief glimpse of what might have been one settle in a sunny part of the grass on my lawn (where I expect to see up to a dozen Gatekeepers when the season gets under way). By the time I got outside there was no sign of it, and with high winds it could have been a Meadow Brown blown from afar (or even a Speckled Wood though I think I would have recognised that from my brief sighting). +++

Among several other butterfly reports for today I will mention that when Peter Eeles was at Bentley Wood (on the Wiltshire border, far from the Alice Holt Forest on the Surrey border of Hampshire) he not only saw a male Purple Emperor but also noted that the log book there shows that the Emperors emerged there on the same day as they did at Alice Holt - June 27. On Peter's personal sightings list today were 31 Silver-washed Fritillaries, 7 White Admirals and 6 Commas.

The evening of June 29 brought three more first of year moths plus one first of a new brood - a Herald taken by Barry Collins in Havant more than a month after what was presumably the last of the overwintering generation was trapped at Titchfield Haven on May 25. The first of year moths were a Beautiful Hook-tip taken by Russell Wynn at Pennington and two micros taken by Barry Collins (*Agapeta zoegana* and *Trachycera marmorea*). +++

In addition to these firsts Barry had several good seconds - a Kent Black Arches just one night after Russell Wynn had the first, a Brown-tail two nights after Russell, a Clay which Mike Wall had in Basingstoke on June 25 and a Common Footman which Russell had on June 24.

The final item for today's news comes from Colin Allen in the New Forest on the evening of June 29 where he watched five Hobbies and a Kestrel catching Summer Chafers. This is the first explicit mention of Summer Chafers but I guess they have been on the wing un-reported before this date.

WED 30 JUNE

The peak count of Glow-worms in Havant Thicket that I am aware of was 87 in July 1999 (following a count of 86 in 1998) but since the turn of the century I have heard of no counts anywhere near these numbers (either here or elsewhere - I think the highest figure in my database is of 38 on Goodwood Trundle in 2001). These figures are of course just casual reports and do not necessarily tell us that Glow-worm numbers have crashed but they do suggest that there is cause for concern. Although we are not yet into the peak season for them (usually the first half of July) a count of just four made by John Goodspeed during a Nightjar survey visit to the Thicket this evening is not encouraging (though John did not go out of his way to search for them - in the past I have found them to be very widespread requiring a long walk to get a good count)

TUE 29 JUNE

This evening Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John (north of Basingstoke) once more clocked up a very wide range of moths in his trap (395 moths of 94 species), 24 of the species being new to my yearlist. Only five of these were macros - Yellow-tail, Leopard Moth, Brown Scallop, Minor Shoulder-knot and Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing. Of the nineteen micros one at least was a national rarity called *Ethmia dodeca*, and of the others two at least are not strictly firsts for the year as Thistle Ermine was seen by myself at Northney on Hayling Island last Sunday (June 27) though at the time I did not know it had this English name and only recorded it as *Myelois cribrella*, and the European Corn-borer has appeared on Steve Nash's national website with finds by Steve in Oxfordshire on June 8 and by P.Harris at Weymouth on June 26. Of the others three Tortrix moths have English names (Plum, Red-barred and Variegated Golden Tortrix) and there is also a Bramble-shoot Moth leaving *Triaxomera parasitella*, *Tinea semifulvella*, *Trachycera suavella*, *Euzophera pinguis*, *Endotricha flammealis*, *Agriphila tristella*, *Crambus perlella*, *Chrysoteuchia culmella*, *Lozotaeniodes formosanus*, *Agapeta hamana*, *Aleimma loeflingiana* and *Eucosma cana* to languish in Latin. +++

Not to be left out Colin Baker had another micro at Odiahm Common - this was *Platyptilia*

pallidactyla (perhaps that should have the English name of the Pale Fingered Platypus moth?)

Turning to butterflies seen today Robin Pottinger of Southbourne (near Emsworth) offers a ray of sunshine with a Clouded Yellow in his garden, and at the Portsmouth Grammar School Playing Fields at Hilsea in Portsmouth James Wheeldon had what may have been the first (very early) summer Peacock though he does not comment on its freshness or otherwise .. I have not heard of this species being seen since June 4. James was more impressed by the unusual variety of butterflies on the playing fields today than by the Peacock - his list also had a Painted Lady, two Red Admirals, five Small Tortoiseshells, two Marbled Whites, two Speckled Woods and two Large Skippers with five Meadow Browns. Along the Titchfield Canal Path Richard Carpenter came on two impressive beetle species, both Longhorns (*Stangalia maculata* and the Wasp Beetle).

Eleven more Hummingbird Hawkmoth sightings are recorded on Steve Nash's website for the period from June 25 to 28 (most of them in the Scillies or Channel Islands) but it may be of interest that one was in Northumberland and another in Glamorgan.

MON 28 JUNE

Both Mike Duffy in Basing Forest and John Collman at Hazeley Heath were highly delighted today to see an unexpected male Purple Emperor on the wing. Yesterday in Alice Holt Forest Matthew Oates was on the lookout for them and saw a total of 13 males, the first of the year, in what he describes as 'an explosive start' to the Purple Emperor season. John Clark commented that he can vividly remember his earliest Purple Emperor, seen on 24 June 1976, and a check through the Hampshire Butterfly Reports for 1992 to 2003 shows that three years have seen the first out on June 24 but there have been no earlier records. +++

Another good sighting today was by Andrew Brookes who found 15 White Admirals in the Huntbourn Woods to the west of Denmead - Andrew says this is a record count for these private woods which he has been monitoring for several years (I don't think he managed more than 3 there last year).

Marbled Whites are hardly rarities but I was very pleased to find a new colony of them today thanks to a phone call from Sue Drewett who was so surprised at seeing one this morning in her woodland garden (on the southern fringe of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth) that she rang me on the spot. While this individual could have flown/been blown for miles to appear in Sue's garden I thought it worth having a look at the nearest likely upwind site where there might be a colony - a large grassy field on the western edge of the Hollybank Woods only 600 metres from Sue's house. +++

The field is called Spencer's Field, and while the southern end has a housing estate on it I understand that the northern two thirds of the original large field cannot be used for further building though there have been suggestions for using the land as a cemetery. When I visited it last summer there was distinct evidence of unofficial use as a motor cycle circuit but this year it would seem that has not happened and the field is open grassland on poor heathy soil (so not rank with long grass or weeds). In today's sunshine the grass was alive with well over a hundred Meadow Browns and perhaps half that number of Small Skippers, and a walk through the sunny central area of undisturbed grass put up at least 13 Marbled White, some looking very fresh so the total may still increase. +++

While in the field I noticed a couple of Burnet Moths, both of which I tracked down to check their wing tips on which they had the single spot of a Five-spot. There was not much Ragwort in the field but a good part of what there was was covered with Cinnabar moth caterpillars (their parents by now deceased?)

SUN 27 JUNE

Leading a regular 'fourth Sunday of the month' nature walk around Brook Meadow at Emsworth Brian Fellows commented on a good number of 'stunningly beautiful' fresh Commas being out among the hundreds of Meadow Browns. At least one Banded Demoiselle was seen but neither Brian nor anyone else has yet reported seeing a Gatekeeper (the first of these was seen on this day - June 27 - last year in Stansted Forest,

though they did not become a regular sight until July 5) +++

If anyone wants to join Brian for future guided tours of the Brook Meadow site the next one is scheduled to start in the Palmer's Road carpark at 10am on July 25 - there is no charge for the walk but you might be encouraged to fork out £3 for membership of the Brook Meadow Conservation Group as they are so close to achieving this year's membership target of 300 (as of today they have 291 members and are promising a special prize for the 300th member!)

In Botley Woods today Richard Carpenter enjoyed the sight of a Golden Ringed dragonfly, along with a Downy Emerald and 8 Emperors. He also saw Five-spot Burnet there +++ Other moths seen today that are new to my yearlist were Six-belted Clearwing found at Martin Down by Tim Norriss, and Scalloped Oak coming to Russell Wynn's moth trap at Pennington in the evening

At Walters Copse near Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight Ian Pratt found White Admirals seeming to outnumber Meadow Browns (he reports 30+ of each and only 3 Silver Washed Fritillaries) but even more unusual was the sight of a Dormouse out and about in the trees as if it were night time - see my comments on why in my Other Wildlife notes for today.

SAT 26 JUNE

A total of 21 new moths for my yearlist are mentioned in trap reports for this evening and the previous two nights. This evening's haul included a Short-cloaked Moth and a Pyralid called *Orthopygia glaucinalis* taken by Derek Mills at Farnham while Russell Wynn at Pennington had Kent Black Arches and Scarce Footman. +++

Yesterday evening (June 25) brought a Magpie moth to Richard Carpenter at Hill Head and good lists for Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John and for Mike Wall at Chineham (both in the Basingstoke area). +++

Nick's newcomers were Toadflax Pug, Bordered Pug, The Fern and Plain Golden Y plus micros *Phtheochroa rugosana*, *Archips podana*, *Crambus pascuella*, *Ypsolopha sequella* and *Clepsis consimilana*. +++

Mike added Drinker, Clay and micros Barred Fruit-tree Tortrix, *Celypha striana* and two still to be confirmed - Grey Tortrix and Light Grey Tortrix +++

On the evening of June 24 Russell Wynn had the first Common Footman and going back to June 20 I see that James Havers at Crawley estimated that there were 400 Five-spot Burnets out in the Bewbush area near Crawley in Sussex.

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 02 JULY

I have not yet seen a Slow-worm for myself this year and there do not seem to have been many reports of them (I only have six records of them plus two reports of dead ones) but Andy Brook, referring to the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth, tells me that .. 'Sightings of Slow Worms are very high at the moment in the central section, which seems to indicate a healthy population. The Common Lizard is also doing well in one particular 'heap' of old branches and bramble, taking full advantage of the insects and spiders which also co-habit! And there are young present already. (Although being born 'alive' rather than as eggs, they do seem subject to high predation from snakes - but so far the numbers are encouraging, though a greater number of young seem to be born late July and into August. I have a feeling, though, that this will be a good year for their numbers.)' +++

The Lizards do seem to be flourishing and I have a note that Andrew Howard actually saw one out in his Petworth garden as early as Jan 17 while Andy Horton found some 50 of them on Shoreham Fort by the end of March.

SUN 27 JUNE

Ian Pratt went to Walter's Copse near Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight today looking for butterflies in the daytime sunshine and somehow managed to get a lovely natural photo of a Common Dormouse out and about in the trees. Normally Dormice only come out at night and would be fast asleep in the daytime. Ian offers no explanation of why it was out so presumably he did not accidentally disturb it himself so I am left to guess what it was doing and I will go for the idea that this was a female with a hungry litter of new born young in her

nest - maybe she couldn't sleep because they disturbed her, or maybe they were demanding more milk than she could readily supply without going out on a foraging trip to fill her own stomach?

WEEK 26 JUNE 21 - 27

BIRDS

FRI 25 JUNE

A brief note from Val Lowings on Hoslist today says .. 'There was a Golden Plover (full breeding plumage) on the shore at Hill Head at about 11am today'. That's pretty exciting to hear about (and lovely to see) as there have only been 12 June records of Golden Plover in Hampshire, but if we had a bit more information about the distribution of the white separating the golden back from the black belly, the intensity of the black on the bird's face, the length of its legs and the degree of fineness/coarseness of the black 'notches' on its closed wingtips we might have an even more exciting bit of news indicating an American or Pacific Golden Plover. So far as I know there has been only one Hampshire record of Pacific Golden Plover (one at Needs Ore on June 27/28 in 1992) and one June record of an American race bird (at the Lymington marshes from May 20 to June 2 in 1998) though there have been two November records of juveniles of this species here in 1994 and 1999.
+++

More definite news from Val at Titchfield Haven is of the first returning Common Sandpiper there today (following the first back in Sussex on June 23 at Brighton).

On the Isle of Wight today brought the first Sand Martin heading south, seen by Kris Gillam at Sandown. Kris says it was a juvenile and that Sand Martins have only been recorded as breeding on the Isle of Wight once since 1983 (sadly Kris does not say where or when!) so I guess he assumes this was a bird hatched on the mainland and already on its way south.
+++

The very tame first summer Little Gull was still at the Sandown boating lake where it arrived yesterday.

Local news for today comes from Ian Julian at the Hayling Oysterbeds where he again met Jason Crook and heard his estimate that the storm force winds last Wednesday had persuaded around half of the Little Tern pairs to abandon thoughts of nesting there this year (leaving perhaps 17 or 18 pairs at the Oysterbeds and an unknown number on the RSPB Islands). Ian also says that they could not see the Ringed Plover family anywhere, and even if they had moved away from their nest site a thorough search should have found them somewhere as I assume any chicks they have (while they can run about as soon as they are hatched) could not have swum from the island - or could they? (downy ducklings have no problem in swimming). +++

One other snippet of local news from myself is that I saw a pair of adult Shelduck with one juvenile (all three able to fly) on the sea off Conigar Point at Warblington this evening (maybe from a nest across the water at Northney?)

THU 24 JUNE

A first summer Little Gull turned up at the Sandown Canoe Lake today and was very happy to take bread and pose for close up photos - I guess it found the water calmer and the food supply more certain than it has been on the open sea during the previous day's exceptional storm.

Another gull in the news today is the startling 'albino' Black Headed Gull which was circling above Portsmouth and Southsea railway station this evening as Martin Hampton waited for the train to bring him home to Havant. This is the seventh report I have had of what I assume to be a single bird that has been seen since May 1 at Lymington Marshes, Titchfield Haven, Pilsey Island in Chichester Harbour and Pulborough Brooks

The SOS website has news for yesterday (June 23) from Richard Ives at Brighton where he found the first returning Common Sandpiper of autumn and had a look at the Guillemot which Matthew Silk saw in the marina area on June 20 and thought could possibly have been a juvenile Black Guillemot. That suggestion did seem unlikely (I don't think any Black Guillemots nest on any part of the English coast though they breed in Scotland and Ireland)

and Richard confirms that the bird is a normal Guillemot which is not in breeding plumage.
+++

At the Pett Pools on the edge of Rye Bay Cliff Dean was surprised to see a Shelduck with seven newly hatched ducklings at this late date - presumably after a second attempt at breeding?

WED 23 JUNE

I was not expecting any birding news today but it seems that Derek Hale and Chris Meaney braved the rain and storm force winds to have a look at what could be seen from St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight where, between the morning showers, they were rewarded with 8 Manx Shearwaters and around 140 Gannets plus 9 Kittiwakes, 6 Sandwich Terns, 5 Guillemots, 20 Swifts and - among the local residents seen - 2 Fulmars, a female Peregrine, and a Kestrel. I was interested to read of the Swifts as I would not have expected to see them in such weather - I thought they would either have been hiding in their nests or as far from the storm as they could fly (even if that meant flying for a day or so, perhaps down to the Mediterranean)

TUE 22 JUNE

Yesterday Graham Roberts put out the news that all three young Peregrines (all females) have now left their nest on Chichester Cathedral but are still offering good views as they perch with their parents on various parts of the cathedral so now is a good time to take up the offer of free viewing through the telescopes of RSPB volunteers based at the cathedral refectory from 10am to 5pm each day (except Sundays) until July 3. +++

Today Paul James implies that the young Pergrines have also flown from the Sussex Heights nest box in Brighton but I do not know what the breeding success has been there and all Paul says is .. 'Three Peregrines showing well in the vicinity of the nestbox on the north side of Sussex Heights this afternoon.' That could mean three young, two adults and a juv or any other combination including an intruding adult.

The main item on the SOS website today is an interesting note from Owen Mitchell claiming this year's Selsey Bill Pom King title with a mere 35 Skuas although an esitmated 45 were seen at Selsey on Apr 26 (62 at Seaford on that same day) and 136 were seen at Dungeness on May 2 (not to mention the thousands seen streaming past the Scottish islands). Both Richard Prior and Bob Marchant were close runners up and the title (which usually goes to the person with the greatest stamina) went to Owen through the lucky chance that Bob was not present on May 16 when a flock of 25 Poms passed close in while Owen was there (with Pete Gammage and Richard Prior). +++

One extra fact that I learnt from Owen's account of the title fight was that May 2 happened to be Ron ('Chunky') King's 70th birthday which he celebrated at the Bill, generously handing out cake and champagne to all present.

Today brought an Arctic Skua past St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight, seen by Derek Hale. I was under the impression that Skuas vanished from the scene at the end of May to re-appear at the beginning of July but I see that there are one or two June records, one of the more unusual being of two birds seen circling for five minutes over Petersfield Heath Pond, well inland, on June 29 in 2000. The impression that they had lost their bearings was enhanced when they flew off north west towards Wales.

Local news with general implications for birders all along the coast came from Brian Fellows who noticed that an adult Med Gull which he saw on the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth had started to moult and was losing the dramatic black hood on its head. +++

A more commonplace observation was of a male Blackcap in my own garden at Havant. I have heard him singing daily for a couple of months (and he still gives the occasional short burst). What was special was that he was accompanied by three fully plumaged juveniles so well dressed that I thought they might be a harem of females until I saw him feed one of them!

In the notes for yesterday (June 21) Ian Julian told us that he was concerned that neither he nor Jason could see the Ringed Plover which they knew to have hatched one chick from three eggs at the Hayling Oysterbeds but I have since heard from Martin Hampton, who was also at the Oysterbeds on Monday, that he saw the pair of Ringed Plovers fussing over

young chicks so I hope that the reason that Ian did not see the birds was that the other eggs had hatched and the family had immediately moved away from the nest area. +++ Referring to another previous note about House Martins at Stansted House Martin tells me that his report of just three nests was based on a cursory glance while he was visiting the 'Garden Show' in the grounds and was not necessarily a complete count of the nests on the house.

The Titchfield Haven website has just had one of its occasional updates and has news of several recent interesting bird observations there including sightings of Whimbrel, Greenshank, five adult Little Ringed Plovers and four Green Sandpipers plus up to 97 Black-tailed Godwit (on June 19). Other unexpected sightings for this time of year have been of a single Shoveler, one Mandarin, five Teal and nine Gadwall. A Grasshopper Warbler which has been singing at the Haven on at least five days in the past week may well be the same bird which was heard regularly there during April and May after arriving on April 10 - hopefully it has just resumed singing after a period of silence when busy feeding young? +++

Sightings of Greenshank at the Haven on June 16 and and at Pulborough Brooks on June 21 may well, like the Green Sandpiper that are now widespread and numerous, indicate early autumn passage but several sightings of a single Whimbrel at the Haven since the last passage birds left on May 13 seem to show that one has stayed on there.

MON 21 JUNE

Ian Calderwood at Gosport is the first to report a sighting of a juvenile Egret out of the nest. Presumably it came from a nest in the MoD Defence Munitions site on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour and if one is out there may well be others appearing in the harbours from now on.

Ian Julian was at the Hayling Oysterbeds today where he met Jason Crook, and combined info from both of them is that there are 35 Little Tern nests there at the moment (until the high tide of July 4 washes them out again!), five of the nests being on the outer bund walls of the Oysterbeds. A few days ago I heard from our RSPB warden Chris Cockburn - his estimate of the current status of nests on the RSPB Islands in Langstone Harbour adds another 30 Little Tern nests plus those of 57 pairs of Mediterranean Gull (whose chicks are currently flourishing), 171 pairs of Sandwich and 192 pairs of Common Tern (not to mention 4587 pairs of Black-headed Gull).

While out in Havant today I bumped into an old IBM colleague who lives in the Southbourne area east of Emsworth, and in the course of conversation he mentioned that he had seen Red Kites on some half dozen occasions during the past month at various widely scattered locations in south east Hants and south west Sussex, giving a further view from a non-birder of the arrival of Kites in our area. Add to that a sighting of a Red Kite by Tony Gutteridge when on the South Downs Way on Saturday (June 19).

SUN 20 JUNE

Kris Gillam was surprised today to see a Little Egret on the sands in the Shanklin area of the Isle of Wight, well south of the places around the northern coasts of the Island (from Yarmouth to Bembridge) where they are a regular sight. Maybe it was a local bird out on a day trip but it suggests to me that it could have been a bird that had made the trip north over the channel during the night and was having a rest and a snack before finishing its journey. +++

Another bird which raises a question mark in my mind was a Guillemot seen at Brighton today by Matthew Silk who says it was .. 'a very pale Guillemot, maybe even a juv/(winter plumage) Black Guillemot'. Have a look at what I wrote on June 8 about the status of Guillemot as a breeding bird in Sussex and you will see why I am interested in reports of what might be juvenile Guillemots at this time of year! +++

Here in Hampshire Cliff Oakley took his Petersfield Wildlife Group to Noar Hill today and their bird list of 35 species included 6 Turtle Doves (am I right in thinking these are making a minor come back this year?) and two Garden Warblers. Also on their list was a Kestrel, 3 House Martins and a family of 10 Long-tailed Tits

SAT 19 JUNE

Cliff Dean in the Rye area of East Sussex reports the first appearance of a brood of Tufted Ducklings (something that will probably be seen in many other places in the near future). Cliff also reports that Tree Sparrows were easy to see today in the Broad Oak/Udimore area north of Hastings and that he saw two Yellow Wagtails (probably in the valley of the River Brede). Hopefully these Wagtails are birds that have been breeding in the area but not having heard any mention of the species in that area since May 3 I wonder if they may be birds already heading south (and thus a signal to look out for them at other places along the coast)? +++

From the Isle of Wight comes a report (via Kris Gillam) of a Kingfisher at the Brading Marshes where they are unusual at this time of year and that suggests to me that this could be a juvenile from this year's first brood. As I understand it Kingfishers are good parents, having two broods of seven eggs each year and doing their best for the young while they are in the nest. All that changes, however, when the fledglings leave the nest hole and get their first glimpse of the outside world - the parents are said to immediately drive the young away as if they were intruders into the private fishing waters of the parent birds. So without any parental guidance on how to fish and how to avoid the many dangers that confront them, the fledglings set off down stream. Many drown, many starve and many are taken by predators but a few make it to the coast where there is a chance of fishing without being harried by a resident Kingfisher, and at this time of year it is not uncommon to find dead Kingfishers which have flown into windows, but presumably some of the 14 young raised by each adult pair survive and maybe this one at Brading Marshes was one of the lucky ones. It's a pity that the person who saw it did not tell us the colour of its feet to show if it was a juvenile (adults have bright orange feet, juveniles have black feet and also have a tiny white tip to their bills).

Here in Hampshire there was more good news of Turtle Doves with two of them in a Catherington garden during the week, though this was Stephen Harwood's garden which backs onto Catherington Down +++

Another report for today from Tony Gutteridge is of a family group of Marsh Tits seen in the South Harting area.

Yesterday (June 18) brought at least one juvenile Black-headed Gull to the Pilsey Sands area of Chichester Harbour where it was seen by Barry Collins (just one day after Kris Gillam saw the first juvenile away from its nest - see notes for June 17). Goodness knows where it came from! +++

On Thursday (June 17) Barry made a wader count at the Thorney Great Deeps and found a total of 66 Shelduck - maybe a farewell party as most of the adults will be off to Heligoland very soon for their annual moult. 113 Lapwing were also present and I assume these have only just returned to Thorney as I am not aware of any breeding there nowadays although the Thornham Marshes should be suitable for them. Maybe some of the 68 Redshank had stayed to nest on Thorney, but recent Sussex bird reports indicate that it is unlikely that more than 20 pairs nested so I guess some of this 68 were autumn returnees. A group of 12 Canada Geese may have been birds that nested on the island plus their offspring, and maybe they will stay there through the moult period (a wise decision if they do, as if I were a Canada Goose I would not choose to join the shabby and smelly crowds of moulting birds at Baffins Pond or the IBM Lake!)

I went to the IBM Lake at Portsmouth this morning for the monthly WeBS count and found 196 Canada Geese there for their summer moult. Only 12 of these birds were still obviously juveniles (despite wearing adult dress) and still in three family groups. +++

Other birds of some interest were a single Egret, three (maybe 5) Herons, two first year Cormorants and one Great Crested Grebe (no sign of the pair that should have a family), with no Swans at all. Near the water I heard strong song from one Sedge Warbler which Kevin Stouse thinks may have nested here, and weak song from a Reed Bunting.

Unexpected was one Grey Wagtail (a male Pied Wagtail was seen but no family group)

An unexpected piece of news relating to Dartford Warblers comes in a Hoslist message from John Eyre today. He passes on a request for everyone to keep their eyes open for

colour-ringed Dartford Warblers as 250 birds which were colour ringed last year seem to have vanished (no sightings reported since last August) Any sightings should be reported to Giselle Murison at the University of East Anglia, e-mail: g.murison@uea.ac.uk +++
What's more John tells us that Dartford Warblers seem to have such a poor breeding success that it has been suggested that they may be genetically deficient. +++
I have no further details of the reasoning behind this suggestion but I think it relates to studies in Hampshire and Dorset (which is where the ringing took place), and in view of what seemed to be a strong expansion in Dartford Warblers a few years ago I wonder if the birds have recently been hit by some disease?

PLANTS

FRI 25 JUNE

Arriving in the main avenue carpark at Stansted Forest this morning I was intrigued to find two large Caper Spurge plants peeping over the fence on the west side of the carpark, competing with the bracken and brambles. Walking west along the old carriage drive (parallel the the north side of the main avenue), then north up the Broad Avenue before turning east on the Rough Avenue and finally south through the trees, I enjoyed a great display of many common plants - Foxgloves, Enchanter's Nightshade, Lesser Stichwort, Common Centaury, Heath Bedstraw, and a great mass of Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil plus a few plants of Musk Mallow. New for my personal yearlist were Heath Groundsel, Wood Sage, and the lovely Slender St John's Wort (a lot of Hairy St John's Wort was also newly in flower). One plant that I do not recall finding in Stansted Forest before was a single Pyramidal orchid hiding among banks of Marjoram and Fleabane (neither yet in flower) at the extreme north west end of the Rough Avenue +++

In the evening a brief walk at Warblington found the first flowers open on Round-leaved Fluellen in the cemetery. White Stonecrop is flourishing on several old graves at the extreme east end of the cemetery, and around the ephemeral pond in the first field west of Nore Barn Redshank was in full flower

THU 24 JUNE

A short walk around the backstreets and rougher areas of Havant today found many plants of 'bomb site' Buddleia in flower and one plant of Lesser Burdock. Annual Wallrocket, Black Horehound and Small-flowered Cranesbill also went onto my list. Of most interest to me was the discovery, along the north side of Solent Road where it runs past the Tesco store, of many young plants of Black Mustard (already going to seed to prove their identity). There had been some large plants here which were cut down earlier in the year - there is now a lot more than there was before! +++

In the evening I enjoyed a walk around Catherington Down in the company of Stephen Harwood. I had hoped to find a Frog orchid but had no luck with that, nevertheless the sight of the lovely Dropwort plus a good show of Clustered Bellflower, Round-headed Rampion, and Squinancywort, made the visit well worth while. Between the Catherington Lane carpark (opposite the village pond) and the Down itself the Parsonage Field is developing into a rich wildflower meadow after a lot of management care.

TUE 22 JUNE

A phone call from Rosemary Webb today gave me the news that at least a dozen Marsh Helleborines are already in flower (very early) at the Greywell site near the Basingstoke Canal and with them was at least one of the large 'densiflora' marsh forms of the Fragrant Orchid. She has also been to the New Forest and seen Lesser Butterfly orchid, and can confirm that there are several Frog orchids now flowering at Noar Hill (where she has been playing the role of advocate for the beauty and interest of orchids in a film being made by Chris Packham to appear in a BBC TV 'Inside Out' programme this autumn) +++

Tomorrow evening (June 23) Rosemary will be the expert on hand to show you the orchids at Noar Hill if you join the walk advertised in the Wildlife Trust diary (and on the What's New page of this website) as being led by John Goodspeed.

MON 21 JUNE

One welcome new flower seen by myself at Langstone today was Musk Mallow

SUN 20 JUNE

At Noar Hill today the Petersfield Wildlife Group led by Cliff Oakley seem to have been the first to find Frog Orchids in flower but I have no details - just the name on their tick list alongside the Fragrant and Musk orchids, etc

SAT 19 JUNE

The annual count of the Southern Marsh orchids on the Langstone South Moors was made today by members of the Havant Wildlife Group. They found a total of 5561 flowering spikes, which is the highest count since 6763 were found in 1995 (see the figures for the previous ten years in my notes for June 10).

Richard Carpenter was in the Meon valley today at various sites around Droxford and Exton, finding both Rosebay Willowherb and Lesser Burdock newly in flower along with some Great Mullein.

Just one flower was open on each of Great Willowherb and Fleabane when I was at the IBM Portsmouth site this morning. Both these will soon be seen everywhere but you are unlikely to see two rarities which were also out - one was the Hairy Bird's Foot Trefoil still growing on one close mown bank (it could not survive without the mowing) and the other was the Rough Mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*). Both species were most probably introduced to the site as wildflower seed, but have survived here with no special care for 25 years. +++

Masses of pink Centaury and Yellow-wort were flowering and there was an exceptional display of Pyramidal orchids (many thousands) but a surprisingly poor show of Bee orchids (less than 50 and most of those looking small and starved). More worrying was the total absence of *Lathyrus aphaca* (Yellow vetchling) which I did not see today or on my May visit (when it should have been out) and there was no sign of any dead or dying plants today (I see that in 2002 there was a good show of this rapidly disappearing species on Milton Common in June so I may go and have a look there though that report could have been of Meadow Vetchling). +++

I ticked Trailing St John's Wort (which Richard Carpenter saw last Wednesday) and found good displays of Pale St John's Wort as well as Perforate. At the edge of the lake Yellow Loosestrife (the genuine, not the Dotted, species) was flowering and by the canal banks near the site entrance there is a mass of Large Evening Primrose. Less obvious was the mass of Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil which always occurs here. +++

Driving back from the IBM site via the narrow Cow Lane cut through to the Wymering area I stopped to check a mass of bright yellow by the roadside and found it was Creeping Yellow-cress (on corner of Cow Lane and Northharbour Road)

INSECTS

FRI 25 JUNE

Andrew Brookes today visited the Defence Munitions site (on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour at Gosport) where plenty of butterflies were on the wing but the star of the show was a single White-letter Hairstreak. One Ringlet was of interest as the first to be seen at this site where there is plenty of both woodland and open grassland. The grass had 40 Marbled Whites and 11 Small Heath but only 4 Common Blues. Three Small Tortoiseshells and one Painted Lady were also seen. +++

Andrew's White Letter Hairstreak was the first I have heard of locally but in the same batch of emails I had one from Philip Hack who had been at Bentley Wood on June 20 and had seen one there .. 'in the usual Wych Elm tree(s) near the Ralph Whitlock seat.'

Dark Green Fritillaries were seen today by Tim Norriss at Martin Down and by Alan Thornbury at Stockbridge Down (5 seen there) while Lynn Fomison passes on news from Linda Broad who had one in her Upham garden (west of Bishops Waltham - the butterfly may have come from Stephen's Castle Down in that area?). Linda also had a Hummingbird Hawkmoth and 11 Tortoiseshells while Tim at Martin Down saw both White Admiral and Silver Washed Fritillary but was mainly interested in deceiving poor innocent Clearwings about his sexual intentions toward them. +++

Alan was more interested in butterflies and at Stockbridge Down he had more than 50 Marbled Whites, 18 Common Blues and two each of Small Copper and Silver Washed

Fritillary. Later he went to Whiteley Pastures near Fareham and clocked up another 18 Silver Washed plus one White Admiral. +++

More woodland butterflies were seen by Peter Eeles at Pamber Forest - 43 Ringlets as well as 26 White Admirals and 12 Silver Washed Fritillaries

This morning I walked west along the 'ornamental drive' (old carriage way) from the main Stansted Forest carpark and soon found one sunlit patch of flowering bramble covered with Meadow Browns having their breakfast. As soon as I stopped to watch them a White Admiral appeared, followed by the first three of at least a dozen Silver-washed Fritillaries which I saw during my walk. Both Large Skipper and Small Tortoiseshell were seen on this bush, and when I walked on it was not long before I had Small Skipper on my list. Turning north up the 'Broad Avenue' I added a second White Admiral, and at the top of the rise, where the Broad Avenue meets the Rough Avenue, I found a very worn Painted Lady. Turning left to the north west end of the Rough Avenue I at last came on a Ringlet to bring my butterfly species count for this outing to eight. +++

After I had got back in my car and driven off homewards I found a half-size instar of a Oak Bush Cricket on my hand, and it is now hopefully finding a new home in my garden. +++

More local butterfly news for today came from Ian Julian on the Hayling Coastal Path just south of the Oysterbeds where he saw 5 Red Admirals (perhaps locally hatched?) as well as 4 Tortoiseshells and 4 Green-Veined Whites (the latter maybe an early emergence of the summer brood that normally appears in July?)

News on the HWT website from Graham Dennis, warden of the Pamber Forest nature reserve, is of the first Silver Washed Fritillary and the first Ringlet for the site both appearing on June 20 - but don't always believe the warden as my database has claims for Silver Washed Fritillary being seen at Pamber on June 13 by Paul Bowyer and Derek Brown, and by Peter Eeles, Peter Vaughan and Colin Baker all on June 19, while both Colin Baker and Peter Vaughan saw Ringlets there on June 19. +++

Graham Dennis does not mention Purple Hairstreaks but Peter Eeles saw two there on June 23.

Finally for today there is a very good moth trap record from Philip Hack at Nursling, just outside Southampton, of a migrant Scarce Bordered Straw taken by his moth trap on June 4, effectively the first equal of the year (equal with one taken in the Scillies that night, but both were preceded by a single record of one at Ferring, part of Worthing in Sussex, back on Feb 11 when all sorts of strange things were blown into this country). +++

Incidentally Philip has sent a note of this moth to me dated June 5 but I see Steve Nash records it for June 4 and I suspect this discrepancy is the result of a difference of opinion over dating moths which come to overnight lights - Steve Nash argues that the proper date to record is that on which the moth was on the wing before entering the trap, not the date on which the trapper woke up and found it! Steve's argument makes sense to me - I am interested in the 'first dates' on which moths started to fly or on which they reached this country and that will generally be the day before they were found in an overnight trap. +++

Since June 4 Steve Nash has only three more records of this species for this summer - singles taken in the Scillies on June 7 and 17 and at Durlston country park on June 8.

TUE 22 JUNE

Although all the news in this entry is for June 21 or earlier it may be less confusing to put it under the date on which it reached me

The top news for June 21 comes from Mike Gibbons who, from his Christchurch garden just east of Bournemouth, watched the first Purple Hairstreak of the summer 'hurtling round the top of a tall oak in the evening sunshine, occasionally landing and basking with it's wings flat out to show a startling purple sheen'. +++

The only other butterfly mentioned on June 21 is a single Painted Lady seen on north Hayling by Martin Hampton along with the first local (Six-spot) Burnet moth +++

Across Langstone harbour, in his garden in the Milton area of Southsea, Ian Thirlwell had a micro moth called Phlyctaenia perlucidalis while in the far off Scilly Isles the Scott tribe recorded Blair's Mocha

More first of year moths seen recently at Bishopstoke (Eastleigh) by Peter Hooper are Pine

Carpet, Swallow-tailed Moth and Barred Red, all of which I have recorded for June 21 although they were actually taken at unspecified dates from June 7 to 21.

I have similarly lumped together ten more Hummingbird Hawkmoth sightings which appear on Steve Nash's national site for dates from June 17 to 21. With them Steve records two more Clouded Yellows on June 17 and one more Striped Hawkmoth on that same day (or night) - none of these were in Hampshire or Sussex but its interesting to know that they are still arriving.

A moth trap was run at Titchfield Haven on June 15 and among the 71 species listed on their website I see there were seven species of Hawkmoth (Privet, Pine, Lime, Eyed, Poplar, Elephant and Small Elephant) as well as six species new to my year list - these were Square-spot Rustic, L-album Wainscot, Cloaked Minor, Common Rustic, Scarce Silver-lines and Gold Spot.

MON 21 JUNE

There can be no doubt now that the summer brood of Small Tortoiseshells is out, and seemingly in good numbers. Although I did not know it when writing my last update the first batch emerged on Thursday June 17 with 23 of them seen by Tony Gutteridge on the Warblington fields. Then on Saturday, when more observers were out, Maurice Pugh saw 20 of them in the Winchester area (12 at Yew Hill and 8 at St Catherine's Hill), Richard Carpenter saw 6 in the Meon Valley and Mike Duffy had 4 in Basing Forest. On Sunday there was just one report of 4 seen at Noar Hill (with 32 Small Heath which are having a great season everywhere), and today Richard Carpenter counted 24 Tortoiseshells along the Titchfield Canal Path (with one Comma).

The only other item that caught my eye today was a report of more than 10 White Admirals in Parkhurst Forest - the first report of them from the Isle of Wight that has reached me.

SUN 20 JUNE

Several Hornets were seen today at Bartley Heath by Peter Vaughan. Can anyone tell me more about the annual timetable of these insects? I know that it is only the queens which overwinter, and that their first task in spring is to build a 'starter home' in which to lay eggs and raise the first workers, but how long is it before the queen can cease to do all the work? Were all the Hornets seen today queens? +++

Also flying at Bartley Heath was a Common Darter - a definite sighting whereas Peter's glimpse of one last Wednesday was only 'probable'. Andy Horton claims the first definite sighting of one for this year, seen by him on the Adur Levels - he gives the date as June 9 and says that it was early but it is possible that this is a slip of the fingers when typing as his email is dated June 19 and that seems the more likely date (and is still the first!)

SAT 19 JUNE

Two new dragonflies were seen today - near Crockford Bridge in the New Forest Maurice Pugh found the tiny Southern Damselfly (it has probably been on the wing for some time but this is the first report I have heard) and in the north of the county Peter Vaughan had the first Keeled Skimmer at Silchester

I have 51 records of Hummingbird Hawkmoth already in my database (starting with one feeding for 10 minutes on plants at the Bassett Lawn Tennis Club in Southampton on Jan 10 and continuing with numerous sightings in each of the following months up to the last entry on June 17 summarising 27 sightings country wide) but it may be of interest to know that Stephen Harwood at Catherington saw two today - one in his garden and the other in his kitchen!

Recent moth records start with a species that I cannot find in any of my books or in my 1979 copy of Bradley and Fletcher - this is named by Richard Carpenter as a Channel Islands Pug and it came to his Hill Head moth trap last night (June 18). +++

Also seen yesterday, on Thorney Island by Barry Collins, was another Clouded Yellow. +++ The evening of June 17 brought two firsts for the year to Russell Wynn's moth trap at Pennington - Peach Blossom and Barred Straw - while on June 16 Russell had the first Dwarf Cream Wave and True Lover's Knot, with a Broom Moth on June 15.

The final item from today's input is news from Juliet Bloss who travelled to North Wales to join in a Butterfly Conservation field trip which saw another moth that is not in my books (a

Large Tabby - perhaps it was not a moth but a cat taking its pick from the moth trap?). More interestingly, as it has implications for what we may be seeing here in Hampshire very soon, they found a local form of Grayling butterfly already on the wing.

The Small Tortoiseshells which overwintered were very active in March this year, and these have usually vanished from the scene before mid-May to leave a gap in sightings until their offspring appear in early July, but this year some Tortoiseshells seem to have lived longer than usual as I have heard of ones and twos being seen on May 31 and June 4, 11, 13 and 16 with another single being seen today on the Isle of Wight. Without seeing how fresh they look it is difficult to form an opinion as to whether they are OAPs or youngsters from an earlier than usual 'baby boom' this year, but I think it is clear that the normal July outburst of youngsters is not yet upon us. +++

Roughly the same can be said about Holly Blues, of which I have heard eight reports of June sightings, the latest being on June 15 and 18 (when Brian Fellows had one in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth). I doubt we will hear of many more until the start of July when I hope for a good show.

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 24 JUNE

When Mike Rafter was at Inchmery Quay (at the mouth of the Beaulieu River) today he saw a large Seal resting on a floating landing stage and wondered if it had been driven inshore by yesterday's storms. Val Lowings responded to this query, saying .. 'A Grey Seal has been using the landing stage on the Beaulieu River to rest on for quite a few months now. It is very tame and does not move when people/boats approach. The RSPCA seal expert has had a look at it and it seems quite healthy. I believe it is tagged, but not with a UK tag, so it is thought to have come from a 'sanctuary' in Europe'. I wonder if by 'some months ago' Val means January of this year when Adrian Martin saw a Grey Seal off the Keyhaven Marshes on Jan 17 - as most of the Seal sightings along the English Channel coast are of Common Seals I noted that Adrian had seen that the one off Keyhaven was big and had a 'long, flat head' (where Common Seals have a round headed, snub nosed look).

SUN 20 JUNE

During a 'work day' for the conservation volunteers of the Brook Meadow group in Emsworth today while some did the hard manual work others carried out a Water Vole survey of which Brian Fellows writes, in his weekly Brook Meadow newsletter .. 'Debi, Pat, David and Rob conducted a Water Vole survey of the River Ems, finding lots of evidence of Water Vole activity including more than 40 burrows, latrines, a grazing area and feeding stations. One vole was sighted near the bend in the river above the North Bridge.'

WEEK 25 JUN 14 - 20

BIRDS

SAT 19 JUNE

I went to the IBM Lake at Portsmouth this morning for the monthly WeBS count and found 196 Canada Geese there for their summer moult. Only 12 of these birds were still obviously juveniles (despite wearing adult dress) and still in three family groups. +++

Other birds of some interest were a single Egret, three (maybe 5) Herons, two first year Cormorants and one Great Crested Grebe (no sign of the pair that should have a family), with no Swans at all. Near the water I heard strong song from one Sedge Warbler which Kevin Stouse thinks may have nested here, and weak song from a Reed Bunting.

Unexpected was one Grey Wagtail (a male Pied Wagtail was seen but no family group) An unexpected piece of news relating to Dartford Warblers comes in a Hoslist message from John Eyre today. He passes on a request for everyone to keep their eyes open for colour-ringed Dartford Warblers as 250 birds which were colour ringed last year seem to have vanished (no sightings reported since last August) Any sightings should be reported to Giselle Murison at the University of East Anglia, e-mail: g.murison@uea.ac.uk +++
What's more John tells us that Dartford Warblers seem to have such a poor breeding success

that it has been suggested that they may be genetically deficient. +++
I have no further details of the reasoning behind this suggestion but I think it relates to studies in Hampshire and Dorset (which is where the ringing took place), and in view of what seemed to be a strong expansion in Dartford Warblers a few years ago I wonder if the birds have recently been hit by some disease?

FRI 18 JUNE

I took a morning walk from central Havant to Budds Farm and back this morning, the most interesting birds being the two Brent which I saw at the mouth of the Langbrook stream (see my comments in the notes for Wed 16 June in connection with Giles Darvill's suggestion of a 'marital pair' at Keyhaven). At Budds Farm Pools I saw three adult Shelduck with one almost full grown juvenile, and just one Mute Swan (no mate or young). Walking back along the South Moors seawall with the tide rising, and nearly full, six Little Egrets were feeding, with just one Common Tern and one Little Tern trying for their share - otherwise the harbour seemed very empty.

Brian Fellows went to Marlpit Lane near Funtington and heard a single Turtle Dove which had not been put off by some ugly fly-tipping and a burnt-out abandoned car on the lane (the open area is hiding some of its wounds under new wild flowers).

THU 17 JUNE

In both the last two summers the first juvenile Black-headed Gulls arrived on the shores of Langstone Harbour long before, so we are assured, any young had left nests on the RSPB islands - leaving us to assume that the ginger juveniles that we saw must have flown a long distance from another gullery. Today we have another example of this long distance travel by young gulls in Kris Gillam's report from Sandown on the Isle of Wight, where - he writes .. 'the first fledged juvenile Black-headed Gull was on the Canoe Lake (a bird which could barely stand let alone fly and completely fearless of man, the nearest colony is 12 miles away)' +++

More juveniles are now out of the nest at Farlington Marshes according to Bob Chapman who reports both Bearded Tit and Cetti's Warbler families. +++

At Warblington today Tony Gutteridge was pleased to see what appeared to be a juvenile Grey Wagtail in the stream where the public path to Emsworth crosses it just east of the church - surprisingly Grey Wagtails have never attempted to set up a territory here in the past but maybe with the expansion of the species this one might be seen again there next spring. +++

Two more youngsters in the news are a couple of Peregrine chicks from what may be the first nest within the city of London. Graham Osborne tells me .. 'You may have seen in the press that Peregrines have bred successfully this year for the first time in central London with two chicks being raised on the the roof of the University of Westminster's Marylebone Campus' In March this year Graham had told me that .. 'As far as I know the nearest succesful breeding to central London has been a pair nesting for the last 4+ years at Battersea Power Station. There was a further unsuccessful breeding attempt in central London last year (maybe the Tate Modern birds) and an unconfirmed breeding report in the Canary Wharf area.'

WED 16 JUNE

I have previously reported that a Quail was heard just inland from Seaford in East Sussex on June 2 and another from the Titchfield Canal path on June 5. Today brings news of at least four more of these birds - on June 12 Tim Norriss heard one on Martin Down and on the same day one was heard by Cliff Dean near the Powdermill reservoir to the north of Hastings. June 13 brought news from Dave Green of one on the downs north of Lancing in the Worthing area and today Richard Ives located two Quails on Steep Down in that area. It seems that there are at least two people who do not share my view that fewer House Martins are breeding at Hampshire sites each year. Both Simon Woolley in Winchester and Andy Broadhurst in Brockenhurst report local increases in their home areas (as did Ali Downs at Four Marks recently - see notes for June 2) but the enthusiasm generated by

their news is balanced by a note today from Martin Hampton saying that when he was at Stansted House on June 13 he saw just three House Martin nests under the eaves of the big house where I can remember expecting around 30 nests each summer (plus a Kestrel nest in a huge ornamental casing at the top of an old lead drain to take water from the roof - I think they too have moved though a pair still hold territory within sight of the house).

A very unexpected note from Giles Darvill appeared on HOSLIST today in which Giles wrote of two Brent Geese seen yesterday at Keyhaven 'behaving like a marital pair'. At first glance this suggested that he saw the pair mating and visions of 2004 as the year in which wild Brent Geese first bred in Britain leapt into my mind. After a moments reflection that seemed unlikely (if only because of the late date) and I began to put other interpretations on this imprecise wording - could it mean that the two were arguing viciously, or totally ignoring one another, or perhaps the male was seen slinking off through a door marked 'Dog House'? I do wish that people who have interesting news to communicate would be more explicit and not assume that readers know what is in the writer's mind! +++

Interestingly two Brent Geese were still at the mouth of the Langbrook stream running down the west side of Langstone village on Friday June 18 - a very late date to be seen there rather than hiding out on the harbour islands - and these two were ignoring one another (he was taking a cold shower in the stream and she was still in the bedroom putting on her make-up, or at least preening at great length.) +++

Going back to Giles Darvill's news from Keyhaven he also mentioned a flock of 15 Little Terns fishing there. As far as I know Little Terns do not breed at any sites between Langstone Harbour and the Chesil Bank at Portland. I'm not sure of my facts here, but if that is true I wonder if these were birds which have had their nests washed out in Langstone Harbour and have given up further attempts this year. While on that subject I hear from Chris Cockburn that he has around 30 pairs of Little Tern still nesting on the islands in Langstone Harbour, but that is an 'as of now' figure - July 4 has a high tide predicted to be as high as that of June 4/5 which submerged the nest island at the Oysterbeds. +++

One other snippet of news for June 15 is of a highly probable Hoopoe sighting near Hurstpierpoint east of the A23 north of Brighton.

In his note of news from Farlington Marshes (re juvenile Bearded Tits etc above) Bob Chapman wrote of the imminent arrival of the first waders on autumn passage. Green Sandpipers have already returned to Titchfield Haven and Rye Harbour (see June 12) and on June 14 Kris Gillam found a post breeding flock of 13 Lapwings with three juveniles back on the Isle of Wight at Haseley Manor on the Newport to Shanklin road. June 14 was the day on which I heard my first Lapwing back on the Langstone shore...

TUE 15 JUNE

This evening I went down to the Mengham Rythe sailing club across the water from Tournbury Wood in south east Hayling and watched the Egrets come to roost there, getting a total of 33 before I left at 21:50 when it was still light enough for a few more late arrivals. With a total of 38 on Thorney on June 11, 31 at Langstone last night and 33 on Hayling this evening we have 102 birds in the Langstone/Chichester Harbour area at those three roosts (plus any that may spend their nights in the Oldpark Wood at Bosham which no one monitors and those that fly out of Langstone Harbour to roost at Horsea Island in Portsmouth Harbour). +++

While there I had the added interest of quite a lot of Heron activity plus the corvids which roost in the same trees as the Egrets. Twice a Sparrowhawk flew across the water and into the wood and later, in the dusk, what appeared to be a much larger raptor appeared low overhead silhouetted against the sky before dropping low enough for me to see it against the trees and discover it was a male Kestrel! Another strangely shaped silhouette with a distinctive flight pattern coming across the water from the wood was a Green Woodpecker.

MON 14 JUNE

I was on the seawall at Langstone before 8:30 in the evening for the mid-month Egret roost count at Wade Court and was soon joined by Jason Crook, and by 10:15pm we had counted 31 Egrets coming in for the night. The only other count I am aware of so far comes from Thorney Island where Barry Collins made his count on June 11 - he had 38 and I

suspect the figure would have been roughly the same this evening as there was no evidence of a sudden increase at Wade Court (as does occasionally happen when birds disturbed at one roost move en masse to another nearby). +++

Egret roost counts are normally at their lowest in the months of April, May and June as birds move away to breeding areas, and the July count should show a considerable increase though I expect to see more birds well before mid-month. One hint of this comes in news from Cliff Dean in the Hastings/Rye area where on June 12 he says .. 'a flock of 5 adult Little Egrets appeared at low level from the south (but where?) and fed, plumes blowing in the breeze, for about 15 minutes before moving off East.' I read that as more than a hint that birds that have been breeding on the continent are now returning across the channel (though as you can see there is no proof of that!). +++

While at Langstone waiting for the Egrets Jason spotted a Hobby heading east along the shoreline, going almost over us at about 100 feet up, and I see that Martin Hampton saw one in central Havant yesterday, flying over the Old Town Hall area. Before Jason arrived I heard one burst of Cetti's Warbler song from the Langstone pond (on which I was told that the Swans still have all six cygnets though I only saw three of them), and after I left Jason not only heard young Tawny Owls in the vicinity but also heard the belling of a Teal on the pond (one or two have been at Titchfield Haven throughout May and I see that there were four there at the beginning of June). I assume this Teal is the first to return to the Langstone area, and another first back was a single Lapwing (heard only - there could have been more than one). +++

A new feature of this evening visit was the arrival of at least three parties of Starlings, each of around 50 birds, intending to spend the night in trees around Langstone pond. +++

A bird that I have not heard in the Langstone/Havant town area for sometime is Nuthatch (the last note I have of one was for Jan 29) but maybe some of the surplus population from the local woods has made its way towards the coast as Martin Hampton heard one in the Old Town Hall carpark in the Billy Line this morning.

SUN 13 JUNE

Very early this morning (around 1am) George Spraggs, in the West Town area of Hayling, heard the unmistakable drawn out screech of a Barn Owl. These lovely birds still breed on Hayling, but not (as far as I know) in the West Town area so I guess this one was having a night out away from its normal hunting area (or maybe having to cast its net wider than usual to keep its young fed at the moment - if so there is a chance of getting a daylight view of one hunting as they do at Titchfield Haven) +++

Perhaps not quite as unexpected was the sound of Willow Warbler song heard at the Amberley Wild Brooks area today. Chiffchaff are still singing strongly and will be for some time to come but Willow Warblers will soon fall silent until that magic day when we hear the quiet voice of one on autumn passage. +++

In the Thames valley and Chilterns Red Kites are now commoner sight than are Buzzards in our area, and with the number of Kites growing each year they are becoming a regular sight in Hampshire skies. Clearly it is wrong to reveal exact locations of sightings which might cause the birds to suffer unwanted attention, and thus to be driven away, but I think everyone has a right to be aware of the progress of their spread and the increased frequency of sightings in Hampshire and West Sussex, so I will continue to pass on reports of sightings in the general terms I have suggested. Last week I heard of two sightings in the Portsmouth area (i.e. within a ten mile radius of the city) and this week two more sightings have reached me from widely separated points with Petersfield and Midhurst as centres for the areas in which they appeared. In one of those areas two Ravens were also seen.

I was up early to visit my BBS square on Harting Down this morning, recording a good selection of expected birds with the bonus of Turtle Dove purring at one point. Several Yellowhammers were singing and I had one Lesser Whitethroat but was disappointed not to see a pair of Stonechat on some isolated bushes where they were based last year and on my earlier visit to this square this year - no doubt that only meant that they had bred

successfully and dispersed.

SAT 12 JUNE

The Titchfield Haven website has just been updated and from it I learn that the first 'autumn night roost' of Swallows could be seen entering the reeds there this evening. Also seen at the Haven today was a single Whimbrel, and yesterday (June 11) saw the return of the first Green Sandpiper - maybe the same bird was there on both June 12 and 13. This return of Green Sandpiper was also noticed at Rye in East Sussex where two were present today (along with at least one Tree Sparrow). +++

Going back to June 5 there was a report of a Quail (presumably heard) from someone on the Canal Path at Titchfield. On that day a Whimbrel was also at the Haven and a count of 68 Black-tailed Godwit was reported there.

In the New Forest Mandarin ducklings were seen today, and locally it seems that Barry Collins has answered Brian Fellows query about the origin of a pair of Swans with 5 young cygnets which appeared 'out of the blue' on the Emsworth town Millpond last Wednesday (June 9). Barry says that a family answering that description hatched in a nest at one of the ponds in the land around the Oyster Quay 'stilt houses' adjacent to Emsworth marina. Barry last saw them in Emsworth Harbour on May 30. +++

Further news on the albino Black-headed Gull comes from Richard Ives who says of the bird seen at Pulborough Brooks that it .. 'was indeed a Black headed Gull but was so leucistic that it was almost pure white save for a dusky throat. Its wings and primaries were snowy which could produce a few headaches for observers if the bird was seen badly or distantly on a sea watch. The bare parts were normal for Black headed. A lovely creature and I am sure that it will be logged wherever it lands.' +++

Loggings of it so far in my database start with a sighting at Lymington Marshes on May 1 by Russell Wynn. On May 14 it was seen at Titchfield Haven by Peter Raby and on May 18 Barry Collins saw it at Pilsey in Chichester Harbour before it was back at Titchfield Haven on May 25. The latest sighting at Pulborough Brooks was on June 9.

PLANTS

SAT 19 JUNE

Just one flower was open on each of Great Willowherb and Fleabane when I was at the IBM Portsmouth site this morning. Both these will soon be seen everywhere but you are unlikely to see two rarities which were also out - one was the Hairy Bird's Foot Trefoil still growing on one close mown bank (it could not survive without the mowing) and the other was the Rough Mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*). Both species were most probably introduced to the site as wildflower seed, but have survived here with no special care for 25 years. +++

Masses of pink Centaury and Yellow-wort were flowering and there was an exceptional display of Pyramidal orchids (many thousands) but a surprisingly poor show of Bee orchids (less than 50 and most of those looking small and starved). More worrying was the total absence of *Lathyrus aphaca* (Yellow vetchling) which I did not see today or on my May visit (when it should have been out) and there was no sign of any dead or dying plants today (I see that in 2002 there was a good show of this rapidly disappearing species on Milton Common in June so I may go and have a look there though that report could have been of Meadow Vetchling). +++

I ticked Trailing St John's Wort (which Richard Carpenter saw last Wednesday) and found good displays of Pale St John's Wort as well as Perforate. At the edge of the lake Yellow Loosestrife (the genuine, not the Dotted, species) was flowering and by the canal banks near the site entrance there is a mass of Large Evening Primrose. Less obvious was the mass of Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil which always occurs here. +++

Driving back from the IBM site via the narrow Cow Lane cut through to the Wymering area I stopped to check a mass of bright yellow by the roadside and found it was Creeping Yellow-cress (on corner of Cow Lane and Northharbour Road)

FRI 18 JUNE

A morning walk from central Havant to the Langstone South Moors started with the sight of a large plant of Smooth Hawksbeard in my own garden. Although I have seen a couple of

early isolated examples of this plant it was clear that today it has started to flower widely, as has Bristly Ox-tongue. A few examples of Perennial Sow-thistle show that they, too, will soon be seen everywhere. Much less common was Small-flowered Cranesbill at a regular site in Juniper Square. +++

Going down beside the Langbrook stream the Mallard Close streamside gardens had Monkey Flower and Skunk Cabbage, and climbing the stile beyond them I was puzzled by a huge vetch type plant (with no flowers yet) growing against the south side of the stile - the large leaves split into a large number of leaflets suggested Crown Vetch but I may be wrong. +++

Climbing the next stile into the cattle track I was pleased to see at least three very large Southern Marsh Orchids in the ditch where I have never seen any before (a sign that the plants are still spreading). Where the narrow cattle track first opens out into grassland I found a very small example of Marsh Ragwort with one flower open and in the normal 'orchid meadow' there is an excellent show of orchids with Jointed Rush in flower and one example of the rayed form of Black Knapweed. +++

By the new path to South Moor Lane lots of Square-stalked Willowherb was starting to flower, and coming back along the seawall I noticed not only incipient flowerheads of Rock Samphire but also a single plant of Sea Kale (I think the first to appear on this northern shore). +++

Turning north beside the Langbrook stream I stopped before going through the first kissing gate and climbed down to the fence of the grazed South Moors where I was pleased to see one or two flowers on Knotted Hedge Parsley. Going through the gate and walking north I passed the original favoured site of the Knotted Hedge Parsley on the raised bank which prevents the stream flooding the moors - it has ceased to appear there since the moors were fenced and the cattle can no longer get onto the footpath to graze the stream bank - the tiny Hedge Parsley cannot compete with the long grass that grows there now. +++

Coming to the end of Mill Lane I found that the home-made stile to the path continuing north had been replaced by yet another metal kissing gate - no doubt convenient for lethargic walkers but in the process of construction one of the two sites at which the Knotted Hedge Parsley was just managing to survive has been destroyed. English Nature 'closed down' the main site for it by fencing to exclude cattle from the footpath (done during the great Foot and Mouth year, perhaps intended to separate cattle and people but also conveniently stopping the public and dog walkers from getting onto the SSSI area), the southern site was then covered with a dump of cut brambles after 'conservation volunteers' had been at work (luckily the landowner, Robert Carrell, reacted and promptly cleared the dumped 'rubbish', hence the flowering of the plant there today), and now the northern site has been permanently destroyed by persons unknown when installing the new kissing gate to replace George Hedley's 'personally signed' (in wet concrete!) environmentally friendly stile. +++

Continuing homeward down Mill Lane I found a mass of Enchanter's Nightshade in flower, and at the end of my walk many Corn Cockles were flowering in the Lymbourn triangle site (as were several huge Spear Thistles which, if not rooted out, will take over the whole of this lovely site). Enchanter's Nightshade was also out today in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth where Brian Fellows found it in a more expected woodland setting.

John Goodspeed tells me that he almost certainly found Lesser Centaury flowering on Portsdown today - the flowers passed the test of having short stalks between the bracts and calyx, but John was surprised at the size of the plants which are usually (but not necessarily) tiny in the case of Lesser Centaury. Stace says that Common Centaury can grow to 50cm tall but Lesser Centaury is usually less than 6cm tall though it can grow to 20cm. He also give the flower stem length (from bract to calyx) as 1mm or less for Common Centaury and as 1 to 4 mm for Lesser. Before making any of these measurements plants of Lesser Centaury normally stand out as having bright red flowers where Common Centaury is pink. +++

In the same note John tells me that Bastard Toadflax was in flower on the hill on June 13.

THU 17 JUNE

I was unable to get out with Tony Gutteridge this morning to walk the Warblington Farm fields but Tony told me afterwards that he had found a better than usual show of Bee Orchids there this morning with 75 large and healthy plants alongside the sliproad coming off the westbound A27 to the A259. (The new A27 and associated sliproads cut into the corner of the original Warblington farm fields so we still monitor the birds on what is left of the site.). Another good roadside site for these orchids is on the elongated triangle of grass between the two carriageways of the old A27 (now the Havant Road) immediately west of the Forty Acres roundabout under the A3M at Bedhampton, and more can be found dotted around the Broadmarsh area.

WED 16 JUNE

During the day Tony and Helen Gutteridge were carrying out a flower survey along the woodland edge of Inholmes Wood north of Stoughton village near the source of the River Ems. They found a good selection of plants in profusion but the one that I was most pleased to hear of was Long-stalked Cranesbill in flower. That site is of course in Sussex but I hope to see the plant flowering in Hampshire when I next visit Old Idsworth Farm.

In the evening I joined the party led by Andrew Powling in the search for flowers on Portsdown and was rewarded with a find of a small but lovely plant I have only seen three or four times in my life before - Basil Thyme. I once saw it near the summit of Butser Hill and have found it a couple of times on Idsworth Down though when I went specifically to look for it on June 6 I could see no trace of it (maybe I was too early). This find was on Portchester Common, growing in the main track about half-way from Skew Road to the exit gate into the setaside fields where we saw Venus' Looking-glass (looking very unimpressive with all its flower close for the night). Another find was the first flowering Agrimony that I have seen or heard of. +++

At the Skew Road/Nelson Lane junction the Field Cow-wheat was not as numerous as it has been in some years but there were two sizeable clusters of the plants, one of them in a new place some way west of the original site (south side of Skew Road, just over the motorway fence some 20 fence posts east of the point at which the fence turns south to follow the curve of the road) - this new site is almost at that bend in the fence. +++

The Small Yellow Foxglove (*Digitalis lutea*) was doing very well and in the peak of condition - you look for this on the steep bank on the north side of Nelson Lane just before it turns north and goes into the trees. +++

In the Fort Nelson carpark Meadow Cranesbill was flowering on one of the banks separating the carpark bays where I do not recall seeing it before but I see that Phil Budd found it there in June 2000. The only other place where this plant might be growing wild on Portsdown is beside Crooked Walk Lane leading down to Southwick from the Nelson Monument area. Another plant which I noted in the carpark area was a mass of Perforated St John's Wort (first of the year) flowering in the set-aside field south of the public grassland.

Richard Carpenter had some good first of year finds in the Botley Woods today, starting with Common Centaury and Greater Birds-foot Trefoil and also including the less conspicuous Lesser Skullcap and Trailing St John's Wort. He also enjoyed Dyer's Greenweed there and I will have to record this as the first of the year as I can find no record of a previous find though I am fairly sure that someone told me of a find in a phone message of which I cannot remember the details

TUE 15 JUNE

Brian Fellows today noticed the Wild Onions in Emsworth were casting off the 'cellophane wrapping' which covers the cluster of bulbils atop their tall stems. I see in Francis Rose's Wildflower Key the Wild Onion is illustrated as having pink flowers among the bulbils but I cannot recall ever seeing any flowers on this plant - I must check a few more of the rather uninteresting 'flower heads'. +++

Brian also found Meadow sweet starting to flower at Brook Meadow as it is in several other places.

MON 14 JUNE

On June 3 I reported Bob Chapman's comments on the Marsh Orchids at Farlington Marshes

in which he suggested that Early Marsh orchids were present as well as Southern Marsh, but at that time I was uncertain if the count of 140 which Bob reported was the total of all the Marsh Orchids in the hayfield or the total of Early Marsh among more Southern. This evening Jason Crook answered this question by telling me that the overall total of Marsh Orchids in that reserve is measured in thousands, so the 140 must refer to the Early Marsh population.

SUN 13 JUNE

Richard Carpenter added a new orchid species to the yearlist today with Musk Orchid at Noar Hill where Field Scabious was also flowering. He also visited Thursley Common in Surrey and found both Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heath in flower with Bogbean in the wet areas - I suspect the latter will have been in flower for some time but this is the first I have heard of it. +++

Another special plant seen today by Derek Mills at Old Winchester Hill was Round-headed Rampion. +++

On Portsdown John Goodspeed came on old friends in the set-aside field between Fort Southwick and Fareham (sometimes called Portchester) Common. Venus' Looking-glass is a rarity which requires the soil to be tilled for it to germinate and flourish, and by 'setting aside' the field lack of cultivation seemed likely to end its reign, however youths with motor-cycles have come to its rescue in recent years, churning up the thin soil with their wheels and digging out holes/building banks to act as jump ramps. The other uncommon plant flowering there is the beautiful deep-red flowered Rough Poppy with its unshaven, globular, seed pods. +++

Another pretty plant, attractive enough to be in several garden collections but sturdy enough to flourish in waste ground, is the Orange Hawkweed (sometimes known as Fox and Cubs). Alan Cokes found it in its wild setting today, beside Tempest Avenue off Hulbert Road in Waterlooville. +++

Alan also found a Bee Orchid but he could not compete with the count of 184 Bee Orchids found today by Barry Collins on Thorney Island where there was also a record display of 697 Pyramidal Orchids (maybe more to come as this is still the start of their season). +++

I also noticed a large number of Pyramidal orchids among literally thousands of Common Spotted on Harting Down this morning. This is an easy site for orchid viewing as they crowd right up to the fence on the east side of the Harting Down carpark - when you go east through the gate from the grass area around the carpark onto the South Downs Way just fork right on one of the tracks through the grassland and you will immediately be among them. +++

A fitting setting for these grassland orchids is now available at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - this is Meadow Barley, though I suggest that if you want to enjoy that you would do better to walk to the very far east end of Thornham Lane on Thorney Island where a great sea of this grass should now be waving in the breeze on Thornham Marshes, with the bonus of walking through banks of Dyers Greenweed before the end of the track (and maybe Common Centaury is also out there by now).

INSECTS

SAT 19 JUNE

The Small Tortoiseshells which overwintered were very active in March this year, and these have usually vanished from the scene before mid-May to leave a gap in sightings until their offspring appear in early July, but this year some Tortoiseshells seem to have lived longer than usual as I have heard of ones and twos being seen on May 31 and June 4, 11, 13 and 16 with another single being seen today on the Isle of Wight. Without seeing how fresh they look it is difficult to form an opinion as to whether they are OAPs or youngsters from an earlier than usual 'baby boom' this year, but I think it is clear that the normal July outburst of youngsters is not yet upon us. +++

Roughly the same can be said about Holly Blues, of which I have heard eight reports of June sightings, the latest being on June 15 and 18 (when Brian Fellows had one in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth). I doubt we will hear of many more until the start of July when I hope

for a good show.

THU 17 JUNE

Jon Stokes was very pleased to find a Blackneck moth in his trap this evening - as far as he knows this is the first to be found in the Portchester area of Fareham (where he lives) for about 30 years but Ian Thirlwell is aware of a more recent 2002 record in nearby Portsmouth. This is a medium sized moth (roughly the same size as the Herald) of an overall reddish buff colour but with a very distinctive jet black front end to its body (everything forward of its front wings) so it is unlikely to have been overlooked, and as its food plant is Tufted Vetch it should not be limited by supplies of that. I see that in 2002 Barry Collins in Havant and Simon Woolley in Winchester each had one about this time of year, though I saw no reports of it last year. +++

Yesterday evening (June 16) at about 7pm Tim Walker by the River Itchen at Winchester saw what must have been a lovely sight of some 15 Scarlet Tiger moths 'dancing' above nettles and sycamore leaves - this species will fly in daylight as well as being attracted to lights overnight. As the species spends something like ten months of each year as a caterpillar, mainly on the underside of leaves, its one month of winged life must be a sort of 'out of body' experience, dancing above the leaves on whose underside it has spent so much time. +++

Orange Moth and Great Oak Beauty are both rare woodland species and Graham Dennis was very pleased when 6 of the former and 4 of the latter came to his moth trap in the Pamber Forest on Tuesday evening (June 15). He also had five examples of another rarity, The Fan-foot. +++

Blotched Emerald seems to have had a good year but I guess I was letting my imagination run away with me when I heard that Jan Schubert (secretary of the Southampton Natural History Society) had found one on the pavement of London Road in the centre of Southampton (alive, but only just). The thought that came to my mind was that this must have been a female celebrating a good year with a shopping trip, and that she had literally 'shopped until she dropped'.

I still don't know if the six Marsh Fritillary butterflies which Ashley Whitlock found on May 27 'in a meadow near Ringwood' were in Hampshire or in Dorset, but today we have definite news that at least one Marsh Fritillary has been seen in Hampshire. This news appears on the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website in the form of an email from an unnamed person who writes .. +++

'This afternoon, 13/6/04, at the Wildlife Trust reserve at Ron Ward's Meadow, Tadley, my husband and I saw 1 Marsh fritillary, 5 Large skipper, 3 Burnet companion, 1 Yellow shell. +++

'The Marsh fritillary was at the bottom of the hill on the western side of the reserve in the strip of acid grassland. It is marked out by tormentil rather than birds foot trefoil. (I visited the reserve at the beginning of May with Reading Natural History Society, and then the acid band could be clearly seen in a river-like pattern from the top of the hill. In May it was marked out by lousewort.) We saw the Marsh fritillary in good light quite close up with binoculars and are in no doubt about its identification. (We have seen Marsh fritillary before at Seven Barrows and Cerne Abbas.) +++

'At the Butterfly Conservation talk in Kingsclere in March, we bought 'The Butterflies of Hampshire', and we note with interest that there are no Marsh fritillary records shown for Tadley.' +++

I suppose that now some spoil sport will come along and say that this record doesn't count as the butterfly was clearly an introduction (not that there is any evidence for that!)

Another report on the HWT website comes from Chris Archbold on the Isle of Wight with good news that on June 8 several of the rare Reddish Buff moths came to a moth trap at Ningwood (a small reserve south of the Newport to Yarmouth road). +++

Chris also tells us that ten Field Crickets could be heard singing on Arreton Down on the evening of June 3 but at widely separated locations on the down which he fears may be too far apart for the females to make contact with the singing males. If this means little to you the story so far (to my very limited knowledge) is that Field Crickets are a species that has

been declining on numbers in recent years and so last year a large number (I think 1200) of them were bred in captivity and, at the end of August 2003, were released on Arreton Down to boost or replace a colony that had existed there. After release the insects will have hopefully found themselves grass tussocks in which to pass the winter, and about now those that have survived the winter will emerge from the burrows they have created and will sing to attract females. +++

Ten singing males does not sound very promising from an introduction of 1200 insects, and coupled with Chris' fears that the insects have spread too far and wide to make contact with one another the outlook does not sound too promising, but we must wait and see.... +++

I think a similar introduction took place on Coates Common in West Sussex a few years ago and I have just two reports of their continuing presence there last summer - on May 29 Lawrence Holloway located some, as did Tony Wilson on July 5 (but only a couple of them heard by Tony whereas on 31 May 2002 Lawrence wrote of a visit to Coates Common that .. 'The heathland was alive with the strident calls of Field Crickets. I tried hard to see one, but was defeated'.

WED 16 JUNE

Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website today carries an impressive list of new records which include a single find of a Death's Head Hawkmoth in Cornwall on June 14, a 'probable, awaiting confirmation' report of a Convolvulus Hawkmoth in Suffolk on June 11, and sixteen reports of Striped Hawkmoth, the first arrival being on June 7. Three of these reports come from Sussex, including one from Sarah Patton at Chichester on June 12, but the most interesting of them was one seen in Somerset attempting to mate with a Small Elephant Hawkmoth. These moths are clearly part of the same invasion that has brought us many Painted Ladies and a few Clouded Yellows, and with them have come at least 27 Humming-bird Hawkmoths that have also been reported between June 7 and 16.

Perhaps the most interesting report from here in Hampshire today was of what may have been the first Common Darter of the year. They normally start to appear in mid-June but Peter Vaughan cannot be sure that the insect which he saw briefly at Bartley Heath in north Hampshire today was one.... Peter did see a Marbled White and two White Admirals at Bartley Heath today, and in the evening I saw two Marbled Whites on Portsdown.

Alan Thornbury travelled to Collard Hill in Somerset (near the town of Street, just south of Glastonbury) today and saw 6 Large Blues - he was told that they started to emerge on June 6 this year and I see that someone who went there in July of 2002 missed them, the last having been seen on July 5 that year. +++

Back in Hampshire Terry Hotten went to Yateley Common today and saw more than 50 Silver-studded Blues, while closer to home Tony Gutteridge found plenty of Ringlets on the wing in Inholmes Wood near Stoughton (close to the source of the River Ems). In Emsworth Brian Fellows found a fresh Comma in the bright orangey colour of a Huchinsoni form specimen.

Turning to moths Richard Carpenter had the first Blue-bordered Carpet of the year at his Hill Head home this evening while Derek Mills at Farnham had a Buff Arches, though Tony Wilson seems to have claimed the first of year for that species with one at Hove in Sussex on the evening of Sunday June 13. +++

Other finds reported today which may be of interest start with a cluster of at least 15 Glow-worms on Harting Down, seen by Tony Gutteridge near the hang glider launch site as he walked back from a Nightjar survey on Beacon Hill to the Harting Down carpark. By day in Emsworth Brian Fellows found a large number of Oedemera nobilis ('Thigh Beetles') filling all the trumpets of a bank of bindweed flowers, and in Hill Head Richard Carpenter found Narcissus flies on the wing for the first time - these are the brown hairy hoverflies also known as Merodon equestris and getting their common name from the fact that their larvae live on Narcissus bulbs and are thus not popular with gardeners.

TUE 15 JUNE

This evening Tim Walker at Winchester took three new moths for the year in his trap - Golden Plusia, Grey Arches and Ringed China-mark. He also had a Large Nutmeg but I see that Nick Montegriffo had one of these as long ago as May 25. +++

Yesterday (June 14) brought four more new moths, three of them taken by Barry Collins. On Thorney Island Barry had two appropriately coastal species - Sand Dart and Shore Wainscot - and at his home in Havant he added Barred Yellow. Derek Mills took the fourth species, a Dot Moth, in Farnham. +++

June 13 added five new moths - in Winchester Tim Walker took Reddish Light Arches, The Fan-foot, and what I have put down in my working list as a 'Tripe-spotted Pug' but I think a letter L has got lost from that one! Also on June 13 Tony Wilson had a Clouded Buff by day in the Ashdown Forest, and back at home in Hove he had the first Buff Arches. +++

Going back to June 12 I see that Tim Norriss was at Martin Down getting Shaded Pug, Brussels Lace and the Lackey moth but I have a feeling that (in the same way that I left the 'L' out of Tripe-spotted Pug) Derek Mills may have accidentally added a zero or even two to Tim's count of Small Elephant Hawkmoths - Derek's website credits him with 700 of them! +++

The final newcomer to my yearlist from the current batch of additions to the Butterfly Conservation website is a Blotched Emerald taken by Robin Worman at Colden Common on June 7, since when Derek Mills, Simon Woolley and Barry Collins have all recorded it as a personal first.

Turning to dragonflies I see that when Tony Wilson was in Ashdown Forest on June 13 he found the first White-legged Damselflies to get a mention here, and when he moved on to Fittleworth (just west of Pulborough) he found the first Club-tailed dragonflies that I have heard of this year (although they probably emerged a good three weeks ago and are now nearing the end of their flight period for this year). One reason for the lack of sightings of this dragonfly is that if you miss their mass emergence from underwater they immediately fly off to woodland where they can easily escape detection for several weeks until they return to the slow-moving streams where they will mate and in the muddy bottoms of which their larvae will spend four whole years before re-surfacing.

Other miscellaneous news in the current batch of input is of a fairly late Holly Blue in Richard Carpenter's garden at Hill Head on June 15 and a note on the SOS website of a 'good number' of Adonis Blues on Malling Down (right outside Lewes on its east side). There are also a couple more reports of Glow-worms at Martin Down and in Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight, though no large numbers of them anywhere so far (Tony Gutteridge's count of 15 on Harting Down is in the lead so far).

While writing these notes I had a phone call from Mike Wearing at his home in the densely populated North End area of Portsmouth, with just a couple of trees in the garden. He had just driven home and was astonished to be greeted with the sight of a rather battered Silver-Washed Fritillary, only the second sighting of this species for the year!

MON 14 JUNE

Today's two major butterfly 'firsts' come from Mike Gibbons (with a single Dark Green Fritillary flying at Martin Down) and from Peter Eeles who counted 71 Silver Studded Blues on Silchester Common in the extreme north of Hampshire - although this is the first report of them they must have been out for several days. +++

Another notable butterfly sighting was made today by Richard Carpenter with his first Marbled White seen at Swanwick on the banks of the River Hamble. Mike Duffy had the 'first of year' for this species with one in Basing Forest yesterday.

James Wheeldon, at Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields in Hilsea, scored a first with Lesser Stag Beetle, and at Swanwick Richard Carpenter added another eye-catching beetle - the yellow striped black longhorn called *Strangalia maculata*. +++

On the subject of beetles more has come in about Stag Beetle predators. From Farnborough Chris Jones writes to say that he knows someone in that area who has a garden shed whose roof is a regular killing ground used by Magpies to enjoy their Stag Beetle 'crab soup', and Mike Wearing tells me that he has seen shattered shards of Stag Beetle carapace all around a Song Thrush snail anvil (out in the open where the remains could not have dropped from a tree above). Although no one has direct proof several people suggest that Little Owls are likely predators of these beetles, and Steve Keen adds both Tawny Owl and domestic cat to the list - he writes .. 'Have found several bits of Stag Beetles over the

last few days in places which would not have Little Owls and probably no other owls. Several years ago found several dozen bits of them over a few days scattered beneath trees I knew to be a roosting site for Tawny Owls, and definitely not one for Little Owls, so have always assumed TOs eat alot of them. Nice easy meal, lots of protein. Also had a very vivid description from one of my customers the other day about how her cat got a male stuck in its throat, antlers up!!' I doubt many cats take them but Mike Wearing suggests that a very likely suspect is the Hedgehog, and another ground based predator that would not scorn them is the Badger.

SUN 13 JUNE

Today marked the opening of the summer season for woodland butterflies with both White Admiral and Silver Washed Fritillary being seen in Pamber Forest (one of each seen by Colin Baker and Derek Brown respectively). +++

Today also brought out the first Marbled White for Mike Duffy in Basing Forest where he also found more than seven Small Skippers. +++

On Thorney Island Barry Collins had both a Clouded Yellow and three Painted Ladies while on the Isle of Wight another Clouded Yellow was seen by Derek Hale on Ventnor Downs. Another summer Comma appeared at Hook in north Hampshire for Peter Vaughan.

The very first Burnet Moths (the commoner Six-spots) were seen at Burkham Home Farm near Alton today by Jonathan Forsyth. Hopefully we will all be seeing them in the near future but I doubt we will be as lucky as Andrew Brookes who was visiting Winchester Cathedral area and walking along the Mill Stream path when he found a female Scarlet Tiger moth still drying her wings. Walking back past the same place a little later he saw that a male had already found her and the two were mating. +++

Moth trapping at Havant in the evening gave Barry Collins a notable first of the year with a Red-necked Footman, and with it was another first - Four-dotted Footman. Also in his haul was a Lobster moth. +++

A potential first that cannot be recorded was seen by Colin Baker in Pamber Forest - he is pretty sure it was a Magpie or a Small Magpie but not certain...

At Thursley Common Richard Carpenter had a dragonfly first with Brilliant Emerald though he does not say if it was a male or female, the male being probably the most eye-catching of all British dragonflies if seen in sunlight.

SAT 12 JUNE

Richard Carpenter's moth trap at Hill Head this evening gave him a small and relatively drab first for the year with Sloe Pug (its larvae eat the Blackthorn flowers) +++

The only other first scored today was for the day flying black Chimney Sweeper moths of which Mke Duffy saw more than 14 on Stockbridge Down. Mike also had a few Painted Ladies at Stockbridge plus two more at Martin Down while Tim Norriss had two more, plus the day's only Clouded Yellow, at Ashford Hill north of Kingsclere in north Hampshire +++

Best moth of the night by far was a Scarce Merveille du Jour taken by John Shillitoe near Wickham in the Meon Valley. Unfortunately Peter Allen at North Gorley in the Avon Valley had trapped the first of these on June 4 but John gets a silver medal for the second of the year. +++

Another good silver medal winner was a Golden Ringed Dragonfly seen by members of an SOS outing at Ambersham Common near Midhurst today. The gold medallist in this case was Mike Gibbons who had one at Sopley in the south of the Avon Valley on May 31.

From the Titchfield Haven website update that has just been made I see that their moth trapping session last week on June 8 produced four first of year records. The species concerned were Riband Wave, Obscure Wainscot, Bordered Sallow and The Snout.

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 18 JUNE

After a lengthy period with no rain a short shower last night seems to have been sufficient to bring up three False Death Cap toadstools in the Hollybank Woods where they were seen today be Brian Fellows. More rain forecast for the weekend and next week could bring other fungal surprises.

MON 14 JUNE

Claire Sambrook emailed me to say .. 'my dog has been swimming with a seal this morning at Southsea' .. and she wonders how common this might be. As far as the presence of the seal is concerned I am not very surprised as, while this will probably be the only sighting of a Seal off Southsea this year, they are present year round along the coast. As to the dog swimming with the seal, I should think that was rather uncommon and possibly quite dangerous for the dog as seals are large and vicious carnivores - swimming with dolphins may work wonders but I would risk my arms or legs by trying to cuddle up to a seal! I recall one seal in Langstone Harbour in recent years that developed a taste for duck and was seen on more than one occasion tossing half eaten Goldeneye and Mergansers in the air after seizing them from below - perhaps it was trying to shake off the feathers before eating the flesh. +++

As far as I know there is still a colony of more than a dozen Common Seals resident in Chichester Harbour where they have been for several years but the fourteen sightings that I have recorded this year in our area before this current one show that they explore the area quite widely. I know of one seen in Pagham Harbour, two off Titchfield Haven and seven sightings in the Lymington area spread out fairly evenly by date between Jan 25 and May 1. In this period I have also heard of two very unusual sightings well inland up rivers. One was in the Hamble seen from Bursledon, another in the Arun close to Pulborough Brooks well north of the Downs. +++

Although it is possible to find the 'long nosed' Grey Seals in the English Channel they prefer the rocky shores of the west country and any sighting hereabouts is very likely to be of a 'round faced' Common Seal (which prefer the sand banks of the North Sea - or the mud flats of our harbours).

One other sighting in the Langstone area that may be of interest is of a Noctule Bat seen by Jason Crook during this evening's dusk vigil for Egret roost counting.

SUN 13 JUNE

So far this year I have only heard of half a dozen sightings of Slow-worms, and have not seen one myself yet (though we usually find them in the long grass of our garden before now - or find their corpses with the characteristic set of pinhole pricks that show were a cat's claws have grabbed one) so I am glad that Christoph Harwood has just found a good specimen in his (cat free) East Meon garden. I hope that the absence of sightings is due more to the lush growth of grass and other vegetation this year than to predation (with both Magpies and Cats high on the list of predators).

Another piece of what I suspect is heavily un-reported news comes from Peter Vaughan at Hook in north Hampshire reporting a pondful of fully formed Froglets.

WEEK 24 JUNE 7 - 13

BIRDS

FRI 11 JUNE

On Wednesday Brian Fellows told us that 71 Canada Geese had recently flown into Baffins Pond to start their summer moult and today Kevin Stouse tells me that at least 50 have arrived at the IBM Lake for the same purpose, giving a total of 84 at Baffins and over 100 at the IBM Lake (where I expect to find at least 175 when I go there on June 19 for the next WeBS count - in June 2003 the count there was 173, and at Baffins it was 273) +++

More welcome news from the IBM site is of a family group of four juvenile Pied Wagtails being seen out of the nest there yesterday. +++

Another bit of good news from the Havant area is that when I had to take my car to a local garage near the Bedhampton level crossing this morning I watched at least three pairs of House Martins busily putting finishing touches to nests on houses north of the West Street/Brockhampton Road junction (with a nearby water/mud supply in the Hermitage stream). To the east of Havant centre the population continues to decline with at least one house that had nests last year having none this year, and at most one pair somewhere in the area, occasionally coming over my garden. +++

Another unexpected sound on my roundabout walk home was a single of burst of Cetti's Warbler song from the dense thickets of blackthorn lining the Hermitage Stream between Barncroft Way and Purbrook Way

More good news of the current Woodlark expansion and the return of these birds to chalk downland sites comes today from Daryl Short who heard one singing over the mid-Hampshire chalk. Earlier this year I commented on hearing one in south east Hampshire and of several reports from just over the Sussex border in that area, and I see that Birds of Hampshire tells us that .. 'during the Atlas Survey of the late 1980s no Woodlark were found breeding on the chalk where there had been a sizeable population in the 1950s'. The Hampshire Bird Reports for 2001 and 2002 indicate a good breeding population on the heaths of north east Hampshire and in the New Forest but do not have any follow up on the remark in the 2000 report which says that two territories were found on chalk in that year (at different sites to Daryl's current find)

WED 09 JUNE

A series of items in the input for today's notes makes me wonder if the silly season is upon us. The first curious story comes from Brian Fellows who went to Baffins Pond in Portsmouth today and found a Canada Goose accompanied by 2 yellow and 3 white goslings plus the apparent origin of the white offspring, a white farmyard Embden or Roman Goose which has been at the pond since August 1999 without making any previous contribution to the sex life of this city pond. +++

Perhaps shocked by such goings on both the Snow Goose and the hybrid Bar-Head Goose have vanished from Baffins and the Barnacle flock (once over 40 strong) is now down to just 5 +++

Outweighing these departures 71 Canada Geese have arrived at the pond, upping the count of adults there from 13 on May 17 to 84 today. This gives added credence to my comment in last Sunday's notes that the 20 Canada Geese seen flying over south Hayling were probably heading for Baffins to spend their moult period there (knowing that Portsmouth City Council have a budget for handing out free and healthy bird food to these 'illegal immigrants'). Brian says that last summer's peak count of Canada Geese at the pond was 273 on June 26

The second silly season item is probably of more interest to serious birders. At Pulborough Brooks today Peter Edmonds was puzzled by a pure white gull with orange-red legs which was seen flying and paddling in shallow water, pecking at the surface. I have no idea what it was but it reminds me that Peter Raby had a startling pure albino Black-headed Gull at Titchfield Haven on May 14 and again on May 25 - maybe its unusual plumage is not popular with the other gulls of its species and the poor thing is condemned to a wandering life, getting the cold shoulder from gulls wherever it turns up?

The third item is merely a puzzle. It again comes from Brian Fellows who today found that a pair of Mute Swans with five newly hatched cygnets had appeared on the Emsworth Town Millpond. Unless the sluice gates have been opened to empty the pond in the past day or so (and I very much doubt it) these baby cygnets could not (unaided) have got into the enclosed water of the millpond other than from a nest somewhere around the periphery of the pond (and there is no obvious hiding place for a nest with a Swan sitting on it for seven weeks). Perhaps someone has transported the whole family from elsewhere (but it would take a brave and determined person to catch and transport the adults with their young, though I am aware that anglers on some fishing waters are very keen to rid their fishing area of Swans which keep getting entangled with lines or swallow hooks with weed). Any answers to this one will be welcome - I suspect the answer is simple and there was a nest hidden somewhere around the edge of the pond (perhaps in the garden of the sailing school buildings or under the decking near the sluice gates?).

Another local item comes from John Goodspeed who was asked to deal with a badly injured crow in a Bedhampton garden. He did the best he could by transporting it to Brent Lodge hospital but my interest in the event was that it was one of the 'white winged black crows' which have been increasing in number hereabouts for over 20 years. I once found one in which the white winged effect was caused by the 'cellophane wrapping' (which encloses

the feather barbs as new feathers grow through the birds skin and which is designed to split and allow the barbs to expand as soon as the feather blade is free of the birds skin) having partially failed to split, but I have never heard of another case of that whereas most of these 'white winged' birds seem to have genuine white pigment (or absence of black pigment) causing the effect, and in the case of John's bird the effect was caused by the pigment.

+++

One point that came up in discussion of the reason for this 'evolutionary change' was that (a) it seems to be more common with coastal rather than inland birds (and is said to have originated in the Channel Islands before being seen in England) and (b) with the increasing number of Crows more and more of the coastal birds have taken to feeding on the shore rather than in fields. This could point to a dietary problem (too much salt with their crisps!). Finally for today John Chapman was in Havant Thicket tonight enjoying the roding of five or more Woodcock and hearing at least three Nightjar churring, when he saw flames in the dry undergrowth and (with no mobile phone in his pocket) he gallantly run a mile or so to sound the alarm. Sadly this seems to be a very regular call on the local fire brigade, and the fires are almost certainly caused by local youths (perhaps unintentionally as they light camp fires in inappropriate places, but more likely with malicious intent). +++

Had he not had to run from the scene John might well have been the first to report a local Glow-worm sighting as the first sighting I have heard of for this year came from Paul Bennett at Ambersham Common near Midhurst last night).

TUE 08 JUNE

Maybe there has been a late arrival of Turtle Doves as today Richard Carpenter heard five of them purring in the Botley Woods and John Shillitoe, carrying out an RSPB survey at Old Idsworth Farm north of Rowlands Castle, possibly heard three - one for sure in a place where he heard one on his previous visit, so presumably an established bird. Equally exciting news was of a Spotted Flycatcher seen near the farm. +++

More good news of farmland birds comes from George Spraggs who not only heard at least four Skylarks singing over the cereal crops in the West Lane fields on Hayling Island but also saw several of the birds carrying food down to (hopefully) young in the nest. Incidentally last time I drove down West Lane I noticed a substantial amount of the cereal being grown was Oats - I think most farmers have given up growing Oats in favour of Barley or Wheat in recent years and the thought crosses my mind that Oats may be more bird friendly both in being a less dense crop for larks to penetrate when it is growing and also in possibly leaving more grain on the ground when the crop is harvested. Can anyone comment on either of those ideas? +++

Another item of good news comes from the Warnham Mill Pond nature reserve at Horsham where volunteers built and launched a new Tern raft last March. Today, for the first time since the launch, a pair of Common Terns were seen to land on it and what's more to mate. +++

That item reminds me that I have heard no news at all this summer of the presence of breeding Common Terns on the New Lake nature reserve at Chichester gravel pits. The last thing I heard was that there were up to 11 Common Terns over Ivy Lake in April this year, so there are real fears that the nesting colony on New Lake has totally abandoned it (so far as I know none nested there last year after some disaster killed 59 chicks in June 2002)

Quite a lot of birds sing an evening chorus at this time of year, Robin and Song Thrush prominent among them, but I was a little surprised to hear that Steve Keen had heard Dartford Warbler singing 'well into dusk' as he was carrying out a Nightjar survey in Hampshire, and this evening I see that Paul Bennett heard others singing on Ambersham Common near Midhurst between 21:15 and 22:30.

Malcolm Dixon returned home last night (he gives no clue where his home may be) to find a male Great Spotted Woodpecker lying dead on the lawn below some windows into which it had probably flown and killed itself (perhaps fleeing from a Sparrowhawk?). This morning the female of the pair was working hard to feed one juvenile - the young bird was clinging to the 'trunk' of the bird table while the female collected bits of nut from the feeder above and

ferried them down to the young bird.

A note on the SOS website saying that Paul James had seen a Guillemot within the east arm of Brighton marina on June 6 caused me to check how unusual that might be in June. In doing so I discovered two things. Firstly, a sighting in June is not unusual - the low point in their numbers comes around August. Secondly, and much more interesting (possibly with implications for this particular bird), when I checked on whether Guillemots breed on the Sussex cliffs I read that the last official record of breeding was of a pair on Beachy Head in 1904 (perhaps a centenary wake for their demise is called for!) but despite the official status of this species as 'formerly bred' I see that (a) two Guillemots were seen to attempt to land on the chalk face of Seaford Head on 9 June 1999, (b) an adult was seen with a small chick two miles off Beachy Head on 8 July 1999, and (c) a downy juvenile was seen on the sea off the Southwick area of Brighton on 26 June 2001

While writing these notes I was phoned by a reporter from the Portsmouth NEWS to get my reaction to what was in an advance copy of the Government Inspector's report on the new Havant Borough Plan. Although I am sure this is not the end of the story, and the Inspector's report is not a comment on a specific development proposal for the Broadmarsh site (no formal proposal has yet been submitted), it would seem that the government is officially opposed to the concept of development on the shores of Langstone Harbour on environmental grounds.

MON 07 JUNE

Sanderling are the last of the wader species to leave their winter quarters and make their dash for arctic breeding grounds that are only now unfreezing enough to generate the rich plant and insect life needed by the waders as food for themselves and their young. Today Val Lowings saw 17 Sanderling on the west solent shore but Pilsey Island in Chichester Harbour provides a better gauge of the scale of the movement, and Barry Collins tells me that he found 44 Sanderling there on June 1, 52 on June 4 and 83 present yesterday (June 6). I doubt that the birds that were there on June 1 are in yesterday's count and I think these figures are best regarded as readings on a river water depth gauge - the river never stops flowing but the depth increases as more and more water comes down stream from where it has fallen as rain (in this case the input is flocks of Sanderling coming from the many places where they have been wintering). They are also probably a very poor indicator of the true number of birds heading north, since the return flow in autumn is likely to produce counts of 400 or more at Pilsey.

Thankfully there is no need for birds breeding in Hampshire to wait until June for the ice to melt and allow breeding to begin (that may not be true in fifty years when the Gulf Stream has stopped flowing!) but one breeding species that has only hit the headlines this weekend is Pochard with several broods of youngsters seen along the River Test by Mike Rafter and David Thelwell. I suspect that most birders who do not live beside Hampshire's rivers still regard Pochard as a winter visitor species and it may surprise some to know that breeding of this species was first confirmed in 1935 (that was on the Test near Romsey), and that Birds of Hampshire estimated that the number of breeding pairs in the county in 1991 may have been 50 (giving Hampshire 10% of the UK's total breeding population of this species). Looking at recent annual reports it appears that the breeding population has diminished to perhaps 20 pairs but without a comprehensive survey dedicated to searching out these birds (many of which may breed on stretches of private water that are normally inaccessible to birders) the population must remain under counted. +++

As well as the Pochard ducklings David Thelwell noticed his first juvenile Herons on the Test well over a month after the first juveniles appeared at Bembridge Pond on the Isle of Wight (three there on April 27). I know that Herons have an unusually long breeding season with some birds laying their eggs as early as February and others not doing so until about now, and I am under the impression that this is to ease the load on local fish supplies (if all the Herons in one Heronry were to have young to feed at the same time of year they might run out of fish) but surely that would only be true if all the Herons did their fishing in the same water, and it seems to conflict with another aspect of Heron behaviour (namely that each Heron has its own fishing beat, sometimes many miles from the Heronry and involving a

flight of ten or twenty miles to reach it, and the Heron which owns that stretch of water jealously drives out any intruders that try to muscle in). Can anyone comment on these two aspects of Heron behaviour? are they now superseded by newer theories?

Last Wednesday (June 2) Kevin Stouse found a Swan family with five cygnets at the mouth of the Brockhampton stream, and so far no one has claimed to know the location of their nest but two things have emerged. The first is that they are not from Langstone Mill as that family, still with all six cygnets, was present on Langstone Mill Pond this evening. The second is that the 'Peter Pond' family which was last seen at Emsworth on or just before May 21 is still missing and it had five cygnets but I would have thought they would be more likely to have headed south down the Emsworth Channel and perhaps be lurking around Fowley Island or maybe in the Mill Rythe area rather than heading a long way west to the Broadmarsh area (the cygnets of that family, hatched on May 6, would now be bigger than Mallards albeit still totally downy)

I was up early today to visit the Warblington Common Bird Census plot with Tony Gutteridge. The main feature of this visit was the family groups of the successful breeders now out of the nest - Great and Blue Tit families were trooping round the trees, well grown young Blackbirds were out on their own, one young Pied Wagtail was in the farmyard with its parents, a family of three well grown Moorhen chicks were in the cress beds and elsewhere I saw a Chaffinch with a juvenile in tow - best of the bunch was a probable juvenile Reed Bunting (prolonged juvenile food calls from a thicket near the shore line reed bed where I saw a Reed Bunting flutter in - the plumage looked adult but the flight very unpracticed!). One surprise was to have 16 Rooks in a shore field (I have mentioned several times that Rooks have ceased to breed on the farm or nearby so these must have come from central Emsworth or even from Northney across the water) - another pleasant surprise was the sight of three adult Med Gulls in a field where the grass had just been cut for silage, attracting many grub hunting Starlings as well as these gulls. The breeding season is by no means over and the continuing presence of two Cuckoos shows that they are still hoping to find nests in which new batches of eggs are being laid.

George Spraggs saw three Brent in Langstone Harbour today when he was on the Hayling Coastal Path alongside the large open fields beside West Lane south of Daw Lane, and I guess the Brent were in the area that I call the 'Half-way saltings' (at the landward end of the Sinah Lake channel and half way between the Oysterbeds and the Kench). Birds there are not easily seen from Farlington Marshes, and yesterday when Kevin Stouse's party were on the seawall of the Marshes they saw four Brent out among the islands, and my guess is that these two groups make up the total of seven Brent which I saw together at the mouth of the Langbrook stream on May 23

SUN 06 JUNE

Kevin Stouse led a HOS walk around Farlington Marshes today, highlights being some good views of Bearded Tit in the reeds beside the stream, and a brief snatch of 'reeling' from a Grasshopper Warbler (not a 'resident' there but probably a young bird that is not breeding this year and is just making an exploratory visit here before a more serious trip next year - Kevin heard from Bob Chapman that there has been a recent arrival of quite a few such birds of various species, maybe including the Golden Oriole heard singing in Sussex yesterday). +++

I have already mentioned in Monday's notes that they saw four Brent Geese out among the islands, and while on the eastern seawall they saw half a dozen Little Egrets in the Russell's Lake area. Near the Point they had a surprise sighting of a Pheasant, reminding me that these birds were unknown on the reserve until the autumn of 2002 (I first heard of them from a Havant Wildlife Group party visiting the reserve in Nov 2002 when up to six were present). Normally I view feral Pheasants in the same way that I look on the Woodpigeons that infest our fields like a herd of Dyson vacuum cleaners, stripping the ground of food that I would prefer to see going to other wild birds, but everything has its good and bad points and maybe Pheasants at Farlington help to feed the foxes that would otherwise be taking Lapwing chicks? +++

No Lapwing chicks were seen at Farlington (at Titchfield Haven today Peter Raby saw one

with two chicks) but a few adults were at the Lake with the summering Black-tailed Godwits, and I guess those Lapwing could be said to be now in 'autumn mode', precursors of the shoreline flocks that will soon be appearing all along the coast +++

Moving the focus to Titchfield Haven other birds seen by Peter Raby today were 44

Black-tailed Godwit, 5 Avocet and some Shelduck (including 8 ducklings which will soon be abandoned by their parents as the adults fly off to Heligoland for their summer moult) +++

Mention of the departure of the adult Shelduck for their summer moult, and Brian Fellows recent observation that Swans are already shedding their feathers at Emsworth, brings me to a note I had from George Spraggs yesterday in which he expressed surprise at seeing 20 or more Canada Geese flying over south Hayling. Within a month those geese will be grounded for several weeks as they shed and regrow their flight feathers during July, and maybe the birds George saw had realised that, while they can still fly, they should be on their way to the place where they will spend that moult period - if the birds over south Hayling were heading west or northwest they may well have been heading for Baffins Pond or the IBM Lake.

Back in mid-April Brian Fellows was the first to tell us of how the bushes had been cleared from the land east of Marlpit Lane near Funtington, and how he feared that no Nightingales would be heard there this year, but on Apr 28 I heard one Nightingale in full song there from the dense thicket of young trees planted to 'restore' the land when quarrying ceased on the northern part of that site, and I noted that there has been no change in the habitat to the west of the lane where Nightingales have sometimes been heard, but the clearance of the more open ground did not seem to bode well for the return of Turtle Dove +++

Today Mike Collins visited the site for the first time this season and was as horrified as Brian and I were at the loss of habitat - furthermore he found a group of motorcyclists charging around the cleared ground, so I was not surprised that he did not hear a Nightingale (in any case their song normally dies away by the start of June) but I was surprised and pleased that he found both Turtle Dove and Cuckoo present (the latter would not be there if there were no small birds nesting in the area!). I think most people familiar with the site have long been surprised that it continues to have an attraction for Nightingales and Turtle Dove, and I am reasonably confident that there is sufficient habitat left (and not under threat) to continue to attract them. We all know how close you can get to wildlife if you stay in a car, and how huge and noisy vehicles and other machines do not seem to worry them, so I guess that quarrying, noisy motorcycles, and clay pigeon shooting is not as strong a deterrent to wildlife as it is to us! +++

Better news from Sussex today comes from the Ashdown Forest where Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers could be seen with their young, and from Rye Harbour where a tiny colony of Little Terns (only 16 nests) has chicks in three of those nests - not that such a small breeding success will do anything to halt the downward slide of the Little Tern species into oblivion. Does anyone know if Little Terns are faring better in other countries? The distribution map in the Collins Guide seem to show that Little Tern have a huge breeding range in southern Russia and they are only exceeded in the size of their breeding area by Common Tern (perhaps we should be more concerned to save the Roseate than the Little Tern?)

SAT 05 JUNE

A Golden Oriole was singing today in the Devils Dyke, a deep cleft in the north face of the downs above the village of Fulking (north of Brighton). Maybe a newly arrived bird which had just flown the channel with no intention of breeding here, or just possibly one that had attempted to nest (but failed) in East Anglia. In either case I doubt the bird will be heard again at the place where it sang today. +++

Slightly less exciting was an excellent day's birding experienced by a group of SOS members, led by Bernie Forbes, walking around the West Dean woods on the downs north of Chichester. Three pairs of Spotted Flycatcher and several purring Turtle Dove helped to get the day off to a good start before both Willow Tit and Grasshopper Warbler went on their list, and on the last stretch through the conifers where the Wild Daffodils flowered in April they were accompanied by Goldcrest song - Bernie reckons there was a pair for every

fifty yards of suitable habitat. As an encore they had a quick flash from a Silver Pheasant while overhead the continuous cover provided by Buzzards was breached at one point by what seemed to be a Lanner falcon with no visible jesses.

As happened last year the second half of this week brought high tides which very nearly submerged the whole of the nesting island in the Hayling Oysterbeds lagoon, washing out whatever Gull and Tern nests there were. Ian Julian, acting as a voluntary warden at the site, tells us no Little Tern nests were affected, but only because none of them had yet made nests or laid eggs (though there has been lots of courtship and pair bonding with the males bringing fish as offerings to the females). Maybe these Little Terns had learnt their lesson from last year's disaster and will get down to serious business now the spring tides are over (though equally high tides are forecast for the first week in July and will probably negate their efforts at breeding). +++

I expect very high tides in the winter and at the spring and autumn equinox periods, but Julian points out (after having been told by a passing sailor!) that the past week's tides are the highest so far this year and looking at my tide table I see that the 4.7 metre tides forecast for June 2, 4 and 5 were only equalled by one 4.7 metre tide on Jan 23 (no others have so far exceeded 4.6), and we only have 4.8 forecast for the nights of Oct 16 and 17 and Dec 14. I thought global warming meant that the tides were higher each year, but last year we had several 4.9 tides and one of 5.0 metres on Oct 26. Of course these predicted tides take no account of the atmospheric pressure - a low pressure system can cause the predicted tide to be considerably higher than forecast. +++

No doubt this repeated inundation of most of the island will encourage further work to raise the height of the nest island by adding more shingle during the coming winter, and hopefully that will help the birds, but they have their own ideas about the best places for their nests and I am reminded of the work done to raise the height of the Swan nest site at Emsworth's Peter Pond after it had been washed out by high tides in past years - the birds decided they would not use the improved site and built their new nest in a different place altogether, doing their own construction work to build up the nest height to a level which remained above the highest tide. Maybe too much change to the look of the island will drive them all away. +++

One other reflection on this week's flooding of nests is that some species seem to be born survivors, others to be born losers in the game of life - guess which species had a chick that survived the current disaster? yes, an Oystercatcher.

PLANTS

FRI 11 JUNE

Both Clustered Bellflower and Dropwort were flowering when John Goodspeed was at Catherington Down today. Also seen there were a dozen Fragrant Orchids, one of them white though not definitely an albino.

Ladies Bedstraw had opened its lovely yellow flowers for Richard Carpenter at Brownwich, west of Titchfield Haven today, and here in Havant more yellow was seen on fresh plants of Wall Rocket growing in the tiny area of gravel pretending to be a garden in front of flats in East Street. +++

Other new flowers seen by myself in Havant today were Water Figwort, Common Ragwort and my first Spear Thistle flowers with more flowers out on the Weasel's Snout at the New Lane allotments where Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea had just started flowering.

THU 10 JUNE

I normally expect to see Great Mullein in flower before I find Dark Mullein but, while there is insect news today of the first Mullein moth caterpillars munching away on the hairy leaves of the larger plant in Stubbington, Brian Fellows has news of Dark Mullein flowering today in Forestside, north of Rowlands Castle, before anyone has told me of Great Mullein flowers. +++

Another piece of news reaching me via Brian Fellows comes originally from Anne de Potier who organised the annual count of Southern Marsh orchids in the Fishbourne meadows today and achieved a total of 798 flowering plants where the previous record count (made

in 2000) was of only 349. It will be interesting to see if the count at the Langstone South Moors, to be made on June 19, is also higher than usual. For reference the annual counts for 1995 to 2004 have given totals of 6763, 4319, 2407, 4890, 340, 5614, 491, 5084 and 4474. Before 1995 there was one count of nearly 8000. As you can see the numbers vary considerably and I do not know if they are predictable though I do know that hungry cattle will eat whole plants (I have not seen the cattle in the orchid area recently but I think they still have access to it although they seem to prefer the grass nearer the sea.

Tuberous Pea is now flowering in the Gilkicker area at Gosport, so Martin Rand tells me after Barry Goater had seen it - I have not seen this plant and fear I might confuse it with the commoner Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea but I think one of the main differences is that Tuberous Pea has square stems while those of the Everlasting Peas are flattened and winged.

We saw plenty of Knapweed Broomrape on Portsdown yesterday but the only news of the smaller, mauve tinted, Common Broomrape to reach me so far comes from Maurice Pugh who saw one example by the A31 between Winchester and Alresford on June 7 and found lots at Yew Hill to the south west of Winchester yesterday. +++

Maurice also reports finding the Greater Broomrape (which looks similar to the Knapweed Broomrape except for some fine detail in the stamens and stigmas, and is parasitic on gorse and broom rather than Knapweed) at Yew Hill but I am not sure how confident he is in this find.

Last Saturday (June 5) Martin Rand visited south Hayling and found the Nottingham Catchfly in flower, presumably at the only site which I know for it there (close to the golf course fence in the heart of the Green Winged Orchid country east of the pillbox). Martin tells me there were 81 spikes in flower which is an excellent show compared to past years, though last year I was delighted with a count of over 100.

WED 09 JUNE

With the good news in today's local newspaper that the government intend to block any proposals for building of a marina, hotel and houses on the Broadmarsh site, I went there today to see how the plants were re-acting to the news. On top of the old rubbish tip which I call the Broadmarsh mountain, and which now has a thick tree belt all around its base and a lovely grass plateau of more than three hectares 'above the tree line' the *Lathyrus hirsutus* was just starting to flower in several places in the north east sector, while the grass over the whole area was almost dominated by *Lathyrus nissolia*, the Grass Vetchling whose blood red flowers were everywhere. +++

From the mound I went along the shoreline path to the eastern gate of Farlington Marshes, and along the track below the A27 I found Tufted Vetch, Meadow Vetchling, Yellow-wort and Self-heal newly in flower with Sea Lavender out at the end of the track. Also along this path I counted 17 good Bee Orchids and a new bush of Sweetbriar +++

In the evening I joined John Goodspeed's party on a walk from Fort Widley on Portsdown to the Hookheath nature reserve at the northern foot of the hill. At the start on the hilltop we found one flower on Restharrow and good displays of Knapweed Broomrape and Greater Knapweed (on the return journey I found my own first Pyramidal orchids hereabouts). Reaching the damp ground of the nature reserve, through which flows a tributary of the Wallington River, we found the first Bog Stitchwort and just one plant of Meadowsweet already in flower among thousands of unopen buds. Throughout the reserve we came on large numbers of Southern Marsh Orchids with one good cluster of Common Spotted and a great mass of Heath Spotted orchids looking paler than usual in the dusk light (just one group of three were albinos). One plant which John said had been flowering for ten days (and which Richard Carpenter found yesterday) but which was new to my yearlist was the lovely Meadow Thistle

Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today and added the lovely blue Skullcap to yearlist. He also saw the first Spear Thistle which will soon be out everywhere, as well as finding Stinking Iris in flower. John Goodspeed has also seen Stinking Iris in flower recently, but considering that its persistent red berries are quite a common sight it is

surprising that most people hardly ever see its flowers (unlike the Yellow Iris this one has flowers that are not eye-catching).

TUE 08 JUNE

Richard Carpenter found the first White Water-lily flowers today in the Botley Wood area where he also found the first Meadow Thistles.

On June 2 Brian Fellows was in the Fishbourne Meadows near Chichester and counted 296 Southern Marsh orchids which does not sound a great number when compared to some local colonies but Brian now tells me that he has heard from Anne de Potier that the highest record count at that site was only 349 and that last year's official count was 294.

MON 07 JUNE

A visit to the Warblington Farm fields this morning added Field Rose and Brookweed to my year's flower list and also gave me a count of 179 Southern Marsh Orchids in the SSSI just east of the cemetery (my first memories of this field were of up to 800 orchids here). Also in the SSSI I found more Large Bittercress with Tufted Forget-me-not and in the cemetery Round-leaved Fluellen and White Stonecrop were getting near the flowering stage. My first summer Hogweed flowers added a personal tick though I am not the first to see them. One thing that impressed me were the clouds of pollen coming from masses of Toad Rush plants in one shore field as my boots moved through their dense ground cover - just like the clouds that come from shaken Yew branches in early spring. +++

In the afternoon I happened to be passing the entrance to Havant's multi-storey carpark on Park Road South and took a look at the plants of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea that have been growing there. Today they were just starting to flower but the leaves were already withering as if from lack of water and the flowers, instead of being the statutory deep red, were white. Maybe this is due to the presence or absence of something in the soil here as near by some Love-in-the-mist (Nigella) plants were also white where they should have been blue.

SUN 06 JUNE

Richard Carpenter had today's best find when he was at Browdown (between Gosport and Lee on Solent) and came on Nottingham Catchfly flowering by the thousand. Nearby Ling Heather was also out along with Burnet Rose and Wood Sage. Richard also had two more common firsts that we will all be seeing soon - Wild Carrot and Creeping Thistle. +++

This news reminds me that it is time to check the Sinah shore of Hayling again to see how the tiny colony of Nottingham Catchfly is faring there, and when I find that I usually also find Bell Heather flowering on the nearby golf course/

Inland on and around Idsworth Down I found Deadly Nightshade in flower with both Welled and Musk Thistles but I failed to see the Basil Thyme I was hoping for (maybe there is some on Butser Hill, the only other place I have found it in 'my patch'). In fields below the down I came on a clump of Hounds Tongue, and crossing into the public paths through Old Idsworth Farm I found a 'lifetime first' among the wildflower seed sown alongside the path north from Idsworth Chapel to Husckswood Lane. This was Small-flowered Buttercup (two examples with flowers only 8mm wide and short stems with linear leaves more like those to be found on Water Dropwort than on a Buttercup). Having seen them 'planted' here I am the more eager to find them 'in the wild' and I see that in 1999 they were to be found on the shore of Chichester Harbour at Apuldram ... Near these buttercups among the Cornflowers, Corn Cockles and cousins of Corn Chamomile was one small plant fitting the description of Pheasant's Eye, but I do not have any hope of seeing that for real. +++

North of Huckswood Lane, in short downland turf on the lip of the big abandoned chalk quarry, I refound the downland form of Southern Marsh orchid which I had first seen there last year (nine healthy flowering plants with just one Common Spotted nearby). Another interesting discovery by the roadside near the road bridge over the railway west of Huckswood Lane was of a good show of Spiked Sedge

Kevin Stouse was leading a walk around Farlington Marshes today, and en route there from the Broadmarsh carpark he found a good show of Bee Orchids.

SAT 05 JUNE

Richard Carpenter was on the Titchfield Canal path today when he found a significant sign of summer that will soon be turning many a wayside yellow with its flowers - Meadow Vetchling. He also found a less common plant newly out - Common Meadow Rue. +++

On Portsdown Hill the Havant Wildlife Group spent the morning checking the hillside above Portchester on both sides of the motorway. Their major contribution to the year's flowering list was the first Eyebright, and less commonly seen plants were Thyme-leaved Sandwort, Crested Hairgrass and the lovely blue of Perennial flax growing from a seed that must have blown from last year's crop in one of the hilltop arable fields. At the Hill Road/Skew Road/Nelson Lane junction the Belgarum version Bee Orchids (with the 'browned off' look to their flowers) were flowering in greater numbers than in previous years but there was no report of either the Field Cow-wheat nor the Small Yellow Foxgloves. I have already seen the Cow-wheat in flower there myself this year but in far smaller numbers than in the past and growing further from the fence line so I am not surprised that was not spotted, while the Foxgloves are probably not yet in flower. +++

Also on Portsdown, seen at Fort Purbrook by Brian Fellows in addition to those seen by Rosemary Webb near Fort Southwick (see below) were Pyramidal orchids, and in the West Dean Woods a party from the Sussex Ornithological Society enjoyed twelve plants of Great Butterfly Orchid alongside their path

Taking a quick break from writing these notes today I cycled to the New Lane allotments where the first flower was open on the lovely Weasel's Snout (small wild Antirrhinum) and flowers were about to open on Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea. Continuing a circuit over the railway and back through Denvilles I found Biting Stonecrop in full flower along the pavement edge of Swallow Close, looking just as if the men who put the yellow lines down along the roads had got fed up with the job and dumped whole drums of bright yellow paint on the kerb of this quiet cul-de-sac. +++

Also today Rosemary Webb rang to say that she had been out with the Havant Wildlife Group this morning when they met at Skew Road on Portsdown above Portchester and found the colony of aberrant Belgarum form Bee Orchids had increased in number, and that she had seen her first Pyramidal orchids flowering by the hilltop roadside as she drove back along the stretch from Fort Southwick to the hilltop roundabout.

INSECTS

FRI 11 JUNE

A number of recent sightings of Painted Lady confirm that there has been an invasion of these migrants, probably starting on June 7 when Barry Collins saw one on the Isle of Wight, but the major thrust coming on and since June 8 (when 7 were seen in the Gosport area, several in Highcliffe near Bournemouth, with ones or twos at Ropley, Havant, Basing Forest and Botley Woods and more in the Havant area on June 9) +++

New resident butterflies were an early summer Comma seen at Ropley on June 9 and the first Ringlet seen in Stansted Forest by Michael Prior (the head forester) before June 10 - Michael also confirmed to Brian Fellows that no Pearl-bordered Fritillaries had been seen in Stansted this year. +++

Martin Hampton tells me that the two Pearl-bordered Fritillaries he saw in Southleigh Forest were both worn specimens, and had probably been flying around those woods for several days, but nevertheless I think expert opinion is in favour of their presence being due to some well intentioned person having bred them in captivity and released them there in the hopes of re-establishing a colony (with little chance of success - if the butterflies die out at a site for their own good reasons putting more into the same environment is hardly kind to the butterflies - a bit like a first world war general sending in more troops because all the others have been killed!) +++

Of course some expert opinion is of the President Bush school of thought - they are the experts and must be right - and I fear this label may have to be attached to English Nature (who are always getting stick from all sides despite the great job that they do) if I am right in

interpreting Ashley Whitlock's observation of several Adonis Blue on Old Winchester Hill as evidence of yet another official re-introduction of this lovely species to this site (I think at least three previous re-introductions of Adonis Blue there have failed during the past twenty years though I do not have the facts to support that statement) +++

And while on this subject of well intentioned re-introductions I see that while Matthew Oates was on the Isle of Wight enjoying the Granville Fritillaries last week he came on a lone male Marsh Fritillary deprived of any female company of his own species to relieve the frustration of his wasted life. (Once again I have no facts to support my implied criticism of whoever caused the butterfly to be there - maybe it was an act of God?)

THU 10 JUNE

Black Hairstreak is not a Hampshire butterfly but Mike Duffy managed to see more than 16 of them today by taking a day trip north into BBONT country (Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust) and visiting the Whitecross Green nature reserve where more than 20 Wood White were also on the wing along with a late Orange Tip (incidentally an Orange Tip was also seen in Stansted Forest today by Brian Fellows).

After a few days away from his computer Derek Mills was confronted on his return with a mound of butterfly and moth reports for the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website.

Having got them all onto his website I in turn was hit by the tidal wave of data from which I have extracted the following 22 new moth species for my yearlist and I will list them here by date starting with the first Rivulet seen by Peter Allen at North Gorley on May 28. +++

On May 29 Peter had two more firsts - The Uncertain and Ingrailed Clay before taking the lovely Scarce Merveille du Jour on June 6 (when he also had a Burnished Brass and a Straw Dot, while Mike Wall at Basingstoke added Metzneria lappella). +++

June 5 brought the first Large Yellow Underwing to John Cloyne in Winchester, along with a probable Eucosma aspidiscana. Also on June 5 Maurice Opie had a Silky Wainscot at Funtley near Fareham and Tim Norriss took a Brindled White-spot in Crab Wood west of Winchester +++

On June 6 Tim Norriss had the first Yellow-legged Clearwing in Harewood Forest beside the R Test near Andover. On that same day I see that Ashley Whitlock saw a Small Elephant Hawkmoth and an unspecified Tiger Moth species at Old Winchester Hill though neither count as firsts (Tim Walker had a Small Elephant at Winchester on May 29) +++

June 7 brought Simon Woolley in Winchester both Treble Brown Spot and Common Lutestring while Martin Laux at Chandlers Ford had a 'flush of smalls' with Small Blood-vein, Small Fan-foot, Small Dusty Wave and Small Yellow Wave +++

June 9 brought a couple of local entries with a Currant Clearwing coming to Jon Stokes lure at Portchester and a couple of Olindia schumacherana flying around Richard Moore's garden at Catherington (presumably they are fans of the Schumacher tree and not the racing driver!) +++

Coming up to date June 10 gave Derek Mills a Clouded Brindle at Farnham while (out of county) Mike Duffy had what he lists as a Netted Heath at Whitecross Green - I am presuming this is what my books name as Latticed Heath (*Semiothisa clathrata* - B&F 1894)

WED 09 JUNE

I was pleased to see a Meadow Brown this morning at Broadmarsh before having heard of any other sightings of this butterfly, but as might be expected, when I got home and checked my emails I found that Barry Collins had also seen them today both on Thorney Island and in the Thicket Lawn meadow near the Leigh Park Gardens lake in Havant (where he also had a good dozen Large Skippers). Later an email from Richard Carpenter told me that he had seen Meadow Brown yesterday in Botley Woods, but surprisingly (considering the warm weather) no one so far has told me of a Marbled White.

Martin Hampton has just told me that there were at least three Stag Beetles in and around his garden here in Havant last weekend, and this evening I saw two more in my own garden when I arrived home at dusk and was putting my car away. One of these two was a male flying high against the milky sky and trailing something much longer than its own body behind it - one occasionally sees gulls which have been feeding on a rubbish tip trailing bits

of plastic but this is the first time I have seen a beetle in similar trouble (hopefully it was only a bit of grass or perhaps Cleavers). The other beetle must have been on the outside of the garage door as I opened it, and it fell to the ground with a buzzing sound before disproving my theory that Stag Beetles cannot take off from the ground! +++

Before seeing these beetles I had been with John Goodspeed's 'Wednesday Evening Walk' party visiting the Hookheath nature reserve at the northern foot of Portsdown, and while there we had a close-up encounter with a Beautiful Demoiselle which we disturbed from its night roost and watched it flutter sleepily downwards to settle again in some long grass. We also disturbed and had good views of a Plume Moth whose wings were the colour illustrated in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects for *Agdistis bennetii*, though I do not recall that its body was as lengthy as is shown for this species. Another unidentified find was a metallic green medium sized beetle resting on a leaf of Water Mint - maybe the beetle was the uncommon *Chrysolina menthastri* but I cannot do more than suggest that name!

At Hill Head near Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter's moth trap this evening gave him two firsts for my yearlist - Cypress Carpet and Dark Brocade. At the end of his moth list Richard has 'One Cockchafer' and that may well be the last we hear of those big insects this year as we are now coming into the season for seeing their smaller relatives, the Summer Chafer

TUE 08 JUNE

The first glowing Glow-worm which I have heard of this summer was seen at Ambersham Common near Midhurst this evening by Paul Bennett as he was ending a Nightjar watch at 22:30 - hopefully we will soon be seeing them in Havant Thicket. +++

Not far south of Havant Thicket Barry Collins had his moth trap running this evening, adding Single-dotted Wave and Green Oak Tortrix to my yearlist, and here I must apologize for an error in my notes for last Saturday regarding Barry's moth trap result on that night - my fingers typed Marbled Beauty when my mind was reading Mottled Beauty from the list he sent me. Mottled Beauty (*Alcis repandata*) was a good first for the year, and while Marbled Beauty is also due out now the only record I have of it was for one taken in Southampton by Alan Dawson on 5 July 2002 (it is said to be found in stony places so perhaps it is a city dweller!).

During the day Richard Carpenter was in Botley Woods seeing the first Meadow Brown of the year along with a Hornet, 10 Downy Emerald and 13 Beautiful Demoiselle damsel flies. Perhaps the most interesting of his finds was of three Painted Ladies, suggesting the start of a summer invasion? +++

Another Painted Lady was seen today in Havant by Martin Hampton (who also saw it or another in the same place the following morning). +++

A further possible indication of the start of a butterfly invasion came from Emsworth where Brian Fellows had a Clouded Yellow settle in his garden for close inspection - Brian however says that the butterfly seemed so fresh that it did not look as if it could have crossed the channel, and he wonders if it could have emerged from its chrysalis somewhere near at hand - perhaps on Thorney Island. All I can say on that subject is that any Clouded Yellows which overwintered (as caterpillars) should have pupated by the start of April and emerged before the end of that month. I did hear of Clouded Yellows being seen at Beachy Head, Alum Bay on the Isle of Wight, Southbourne at Bournemouth, and at Portland Bill by May 1, and I see that an egg laid by one of these would take a week to hatch, the caterpillar would take a month to complete its growth and the butterfly would emerge after a three week pupation. +++

I think June is a bit late for the emergence of an overwintering caterpillar (they seemed to have emerged between Apr 24 and May 1 this year) and any offspring of those 'British residents' should not appear until the end of June at the earliest, so I guess that both this Clouded Yellow and the Painted Ladies are probably immigrants. +++

One more Painted Lady was seen at St Boniface Down yesterday by Barry Collins when he went to the Isle of Wight to enjoy the Glanville Fritillaries, and on Shanklin Down he saw the first male Fox Moth that I have heard of this year. In most species the males appear before the females (and it may well be the case with this moth) but while there were two reports of

the drab brown females on May 19 and 22 they were night fliers coming to moth trap lights, and maybe the lack of reports of the richer red-brown male (earning the species the name of Fox after the colour of the animal) male Fox moth has something to do with their preference for flying by day while the females prefer to party by night (I seem to remember that this is the case with the Oak Eggar). +++

Having written that suggested theory of a difference in habit between the sexes regarding day and night flying I thought I would check to see if I were right, and surprisingly it seems that I am!

SUN 06 JUNE

James Wheeldon was one of the first people to see Stag Beetles this year when on May 17 he found two of them at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea but you may remember that only one of them was alive, the other had been battered to death by a blunt instrument thought to be a Magpie's bill. Perhaps that Magpie liked the taste of Stag Beetle juice as it seems to have developed a taste for it, and today James tells me that he found another half-eaten Stag Beetle at the playing fields, the third such corpse he has seen there in the past week. It could be that I am slandering the 'good name' of the Magpie species in this matter as James has not yet seen the phantom Stag Beetle mugger at work, and I suppose it could be the work of a Red-backed Shrike as they would probably be proud to impale such a large meal on a spike in their hedgerow larder, but I fear that is pure phantasy as I doubt there is a single Red-backed Shrike in southern England at the moment though there is still the possibility of seeing a vagrant for a few days in August or September (we can but dream ...)

Moth trapping in his Hill Head garden near Titchfield Haven this evening Richard Carpenter took two new species for my year list. One was Heart and Club, the other a White-line Dart.

SAT 05 JUNE

Barry Collins did well with his moth trap in Havant this evening, taking four species that are new to my year list. They were Marbled Beauty, The Rustic, Middle-barred Minor and a micro which I think is a Tortrix species called *Lozotaenia forsterana* +++

Also in the Havant area Brian Fellows was the first to comment on one of the delights of summer - the sight of a bright metallic green 'flower beetle' posing on top of a bright yellow daisy flower as if waiting for some passing artist to set up his easel nearby and give the beetle a tip for his contribution to the colourful picture. I can see that the green colour of the beetle is good camouflage among the plant stems and leaves, but it does pick them out as an easy target (at least to our human eyes) when they go into 'lotus eater' mode and lie motionless in a flower head. Maybe the beetles that we see doing this are males that have already served their purpose in life and decide to seek a happy ending to their life though a combination of drowning in nectar while lying on a sunbed, careless of the fact that they may be snatched from live by a passing bird while in this happy state. (How's that for a bit of anthropomorphism). By the way, if the insect police question you about the death of this individual, Brian thinks his name was *Cryptocephalus sericeus*.

OTHER WILDLIFE

TUE 08 JUNE

I expect most readers will have watched 'A Touch of Frost' on the TV at some time and will be familiar with Inspector Mullet and his efforts to direct operations without having the first idea of what is going on, and it was his name that came to my mind when Brian Fellows told me a sad story of a large fish (possibly a Grey Mullet) swimming around in circles at the surface of the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth today. I am familiar with seeing the backs and dorsal fins of huge Carp protruding above the surface as these fish come to spawn in shallow parts of the IBM Lake, but this fish was in deep water and seemed to be distressed and disoriented. +++

Eventually Brian was able to see that the trouble was caused by something, possibly a sheet of plastic, having become stuck on the head of the fish so that it could not see where it was going (and maybe also obstructing its mouth and/or gills). When writing about the Stag Beetle which I saw this week trailing something from its body as it flew over me I said that

reminded me of gulls which I had seen with their heads or legs ensnared by our human rubbish, and if this fish did not rid itself of the plastic fairly soon it could well die a needless and prolonged death similar to one gull which I once saw flying with its legs through the handle of a plastic shopping bag, the air filling the bag as the bird flew and acting as an airbrake. That was awkward for the bird but it got worse when the gull landed on the IBM Lake and the bag filled with water, preventing the gull from taking off and possibly dragging the gull down to drown as it became exhausted by its efforts to take off.

WEEK 23 MAY 31 - JUNE 6

BIRDS

FRI 04 JUNE

Wivelsfield Green is a small village just east of Burgess Hill, well north of Brighton and the downs, and today's entries on the SOS website include an account from Matthew Silk, who lives there, of a flock of 40 gulls parading on the village green on Monday morning (May 31). Nothing too unusual about that except that among them were 4 Yellow-legged whose presence so far inland was doubly unusual both for the location and the date. In about a month's time large numbers of these gulls will probably be along the south coast (last year July 7 brought 80 to Pagham Harbour and there were 26 at the top of Southampton Water on July 5 with 130 there on July 15), but I have only heard of three sightings of this species since the start of April, so I guess Matthew's group of four marked the start of this species return to our shores, especially as Bob Marchant had one at Hook near Warsash this morning (and Kris Gillam had two 'in off' the sea at St Catherine's Point on May 15) +++

Another bird that will be back on our shores in strength during July is Lapwing. I mention this as Mike Rafter today saw one over the built up area of Romsey and assumed it was on a post breeding dispersal flight.. That was not the first Lapwing to abandon thoughts of breeding as Barry Yates described a group of ten seen at Rye Harbour on May 15 as the 'first autumn flock' which had switched from being territory holding individuals to the social mood of winter by coming together as a flock. +++

Also on the SOS website today Paul James tells us that the 'grey headed Marsh Tit' seen at Woods Mill a couple of days ago was not the first to be seen with this plumage aberration. Paul saw a similar bird (just possibly the same one) back in 2002 near the village of Sutton which is southwest of Pulborough (a couple of miles south of Burton Mill Pond and north of Bignor). +++

Paul goes on to remind us of the bird life of Stanley Common just east of Liphook (but across the county boundary in West Sussex) where Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Turtle Dove, Redstart and Garden Warbler can all be seen with a good chance of a Hobby and plenty of other resident birds

Hampshire bird news reaching me today includes a Hoslist note from Steve Keen giving three sightings in the New Milton/Sway area during the past week. One was of a Cockatiel (these inevitably get out as warm weather causes people to leave their house windows open), another of a Raven, and the third was a very unexpected view of a Tree Sparrow. Dave Unsworth comments on the latter by saying that a Tree Sparrow with a 'brood patch' in its breast feathers was recently caught at Portland Bird Observatory but was not thought to be a local bird (maybe it had been nesting somewhere in the north of England and had flown south to take its mind of its troubles when its nest was destroyed???)

THU 03 JUNE

Kevin Stouse took a walk around the IBM Portsmouth site at lunch time today and was specially pleased to see that a single Sedge Warbler which he had come across on May 7 (and assumed that it was just passing through as Sedge Warblers have not been recorded as breeding at this site) was still present and appeared to be feeding young at a nest somewhere in the area of the bridge over the 'canal' west of the buildings. Less unexpected good news was of successful breeding by Little Grebes (Kevin saw an adult

taking a fish into the reeds) and this reminds me that the HWT website currently records the first ever breeding by Little Grebe somewhere on the Roydon Woods nature reserve just north of Lymington. +++

Going back to Kevin's news from the IBM Lake he fears that the established pair of Swans may have failed to produce young this year - he saw two adult birds at different places, neither with any young, and the nest was deserted. As the nest was seemingly complete by Apr 24 but had no eggs in it then I guess the eggs would have been laid by the end of April, meaning that the 35 day minimum incubation period would only just have ended now if incubation had started on Apr 28, but if a brood of cygnets had just left the nest I would have expected both parents to be together with them. There is always a chance that the pair were hidden away in the canal system with their cygnets and that the two birds Kevin saw were 'intruders', but I fear the worst. +++

Kevin also failed to see any young Great Crested Grebes, though he did see three adult birds, so another mystery about their breeding success remains to be solved. +++

Yesterday evening Kevin took a long walk along the Havant shore line from the Brockhampton stream (alongside Budds Farm) to Pook Lane east of Langstone. Near the mouth of the Brockhampton stream was a pair of Swans with five cygnets, raising the question of where they had come from. The birds were not the pair from Budds Farm pools (he saw those still there) and the pair which attempted to nest on the banks of the Brockhampton stream abandoned their attempt before laying eggs, but that leaves at least three candidates for the origin of this family. It could have been a pair that has been nesting at Bedhampton Mill Pool (only a short way up the Hermitage stream into which the Brockhampton flows), it could have been a pair which has nested on North Binness Island out in the harbour, or it might be the Langstone Mill Pond family whose current location is unknown (they normally move to the mouth of the Langbrook stream but may have gone a little further this year). +++

On Budds Farm Pools the single Shelduckling that was first seen on May 27 was still with one parent (and another pair of adults were also there) and at the mouth of the Langbrook stream a single Whimbrel was present (sounds as if one is staying the summer). Three Brent Geese were with it. +++

On the other side of Langstone the shore between the pond and Pook Lane had families of Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits while two juvenile Pied Wagtails were on the mud

The Titchfield Haven website has just been updated for the period 13 to 31 May and among lots of news that is now a bit stale I see that a Grasshopper Warbler was heard there on May 31 and that two Roseate Terns were seen (by just one person) on May 19 (a few days after the first reliable report of one reaching Rye Harbour was put out on May 15). Also on May 19 the flock of Black-tailed Godwit numbered 60 birds.

WED 02 JUNE

Charlie Peverett was the lucky first person this year to hear the whiplash call of a Quail, not at dusk but at 10am this morning when walking on the downs north of Seaford. Hopefully others will also turn up, but in a good Quail year I think the first are normally heard in mid-May so a late 'first' may indicate a poor year. +++

Two other late arriving summer visitors seen today were Honey Buzzards. One was seen going over Church Norton at Pagham Harbour in Sussex and the other was heading north up the Hamble river in Hampshire - seen by Dave Ryves who I think lives at Burrige (but he does not say where he was) +++

Another impressive bird was a Curlew Sandpiper in full red summer plumage, seen at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool where a male Garganey is still lurking with intent (but will anyone see Garganey ducklings there is the big question). +++

Further east in Sussex a strange Marsh Tit came to feeders at the Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ at Woods Mill near Henfield. Mike Russell writes of it .. 'A Marsh Tit came to the feeder at the Woods Mill garden today which is a nice record in itself, but this one was a very strange looking individual as the cap was a whitish grey colour with no hint of black at all! It arrived with a typical Marsh Tit call and I had a good view of it for a while.'

Good news of House Martins and Sparrows comes from Ali Downs who lives in a housing

estate at Four Marks near Alton where the houses were only built about five years ago. The first House Martin was back at this site on Apr 22 this year and the Martins are now using four nests that were also used last year, the good news being that this year they have built an additional new nest on her house. She goes on to say that she knows of at least two House Sparrow nests tucked under the roof tiles of houses neighbouring hers, which reminds me that here in Havant my own house has a Sparrow nest in the roof space (I don't recall ever having one before) while the Starlings that normally use a different entrance into the roof space have not appeared this year.

I cycled to south Hayling this morning, mainly in search of flowers, but as I passed the Oysterbeds I saw that two of the Black-headed Gull nests there each had at least one well grown downy chick in it. Further down the coastal path I was just thinking to myself that Yellowhammers had abandoned the island when I saw one male and heard another singing. I also heard one Lesser Whitethroat singing thereabouts, with another singing in the Sinah Common area.

TUE 01 JUNE

Each summer there comes a time, usually a little later than now, when the Little Owls that have been difficult to spot during their breeding season suddenly show themselves openly, sitting on the exposed tops of telegraph poles or in other equally obvious places especially at dusk. This year they maybe nested earlier as three different reports reaching me today describe what seem to be such sightings. Richard Carpenter had one at Titchfield Abbey, Derek Hale had one in the Seaview area on the Isle of Wight and here on Hayling Island George Spraggs spotted one while driving home down West Lane at around 9:30pm +++ The owls may or may not have raised young but in East Meon Christoph Harwood had proof that a local pair of Song Thrushes were successful when four of their young appeared in his garden today - he says that his garden is cat free, giving them an even better chance of growing to maturity. +++

Going back to Derek Hale at the Hersey nature reserve on the shore near Seaview he had more good news in seeing six House Martins gathering mud for their nest building, but found the hide that was only completed and opened a couple of months ago had been vandalised - there is a big hole in the roof and a broken window.

News of Chiffchaff song gets curiouser and curiouser. Richard Ives was at the Ambersham Common car park yesterday morning and was baffled by a Chiffchaff which seemed to think it was a Garden Warbler. He says .. 'It spent 30 minutes singing like a sylvia warbler - a song I have not heard in 40 years of birding. May I suggest that someone records its song as this bird may be Iberian or perhaps just a sub species of the nominate race. The bird does sing from the tops of silver birch and pine trees. It is unmistakable - the song is not particularly loud but this bird does not seem to have any normal song. It has a fairly prominent super but otherwise it does not stand out too much from the other phylloscs around.' +++

This is the fourth case of Chiffchaffs singing strange songs that I have heard of recently. On May 25 Russell Wynn was puzzled by one in the Lymington area. On May 12 Steve Keen had one alternating between Chiffchaffing and Willow Warbling as did Richard Mould-Ryan in the Itchen Valley Country Park during April of 2003. +++

I think Richard Ives is hoping that he has discovered a rare vagrant singing its normal song, but at the moment I would put my money on it being a normal Chiffchaff that has got bored with its own boring song and has decided to imitate a more interesting song! (Have you noticed how, particularly later in the season, Chiffchaffs regularly intersperse their Chiff Chaff notes with a quiet 'brr brr' that sounds just like the ringing tone on a telephone? Maybe this one has got through to some internet bird song site and has downloaded a new ringing tone for its mobile phone).

Following James Wheeldon's recent report of House Martins collecting moulted gull feathers strewn across the cricket pitches for which he is responsible I see today that Brian Fellows' has noticed that moulted Swan feathers are now appearing on the water of the Mill Pond at Emsworth where 47 Swans are gathered. This reminds me that the herd of 70 to 100 moulting Swans which a few years ago was a regular feature of the water at the mouth of

the Hermitage Stream at Broadmarsh is now non-existent. I wonder how many there are in the Fishbourne and/or Bosham channels of Chichester Harbour?

MON 31 MAY

Derek Hale proved that seawatching can still be worthwhile at the very end of May when he went to St Catherine's Point this morning and, between 7 and 11am, saw 73 Common Scoter, 47 Manx Shearwaters, 19 Kittiwakes, 2 Arctic and 1 Great Skua with over 100 Gannets. Derek noted one of the Kittiwakes as being 'immature' and this imprecise term sent me to check on when young Kittiwakes leave the nest - as they not start to nest until late May and the young do not normally fly until late July I guess the bird seen today was a first summer. I was interested in this knowing that those Black-headed gulls which succeeded with their first brood now have young that are more than two weeks old (Barry Yates reported chicks had been hatched at Rye Harbour on May 15). Last year the first chicks hatched at Rye on May 10 and Andrew Howard reported that some had fledged (i.e. were flying) when he was there on June 16, so it is reasonable to expect juvenile Black-heads to be flying around June 21 this year. +++

Another thing which interested me was Derek's observation of three Herons flying far out to sea (presumably going south rather than heading for the Sussex coast) but eventually changing their mind and coming back. If anyone has evidence for any pattern in the sporadic reports of Herons 'migrating' I would like to hear from them - my current impression is that the birds seen on long distance flights are those which cannot find enough fish (or possibly nest sites) in their normal area and set out more or less at random (like the three birds today) in the hope of finding that the 'grass is greener' over the horizon. The group of Herons most likely to have difficulty in finding good fishing in their 'home area' are of course juveniles and today's three could well have been this year's young birds (but as there are reports of migrant Herons at other times of year dispersion of juveniles cannot be the only cause of 'migration'). Strangely I do not recall reading reports of migrant Herons coming from the north or from the continent in hard winter weather, but that may well be a function of the lack of birders willing to spend 14 hours of their day sitting on shingle at that time of year! A walk round Farlington Marshes on a winter's day will show that there are a large number of Herons there in winter which are elsewhere in summer, but I do not know how far those birds have travelled - they may well be relatively local birds.

SUN 30 MAY

One or two Black Redstarts are normally seen in Hampshire during the breeding season each year but it is rare for us to get reports of confirmed breeding such as occurred in both Fort Purbrook and Fort Widley on Portsdown during the 1970s and at no other site have these birds returned (like Swallows) to established nest sites for up to four years in a row. I look forward to hearing if birds that were regularly seen on the shores of Southampton Water in the early months of this year stayed to breed there but in the meanwhile I see that a male that was heard singing in Horsham town on Apr 26 is still in the same area.

My comments on the spider which recently took possession of a Blue Tit nest box on Hayling Island have drawn a couple of responses - no one else has come across a large spider (so maybe that is a sign of global warning!) but Tom Muckley in Petersfield, says that .. 'a few years ago we heard a strange buzzing noise coming from a nest box in which blue tits had begun to incubate. After a few days it was obvious that the birds had deserted, and on examining the nest we found that a huge and ferocious bumble bee had taken up residence right in the centre.' He goes on to say .. 'This was one of only two occasions in thirty years that the nest in this particular box has failed to produce young. The other was last year, when one adult disappeared after the young had hatched. The other hung around for a day or so, looking lost, before giving up and leaving the young to starve.' +++

I suspect that in both cases the failure was caused by the death of one or both parents by a normal predator (not a bumblebee or spider) and George Spraggs now tells me that just before the spider took over his box he had seen a Sparrowhawk plucking prey on a branch near the nest box, and that the feathers left below the branch could have come from a Blue Tit. In both George's and Tom's cases I am surprised that the second parent abandoned

the nest - particularly in Tom's case when the young would have been calling for food, a noise that often forces adults of different species (not the real parents) to feed the young.

+++

A more interesting case with no apparent connection to these two is quoted by Darrin Madgin (who operates in the mid-Sussex area) who went to ring young in a nest box a couple of days ago and found six Nuthatch plus three Great Tit chicks all alive and well in one nest box. Knowing the aggressive ways of Nuthatches I doubt that there was an amicable sharing of the nest between them and the Great Tit, and my guess would be that the Great Tit had been killed after laying three eggs and that by chance the Nuthatches happened to chose that nest box and start laying their eggs before those of the Great Tit had begun to be incubated - a very lucky chance for the young Great Tits.

SAT 29 MAY

Proof that spring Wader passage is not yet over comes from Mark Litjens at Keyhaven where he saw nine Red Knot in the summer plumage which gives them their full name. Another indication of this came from a casual conversation with Barry Collins who told me that he had very recently seen a flock of around 50 Sanderling on the Pilsy Sands (I did not note the details at the time but I think that is the gist of what he said). Another late bird was a Whimbrel seen in the Broadmarsh/Hermitage Stream area by Chris Jones when he paid a visit to Budds Farm today (seeing a first summer Little Gull over the pools - maybe one of the two birds seen at Farlington Marshes on May 11 and then at Budds Farm on May 16 with a further sighting of one at Farlington on May 15). The Whimbrel too may not be 'on passage' but have decided to hang about in Langstone Harbour for the summer as sometimes happens.

Cliff Oakley today took his Petersfield Wildlife Group to Chapel Common which lies just west of the A3 south of Liphook. Among the birds they found there were Woodlark, Tree Pipit and Redstart while a count of 5 Mistle Thrushes on their list sounds as if they had encountered a Mistle Thrush family group now out of the nest.

Finally I see a Dotterel has at last been seen, the only sighting I have heard of this spring. The lucky finder was Mike Scott-Ham and the location was a field of spring wheat on the downs above Alfriston, just west of the Cuckmere Valley northwest of Beachy Head. Last year Sussex birders were exceptionally lucky to have a Dotterel on show at Rye Harbour from April 25 to May 11, and Hampshire also had a single record thanks to Doug Robertson who found a female in a stubble field on Gander Down on May 23.

PLANTS

SAT 05 JUNE

Taking a quick break from writing these notes today I cycled to the New Lane allotments where the first flower was open on the lovely Weasel's Snout (small wild Antirrhinum) and flowers were about to open on Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea. Continuing a circuit over the railway and back through Denvilles I found Biting Stonecrop in full flower along the pavement edge of Swallow Close, looking just as if the men who put the yellow lines down along the roads had got fed up with the job and dumped whole drums of bright yellow paint on the kerb of this quiet cul-de-sac. +++

Also today Rosemary Webb rang to say that she had been out with the Havant Wildlife Group this morning when they met at Skew Road on Portsdown above Portchester and found the colony of aberrant Belgarum form Bee Orchids had increased in number, and that she had seen her first Pyramidal orchids flowering by the hilltop roadside as she drove back along the stretch from Fort Southwick to the hilltop roundabout.

FRI 04 JUNE

A short evening visit to Portsdown Hill this evening during the Friday evening rush hour gave me a magnificent show of wild flowers right alongside the busy London Road coming up from Portsmouth where the almost equally busy Portsdown Hill Road crosses it on a bridge near the George pub. Coming up from Havant on the Hill Road I parked in the viewpoint carpark just east of the London road (not the more popular one to the west of the road) and fifty yards down hill from where I stopped was a lavish display of Sainfoin flowering like a

bed of small pink Lupins. Later there should be Bastard Toadflax in this strip but today the only other new flowerings there were Salad Burnet and Rough Hawkbit. The strip containing these delights is an old track where the downland turf is thinnest, and it is protected from mowing whereas the open hillside all around is close mown. +++

I then walked east through a hedge into a large area maintained as a 'wildflower meadow' where only a few small tracks are mown to allow walkers to view it without trampling the flowers (or getting their feet soaked in long grass after rain). Here a couple of plants of Small Scabious were starting to flower and masses of Fairy Flax could be found among the grass whose growth was restricted in some areas by the parasitic effect of Yellow Rattle. After completing a circuit here I passed some nettles hosting a nest of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars and found some Alexanders still managing to flower. +++

Next I went west over the sliproad to the southbound London Road into another large area bordering that road which is not mown, and after walking a little through masses of delicate Totter Grass (*Briza media*) I found my first Bee Orchid - before the end of my walk I had seen over 40 of them, mostly on the west side of the main road. Perhaps the dominant flower here is Wild Thyme and on the steep bank going down to the road, where a ground hugging *Cotoneaster* suppresses most other growth and bejewels the ground with its tiny white flowers, a mixture of those flowers with Wild Thyme and Birds Foot Trefoil is stunning. At one point in this area of very low growth my first Squinancywort was just starting to flower, and in longer grass at the edges of the area both Wild Parsnip and lots of Black Knapweed surprised me in full flower, but best of all was a single flower of Harebell. Also on this east side of the road was one clump of Common Spotted Orchids with half a dozen flowering spikes densely packed together and near them I found my first Hieracium flowers growing in longer grass - coming back up the bank to the tarmac pavement where it joins the pavement of the Portsdown Hill Road I found more of these plants with their black stippled leaves showing them to be *Hieracium maculatum*. +++

Crossing westward over the bridge and turning south down the pavement of the sliproad I came to the concrete box used to store salt for de-icing the road in winter, and immediately uphill from this and overhanging the mown strip beside the pavement is a rarity pointed out to me last summer by John Goodspeed (who in turn was told of it by someone who remains nameless as far as I am concerned). What you see at the moment is a dark green bushy growth about a metre in diameter and standing less than 30 cm high, but a close look found two slivers of yellow among the green where flower heads are developing (and on one of them a single floret was open). This plant is Sickie Medick, almost certainly the only specimen currently to be found in Hampshire. +++

Next to the Medick, and stealing its limelight was a straggling bush of white flowers - Hedge Bedstraw in full flower where everywhere else it is still to come out. While there was nothing else new on this patch the number, variety and colour of the flowers here is breathtaking. This is a south facing site on chalk that encourages such a variety but I can't help feeling that the growth is encouraged by a microclimate of warm air and noxious emissions coming from the cars which never cease to run by.

THU 03 JUNE

This evening I went to check on the Southern Marsh orchids on the Langstone South Moors and was greeted by a new Hampshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve signboard at the Southmoor Lane end of the new 'yellow brick road' path heading west across what was the IBM playing fields to the genuine old meadows where the orchids grow. +++

When I was last here (on May 23) I could only find three orchids starting to flower - this evening they are there in hundreds and may well be numbered in thousands when the official count is made on June 19. I did not attempt to count them but did make two good finds, both unexpected. One was of Marsh Bedstraw - a small patch of tiny white buds on the ground - and the other was of Large Bittercress (*Cardamine amara*) of which two plants were growing in the shallow wet ditch surrounding the orchid field. +++

Earlier in the day Kevin Stouse had been walking around the IBM Portsmouth site, mainly looking for birds, but had noticed the first Pyramidal Orchids starting to flower there - he was not certain of their identity but if these were not Pyramidal there will soon be hundreds

of them flowering there (and Derek Hale has already seen them out in Appley Park at Ryde on the Isle of Wight)

Yesterday evening Jim Berry led the regular 'Wednesday evening walk' for the Havant group of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. Their starting point was at Walderton near the source of the River Ems but they headed north on to the hill ridge going through Inholmes Wood before turning west to make an anti-clockwise circuit via Watergate House (where they saw a Foxglove tree in flower - something I have not noticed there but am familiar with as a good specimen grows near the main reception lake at the IBM Portsmouth site where Tulip trees will soon be in flower). More expected finds were White Helleborine and Twayblade orchids, while Bugloss provided something that I expect some of the party were not familiar with.

Other recent finds were made by Rosemary Webb who was on Beacon Hill at Exton in the Meon valley within the past week and found a Fragrant Orchid having one flower open, plus a very colourful variant of Common Spotted in which the leaves and stem are a bronze colour and the lip of the flower is bright magenta. +++

Another recent discovery was made by Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes where a colony of what I thought were Southern Marsh orchids has been increasing in numbers year by year. Bob writes .. 'Over the last ten years or so an increasing population of a pink Marsh Orchid has become established in the Hayfield at Farlington. When I first saw them I thought they were Early Marsh Orchids, although this species is not recorded from the area. However the Marsh Orchids are a notoriously tricky group, with lots of hybrids and variations. +++

'In that first year there were about fifteen or so flowering plants. Steadily the numbers have grown and this year there are over 140. There has been some doubt expressed about their status, obviously they owe at least something to Early Marsh Orchids but are they hybrids or not? One or two do look a bit intermediate with the Southern Marsh Orchids in the same area but most do not. +++

'This year I have taken a number of pictures to compare with supposedly "good" Early Marsh Orchids. The key features are: the flower colour, pink, the specific name for the plant is incarnata which means "the colour of meat"; the unspotted leaves with slightly "hooked" tips; the narrow column shape of the flower stem; the rather narrow flowers and the shape of the markings on the flowers. All look OK to me, but then I am no botanist.'

WED 02 JUNE

I cycled to South Hayling this morning to check the status of the Childing Pink plants and found 57 of them in flower with lots of the lovely blue Sheep's Bit on the short turf nearby and the pinkish flowers of Knotted Clover discernible in the equally short grass near the skate board park. Crossing the road from there to look at the area cleared of burnt gorse last year I found it covered with a variety of plants but was very puzzled by one of my first finds there - a small clump of bramble with a dozen drooping flowers of yellow tea rose apparently growing up through it but a closer examination found that these were dying cut roses which someone had carefully placed in the bush, I know not why! One reason for being initially taken in by the roses was that near them a clump of tall Gladioli were flourishing (no pretence of being the small wild plants or even the Mediterranean form grown in many gardens), and close to them was the more interesting sight of two or three clumps of a white flowered Allium which I find to be Allium Neapolitanum (triangular stems some 40cm high surmounted by a delicate ball - about 5cm across - of small, long stemmed, white flowers. What leaves there had been were withered remnants on the ground). If anyone wants to see them walk west from the Childing Pinks till you come to the start of the cleared area and look just behind the first row of re-growing vegetation (about a couple of yards from the natural turf, in a 'sand pit'). +++

In the same cleared area I saw my first Vipers Bugloss but there was lots more south of the golf course where the Sea Kale, Thrift, and Birds Foot Trefoil etc make a glorious sight at the moment. Going on towards Gunner Point the Tree Lupins are at their best (no signs of the fungus which sometimes kills them) and there is a reasonable show of Hares Tail grass (but nothing to match that at Black Point). Cycling back via the Kench I stopped to check

the big Bladder Senna bush along the east side of the inlet and saw it had plenty of bright yellow flowers, and passing the open grass between Ferry Road and Sinah Lake I noticed many tall and healthy plants of Slender Thistle coming into flower. +++

Those same thistles are starting to flower at the Oysterbeds where a great mass of Common Centaury has raised green stems on the earth mound where the patch of Early Forget-me-not is now dead leaving a blackish mat of dead stems. The Milk Thistles are coming on well and several have raised flower stems with closed buds covered with vicious looking spikes (like the spiked balls used by knights of old). Two other new flowers in this area were the yellow Melilot (I think Ribbed) on the southern bund of the lagoon, and my first Hedge Woundwort by the coastal path (no sign of flowers on the Goats Rue yet). Two other new flowers were almost the first things that I saw when I reached the Island - one was Hop Trefoil, the other Wild Privet.

In Emsworth Brian Fellows found a Medicago species growing on the dry rough ground between Seagull Lane and the north bridge into the damper Brook Meadow. He would have passed it by as Spotted Medick until he noticed that there were no spots on the leaves and he is wondering if it could be Toothed Medick which is occasionally found in Hampshire, mainly on stabilised shingle on the shores but also on tip sites (and that description could be applied to where these plants were found). Before this came up I had the impression that spots on the leaves were not always to be found on Spotted Medick leaves and at least one authority says 'usually with dark blotches' implying not always, and as Brian is still in doubt as to whether the plants fit the description of Toothed medick I suspect the wisest course is to assume it is the commoner species. However Brian does mention a significant factor which is the look of the seed pods but I am not sure if the plants he saw yet have mature seeds (I have not yet seen any on Spotted Medick). +++

Earlier in the day Brian had been at the Fishbourne meadows near Chichester and had counted 296 Southern Marsh orchids in flower though I suspect that there will be more before the season is over. Before too long a visit to that area should also find Corn Parsley and Dittander flowering along the sea wall further south near the sewage works.

TUE 01 JUNE

Richard Carpenter visited Brockwood to the north west of West Meon today and found Spindle bushes in flower. Another late flowering tree whose flowers I have just noticed in my own garden is Walnut - it looks as if we may have a good crop this year and the Beech-tree growing alongside it above the Hayling Billy trail has a tremendous mass of young Beechmast on it.

Yesterday Brian Fellows walked up to the Goodwood Trundle and saw some large thistles flowering in the distance - my guess is that these would be the lovely Musk or Nodding Thistles that are the first to flower on downland and if so it is worth making an expedition to smell them! Less aromatic, but often rewarding to look at, are the Hogweed flowers he also found. These probably mark the start of the summer season for this common plant - perhaps later than in some years but I still found it flowering on Feb 11 so it has not had much of a break (and Richard Carpenter found it back in flower on May 7).

SUN 30 MAY

The first Common Cow-wheat was in flower at Durley Mill on the headwater of the River Hamble south of Bishops Waltham today, found by Richard Carpenter who also noted flowers on a Wild Service tree

SAT 29 MAY

Michael Wilsdon tells me that more than 1000 Burnt Tip orchids can currently be seen in flower on Mount Caburn, just outside Lewes, and that Early Spider orchids at a site north of Brighton still have a few flowers left. Both these species were already on my list of fifteen wild orchid species known to me to be flowering on the south coast but John Goodspeed has reminded me of one more for that list, flowering just the other side of Portsdown Hill in the HWT nature reserve at Hookheath to which John will be leading the 'Wednesday evening walk' on June 9 (details are in the Imminent Events section of the What's New page of this website). This sixteenth species is Heath Spotted Orchid.

INSECTS

FRI 04 JUNE

I think that in the past I have confused the Hairy Dragonfly with the larger Emperor, something not possible if you get a close up view like that in a photo taken by Mark Litjens today showing the thick growth of hair covering the thorax of this insect. Mark got his chance to photograph this dragonfly at Titchfield Haven today as it paused to munch a Larger Red Damselfly for dinner. The Emperor is nearly a centimetre longer than the Hairy, but that size difference may not be obvious when you only see one of them (particularly as the Hairy is usually on the wing before the Emperor appears to allow you to make the comparison), but a good tip is that the Emperor tends to droop the tip of its 'tail' in flight where the body of the Hairy is straight (Dan Powell has a good illustration of the difference between the pencil thin male Hairy and the fat cylinder of the female's body). Another difference is that the Hairy is usually on the wing in early May several weeks before the Emperor and a couple of months before the Southern Hawker that will be common from July onwards. There are of course plenty of other differences between the species if you get a close up and can see the colours and markings on the body but often all you see is a fairly distant flying insect on which you cannot be sure of these details.

Barry Collins today took a look at the lovely Thicket Lawn wildflower meadow and the adjacent Leigh Park Gardens lake here in Havant. In the meadow he saw at least two Large Skippers, and over the lake an Emperor dragonfly with more than 30 Red-eyed Damselflies. +++

Barry also tells me that he had 10 personal 'new for the year' moths in his trap this morning with another ten species that were not new. Looking at his list I thought that *Lychnis* was one that others had not seen but a check showed that it had been taken by Nick Montegriffo on May 19 and Tim Walker on May 20 +++

I was on Portsdown Hill this evening and found Common Blue and Small Heath still flying with various moths I could not name, other than one fresh Burnet Companion which sat and showed me the yellow markings on its hind wings. One good find there was a nest of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars on nettles.

THU 03 JUNE

Eleven new moths were listed on the Butterfly Conservation website when I checked it today starting with a Varied Coronet taken by Rob Edmunds at Fleet this evening. Last night Derek Mills had a Middle-barred Minor at Farnham and Mike Wall had two micros at his Basingstoke trap (*Phyllonorycter leucographella* and *Blastobasis decolorata*) plus Smoky Wainscot, Light Arches, Dusky Brocade, Mottled Rustic and Green Silver-lines, while in Havant Barry Collins added Small Dotted Buff. A late report for the evening of May 30 was of a Small Seraphim taken by the wardens at Titchfield Haven

Last summer Jonathan Forsyth told us of the astonishing numbers of butterflies to be found at Home Farm close to Burkham House near Lasham on the Alton to Basingstoke road and it looks as if this summer has started well there. Jonathan visited the site yesterday (June 2) and found 245 Common Blue, 82 Small Heath, 7 Green Hairstreak, 3 Brown Argus, a Red Admiral and a Large Skipper. Also there were 80 Burnet Companion and 4 Mother Shipton moths.

Two late reports come, first, from Peter Vaughan at Hook in north Hampshire where on May 26 he watched a Hornet which was unable to take off being over-run by ants and doomed to the death of a thousand cuts. More cheerful news comes from Graham Dennis, warden of the Pamber Forest nature reserve, who counted 50 of the rare Drab Looper moths there on May 25 (and I must apologize for my error in saying - on May 18 - that five Drab Looper caterpillars had been found there on May 11. These were in fact the first moths on the wing as this species overwinters as a pupa, emerges as a moth in April or May and its caterpillars are only found in the second half of the summer).

WED 02 JUNE

Mark Litjens today restored Hampshire's honour by finding a Large Skipper at Farley Mount to the west of Winchester (yesterday the Skippers were out in Surrey and the Isle of Wight but no one reported them in Hampshire!). He also found a very good show of 41 Common

Blues (last year we had to wait until the second brood to get just 30 at this site on Aug 4) and a less dramatic find of 9 Small Blues was better than last year's maximum count of just 3 on June 16).

TUE 01 JUNE

An Emperor dragonfly was seen today by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven (also there were two Hairy Dragonflies) and while he had already seen an Emperor at Whiteley Pastures on May 23 no one else has reported one although their normal flight period starts in late May. Richard also saw the first of the large hoverflies (*Volucella pellucens*). +++ If the Emperor is a bit late this year the first Gold Ringed Dragonfly (seen today by Mike Gibbons at Sopley, just north of his home at Christchurch in the Avon valley) is bang on schedule as an 'early June' species. +++

Not new, but always a delight to see, were Banded Demoiselles seen by Brian Fellows by the River Ems in Emsworth - both male and female were present. +++

Less elegant were the Water Boatmen (or 'Back-swimmers') now to be seen in Ali Downs' garden pond at Four Marks near Alton. She says that the pond was only created a year ago and already has at least two species of damselfly and other creatures, and this has just reminded me that, quite a few years ago, I was standing in my garden (which has no pond) and was hit by a flying object which I thought must have been a beetle but which, when I found it on the ground, turned out to be one of these Water Boatmen 'bugs' presumably flying in search of a mate or a pond or both. Prior to that I had thought of these creatures as restricted to the watery environment. +++

The only new moth taken tonight was a Double Square-spot which came to Derek Mills trap at Farnham and which has had its id confirmed by Mike Wall. Another good catch in Derek's trap was a Pine Hawk, only the third of the year since Russell Wynn took one on May 21.

MON 31 MAY

The first Large Skippers of the year were reported today, one on the Isle of Wight at Bonchurch Down and the other at Botany Bay near Chiddingfold in Surrey where Adrian Hoskins counted 80 Wood Whites and saw some fresh Speckled Woods. A new brood of the latter seem to have emerged here in Havant today as I passed six of them in a short walk down the old Hayling Billy trail between Havant and Langstone. +++

Hampshire did have one 'first of the year' today - a Black-tailed Skimmer dragonfly seen by Peter Vaughan in the Odiham Common area where there were also Beautiful Demoiselles and many Forester moths on the wing.

SUN 30 MAY

Mike Duffy joined a party visiting Porton Down in Wiltshire today and probably saw the first of the new brood of Speckled Woods there as well as first of year Wood Tiger and Cream Wave moths, but the sighting which I would most like to have shared was of a Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth nectaring on Meadow Clary! +++

In Surrey Derek Mills had a couple more first moths - a Bordered White and a micro called *Apotomis sororculana* (somehow that name suggests to me a character from the Gilbert and Sullivan 'Ladies College' in Princess Ida - or perhaps a peculiar female member of staff at Hogwarts College), while at Hill Head Richard Carpenter enjoyed a more conventional character in the form of a Red Admiral (possibly one of the first offspring of this year's early breeding?)

SAT 29 MAY

This evening Tim Walker at Winchester had another good moth trapping session with eight firsts of the year, best of them undoubtedly a Small Elephant Hawkmoth. The others were a Satin Wave and six micros. +++

New moths seen during the day were a Yellow Shell seen on Stockbridge Down by Mike Duffy (along with several micros), another Yellow Shell (I guess, though Cliff Oakley reports it just as a 'Shell moth') on Chapel Common near Liphook where there were many Common Heath moths, and in Fleet Rob Edmunds had a less common longhorn moth called *Adela rufimetrella*.

Yesterday evening both Mike Wall and Nick Montegriffo went moth trapping at a site near Overton and their haul included the first Beautiful Golden Y, Brown Rustic, Small Angle

Shades and a Netted Pug plus five micros which included the Codling Moth whose caterpillars we eat when munching apples from an unsprayed crop and an Ash Bud Moth. A separate account of the session coming from Nick Montegriffo adds Dark Arches and Mompha epilobiella to the score. Two other new names coming from Nick's trapping (presumably at his Sherborne St John home) were a Nephopterix angustella (on May 27) and a Bactra lanceolana (on May 25) +++

Here in Havant Barry Collins also ran his moth trap last night and had a good haul of 21 species, none of them new but including a fine Coxcomb Prominent and a Ruby Tiger.

Today I learnt the secret of the location of the Dean Hill Naval Armaments depot which Ashley Whitlock has been praising as a wonderful butterfly site, and I now know that it is not at the Dean near Bishops Waltham nor the Dean near Sparsholt west of Winchester but is on the Hants/Wilts border east of Salisbury and south of Bentley Wood - apparently the county boundary divides the site into two sections between which the butterflies are not allowed to fly. The best way of locating it on the map is to follow the A36 north towards Salisbury to the point where it runs under Pepperbox Hill, then follow the north ridge of the downs east from that hill until you are above the railway station at West Dean. (As an aside on British placenames the West and East Dean here are third such pair that come up in these notes from time to time, the others being north of Chichester and west of Eastbourne respectively). I still don't know if it is an active or an abandoned MoD site but I guess the latter as I see that Anne McCue was able to visit it on May 23 and found 31 Duke of Burgundy, 130+ Common Blue and one Painted Lady among others and she was not arrested by MoD Police.

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 03 JUNE

In most years I have either seen or at least heard of young Fox cubs appearing well before May is out and I am sure there is no diminution of their numbers or breeding success this year but it is not until today that I have been told of cubs being seen. The news comes from Ian Julian who lives in a heavily populated area of south Hayling near Eastoke corner and has recently discovered that Foxes have a den in which they have raised young within 100 feet of his backdoor. To prove it he has sent me an excellent photo taken from close to that door of a well grown cub in full view and apparently unconcerned about any danger.

WED 02 JUNE

On Monday Brian Fellows watched a Cormorant struggling with a large Eel in the Slipper Mill pond at Emsworth. There are plenty of Eels (and too many Cormorants) in our waters so such an encounter does not sound particularly newsworthy but (a) it is an uncommon observation at Emsworth and (b) the last time Eels were noticed at Emsworth was at this time of year (June 16 last year). Putting two and two together made me wonder if this event marks the start of this year's great journey by mature Eels to their breeding grounds in the Sargasso sea. Brian does not comment on the colour of the Eel (I think resident Eels staying in British waters are 'brown' whereas those ready to 'migrate' are 'silver', but whether this can be detected at a distance is something I do not know). Having raised this thought I will repeat what I wrote last year on June 16 ... +++

The weekly newsletter which Brian Fellows writes for the Brook Meadow conservation group at Emsworth has an interesting observation made by Martin and Margaret Baggs last Friday (June 13) of at least three large Eels in the River Ems running under the footbridge on which they were standing, and on the following day Brian went to the same spot and saw an Eel that was at least two feet (60cm) long and which he thinks by its dark brown colour and size was a female. +++

I have always been a bit puzzled by the life cycle of Eels so I took this opportunity to check up on it. I may well have got some things wrong and welcome correction but my understanding is that our Eels only breed in the Sargasso Sea, nearly as far from here as it is to the Caribbean. The young eels start their life out in these tropical waters but before long they set out to return to the coasts from which their parents came (this is just a guess, as is my conjecture that the adults which spawn the young then die and never make the

return journey). I read that, on reaching our coast, some of them stay in the salt water of estuaries and do not go into fresh water, but I think the great majority do swim up stream, sometimes crossing dry land to arrive in isolated ponds rather than sticking to the waterways. +++

I don't know what determines where their journey ends (nor if they remain in one area or move about restlessly during their time in this country) but I read that they can spend as long as 30 years here before returning to sea to breed and die, and in those years they can grow huge - my source quotes East Anglian records of Eels that weighed 23 lb (10.5 kg) and 27 lb (12 kg) respectively, both being over 5 feet (150cm) long. +++

One of the mysteries of Eels is that when they are adult they come in two types defined by the skin colour - brown and silver eels - and these types have slightly different body shapes (browns are 'bigger headed'). I think my book is suggesting that all eels are of the brown form from the time that they arrive here until they are ready to leave for the sea again, and that they then change to the silver form to head downstream and out to sea. +++

One final bit of information about Eels is that they are mainly nocturnal and most live in murky water so they use scent rather than sight to locate their food (fish eggs, snails, and no doubt puppy dog tails if any fall in the water). If you get a close look at one you should see what look like two nostrils set widely apart on the upper lip of their mouths, and these are used for smelling out prey, not for breathing.

MON 31 MAY

I think the young of Weasels are called 'kittens' and that a female can give birth to two litters each summer - one in April or May and another in July. To feed all her offspring the female Weasel has to do a lot of hunting at this time of year and is likely to be seen out in the daytime but Richard Carpenter is the first to mention such a sighting this year - at Titchfield Haven.

SUN 30 MAY

Derek Hale found five Hares in fields near Shepherd's Chine on the Isle of Wight today.

SAT 29 MAY

At his home in Hill Head, just east of Titchfield Haven, Richard Carpenter today watched Grey Squirrels building a summer drey (in which young will be born?) in a Willow tree, and looking over the garden fence he saw the hole left by a Badger which had dug up a Bumblebee nest.

WEEK 22 MAY 24 - 30

BIRDS

FRI 28 MAY

We are now entering the quietest period of the year for bird-watchers but I hear that a Curlew Sandpiper was reported at Farlington Marshes this afternoon while last night Martin Hampton looked out of his homeward bound train to Havant as it passed the playing fields just north of Farlington Marshes and glimpsed what seemed to be a Harrier species - perhaps we will hear more about that later, hopefully from more a reliable source than the person in the Bedhampton area who (when Tony Gutteridge was carrying out a House Sparrow survey in that area recently) insisted that he had lost all his sparrows to a Montagu's Harrier which he had seen to take them in his garden. +++

Not far west of Farlington Marshes, on the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea, James Wheeldon tells me his work as one of the groundsmen there has been helped recently by House Martins which have been coming to take some of the feathers left by moulting gulls which roost on the cricket pitches and leave the wickets littered with feathers which have to be cleared before games start. Unfortunately House Martin nests are too small to accommodate the larger feathers ... +++

Another birds nest story comes from George Spraggs on Hayling Island. He had seen a Blue Tit start to use a nest box in his garden and thought the lack of activity around the box was due to the bird sitting until he noticed a spiders web across the entrance to the box. Wondering what had happened George took down the nest box and as he opened it a

'large and aggressive spider' jumped out. When it was safe to do so he looked into the box and discovered lots more spiders web plus a bundle of spider eggs. Clearing these out he at last came to the Blue Tit nest with just one egg in it. +++

George suggests that maybe the spider ousted the Tit and caused it to desert though I would have thought it more likely that the Blue Tit met with an untimely end by some other means (probably a cat) and the spider took over the uninhabited box. +++

I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has encountered large spiders taking over bird-boxes in this way and at this time of year. Most spiders mature and lay their eggs in the autumn but I see that some of the larger species may over-winter once or even twice before they mature, and one of the candidate species (*Amaurobius ferox* - which can grow to 16mm) is described by Dick Jones as having a season from autumn to spring so might well be reaching maturity and egg-laying now) Another possibility is that this was one of the big 'house spiders' (*Tegenaria gigantea* or a relative) or even the very big (22mm) jet black recent invader of this country called *Segestria florentina* which inhabits 'holes in walls'. Maybe what George found will become common in the future as a result of global warming. +++

On a more general birding topic Andy Broadhurst raises the question of whether Woodcock numbers are generally lower this year than last year. Andy says that near Brockenhurst in the New Forest, at the same fixed point where he stood last year for the Woodcock survey and had 13 to 15 'contacts' (i.e. individual birds heard or seen during an hour at dusk), this week he only had 2 contacts in the hour. I was interested to see this as when I went to Havant Thicket and heard Nightjar I did not hear or see a single Woodcock (very unusual for that wood). +++

John Eyre shares the same impression as Andy that numbers are low this year, but Paul Winter has had 14 contacts on one visit to his New Forest checkpoint and 13 on the other +++

I think it may well be true that Woodcock numbers are diminishing but I also think that nothing can be read into individual experiences without looking at the broader picture. Many factors can influence Woodcock behaviour at a particular time or place - ranging from the weather, the success of the 'cocks' in mating (maybe an increase in the number of birds could mean that the cocks are 'satisfied' early in the season and don't bother to go curb crawling later?), and changes in habitat (if rides that were clear last year become 'scrubbed up' then the cocks will search for new open areas where the hens can be seen on the ground, and the same number of cocks may be present in the wood but no longer pass over the chosen survey point - even if the rides at that point are still open). One other factor is that Woodcock start roding as early as January in some years, and it may be that this has already been a good year for them and some have already gone off for an 'early bath'. I suggest that Andy might get his own answer by spending more evenings checking different but suitable places.

My query about the absence of information on Cinnamon Teal has received a reply from Ed Griffiths who undertook a search of the internet on the subject and discovered that the species has gone under the name of Cinnamon Teal since at least 1816, and it seems that its apparent absence from British bird books is merely because we on this side of the Atlantic prefer to call it Blue-winged Teal. I also see that my puzzlement at the fact that, although it is listed under the name of Cinnamon Teal in the new Collins Bird Guide it is the only species in the 'vagrants' section of that book to have no illustration alongside the species entry, is due to my own failure to read the species entry which tells you to look for the illustration with the Blue-winged Teal entry in the main section of the book. +++

Further information from the web tells us .. 'There are five subspecies of the Cinnamon Teal, all native to the New World. The only subspecies native to North America is the Northern Cinnamon Teal (*A. cyanoptera septentrionalium*). The Northern Cinnamon Teal breeds in western North America from British Columbia south to California and winters in the south-western States and Mexico. The remainder of the subspecies are native to South America. The Argentine Cinnamon Teal (*A. c. cyanoptera*) breeds from southern Peru south into Argentina and the Falkland Islands. The largest subspecies, the Andean

Cinnamon Teal (*A. c. orinomus*), is located in the high elevation areas of Peru, Bolivia and Chile. The smallest subspecies is the Tropical Cinnamon Teal (*A. c. tropica*) from the lowlands of Columbia. The rarest subspecies, the Borrero's Cinnamon Teal (*A. c. borreroi*) is located only in the highlands of Columbia. (Wescott, 1998). Many thanks to Ed for this info.

THU 27 MAY

I suspect that quite a few people will be slightly envious of Derek Mills, living in Farnham, who has perhaps four or five pairs of Bullfinch resident in his area and coming to feeders in his garden. In mid-March this year Derek wrote .. 'My regular Bullfinches are very loyal and there are definitely 3 females and at least two males as they have appeared all together, but there may be more.' Today Derek writes .. 'a week ago I had the first juvenile Bullfinches appear at my feeders. They must be doing well in this immediate area because, just yesterday, there were four males feeding at the same time and prior to the nesting season I could regularly see three males & females at the same time.' +++

Another piece of encouraging news comes from Mike Collins who works on the Goodwood estate north of Chichester and says that he has heard Firecrest song on the estate throughout May and he thinks the bird(s) may have come from the West Dean woods, possibly showing that the species is expanding in the woods and spreading out into the surrounding country. +++

Here in Havant Mike has seen at least one baby Shelduck on the Budds Farm pools and on May 25 he found six Brent at the mouth of the Langbrook stream

In East Sussex a Temmick's Stint was at Rye Harbour today along with a Common Sandpiper and a Little Ringed Plover (though I'm not sure if the later was also just passing through - I suspect it got a mention because it happened to be seen with the other two).

WED 26 MAY

Mike Rafter today shattered another of my innocent illusions when he watched a Cuckoo lay her egg in the nest of a Dunnock at Titchfield Haven. I had always thought that when a female Cuckoo had discovered a candidate nest offering a suitable home for her youngster she would surreptitiously watch that nest until a full clutch of eggs had been laid in it by its owner, then sneak in while the owner was away having a necessary break, eject one of the owner's eggs, and lay her own, all without the knowledge of the rightful owner. Part of my reasoning was that, if the owner was aware of the intruder, surely she would create as much noise and fuss over the intrusion by a Cuckoo as she would if a Weasel, Squirrel or Magpie was trying to steal her eggs? +++

Mike says .. 'I watched a Cuckoo today at Titchfield Haven apparently laying an egg in a Dunnock's nest. It flew up to the nest site at least 3 times before expelling the incumbent and presumably laying the egg, a procedure which only took a couple of minutes.' Note that he does not mention any real fuss or objection created by the Dunnock and he gives me the impression that the Cuckoo's technique is that of a door-to-door saleswoman, flying up to the chosen nest, jamming her foot in the door and quickly persuading the occupant that if she just goes off for a couple of minutes the Cuckoo can transform her 'ordinary' family into one that will be the envy of all the neighbours (not mentioning the cost in terms of extra feeding, or at best using the 'buy now, pay later' spiel ...). +++

Mike goes on to say that .. 'the Cuckoo appeared to be a rufous or hepatic morph appearing reddish brown rather than slate/grey'.

Over on the Isle of Wight Derek Hale was in Parkhurst Forest after dark, not only finding Nightjar and Woodcock but also seeing three juvenile Long-eared Owls out of their nest. Derek saw one of these young birds in his torch beam but does not comment on their plumage which I would have thought was by now more feathers than down. Long-eared are fairly early nesters, maybe laying eggs before the end of February after which come four weeks incubation and three weeks in the nest before the young venture out - perhaps as early as the second half of April. For comparison Russell Wynn at Pennington saw his first juvenile Tawnies out on May 12. +++

Here in Havant I joined a large party which visited Havant Thicket in search of Nightjar but only heard one bird churring, and I did not myself see any Woodcock though at the end of

the session the group became split and while the group I was with did not see them the others may have gone off to wait at a viewpoint with a wide view of the sky and been more lucky. +++

Before it was dark we walked across the wide area of unimproved meadow south of the Thicket known as the Gipsies Plain and watched at least one Lapwing patrolling the air in a way that told me it was on territory, and this was confirmed by John Goodspeed who has this area for his BTO Breeding Birds Survey. There seemed to be three birds calling tonight and John says he has seen two pairs here this year. +++

And finally for that story that just won't go away. An email on Hoslist today from someone who does not give their name (but has an 'email name' looking like Al Sharp) states that the Cinnamon Teal is still at Fleet Pond, seen there this morning. Is this part of the slander campaign to convince people the bird is a plastic fixture at the pond?

TUE 25 MAY

Ian Julian was at the Hayling Oysterbeds today watching Little Terns bring small fish back to their nest sites where there should now be some young in the nests of the few pairs which managed to secure a foothold when they first returned in mid April. Given a week to settle in and three weeks to incubate their eggs those early birds should have hatched young by mid-May and maybe some of the food now being brought in is for young but some or most of it could be offerings from males to their partners who are only now settling to nest (after the Black-headed Gulls have given up) - if so we should expect the real feeding of young to start in three to four weeks from now ... one can only hope. +++

A more definite and equally interesting observation by Ian was of a Curlew Sandpiper which flew in and landed at the Oysterbeds before he left. I know Curlew Sandpiper are uncommon on spring passage and my first reaction was that this was out of the ordinary as being very late for a passage bird but I see from Birds of Hampshire that what records there are are distributed through the whole month of May with some in June (at a guess today's bird will not be breeding this year and this feeling is enhanced by the fact that Ian did not comment on its plumage which should be striking in a breeding bird) +++

Another slightly unusual Sandpiper observation came today from Richard Carpenter who saw a Common Sandpiper on the banks of the Itchen at Ovington. Turning once more to Birds of Hampshire I see that there has been at least one case of attempted breeding in Hampshire by Common Sandpiper (at Timsbury gravel pit in 1978), and another possible case at Broadlands (Romsey) in 1984. (Note that Richard made no suggestion that this bird might be breeding - I was just checking on the possibility of it).

Successful breeding by Great Tits is hardly newsworthy but we all take pleasure in seeing a family of young just out of the nest, not yet caught by cats or other predators, so I can understand why I have been told of two families seen today - Martin Hampton had one lot around him as he headed along the old Hayling Billy line on his way to Havant Railway Station this morning and Rosemary Webb had another lot in her Hayling garden where she was also intrigued to see how a pair of Crows escorted a Heron off the premises - one Crow at each wingtip threatening to pull out his primaries if he don't get away from their territory. +++

Better class juvenile birds seen on Ambersham Common today were Stonechats. Back on Apr 25 Brian Sharkey reported 'confirmed breeding' by a pair at Silchester Common but this is the first time I have heard of juvenile out of the nest.

Turning to the unusual birds which usually hog the headlines Peter Raby tells us that there was a 'stunning' albino Black-headed Gull at Titchfield Haven today (he had seen it there on May 14 so it may well turn up again) +++

From Sussex comes news of a late Osprey over Crowlink (an isolated big house south of Friston Forest west of Eastbourne), while a female Marsh Harrier was seen over the Pevensy Levels the other side of Eastbourne. The only other Marsh Harrier to be seen since one was over Pulborough Brooks on May 9 was another female seen by Russell Wynn at the Lymington marshes on May 20

An update from Russell Wynn on his sightings in the Lymington area in the past week or so includes several birds that have not been mentioned by others. +++

Last Sunday (May 23) he saw a flock of 230 Black-tailed Godwit still in the Lymington area and remarks that it was a big number for late May - this was not a one day wonder as there had been 110 there on May 17. To my mind this is an exceptionally high number as the Hampshire Bird Reports for 2000, 2001 and 2002 give the May counts for the Lymington area as 22, 0 and 10 respectively, and the peak counts at Titchfield Haven and Farlington Marshes for June of 2003 in my database were 74 and 90 respectively (May counts were even lower and nobody bothered to report any counts from Lymington) +++

Also last Sunday Russell joined the club of birders who have encountered Willow/Chiffs singing the songs of both species in their own special way. Russell says of his .. 'The most curious bird was a phylloscopus warbler that was giving a mixed Chiffchaff/Willow Warbler song (translated as a strident Chiffchaff-like 'chewtee chewtee' followed by a Willow Warblers' descending 'tiu tiu tiu tiu tiu tiu tiu tiu').' +++

Most colourful bird in Russell's list was a male Blue-headed Wagtail seen and photographed on May 20, and most dramatic was a White Stork which landed within two hundred metres of his own front door. +++

He also had his share of the Temminck's Stint passage with two of these. plus a Wood Sandpiper, present throughout May 18 after what was probably a different Temminck's was seen on May 17. May 17 also gave him a first summer Spoonbill flying low over his head plus two Avocets in the pools

MON 24 MAY

Mike Collins had a big surprise at the Budds Farm Pools this evening when he saw a young Red-throated Diver on the water. He describes it as a second calendar year bird (hatched last year) and so it presumably has traces of adult summer plumage but not the full show. I have never seen a diver take off from the water but I guess it needs a fairly long runway - I would think there is no problem for it getting off from the pools but it would need to choose the start point of its take off run and the bird might take a little time to work out where that was on this unfamiliar water. Mike says .. 'it was very restless and doing its best to avoid the Swans and Canada geese. It tried to take off once but landed on the pools again, but was not in view when I left at 7.30.'

This could be the bird which George Spraggs saw in Langstone Harbour last week and if it has been here for a week maybe it will stay longer? Maybe the reason for its continued presence is that it has some difficulty in flying? I think it is very unusual for a diver to be in any of the harbours at this time of year but it is not exceptionally late as a coastal passage bird - Birds of Hampshire says that passage should tail off after mid-May but, prior to its publication in 1993 there were 8 records of birds seen in June, the latest being on 26 June 1989. +++

Less exciting than a diver, but nevertheless a pleasant surprise for me at Langstone this evening, was a noisy juvenile Pied Wagtail being fed by, and then flying off with its parent. The juvenile had not yet grown a long tail and looked odd beside its parent in flight. While watching them I heard the Cetti's Warbler still singing so maybe we will soon be hearing the strange notes of their young - when I first heard them last summer I thought I was listening to a Blackcap giving a strange version of its 'tucc' note from the reeds. +++

Another pleasant sight on Langstone Pond was of all six tiny cygnets from this years brood with their parents at the 'feeding place' inside the sea wall. When I last saw this family they were on the seaward side of the mill, and since then we have had neap tides that come nowhere near the top of the seawall so I was left wondering how the cyngets surmounted the wall to get back into the pond - I guess they must have used the ramp west of the Mill and walked back along the seawall path but I cannot help wondering if I missed a view of the mother Swan flying in with all six cygnets perched on her back!

The Cinnamon Teal could not be found at Fleet Pond today (I have not heard of it since midday on May 21) but the controversy over whether it is just a local escape or a genuine vagrant from America continues. In favour of the bird being a wild vagrant is Alan Lewis who writes .. 'Given the similar arrival dates, is it not possible that both the Fleet Pond and the Hebrides birds were part of the movement of north american vagrants this spring, notably buffleheads and pectoral sandpipers? The events in Iceland may also support this

theory. Does the (shy, unringed, elusive) Fleet Pond bird support or diminish the case for the Hebridean bird? North American wildfowl are not the sole preserve of the Hebrides - even if it that's the way it feels these days...'. Taking up the case for the prosecution and assuming the bird to be an impostor without even considering the evidence in favour of its being wild, Lee Evans says .. 'The only Hampshire record of CINNAMON TEAL that I know of previously was a drake at Woolmer Pond on 16th July 2003. In all probability, this is the current Fleet Pond bird, discovered on 5th May. There have also been two birds present intermittently in Oxfordshire and this may lead to some duplication of records.' +++

What was discovered on May 5? I thought the bird we are discussing had been first seen at Fleet on May 19. And what were the 'events in Iceland'? As an unofficial member of the jury I would really appreciate it if the counsel on either side would tell us the full story and not assume we knew what they knew!

SUN 23 MAY

At Titchfield Haven today Bob Marchant not only saw five Avocet but also a pair of Garganey, and in Pagham Harbour at least one male Garganey was at the North Walls Breach Pool (along with a Temminck's Stint - presumably a different bird from the one reported there on May 11) and another Garganey was seen at Sidlesham (presumably at the Ferry Pool rather than off the village). Somewhere in the harbour there was still a Knot (six of which were at Rye Harbour today). +++

An Osprey circled over Sandown on the Isle of Wight today before flying north, presumably too late to be breeding this year but maybe one that may breed next year coming to check out the possibilities of finding a nest site for the future. +++

Also on the Isle of Wight Derek Hale heard at least two Nightjar churring in Firestone Copse while in Hampshire David Holland estimated that four were churring on Yew Tree Heath in the New Forest, but he says they all fell silent when a Barn Owl started to hunt over the area. He also noted that a Cuckoo continued to 'sing' well after sunset, reminding me of reports last year of Cuckoo singing in the middle of the night - on 12 May last year David Thelwell .. 'reported his surprise at hearing a Cuckoo 'singing' at 1am in a very dark place with no artificial lighting to delude the bird into thinking a new day was breaking' and David Harper came up with information that .. 'New Zealand Cuckoos are well known as night songsters' but that led us into an argument about the evolutionary advantage to the species of singing at night which I don't wish to discuss again! (My view is that 'it's my party and I'll cry if I want to' or in this case sing)

Richard Hallett is the first this year to come across juvenile Great Spotted Woodpeckers screaming for food from their nest holes - he heard one family in the Creech Woods south of Denmead where he also heard the more pleasant sound of Turtle Dove purring and watched one of these birds wing clapping in its display flight. +++

Seven Brent were lazing in the evening sun at the mouth of the Langbrook stream at the Langstone South Moors this evening when I walked by, and on the Budds Farm pools Little Grebes were feeding at least one family of chicks. The Swan was still on her nest and three Shelduck were present - two of these were together, looking like a non-nesting pair, but the third was on its own and may have a sitting mate in the vicinity. Another pair of Shelduck were in the Langbrook Stream outflow.

SAT 22 MAY

We know that many Red Kites have been re-introduced into the British Isles but it is possible that a small number reach us from the continent of their own volition. Yesterday (May 21) one was seen to fly on off the sea at Brighton and to circle for half an hour before pressing on northwards. A Black Kite was reported over Lewes on May 18, and that almost certainly came from the continent, so why not Red Kites? (Or, for that matter, parakeets - I see that on May 24 Richard Prior saw one of these fly in off the sea at Selsey Bill!)

Making my monthly visit to the IBM Portsmouth site for the May WeBS count I found a total of 57 adult and 18 juvenile Canada Geese with three of the adults still sitting on nests that could add another 15 or 20 juveniles in the near future (last year the May count was of 39 adults and 23 juveniles). There was little good news to counterbalance the increased number of geese but I did see one Common Sandpiper, two Egrets (where there is

normally one), and found the Swan pair still sitting. There was also a singing Reed Bunting but I did not see the expected pair of Great Crested Grebe, and also noticed the absence of any House Martins which often feed around the buildings (just three Swifts). One thing that I have not seen for some time was a stream of more than 30 Jackdaws flying south high over Portsdown to feed on the Paulsgrove rubbish tip. +++

To make up for the missing House Martins at the IBM site I hear that the Havant Wildlife Group watched at least half a dozen gathering mud from the shore of Chichester Harbour to build their nests under the eaves of the houses which replaced the old Northney Holiday Camp (to the demise of which we owe the new North Common public open space on which the group were walking!). If there is anyone out there in an area in which House Martins still attempt to nest I hope they realise that a muddy puddle within mud carrying distance of a potential nest site is an essential element in retaining the Martins (even if you put up an artificial nest the instinct of the Martins may well tell them to stay away from the area if the ground around is too dry), and it is well worth carrying a bucket of water to refill the pool as necessary (all other birds will also appreciate your effort in supplying drinking and bathing water).

PLANTS

FRI 28 MAY

A walk around the south east corner of Hayling Island (Black Point and Sandy Point) this afternoon gave me a long list of interesting finds. Newcomers to my own year list were Yellow Horned Poppy (just a couple of plants in flower so far), Rough Clover (*T. scabrum* - with white flowers), Sticky Groundsel, Bugloss (*Anchusa officinalis*), Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Sea Bindweed (with both Large and Field Bindweed being found for the first time today), and (just inside the fence at Sandy Point) the expected Hound's Tongue just starting to open its flowers. Other impressive sights were the Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*) which effectively grows wild here though mainly in gardens, and the Spanish Broom which I noticed for the first time has grown into a 'grove of trees' in the grounds of the sailing club (bare, irregularly shaped, twisting 'trunks' going up for a couple of metres, topped by bushes of hard green cylindrical 'leaves' full of bright yellow flowers, the top of the bushes probably four metres above the ground). +++

In the sand alongside the causeway Dune Fescue and Sand Sedge covered large areas but could not compete with the acres of Hare's Tail grass waving in the breeze wherever I looked. I came on one patch of what I think was Sea Fern Grass and also in the sand was a good show of Sea Holly with green flower buds that will not turn blue with flowers for some time. At one point I was surprised to see a lone Corn Salad plant in the sand at the foot of the sailing club embankment. +++

More sand to the west of the sailing club has been fenced off in a very inoffensive way (using deadwood to imitate a 'laid hedge') with notices saying that the area has been seeded, though it does not say what has been planted but presumably natural sand dune flora. The only thing that was obvious was that banks of Sea Rocket have sprung up and are already flowering but other plants are at a very early stage of growth - I think quite a lot of what I saw would turn into Saltwort but there were probably other species. One isolated young plant of Frosted Orache could be identified but as I found this here last year before the planting it may have been a native of the place. At the south west point of the 'land' I was pleased to see a massive plant of Cotton Thistle growing (there was a good show of these monsters here a few years ago but I thought they had died out). +++

Heading south and passing behind the Lifeboat station I was very pleased to see Bugloss flourishing everywhere (this is the arable weed *Anchusa officinalis*, not to be confused with Vipers Bugloss). For several years I have found it at the approach to the Sailing Club and wondered if it was the result of seeding, but the masses that I saw today were a long way south and on heaps of rubble where they are most unlikely to have been planted! +++

Going on south I had a look for the rare Sea Knotgrass but could only find two plants with any sign of life and just one whose 'woody rootstock' seemed totally dead - hopefully more plants will push up through the shingle before the summer is out. Around Sandy Point Sea

Spurge is flourishing and the English Stonecrop is now flowering but the only other plants of interest seen here were the Hounds Tongue that I have already mentioned - from outside the fence I could see three clumps in the peak of condition, just starting to flower.

THU 27 MAY

Two more orchids now flowering are Bee (seen on Thorney Island by Barry Collins whom I happened to meet in Havant) and Pyramidal (seen in Appley Park at Ryde on the Isle of Wight by Derek Hale and noted on his bird news website). +++

The only plant of interest seen by me today has been out for over a month but is still covered with flowers and has grown into large bushes, taller than my knee-height, which almost block the narrow path between houses in the Warblington area of Havant where they grow - this is the Shining Cranesbill which I had never seen in Havant until about ten years ago.

WED 26 MAY

The very first Buttonweed flower of the year was out this morning in the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton - last year I saw the first on May 24. This morning I did not have any boots to cross the stream and search for other flowers but it will not become important to check on the numbers until the peak occurs in August. +++

I went on to Broadmarsh and found a dozen or so clumps of Salsify flowering on top of the old rubbish tip 'mountain' where lots of Smooth Tare, with its slightly larger lilac coloured flowers, has succeeded the Hairy Tare and its dense clusters of smaller white flowers.

There was no sign of flowers on the *Lathyrus hirsutus* yet but I was interested to see tracks through the thick ground cover of Common Vetch which seemed to show that others had been checking on the *Lathyrus*. Coming down from the mountain and crossing the grass west of the boatpark I was amused to see two lonely stems of flowering Broad Bean looking rather out of place before I reached the seaward side of the boatpark to tick off first flowers on Hemlock. +++

In the evening I joined the party visiting Havant Thicket (to hear Nightjar) and added Heath Bedstraw to the flowering list. While in the area I walked along the track over the Gipsies Plain beside the 'orchid ditch' and counted at least 130 Common Spotted Orchids (there will be many more in a week or so). I have made a note to revisit this ditch in the near future to check on at least two other plants not yet in flower - one a mass of what I assume to be Marsh Bedstraw and the other some plants already a great deal taller than the Lesser Spearwort that was flowering profusely in the ditch - maybe Greater Spearwort?

TUE 25 MAY

Richard Carpenter was by the upper stretches of the River Itchen today and recorded Early Marsh Orchid in flower at Itchen Abbas, Great Tussock Sedge at Ovington and Blue Water Speedwell at Cheriton (Richard does not say that this is the genuine plant and may be using the name as I often do to refer to the hybrid which is by far the commonest Water Speedwell)

Rosemary Webb today told me that when she was at Chappets Copse last Thursday (May 20) for the annual count of Sword Leaved Helleborine she also saw Birdsnest and Great Butterfly Orchids which have not yet been recorded in these notes.

A quick stroll along the Hayling Coastal Path and nearby shore from Saltmarsh Lane this morning gave me my first Pale Flax of the year by the path through the 'Saltmarsh Lane open space' (private land for which the owner cannot get planning permission), and the hedges of the Coastal Path as I walked north were entwined with Black Bryony, some just in flower (White Bryony was also out but not new). +++

After coming back along the shore to the point where the Saltmarsh Lane wetland drains into the sea I turned onto the path following the woodland edge and as I did so I noticed two things in the cereal crop growing in the field south of the copse - one was many spikes of Black Grass in flower (I hope there's not too much of that in the crop!) and the other was a clump of pale flowered buttercups with very small flowers (barely 10mm across). The reflexed sepals, overall hairiness and lack of swelling at the base told me they were Hairy Buttercups but the size of the flowers and the very upright (not bushy) stance of the plants made them look very different from the pale yellow flowered 'hairy' buttercups that I see in shoreline meadows and have always assumed to be Hairy Buttercups - maybe those are

Bulbous after all and I have only now discovered the real Hairy species, or maybe today's plants were an unusual batch? +++

Also today, in the Hayling Billy line behind my house, a couple of plants of Common Figwort were in flower, their yellow pollen patches looking like yellow teeth in some dead animals skull. Back on May 18 Brian Fellows had found buds on Water Figwort at Brook Meadow, so I guess that is also in flower by now.

MON 24 MAY

Richard Carpenter was in the Hook (Warsash) area today and found Climbing Corydalis flowering beside the path which follows the top lip of the Hook Lake valley north from Hook Park Road. Nearer the sea Sea Beet was just coming into flower. +++

A quick look at the north pier of the old rail line at Langstone this evening gave me nothing new for the year list but I did find my own first Bladder Campion and a tremendous show of Sea Sandwort in full flower. Crossing the dry muddy creek between the old railway and the main road I saw the thin flower stems of Sea Lavender sticking up everywhere (no hint of the flowers yet) and also found lots of freshly flowering English Scurvygrass which I would have expected to be over. A few plants of Thrift also grow here and were in flower.

SUN 23 MAY

In last Thursday's notes I reported that Richard Carpenter had found the first Southern Marsh Orchid flowering at Titchfield Haven on May 19 so this evening I went to the Langstone South Moors and found two plants already in flower with a third showing some colour in its unopen flower spike. These three were all that I could see but hopefully the numbers will have increased before the annual count is made by the Havant Wildlife Group on June 19 (the total found at this site should be several thousand but has been as low as 500 in some years). +++

Just outside the new Southmoor nature reserve Slender Thistles are flowering in thousands alongside Southmoor Lane. Going south you will see them on your left as soon as you have gone through the anti-traveller earth bank, and they dominate the waste land there until you come to the north boundary of the new nature reserve at the new footpath to Langstone. +++

Other things seen on this evening walk were the first Feverfew flowers of the year and the very first plant of Smooth Hawksbeard with its leaves prolonged into a needle like point and its stems as smooth as a baby's bottom. A less certain find was of what seemed to be Strawberry Clover starting to open its flower heads (I don't think any Red Clover has that mixture of pink and white even in unopen buds but I will wait to see a properly open flowerhead before claiming it). That was on Budds Mound and when I got to the Langstone side of the South Moors I had no such doubts about a plant growing on the earth bank which stops the Langbrook stream and incoming tide from overflowing onto the moors - this was the first Corky-fruited Water Dropwort. One more item before I reached home was the sight of incipient flowers on Lime trees, my attention being drawn to them by the stickiness that now covers all the leaves and will drip onto any cars parked beneath them. +++

Earlier in the day I walked north from my home past the New Lane allotments where Garden Asparagus was about to open the tiny bell like flowers hanging from its spiky branches. A little further on I noticed that Holm Oaks were now flowering and as I came back alongside the Langbrook stream just south of Crosslands Drive I found Scented Chamomile in flower - double checking the strong smell by seeing that they flower head was hollow in the centre. When very nearly home I came on my first Ground Elder flowers and had a look round the wall of the East Pallant carpark on which hundreds of tiny plants of Rue-leaved Saxifrage are now withered but still hold seedpods erect. In a shaded corner I found just one fresh flowers, the very last of this year's crop.

SAT 22 MAY

At least 50 Common Spotted Orchids were in flower on the islands in the IBM Lake today and there were probably more around the motorway banks in areas I did not visit - some had full spikes a flowers all open and had clearly been out for several days but the majority were only just starting to flower. They were firsts of the year for my list but I enjoyed seeing 33 healthy White Helleborine flower spikes on the canal bank running north from 'D' building

(despite there being a Canada Goose nest with a sitting bird among them!). Other firsts were Heath Speedwell, Kidney Vetch and Lesser Sea Spurrey, and by the look of the plants they will be joined by Yellow-wort and Small Scabious within the next few days while Bee orchids cannot be far behind (one or two plants had raised their flower stems and were showing 'bulges' where the flowers will appear). +++

The last of my finds at the IBM site was Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), and I hear that the Havant Wildlife Group also enjoyed that delight during their coffee break while on Hayling's North Common today (in the low ground at the east end of the common). Equally colourful for those who had not seen it before this year was the Hedgerow Cranesbill flowering around the entrance gate to this site.

INSECTS

FRI 28 MAY

Ashley Whitlock went to Ventnor on the Isle of Wight today and on the downs above Bonchurch between Nansen Hill and St Boniface Down saw Adonis Blues in numbers that he reckoned exceeded 1000 (compared to Peter Eeles' count of 29 at Martin Down yesterday). Only a few Wall Brown were seen on the downs but Common Blue, Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper and Small Heath were numerous. +++

Going down to the undercliff areas at Ventnor he found over 100 Glanville Fritillaries in Wheelers Bay with about half that number in Horseshoe Bay and a few more which had spread into the Monks Bay area.

Here in Havant I was pleased to see a very fresh Red Admiral vigourously patrolling the old Hayling Billy trail behind my house when I took a dog for a walk late in the afternoon when the sun was not visible. Earlier in the afternoon, walking through a residential area of south Hayling. I was surprised to see four male Common Blues enjoying the sun in small patches of roadside grass nowhere near open grassland (they had probably been blown from Sandy Point).

THU 27 MAY

After seeing Painted Ladies everywhere from early February until mid-April they have been 'off the menu' for well over a month but a new invasion may just possibly be on the way with news from Peter Eeles of six seen today on the Hampshire coast at Hordle Cliffs - we will have to wait and see! +++

Prior to this sighting Adrian Hoskins had one Painted Lady in Dorset on May 2 and Ashley Whitlock had a 'probable' in Hampshire on May 22 but he did not see any today at Martin Down where over 100 Small Blues were still on show. +++

Earlier in the day Ashley had been in the Ringwood area, well within Hampshire, and he tells us that he found 6 Marsh Fritillaries 'in a meadow' but does not tell us if the meadow was in Hampshire or Dorset. This is the more frustrating as he himself seems to have said that 'we are all desperate to know if the Marsh Fritillary can still be found in Hampshire' when asked if they could still be found at Martin Down.

Just one new moth for the year is mentioned on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website today - this was a micro called *Rhyacionia pinivorna* (or the Spotted Shoot Moth, whose larvae feed on pine shoots) and three of them were taken last night (May 26) by Derek Mills at Farnham.

WED 26 MAY

Martin Hampton today gave me some excellent local news after he had walked through part of both Southleigh and Stansted Forest, starting in the Hollybank Woods. Pearl-bordered Fritillaries used to be a regular feature of spring in Stansted Forest, but I do not recall ever hearing of them in Southleigh Forest (of which the Hollybank Woods are a part). Sadly they seem to have vanished from Stansted - the last I heard was that Michael Prior (the head Forester) had only seen one or two of the butterflies there in 2001, with no reports reaching me for 2002 or this year despite several visits by Adrian Hoskins. +++

Today's good news is that Martin saw two Pearl-bordered in the Southleigh Forest, one somewhere in Hollybank and the other by the bridle path heading towards Stubbermere just before it reaches Woodberry Lane. Martin says that he did not see the underside of

either well enough to be sure that they were not Small Pearl-bordered but I have never heard of the Small species in this area and so I think the chances are that these were Pearl-bordered. +++

Ashley Whitlock went to Bentley Wood to the west of Stockbridge this morning and at 7:45am was counting at least 50 Small Pearl-bordered and 25 Pearl-bordered Fritillaries perched on bracken tops as they warmed up in the sunshine.

TUE 25 MAY

Ten new moths for the year-list were recorded tonight. At Sherborne St John Nick Montegriffo had Scorched Wing, Large Nutmeg, Water Veneer and Epiblema trimaculana. At Pennington Russell Wynn added Broad-barred White, Bird's Wing and Common Wainscot while at Efford, also in the Lymington area, Pete Durnell found Plain Pug, Barred Umber and Small Clouded Brindle. +++

By the upper Itchen Richard Carpenter found Mayflies in abundance and at both Ovington and Itchen Abbas he saw two Banded Demoiselles - first of the year. +++

Another dragonfly sighting which I find slightly harder to believe is an anonymous report on the HWT website of a Brown Hawker being seen in the Blashford Lakes area at Ringwood on May 21. I think this may be a mistaken identification as this species is not normally on the wing until mid-June and the first report for last year did not come until July 9. +++

Also on the HWT website, with no doubts this time, is a note from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes reporting the appearance of a Wasp Beetle on a log pile at Farlington Marshes. These large black and gold beetles seem to show no fear of predators and can often be seen in early summer on dead wood in which they will lay their eggs and where the larvae will live until they emerge as adult beetles. This is one of a group of beetles known as Longhorns because of their prominent antennae.

New moths found last night (May 24) were Maple Prominent (taken by Derek Mills in Farnham), The Shears (Russell Wynn at Pennington) and a Grey Pug (Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John - Nick says this one is 'awaiting confirmation'). On the evening of May 20 Nick had Wormwood Pug, Tawny Marbled Minor, a Small Clover Case-bearer and a Eudonia tuncicolella.

Not new, but an interesting find by Patrick Fleet when surveying part of the Alice Holt Forest near the Bentley Station Meadow of which he is warden, was a Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth. This was seen on May 17.

MON 24 MAY

Tony Wilson went to the Burton Mill Pond area west of Pulborough today and saw at least six species of dragonfly. Hairy Dragonflies, Four-spotted Chasers and Beautiful Demoiselles were numerous, having been on the wing for some time, but there were also three newer species starting with three female Scarce Chasers (the first of these that I know of was in Mike Gibbons garden at Christchurch yesterday - May 23). Red-eyed Damselflies were also present and the first of these had been seen by Richard Carpenter at Swanwick by the River Hamble on Saturday - May 22 - but Tony was the first to report Variable Damsels. I assume species such as Common Blue, Azure and Blue-tailed damsels were also present at Burton. +++

Richard Carpenter was at Hook with Warsash today and comments that a Hairy Dragonfly that he saw there may have been new to the site - any comments from David Tolcher or other regulars at Hook?

SUN 23 MAY

Mike Gibbons today scored a first with a Scarce Chaser dragonfly without even leaving his own garden at Christchurch, and in Botley Woods north of Fareham Richard Carpenter had the first Emperor dragonfly along with a couple of Downy Emeralds (of which he had seen the first yesterday) +++

Also in Botley Woods Richard had two separate Hornets (presumably at this date they were both queens representing two colonies for the coming summer), and at Odiham Common in the north of Hampshire Peter Vaughan had the 'moth of the day' - the first Forester.

Turning to butterflies I see that Alan Thornbury was in Dorset today visiting a nature reserve at Powerstock (some way to the north west of Dorchester) and not only saw five Marsh

Fritillaries but also a dozen Wood Whites (in my ignorance of such matters I had previously thought that the only place to see Wood Whites in the south of England was at the Botany Bay woodland complex near Chiddingfold in Surrey). Alan later went to Bentley Wood on the Hants/Wilts border where he found 16 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries but only 6 faded Pearl-bordered, making it sound as if the larger species, which only appeared on the scene on May 10, has already been ousted by the smaller which only appeared on May 20. +++ Still very much on the increase it seems are the Small Blues at Martin Down - Simon Woolley went there today and estimated that there were more than 150 along with 50 Grizzled and 30 Dingy Skippers. Simon also had 3 Adonis Blues at Martin Down and Ian Pratt had two more on the Isle of Wight today (single male at one site and a single female at another!). The very first Adonis Blue seems to have been seen yesterday - May 22.

SAT 22 MAY

The first Downy Emerald and Red-eyed Damselflies of the season were seen today by Richard Carpenter over the pools in the pits from which brick-clay was dug at what is now the Swanwick nature reserve beside the River Hamble on the north side of the M27. Of the four Red-eyed damsels two were already flying in tandem.

Tonight was the advertised National Moth Night when the whole nation was supposed to go out and enjoy moths - unfortunately clear skies allowed the temperature to drop rapidly and the moths stayed in even if the people did come out to see them. Several new moths were added to the year list but none of them was large enough to have an English name. At Stockbridge Down by day Mike Duffy had *Pyrausta nigrata*, and at the Hordle Cliffs Adrian Hoskins found a Plume Moth called *Platypilia gonodactyla* (a name giving me the impression of a Duck-billed Platypus with its sexual organs on its fingers). At Fleet by night Rob Edmunds had *Alabonia geoffrella* and Mike Wall with others on Yateley Common recorded *Dioryctria abietella*. Richard Carpenter, back at his Hill Head home, did trap four moth species including Puss Moth, but nothing new or dramatic. +++

Better known moths have been found on recent nights, starting with the first Pine Hawkmoth of the year in Russell Wynn's trap at Pennington on May 21. On May 20 Russell took the first Mullein Wave and on May 19 he had the first Fox Moth +++

Also on May 19 Paul Boswell at Greywell added *Aethes smeathmanniana* to the year list and on May 17 John Cloyne at Winchester seems to have found a new moth which I am unable to track down - he calls it a Dingy Shell and implies that Tim Walker has also had one recently though Tim's news never seems to have reached the Butterfly Conservation website.

Best butterfly was the first Adonis Blue of the year seen by Peter Vaughan at Martin Down (he also came on a female Glow-worm, not a particularly exciting sight by day!) and most enthusiastic butterfly watcher was Ashley Whitlock who is so enthusiastic about a site which he visited today, finding 35 Duke of Burgundy and many Common Blue, Dingy Skipper and Small Heath, that he wants others to visit it - unfortunately he does not tell us where in the south of England it is to be found, only that it is a Naval Armaments Depot at somewhere called Dean Hill (perhaps that is a necessary security precaution in view of the contents of the site, which also implies that anyone going there is unlikely to get in to see the butterflies!). Perhaps one clue to the location of this site is that Ashley seems to have fitted in a lengthy four hour visit to it on the same day that he led a party around Pignal Inclosure in the New Forest. While at the Dean Hill site Ashley noted 18 butterfly species which included a single Painted Lady. +++

Other butterfly news for today includes a first mention (from Ian Pratt) that Glanville Fritillaries are out at the Ventnor site on the Isle of Wight, a couple of days later than Mike Gibbons found the first at the mainland Hordle Cliffs site.

My monthly visit to the IBM North Harbour site (on the pretext of making the monthly WeBS count of shore birds) gave me just one male Common Blue butterfly and one Blue-tailed Damselfly today but I did have a bonus in the form of a good view of a fresh Burnet Companion moth.

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 26 MAY

Long before sunset, and with people and their dogs still out walking within a couple of hundred yards of them, I watched a group of five Roe deer openly feeding like grazing cattle in the Gipsies Plain meadows just south of Havant Thicket this evening. This may have been a family unit but my impression was of three adult does with one smaller doe (one year old?) and a single young buck with distinctive antlers that seemed to be curved back rather than sticking straight up (but I only had a short glimpse of him as he seemed to prefer to be lying down in the long grass where he became invisible).

SUN 23 MAY

Walking down the path beside the Langbrook stream from Havant to the South Moors on this warm and sunny evening I had a rather unexpected sight as I passed the concrete track used by the cattle that graze the moors to get to and from their barn at the old Dairy Farm buildings. Walking nonchalantly towards me down the open concrete track, and coming within twenty yards before it turned off into the cover of brambles, was an adult Fox with a dead Magpie in its mouth.

WEEK 21 MAY 17 - 23

BIRDS

SAT 22 MAY

Making my monthly visit to the IBM Portsmouth site for the May WeBS count I found a total of 57 adult and 18 juvenile Canada Geese with three of the adults still sitting on nests that could add another 15 or 20 juveniles in the near future (last year the May count was of 39 adults and 23 juveniles). There was little good news to counterbalance the increased number of geese but I did see one Common Sandpiper, two Egrets (where there is normally one), and found the Swan pair still sitting. There was also a singing Reed Bunting but I did not see the expected pair of Great Crested Grebe, and also noticed the absence of any House Martins which often feed around the buildings (just three Swifts). One thing that I have not seen for some time was a stream of more than 30 Jackdaws flying south high over Portsdown to feed on the Paulsgrove rubbish tip. +++

To make up for the missing House Martins at the IBM site I hear that the Havant Wildlife Group watched at least half a dozen gathering mud from the shore of Chichester Harbour to build their nests under the eaves of the houses which replaced the old Northney Holiday Camp (to the demise of which we owe the new North Common public open space on which the group were walking!). If there is anyone out there in an area in which House Martins still attempt to nest I hope they realise that a muddy puddle within mud carrying distance of a potential nest site is an essential element in retaining the Martins (even if you put up an artificial nest the instinct of the Martins may well tell them to stay away from the area if the ground around is too dry), and it is well worth carrying a bucket of water to refill the pool as necessary (all other birds will also appreciate your effort in supplying drinking and bathing water).

FRI 21 MAY

Tony Gutteridge and I walked the Warblington fields this morning for the Common Bird census (the seventh visit of the ten to be made during the breeding season), but we found nothing of great significance - the best thing being that the fields which had recently been ploughed and sown just after the Skylarks had probably made nests in the grassy weeds that were there before the ploughing, are regaining ground cover with the Sweetcorn now several inches high, aided by the small tufts of grass which are regrowing. This has brought back Skylarks to sing over two of the three fields which the Skylarks seem to like best and hopefully they are having a second go at nesting. +++

One unusual thing that I did notice was that a pair of Mallard had arrived in the farmyard and were happily poking about in a puddle created by recent heavy rain. They did not seem perturbed by my close presence and may well have had thoughts of nesting somewhere nearby (at the IBM North Harbour site several pairs regularly nest in flower beds around the site and show little concern over humans in the near vicinity). Co-incidentally George

Spraggs found another pair in his Hayling Island garden where he has never seen them before - they too may well have thoughts of nesting. +++

Going back to Warblington I was surprised to find what seemed to be a family party of Goldfinch flying into a tree in the cemetery, but they flew on before I could confirm that some of the party were juveniles. I'm pretty sure they were a family and this adds to the evidence of early breeding this year reported by Paul Winter in my notes for last Monday (May 17) +++

Another unusual observation made by Tony was a second sighting of a Green Woodpecker which he had seen on the previous visit. This bird seems to be afflicted with a severe case of melanism (the opposite of albinism!). Tony says that all the plumage which is normally green is a dark brown or even black but the bird is definitely not a Black Woodpecker.

THU 20 MAY

A Cinnamon Teal appeared on Fleet Pond yesterday and has given pleasure to a number of viewers despite its wariness of humans which is one of the signs suggesting that it could be a genuine wild bird from the New World. Quite a few of these birds are kept in collections and sometimes escape - it seems that in the 1990s one or more escapees could be seen on the Frensham ponds in Surrey - but there is no obvious indication that this bird is an escape so it is odd that someone has gone out of their way to invent a story that this bird has been hanging about at Fleet Pond for a couple of years - the motive for spreading this falsehood is apparently to 'rubbish' any claims that it might be wild. With such a closely watched site as Fleet Pond it is not possible that this bird could have escaped the attention of the many experienced local birders, and the lies being spread about it are a sad reflection on how one warped mind can poison the pleasure of seeing this beautiful and possibly rare visitor. +++

One thing that intrigues me about Cinnamon Teal is that it seems to be a newly evolved species, only appearing on this planet in the past twenty years or so. It is named as a rare vagrant species in the new Collins Bird Guide but does not get a mention in my 1983 Shell Guide or any other of my bird books, and when I turn to my original Peter Scott 'Key to the Wildfowl of the World' (published in the late 1940s) I find 24 species of Teal listed but nothing named Cinnamon Teal or *Anas cyanoptera* (nor does it appear in my slightly more recent Arundel Guide which has only 15 Teal species. Can anyone tell me if this bird is a recent 'split' from one of the original species that I have listed?, has it just been renamed to conform to some edict from the civil servants who run the World Council of Bird Names?, or is it genuinely a newly discovered species?

At Pulborough Brooks all four eggs in the Barn Owl nestbox at the visitor centre have now hatched and the chicks can be seen on the live webcam. Less good news was on BBC South TV this evening when we were shown pictures of the Peregrines nest on Chichester Cathedral - it seems that only three of the eggs there hatched but the three chicks which did hatch are now well grown and thriving, sufficiently so for Graham Roberts to be scheduled to appear on TV in a week's time ringing the chicks before they fledge.

News from the Isle of Wight for today includes a sighting of a Honey Buzzard passing north over the Alverstone area and a brief glimpse of a Hoopoe flying in off the sea and appearing to land on the end of the pier. A more 'ordinary' observation was of a Spotted Flycatcher singing in the Havenstreet area. +++

More 'singing' was heard in Sussex from two (possibly three) Grasshopper Warblers in the Beeding Brooks (just north of where the Adur river passes through the Downs to reach the sea). At Pagham Harbour two male Garganey and a female Wigeon were seen today, and last night a Nightjar was heard in the Chailey area north of Lewes +++

Here in Hampshire 22 Black-tailed Godwit were still at Titchfield Haven with a Hobby also present, and Richard Carpenter who saw those birds had a much more unusual observation on the previous day (May 18) when by the Meon near Droxford - he heard the 'song' of a Kingfisher (which must be even rarer than that of a Bullfinch but resembles it in being a more or less random collection of notes). +++

Just before the Kingfisher pair which gave such us good viewing at the Langstone Mill Pond

last winter left they (or one of them) was very noisy as the two birds seemed to be having a game of 'tag' chasing each other round the pond (presumably working up to mating), but the noise then was just many repetitions of the sharp whistle which they use as an alarm call or to announce the return of one of a pair as it approaches the nest (there is no room for two adults in the nest approach tunnel and a sitting female with newly hatched young - who cannot see anything of the outside world - has to be told to come out of the nest to let a male with new supplies of food enter the tunnel). I imagine what Richard heard was something different, including notes of varying pitch, and probably delivered by a perched rather than a flying bird.

WED 19 MAY

About this time every year I am reminded of Attila the Hun and his barbarian hordes streaming out of the east to ravage the countryside - the trigger for this thought comes from the screaming mob of Starlings as the year's first crop of young birds emerge from their nests to cover any available grassland in their desperate search for food. Derek Hale remarked on the appearance of these birds on the Isle of Wight today and here in the Havant area I could not help but noticed the seething mass of birds dashing around in the grass - the adults searching silently for insects and their grubs, the juveniles standing about, fluttering wings and screaming for food to be brought to them. One would think all this din would attract predators but it seems that that sheer number of birds and the volume of the noise actually drives them away, and I suppose we should all be grateful to the birds for their 'field cleaning' work - without them our houses would soon be full of fluttering Daddy-Longlegs and no doubt crops and cattle would suffer from an overpopulation of other types of insect. +++

A much more attractive aspect of May, now sadly experienced by fewer and fewer people each year, is the return of Spotted Flycatchers to their regular nest sites, and while I have been bemoaning the fact that I am unlikely to see a single Spotted Flycatcher until the autumn, Simon Woolley in central Winchester is still able to tell us that a .. 'Spotted Flycatcher is now singing from its regular arrival songpost in College Street, central Winchester, in the Indian Bean Tree'

Non-breeding birds of several late arriving summer migrants may still be seen on our shores until the end of May and a good example of unexpected sightings comes today from Kris Gillam at Sandown Bay on the Isle of Wight where he found 12 Common Sandpipers - I have noted 24 reports of these birds arriving on the Island from Apr 14 this year, mostly singles and never more than four together until today. +++

Another unexpected sighting was given to George Spraggs today when he was at the northern end of the Hayling Coastal path. After checking out the terns at the Oysterbeds he came across a Little Owl on the ground in a field adjacent to the main road onto the island, and the fact that the bird was on the ground in broad daylight suggests to me that it was under orders to fetch a continual supply of food for newly hatched young - their principal food source is, I believe, worms and beetles found on the ground (a good place to look for Little Owls is where old trees in field hedgerows offer nest hole opportunities - and rain-free roost places - close to an active dung heap which offers lots of beetle and worm food).

TUE 18 MAY

Today's big news is of a Baird's Sandpiper seen with a Temminck's Stint at Rye Harbour yesterday (May 17). On looking up this very rare vagrant the first thing I found was that it is very unusual for one to turn up in Britain outside the Aug-Nov period, but the next thing I remembered was that Jason Crook had a spring bird at the Hayling Oysterbeds, and on looking that up I found it was on 8 May 2000 (to illustrate the rarity of the species that was only the fifth ever record for Hampshire). I'm not sure if Jason's bird was the earliest ever for Britain, but was certainly ten days earlier than the current Sussex bird. +++

The current Sussex bird is definitely the earliest for that county (previously the earliest was July 23) and it is I think the eighth record for Sussex where the seventh was at Sidlesham Ferry on 1 Oct 1996 following a September bird at Pett Pools near Hastings in 1989 with none before that since 1981. +++

I don't think there is any connection between the Baird's Sandpiper and the following remark from one observer at one of the Rye Harbour hides but I cannot resist quoting it as an example of the 'ordinary birders' attitude (which I share!) towards the difficulties of identifying 'peeps and stints' - the observer wrote .. 'There was also a small wader which could have been a little stint but there seemed to be some disagreement about it in the hide!'. For the genuine train spotter, who must have the full number of every engine passing their platform (and the location of its engine shed, the date on which it was built, and the various routes on which it has served - just what you get from bird ringing data!), one of the important things about this bird is that its closed wings project well beyond the tail and only the White Rumped Sandpiper shares this characteristic (but that bird separates itself from identification as a Baird's as soon as it takes wing and shows its white rump). +++

The other observer at Rye whom I quoted above tells us other equally (if not more) important bird news including the fact that Ringed Plover chicks could be seen on the shingle and that a Lapwing managed to 'see off' a Kestrel which was eyeing up the Lapwing chicks for dinner.

Returning to the subject of 'really important' birds I see that today a Black Kite was over that East Sussex raptor hotspot, Mount Caburn just outside Lewes, and in Hampshire a White Stork was seen by Peter Raby in the midday heat high above Titchfield Haven. It circled and soared for seven minutes before it vanished into the haze, seemingly drifting north on the seabreeze. While there some disturbance in the Haven put up 4 Avocets, 31 Black-tailed Godwits (staying the summer here?), a Greenshank, and two Turnstones as well as the inevitable football crowd of 'Oicks'. +++

Trevor Carpenter spent two hours at Hill Head this evening and for all of that time a Black Tern was fishing offshore. Several hundred Common Terns were present and 7 Eider were seen plus one distant unspecified Skua.

From other places in Hampshire two Red Kite sightings have reached me. I totally agree with the principle of not revealing the location of potentially breeding birds (rare or otherwise) but at the same time the whole spirit of bird-watching lies in the immediacy of what is going on in the bird world today and I have had no reason to change the proposal that I put forward in April in order to inform those who are interested in current news of birds in their part of the world without causing disturbance to the birds concerned. That proposal is that sightings of any birds which might suffer disturbance from gawpers, twitchers or egg/chick thieves should be publishable by reference to some well known town that lies within ten miles of the actual location of the sighting, Thus today's sighting of a Red Kite was in the Portsmouth area and tomorrow's sighting (May 19), also of a Red Kite, was in the Alton area.

MON 17 MAY

Despite the ongoing and apparently inevitable depauration of the Corn Bunting from the south coast countryside there are still enough left for most birders to get them on their yearlist without travelling far, and now is probably a good time to go out and get that tick as they sing to establish breeding territories. I'm sorry to say that I missed John Shillitoe's recent appearance on TV showing him cycling the lanes of the Meon Valley to illustrate whatever angle the TV people chose to put on the decline of 'the fat bird of the barley', but my take on the decline of Corn Buntings is measured by the fact that I have only come across 9 reports of Corn Bunting anywhere in Hampshire so far this year (and one of those was the wandering bird seen by Russell Wynn near Barton on Sea on Apr 29) whereas in the same period last year I collected 25 records which included flocks of 40 at Longwood Warren on Jan 24 and 24 at Hoe Cross on Mar 28. This year's highest count in Hampshire was just 6 birds. +++

Sussex has a few more of these birds than does Hampshire but records so far this year only come from a dozen sites - 8 on the South Downs, 3 around Chichester Harbour and of course Rye Harbour where the winter flock reached a peak of 82 birds. On the Downs the highest count was of 50 at Truleigh Hill on Apr 4 and on the Thorney Island I was told by Barry Collins that the winter flock peaked at 36 birds. +++

The reason for mentioning Corn Buntings today is that there have been three reports of them this weekend. Today Richard Carpenter came on one at Long Road, Soberton, on Saturday Will Walmsley found at least 5 in the Hoe Cross area west of Hambledon, and on Sunday Brian Fellows saw one singing on the Nutbourne Bay seawall (where Cliff Oakley had come on one in March this year). If you want one for your yearlist and fail at Hoe Cross or Nutbourne it's worth taking the path south from Dell Quay towards the Chichester Marina on the Fishbourne Channel - Kevin Stouse heard one singing from a field of rape here on May 9. +++

On a similar subject, but with a more cheerful note, Dave Unsworth suggests that it could be well worth checking out potential Grasshopper Warbler sites on warm evenings in the next week or so. There does seem to have been a good arrival of these birds in April and I have gathered 36 reports of them from around 20 different locations, and today Dave Unsworth tells us (without revealing the location of potentially breeding birds) that he heard three different birds reeling at one site that he visited recently. I certainly intend to check out one area north of Emsworth where I came across one of these birds a few years back.

I'm sure most of you will have seen newly fledged birds of various species in the past week or so, but I doubt anyone has seen young Goldfinch yet - they are normally one of the later birds to be seen in family parties. Nevertheless Paul Winter tells us that he was surprised to see two juveniles in his garden in the Rownhams area of Southampton this evening.

+++

When I was out this evening I came on a family party of Long-tailed Tits and Brian Fellows noted a juvenile Robin at Brook Meadow on Saturday and had a young Black bird in his Emsworth garden recently.

SUN 16 MAY

Ian Julian reports good news from the Hayling Oysterbeds today, saying .. 'On the island, over 100 Little Tern, spread all over, appeared to be nesting. Also, several Common Tern and far fewer Black headed Gulls nesting.' We certainly should not count our Tern chick until they have fledged and flown, but Ian's picture is far better than my personal expectation (though I have difficulty in believing that the gulls have been ousted by the Terns - more likely the Terns have been 'gulled' into feeling that they have won the day prior to an all out dawn offensive by those squadrons of immature Herring and Great Blackback Gulls who have sold their services to Blackheads) +++

Even better news comes from Chris Jones who, on visiting the wet meadows of The Vyne estate north of Basingtoke to see the breeding Lapwing, Shelduck and Redshank also noted 'several Spotted Flycatchers in the gardens of the big house' - probably just returned as I note that three were seen at St Catherine's Point and two on West High Down yesterday (May 15) as a wave of late arrivals reached the Isle of Wight. Not many years ago these birds would be expected around Stansted House down here in the south, and at a range of other properties in the Havant area (down to one pair that I remember nesting on the most primitive of 'porches' - two metal poles and a small square of flat roof - outside a council house in Leigh Park). In those days anyone who hung out a flower basket in front of their house had a good chance of having a Flycatcher nest in it, but times have changed and nowadays I do not expect to see a Flycatcher until the autumn when family parties move down from the north to spend a few days near the coast preparing, like the D-Day troops, to cross the channel

Unusual birds today start with a Purple Heron in Pagham Harbour and a first report of a female Montagu's Harrier from somewhere in Hampshire, plus a less surprising report (in view of the number being seen on the coast at the moment) of a Temminck's Stint at Fleet Pond. Even less surprising, but nevertheless a delight for the viewers at Selsey Bill, was a flock of 25 Pomarine Skuas. (This reminds me that I forgot to mention a female Serin seen in the Bill House garden on May 13). +++

An unexpected sight at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today was of four Siskin that had apparently just flown the channel long after all our garden Siskin have left the peanut feeders here. +++

Among other late birds are the summering Brent in Langstone Harbour - back on May 1 I saw

six of them at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream west of Langstone village and today Mike Collins saw only five while Ian Julian (across the water at the Oysterbeds) only saw four - they could have been different birds, but I suspect they represent one group of six birds doing their annual disappearing trick. (After a last appearance in the South Moors area in early May each year they leave the harbour shores to hide away out among the islands until early September when they re-appear, obviously looking for the returning migrants). +++

And finally for today I have an interesting observation from Sue Drewett in her north Emsworth garden where a secure (Squirrel proof) bird feeder is well used, attracting Wood Mice to feed on any bits which fall to the ground below. Watching the area today Sue saw a Magpie fly down to a tuft of grass into which it plunged its bill to come out with a mouthful of Mouse (which it carried away as its contribution to its family dinner). Sue could not be sure if the prey was Mouse or Vole but I would have suspected the former until I checked on Vole diet. We all know that mice like grain and nuts, and I had previously assumed that Field and Bank Voles, like Water Voles, fed almost exclusively on the leaves and roots of plants, but I see that the land based species take berries, nuts and fungi as well as green matter so I have learnt something new! What I do think is true is that Voles are much less likely than are Mice to come out of cover onto e.g. a bare patio - perhaps someone will now disillusion me of that assumption. +++

Going back to the Magpie behaviour I have never seen one catch a mouse but I have seen one in my own garden trying to catch a Slow-worm in long grass.

SAT 15 MAY

It is most unlikely that any Tree Sparrows now breed in Hampshire (a few years ago they were given every encouragement at their last stronghold at Odiham airfield but failed to take up the offer as I think they similarly rejected the encouragement given them at Pagham Harbour) but one can always hope that they will change their minds and this spring Tony Gutteridge and I have both, on separate occasions, seen two little Sparrow sized birds flying high, fast and straight in fashion suggesting Tree Sparrow, over the Warblington fields where they last bred in 1987. We can always hope for a miracle, and today we had a sign from across the water - the first Tree Sparrow to be seen anywhere on the Isle of Wight since May 1998 flew west from St Catherine's Point (never to be seen again?) +++

Coming back from phantasy land I see that the first Roseate Tern of the year was at Rye Harbour today, and hopefully that means that others will turn up elsewhere before too long (Titchfield Haven being the most likely place to see them - last year the first was there on May 4 following the first of year on Apr 29 at Hurst) +++

Another welcome return to Hampshire is of Honey Buzzard, two being seen somewhere in the county and confirming their identity by a wing clapping display.

Local news for today is that a Swift was seen to enter a potential nest space in the roof of an Emsworth building, and yesterday Martin Hampton heard the long awaited 'inspiring' song of a Reed Bunting back at Langstone Pond

PLANTS
SAT 20 MAY

At least 50 Common Spotted Orchids were in flower on the islands in the IBM Lake today and there were probably more around the motorway banks in areas I did not visit - some had full spikes a flowers all open and had clearly been out for several days but the majority were only just starting to flower. They were firsts of the year for my list but I enjoyed seeing 33 healthy White Helleborine flower spikes on the canal bank running north from 'D' building (despite there being a Canada Goose nest with a sitting bird among them!). Other firsts were Heath Speedwell, Kidney Vetch and Lesser Sea Spurrey, and by the look of the plants they will be joined by Yellow-wort and Small Scabious within the next few days while Bee orchids cannot be far behind (one or two plants had raised their flower stems and were showing 'bulges' where the flowers will appear). +++

The last of my finds at the IBM site was Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), and I hear that the Havant Wildlife Group also enjoyed that delight during their coffee break while on Hayling's North Common today (in the low ground at the east end of the common). Equally colourful for those who had not seen it before this year was the Hedgerow Cranesbill flowering around the entrance gate to this site.

FRI 21 MAY

Walking the Warblington fields this morning I found Rough Chervil just starting to flower by one hedgerow - the umbels on the plants were still drooping but with a lens I saw the some of the tiny flowers were in fact open!. Two other significant firsts were Marsh Thistle and Spindle, and a special pleasure was to find Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) in full flower in parts of the SSSI field that are probably below sealevel and are influenced by salt water seeping up from the ground. A very obvious new flower in fresh water was Water Cress and elsewhere I found both the large flowered Water Forget-me-not (*M. scorpioides*) and the small flowered Tufted Forget-me-not (*M. caespitosa*). Other firsts were White Bryony and Swine Cress (no smell of cress so not the Lesser Swinecress that I have seen for some time). Later in the day, walking in Havant, I noticed a great display of Annual Pearlwort along the top of an old wall.

THU 20 MAY

John Goodspeed tells me that Horseshoe Vetch is now flowering on Portsdown, and here in Havant I saw my first Purple Toadflax. +++

Yesterday at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter found the first Southern Marsh orchid in flower (I doubt any will be out at the South Moors yet) and on the previous day (May 18) Richard found the first Ground Elder (gardeners beware!) in the Meon Valley where Greater Celandine was also out.

WED 19 MAY

My first Common Mallow and Foxglove flowers were probably today's most significant markers on the road to high summer, but top of my list of today's sightings was a 'waterfall' of Dog Rose flowers cascading over the gateway of industrial premises on the east side of Palmer's Road in Emsworth (immediately before the carpark entrance). This is where the first rose of summer was seen by the Havant Wildlife Group last Saturday and it is still the only place that I know where these roses can be seen (but that won't last long!). Under the roses Bittersweet Nightshade was flowering (only my second tick for this) and subsequently cycling up Mill Lane to Westbourne I found my first Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil and Dames Violet in flower. +++

Happening to meet Brian Fellows near Brook Meadow he joined me for a walk through the site and showed me several of the Sedges on offer there including both False Fox and the similar but less common Spiked Sedge. Lots of Common Spike Rush was flowering in the meadow. Before we parted Brian showed me the excellent artwork of Marion Forster on the interpretation board which greets you as you enter the meadow area from the carpark (southern end, nearest the main road). That is well worth pausing to examine in detail, giving you a real feeling that you are about to enter a place full of colourful living things (unlike the Hampshire Wildlife Trust's latest style of 'welcome' boards which make you feel you are about to enter a play school for young children and which have clearly been

designed by highly paid marketing professionals who love to create the sort of image over which Margaret Thatcher would drape her handkerchief to avoid having to look at something she found distasteful). Not only is this static board more informative and attractive than similar boards at other nature reserves but it is backed by several other 'dynamic' boards around the site displaying recent and regularly changed photos and informative notices - no wonder the meadow and its associated group are flourishing. (If you have never been go along there soon with a few friends and sign up for membership - the current membership is close to its target of 300 and one of you stands a good chance of getting some sort of special prize if you happen to be the 300th member) +++

Going back to my own outing this morning I was pleased to add yet another site for Small-flowered Cranesbill to my local list - I stopped to admire a great show of Biting Stonecrop (none of it fully in flower) on the pavement of Swallow Close (off Fourth Avenue in Denvilles) after taking a shortcut path from Southleigh Road, and also on this pavement edge I found several plants of the Cranesbill. This reminds me that I found another site for it beside Warblington Road in Emsworth on Monday, and I am now getting my eye in for spotting this plant at a distance before checking the hairs of the flower pedicels with my lens to be sure of my find. Incidentally I find that looking at the flower pedicels with a lens is also the way to confirm finds of the Round-leaved Cranesbill. On normal Dove's Foot Cranesbill the hairs on the pedicels are non-glandular and vary in length, some much longer than others and all longer than on the Small-flowered on which the hairs are also non-glandular but form a very short downy coating to the stem with none sticking out. On Round-leaved they are also uniform in length but every one is capped by a tiny globular gland to give an instantly recognizable difference from the others.

TUE 18 MAY

The very first flowers were open on Weld in the Hayling Billy trail behind my house this morning with the nearby Horse-radish plants in full flower. Still with local news I was very interested (in view of my recent remarks on the current spread of Round-leaved Cranesbill in the Havant area) to see two 'bushes' of it growing from the tarmac outside shops backing onto Prince George Street (if you turn off North Street and drive down this road to enter the Waitrose carpark the plants are on your right as you round the bend in the road). Further down Prince George St, where it meets The Pallant at the back of The Bear hotel, an almond tree growing in the grounds of the Vets premises, but overhanging the road, has the most extraordinary 'leaf curl'. Nearly all the leaves have turned a deep red and ballooned into the strangest of shapes, Can anyone tell me what is the cause of this - a fungus or some other plant disease, or is it an insect induced type of gall?

MON 17 MAY

Just when I was beginning to wonder if any other orchid species were to follow the Early Purple and Green-winged ones Richard Carpenter tells me of four new species he has seen today. Twayblades must have been out for some time but no one has mentioned them until today when Richard saw at least 30 at Noar Hill (with at least 50 Early Purples). He then went to Chappetts Copse near West Meon and found one White Helleborine, five Fly Orchids and over 100 Sword-leaved Helleborines (this wood is far and away the best site for this last species in the UK and an official count of the plants is scheduled for this coming Thursday, so more anon). The White Helleborine was not the first of the year (Richard found that on Saturday and those which Mike Bending saw at the Portsmouth IBM site with unopen flowers last Monday - May 10 - may well have opened their flowers before then). One other common orchid species should be out by now is the Birds Nest, while in Kent or Dorset the Early Spiders may well be over by now!. +++

Another new flower found at Noar Hill today was Salad Burnet, reminding me that among the surviving plants from last year's wildflower seed sowing at the Lymbourne Triangle site here in Havant are a couple of plants of Great Burnet. +++

Here in the Havant area today I found my first display of Lesser Stitchwort in the Warblington area, and on Thorney Island the Red Hot Pokers were well out.

SUN 16 MAY

Brian Fellows led a group around the Hollybank Woods today and among a number of other plants he is the first to mention Wood Millet which I think to be one of the more elegant grasses.

SAT 15 MAY

Woodruff (that magic plant which cures all ills and defeats all evil powers) was flowering today in the Meon valley near Soberton, and Common Poppy was flowering in fields near Kilmeston when Richard Carpenter headed towards his one time homeland at Alresford. Richard also enjoyed his first Goldilocks buttercups in this area.

Insects can cause many plants to grow in a cancerous way, and so can the various chemicals with which we spray our crops and 'weeds', and industrial processes can also introduce 'evolutionary change' ranging from the growth of lovely plants like Cut-leaved Germander on the Micheldever spoil heaps to the less welcome effects experienced around Chernobyl. I mention these causes of plant mutation as one of them produced a very interesting find for Brian Fellows in Emsworth today - one or more apparently normal plants of Cleavers had flowers on them which had developed into a 'fountain' of white petals - some twenty time their normal length, and many layers of them piled on top of each other to give a difference from the normal flower of the sort that we see between a wild rose and an artificially bred 'cabbage rose'. Has anyone found this elsewhere, and do you know the likely cause? (My guess is that Brian's statement that the plants were growing near an industrial estate may be relevant).

INSECTS
SAT 22 MAY

My monthly visit to the IBM North Harbour site (on the pretext of making the monthly WeBS count of shore birds) gave me just one male Common Blue butterfly and one Blue-tailed Damselfly today but I did have a bonus in the form of a good view of a fresh Burnet Companion moth.

THU 20 MAY

In my notes for yesterday I commented on the appearance of the first Hornet of the year which was actually seen today in a Havant bedroom, and later my internet trawl for news gave me a second report of one seen today in the kitchen of a house at Crowborough in Sussex (again causing panic in the household though Hornets are among the least aggressive of insects)

Both Glanville and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary took wing today. The Glanville was seen by Mike Gibbons at Hordle Cliffs (on the mainland) west of Milford on sea and the Small Pearl-bordered by Adrian Hoskins at Bentley Wood on the Hants/Wilts border. Adrian found 8 of the Small Pearl-bordered which were also seen by Peter Eeles before Peter went to Martin Down and found Small Blues and Dingy Skippers in large numbers (he estimated 120+ and 63 respectively). Worryingly among all the Small Blues he only came on one Common Blue ... other species on his list were Brown Argus 5, Small Heath 7, Grizzled Skipper 13 and Brimstone 17. +++

Common Blue does seem to be in short supply everywhere on the mainland at the moment (though I expect they will suddenly appear in June) but when Andrew Brookes led an expedition to the Isle of Wight yesterday (May 19) they found Common Blues by the hundred on Mottistone Down (along with a couple of Wall Brown)

Cream-spot Tiger was a colourful first among the moths today found, along with the first Yellow Belle, by Mike Gibbons at Hordle Cliffs when searching for the Glanville Fritillary by day. Of four other new for the year moths taken at traps this evening Peter Hooper at Bishopstoke had Alder Moth and Flame Carpet while Tim Walker at Winchester had Campion and Small Square-spot. +++

Yesterday evening (May 19) brought the first Elephant Hawkmoth to Nick Montegriffo's trap at Sherborne St John (north of Basingstoke). Other firsts with it were Rustic Shoulder-knot, Lychnis, Small Magpie, Epiblema cynosbatella, Celypha lacunana and Garden Pebble. This last also came to Mike Wall's trap at Chineham in Basingstoke along with Bee Moth and Freyer's Pug. One other first of year moth found yesterday (May 19) was Mother Shipton when Peter Vaughan was out by day at Odiham, his major find being a lovely colony of over 50 Beautiful Demoiselle damselflies (not first of year - that was seen on May 17). +++

While on dragonflies Michael Hawkins was pleased with his first Broad-bodied Chaser holding territory in the Lewes area yesterday, and at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter had seven Hairy Dragonflies and found Four-spot Chasers. +++

Returning to the subject of moths I was intrigued to read how Mike Gibbons set off from Christchurch to Martin Down carrying fresh cut Lilac flowers which he hoped would bring Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoths to be filmed. The moths were there, but it took four hours of patient waiting before they responded to the invitation and came to the lilac to act as unpaid actors on video film - they do say there is always a lot of sitting around to do on film sets!

News for last Tuesday (May 18) comes from Adrian Hoskins at Hog Cliff (not sure where that is) in Dorset where some 60 Marsh Fritillaries were on display (none left in Hampshire?) and where Adrian had the first Burnet Companion moth as well as being the first to report a find of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars. +++

Also on May 18 a first Willow Beauty moth came to Richard Carpenter's garden at Hill Head, and on the previous night (May 17) Simon Ingram at Eastleigh had a White-point moth, equalling the first of year date already accredited to Russell Wynn., while May 16 brought a claim from Peter Hooper of the first Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth, seen at Bentley Wood.

WED 19 MAY

Before completing the input for this update I have received a vivid account of how the first Hornet of the year appeared in a neighbour's bedroom here in Havant (on Thursday 20 May) but was eventually persuaded to leave via a window which had not been opened for years, the struggle to open it adding to the trauma of having to make the effort with the giant queen Hornet within a few feet.

Little news for today has yet reached me from the outside world but my own outing to Emsworth today gave me a beautiful Small Copper in Emsworth's Brook Meadow (where one rather tatty Small Tortoiseshell flew by), and a Holly Blue was on parade in the nearby carpark area. Single Holly Blues are now a daily sight in my own Havant garden - I suspect that the one which patrols the back garden before lunch is different from the one which checks the front garden after lunch.

TUE 18 MAY

Hard on the heels (metaphorically) of the Stag Beetle seen on Hayling Island yesterday two were seen today by James Wheeldon at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea. Unfortunately one of these two was dead, apparently attacked by a Magpie, but I suspect that its companion which survived was not the only one to do so.

The lengthy lists of moths reported on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website are now presenting me with a problem when trying to pick out those which are new on the scene from those which have already had their moment of glory as 'first of the year'. To deal with this problem last year I set up a procedure whereby I laboriously copied the names of all the species which might be new into a list which was read by a program I had written to sort them into sequence, match them against a list of previously reported names, and provide me with the names of those new to the existing list (while adding these new names to that list). That procedure was rather laborious and so this year I have just devised a simpler method - I take the whole text of the relevant days entries from the BC website and insert a "\ " marker at the beginning and end of each candidate name before the text is read by a program which extracts each name (whatever lies between a pair of "\ " characters) in turn and checks for a previous entry for that species in my database to give me the list of 'new' species. +++

As you might expect I have to deal with the problem of spelling variations (especially the placement of dashes between parts of the name where e.g. some observers report Chocolate-tip and others leave out the dash) and with duplicate names (an entry for Green Carpet asks me to confirm that that is what I meant and not Red-Green Carpet) as well as names that I have never heard of before and so have no entry in my database (some of these are valid names of rarely reported species, others are typified by the entry on the BC website for *Dicrorampha acuminata* which should have read *Dichrorampha acuminata*!). Writing this sort of program gives me great satisfaction, and I pity those who are not able to tell their computers what to do, but instead rely on the facilities offered by Bill Gates - could he provide the simple facility needed to solve this problem?

As a result of this new facility I found that I had missed some 'first of year' entries from the lists I reported in my notes for last weekend (May 15 and 16). Those missing entries are included in the following list ... +++

New moths appearing on May 17 were Pretty Chalk Carpet (Adrian Hoskins at Noar Hill), White-point, Common Swift, Light Emerald, Marbled White-spot, Marbled Minor, Lime-speck Pug and Peacock moth (all taken by Russell Wynn at Pennington), Privet Hawkmoth (Peter Allen at North Gorley) and Pale-shouldered Brocade, *Dichrorampha acuminata* and *Eudonia mercurella* (Mike Wall at Chineham in Basingstoke). +++

New moths taken on the evening of May 16 were Birch Mocha (Peter Allen), Shark (Russell Wynn), Treble-bar (Adrian Hoskins on Stockbridge Down by day), The Flame (Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John), plus *Argyresthia trifasciata* and *Tachystola acroxantha* (found by Rob Edmunds at Fleet, flying out when he shook a *Leylandii* hedge) +++

By day on May 15 Simon Curson saw three Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoths at Martin Down and that evening gave Tim Walker the first Buff-tip at Winchester and Patrick Fleet a Common Carpet at Bentley Station Meadow. +++

Going back to May 11 Derek Mills had both Buttoned Snout and Silver-ground Carpet at Farnham, and in Pamber Forest the caterpillars of the Drab Looper were found. From the Migrant Moth website I see that Clouded Yellows were seen at Portland Bill on three days last week with up to 7 on May 14, and up to 7 were seen in Ireland on May 17

MON 17 MAY

The first Stag Beetle which I have heard of this year was seen today by Rosemary Webb as it was walking across a road on Hayling Island. While more normally encountered flying at head height in the dusk of a warm summer evening it is quite common to see them crawling along roads or pavements, and I assume they do this because (like Swifts) they have difficulty in getting airborne from the ground so, when they do find themselves on the ground they walk off in search of a tree to climb as a take-off point. This is just guesswork, but it is supported by the fact that I have never seen one take off from the ground but I did on one occasion come on a 'hatch' of these beetles coming up from the ground and clambering up a tree to roughly head height before flying off.

Adrian Hoskins counted 25 Duke of Burgundy butterflies at Noar Hill today before moving to Ramsdean Down (the northern slope of Butser Hill near Petersfield) where he counted 35 of them. I'm not sure how well such counts represent the true number of butterflies at a site but it clearly shows that Ramsdean is a good place to find them at the moment and I am surprised that it has not featured in the Hampshire Butterfly Reports (Butser Hill was mentioned in the 2002 report but only to say that it was suffering badly from overgrazing by rabbits - and this year Rabbits seem to be numerous everywhere yet the butterflies are doing well). Ashley Whitlock is once again encouraging people to go out and find 'undiscovered sites' for the Duke of Burgundy - maybe this is one of them and maybe the search could be encouraged by offering a title to the finder of the most butterflies each season. In line with the 'Pom King' title awarded annually at Selsey Bill to the person who sees the most Pomarine Skuas maybe we should have a Hampshire 'Dob King'? +++

While on Ramsdean Down Adrian was fascinated by the activities of one or more small solitary bees called *Andrena labiata*. Michael Chinery illustrates this species in his Collins Guide to Insects, showing that it (at least the female) is all of 8mm long, black in body colour but with a broad orange red band around the forward end of its abdomen and with pale golden hairs on her legs (Chinery adds that this species forages for pollen exclusively on Speedwell flowers). Presumably the female digs small holes in the ground to act as her 'nursery' and stocks the hole with pollen to feed her young after laying eggs, but what Adrian saw seemed to be a much greater demonstration of parental care than most similar species exhibit (basically they make a hole, lay eggs, provide some food for the young and then fly off). What fascinated Adrian about this species was that one or more of the insects he saw .. 'repeatedly collected broken twigs and dead grass stems (as much as 4 inches long) and carried them in flight to deposit them in a pile on the ground at it's nest.' I assume these were intended to form some barrier to discourage predators or parasites from getting acces to the nest tunnel - and I am amazed that an insect 8mm long could pick up and fly with a piece of grass more than 12 times its own body length (maybe its something in the Speedwell pollen that helps it)

SUN 16 MAY

Alan Barrett was visiting a house in Brighton today to see a display of art as part of the Brighton Festival (I remember seeing a TV feature on this interesting aspect of the Brighton festival last year - people opening their otherwise rather ordinary small houses to allow people to walk in off the streets to see the 'etchings' (or what have you) in their bedrooms and kitchens). Alan does not comment on the art but does tell me that in the garden of one such house he saw a very fresh newly emerged male Clouded Yellow. Does that mean that, as at Southbourne in Bournemouth and possibly at other south coast sites further west, Clouded Yellows have now established a permanent residential status in Brighton? In my notes for May 17 above I have suggested that a 'Dob King' title be instituted to encourage people to find more Duke of Burgundy butterflies, but maybe the title would be more impressive as the 'Wow King' of Surrey. If there is anyone out there to fund this award they should be considering Colin Baker as a potential candidate for this year's

award - he scored 40 while at Botany Bay near Chiddingfold today. (I should point out that I use three character codes as keys to the species in my butterfly database - DOB for Duke of Burgundy and WOW for Wood White). +++

Dingy Skipper is not the most exciting butterfly species but last year apparently saw its extinction at the Fort Purbrook site on Portsdown so there was great rejoicing when Theo Roberts found two of them at that site this weekend. +++

Another small item of butterfly news that may be of interest to some comes from Martin Hampton here in Havant where he today watched a female Holly Blue egg-laying in his garden where both Holly and Ivy are available. Scorning both this female laid her eggs in Pyracantha flower buds.

A Butterfly Conservation field meeting at Holmsley in the south west of the New Forest today was led by Tim Norriss, but while he was finding tiny *Ancylis geminiana* Tortrix moths others in the group saw a Bee Hawkmoth fly by but were unable to say if it was of the Narrow or Broad-bordered species. Never having seen one of these I imagine they fly somewhat like a Hummingbird Hawkmoth but wonder if the 'see through' wing panels are noticeable in flight? +++

Other new moths seen today include Figure of Eighty, Broken-barred Carpet and Silver-ground Carpet which came to Nick Montegriffo's trap at Sherborne St John north of Basingstoke this evening while back at his home in the Anna Valley at Andover Tim Norriss added Lesser Treble-bar to the year list +++

Miscellaneous insects seen today included my first find of the Nursery Tent spider (*Pisaura mirabilis*) which I always find rather attractive (unlike some spiders!), and in the Botany Bay woodland in Surrey Colin Baker photographed even more attractive Cardinal and Green Tiger Beetles.

SAT 15 MAY

Nine Small Blues were out on Martin Down today, seen by Mark Litjens, and on Sunday (May 16) Adrian Hoskins found one on Stockbridge Down, but on Monday (May 17) the weekly Nature Notes poster I received from John Goodspeed told me that John himself had seen the first of the year on Portsdown last Monday (May 10) along with two Wall Browns.

At least six more moth species are now on my yearlist thanks to news from Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John north of Basingstoke, Patrick Fleet at Bentley Station Meadow near Alton and Simon Ingram at Eastleigh. +++

The first newcomer was May Highflier, seen by Simon on May 11, then last night Nick added Dark-barred Twin-spot and Shoulder-striped Wainscot. +++

This evening Nick had the first Heart and Dart, and Simon had a Buttoned Snout while Patrick added Clouded Silver. Patrick also recorded two species of which there had only been 'possible' finds previously - one was The Mocha (which John Shillitoe probably had on May 7) and the other was Pale Oak Beauty (maybe found by Tim Walker at Winchester on May 13)

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 20 MAY

Hopefully there are still plenty of Hares on the Isle of Wight but I very rarely see a mention of them so it is worth recording that Derek Hale watched four of them in a field at Whale Chine today.

Good news for yesterday (May 19) is that an expert came to Brook Meadow in Emsworth to investigate Brian Fellows' worries that all the Water Voles had disappeared at a time of year when they should be very active and noticeable. A check for signs of the voles was made and plenty were found, as well as a couple of sightings of live Voles, so it would seem that all is well. +++

A less dramatic piece of news from Richard Carpenter tells me that he saw a Grass Snake at Titchfield Haven, also yesterday.

WED 19 MAY

News from Brian Fellows today tells of a visit he made to Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Monday (May 17), and of the first sight this year of two large Terrapins basking in the sunshine. I guess they will have come out of their hibernation in the mud at the bottom of the pond some time ago but no doubt they have been busy gobbling up baby ducklings to regain their strength and only now have time to spare for sun bathing.

MON 17 MAY

A large toadstool which often occurs in troops in arable fields a little later in the summer has put in an early appearance in Hayling Park on wood chip mulch - this is *Volvariella speciosa* which is one of a small group having pink spores

A small snail with which I first became acquainted on the IBM site in Portsmouth and have only found in one other place was alive and well at that second location today - the place is the inside of the Thorney Island seawall where it passes the west end of the Great Deepes and the snail is *Cochlicella acuta* (The Pointed Snail). Although this snail can grow to 15 mm in height it has an annual life cycle and at this time of year only 'babies' can be seen alive and the one I saw was barely 4 mm tall.

SUN 16 MAY

Although Grass Snakes are reasonably common, and the first was seen this year on Apr 23, I had only heard of two others until Sue Drewett told me that one was swimming in her garden pond at Emsworth today.

SAT 15 MAY

Hare sightings in Hampshire are if anything less common than those of Grass Snakes and a sighting of two Hares in the Meon Valley today by Richard Carpenter was only the thirteenth report of them to reach me this year, and of those reports only one was of more than ten animals (11 seen on Feb 25 by Peter Hutchins in the Ashley Warren area north of Whitchurch)

WEEK 20 MAY 10 – 16 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 14 MAY

LITTLE EGRET COUNTS

This being the 14th day of the month I was one of a dozen people counting Egrets coming to roost in the 'greater Hampshire' area where Egrets which may feed by day in Hampshire spend their nights. Once again the tide was high at dusk so some of the Egrets will have left their fishing grounds maybe a couple of hours before dusk and could have disappeared from view before the counters arrived, but luckily for me the birds at the Langstone Wade Court roost were wary of going into their trees and five of them were perched in full view on the top branches of a totally dead tree, and at one point something put them all up into the air, more or less confirming that there were no other hidden birds in that area (as they too would almost certainly have come up in response to a threat).

May and June are the months when most Egrets have left Hampshire (and probably England) on breeding duty so I was half expecting to get a count of six to ten birds but by waiting patiently until it was dark I counted 17 birds at this roost - the last three came in at five minute intervals but waiting for them was not dull with lots of evening bird song, particularly from Song Thrushes but including a Cetti's Warbler. +++

As I was uncertain if the Tournembury roost on Hayling would be counted this evening I went there last night and could see five birds in the trees - there may have been more but at least I was satisfied that the Egrets are still using that roost. With the tide high and mist covering the harbour it would have been pointless to wait for more to come in but the visit was by no means wasted time as I not only met up with two ex-IBMs whom I had not seen for at least ten years but also found a plant species which I have never seen in my life before.

GREY WAGTAIL FAMILIES

During the day I cycled to Bedhampton and came on evidence of two Grey Wagtail families

with young. By the Homewell stream an adult bird was greatly agitated at my approach and as I cycled round the next corner another Grey Wagtail was on the ground and I nearly ran over it as it did not immediately take off (I assume this was a young bird). Then, crossing the Wayfarer's Way path bridge over the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton, I stopped to watch a female Grey Wagtail assiduously gathering tiny insects before flying upstream, presumably to young in a nest. +++

In Emsworth Brian Fellows has for some time been aware that Grey Wagtails have a nest upstream of Brook Meadow, and today for the first time he saw both parents out with one youngster (I hope they have more).

Over the past few years birders throughout the south have noticed an expansion of Grey Wagtail numbers and a change in their habits from being purely birds of fast running streams to town and garden birds like their Pied cousins. While this has been going on the numbers of Pied seem to have diminished and nowadays Pied Wagtail is by no means a certainty on a day list. At Warblington Farm, with plenty of insects around the cattle, two good streams and plenty of nest places available, we only have one pair nesting (but to be fair we have only had 3 pairs in two of the 28 years, 1986 and 87, for which Tony Gutteridge has kept up the CBC on that farm, and 2 pairs in seven other years, so one pair is nothing new), and at the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth I do not think we have ever had more than one pair nesting. Maybe my feeling of diminishing numbers comes from the great contrast between the numbers we see in the winter and those that stay for the summer.

RUFF AT TITCHFIELD HAVEN

Richard Carpenter had an unexpected selection of passage birds at Titchfield Haven today with 7 Avocet, a Spotted Redshank, a Greenshank and a single Grey Plover in summer plumage plus a female Ruff (surely by now she should be queening it at a some jousting session between the gaily plumed males of her species?). +++

I get the impression that this Ruff has lost the migration urge and settled down to spend the rest of her life at the Haven where she has been seen since Jan 14 this year, though only every fourth or fifth day (seen on 26 out of 122 days). Since the beginning of April what I assume to be the same bird has been seen on Apr 2, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 21, 28, 30 and now on May 14. This 'single bird theory' is of course just guesswork but I will be watching reports from the Haven during the summer to see if she continues to pop up from time to time. +++

One reason why it may not be the same bird seen each time is that not all reports are of a female (though the majority have been and I assume the other reports may have been from people who were not sure of the size difference) and another is that there has been a small wave of birds passing through the south of England recently - Isle of Wight on Apr 25, Rye Harbour on May 1, Pulborough Brooks on May 2 and another at Rye on May 3 (but none since May 3).

THU 13 MAY

CUCKOOS

Brian Fellows heard a Cuckoo today around the Emsworth Brook Meadow site where he has not heard one for several years, and Brian also tells me that one has been heard in the East Park at Stansted where Michael Prior (head forester of the estate) has similarly not heard them for some years. Although they have never failed to appear on the Warblington CBC plot they have been an uncommon sight and sound there in the past few years (in the 1980s and early 1990s we often had three females at work there and in two years had four) and this morning Tony Gutteridge was surprised to have two (admittedly males - we have only had one female this spring). +++

Other birds seen on this morning's CBC visit to Warblington were half a dozen or more potentially nesting Swallow pairs (only one at the farm, but a 'swarm' of Swallows made a

single appearance at the pony stables on Pook Lane), at least six singing Lesser Whitethroats (none of them obviously just moving through), and a good number of Reed Warblers (though a couple of singing birds were in places well away from the reeds). My best find was of both male and female Reed Bunting near the shore reed bed where a Whinchat was momentarily seen on a wire fence. A similar passing sight was of two Shelduck at the cress bed, and the Egrets were down to just two birds. Sadly the expected three or four singing Skylark were down to just one bird (the fields which they prefer had been ploughed and sown within the past fortnight and are still effectively bare earth). One Moorhen chick was seen but no other birds had visible young.

UNUSUAL CHIFFCHAFF-WILLOW WARBLER SONG

Also yesterday, but at New Milton in Hampshire, Steve Keen had a puzzling encounter with a leaf warbler that couldn't decide whether it was a Willow Warbler or Chiffchaff. Steve writes .. 'The song started with two or three pair of "chiff-chaff" notes, just like Chiffchaff, but each note slightly lower than the preceding one, then there was a note which was a cross between a Chiffchaff's "chiff" and the opening note of a Willow Warbler's song, then it went into a shortened version of a standard WW song. The whole phrase, including the chiffchaffing, was about as long as a standard WW phrase.' Steve heard this bird singing the same song for about an hour. +++

This reminded me of an observation made by Richard Mould-Ryan in April of 2003 about which he wrote at the time .. 'A very curious observation at Itchen Valley CP last Friday. About 5:30 pm, I heard my first willow warbler song of the year from a large willow bush about 20 yards from me, not full song, and only a few seconds long, but quite unmistakable. Scanning the bush I found a phylloscopus in about the right place, thinking "good, year tick", but before getting a good look it began chiff-chaffing, so I thought "OK, different bird, keep looking" (there were other chiffchaffs singing nearby). +++

'So I scan across the bush, and another phylloscopus pops into view, and gives a little burst of willow warbler song whilst I'm watching, so I think "good, got it". Better views this time, and this is clearly a willow warbler, (flesh legs, more yellow than buff on breast, paler supercilium and better defined eyestripe), but then, while I'm watching, it starts giving its chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff etc. Now I know it hadn't been out of sight between hearing the two calls, (and I saw its beak move both times), but I'm still doubtful, but then it starts singing willow warbler again, and this time it shifts into chiffchaff mode halfway through its song! By now I'm getting very good views, and there's no doubt it is a willow warbler. +++

'I can see how if the bird cut each note of its normal song very short, it could sound like a chiff-chaff to some extent, but this was very accurate mimicry, and I can only assume that for some reason the sound of chiffchaffs nearby prompted it to imitate, maybe if it was an impressionable 1st spring/ summer newly arrived(!) My range of reference is pretty limited, so I was wondering if anyone else has seen/ heard of this before or if it's mentioned in any texts. I'm also hoping/ assuming that the two species don't interbreed to produce polyglots, it's hard enough with multiple races of chiffchaff!' +++

WED 12 MAY

Yesterday evening Martin Gillingham and Jason Crook were watching a Little Stint by the lake at Farlington Marshes when two Temminck's Stints flew in to join it, and Hugh Venables found all three birds still present today (though a Little Gull which had been there last night was no longer around) +++

BIRDS ON TERN ISLAND

On north Hayling I visited the Oysterbeds briefly in the afternoon and, although the tide was not anywhere near high, a flock of Dunlin were roosting (or resting) on the west side of the Tern Island near its north end. I couldn't be sure of the total but reckoned there must be at least 250 birds standing motionless on the shingle, all with the rich brown backs and black bellies of summer plumage. At one point a single Grey Plover, not in summer black and silver, flew in to join them and a couple of minor disturbances caused a small flock of less than twenty Turnstone to fly out over the water. Once the Little Terns were also disturbed

and about twenty of them took to the air together but there could have been more that did not take off. One Common Sandpiper flew across the water, one Egret landed to fish at the foot of the island's bank, and one Ringed Plover appeared from nowhere to chase off a Dunlin (maybe intruding on the Plovers nest space). Two Oystercatchers and many nesting Blackheaded Gulls were not difficult to spot! 6 Whimbrel flew over without stopping and some ten Cormorant were to be seen on Round Nap island out in the harbour but I was left with a puzzle when two Pipit sized birds flew from one part of the shore to land on more shingle into which they vanished - possibly Meadow Pipits but by their behaviour more like late Rock Pipits.

TUE 11 MAY

In Hampshire John Shillitoe made an early visit to Old Idsworth Farm and encountered a Turtle Dove (first record for the farm as far as I know - though no doubt they have been there in the distant past). John also heard Whimbrel overhead as did Jeff Goodridge at his home in Horndean where he heard both Whimbrel and Dunlin calling as they passed over in the dark around 10pm.

A note from Kevin Stouse tells me that one more Canada Goose gosling was absent from parade today at the Portsmouth IBM site, but that only reduces the new generation from 22 to 21. He also says that the 'junior' pair of Swans seem to have abandoned their attempt at nesting and have now left the lake, though that loss is partially compensated for in the presence of a third Great Crested Grebe (another adult in addition to the regular nesting pair). Nothing else of great importance but two Cormorant are still present (they used to be winter only birds here a few years back) and young Coot chicks have started to appear.

Tony Gutteridge enjoyed the dawn chorus in the Beaulieu Road area of the New Forest this morning and was particularly pleased to hear Willow Tit at one point, and later in the morning to come on a nest with young (though he could not be sure these were Willow Tits as the parents remained silent and Tony could not check the nest for signs of it having been newly excavated this season without disturbing the young and their parents)

MON 10 MAY

I know that Wood Warblers can still be found in the New Forest, but once upon a time they were regulars in the West Walk woods of the Meon valley and I still regret their departure from south east Hampshire but I was cheered today to hear of three singing males at Stanley Common (only just into West Sussex from the Hampshire border near Liphook). Looking back to last year I see that they were also recorded at Stanley Common and at Woolmer Pond in Hampshire (with another on Black Down near Haslemere).

Another bird which has always been scarce during the past fifty years, and which varies greatly in numbers seen from year to year, is Garganey, and it seems to be holding its own again this year. Since the first appeared at Rye Harbour on Mar 2 I have noted 20 reports in my database, and this weekend (the peak time for their spring passage) I have to add reports of two (maybe three) males at Pulborough Brooks today and of 4 birds (including one female) seen in Pagham Harbour yesterday.

Local news for today shows the return of breeding Swifts to the Havant area. This morning Brian Fellows saw two over houses where they are expected to nest in Emsworth, and at dusk this evening two were patrolling the sky over the Manor Close site here in Havant (attracting my attention by their screams).

At Langstone Mill Pond the newly hatched Swan family were in trouble sometime around midday when some of the cygnets got over the grille which separates the pond from the mill stream - ducklings regularly get into the stream here where they are in danger of being swept under the mill building and out to sea, and if they avoid the current of the stream they still find it impossible to get back into the safety of the pond. Knowing this some local residents have developed a standard rescue procedure, so when I heard a report of cygnets in trouble I phoned Mike Rogers who lives close by and his wife told me she would get out her net and proceed immediately to the rescue. I haven't yet heard what happened but I have heard that someone walking past the pond in the late afternoon saw the Swan

parents on the pond with 5 cygnets so even if a couple have been lost there is still a reasonable return on the effort of this years nesting.

RALPH'S VIEWS ON HABITAT LOSS AND THE HUMAN RACE

Most people misunderstand me when I express my opinion that there is no way in which those of us with a concern for wildlife can prevent habitat loss. I see it as a law of nature that any species without predators will continue to grab the earth's resources for it's own short term benefit (in our case food, housing, jobs and money) until it runs out of those resources and is faced with starvation, disease or war between conflicting interest groups. If we did not predate them trees would cover most of western Europe, and we can see similar forces at work with the Red Deer population in Scotland. Even the most dedicated human conservationist is a human first and a conservationist second when it comes to defending the perceived interests of themselves and their families. +++

This is not to say that we should not do what we can to make life more pleasant for ourselves by preserving small areas as 'nature reserves' but let us be honest and recognise that all we are doing is creating 'gardens' and 'zoos' in which we decide on a management regime to preserve things which we like to see, not the things that would be there if humans did not exist. We must also realize that even these protected areas cannot be protected against such things a climate change and global pollution. By all means enjoy what we have got, and enjoy the good feeling of one upmanship in being able to name obscure species or having longer lists of things seen than others, but do not pretend that we are 'saving the planet' - we cannot compete with the forces of nature either as manifested in human nature or in the forces which determine the future of the planet. +++

I will cast my vote against the development of Broadmarsh or of Dibden Bay when it comes round again (probably in the form of habitat destrucion at Felixstowe or somewhere else in Britain) but I realise that I am part of a minority that even takes time to think about these issues, and certainly no match for the mainspring forces of capitalist society. +++

PS. There is of course one way to save the planet from predation by humans, that is to get rid of the great majority of the human race and to follow the example of scientists in Russia who, back in the late 19th century, realised what humans were doing to the planet and who succeeded in creating a series of Nature Reserves which are what they claim to be - i.e. areas in which nature is left to its own devices and no humans are permitted to enter (other than small teams of specialist observers who occasionally enter (not every year) to monitor changes. These reserves are call Zapovedniks, there are 100 of them, and their total land area is 28 million hectares (which, if my maths is right, is roughly the size of southern England south of Oxford - but I may be out by an order of magnitude, I assume that each Square Kilometre holds 10,000 hectares)

SUN 09 MAY

MUTE SWAN FLOCKS IN SUMMER

Today Kevin Stouse led a HOS walk party along the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour and found 106 Swans on the water. Such a number is not unusual during the summer moult period (on 27 June 2001 I counted 113 Swans here, not including a breeding pair with six cygnets nearby) but this seems an exceptionally early date for such a large herd, and there is no sign of a flock off the Broadmarsh area in Langstone Harbour yet (on recent visits I have seen none there) nor of any growth in the flock at Emsworth (which has I think declined from a peak of 79 birds on Mar 8 this year to a normal figure of 49 last week. Checking last year's records I am surprised that I can find no evidence for a flock off Broadmarsh at any time during the summer (in past years 70 to 100 birds have been known to spend their moult period there) - that may be carelessness on my part in failing to record the numbers but it could well be that the Swans have changed their habits both in choice of summer holiday location and date of the holiday period. +++

All five Mute Swan cygnets seen by Brian Fellows at the Peter Pond nest in Emsworth last Friday after starting to hatch on Thursday (May 6) were on the water today with their parents (the two eggs still in the nest have not hatched). Brian claimed these as the first to hatch in our area, and they were certainly one day ahead of the Langstone Mill pond nest

which started to hatch on Friday. +++

Kevin's party also found 19 Great Crested Grebes in the Fishbourne channel where there had been only five on the equivalent date last year, but they only saw 15 Shelduck where there had been around 40 last year on May 11. There was less change in the number of summering Brent (6 there today - 8 last year), and one bird which was absent last year and a welcome sight today was a single Corn Bunting singing from Rape in a field south of Dell Quay. Another interesting sight was of a Peregrine carrying prey in the direction of Chichester cathedral.

WINTER WADERS

A reminder of winter is a current wave of Dunlin moving along the coast. Today Colin Allen found just over 200 of them, all apparently in full summer plumage, on the shore of Southampton Water at Hythe. A quick check on other reports of Dunlin seen this month (excluding seven reports where the number seen was less than 50 birds) shows that 290 were on the Lymington Marshes on May 1 (Russell Wynn), 130+ were at Rye Harbour on May 6 with 75+ there on May 8 (along with two Little Stint), and today (May 9) Pagham Harbour hosted some 500 Dunlin along with 13 Knot and an unstated number of Golden Plover. For the record Kevin Stouse also found half a dozen in the Fishbourne Channel today. +++

So far there has been no strong indication of Sanderling starting to move but both Dunlin and Sanderling must start their dash to the arctic within the next week or so if they are to have a successful breeding season (but if they start too early and their nest site area is still hard frozen when they arrive they are very likely to starve and/or freeze to death so they are careful to leave their departure until the last possible moment!)

Simon Wright tells us that an Osprey was to be seen perched in the southern half of Langstone Harbour today, visible from the south end of the Hayling Coastal Path. Quite a few Osprey have already passed north through the harbour, hurrying back to nest sites, but at this time of year we are more likely to see young non-breeding birds returning to Britain but in no hurry to go anywhere so this one may stay around for a week or so ... +++

Even more conjectural were two of my own observations when making a quick sortie into Havant Thicket today - one was a sound very like Crossbill calls coming from the tops of some cone rich Spruce trees on the southern border of the woodland (roughly north of the Long Avenue coming up from Leigh Park Gardens). Although I spent some time looking I never glimpsed even a movement by a bird in these trees! The second observation was of a fairly recent extensive fire along the north edge of the main track going west from Castle Road where it passes the west end of Long Wood - this could be very attractive to Nightjars as the bracken starts to regrow.

SAT 08 MAY

Sussex had some good birds today with a Greater Sandplover at Pagham Harbour (I think it flew off north and is unlikely to be seen there again), a Sabine's Gull seen flying east off Worthing (Richard Ives), and two Spoonbills flying east over the Adur in the Henfield area. Also from Sussex comes news that three of the four Peregrine eggs in the Chichester cathedral nest have now hatched (and have appeared on BBC South TV). +++

PLANTS

FRI 14 MAY

Brian Fellows found Nipplewort in flower (I wonder if it was aided by some such micro-climate as exists on the footpath along the east end of the Tesco store in Havant where huge fans continuously blow out hot air from the buildings air conditioning system - that is where I saw my first Nipplewort flowers today!).

In the Brownwich area of the east Solent shore today Richard Carpenter found Bladder Campion and Smooth Tare in flower, and at Broadmarsh I noted my first Hairy Tare which I won't claim as a first as I think I have seen other claims for finding them recently, and in any case I may be wrong in my identification of Tare species as I classify them purely on

flower colour (white flowers assumed to be Hairy, blue flowers assumed to be Smooth). My reason for going to Broadmarsh was to check the progress of the *Lathyrus hirsutus* plants, and I can assure those who want to use them in defence of the area against development that a good crop of healthy looking plants are once more coming up but are not yet close to flowering. Near them were a few scattered stems of grass (standing some 50cm tall) which caught my eye by having straw coloured flowerheads, and their inflated upper leaf sheaths and very rough leaf blades, coupled with a very bristly cylindrical panicle, suggested that it might be a Beard grass but it is almost certainly an odd form of Meadow Foxtail. +++

Round-leaved Cranesbill continues to expand its range locally, and a mass of this can now be found at the foot of the Broadmarsh 'mountain' (as you go along the approach road to the slipway look at the east side of that road in the area where it passes the entrance to the big carpark) +++

More expected first flowerings in the Bedhampton area today were Pellitory of the Wall in the Bidbury Mead carpark along the wall of St Thomas Church, Cut-leaved Cranesbill by the approach road to the small western carpark at Broadmarsh, and Creeping Cinquefoil in the roadside edge of the grounds of the Apollo Fire-extinguisher factory. One other plant noted was Changing Forget-me-not growing by the Wayfarers Way path where it opens out into an access road for the water company to get into its western 'compartment' adjacent to Bedhampton Mill Pond.

Yesterday evening (May 13) I went to the Mengham Rythe Sailing Club on Hayling Island and walked the narrow path from the seawall alongside the clubhouse to the north end of Selsmore Ave. Under large boats parked on hardstanding in Wilson's Boatyard, right by the path I was on, were half a dozen examples of a plant that I have never seen before - the genuine American Wintercress which (unlike the plants which I have quite often come across and thought were that species because of their pinnate leaves, but which are never more than 30cm tall and thus qualify for Intermediate Wintercress) were probably about 1 metre tall and clearly different. +++

Also yesterday Brian Fellows was in the Hollybank Woods and found Pig-nut in flower as well as getting a 'normal' count of 255 flowering spikes of Early Purple Orchid (in exceptionally good years three times that number have been found at this site)

Another orchid count which shows that numbers are not the only way in which we should judge the value of wild flowers comes from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes where, in the 'Hay Field' by the north east seawall of the reserve, he has seen at least five Green-Winged Orchids where there are usually fewer or none to be seen, making these five as important as the 5000 to be seen at Gunner Point on Hayling +++

Going back to Wednesday (May 12) I see that Brian Fellows found the lovely Ragged Robin flowering in the typical wetland habitat of Emsworth's Brook Meadow although it was not yet in flower at the equally appropriate Warblington SSSI on the following day. Confusingly it was out in the dry ground of the Lymbourne Spring triangle site here in Havant on May 7! +++

Just one other first find dating back to Tuesday (May 11) was of Spring Sedge, found by Richard Carpenter at Brownich - no doubt this can also be seen on Portsdown though finding the small plant could involve a lengthy search among the grassland.

THU 13 MAY

A walk around the Warblington Farm fields this morning gave me several new flowerings including the Hybrid Water Speedwell in the cress beds and both Brooklime and Sea Arrowgrass in the SSSI marsh. In the cemetery Bittersweet Nightshade was in flower and Pineappleweed was found in the farmyard.

I was much puzzled by the Arrowgrass (not by the leaves which were of the un-furrowed Sea Arrowgrass type) but by the fact that the two specimens which I found stood out from a distance like giant Autumn Ladies Tresses with long spike totally covered with white flowers.(they should be inconspicuous and greenish). The plants were definitely not Sea Plantain (and I do not know of any other possible confusion species) and the only explanations I can think of are (a) it was some form of albinism or (b) the flowers had attracted some external white coating. Can anyone help? +++

Another plant which is not new but was flowering in two places in the poor soil on the seawall and looking very pretty was yet more Early Forget-me-not. This does seem to be having a good year - yesterday I found the 'new' patch at the Hayling Oysterbeds was more impressive than when I first saw it. If anyone has not seen it they should walk along the ridge of the 'earth mound' on the landward side of the lagoon and look behind and above the small clump of brambles about two thirds of the way from the north to the south end of the mound.

WED 12 MAY

This afternoon I cycled from Havant around north Hayling and as I reached the south end of Langstone Bridge (on the east side) I was greeted by the newly opening flowers of pure white 'Red Valerian' with, a few yards further south, a large patch of Common Toadflax in full flower - this later always flowers early here and it may be several weeks before the Toadflax is a common sight elsewhere. +++

Stopping at the corner of Northney Road I walked around the ground which was used as a base camp by the bridge repairers last year but did not find any rarities in the recently disturbed ground though if anyone is not familiar with Parsley Piert they cannot help treading on it with every step they make here. Continuing east along the road, just before the unofficial layby at the southern end of the Wadeway from Langstone, I did find something unexpected - three plants of Borage in full and beautiful flower. +++

On North Common, south and east of the marina, I saw my first Silverweed (following Richard Carpenter's first find on Monday) and came on a really magnificent plant of garden Aquilegia near the oak tree at the corner of the field on your right as you enter the site (no sign yet of the Goats Rue that will soon dominate the dip in the ground here). Also here I came on two clumps of Small Nettle, and by the mouth of the marina Scarlet Pimpernel was flowering on the beach and Goatsbeard on the grass near the beach.

John Goodspeed tells me that Hairy Rock-cress can now be found in flower on Portsdown - I usually find this by following the path along the southern face of the hill west from opposite Fort Widley to end of the fenced compartments (near the hilltop roundabout)

MON 10 MAY

Another early find, though of White Helleborine flower buds not yet quite open, was made by Mike Bending at the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth where they have suddenly appeared since 2002 - last year I found them flowering there on May 17.

Richard Carpenter was the first to find two plants in flower that will soon be omni-present - one was Elder, the other Silverweed. Another less conspicuous first was Sheep Sorrel and another was White Clover. These were all in the Titchfield Haven area, and moving along the coast to Hook Richard made his best find of the day with the 'small but perfect' Spring Vetch.

Richard was probably out early in the day but it was not until lunchtime that I managed to get down to Sinah Common on Hayling where I found such a wealth of delights that I was about an hour late getting home for lunch. I too had Spring Vetch and Sheep Sorrel (but not White Clover) but also found Sea Radish, Buckshorn Plantain, Round-leaved Cranesbill (along the path following the east fence of the Golf Course to the sea) and on the shingle both Sea Kale that has been out for some time and Little Robin (which I was not expecting yet). The short grass near the mass of Green-winged orchids also surprised me with Yellow Rattle, though I was expecting the Subterranean Clover and hoping for the tiny Birds-foot (no relation to Bird's Foot Trefoil) which were both to be found near the orchids. Further west the Wild Lupins were just starting to flower, and to the east of the golf course I found lots of Smith's Pepperwort (and eventually a little of the Shepherd's Cress that has been out for some time). With the latter was a lot of Spring Vetch. Other firsts for me were Sand Sedge and Mouse-ear Hawkweed with quite a lot of Thrift now in flower.

SUN 09 MAY

Today I made a brief excursion to Havant Thicket, finding the Bitter Vetch and Tormentil which Richard Carpenter had seen in Botley Woods a week ago on May 2, but I did also find Common Catsear and Rowan trees in flower plus Marsh Thistles in bud and the very

distinctive first leaves of Wild Angelica.

INSECTS

FRI 14 MAY

Today saw the first appearance of both Small Heath and Brown Argus butterflies, both species being seen by Alan Thornbury at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester (where Alan was told that the first Common Blues had only just been seen some three weeks after they first appeared in the Meon valley on Apr 23). Small Heath were also seen at Noar Hill today by Mark Litjens and over the road from Stockbirdge Down Alan had at least 18 Duke of Burgundy in Ridges Grove (not sure if there is public access to this site)

Over the county boundary near Chiddingfold in Surrey Pete Irvine was in the Botany Bay/Oaken Wood area where the Pearl Bordered Fritillaries have just started to emerge (a few days later than those at Bentley Wood which were first seen on May 10). Here there were too many Wood Whites for Pete to count - at one point he was surrounded by a dozen or more. +++

In Emsworth Brian Fellows was delighted with the very first pristine Small Copper to be seen at Brook Meadow this year and at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter had his first Hairy Dragonfly.

THU 13 MAY

Seen by day today was a Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly on the Isle of Wight, but an email from Mark Tutton tells me that four of these dragonflies emerged from his garden pond in the Farlington area of Portsmouth yesterday (May 12) and those are the first I have heard of for the year. +++

TUE 11 MAY

Today's big news is that the Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are on the wing - Peter Eeles went to Bentley Wood on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border east of Salisbury today and found twelve of them, and the site log book indicated that they had started to emerge yesterday (May 10). +++

Peter also visited Noar Hill and found 14 Duke of Burgundy which sounds as if they are having a better season than last year when the highest individual count reported was of only 8 (seen by Mike Duffy on May 4), but 2003 was a bad year for the species.

MON 10 MAY

John Goodspeed tells me that he has saw two Wall Brown today on Portsdown where the first appeared 'last week' but I cannot yet say how the Hampshire date, or their first appearance on Thorney Island (no news from there yet), compares to Tony Wilson's find of them at Beachy Head on May 6.

SAT 08 MAY

Seen today by Andy Brook when walking on the downs north of Chichester where the first Bloody-nosed beetles to be mentioned this year. Andy was not certain of what they were called and sent me some good close-up photos, two of which helped to clinch the id by showing the beetle munching away on Hedge Bedstraw which I see is the beetle's favourite foodplant (something I did not know before this)

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 14 MAY

Two fungal finds, made by me on a cycle ride in the Bedhampton area of Havant today, were of a small late troop of St George's Mushroom on the grassy banks of the Hermitage Stream beside the overflow entering the stream from the Water Company springs, and of the first Weeping Widows on the Broadmarsh area

THU 13 MAY

A few days ago I was told that a Roe Deer had been seen on the shore of Chichester Harbour just east of Langstone Mill - I was not given a date but was told that the deer had no

difficulty in leaping the upended rail sleepers which form a seawall here before it disappeared into the fields south of the A27. +++

I assumed that was the last I would hear of it, but this morning Tony Gutteridge was surprised to see two adult Roe Bucks (multiple points to their antlers) in a field at Warblington (just south of the A27 between Pook Lane and Church Lane) +++

Both Tony and I have found plenty of Horse Mushrooms in these Warblington fields in the past couple of weeks, and Tony and his wife Helen have both eaten them without harm!

SAT 08 MAY

Walking the Canal Path alongside Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter came on a Dryad's Saddle fungus, presumably fresh and probably not fully grown at this time of year, and also found a troop of St George's Mushrooms (a bit late for the saint's name day on Apr 23 - some were found at the Blashford Lakes on Apr 22 to show that they do come out at the proper time in some places!)

Late news for May 1 comes from Russell Wynn who on that day watched a pod of seven Bottle-nosed Dolphins swimming close to the shore off the Lymington Marshes - close enough for him to get a good photo. Russell writes .. 'The group included two immatures and several animals were seen spectacularly jumping clear of the water on numerous occasions.' +++

Russell wonders if these could be the same Dolphins that are regularly to be seen off Durlston in Dorset, but reports of 8 Bottle-nosed Dolphins off Hastings on May 28 (and 8 Pilot Whales -which I think may have been Dolphins - off the southern Isle of Wight on Apr 27) suggest to me that a surge of these animals had recently entered the English channel to add to any already present.

WEEK 19 MAY 3 - 9

BIRDS

FRI 07 MAY

Brian Fellows enjoyed the sight of the Emsworth Peter Pond female Swan taking necessary time out from sitting on her nest (food, drink and other bodily functions including a wash must be a daily necessity for any sitting bird) and being followed onto the water by the four cygnets which hatched yesterday (but leaving the latest cygnet and a couple of unhatched eggs in the nest). I certainly prefer that interpretation of what Brian saw to the more pessimistic view that the mother had abandoned the last chick and two eggs but we will soon find out if the whole clutch of seven cygnets follow their mother onto the water in the next couple of days.

As far as Brian and I know this is the first brood of Swans to hatch - that may not turn out to be so but at any rate these youngsters will be well ahead of any that emerge on the IBM Lake where (as recently as Apr 24) no eggs had been laid in the first Swan nest to be built there, and a second nest has only just appeared at the other end of the IBM Lake (that one will probably come to nothing - just practice!)

Other news from the IBM Lake concerns the dreaded Canada Goose population explosion. Kevin Stouse made a check on them today and found 22 goslings (effectively a 50% increase on the count of 42 adults that I found there on Apr 24, and still more are to come from at least four nests that still have sitting parents - those four broods could add 32 to the score if each has the 8 goslings that have already been produced by one pair on the site). The only good news is that one brood of six which hatched a week ago has been reduced to 3 (though in general Canada Geese are good parents and do not lose many of their young). +++

Turning to better things the pair of Great Crested Grebe are still to be seen occasionally around their nest site (the nest is well hidden in reeds) and could produce young soon. No definite news of Little Grebe success but there must be a minimum of four pairs nesting (maybe seven or eight), and they normally have two broods each summer. Mallard breeding success appears to be very low - just one family of two ducklings seen today and other than one family seen by Kevin on Mar 26 this is the only news of them I have heard of

them from the IBM Lake this year. +++

Perhaps the best birds to go into Kevin's book today were a couple of Garden Warblers which not only gave a quick burst of song but showed themselves well. A calling Reed Bunting was to be expected as were several Reed Warblers but a Sedge Warbler was a bonus - they only occasionally stop there and have never, to my knowledge, bred there. Another good bird was a Lesser Whitethroat. On the missing list for this year is Cetti's Warbler (one was regularly heard around the lake in the second half of 2002 and one was heard there by Dave Tolcher on May 16 last year, but not since), and other birds which have nested on the site are Stonechat, Skylark, Meadow Pipit and even Yellow Wagtail but those are all well in the past now!

John Shillitoe made another tour of the Wickham, Hambledon, Soberton area and reports bad news in that he did not hear or see a single Corn Bunting, and good news in that he both saw and heard a pair of Woodlark in a new area, adding evidence for a current wave of Woodlark expansion into farmland in south east Hampshire (a very minor but a very welcome expansion!)

At Noar Hill were three Turtle Doves and seven Yellowhammer but once again no Corn Bunting.

In the 'old days' when April showers gave way to May sunshine the Swifts would return to their nests in Havant on May 1 and depart on July 31. This year the Swifts started to arrive along the south coast on April 17 (after a couple on Mar 3 and 16) but the weather has not induced them to think of nesting and any that have returned to nest sites have probably (as with those I reported on Apr 28 which entered the roof of Alan Lewis' home in Basingstoke) stayed indoors waiting for the weather to change. Here in Havant Swifts have been seen over Budds Farm since Apr 18, but I had to wait until this evening to see one low over Havant, possibly returning to its nest site. Last year they were back here on May 4 (and in Emsworth as early as Apr 28)

In my notes for last Wednesday (May 5) I passed on Val Lowings report that the Titchfield Flamingo had not been seen there for a couple of weeks and today Richard Carpenter tells me that one is now at the Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset and is thought to be the Titchfield bird. I have no idea when that bird arrived at Abbotsbury but if it was after April 18 that may well be the case. After being seen regularly at Titchfield Haven up to Apr 15 a Flamingo was seen at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight on Apr 17 but the next day (Apr 18) the Flamingo was reported back at the Haven so I assumed that the Yarmouth bird was a second one in the area. However, with no reports from Titchfield since Apr 18 and with the current report that the bird has flown west, it is reasonable to think that the bird was getting restless in mid April (perhaps thinking it was time to look for a mate?) and flew to Yarmouth. Not finding a mate there perhaps it had second thoughts and returned to familiar territory at the Haven before making a more determined effort to improve its love life. Any signs of it pairing with a Swan?

When anyone asks me if I have been to twitch the latest rarity my standard answer is that I would prefer to see birds in their natural habitat than to spend my time and money 'beach combing' for oddities washed up on our shores - when I have angel wings and all eternity to fill I will certainly want to see all the natural wonders of this world, and any other planets that support life, but at present I find quite enough to interest me within walking and cycling distance of my home (perhaps because I allow my self to take an interest in whatever comes my way - plants, insects and other living things and not just birds - and also because I do not suffer from the competitive urge that afflicts so many humans and causes so much trouble). +++

Being of that 'homely disposition' I am currently enjoying a quiet smile at the expense of those dedicated seekers of the Sussex 'Pom King' title who sit for ten or more hours a day waiting for Pom Skuas to fly past them at Selsey or Seaford in the hope of seeing just one more bird than any other competitor in the race, and ending up with a total score of less than 100 birds seen during the whole spring passage. The reason for smiling is to be found in the reports of Pom Skuas passing other parts of the British Isles in huge numbers - if they really see merit in seeing more Poms than anyone else they would clearly stand a better chance

of doing so by exchanging a seat on the Sussex seafront for one in the Scottish Islands where, so I am told, just one extended flock of Poms seen on May 8 would have given them a score of 2000 out of a probable day total of over 3000 Poms passing the outer Hebrides. Other recent reports are of 136 Poms at Dungeness on May 2, 280 seen in two hours from the Irish coast yesterday and 900 seen from the Hebrides today.

In my notes for last Sunday (May 2) I wrote of the likelihood of seeing flocks of 10 or 20 Hobbies arriving together and feeding up after their journey. Today comes news from Derek Crawley at the Pevensey Levels showing that we are getting into the peak season for Hobby arrival - Derek writes .. 'I would estimate approaching 20 Hobby during the mid-morning. At one point a group of 8 were hawking back and forth over Down Level. I have never seen so many at one time. A good number of Swifts were also in the area'. From Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter writes of 5 Hobbies hunting over the meadows today, and yesterday in Sussex there were at least 10 at Pevensey, 6 in the Pannell valley and 2 at Rye Harbour

THU 06 MAY

Not yet a rarity, but rapidly becoming so, is the Turtle Dove and it has reached a stage in its decline where I take an interest in every report. Up to May 2 I had heard of nine birds arriving in this country but now, like the Hobbies, their main arrival is in progress. I have already mentioned in notes for May 7 above that 3 were at Noar Hill when Cliff Oakley's group went there, and today Keith Hackett found four of them in Darwell Wood northwest of Battle near Hastings. Best of all, Brian Fellows heard one not far from Emsworth marina today.

Three items of late news for the past weekend are, first, a one day stand by a Pectoral Sandpiper at Keyhaven on May 3, and second, of much greater interest to me, was a sighting of a Firecrest in the Hollybank Woods on May 2.

The Firecrest was one of 94 species seen by Martin and Tim Hampton in their annual 'car less' May bird race (using bikes and train only). I'm not sure of their full route or species list but Martin tells me that they did better than I would have expected in the Hollybank woods, seeing a pair of Peregrine flying south overhead as well as the more expected Sparrowhawk and Buzzards (nine circling together). They also had at least six Holly Blue butterflies around the trees which give the Hollybank wood its name before taking the train to Beaulieu Road and getting Woodlark, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Wood Warbler as well as more expected Redstarts

WED 05 MAY

Canada Geese had hatched two broods of 5 and 6 goslings at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth when Brian Fellows was there this morning and a family of 7 had probably hatched on the Isle of Wight at pools near Marvel Farm beside the disused rail track going south from Newport (Derek Hale saw them on May 6) - no doubt others have appeared at the Portsmouth IBM site and many other places. +++

So far I have not heard of any Swan broods hatching, and at Baffins Pond they may not do so as Brian could only see one Swan and no nest when he was there today. A pair of Swans had been at the pond up to Mar 10 this year, and one was apparently sitting on a nest on Mar 2. Although they may have failed to breed at Baffins Brian found all three nests at the nearby Milton Lakes had sitting Swans, but I have no news from the Eastney Lake nest site where a pair hatched six cygnets in 2003 despite one parent having been killed by dogs soon after the 2002 brood hatched (Brian could see no sign of this pair or their nest when he looked for them this year on Mar 26). +++

Another sign of declining numbers at Baffins was that only 3 Barnacle Geese could be seen. Back in the spring of 1999 the flock of Barnacles there numbered 42 but disease killed at least 17 of these in the summer of 1999 and in the first half of 2000 only 12 Barnacles were present. They were down to 11 in Oct 2000 and that number was maintained to Mar 2003. The number then dropped to 9 from Oct 03 until Mar 04. The fact that only 4 were there in April and 3 today may just mean that two or three pairs have gone into hiding at some nearby unknown nest site, but I suspect that the days of the Baffins Gang are now numbered.

Richard Carpenter saw a Hobby and heard a Grasshopper Warbler at Titchfield Haven today, and Val Lowings tells us that the Flamingo which had been there since Nov 7 last year has not been seen for two weeks (no official word on this as the Titchfield Haven website has not been updated for two weeks - since Apr 22)

At Pulborough Brooks the first Barn Owl egg in the visitor centre nestbox is expected to hatch in the next few days (the nest can be watched by video camera) but the warden (Pete Hughes) tells us that wader passage through the reserve has been poor so far. He says that on Sunday (May 2) two Ruff, three Whimbrel and a Little Ringed Plover were seen there, and that today brought the first Greenshank (though Tom Howard-Jones had reported on when he paid a visit there on Apr 25).

TUE 04 MAY

Pete Carr has just sent out the results of the mid April Egret Roost Count for this year's monthly survey of Egret numbers in Hampshire and other roost sites adjacent to Hampshire. This shows a couple of things that may be of general interest, first of which is the expected drop in numbers in the April to June period as many of the birds leave us (presumably to breed elsewhere - probably back on the continent). Although not all roosts were counted each month the overall total number of Egrets counted each month show this drop, the totals for Jan Feb Mar and Apr being 249, 265, 194, 86. +++

The other thing which I find of interest is the relative size of the different roosts, especially the decline in size of the Thorney roost which once held nearly 300 birds and which was for the first few years after the 1989 'Egret invasion of Britain' the only roost site for the central south coast. To get a view of this I have summed the four counts made so far this year for each roost site, and the figures given by this view show that the Langstone Wade Court roost is now the one preferred by the greatest number of Egrets (total of the Jan, Feb, Mar and Apr counts is 165). Second in size by this view is Alresford with 114, then comes the north Pagham roost with 113. Thorney Island drops to fourth with only 98, just above the southern Itchen Valley roost with 84 (note that this site does not have an April count recorded so may really be higher up the list) The Meon Valley roost north of Wickham is fifth with 69 and the Isle of Wight roost in Salterns Wood at Yarmouth came sixth with 62. Although 12 sites are included in the survey the others have not so far revealed much use (partly lack of counts, partly lack of interest by the birds?) and the only other one that is worth mentioning as it has been dutifully counted each month is the Horsea Island one in Portsmouth Harbour which returns a total of 48. All these figures are of course just the limited view obtainable from the counts returned to Pete Carr - there may well be lots more Egrets lurking in places that have not been counted (including roosts that no one is yet aware of).

Derek Hale went to the new Hersey Nature Reserve at Seaview on the Isle of Wight this morning and tells us that he heard a Marsh Warbler there. I hope he is right but I know of two reasons for doubting the claim. +++

The first is that Marsh Warblers do not normally arrive in Britain until the third week in May - the very earliest record I can find is May 17 (in 2002 at a Sussex site where in 2001 a pair arrived on May 19). A more typical date is June 3 (the date of the most recent Hampshire record - of a bird which spent half an hour in Peter Potts garden in the Chilling area back in 1998). That record is the latest I can find in the Hampshire Bird Reports, though I see the Mike Rafter told us on Hoslist that he had come on one in the Test Valley near Romsey on 19 May 2002 but unfortunately it did not stay long enough to get confirmation of its id and is thus not in the 2002 HBR. Mike's message at the time read .. '1 singing Marsh Warbler not far from Romsey on Sunday, could not be located the next day so prob. migrant' +++

The second reason is that some Reed Warblers can have a song as strong and varied as a true Marsh Warbler. A bird which initially fooled several birders was at Pagham Harbour in July 1999 but this was eventually agreed to be a "mega-mimetic Reed Warbler" Simon Woolley was one of those who were not taken in by it but Simon wrote that it's song .. 'included an incredible variety, depth and intensity of sounds borrowed from other species. This is probably a non-exhaustive list, but I heard it use Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover,

Great Tit, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Swallow, Linnet, Nightingale, Sandwich Tern, Green Woodpecker, Magpie, Willow Warbler and Curlew for sure, and possibly snatches of House Martin, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull and Starling!' +++

Please note that the Marsh Warbler report from Derek Hale was quickly retracted by him before he saw my comments below and the bird is now reported by him as a Reed Warbler. Nevertheless the original report was very useful to me in providing a peg on which to review what I know about Marsh Warblers, and I hope the thoughts I expressed below are of interest to others - they certainly extended my knowledge and I am grateful to Derek for the opportunity to do so. +++

As an aside on this subject when I was at the Warblington cress beds during last Sunday morning's CBC visit I was surprised by a slightly unusual Blackbird song which turned into a Song Thrush and then a Reed Warbler before the bird (which I was thinking might be a Sedge Warbler) popped up and showed it was a male Blackcap. +++

Going back to Marsh Warblers this current report gave me cause to check their status in Hampshire and what I see shows that whereas there were reports of the species at a rate of almost one a year in the 1980s there have been no official records in this county since 1998, but I am glad to see that they still seem to be holding on as a regular breeding species at one or two sites in East Sussex, though they too may eventually join the general retreat of the species from Britain that has been going on for many years. No doubt that there will continue to be reports of passing migrants like those of Mike Rafter and Derek Hale.

MON 03 MAY

Bob Chapman's latest news from Farlington Marshes includes his report for today saying .. 'A scattering of Yellow Wagtails among the cattle was good to see, but there is no sign of any of the males taking up territory, so a return to breeding seems remote.' +++

SUN 02 MAY

Another rare bird which seems to have escaped Hampshire birders is the Glossy Ibis which was briefly at Ringwood on Apr 29 and then appeared further up the River Avon (just into Wiltshire) yesterday evening. It seems that it left that site at 9am this morning and has probably now moved to Oxfordshire where one was reported later today. +++

While on this theme of birds that got away John Clark tells us on Hoslist .. 'I'm sure you will all be gripped to know that a Scops Owl was photographed at Dean Lane, near Bishops Waltham on 2nd April 2004. Unfortunately, it was picked up dead, clearly a road kill. I have photographs of the bird which will hopefully be published in the bird report. The finder was a visiting birder from Hertfordshire.' +++

Continuing the same theme Tony Gutteridge was at Warblington this morning for another CBC visit and as he passed an isolated hedgerow Oak tree from which branches have fallen to leave potential nest holes he was surprised to see a couple of Sparrows fly off with a direct and purposeful flight that suggested Tree Sparrow more than House Sparrow (and they did not fly the 250 metres towards the farm buildings where House Sparrows still nest). Tree Sparrows last bred on the farm in 1987 (and were last seen there in 1989) +++

Other birds seen at Warblington by Tony and myself this morning during the CBC visit were at least 6 Reed Warblers, a male Reed Bunting, four or more Lesser Whitethroats, five Little Egrets and both male and female Cuckoo. Whimbrel and one Med Gull flew over the plot and a few Common and Little Terns were fishing offshore with two pairs of Shelduck on the shore. Sadly the fields where three or more pairs of Skylark may have been nesting have been ploughed and sown since our last visit but two larks were still singing over those fields. +++

Also in Hampshire today Ash Warne had four Hobbies flying together at one place in the northern New Forest. The arrival of Hobbies has speeded up in the past few days but I suspect the peak arrival is yet to come - last year David Thelwell had a flock of 10 Hobbies hunting together in the Bishop's Dyke area on May 13, in 2001 Richard Jacobs had a total of 16 in that area as early as May 5, and in 1994 a flock of 19 were feeding together there on May 12 (these feeding flocks are I think one day wonders made up of birds that have

flown in together and are eager to feed up before dispersing to breeding territories) +++
The Isle of Wight today had a Wood Warbler in the Brading area and one (maybe two) Hoopoe in the St Catherine's Point area.

SAT 01 MAY

Today's top birds were the first two Nightjars of the year, one each in Hampshire and Sussex.

The Sussex bird was heard in Ashdown Forest by an SOS party out to hear the dawn chorus. The one in Hampshire was seen to fly in (with more than one Spotted Flycatcher) by seawatchers at Hurst who were also enjoying a count of 65 Manx Shearwaters plus 27 Arctic and 4 Pom Skuas (eight more Poms, 100 Common Scoter and two divers flew past Hurst on May 2). +++

Simon Wright was at Sandy Point on Hayling Island from 5:25 to 9:25 this morning getting distant views of Osprey and Marsh Harrier at the end of his stint but missing a Red-throated Diver and a Great Skua (Bonxie) which others saw soon after he had left. While he was there 4 Yellow Wagtails flew in, a Fulmar and more than 5 Gannets flew by, and a flock of over 30 Sanderling were on the nearby shoreline. +++

Also in the Havant area today Richard Hallett enjoyed the reeling of a Grasshopper Warbler at the northwest foot of Portsdown, by the Wallington River near Southwick, in Assells Coppice (which I see is adjacent to Wynn's Copse - perhaps named after ancestors of our Russell Wynn?) +++

A Spoonbill was seen flying into Titchfield Haven from the Stubbington area (just east of the northern part of the Haven). A Spoonbill was a regular feature at the Haven from April 2 - 11 and that too seems to have first flown in from the north rather than from the sea, and as one had been at the Haven on Mar 7 I am wondering if today's bird is the same one that has been in the area since Mar 7 but which has an alternative home in the area - if so one place where that alternative home could be, and which would bring it to the Haven via Stubbington, is the MoD Defence Munitions site on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour. Could it be that Spoonbills are now breeding there as well as Egrets and Herons? +++

It would seem, looking at Derek Hale's Isle of Wight Bird News website today, that the new nature reserve that has recently 'appeared' on the seaward side of the pools of the Ryde Flamingo Park at Seaview is called the 'Hersey Nature Reserve' - maybe Derek found this name on a notice board there. I wonder if we will soon find out the reason for its creation - does the name 'Hersey' give us a connection to some local person or to the owners of the Flamingo Park? or is it the work of the local authority? or even the Isle of Wight Tourist Board? +++

Among other things seen by Derek today I note that 50 Sanderling were still on the Ryde Sands, many of them coming into summer plumage.

After a dull and damp day the late afternoon and evening turned into a perfect May day tempting me to a walk on the Langstone South Moors under a warm sun in a cloudless sky, with fresh green and many other colours from the emerging leaves on the trees and the many flowering plants (to say nothing of the green carpet of Enteromorpha weed on the shore and covering much of the rising water in the harbour, with not a breath of wind to move it towards the shore where it will soon be accumulating into an ankle deep stinking morass). That one blemish on an otherwise perfect world was more than offset this evening by the 'surround sound' of birds - low flying Swifts and Swallows gently moving the air above my head, Skylarks and a Meadow Pipit singing high in the blue, and an endless wall of sound from Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Blackcaps, Whitethroats and even the bubble of a female Cuckoo responding to the well known song of a male (I was going to say her mate but I really can't see Cuckoos in long-term, faithful pairs - I imagine they have the briefest of couplings on chance encounters). +++

The bird interest in my walk came from the sight of at least 20 Swifts around Budds Farm and 8 Swallows over the Moors where I heard the Cuckoos, from the wonderful sound of Whimbrel on the move overhead, and from the chatter of Turnstone on the shore as well as the songsters mentioned above. At the mouth of the Langbrook stream a group of six Brent were probably summering birds (they usually show here in early May before disappearing out on the Islands until September) and with them were a pair of Swans

where I expected to see only one (the bones and feathers of the unlucky previous member of this pair are still very visible on the shore just below the seawall path where it turns from the line of the stream to follow the harbour shore - the survivor of that pair seems to have had no problem in finding a new mate). +++

On the harbour at least eleven Great Crested Grebe were close in, and just one Egret was fishing. On Budds Farm Pools some 30 Tufted Duck were still present along with three Shelduck and a few Mallard, Coot and Little Grebe, with the nesting Swans very obvious - at one point the male was busy seeing off a pair of Canada Geese. Walking home there were two Wheatear on the old playing fields and a Greenshank called distantly, and by the Lymbourne stream on my home stretch a Goldcrest sang.

PLANTS

FRI 07 MAY

On Apr 13 this year I saw tight buds on Bush Vetch at Stansted and have been expecting to hear of this plant being found in flower for some time so I am grateful to Jim Berry for telling me that it is now in flower (and looks as if it had been out for some time) in Wellsworth Lane at Rowlands Castle. I have an impression that this is normally the first of the Vetchs to flower each year but looking at my records it is perhaps more correct to say that it is an opportunistic plant, flowering at any time of year that circumstances are favourable. In 2002 it was found on Apr 1 by Martin Rand and on Apr 2 by Jim Berry (at this Wellsworth Lane site). In 2001 it was first seen on Apr 23 but in 2000 it did not appear until May 2 and in 1999 it also waited until May 1 but in that year it popped up again in June and again on Aug 25 while in 2001 Richard Carpenter found some flowering in the Meon valley on Nov 28. +++

Another flower that can sometimes be seen much earlier in the year is Wood Avens but despite seeing its leaves on well grown plants for some time I did not see a flower until this evening (Jim Berry also found it at Rowlands Castle today) +++

Yet another plant which seems to be late this year is Hogweed which Richard Carpenter reports today for the first time from the Brownwich area where he also saw Thrift (Sea Pink), White Campion, Common Vetch and Red Clover. Of these Hogweed is the only first of year as Thrift (which I have not mentioned in these notes) was seen with Sea Kale flowering on the Hayling seafront last weekend by Rosemary Webb. +++

I myself took a stroll this evening down the Hayling Billy trail to Langstone and back and found three plants in flower which have not yet been mentioned - Ragged Robin was flowering at the Lymbourne triangle (where masses of wildflower seed was scattered last year and more than I expected is starting to appear this year), Curled Dock was in business alongside the old rail track and Duke of Argyll's Teaplant was well in flower on the wall of the Royal Oak at Langstone

THU 06 MAY

Brian Fellows was greeted by the lovely flowers of Hedgerow Cranesbill on the seawall of Emsworth marina today and with it were the yellow flowers of Black Mustard - no seeds yet to prove it but a lot of Black Mustard has been seen here in recent years. Less colourful were the flowers of Sea Club-rush. +++

Richard Carpenter found Black Medick and Wintercress at Titchfield Haven today - I think Wintercress is coming out in quite a few places now, albeit more than a week after the Intermediate Wintercress started to flower here in Havant. Black Medick is less easy to find at the moment - the odd plant which I discovered in St Faith's Churchyard here in Havant on May 1 has been 'weeded out' and I have not yet seen any more!

The mention of Gromwell in my notes for Sunday (May 2) below made me wonder if the Common Gromwell was now flowering on Portsdown, and today I took a midday break from work at these notes to check the area around Fort Purbrook. Parking in the 'cul de sac' road off College Road opposite the private road leading to Fort Purbrook I found Common Gromwell flowering within yards of where I parked (plants on the north side of the road), and went on to find the first Mignonette and Milkwort as well as Bird's Foot Trefoil.

Glaucous Sedge was also flowering and has not been mentioned so far by others. On the steep chalky banks of the College Road 'cutting' the usual mass of Red Valerian and garden Aquilegia plants were starting to flower, and around the fort there was a great show of Cowslips and Germander Speedwell while along the path at the back of the fort I found my first plants of Sanicle. +++

On the question (posed in last Sunday's notes) as to whether the Gromwell found in Corhampton Forest was the Common or Field species Martin Rand tells me that Field Gromwell is so far unknown in southeast Hampshire (so the plants were almost certainly Common Gromwell). +++

Martin goes on to take up my comments on the tiny Blinks - it seems that he is actively engaged in trying to 'map' the distribution of the various subspecies of this much overlooked plant and he would welcome samples of it which have flowers or fruit - the fruit is needed to identify the subspecies but fruit will usually develop on plants picked when in flower. This plant is probably widespread in southeast Hampshire in damp places away from chalk and I will certainly be on the lookout for it.

WED 05 MAY

Two plants which cannot be overlooked have now started to flower in our area. At Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter found the first Yellow Flags, and alongside the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth Brian Fellow found flowers on the Tree Mallows. +++

Still in Emsworth a look around Brook Meadow on return from a short holiday showed Brian that Winter-cress (and Broad-leaved Dock) had started to flower. Also readily detectable, though not necessarily flowering, were several sedges including False Fox and Hairy Sedge along with Common Spike Rush

TUE 04 MAY

Getting a brief dose of fresh air by cycling around Havant in the evening I was impressed by several huge Horse Chestnuts now covered in green leaves and white flowers lit by the setting sun against a background of very black clouds, and then slightly surprised to find flowers starting to open on self-sown Sweet Peas climbing the wire fence of the allotments along New Lane. On this outing I also found single florets open in the flowerheads of both Horse Radish and Winter-cress beside Hayling Billy trail behind my house (where White Campion has been in flower for a few days). +++

Earlier in the day I had walked by Havant Railway Station and been delighted by the great show of pale blue Cornsalad and bright pink Storks-bill in the 'flower beds' by the steps leading from the station to the Market Parade shops. Here the Cornsalad has a chance to set seed, unlike the plants by St Faith's Church Hall which have already been tidied away by the men from the council.

SUN 02 MAY

Another plant which is not at all common in south east Hampshire (though I have seen it on the IBM site at Portsmouth) has the simple name of Blinks, and I mention it here only because it gets a mention in the warden's report for April from Rye Harbour. If it is out there it should be out in Hampshire so it may be worth keeping an eye out for this tiny ground hugging plant of damp, non-calcareous soils (but if you do find it don't get carried away in efforts to decide the sub-species!)

Richard Carpenter found both Tormentil and Bitter Vetch flowering in the Botley Woods today, and both these should be findable in Havant Thicket if I found the time to visit it! Mention of Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*) reminds me that neither I nor anyone else (to my knowledge) has yet seen the much commoner and usually early flowering Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*)

An early morning visit to the Warblington fields today found Red Clover and Celery-leaved Buttercup newly in flower, and also gave me my first Bugle and Subterranean Clover though these two have been seen earlier. More Herb Robert was out and Marsh Valerian was still flowering, and I noted an odd plant of Honesty with pure white flowers in Pook

Lane.

SAT 01 MAY

An early walk around Havant gave me my first Ox-eye (or May) Daisies flowering near the Langstone roundabout on the A27, and in the grass surrounding St Faith's Church in the centre of the town both Broad-leaved Willowherb and Black Medick were flowering.

Walking through Juniper Square, where Small-flowered Cranesbill will soon hopefully be flowering in the edges of untended lawns which abut the roadside pavement with no fences or walls, the path up to one of these houses through a similarly untended 'lawn' had two bushes of what I would swear was Round-leaved Cranesbill flowering . +++

In the evening I walked down the Langbrook stream and found Common Nettles and Hemlock Water Dropwort had just started to flower, while in the South Moors area further down stream the Divided Sedge was flowering in the grassland, Marsh Horsetails still had small black fertile tips to some of their shoots, and Parsley Piert had flowers beside the new path to Southmoor Lane.

INSECTS

FRI 07 MAY

The current weather is not ideal for the emergence of dragonflies but Mark Litjens found both Hairy Dragonfly and Four-spot Chaser at Titchfield Haven today. Last year the Hairy Dragonfly was seen here by Mark on May 5 but I did not hear of Four-spot Chaser at Titchfield until May 28 although there was an isolated first sighting of one at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough on May 7. +++

Also present at Titchfield today were Large Red and Azure Damsels, and I even had a Large Red in my garden today during midday sunshine.

At Noar Hill Cliff Oakley's Petersfield Wildlife Group found 8 Duke of Burgundy butterflies and from talking to other visitors they learnt that there may well have been more in parts of the reserve they did not visit

THU 06 MAY

Last year the first Wall Brown butterfly was seen on Thorney Island on May 3 with further sightings from other coastal sites on May 4, 5 and 8 (though none at Farlington Marshes until May 15). This year Tony Wilson is the first to report this species - seen today at Beachy Head along with a couple of Green Hairstreak, a Small Copper and four Speckled Wood but no Grizzled or Dingy Skippers

Another piece of good news comes via the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website which reports that 13 Holly Blues were seen in the Gosport area last Sunday (May 2). On that same day Martin Hampton found at least half a dozen Holly Blues in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth. +++

TUE 04 MAY

The main reason why the number of Holly Blue butterflies varies each year is, so I have been led to believe, the result of a never ending struggle for survival between the butterfly and a small parasitic wasp which chooses to lay its eggs in the warm and cuddly bodies of Holly Blue caterpillars. Caterpillars chosen to be nursery and food for the young wasp do not become butterflies so when there are lots of wasps few caterpillars survive to become butterflies, and few butterflies means few caterpillars of the next generation and thus few homes for young wasps (and thus wasp numbers decline to give the butterflies a chance to increase in number - and so on ad finitum) +++

As with all such scientific theories to explain the workings of the natural world this theory has some merit and can be demonstrated to be correct, but as with other theories they tend to ignore the many other factors that determine what happens in the world around us - for example let us assume that farmers or gardeners in a certain area start to use a new pesticide which eliminates the wasp species but not the butterfly ... +++

That lengthy pre-ambule was needed to attempt to explain why, in a one of the low years for the Holly Blue, Lawrence Holloway at Bognor can write in his nature diary today of 'innumerable Holly Blues' in his garden.

Another thing that I read today which seems to need further explanation comes from Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website. It is a report of yet another Hummingbird Hawkmoth seen on May 2 at Gillingham in Kent - nothing unusual in that, but the report goes on to say that the moth was feeding from Galium aparine, a plant that everyone must know (probably under the name of Goosegrass or Cleavers). I imagine that everyone knows of this plant but I wonder how many people are familiar with its flowers (which they can see at this time of year if they look for them). The point is that its white flowers are tiny, and I would have thought that the proboscis of the moth might well be too large in diameter to fit into the throat of the flower, and if it can get in is the effort really worth while (the amount of nectar in the flower must be extremely small). It may however be that these flowers have something special to offer to the moth --- can anyone tell us more? +++

Also new on Steve's website is a first report for the year of a Clouded Yellow in Ireland (Co Wexford), again posing the question of whether it is a migrant that has just reached there or is the product of a local breeding colony. Another entry is for a Red Admiral, and my interest in that is that there seem to have been far fewer spring sightings of this butterfly than in normal years, but that is a purely subjective view and I have done no research about numbers in previous years.

The Hampshire Butterfly conservation website has a really interesting entry concerning a visit to Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley back on April 23. The report comes from Anne McCue in Gosport who went to Beacon Hill and set new 'first of year' Hampshire dates for three species as she saw five Green Hairstreaks, 3 Grizzled Skippers and, best of all, a male Common Blue. No other Common Blues have been reported in Hampshire, and the other two butterfly species were a day earlier than those which I have previously reported +++

A fourth new 'first of year' comes (again via the BC website) from Dennis Bohea who found a fresh Small Copper at the Gosport Wildgrounds as early as March 19. I have known Dennis for many years and have no reason to doubt this observation.

SUN 02 MAY

In Botley Woods today Richard Carpenter had the first Speckled Yellow moths of the year (Adrian Hoskins also had them at Stansted on May 3) and the first of the common longhorn moth Adela reamurella +++

Isolated first sightings have been reported in April of Small Copper (Apr 9 at Gosport and Apr 14 on Portsdown), Green Hairstreak (Apr 24 at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester) and Grizzled Skipper (also Apr 24 at Old Winchester Hill), but this weekend has really marked the start of their season. Visitors to Ballard Down today saw more than 20 Green Hairstreaks and a good half dozen Small Copper (and three were on Magdalen Hill Down in Hampshire yesterday), while Alan Thornbury yesterday (May 1) had five Grizzled Skipper in Botley woods

Turning to the world of dragonflies Mark Litjens went to Titchfield Haven today half expecting an early Hairy Dragonfly - he was disappointed in that quest but did find the first Azure damselflies of the year while Bob Chapman saw the first Blue-tailed Damsel at Farlington Marshes, and up on Portsdown John Goodspeed had Common Blue damsels emerging from his garden pond. I used to think that you could distinguish Common Blue from Azure by their choice of habitat (Azure preferring small ponds and Common Blue preferring larger ones with plenty of open water) but I gather that both can be found in both situations and the only way to pick out one from the other is by their markings. +++

Dan Powell's recent book on Dragonflies gets another plus point from me (over the more popular Brooks - Lewington one) for its plate on page 67 showing all six blue damselfly males side by side with a table below each species telling you what to look for. This shows me that segment two (immediately behind the wings) had some form of club shape or 'spot' on Common Blue, and a quite different 'U' shape on Azure. Segment 3 has blue and black in both species but on the Common Blue the small amount of black never has the 'U' shape (with the black running forward along the sides of the insect, but not in the centre of its back). Finally, segments 8 and 9 (the last before the claspers at the tip of the tail) are wholly blue in Common Blue but segment 9 has black edges in Azure.

On the Warblington fields this morning St Mark's Flies were definitely out, confirming Tony

Gutteridge's sighting at Compton a week ago when he did not name them but told me of seeing 'black, long-legged, flies'. I also had a Holly Blue there and several Small Whites plus a probably Small Tortoiseshell. +++

While at Warblington I found my first good show of Oak Apples lit by the morning sun on a lone oak tree above an ephemeral pond close to the field path from Emsworth to Warblington church (coming through the kissing gate from Nore Barn woodland into the Warblington fields the oak is on your right just before the second kissing gate on the path). The 'apples' are the homes of young larvae of a gall wasp called *Biorhiza pallida* and both male and female wasps will hatch from them in June (each Oak apple is a single sex habitat - some have males, some females, but never mixed). These will mate and the females will lay their eggs on the fine hair roots of Oak trees (I don't know if they have to dig deep into the ground to lay them). The small round galls on these roots will protect the developing young over winter, and from them in February to April will emerge wingless females only. These climb the trees and (without sex) they create the Oak Apple generation of the next year.

SAT 01 MAY

The resident British Clouded Yellows which have set up a permanent colony on the Southbourne cliffs at Bournemouth started to emerge from their pupae on Apr 15 last year, but this year the first fresh insects were not seen until today (though it could be that they came out earlier and hid from recent rain!). +++

Following my news in yesterday's notes of possible migrant Clouded Yellows being seen on the Isle of Wight and Portland Bill Tony Wilson has told me that he has heard of Clouded Yellows also being seen recently at Beachy Head, but he has no dates for the sightings.

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 07 MAY

Slow-worms should now be appearing as the weather warms up and one was seen at Noar Hill today following two reports in March and one on April 30. With the lush growth following all the rain we have had they may be less easy to spot this month but one tip for finding them is to watch Magpies which take an interest in the long grass - scare the Magpie off and you might well save the life of a Slow-worm!

The rain has encouraged a good growth of fungi so far and one more common species, *Psathyrella candolleana*, was found today by Jim Berry in a strip of woodland called Cherry Row just north of Rowlands Castle

THU 06 MAY

Walking the long path parallel to the Portsdown Hill Road where it passes Fort Purbrook (and reflecting on the futility of one off conservation efforts which are not maintained by annual maintenance - here scrub clearance along the path produced a wonderful show of orchids and other flowers for a couple of years, but re-growth of Dogwood seems likely to prevent any substantial flowering this year) I was reminded that nature takes advantage of whatever habitat is on offer. Among the Dogwood regrowth on the road side of the broad path, just about opposite where the steep path come down from the main entrance of Fort Purbrook to meet the path parallel to the road, there is a half hidden pile of straw-like plant remains (probably a dump of last year's plant cutting on the steep path up to the fort). On this 'rotting straw heap' there is a great show of *Peziza* type fungi (I call this type of fungal growth 'bedpan fungi') which might be of interest to fungus enthusiasts. My first guess is that this might be *Peziza vesiculosa*. +++

Another, and much more interesting, fungal find greeted Brian Fellows when he returned today to Brook Meadow at Emsworth after a week's holiday. This was a re-appearance of fruiting bodies on the fungus which has been at work recycling the 'useful elements' of ancient Willow Trees alongside the River Ems - the fungus is *Agrocybe cylindracea*. +++

Another fungus which I did not mention at the time was found in the cattle meadows of Warblington Farm last Sunday morning. I thought these large white mushrooms with extra white caps and fresh pink gills were probably the Yellow Stainers which one is advised not

to eat but Tony Gutteridge, who found them independently thought they were Horse Mushrooms and ate them that evening with no ill-effect though he said they were rather tasteless.

WEEK 18 APR 26 - MAY 2

BIRDS

SAT 01 MAY

It would seem, looking at Derek Hale's Isle of Wight Bird News website today, that the new nature reserve that has recently 'appeared' on the seaward side of the pools of the Ryde Flamingo Park at Seaview is called the 'Hersey Nature Reserve' - maybe Derek found this name on a notice board there. I wonder if we will soon find out the reason for its creation - does the name 'Hersey' give us a connection to some local person or to the owners of the Flamingo Park? or is it the work of the local authority? or even the Isle of Wight Tourist Board?

Among other things seen by Derek today I note that 50 Sanderling were still on the Ryde Sands, many of them coming into summer plumage.

After a dull and damp day the late afternoon and evening turned into a perfect May day tempting me to a walk on the Langstone South Moors under a warm sun in a cloudless sky, with fresh green and many other colours from the emerging leaves on the trees and the many flowering plants (to say nothing of the green carpet of Enteromorpha weed on the shore and covering much of the rising water in the harbour, with not a breath of wind to move it towards the shore where it will soon be accumulating into an ankle deep stinking morass). That one blemish on an other wise perfect world was more than offset this evening by the 'surround sound' of birds - low flying Swifts and Swallows gently moving the air above my head, Skylarks and a Meadow Pipit singing high in the blue, and an endless wall of sound from Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Blackcaps, Whitethroats and even the bubble of a female Cuckoo responding to the well known song of a male (I was going to say her mate but I really can't see Cuckoos in long-term, faithful pairs - I imagine they have the briefest of couplings on chance encounters). +++

The bird interest in my walk came from the sight of at least 20 Swifts around Budds Farm and 8 Swallows over the Moors where I heard the Cuckoos, from the wonderful sound of Whimbrel on the move overhead, and from the chatter of Turnstone on the shore as well as the songsters mentioned above. At the mouth of the Langbrook stream a group of six Brent were probably summering birds (they usually show here in early May before disappearing out on the Islands until September) and with them were a pair of Swans where I expected to see only one (the bones and feathers of the unlucky previous member of this pair are still very visible on the shore just below the seawall path where it turns from the line of the stream to follow the harbour shore - the survivor of that pair seems to have had no problem in finding a new mate).

On the harbour at least eleven Great Crested Grebe were close in, and just one Egret was fishing. On Budds Farm Pools some 30 Tufted Duck were still present along with three Shelduck and a few Mallard, Coot and Little Grebe, with the nesting Swans very obvious - at one point the male was busy seeing off a pair of Canada Geese. Walking home there were two Wheatear on the old playing fields and a Greenshank called distantly, and by the Lymbourne stream on my home stretch a Goldcrest sang.

FRI 30 APR

Today's most surprising news is that the Shorelark which arrived on the Sussex shore at Pett Level back on Nov 15, and was seen daily in company with three Snow Buntings until mid-March, is still present, being seen today by Cliff Dean. The Snow Buntings left after Mar 13 and the Shorelark ceased to show daily after Mar 27 (when it was heard by Cliff apparently starting to sing). It appeared once more on Apr 7 but has not been seen again until today. I don't know the latest date for Shorelark in Sussex but I read in the 1997 Sussex Bird Report that all reports during the 1990s were between mid-October and late April so I guess Apr 30 has a chance of being a record. Birds of Hampshire shows that one Shorelark was on Hurst Beach on 16 Apr 1969, and I think that is the latest for Hampshire.

+++

I'm not sure of the latest date for Snow Bunting in Sussex but it is very unusual for one to be seen after mid-March. There were two April records in 1988 (on Apr 10 and Apr 16) but the Sussex Bird Report for that year only says that Apr 16 is a 'late date', and does not say it was the latest for the county. Birds of Hampshire gives the latest as being seen in Hampshire on 25 Mar 1977 but since that was published we have one record for 3 April 2000 from Hurst Beach. +++

Returning to more regular birds I see that there were 30 Yellow Wagtails at Castle Water, Rye today but I have no idea if they are intending to breed there or will move on north. +++

Another rarity in Sussex today is a Red-rumped Swallow which arrived in the Cuckmere valley yesterday and was still there today, and another item of Sussex news that caught my eye was the arrival of a Spotted Flycatcher at Selsey Bill this morning, so exhausted after its flight that it flopped onto the first patch of mud that it reached and stayed there for some time until it gathered enough strength to fly to a more normal perch ashore.

Hampshire news starts with two more Spotted Flycatchers, one at Hook/Warsash and one at Eastleigh Lakeside this morning, so while we cannot be certain if the 'distressed' bird seen by Tony Deleiros at Coldwaltham on Apr 20 was a Spotted Flycatcher we do know that at least three Spotted Flycatchers have made it back by the end of April. +++

Simon Ingram saw his Flycatcher at Lakeside early in the morning and with it his first Common Sandpiper and first Sedge Warbler of the year at that site, plus a Lesser Whitethroat. Bob Marchant did not get his Flycatcher at Hook until after lunch but with it he also had a Tree Pipit and Whinchat

Mark Litjens put out a message this evening saying .. 'A Common Crane was seen at Titchfield Haven this afternoon from the coast road at around 16:30 but not since, though it is thought to be still in the area. Apparently it's been there since Wednesday when it was heard calling but not seen.'. The message does not say that Mark saw it, and I'm pretty sure he was just passing on a report concerning which Richard Carpenter told me that there were some doubts as a Grey Heron was known to be present at the place where the anonymous observer said the Crane had been seen. +++

The reference to the Crane being heard on Wednesday presumably refers to a report on Hoslist from Trevor Carpenter, who wrote .. 'I was at Hill Head on Wednesday afternoon with Dave Treacher when we heard a bird fly in which we couldn't see. We heard it again a few minutes later moving up the valley. At the time Dave described it as a flying whale. Having just listened to some Crane Calls on the web that was exactly what we heard. A very unsatisfactory Hampshire tick.' +++

This sound does make it likely that a Crane was present but whether that evidence of a Crane is made stronger by the anonymous report of a sighting today, or whether the sighting was the work of an imagination stirred by hearing that a Crane had been heard there, is something I cannot judge! (Sounds like a case for getting out the volunteers with ropes to drag the reedbed in the hope of putting up the bird - this is a reference to a recent discussion on Hoslist of a dubious practice used in the past at some American birding sites to ensure that bus loads of paying 'eco-tourists' get their money's worth by seeing rare Rails which would otherwise remain hidden from view. My vote remains firmly for leaving the birds undisturbed).

THU 29 APR

Catherine Emm today came on a Glossy Ibis in the Mill Stream which runs along the southwest fringe of Ringwood (between the town and the River Avon) at the point where the disused railway (called the Castleman Tramway) crosses the stream before continuing west over the river and through Ashley Heath and West Moors. She rang Birdguides with the news but they were reluctant to put it out at first (they did so only when she told them she had clear photos of it) and maybe this delay is the reason why those who rushed to the scene when the news did go out were disappointed. +++

Although few birders saw the Ibis at Ringwood it may be seen by more people as on Saturday evening (May 1) it was some 12 miles north of Ringwood feeding by the Avon a little north of Downton where a footpath crosses the river at a weir between Charlton and Andrew

Carter's Standlynch Farm. +++

Trevor Carpenter reminds us how unusual Glossy Ibis records are in Hampshire - of the only four records two were of birds shot (in 1881 and 1902), one spent two and half months in the Brockenhurst area in 1965, and the latest record was at Titchfield Haven in June of 1977. I don't suppose we are likely to learn where this one came from but (although I think they breed as near as the Camargue in southern France) the odds must be in favour of it being an escape, and maybe the BBC have something to do with it as I have twice seen them using a picture of what I think were several Glossy Ibis feeding in wetland as an appropriate background picture to TV weather forecasts on wet days in the past week.

A couple of good birds seen in unexpected places today are a Honey Buzzard, which flew north over Trevor Carpenter's house in Fareham before presumably following the A32 north up the Meon Valley, and a Nightingale which David Thelwell tells us has chosen to settle in an unusual wetland site - the carwash of a busy 24 hour garage in Romsey (the Esso station at Greatbridge). David says that this bird has been there for two weeks and was singing strongly this evening. +++

Another good bird today was the first Turtle Dove to appear on the Isle of Wight this year (Hampshire has already had one and Sussex three or four). It was seen on Culver Down near Bembridge this morning.

Sussex had no new birds today but it is good to know that the pair of Garganey could still be seen at Sidlesham Ferry when Matthew Silk was there today. He also had the regular Spotted Redshank, a Greenshank, two Lesser Whitethroats and two Common Sandpipers there.

At Sidlesham Ferry yesterday (Apr 28) Owen Mitchell watched a White Stork fly over at a great height, drifting south west towards the west fields at Selsey. This may be the same bird which Paul Marten say high over Crawley four days ago. +++

Not far from Sidlesham James O'Driscoll watched 130 Swifts, 90 House Martins and 30 Swallows over Ivy Lake at Chichester immediately after a thunderstorm, and at Brighton Matthew Silk found a Marsh Tit at Brighton College where he thinks it had arrived as a cross channel migrant - another Marsh Tit turned up there two days earlier. +++

Also in Sussex on Apr 28 a Hoopoe was in a garden at Nutley (a village in the Ashdown Forest area), and according to the Romsey advertiser another Hoopoe was in a garden at Owslebury (east of Winchester) on Apr 30. In passing on that news Mike Rafter comments that the paper had an excellent picture of the bird, but (while I have no reason to doubt this was a picture of the bird at Owlsebury) I am aware that there is sometimes little co-ordination between journalists who write news stories and picture editors who supply the pictures to support the story. +++

Going back to Sussex news for Apr 28 Sam Smith at Rye Harbour tells us that the Curlew Sandpiper which arrived there on Apr 27 was still present on Apr 28 when a Short-eared Owl was also there. +++

And finally for recent news from Sussex Graham Roberts tells us that three of the four Peregrine eggs in the Sussex Heights nest box at Brighton had hatched on Apr 27 - hopefully the fourth egg has hatched by now and all the chicks will survive.

Last Friday, when the first Turtle Dove was reported, I short listed seven summer migrants still to reach our shores (Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Nightjar, Quail, Montagu's Harrier, Wood Sandpiper and Honey Buzzard), and of these Wood Sandpiper turned up at Rye Harbour last Sunday (Apr 25) and two Wood Warblers were heard in the New Forest yesterday (Apr 27) leaving just Spotted Flycatcher and Nightjar to be expected by the 'ordinary birder' (I am not forgetting that both Spotted Flycatcher and Honey Buzzard have appeared once so far in these pages, but only as 'probables'). +++

My reason for mentioning these last arrivals is that another Wood Warbler turned up today in a rather unlikely place - singing from a small copse near the marketing suite of the Farnborough Business Park where it was heard by Chris Jones

WED 28 APR

Wood Warbler is not the only bird to appear in an urban setting this week. A note on the SOS website from Andrew Armitage reports that a Black Redstart was singing today at the

Anchor House bar in the centre of Horsham. I know that Black Redstarts are well known dwellers in city ruins but I get the feeling that we are seeing a new twist to wildlife adapting to our human lifestyle in order to survive - Wood Warbler hoping for a bit part in a TV ad by attracting attention at the Farmborough marketing suite, and Black Redstart after a chance of a cabaret turn at this Horsham bistro. +++

This theme is repeated when Andrew goes on to describe how Bullfinches in his garden have just latched on to the habit of using hanging seed feeders instead of just picking up left overs on the ground below the feeders. Has anyone else seen this?

Yesterday saw a major arrival of Swifts and hirundines. At St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight Kris Gillam writes of .. 'a large arrival of birds in off the sea with two Hobbies, 220 Swifts, 275 Swallows, 85 House Martins, and three Sand Martins' and at Pulborough Brooks Pete Hughes reports .. 'the first significant number of swifts (at least 30, maybe up to 50) over at about 11am' and other reports echo this impression of a major influx. +++

Despite these birds arriving in large numbers experience of past years tells me that there will be few reports of them screaming over the rooftops in their nesting areas for some time, at least until the weather improves, and in the past I have assumed that this disappearance of the birds was due to their habit of spending most of the time high in the sky above the clouds (and possibly hundreds of miles away outside the weather system bringing us rain). +++

Alan Lewis, however, suggests an equally likely method of disappearing from view. He writes .. 'My first swifts of the year were heard yesterday in my loft in Basingstoke, but they probably did not re-emerge all day (and probably not today by the look of it!). They did the same last year (again in poor weather) and we did not see them for about five days!' +++

I have long known that baby Swifts have the ability to survive without being fed by their parents for several days when bad weather prevents the parents from bringing them food, and from what Alan says maybe the adult birds have the same ability to go into a state of 'suspended animation' at such times - what I did not know was that they would do so in a dark nest cavity rather than 'sleeping on the wing' at high altitude. Maybe Graham Roberts will be able to tell us more using the web cam sited in his loft to watch the progress of the nests?

Birds can be extremely choosy over the selection of nest sites, and it is difficult to work out what influences their choice, but an interesting example of the selection method at work comes today from Alison Downs at Four Marks near Alton. She writes .. 'I moved a tit nesting box about a foot to the left this year and today at 1.00 p.m. a pair of Blue Tits have started busily bringing in nesting material. Obviously moving this previously unused box did the trick!'

Just when we thought it was all over for seeing Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Roger Webb tells us that, while getting some exercise running along the seafront, he spotted four of them this evening near Southsea Castle. The sight stopped him in his tracks and he tells us that he was able to get within five metres of them, and to see that there was a .. 'summery look to them ; spottier, dull legs and some new upperpart feathering.'

Late this evening I paid a short visit to the Marlpit Lane Nightingale site to the north east of Emsworth and was pleased to hear strong song from one Nightingale and also to see that the habitat damage which I had heard of from Brian Fellows was not as bad as I had feared. True, large patches of brambles and a few scrubby bushes had been bulldozed into heaps that look as if they will be burnt when the weather turns drier, but the actual gravel excavation area has not yet extended and the ground is still covered with wild flowers (as well as a million shards of brightly coloured 'clay pigeon' plastic disks). I remember at least one Nightingale singing from these bushes last year but am not sure that any nested in them (the Whitethroats that will have done so are still present in good numbers in suitable nest habitat around the site edges). The trees, shrubs, nettles, etc around the edges of the site have not been touched and the large plantation of young trees on ground to the north of the open site have grown up in an impenetrable jungle of undergrowth in which there is habitat for a dozen pairs of Nightingale - the one I heard was hidden in this jungle.

TUE 27 APR

An attractive bird species that has not been seen on our southern shores since Sept 28 last year turned up at Rye Harbour today - this is Curlew Sandpiper. Last spring the first passage bird was seen at Rye on Apr 29 (after a one off sighting of one on the Isle of Wight on Mar 29). +++

Other signs of the season moving on come from Stephen Harvey who today saw the first fledged Dunnock on the lawn of his Chandlers Ford house near Eastleigh. Interestingly, although I have not seen any young, I have heard a few bursts of Dunnock song in the last couple of days after a period of silence from these ubiquitous songsters and I assume this to mean that the need for secrecy about the location of the nest site is now over with young either out of the nest or the brood having failed. Song Thrushes similarly are starting to resume the continuous song that we heard a month ago (their incubation takes two weeks and it is a further two weeks before the young leave the nest). +++

Birds with less need for secrecy about their nest sites and breeding activity are Great Black-back gulls, and Paul Winter tells us that when he was walking through the Testwood Lakes site at Totton today he saw a pair of Great Blackbacks mating near Meadow Lake. Although these birds are usually colonial nesters on cliffs or rooftops they will sometimes nest on the ground and apart from others of their kind - if they choose to do so at this site they could do a lot of damage to other birds nests and young in the vicinity.

Paul goes on to report further bad news - he says that .. 'a field where Lapwings appeared to be nesting at Moorcourt Farm was being ploughed on Monday evening.' Moorcourt is just north of the Testwood Lakes on the west bank of the Test north of the M27. If the Lapwings were nesting there is a chance that their young have recently hatched and so could have had a chance of escaping on foot ... +++

Slightly better news comes from Cyril Tee at Clanfield concerning Skylarks, another species that has suffered badly from recent changes in farming that mean that the birds can no longer fit in their nesting with the new and unpredictable times at which fields are ploughed and silage grass is cut. Cyril says that the Skylarks whose song he used to enjoy when they nested on grassland close to his home were 'evicted' when that grassland became a close mown and busy sports field, but this year some appear to be nesting in a neighbouring field containing autumn or winter sown barley. Now they only have to worry about spraying of the crop (and still being able to find their nests in the rapidly growing barley).

In my notes for yesterday I reported a total of 41 Pom Skuas seen from Selsey Bill but more recent reports give the total there as 45, while Ewan Urquhart at Splash Point, Seaford recorded 62 during an all day vigil. Sadly for Hampshire birders only one of these was seen to pass through the Solent (that one gave Russell Wynn a garden tick from his home overlooking the Pennington Marshes, and was later seen by watchers at Gosport, as noted below in today's notes). Presumably the mass of these birds went around the south of the Isle of Wight, coming closer and closer to the shore the further east they went, but what route they pursued west of the IoW, and east of Seaford, remains unknown to me and I would welcome any clues from those who do know. Maybe they come east along the Dorset coast, only to swerve out around the IoW to avoid the 'potential dead end' which the Solent may appear to be, or maybe they pass Portland Bill far out at sea on a north easterly heading that brings them closer to the shore as they pass the Island, then Selsey Bill, and finally close inshore at Seaford. And what do they do after Seaford? We never hear of them passing Beachy Head so maybe they come inland over Cuckmere and rejoin the coast before reaching Hastings. +++

One stream of passage birds that did appear in the west Solent yesterday was of Dunlin. Russell Wynn reports a day total of 680 Dunlin which showed the reverse of the Skuas behaviour by crossing the Hurst spit into the Solent, pausing to feed in the Keyhaven marshes and then heading north east overland so that they were not recorded anywhere else along the Hampshire coast. +++

Russell also tells us, in his summary of birds seen at the Lymington Marshes during April, that a new Hampshire day record (for spring passage) of 29 Arctic Skuas was set during the

month, and that the first ever April sighting of a Balearic Shearwater was made, but as they were not his own sightings and are relegated to a footnote in his summary with neither dates nor observers name given I can't tell you any more.

Two more items which should have been in the previous update are sightings of a first year Ring-billed Gull that was seen briefly on the lake at Farlington Marshes on Apr 24 by Jason Crook and Bob Chapman before flying off east towards the islands, and a sighting by Tony Gutteridge on Apr 25 of two Siskin in an unusual location for the time of year (on the almost treeless top of Telegraph Hill immediately east of Compton in the valley north of Emsworth). I guess they must have been in a small wind break conifer plantation there and they were no doubt late migrants passing through but it may be worth keeping an eye open for breeding Siskin in our south east corner of Hampshire (just one Tetrads in the Rowlands Castle/Southleigh Forest area is marked in 'Birds of Hampshire' as having had a breeding record during the Tetrads Atlas survey of the late 1980s). Tony's sighting was well into Sussex but I am pretty sure Siskin are equally uncommon breeders there.

Signs of a major arrival of Swifts over the past weekend were maintained when John Norton recorded 33 passing over Stokes Bay in just one hour this morning, coming in through thick mist. Other recent Swift sightings have included a group of more than 20 over Lewes yesterday and 12 coming in at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight on Sunday (Apr 25) when Tony Wilson had 10 over the Pevensey Levels, Simon Ingram had 8 over Eastleigh Lakeside, Ian Pibworth had several groups of up to 7 at a time over the Testwood Lakes and Simon Woolley noted that breeding birds seemed to have returned to his home area in Winchester. Many more reports of individual Swifts include two over Sinah Lane in south Hayling last night and one over nearby Park Road on Sunday, both seen by George Spraggs. Also on Sunday Simon Wright had another single over the Sinah Lake on Hayling and Trevor Carpenter had two over Titchfield Haven.

Last night, also at Stokes Bay, John and others enjoyed a passing Pom Skua showing its tail 'spoons' plus single Arctic and Great Skua (Bonxie) in the same session though few terns or other birds.

MON 26 APR

Today brought the first report of a Turtle Dove in Hampshire, seen by Dave Pearson at Stockbridge Down, following three singles in Sussex (at Rye on Apr 22, Brighton area on Apr 23 and at St Leonards Forest by the A23 south of Crawley yesterday). There was also a 'reliable report' of one at Burgess Hill on Mar 8, but if true that was either a wintering bird or one of those anomalies brought here by very unusual winds (as with Steve Keen's Cuckoo over New Milton on Mar 16).

For the sea watchers who prefer the 'here today, gone tomorrow' birds business is booming and today saw 41 Pom Skuas passing Selsey Bill (according to Richard Prior, who also tells us that the Pom King title is once more in danger of going to an outsider - Steve Webb from Leatherhead in Surrey had a personal score of 27 today when none of the local contenders were present). A site day total of 41 sounds impressive, but I see that 2001 brought 92 Poms past Brighton Marina on Apr 13, and in 1997 the count at Selsey Bill on May 2 was 107 +++

Another passage bird seen in high numbers today was Bar-tailed Godwit with more than 200 recorded at Seaford today and over 1000 seen there yesterday (when 730 were noted by Kris Gillam at St Catherine's Point). Whimbrel numbers are also high now with 46 past Seaford today after 111 there yesterday +++

While on the subject of sea passage I was very interested to see what Trevor Carpenter had to say today about Eider in the Solent. Last Thursday (Apr 22) I reported Trevor's sighting of 32 Eider flying east off Hill Head and commented that this was one of several recent reports of Eider flying east in the Solent and presumably meant that the flock of up to 100 or more which had stayed in the Solent throughout last year were returning to normal practice and heading north for the breeding season. Today Trevor says that he saw 30 Eider flying east, but adds .. 'this seems to be a regular happening every day at the moment as they fly in from the west'. I don't know what he intended to imply but his words suggest to me that what is going on is not a stream of passage birds passing through but a regular daily

movement of the same group of birds going round in circles within the Solent (perhaps returning west overnight before coming round again next day). This ties in with the pattern of movement that must have been occurring over the past year when the birds kept on appearing in different places throughout the Solent (from Hurst to Gosport) though reports of them show no consistent pattern - in the current case these daily sightings in the Hill Head area are not matched by equivalent sightings of Eider entering the west Solent from the west, and (if we rule out the theory of Eider being spontaneously generated at some magic point in mid-Solent - a sort of reverse Bermuda triangle effect) the lack of reports from the Lymington/Hurst area makes it even more likely that the Hill Head birds are 'going round in circles'.

To end today's notes we have the following message from Steve Keen .. 'A very strange record today was of three Ring-necked Parakeets flying low SW over Sway, very direct and very vocal, at 0959. They were close enough to confirm they were definitely this species and not one of the other oddities we get round here, but so close as to sex them at that speed!' The mention of local oddities refers, I think, to a group of Blue-crowned Parakeets that have been a regular sight in Lymington in recent years, and Steve also reminds us that Ring-tailed Parakeets are not only resident in large numbers in Surrey but can also be found in the Studland area of Dorset.

SUN 25 APR

Steve Keen's work as a gardener naturally keeps him very busy at this time of year but he managed to take time off today for a spot of birding, being rewarded not only with a Red-footed Falcon in male summer plumage (grey all over except for a splash for bright red around the legs and vent, and a black tipped yellow bill) flying in off the sea between Milford and Barton on Sea (then continuing north), but also a Serin going the same way and two Velvet Scoter (needed for his year list) plus an odd White Wagtail.

Over on the Isle of Wight the first ever Green Winged Teal for the Island appeared today near the bridge over the River Yar where it flows into Bembridge Harbour in the St Helen's area.

This bird was still present on Monday (Apr 26) but seems to be fairly mobile. +++

Another bird that is rare on the Island is Ruff so Kris Gillam was pleased to see one in the Bembridge Foreland today, along with 5 Purple Sandpipers and an overflying Serin. +++

At St Catherine's Point Kris noted 17 Velvet Scoter and 12 incoming Swifts as well as the 730 passing Bar-tailed Godwit that I have mentioned above. Kris also recorded 39 Little Gulls but Derek Hale, who was also present, and added a single Black-throated Diver, does not mention the Little Gulls but does list 39 Black-headed Gulls (I'm never one to stir up controversy !!! but I wonder if there was any connection between these two reports) +++

Derek later saw 56 Sanderling still on the Ryde Sands and says that some are now acquiring the red flush of summer plumage on their head and upper breast.

Sussex provides two birding headlines today, the first being the arrival of the first Wood Sandpiper of the spring, seen at Rye Harbour during today's WeBS count - two birds may have been present as Barry Yates' report mentions that one was seen briefly at the Wader Pool and one was at Castle Water without indicating whether these were different birds.

+++

Also from Rye Barry tells us that at least four families of Lapwing chicks have hatched. +++

The other Sussex headline concerns a Goshawk over Brighton. Tim Toohig writes .. 'Huge female Goshawk seen from my back garden 20 Princes Road Brighton aprox 10:00am 25/04/04. Circling for about 5 mins initially mobbed by pair of Sparrowhawks then the Herring Gulls before going very high to the West. (The male Sparrowhawk looked tiny in comparison - even the female Sparrowhawk looked small!)'. +++

One possible reason for the presence of this Goshawk over the built up area could be that it had just flown the channel and arrived here by chance (maybe hungry and wanting a town pigeon as a snack), but interestingly Matthew Silk independently reports a possible Goshawk over Brighton East Park on Apr 24 (yesterday), making me wonder if the bird belongs to back-street Brighton falconer (I'm pretty sure that Tim would have seen jesses if the bird had them, so absence of them makes the idea of a falconer's escape unlikely but not impossible, and Brighton is the sort of place where the trade in exotic pets could thrive).

A much less controversial report, with an excellent close up photo to support it, is of a Razorbill seen today by Richard Creer when sailing in the Stocker's Lake area at the mouth of Chichester Harbour (off Black Point). Razorbills were regularly seen here through December, January and into February and I have heard of none since Feb 14 (when Mike Collins saw two birds), but Richard tells me that the photograph he has sent me was taken from the Hayling Island Lifeboat Station at the base of Black Point on Good Friday (Apr 9) so maybe we have a summer resident in Chichester Harbour. +++

Yellow Wagtails are sadly missed as summer residents in the area around Chichester and Langstone Harbours but have not yet vanished from the Sussex coast. On Apr 17 Chris Bentley told us there were 11 at Rye Harbour and on Apr 22 Barry Yates assured us that they had turned up there in 'good numbers'. Today Tony Wilson found ten of them at Horse Eye Level (the northern section of the Pevensey Levels lying between Hailsham and Herstmonceux Castle).

The headlines for today referring to seawatching at Seaford and on the Isle of Wight have mainly been covered above but a couple of items mentioned in Dick Gilmore's last report from Seaford that I have not passed on are an excellent total of 61 Arctic Skuas on Apr 21 and what may have been the last two Red-necked Grebes going past on Apr 20. Dick also gives year to date totals of 220 Arctic and 51 Great Skuas for Splash Point up to Apr 24
+++

Another of my headlines for today that has already been mentioned above is the Turtle Dove seen today by Michael Funnell in St Leonard's Forest (between Horsham and the A23 south of Crawley) but I have not yet mentioned the fourth Whinchat of the year, seen today by Peter Bateman at Climping near the mouth of the River Arun, just one day after the third of the year arrived at Farlington Marshes on Apr 24 (I have previously reported numbers one and two at Worthing on Apr 22 and Brading, Isle of Wight, on Apr 23)

No Sunday is now complete without Ian Pibworth's report from the Testwood Lakes, and today his vigil was rewarded with (among other things) the sight of a Whitethroat building its nest, one Yellow Wagtail on the ground but unlikely to stay, and 327 Swallows passing north overhead. Despite the recent loss of 8 Swans, killed by hitting power lines as they come in to land at Testwood, Ian still recorded 38 Swans there today. Since they suddenly started to use this water as a night roost at the end of March the highest total Ian has recorded has been 47, so maybe the 8 corpses seen by Les Stride on Apr 20 have now become 9. +++

Another individual out birding in the Test Valley today was David Holland who went to check out the Sand Martin colony at Casbrook Common (on the east bank of the river near Timsbury) and found the birds present in good numbers though he could not count them without trespassing on private land. As a bonus a Nightingale was singing in Bunny Lane which runs east from the river along the south end of Casbrook Common towards Braishfield. +++

Not on his own, Kevin Stouse was leading a HOS walk around the outside of the Titchfield Haven area today and recorded over 50 species which included Grasshopper Warbler (heard by all and seen by some), a lone Avocet seen well before it disappeared into the hidden interior of the reserve (could it be one of a pair which Ash Warne recently observed mating at a Hampshire site whose location he rightly withheld!), and a possible Hawfinch seen only by two back-markers of the party in the Crofton Farm area at the start of the walk. Two Brent seen off Hill Head sailing club have not been reported by regulars there so maybe they were late migrants preferring to travel alone. Other birds which may have been first of the year for some of the party were a Cuckoo and a few Sedge and Reed Warblers, and while they did not see the Barn Owl that is sometimes seen hunting over the reserve long after dawn they did see two separate male Kestrels both carrying food (presumably to different nests). +++

The two Brent at Hill Head could have been the same two seen at Keyhaven today by Giles Darvill when he was rowing on the Keyhaven Lake (the outfall channel of the Avon Water stream) +++

Earlier in the week Kevin went to Pagham Harbour and was very pleased to see the drake

Garganey at Sidlesham Ferry pool plus some Grey Plover in their lovely summer plumage. That day out was on Thursday, and on Friday morning he was understandably reluctant to go back to work, but staying in bed for an extra half-hour cost him the sight of a male Pied Flycatcher on the garden fence of his Havant Denvilles home - he learnt of this only when his neighbour (who had seen it) told him about it that evening!

SAT 24 APR

Cliff Oakley has sent me the list of finds made by the Petersfield Wildlife Group when they visited the Foley Manor area near Liphook today. The 50 bird species seen included Tree Pipits, Redstarts and Dartford Warblers plus 10 Blackcaps, 11 Chiffchaffs, 8 Willow Warblers and 4 Whitethroats. Also on the list are 4 Treecreepers and 2 Siskin. +++

Cliff also tells me that yesterday saw the return of a House Martin to check out one of the artificial House Martin nests he put up on his Petersfield home last summer - these nest boxes obviously have an attraction for the Marting (and save many beakfuls of mud!) +++ Further east in Sussex Paul Marten was gardening in the Crawley area when a glimpse of a larger raptor caused him to reach for his binoculars. The raptor had vanished by the time he had got the bins to his eyes, but when he turned them on a tiny white blob in the sky, hardly discernible to the naked eye, it turned into a White Stork (flying well above the height of the aircraft going in and out of Gatwick -that's my imagination at work!) heading south west.

Around the IBM Lake this afternoon for the monthly WeBS count I heard my first Reed Warblers and saw a Reed Bunting carrying a feather, presumably for nest building, The 'senior' pair of Swans had built their nest on the north west corner of the north island and both birds were on the water but there was no lining to the nest and no eggs have been laid. At the other end of the lake I could only see one Swan of the 'junior' pair and could not spot a second nest. Two separate single Great Crested Grebes were seen - one at each end of the lake, and each could have had a mate on an unseen nest. +++

The dreaded Canada Geese were well represented - I reckon there were 42 of them in total - 14 were in a group on open grass and 14 were in separate pairs and of these I found three nests with birds sitting (one had 7 eggs in it) and I also found an abandoned nest with the bones of a Canada Goose skeleton near it. Coot were in similar numbers (I had a total of 47) but I only saw one nest. My count of Moorhen was only 17 in total but I expect there were a lot more than that present. +++

I only saw seven Little Grebe and only 14 Mallard (no ducklings), and 4 pairs of Tufted Duck were the only other duck. +++

One Egret took off from the main reception pool and at least two Herons were present. +++ With the closure of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip scheduled for next month they are probably running down operations there and I suspect there was no weekend working, meaning that any gulls still in the area were on the IBM site, not making much use of the lake but resting on the rooves. I estimated that there were around 120 Herring Gulls (the majority being immature but there may have been 20 pairs of adults - and one pair of adult Lesser Blackbacks - that could be thinking of nesting there) and perhaps 110 Black-headed. The vigour with which some of the adult Herring Gulls harrassed one Heron overflying the rooves, and later went for a much higher passing Buzzard, might lend support to the possibility of breeding. +++

Whitethroats were numerous (more than half a dozen singing birds), Reed Warblers were slightly fewer, and the only other summer birds I noticed were single Chiffchaff and Blackcap (and no Skylark!)

PLANTS

SUN 02 MAY

An early morning visit to the Warblington fields today found Red Clover and Celery-leaved Buttercup newly in flower, and also gave me my first Bugle and Subterranean Clover though these two have been seen earlier. More Herb Robert was out and Marsh Valerian was still flowering, and I noted an odd plant of Honesty with pure white flowers in Pook Lane.

SAT 01 MAY

An early walk around Havant gave me my first Ox-eye (or May) Daisies flowering near the Langstone roundabout on the A27, and in the grass surrounding St Faith's Church in the centre of the town both Broad-leaved Willowherb and Black Medick were flowering. Walking through Juniper Square, where Small-flowered Cranesbill will soon hopefully be

flowering in the edges of untended lawns which abut the roadside pavement with no fences or walls, the path up to one of these houses through a similarly untended 'lawn' had two bushes of what I would swear was Round-leaved Cranesbill flowering . +++

In the evening I walked down the Langbrook stream and found Common Nettles and Hemlock Water Dropwort had just started to flower, while in the South Moors area further down stream the Divided Sedge was flowering in the grassland, Marsh Horsetails still had small black fertile tips to some of their shoots, and Parsley Piert had flowers beside the new path to Southmoor Lane.

FRI 30 APR

Richard Carpenter today found Lesser Spearwort flowering for the first time at Titchfield Haven

TUE 27 APR

A significant new flowering today of Yellow Pimpernel, found by Richard Carpenter in the West Walk woods in the Meon valley where Giant Horsetails were well grown (as they now are on the Warblington fields)

Jim Berry was also out today making a circular walk around Huckswood and Harris Lanes in the area north of Idsworth and south of the downs. Jim only notes Sanicle and Early Purple Orchid as special finds, but his route reminds me that the stretch of woodland on the north side of Huckswood Lane between the entrance into Barnet Copse and the disused chalk Quarry is excellent for woodland flowers and could have Toothwort now with the first Twayblade orchids very soon. +++

Jim also told me several days ago of a find he made last Sunday in the Holt woodland west of the Rowlands Castle golf course - this was of the first Bugle of the year.

MON 26 APR

Just one new species in flower today, but an uncommon one, was Large Bittercress (*Cardamine amara*) found by Richard Carpenter near the canal by the roadside west of Titchfield Haven. Last year I found this in the wet SSSI field at Warblington and will look out for it again on my next CBC visit there.

SUN 25 APR

One plant that Brian Fellows saw flowering on the Isle of Wight on Apr 10, but which has eluded everyone on the mainland until today, is the lovely Red Campion. The lucky finder of the first mainland specimen was Richard Carpenter in the Durley Mill area downstream from Bishops Waltham.

A couple of my own finds today were, firstly, a big patch of Early Forget-me-not flowers on the earth mound overlooking the Hayling Oysterbeds lagoon. If anyone wants to have a look at them (and possibly prove that what I saw were very young specimens of Changing Forget-me-not) they are to be found on the west (lagoon) side of the earth mound, about half way along it opposite where a well used track leads down on the east side, close to the track worn by horses along the ridge of the mound.

Also today, having to go to Catherington after Hayling, I stopped in the road dip near Pyle Farm just off the main Rowlands Castle to Horndean stretch and found a great show of Goldilocks Buttercups (nearly all with their petals on!) by the road side at the bottom of the dip.

SAT 24 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group met in the Eastney area of Portsmouth this morning and had a bonanza of fresh flowering plants. Expected for several days and probably findable in many places by the time you read this were Common Vetch and Beaked Hawksbeard. A shoreline plant common in suitable shingle habitat was Sea Sandwort (should be lots now on the west side of the old Hayling Railway north pier at Langstone), and Fairy Flax is probably to be found now on Portsdown. The best of their finds may not be so easy to find elsewhere, though it occurs fairly widely on thin grasslands near the sea - this is Subterranean Clover which pushes its small white flowers up through the turf as if the plant was underground though the flowers are in fact on runners coming along only just under the surface from neighbouring plants. +++

One of my own finds that I should have reported earlier in the week was of blue flowered

Cornsalad plants lining the foot of the old wall of St Faith's Church Hall here in Havant - there is no fruit yet to determine the species but the flowers are the common pale blue - and if anyone has still not seen the lovely Rue-leaved Saxifrage plants at the foot of that wall and thereabouts their flowers will soon be past their best.

Walking round the IBM lake at the Portsmouth North Harbour site today on my monthly bird count I found one new plant which I was expecting to be in flower - Changing Forget-me-not - and two other newcomers which I was not expecting. Least expected was a good show of Henbit Dead-nettle on the grass immediately north of the Main Reception Lake, and not so unexpected but staggering in their numbers was a 'ground cover' of millions of plants of Wall Speedwell in the close mown grass. +++

Also in the mown grass around the site were millions of tiny yellow flowers of Spotted Medick and some Field Madder, and fewer plants of Germander and Thyme-leaved Speedwell with a good show of Cowslips on the one section of the lake side bank where they are protected from mowing. Marsh Marigolds were looking very healthy in the three clumps that I saw. Finally there was promise of more to come in several well grown Common Spotted Orchid plants (leaves only). +++

Before going to IBM I paid a brief visit to the Hilsea ramparts to check on the Adders Tongue Fern which grows there in some profusion, and I was not disappointed. Also flourishing there were many Bulbous Buttercup plants in flower and the leaves of several Common Spotted Orchids. Most of the white flowers were out on one Horse Chestnut here. +++

The Hilsea lines area is well worth a visit at most times of the year and if anyone is not aware of the location for the Adders Tongue they should go east along Scott Road (south side of the ramparts and east of Peronne Road which becomes a footbridge over Ports Creek) until they reach the point at which the cycle track turns south from Scott Road. If you are driving you should park near the second entrance to the ramparts area and go in there to the track running along the foot of the ramparts (on the south side - do not go through the tunnel entrance to the main area and moat), turn right and walk east until you see the point where the cycle track leaves Scott Road, and then turn round to walk slowly back looking in the ivy covered ground between the track you are on and the road - you should see the bright green leaves of the Fern almost immediately, right at the edge of the track you are on, but its main stronghold is opposite a large Horse Chestnut tree growing on the slope of the ramparts about ten yards back from your turn round point. Do not confuse any odd young leaves of Arum that you may find with the Fern - when you see it you will recognise it by the number of similar bright green 'leaves' (not much more than 10 cm high) all growing together, and a closer look will show you that a small percentage of the leaves have the fertile spike (which gives the plant its name) sticking up from the point where the leaf blade separates from the stem.

INSECTS

SUN 02 MAY

On the Warblington fields this morning St Mark's Flies were definitely out, confirming Tony Gutteridge's sighting at Compton a week ago when he did not name them but told me of seeing 'black, long-legged, flies'. I also had a Holly Blue there and several Small Whites plus a probably Small Tortoiseshell. +++

While at Warblington I found my first good show of Oak Apples lit by the morning sun on a lone oak tree above an ephemeral pond close to the field path from Emsworth to Warblington church (coming through the kissing gate from Nore Barn woodland into the Warblington fields the oak is on your right just before the second kissing gate on the path). The 'apples' are the homes of young larvae of a gall wasp called *Biorhiza pallida* and both male and female wasps will hatch from them in June (each Oak apple is a single sex habitat - some have males, some females, but never mixed). These will mate and the females will lay their eggs on the fine hair roots of Oak trees (I don't know if they have to dig deep into the ground to lay them). The small round galls on these roots will protect the developing young over winter, and from them in February to April will emerge wingless females only. These climb the trees and (without sex) they create the Oak Apple

generation of the next year.

FRI 30 APR

It looks as if migrant Clouded Yellow butterflies may already be starting to arrive across the channel, but the only evidence I have for this is just two observations recorded on Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website which has reports of one at Alum Bay on the Isle of Wight, and one at Portland Bill, but seen on Apr 24. This is just an assumption from the fact that the butterflies were seen at coastal sites, but we also know that this species has started to reside in this country - last year the 'residents' at Southbourne undercliff in Bournemouth started to emerge on Apr 15.

TUE 27 APR

The Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website today has a wealth of news following the return of Derek Mills (who enters the news onto the site) after a few days away from this duty. +++

From the mass of entries I have extracted reports of first sightings of 30 new moth species and I here list them in date order (hopefully with few mistakes). +++

On Apr 22 Russell Wynn had the first V-Pug at Pennington, and on Apr 23 both Russell and Richard Coomber (living nearby) both had Swallow Prominent while Paul Boswell at Greywell in the north of Hampshire had Iron Prominent and Scorched Carpet. +++

On Apr 24 Peter Allen at North Gorley near Fordingbridge recorded Knot Grass and Tim Walker at Winchester had Mottled Pug and Pebble Prominent. During the day on Apr 25 Russell Wynn found White-pinion Spotted while in Ringwood Forest and in the evening at Pennington had Poplar Kitten. Paul Boswell had Chinese Character and the tiny *Eriocrania subpurpurella* at Greywell while John Shillitoe (with some uncertainty, as a newcomer to mothing, over the identification) claimed Clouded Border at his home near Wickham in the Meon Valley. +++

The night of Apr 26 brought a deluge of new species starting with Lobster Moth taken by Russell Wynn and by Andy Barker at Chandlers Ford and Rob Edmunds at Fleet. Russell (and Mike Wall at Basingstoke) also had Grey Pine Carpet and Andy Barker had Tawny Barred Angle. Peter Allen added Common Wave and Sallow Kitten, and both Paul Boswell and Peter Hooper (at Bishopstoke near Eastleigh) had Red Twin-spot Carpet. Paul also had Bright-line Brown-eye and Nick Montegriffo at Sherborne St John (north of Basingstoke) had Small Waved Umber. In the Chineham district of Basingstoke Mike Wall added the micro *Esperia sulphurella* and Chocolate-tip, Scalloped Hook-tip, Grey Birch, Scarce Prominent and Barred Hook-tip (a species that does not seem to be often reported as I do not have any previous entries for it in my database from the past two years). +++

Best known find for Apr 26 came from Dave Hamilton at Hedge End near Southampton - the first Eyed Hawkmoth (Lime Hawk had been recorded by Paul Boswell on Apr 22 and recorded by myself at that time). +++

Coming up to date with finds recorded tonight (Apr 27) Maurice Opie at Funtley near Fareham adds Foxglove Pug and the migrant Rusty-dot Pearl (which had appeared in the Scilly Isles back in February), and during the day David Green found Light Orange Underwing in Harewood Forest

David Green also found something that is I think unusual inland (and which is impressive enough to maybe hit the general media in the near future). David was driving along the A343 Andover to Salisbury road when he noticed the hedges on either side of the road were suffering from the locust like foliage stripping ability of the caterpillars of the Brown-tail Moth for a distance of about 8 kilometres between the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop to the Pheasant Hotel near the turning to Winterslow. David says .. 'The highest density of webs is just to the west of Middle Wallop. There must be several thousand webs in total and in places the larvae have completely defoliated the hedges. I've never seen anything like this away from the coast before. I stopped off to collect a few to make sure they weren't nests of Small Eggar (*Eriogaster lanestris*). I had an itchy ride home as a result...'

News for yesterday (Apr 26) from the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve is of a mass emergence of Large Red Damselflies, reported by the warden Peter Hughes. +++

On Sunday (Apr 25) Tony Gutteridge seems to have seen the first St Marks Flies when he was walking near Compton on the Emsworth-South Harting road though just writes of 'black long-legged flies'. Also in that area he saw more of the small mining bees, probably Halictus species though again he does not name them. +++

Apr 24 added Grizzled Skipper to the year's butterfly list when one was seen on Old Winchester Hill by Chris Jones - this date is three week's later than the first seen last year on Apr 5. +++

The evening of Apr 23 brought the first Cockchafer (or May Bug) to Paul Boswell's moth trap at Greywell in north Hampshire

... and finally yet another Hummingbird Hawkmoth report dated Apr 20 comes from Julie Worrall who was taking refreshment in the Lavender Tea Rooms in the centre of Haywards Heath when she noticed the moth delicately sipping its own refreshment from Daffodils in the gardens outside the tea room. All very genteel...

MON 26 APR

The Duke of Burgundy butterflies have at last emerged at Noar Hill. Three were seen and photographed there by Alan Thornbury today, and Alan was told by others at the site that they had been first seen yesterday. Very good news, but we need a few more than three to preserve the species!

SAT 24 APR

Dave Pearson tells me that he today found a single first Green Hairstreak at Magdalen Hill Down. Derek Mills, who updates the Butterfly Conservation website, has been away for a few days, so when he returns we may hear of other sightings that are currently only in his Inbox!

Non-butterfly news, but equally interesting and colourful, comes from Richard Carpenter who, in Botley Woods, today saw two Green Tiger Beetles mating. Away from the dry ground where these beetles hunt Richard saw a much more 'laid back' (literally) insect in the shape of the first Water Boatman - another Large Red Damselfly was also near the water.

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 28 APR

From the Harbour wall at Hastings today Andy Phillips, ranger from the Hastings Country Park, saw what he says were 8 Bottle-nosed Dolphins - the first cetaceans of the year recorded there. I wonder if these were the same creatures that went past the Isle of Wight yesterday and were reported as Pilot Whales?

TUE 27 APR

From St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today Kris Gillam noted what he says were 8 Pilot Whales. I have no means of knowing how well he saw them but I think Pilot Whales are less common in the Channel than the Bottle-nosed Dolphins seen off Hastings on Apr 28 (see above), and the fact that there were 8 cetaceans in each report makes me wonder if these were two sightings of the same pod.

Turning to more easily identifiable fungi Jim Berry tells me he saw both Sulphur Tuft and Common Inkcap today, and also tells me that he has found a name for the 'Marsh Mallow' like small white globular fungi (smaller than a tennis ball but larger than a golf ball) we found in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth a week ago. By co-incidence Rosemary Webb, after reading my description of them, also came up with the same name so it has a good chance of being correct. Jim found the name in a fairly recent book (an Encyclopaedia of Fungi by Keizer) where it was given as Enteridium lycoperdon. Rosemary on the other hand has two newly published books specifically on Slime Moulds and they name the same species as Reticularia lycoperdon (and the people who make these changes of genus frown on the use of English Names!).

Still with fungi Rosemary Webb tells me that she went to Noar Hill with the Hampshire Fungal Recording Group on Apr 18 and they found, among other things, three interesting fungi. One was a small, yellowish, 'puffball on a stalk' which grows on thin chalky soil - this does appear in Roger Phillips book and is called Tulostoma brumale. Another was a relative of the edible Morels and grows in conjunction with Hawthorn on chalk soil (it was found last

year on Portsdown during scrub clearance) - this too appears in Phillips and is named *Verpa conica*. The last of the three is one that even Rosemary could not give me a latin name for, nor point me to a picture, but is called in English 'Tongues of Fire' and is a reddish tinged, Coxcomb shaped, form of jelly fungus which only grows on Juniper (and may need Hawthorn to be in the area).

MON 26 APR

Mowing my lawn today I decapitated a row of small toadstools, which had been hidden in the long grass, but that has not prevented a lot more pushing up since and showing themselves to be the common Fairy Ring toadstool (*Marasmius oreades*)

SUN 25 APR

Tony Wilson tells me that, when just east of Lewes .. 'at Park Corner Heath near Ringmer in Sussex today and I found two Adders - one was a normal brown and black one, the other was a brilliant yellow and black - possibly the brightest one I've ever seen.' Tony goes on to report a Grass Snake in the Pevensy Levels, and I see that this is only the second one I have heard of this year after one seen by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven on Apr 16. Adders were being seen much earlier and I now have six reports of them with the first at Pamber Forest on Mar 10. +++

Adders can vary in colour considerably, and Fallow Deer can be found in variable shades of brown (to almost black) with a small percentage of white coated animals present in most populations, but I have not until today heard of a strangely coated Roe Deer. Trevor Carpenter, however, today writes (referring to a sighting at Titchfield Haven yesterday) .. 'There is an unusual Roe Deer on the reserve, it looks normal on its right side but the left side is predominantly white.'

A couple of Seal sightings come from Giles Darvill who saw a Common Seal at Keyhaven today, and from Kevin Stouse who was at Pagham Harbour on Apr 22 and saw a Seal hauled up on the mud - he says it was a Grey Seal but I have not checked how confident he was about this (Common Seals are common on the central south coast and Grey Seals are rather uncommon)

SAT 24 APR

It is very unusual to hear of people being killed by Adders but at this time of year, when the Adders are not as mobile as they will be when they are fully warmed up, there is an increased chance that they will not get out of the way of approaching humans or large animals, and if they are caught in an exposed situation and feel threatened they naturally try to defend themselves by the only means they have - their venom. +++

The reason for mentioning this is that I have just heard that a Spaniel, the only friend and companion to a 90 year old man living in the Denvilles area of Havant, came limping home in great pain and died from what was diagnosed as an Adder bite probably inflicted in the market gardens which border the Emsworth gap area.

WEEK 17 APR 19 - 25

BIRDS

SAT 24 APR

Around the IBM Lake this afternoon for the monthly WeBS count I heard my first Reed Warblers and saw a Reed Bunting carrying a feather, presumably for nest building, The 'senior' pair of Swans had built their nest on the north west corner of the north island and both birds were on the water but there was no lining to the nest and no eggs have been laid. At the other end of the lake I could only see one Swan of the 'junior' pair and could not spot a second nest. Two separate single Great Crested Grebes were seen - one at each end of the lake, and each could have had a mate on an unseen nest. +++

The dreaded Canada Geese were well represented - I reckon there were 42 of them in total - 14 were in a group on open grass and 14 were in separate pairs and of these I found three nests with birds sitting (one had 7 eggs in it) and I also found an abandoned nest with the bones of a Canada Goose skeleton near it. Coot were in similar numbers (I had a total of 47) but I only saw one nest. My count of Moorhen was only 17 in total but I expect there were a lot more than that present. +++

I only saw seven Little Grebe and only 14 Mallard (no ducklings), and 4 pairs of Tufted Duck were the only other duck. +++

One Egret took off from the main reception pool and at least two Herons were present. +++
With the closure of the Paulsgrove rubbish tip scheduled for next month they are probably running down operations there and I suspect there was no weekend working, meaning that any gulls still in the area were on the IBM site, not making much use of the lake but resting on the rooves. I estimated that there were around 120 Herring Gulls (the majority being immature but there may have been 20 pairs of adults - and one pair of adult Lesser Blackbacks - that could be thinking of nesting there) and perhaps 110 Black-headed. The vigour with which some of the adult Herring Gulls harassed one Heron overflying the rooves, and later went for a much higher passing Buzzard, might lend support to the possibility of breeding. +++

Whitethroats were numerous (more than half a dozen singing birds), Reed Warblers were slightly fewer, and the only other summer birds I noticed were single Chiffchaff and Blackcap (and no Skylark!)

FRI 23 APR

A Turtle Dove at Woodingdean, just east of Brighton, was the second arrival I have heard of - the first was reported yesterday at Rye Harbour. That leaves very few summer migrants still to put in an appearance (Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Nightjar, Quail, Montagu's Harrier, Wood Sandpiper and Honey Buzzard are the only species that I can think of that have not yet been positively ticked) +++

The other summer bird that has just arrived is Whinchat - one was at Brading Marshes on the IoW today and the first was at Sompting in the Worthing area yesterday.

Paul Beckett today took a long walk from Lowford (next to Bursledon, where the M27 crosses the Hamble) down river to Warsash and along the shore to Titchfield Haven. A Greenshank was still at the Bunny Meadows and maybe 130 Black-tailed Godwit were still in the Hook area, but the best was to come at Titchfield Haven where both male and female Pied Flycatcher were present. When Richard Carpenter went to the Haven in the evening only one of the Flycatchers could be found but a Grasshopper Warbler was reeling. Both Paul and Richard seem to have missed the sight of five Avocet (reported by Malcolm Dixon) though Richard did see one of them. +++

Two more Grasshopper Warblers were seen on the Isle of Wight by Kris Gillam - one by Hazely Manor in the centre of the Island and the other I think on the shore near Luccombe Chine though the only precise location for them is given as 'near the Goat Pens' (and they do not appear on my maps!). Kris also had a Hobby on Ventnor Downs and at Brading Marshes saw the Whinchat I have already mentioned - many Wheatears were also there. +++

In the north of the Island Derek Hale saw a Swift at Ryde and enjoyed a Grey Plover in full summer plumage at Newtown Harbour where there was also a Nightingale, ten Brent and over fifty Shelduck. +++

An unusual bird getting an anonymous (Pager?) report today was a Great White Egret said to have flown past Hastings at 2:05pm but with no statement as to which way it was going.

Back in Havant Mike Collins had another single Swift and a female Redstart at Budds Farm, while on the Warblington fields the other side of Langstone Tony Gutterdige was carrying out a CBC visit and recording the first Lesser Whitethroats to be seen there passing through among many Common Whitethroats. One Red Legged Partridge was seen (possibly the two which seem to have settled down on the farm this spring are ones hatched on Hayling Island last year), and an unusual visitor to the fields was a single Whimbrel which flew in from the shore and landed at least briefly.. +++

I would normally have been with Tony at Warblington but went this morning to carry out my BTO Breeding Bird Survey at Harting Down. Nothing of special interest there but the scrub was full of Willow Warblers and Whitethroats and I did hear Marsh Tit song but surprisingly did not hear anything from several Yellowhammers. In past years I have had both Cuckoo and Turtle Dove here, but neither was found today. +++

Going back to the Warblington area and going a little further east along the shore to Emsworth

Brian Fellows got a first look into the Peter Pond Swan's nest in which he could see at least six eggs. +++

Two or three more Swan's nests were seen today by Heather Mills at Milton Common where the three small 'lakes' each has its pair of Swans, two of them sitting and the third on the water with what looked like a nest nearby. In the harbour offshore Heather saw what may be the last of the winter Mergansers (though it could be intending to stay here for the summer as one or two usually do, but in the past these have usually been females and this was a male). +++

Across the water at Northney (presumably on North Common) Ian Julian was taking digital pictures of a 'tame' Wheatear when a dog walker disturbed it - rather than flying off the bird flew to Ian's feet and he reluctantly admits that he then had a lengthy (if one sided) verbal conversation with the bird. I say reluctantly as he seems to think that people would think him strange for talking to a bird but (as one who regularly goes into my garden in my pyjamas to feed the birds before getting my own breakfast, and who usually has a conversation with a 'tame' Blackbird - if only to tell him to get out from under my feet before I tread on him) I can see nothing strange in such behaviour (what the postman thinks when he catches me at it and gets offered a share of the breadcrumbs and birdseed I do not know). +++

Moving swiftly from what we say to birds to what they say to us this seems a good place to comment on a note from Steve Keen which reads .. 'I had a Jay in Barton-on-sea this afternoon giving the most amazing call I've ever heard from a bird in Britain. Hard to describe, but a rather electronic-sounding buzzing call, a second or so long repeated many times. Had I not seen the bird making the noise I would have assumed someone had a window open and was doing bizarre things with a synthesizer. I know Jays can be very versatile, but I've never heard anything close to this call.' +++

On Mar 29 (unfortunately now rolled off my second bird page which currently starts at Mar 30) Chris Jones told us he had heard a Jay singing at Fleet Pond and I looked up a description of this song (which I guess few have ever heard) and saw it was a quiet 'mixture of clucking, knocking, mewing and raucous sounds', but it seems Jays have a much greater variety of vocalisations. Richard Carpenter adds to the list by saying .. 'Last year one stopped me in my tracks because it sounded like a Golden Oriole, earlier this year I had one uttering what can only be described as a simple song, and another made a call rather like a Jackdaw before resorting to the usual harsh squawking. I wonder if it is mimicry or whether we underestimate their vocal repertoire?'

THU 22 APR

The item that caught my attention in today's news comes from Barrie Watson whose message on the SOS website reads .. 'In the North Park Wood, Parham, heronry today a soaring Buzzard twice went into the top of a pine containing Grey herons' nests with young. It was not seen to carry anything off but was clearly predated nests. There was no reaction from adult herons in the rest of the colony.' North Park Wood is part of a large woodland south of the Pulborough RSPB reserve and east of Amberley Wild Brooks. +++

The other big news of the day comes from Ian Julian on Hayling Island where he today saw 28 Little Terns back on their nest island at the Oysterbeds, proving that it is possible for the Little Terns to get a toehold on the island. Clearly that island is going to be worth watching over the next week or so to see if this 'D-Day' type invasion of the 'beaches' can be turned into a successful occupation of the 'high ground' (currently occupied by strong forces of Black-headed and a few Med Gulls) where the Terns can nest without being washed out by high tides. +++

At Titchfield Haven Mike Rafter today saw a Hobby, and Trevor Carpenter (after seeing 32 Eider fly east past Hill Head - maybe the Solent will lose its Eider population this summer?) saw a Marsh Harrier coming south into the north part of Titchfield Haven. +++

Gary Calderwood was also seawatching in the east Solent at Stokes Bay this morning and (in addition to a Red-throated Diver and a Fulmar) he saw nine Arctic Terns, outnumbering 6 Common or 5 Sandwich Terns also present. +++

Other Hampshire news for today comes from Simon Ingram at Eastleigh Lakeside where he

had a Swift and a Grasshopper Warbler, and from Pete Smith who had an Osprey over the Beaulieu river.

From Rye in Sussex Barry Yates, announcing the arrival of the first Turtle Dove which I have reported above, also reported that .. 'Yellow Wagtails now present in good numbers, a few Tree Sparrows remain and a few Corn Buntings are singing' He also said that the .. 'First lapwing and wheatear should be hatching soon and some cormorants already fledged!' I was a little surprised by the idea of Wheatear chicks already hatching but I see that their incubation period is only 14 days. +++

Corn Buntings could also be found at a farm at the foot of Mount Caburn, by the main road going south from Lewes. Paul James found two pairs there, along with 3 pairs of Grey Partridge. On the north side of Lewes town Jon Curson found both Hobby and Grasshopper Warbler at 'The Pells', and at Arlington Reservoir (close to Beach Head) Robin Edwards had an Osprey (complete with fish) and a Nightingale (two more Nightingales arrived at Wisborough Green, and at Pulborough Brooks Pete Hughes tells us that at least four are 'performing brilliantly' while at Bury (further down the Arun just above Houghton bridge) Tony Deleiros found that the first Reed Warblers had just arrived. +++

Nearer the Hampshire border Mike Brayshaw saw the drake Garganey on the Sidlesham Ferry pool where it had been first reported yesterday by Richard Prior, and at Ivy Lake James O'Driscoll saw 11 Common Terns (but he gives no hint that they are taking an interest in the New Lake nest rafts). In the Sompting area east of Worthing Richard Ives saw the first Whinchat of the year but we have already mentioned that above.

A couple of Hampshire items for yesterday (Apr 21) come from John Norton at Stokes Bay who saw two Little Gulls and remarked that the local Sanderling are still present (he saw a flock of more than 60). Sanderling notoriously leave it as late as possible to make their flight to the high arctic where they breed, and last year I see there were still 41 at Stokes Bay on May 16, 20 at Sandy Point on May 21 and a late single was at Warsash/Hook on May 25. +++

The second item for yesterday was a report of the long staying female Ruff (or Reeve) at Titchfield Haven. This bird seems to have been at the Haven continuously since Jan 14, all alone except for a one day visit by four male Ruff on Mar 10, and as there have been no further mentions of her since Apr 21 that may have been the end of her stay.

(*** Following notes were included in previous update ***)

Checking my email this morning before starting to write these notes for the past two days I saw that Steve Hall had already been down to Budds Farm and had heard a Grasshopper Warbler as well as seeing a Swift and two Wheatears (which had either been here overnight or disproved Dave Billet's theory that the Wheatears which arrive in Langstone harbour from across the channel leave France at first light and do not arrive here before 11am). +++

Taking a midday break I found two smart Med Gulls resting on the water just yards off the seawall at Langstone Pond, and saw three Egrets, all bedecked with plumes, sitting out the high tide in trees at the south end of the Wade Court south meadow - it remains odd that we have so many Egrets fully dressed for breeding but with no known nesting colony nearer than Gosport.

Another person up early this morning was Alison Downs at Four Marks near Alton - she had sent me an email to say that the first of the House Martins that will hopefully nest on houses in her immediate neighbourhood was back at 6:23 this morning. That was the first report of them arriving at their breeding places that I had then seen, but reading further down in news arriving today I see some were collecting mud for their nests at Rye Harbour village on Monday (Apr 19).

WED 21 APR

I have been reporting each individual Pied Flycatcher sighting (so far I have heard of seven individuals spread across Hampshire, Sussex and the Isle of Wight from Apr 10 to 19) on the assumption that there will be few of them seen on spring passage and each is of interest, but today James O'Driscoll found a flock of 15 in trees around the caravan site south of the Chichester bypass and just west of the roundabout where the Bognor road

joins the bypass. In the same trees were two Garden Warblers, two Willow Warblers, three Blackcaps and a flock of around 50 Starlings also taking insects from the trees. On the grass were 7 Greylag Geese, and over Vinetrow lake (beside the road into the Caravan site) some 200 Swallows and 5 House Martins were hawking other insects. +++

James was also having a look around the gravel pits on Monday (Apr 19), finding 2 Sedge Warblers by the East Trout Lake and two Garden Warblers near New Lake nature reserve, and he saw four Common Terns over Ivy Lake which flew off south but it seems they did not take an interest in New Lake where the colony of Common Terns nesting on rafts suffered a severe setback in 2002. In the 2000 season 50 pairs nested and 44 chicks were ringed, then in 2001 there were at least 70 chicks seen on the rafts at the end of June, but in 2002 the season started with promise (109 eggs laid) but the end of June count found 50 dead chicks and by mid-July the whole colony had deserted the site without any young. +++

Last June the following entry on the SOS website told us that the 2003 season was also a wash out. It read

‘Information on the missing Common Terns at New Lake Chichester GP from Barrie Watson. Tim Edwards noted only one or two birds in early May, but on 14 May there were 50-60 terns apparently settling in on both breeding rafts. I next visited on 22 May and found no terns at all. An influx was noticed in Chichester Harbour at about that time. I have no idea why they have left New Lake. Has anyone else? Last year usual numbers nested but all the young died for no obvious reason.’

A further entry on the SOS website on Mar 23 this year shows that they have been given all possible encouragement by SOS conservation volunteers. It reads .. +++

‘As many of you who look at the birds across Ivy Lake at Chichester Gravel Pits will have seen there is a new Interpretation Board which has the SOS and English Nature Logo on it. The SOS was extremely fortunate, through the good offices of Alan Perry who is our West Sussex Conservation Officer, in being the recipient of an English Nature Aggregate Extraction Sustainability Levy Fund. +++

‘On New Lake a new fibre-glass tern raft has been floated which will enable Common Terns to breed safely and a Kingfisher Bank has been constructed to encourage Kingfishers to breed. (It has to be emphasised that there is NO access to New Lake). +++

‘On Ivy Lake reedbed clearance work has been carried out to remove much scrub and willow trees. +++

‘This has been a major effort on the part of Barrie Watson, Graham Roberts and Alan Perry and with the support of the owners, Cinque Ports Leisure, it is hoped that many of the birds which use these gravel pits will benefit for years to come.’ +++

You can perhaps now see why I was interested in James O’Driscoll’s report of Common Terns back at the Chichester Lakes but seemingly showing no interest in the New Lake nature reserve. There is no mention in the fragments of the story that I have seen about why the chicks died in the summer of 2002 but if the problem was fox predation I would not have expected the corpses of the chicks to be left out for counting, and on the evidence presented above I would suggest that either lack of appropriate sized fish for feeding the young (and adults), or a pollution problem poisoning the chicks, was involved.

From his bed in a house at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight Kris Gillam heard the call of a Stone Curlew passing overhead at 23 minutes past midnight this morning. Unfortunately his understanding of Stone Curlew language is not good enough for Kris to understand exactly what the Stone Curlew was saying about its destination and expected arrival time ... +++

Daylight brought Kris another mystery when he was at the Sandown boating lake. He writes .. ‘At midday a female Yellow Wagtail of one of the dark-headed subspecies was briefly at the Canoe Lake. The head was grey (tinted brown), completely lacking a pale supercilium or any internal marking on the ear coverts, and at a distance the lores/forehead appeared almost black. There was a thin pale half ring around the back of the eye. The underparts had a very weak yellow wash which extended just onto the whitish throat, and at a certain angle there was a (slight) suggestion of a whitish submoustachial stripe. In flight it gave a hard, dry, grating "dzree" very unlike the flavissima race call.’ +++

Reed and Sedge Warblers were singing around the lake, and with them was a migrant Common Sandpiper.

Still on the Isle of Wight I see that hide at the new nature reserve close to the shore at Seaview is now open for use.

Across the water at Hill Head on the Hampshire mainland Richard Carpenter had another view of the Iceland Gull which has been seen intermittently in the Gosport/Titchfield Haven area since Jan 31 (and is probably the same bird which first appeared at the Lynbottom rubbish tip on the Isle of Wight on Dec 17 last year). Richard saw it briefly flying near the Hill Head Sailing Club and I assume this is another sighting of the same single bird although different observers have described it's plumage as both first winter and second winter, and a couple of weeks ago Lee Evans decreed that it was now in second summer plumage. +++

Richard also saw two Arctic Skuas off Hill Head, and they are part of a current Skua 'bonanza' bringing sightings all along the coast from Hengistbury Head in Dorset (where there were 7 Grea Skuas/Bonxies this morning) through Hampshire to the Sussex coast (at least to Seaford near Beachy Head). +++

This morning David Thelwell saw 12 Arctic and 2 Great Skuas at Hurst and at Brighton there was one Pomarine, eight Arctic and one Great, but if we go back to last Sunday at Splash Point on the Seaford shore just west of Beachy Head the totals of sightings there, collected by Dick Gilmore, were 24 Great, 31 Arctic and another Pom.

At the end of my note for last Saturday (Apr 17) I stated that I had never heard of Yellow-browed Warblers in this country during the first half of a year, except for winter birds staying into January, and I have to thank Graham Osborne for correcting this. +++

I was at the time thinking of the bird that showed so well at Ivy Lake in Chichester this winter which was not seen to my knowledge after Jan 25, and putting that in the context of what one of my 'bibles' tells me (the Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland, published in 1983, gives an account for rare vagrants of which months they had been seen in, and the number of different birds involved, prior to its publication, and it gives the range of months for Yellow-browed Warbler as being from the end of August to the end of December). +++

What my failing memory had forgotten was that here in Havant, by the Brockhampton stream that runs beside Budds Farm, we had one or more long-staying Yellow-browed Warblers in each of the winters 1994/95 and 95/96, both of them staying into April. The 1994 arrival came on Dec 29 (it may have been around long before then as there was one at Farlington Marshes on Sep 18) and was here until Apr 5. The 1995 bird was first seen on Dec 2 and seems to have brought a friend with it as there were definitely two birds in Jan and Feb of 1996, and one of them was still singing (heard by Jason Crook) on Apr 12. +++

Graham tells me that this spring there have been very recent reports of three different Yellow-broweds in Britain - one in north Yorkshire, one in Devon and one at Stodmarsh just outside Canterbury. There may well have been others as I have picked up the fag-ends of reports from Horsham in Sussex and Moorgreen near Southampton. My thanks to Graham, and a plea to any others of you who can correct or extend my knowledge of British Birds to do so without requiring me to spend money on bird magazines or on the other commercial publications and news services. My view is that the enjoyment of wildlife should be 'free to all' and not tied up with commercial competition (in which I include spending money on travel and services in order to get a longer tick list than others).

TUE 20 APR

Today brought a party of five Swifts to Rye Harbour where there were also three Black Terns, and at Hurstpierpoint (by the A23 north of Brighton) another male Ring Ouzel was seen. +++

Nearer home in Chichester Harbour Peter Bulfield found a Spotted Redshank and 11 Whimbrel in Nutbourne Bay, and on Aldsworth Pond north of Emsworth Brian Fellows saw a family of 8 Mallard Ducklings but could only see one baby Coot (Tony Gutteridge had seen 6 newly hatched on Mar 30). The Swan was still sitting and three Shelduck were near the pond, as were a dozen Canada Geese. +++

Later in the day Brian heard one Willow Warbler back in the scrub on Longcopse Hill in the

Hollybank Woods, with a Bullfinch in the same patch - the Willow Warbler was still there when I visited the same place in the afternoon, and hopefully it will stay to nest.

Ian Pibworth, who gives us a regular weekly report of his all day vigils at the Testwood Lakes each Sunday, found a herd of 44 Swans arriving at dusk on Mar 29 to roost for the night on the Meadow Lake, and between 40 and 50 Swans have used this roost since that date though they had not done so in the previous year. In order to reach the roost lake their natural flight path would take them through a set of high tension electricity wires which cross the site on pylons, and this causes the Swans to take evasive action at a difficult stage in their landing procedure, and in the poor light of dawn and dusk (when they fly in and out each day) some of them fail to get it right. +++

Les Stride tells us that 8 Swan corpses can now be seen on the ground below the wires, and hopefully it will not be long before the people responsible for these power lines fit the standard devices (used in many other places where a similar problem occurs) on to the lines to make them more visible to the Swans.

Tony Deleiros was by the River Arun in the Coldwaltham area yesterday (Apr 19) and estimated that around 300 House Martins were flying over the sewage works but perhaps of more interest was a bird which he thinks to have been a Spotted Flycatcher though he says .. 'the bird was in a distressed state and it was hard to determine what it was.' Easier to recognize (though even more 'distressed') was a dead Heron which Tony found in a ditch. +++

On a more cheerful note Tony saw a pair of Mandarin duck in the Amberley Wild Brooks area behaving unusually - apparently finding food on churned up ground around the feet of cattle. +++

Another bird seen yesterday (Apr 19) making use of a slightly unusual food supply was female Pied Flycatcher in the Buchan County Park (south of the A286 where it enters the south west fringe of Crawley). This bird had discovered that a litter bin which had not been emptied for some time was a good source of flies.

This evening Brian Fellows went to Marlpit Lane (on the 'country route' from Havant to Chichester) in the hope of hearing a Nightingale but the only birds he came across were a group of eight Magpies (no doubt symbolising some dread disaster) but he had no need of them as a portent of the end of an era in which this has been the best local Nightingale site. In recent years there has been much opposition to a planning application for large scale gravel extraction but that has not stopped the application being granted and the ground surface is now apparently being cleared before the digging begins. Brian says .. 'I was dismayed to see the continued dreadful destruction of the site to the east of the lane. All the bushes have been chopped down and the remains piled around waiting to be burned. There is very little vegetation left, but for a fringe of trees and bushes around the edges.' One ray of hope is that the rest of the land on both sides of this lane has been quarried in the past and is now returning to wildlife friendly habitat, some as open grassland with scrub, some planted with trees to become woodland (of a sort!).

It may well be that Nightingales can now be heard in other local sites (Racton Park Wood, Stansted East Park 'slip', and the west end of Ashling Wood). The first Nightingale this year seems to have been on the Isle of Wight at Newtown Harbour on Apr 4 and the first on the mainland was at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 14. On Apr 17 they were heard at Fawley (Southampton Water), Titchfield Haven and Botley Woods, and two more were in Ashes Wood near Hastings today (Apr 20).

Last Sunday (Apr 18) brought a Hoopoe to the Hastings area, and Ring Ouzels were recorded both at Hastings and at Church Norton. +++

Sunday also brought good seawatching at Seaford, some of the best items on Dick Gilmore's list were a Pom Skua with 24 Bonxies and 31 Arctic Skuas, 13 Black Terns, 3 Manx Shearwaters, 127 Gannets, 224 Common Scoter and 69 Brent. At Goring Richard Ives also had Skuas - 6 Arctic and 7 Bonxies. +++

Going back to Friday (Apr 16) Richard Ives had close views of a summer plumaged Slavonian Grebe only 15 feet offshore at Widewater.

MON 19 APR

A Swift seen in the Test Valley at Timsbury today by Daryl Short was the fourth I have heard of following two on Saturday (at Gosport and near Lewes) and a third over Budds Farm at Havant yesterday. Although most people will probably not see a Swift until early May these birds were not exceptionally early - the current average first date in Hampshire is Apr 18 and in Sussex the equivalent is Apr 15. +++

Today also brought a third Hampshire Hobby, seen by Bill Marjeram at Hook (Warsash) flying east towards him across Southampton Water from the New Forest shore. The first Hampshire Hobby was seen by Phil Lord at Timsbury in the Test valley on Apr 15 (which happens to be the current average first date for the county) and interestingly that too was flying east to west rather than heading north up the valley. The second Hobby of the year did follow a more conventional flight path, seen by Ian Pibworth yesterday coming in from the south to rest for ten minutes in a dead tree at the Testwood Lakes before continuing north. Although the average arrival date in Sussex is Apr 14 none have so far been reported from that county but the Isle of Wight did have an early bird at St Catherine's Point on Apr 6. +++

A smart male Pied Flycatcher which arrived at Fleet Pond in yesterday's rain was still there today, looking better in sunshine. Jonathan Mist saw it on both days and this morning he also found two other newly arrived migrants (a Common Sandpiper and 5 Common Terns) plus a late departing Brambling +++

Another interesting snippet of Hampshire news is that Ron King today found Willow Tits present at Bransbury Common in the Test valley near Andover. This is only the third site anywhere in Hampshire from which this vanishing species has been reported this year - the other two were Straits Inclosure near Alton and Morgaston Wood north of Basingstoke +++

At Eastleigh Lakeside today Simon Ingram had two special visitors, neither likely to stay. One was a male Redstart, the other a Garden Warbler.

Over on the Isle of Wight a party of twelve Purple Sandpipers at Bembridge Foreland was not particularly late but must have come from further west or south as none of the winter residents have been reported there since Apr 7 (and the peak count there this winter was only 9). The last report from Sussex was on Apr 2 and none have been mentioned in Hampshire since Mar 28. +++

Sea-watching from Ventnor this morning gave Kris Gillam three Manx Shearwaters to add to two which passed there yesterday. Another was seen off Selsey Bill yesterday and one went past Seaford on Apr 16, but these are the only ones to be reported in the channel since two early reports (both from the Isle of Wight) on Apr 1 and 3. Usually there is a sudden surge of Shearwater sightings sometime in the second half of April, so watch this space. +++

Kris also had 16 Fulmars off Ventnor today, along with 12 Gannets and a Whimbrel, all of them going west against the normal flow. +++

Inland on the Island at least two more Lesser Whitethroats were seen, one near Bembridge airport and another on the north side of the Yar valley. These follow reports from five sites on Apr 17 when the first of this species arrived in both Hampshire and Sussex.

My own short outing in the Havant area today found Swans sitting on nests at Budds Farm pools and at Bedhampton Mill pool, plus the sad sight of a Swan corpse at the mouth of the Langbrook stream where a non-breeding pair have 'held court' for several years - the surviving bird of the pair was still there at the mouth of the stream close to the corpse which (minus head and neck) lay close to the shoreline footpath. This could have been the work of foxes but may have been the work of dogs (I'm sure that proof of death by uncontrolled pet dogs would please those who are currently expressing strong opinions on Hoslist that dogs should not be allowed to interfere with bird watching - unfortunately in a grossly overpopulated world we have to learn to get along with each others differing views and cannot expect always to have things the way we would prefer, any more than Alf Garnett's views on coloured people can be expected to prevail in a multi-racial society) +++

Unfortunately (to air my own views on Canada Geese!) neither foxes nor dogs had prevented

the presence of three pairs of Canada Geese at the Budds Farm pools today. I only saw one pair of Shelduck and a couple of Teal plus one male Shoveler on the pools but there were at least 30 Tufted Duck still there

SUN 18 APR

Dick Gilmore has today put on the SOS website the amalgamated totals of all seawatching from Splash Point at Seaford (just west of Beachy Head) for four days starting on Apr 15 and ending today, and I thought those who do not indulge in the strenuous sport of seawatching might like to have an idea of how many birds are currently passing up the English Channel. These figures are of course just a part of what could be seen from the shore and omit many birds further out, but with south easterly winds forcing the birds in towards the Sussex coast they give a better idea of the total than you would get on days when the birds all fly further out (where they can just keep an eye on the coastline but watchers on the shore can see very few of them). Note that I have added in some other birds reported from other sites to give a more complete picture. +++

Only 39 divers were seen, 12 Red and 12 Black-throated - the rest unspecified, and there were few Grebes (12 Slavonian and 6 Black-necked) though most of them were in almost complete summer plumage. Most of the 44 Auks were also not identified by species but there was thought to be one Puffin amongst them (that was seen at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight). Gannets were one of the more numerous species with 644 listed, along with 27 Fulmars and 9 Manx Shearwaters (maybe some double counting between sites here). +++

Common Scoter was the most numerous duck species with 1936 birds but there were also 53 Velvet Scoter whose passage is just starting. 153 Merganser were no surprise but I was a little surprised to find 193 Shoveler in the list (seeing them mainly on inland waters in the winter I expect them to fly overland rather than to use the channel, but we too choose the motorways for our longer journeys (if only because we are less likely to get lost as we might do using minor roads). 44 Teal and 29 Shelduck were the only other duck to be seen in any number though there were also 15 Eider, 8 Gadwall, 6 Wigeon, 4 Long-tailed Duck and 2 Pintail (I suspect that many watchers give up on listing distant duck species so there may have been more of these). To show that the supply of Brent is not yet exhausted 659 were listed.

Terns were represented by 1001 Sandwich, 106 Common and 390 Common plus 16 Little and the first 8 Black Terns of the year. 39 Arctic Skuas were followed by a surprisingly high relative number of 29 Bonxies and with them were the first 3 Pomarines. Gulls included 35 Kittiwake (some of these could have been local birds), 61 Little Gulls and 11 Med Gulls (these do seem to be pushing east in increasing numbers).

Locally Mike Collins was pleased to see a single Swift this morning over the Budds Farm pools where Swallows, Sand and House Martins were present and nearby two Whitethroats, two Wheatear, two Whimbrel and two Brent could be seen - the latter probably intending to stay through the summer. Elsewhere in the Havant area I had a look at Aldsworth Pond and saw the Swan back on her nest with just one pair of Tufted Duck on the water from which unseen Little Grebes were trilling. On the edge of the Hollybank Woods I saw a Treecreeper but have not heard their song this year so far. +++

A female Ring Ouzel seen near Bembridge airport today was, I think, the first to be seen on the Island this year (though one was in Hampshire on Mar 28 and two were in Sussex on Mar 27 and 28 with another singing at Beachy Head yesterday). Also on the Island today there was an Osprey over Bembridge Harbour, a Pied Flycatcher at St Catherine's Point, a Cuckoo at Brading Marsh, and (among other migrants) a Garden Warbler near the Bembridge ponds. At Newtown Harbour both Common Sandpiper and Little Tern were present. +++

In addition to the male Pied Flycatcher on the IoW a female was seen by Paul Winter at Nursling Mill and another male attracted a lot of attention at Fleet Pond where one of the people going to see it was Mike Duffy, who tells me that several Common Terns were to be seen over the pond trying to distract attention from an act of gross indecency on the water where a male Mute Swan was trying to rape the resident female Black Swan (I say

'resident' as I know she was there on Jan 24 and Feb 9 but have not heard other reports of her presence though I suspect she is a long term fixture but she could be the bird that has in past years attempted to seduce a mate outside the Duke's Head on the Test at Romsey - is that one still present?) +++

Ian Pibworth's day long stint at the Testwood Lakes today brought him unexpected company in the shape of two Egyptian Geese - I wonder if they will stay and breed as a pair did at Hartley Witney in north east Hampshire last summer, or if these two are two of the nine goslings raised by that pair? +++

Much more deserving of headlines was a Hobby which Ian saw for ten minutes perched in a dead tree before it flew on north - this was the second report of one in Hampshire following the one seen further up the Test by Phil Lord on Apr 15. Other arriving migrants were three Common Sandpipers, two Common Terns and more than 50 House Martins (appearing in force at last). +++

Also at Testwood were two Fieldfare, maybe part of a larger flock as David Thelwell saw 10 of them a mile or so upstream at Broadlands in Romsey and Simon Ingram saw one at the Eastleigh Lakeside site (where he had a late single Redwing on Apr 12). +++

Today also brought another Hoopoe to the south coast, seen from a car near Brighton by Mike Russell - it was flying west near the Waterhall Golf Course. On the IoW the Hoopoe which arrived at Havenstreet was still there today.

SAT 17 APR

A couple of very early Swifts were seen this year on Mar 7 and 16, both in Sussex, but the first two of the 'main stream' arrivals came in today - one at Stokes Bay on the Gosport shore and the other at Barcombe near the River Ouse north of Lewes where John Gowers also had two Common Sandpipers and a substantial flock of 50 House Martins. In addition to the Swift at Stokes Bay Ian Calderwood noted a Red-throated Diver, two Little Terns and four Arctic Skuas, and Peter Raby mentions a Fulmar, 14 Brent and 102 Common Terns. +++

Not quite so early, and following four birds seen on Mar 27 and 28, was a male Ring Ouzel heard singing near Beachy Head today to announce that it was the first of a second wave of these birds. +++

Genuine firsts of the year seen today were four separate Lesser Whitethroats. In Hampshire one of these was seen by Paul Winter at the Lower Test Marshes and another was at a Garden Centre off Allington Lane on the east side of the Itchen Valley country park where Mark Litjens was present on business after finishing his bird watching for the day. +++

Lesser Whitethroats also arrived today at Pulborough Brooks (where 5 or 6 Nightingales were singing) and at Rye Harbour (where there were 11 Yellow Wagtails and 9 Little Terns) +++

More Nightingales were seen or heard today at Ashlett Creek (near the Fawley Power Station on Southampton Water where Les Stride had four different birds) and in the Botley Woods (north of Fareham) where Richard Carpenter had two along with a female Redstart.

Another single Nightingale was heard by Mark Litjens at Titchfield Haven where he also had a Grasshopper Warbler. +++

Less expected arrivals on the Isle of Wight were another Hoopoe, this time at Havenstreet, and a Flamingo at Yarmouth - presumably a second escape from the breeder at Lymington as the Titchfield Haven bird was still there on Apr 18 (the day after this sighting). +++

Sedge Warblers seem to have arrived in force recently as Dave Unsworth found 14 in a three mile stretch of the Itchen south of Bishopstoke and immediately north of the country park while Graham Osborne found more than ten at Farlington Marshes.

News for yesterday (Apr 16) comes from David Thelwell who was seawatching at Hurst and listed 7 Velvet with 55 Common Scoter, 2 Long-tailed Ducks, a Bonxie, 3 Kittiwakes, 4 Fulmar and 4 Little Gulls, 19 Shoveler, 27 Gannets and 63 Whimbrel. +++

What may or may not have been six of David's seven Velvet Scoter were seen on the sea off Brownwich by Richard Carpenter, and also yesterday David Holland had what may have been the first migrant Common Sandpiper at the Testwood Lakes. +++

Also on Apr 16 Ian Julian was at the Hayling Oysterbeds and saw three Little Terns fishing and resting on the bund walls (but keeping well clear of the crowd of gulls on the 'Little

Tern' nest island!). A flock of 140+ Turnstone were presumably a flock passing through, as may have been 22 Brent. +++

Finally for yesterday some Hoslist messages seem to imply that there had been a report on the pagers (and thus unknown to me) of a Yellow-browed Warbler at Moorgreen just north of the M27 at Southampton. One such message spoke of no success in trying to find the bird where it had been reported, and as I said in connection with the one reported at Horsham on Apr 11, I have not heard of any Yellow-browed Warblers ever being found in Britain between February and August though quite a few turn up in the autumn and some stay through the winter to January.

PLANTS

SAT 24 APR

Walking round the IBM lake at the Portsmouth North Harbour site today on my monthly bird count I found one new plant which I was expecting to be in flower - Changing Forget-me-not - and two other newcomers which I was not expecting. Least expected was a good show of Henbit Dead-nettle on the grass immediately north of the Main Reception Lake, and not so unexpected but staggering in their numbers was a 'ground cover' of millions of plants of Wall Speedwell in the close mown grass. +++

Also in the mown grass around the site were millions of tiny yellow flowers of Spotted Medick and some Field Madder, and fewer plants of Germander and Thyme-leaved Speedwell with a good show of Cowslips on the one section of the lake side bank where they are protected from mowing. Marsh Marigolds were looking very healthy in the three clumps that I saw. Finally there was promise of more to come in several well grown Common Spotted Orchid plants (leaves only). +++

Before going to IBM I paid a brief visit to the Hilsea ramparts to check on the Adders Tongue Fern which grows there in some profusion, and I was not disappointed. Also flourishing there were many Bulbous Buttercup plants in flower and the leaves of several Common Spotted Orchids. Most of the white flowers were out on one Horse Chestnut here. +++

The Hilsea lines area is well worth a visit at most times of the year and if anyone is not aware of the location for the Adders Tongue they should go east along Scott Road (south side of the ramparts and east of Peronne Road which becomes a footbridge over Ports Creek) until they reach the point at which the cycle track turns south from Scott Road. If you are driving you should park near the second entrance to the ramparts area and go in there to the track running along the foot of the ramparts (on the south side - do not go through the tunnel entrance to the main area and moat), turn right and walk east until you see the point where the cycle track leaves Scott Road, and then turn round to walk slowly back looking in the ivy covered ground between the track you are on and the road - you should see the bright green leaves of the Fern almost immediately, right at the edge of the track you are on, but its main stronghold is opposite a large Horse Chestnut tree growing on the slope of the ramparts about ten yards back from your turn round point. Do not confuse any odd young leaves of Arum that you may find with the Fern - when you see it you will recognise it by the number of similar bright green 'leaves' (not much more than 10 cm high) all growing together, and a closer look will show you that a small percentage of the leaves have the fertile spike (which gives the plant its name) sticking up from the point where the leaf blade separates from the stem.

FRI 23 APR

Brian Fellows visited the Nore Barn woodland at the west end of the Emsworth shore today and came on some well grown plants of Bulbous Buttercup on the top of the seawall where by chance I saw them in the evening. Nearby by were two bright pink flowers on Herb Robert, and in the woodland edge a clump of Wild Garlic (Ramsons) which is the first I have seen this year

THU 22 APR

The Shining Cranesbill plants which line the footpath from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane in east Havant were well out today - although the first may have been a garden escape these plants increase in number each year and are now the dominant plants along about 200

yards of the path at the Pook Lane end and can best be seen where the path crosses Norris Gardens road. Also seen for the first time today were flowers on Sycamore and the far less eye-catching Grey Sedge. +++

Also out, but not for the first time, I found one small tree of Hawthorn completely covered with blossom beside the A259 road, and by the roadside found both Spotted Medick and Cleavers (Goosegrass) in flower. +++

In my own garden Perennial Cornflower, Common Fumitory and Thyme-leaved Speedwell are now flowering, and driving to Hayling Island this evening I noticed one white flower open on a Horse Chestnut 'candle'.

WED 21 APR

At Brook Meadow in Emsworth Brian Fellows today found the first Common Comfrey of the year in flower, along with the less conspicuous Lesser Pond Sedge. The meadow now has a good show of Cuckoo-flower.

TUE 20 APR

Back in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth this afternoon to lead a different group from those with whom I went to see the Early Purple orchids on Sunday we found just a couple of things not seen on the first walk. The more significant of these was the first Wood Sedge in flower, the other being the first flowers on just one plant of Wood Speedwell. Another plant which I saw today but missed on Sunday was Wood Sorrel, and one oddity which we saw on both occasions was the single white flower of Early Dog Violet.

MON 19 APR

Walking around Havant today I noticed flowers open on Field Maple for the first time and also saw Pendulous Sedge starting to flower by the Homewell stream. At least one flower was open on Sticky Mouse-ear and a couple of minute white flowers on an odd plant of Cleavers (Goose-grass).

SUN 18 APR

Despite the rain, luckily not continuous or too heavy, I went around the Hollybank Woods with a group of the 'Friends of Hollybank' and enjoyed the colour of the first few Early Purple orchids and, in a different area, that of bluebells flowering in an open glade under the white flowers on a dozen Wild Cherry trees. +++

Before starting in the woods I visited Aldsworth Pond where there is a great show of Kingcups (Marsh Marigold) in the wet field east of the pond, and back in Emsworth I found Thyme-leaved Speedwell starting to flower again in roadside grass.

SAT 17 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group spent their morning in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth where, amongst other finds, they came on the first flowering Wood-sorrel to be reported. Richard Carpenter had found this lovely plant 'nearly flowering' in the Botley Woods on Apr 4 so I suspect it has been out for some time.

INSECTS

FRI 23 APR

The good weather at the moment should by now have brought out the Duke of Burgundy butterfly at several Hampshire sites but not one has been reported so far, and this may well be the result of the cold and wet weather which hit them just after they had emerged last April, preventing the majority of them from breeding. +++

Looking through the Hampshire Butterfly Reports for the past ten years I see that Duke of Burgundy have appeared in the period from Apr 10 to 19 in six of those years, but in 2000 we had to wait until April 29 before the first was seen, in 1998 and 2001 the first was not seen until May 4, and in 1996 the first date was May 11 so we should not give up all hope yet. In three of the four years in which they appeared late the number of butterflies was also low, but in 2001 (when they did not appear until May 4 and the previous year had seen relatively few of them on the wing) the number which eventually appeared was above average.

Another species which this year has been late in responding to the spring's invitation to come out and enjoy life has been the Holly Blue. The first did not appear until Mar 31 and by Apr

17 I had only heard 8 scattered reports of single butterflies, but yesterday and today they seem to have appeared in a large number of places, and at Noar Hill today Peter Eeles counted 12 around one Holly tree. +++

I had a Holly Blue in my own garden today, someone I passed in the street had had one in their garden and Tony Gutterdidge saw one on the Warblington fields. Further afield Mark Litjens saw one at Titchfield Haven and Derek Mills saw at least two in the Straits Inclosure near Alton. Yesterday Brian Fellows had a couple in Nore Barn wood at Emsworth and Rosemary Webb had at least one in her Hayling Island garden, John Hunt had one in the north of Hampshire in his garden at Hook and Lawrence Holloway had another at Bognor. +++

A less welcome butterfly is the Large White which did not appear until Apr 16 and was not seen again until Apr 20. There were two reports of it yesterday but today a sighting of 4 specimens at Nutley near Basingstoke by Cressida Wheelwright seems to show that it too has decided to come out in strength (and that was further proved when I myself saw one on Apr 24). There have probably been more which have gone unreported as distant sightings leave the observer uncertain as to whether they have seen a female Brimstone or even a Small White and thus they are often not reported.

Today also brought a boost to the dragonfly season with a count of at least 7 Large Red Damselflies by Mark Litjens at Titchfield Haven and another report of 'lots' of them from Jon Curson at The Pells on the north side of Lewes. The first date for these remains Apr 16 when they appeared at Cliff Oakley's garden pond in Petersfield.

Moth news is headed by the first Lime Hawkmoth of the year which came to Paul Boswell's light at Greywell in north Hampshire last night (Apr 22), and yesterday Brian Fletcher had yet another Hummingbird Hawkmoths in his Winchester garden +++

Another miscellaneous insect observation for yesterday comes from the HWT Swanwick nature reserve by the River Hamble where small mining bees (presumably of the Halictus type) were seen swarming around an earth bank.

THU 22 APR

With the midday temperature here in Havant approaching 20C I had my first male Orange Tip in my garden, and in a short cycle ride to Langstone and Warblington I came on at least three Peacocks, two Small Tortoiseshell, two Brimstones and two Green-veined Whites - one of them giving prolonged views of her bright yellow, heavily veined spring rear underwing while egg-laying. Back at home I found a Brown Plume-moth on the inside of the garage door windows and encouraged it to escape into the world outside.

TUE 20 APR

Hummingbird Hawkmoths continue their round the year performance - Steve Nash's website lists seven seen nationwide since Apr 1, including one seen today at Sharpthorne in Sussex (on the 'Bluebell' railway line north of Haywards Heath). In contrast to these moths only one Painted Lady has found its way onto Steve's website this month - one in the Scillies on Apr 13.

Locally I did not see any butterflies during an afternoon walk in the Hollybank woods at Emsworth but I did come across a smallish Crane-fly with well marked wings - as it was on damp ground beside a tiny rivulet this could have been an insect called *Ptychoptera contaminata* but I have to admit that I did not take much interest in the curves of its waist-line or round-ness of its 'bottom' which would have helped with the identification. +++

Good news from Gosport is that two more Holly Blues were seen there today (and writing this on Apr 23 I have just had the first male in my Havant garden and heard reports of two more just seen at Warblington and Emsworth). +++

Also from Gosport comes the first report of Large White for this year (seen last Friday - Apr 16)

Before reporting other moth news I must correct an error I made in reporting a micro found at Bentley Station Meadow during Patrick Fleet's trapping session there on Apr 14. Sue Clark tells me that the species wrongly reported in my notes for Apr 15 as *Acleris laterana* (about which I remarked that it was new to my database) was actually *Acleris literana* (another

one that I have not previously heard of). *Acleris* species are small Tortrix moths and *A. literana* is sufficiently common to have its picture in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects where I see that it has a distinctive pale green colour with black markings on its wings which it holds 'roof like' along its body. +++

A much larger moth, seen in Woking by Martin Waller on Apr 17, was the magnificent Emperor Moth which is normally on the wing only from mid-April to the end of May. The female has a wingspan of over 8cm and is magnificently dressed in shades of grey and white with two huge 'eyes' on her wings, and would get my vote for 'best dressed lady' in any catwalk show of butterflies and moths from around the world - I find it hard to believe she lives in Woking! Apparently she came to a moth light which may not have shown her colours to best advantage. +++

The night of Apr 16 brought five more moths on to this year's rollcall. They were Brimstone Moth, Pebble Prominent, Pale Prominent, Pebble Hook-tip and Shuttle-shaped Dart, all recorded by Russell Wynn at Pennington

MON 19 APR

No firsts for the year today, but during a cycle ride around the Broadmarsh area today I enjoyed my first male Orange Tip and my first Green-veined Whites of the season. Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks were also on the wing

SAT 17 APR

The latest entries on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website show me that nine new moth species have recently appeared on the scene. Trapped tonight by Mike Wall at Basingstoke was what may have been Hampshire's earliest ever Orange Footman, and at North Gorley, south of Fordingbridge, Peter Allen had both Narrow-winged Pug and Waved Umber. +++

Last night (Apr 16) Simon Ingram at Eastleigh had a Pebble Hook-tip and a micro *Agonopterix aranella* that I have not seen reported in the past couple of years (so presumably uncommon). At Sherborne St John north of Basingstoke Nick Montegriffo added Great Prominent, Flame Shoulder and a White-shouldered House Moth. Back on Apr 2 Nick had trapped the first Pale Tussock of the year.

Also in Nick Montegriffo's moth trap last night (Apr 16) was an insect named *Nicrophorus humator* which I did not recognize as a moth species, and a little research was needed to discover that this is in fact a big black beetle (over 2 cm long) which adds a touch of colour to its appearance by having orange tips to its antennae. It also has a distinctive life-style in that it is one of ten beetle species in the British Isles which provide food for their larvae by burying the corpses of small animals and laying their eggs around the corpse before they cover it with earth, hence their general name of Sexton or Burying Beetles. Although large by beetle standards they are not strong enough to drag the corpse of a mouse into a grave they have dug for it so they have developed a technique of excavating the ground below the corpse - the body then gradually subsides into the hole they are digging and when it has gone down far enough the beetles cover it with the soil they have excavated. +++

Another interloper into Nick's moth trap was a queen Tree-Wasp (*Dolichovespula sylvestris*) which had presumably only just emerged from hibernation and was looking for a warm dry place to spend the night in the period between awakening and completing the first stages of building her own nest for the coming season (a small ball shaped structure hung in a bush).

Butterfly reports for yesterday included mentions of Orange Tips, Green-veined Whites and a Holly Blue (in Richard Carpenter's Hill Head garden). One of the male Orange Tips was seen by Martin Hampton in the Hayling Billy trail (old rail line) within a few yards of my garden here in Havant.

OTHER WILDLIFE

SAT 24 APR

It is very unusual to hear of people being killed by Adders but at this time of year, when the Adders are not as mobile as they will be when they are fully warmed up, there is an increased chance that they will not get out of the way of approaching humans or large

animals, and if they are caught in an exposed situation and feel threatened they naturally try to defend themselves by the only means they have - their venom. +++

The reason for mentioning this is that I have just heard that a Spaniel, the only friend and companion to a 90 year old man living in the Denvilles area of Havant, came limping home in great pain and died from what was diagnosed as an Adder bite probably inflicted in the market gardens which border the Emsworth gap area.

THU 22 APR

Bird news from Pete Hughes, warden of the RSPB Pulborough Brooks nature reserve, today also included a mention of several Adders seen basking in the sun there as they emerge from hibernation and revive their sluggish bodies. People, especially with children, should be aware that these snakes are quite common and at this time of year they should be given a wide berth (later in the summer you are unlikely to see them as they feel the vibration of your approaching feet through the ground and will quickly slide away into cover before you get near them). Look out for them on patches of dry ground close to bushes under which the snakes can vanish at the approach of danger, and be aware that the snakes also find good basking places in brushwood dumped in places where the sun shines warmly.

We have not had much news of fungi recently but one very topical item comes from the HWT nature reserve at the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood where a troop of white St George's Mushrooms could be seen a day early for the Saints day for which they are named. +++

While mentioning them I wonder if anyone can come up with a better or more precise suggestion for identifying a fungus which was found in the Holly banks woods on two expeditions last week (Apr 18 and 20). On both occasions what we found was a white globular growth (around 4cm in diameter) attached to a tree trunk less than 1 metre off the ground. Unlike the young growth of something like a Ganoderma species, which can be a similar white colour and round shape, these 'balls' had a squidgy feel to them, similar to the feel of Turkish Delight. All I could say about them to the people that were with me was that they were probably 'Slime Moulds' and that I could not give them any name.

WEEK 16 APR 12 – 18 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 16 APR

John Shillitoe this morning made his first visit to Old Idsworth Farm to carry out an RSPB and Farmer Alliance bird survey, and he asked me to join him as I know the farm well. I'm very glad that I did so as John turned up some good birds, best of all being Woodlark which I have never heard here before (and which supports my theory that Woodlark are currently extending their presence in this area - this is a fifth site hereabouts at which they have been recorded this year). Next best was an overflying Peregrine (again new to the farm as far as I was concerned), and nearly stealing the show was a Lapwing seen clearly to fly down as if to land on a field in which peas have just been planted and which appears to be bare earth. I say nearly stealing the show as it would have done so if we could have seen the bird sitting on eggs in this field, but despite scanning the field at length from several viewpoints we never saw it again. Also worth a mention was a sighting of two Grey Partridge, a good view of my first Whitethroat, one Swallow flying near barns in which they will soon be nesting, and overflying Kestrel and Buzzard. While we were there John took a phone call from his wife to say that she had just heard the first Cuckoo calling in the Meon Valley, but we did not hear one though we had Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers.

THU 15 APR

Dick Jackson saw two Little Terns off Church Norton. I think Jason Crook mentioned last night that at least one has already entered Langstone Harbour but I cannot remember the detail, though I do know that they have not yet made any serious attempt to return to their nests. +++

Local news is of a Cuckoo heard by John Goodspeed on Portsdown and of the first Willow Warbler to be heard by Kevin Stouse at the IBM site below the hill. Kevin also saw both pairs of Swans that may nest there back on the IBM Lake but showing no sign of nest

building. Three Great Crested Grebe were also on the lake (maybe the resident pair and one of last year's young?) and they were possibly considering a nest at the opposite end of the lake to where they were last known to nest. +++

Down at Eastney Mike Collins watched a flock of 70 Bar-tailed Godwit heading east along the coast outside Langstone Harbour

Yesterday evening (Apr 14) Kevin Stouse walked along the shore from Warblington through Langstone to Budds Farm and from the South Moors shore watched a distant flock of around 60 Whimbrel flying south over Langstone Harbour with a closer view of two Common Terns in the north of the harbour. Twenty Brent were still around, as were 9 Knot and a total of 70 Black-tailed and 20 Bar-tailed Godwits (the latter showing no sign of summer plumage whereas many of the Black-tailed are already colourful). At Budds Farm three Shelduck could be seen (one already sitting?) and only one Swan was present (presumably not sitting), while on Budds Mound a Meadow Pipit was displaying. +++

Earlier in the day, at the IBM North Harbour site, I am pleased to hear that one pair of Canada Geese had abandoned a nest with two eggs in it, and that no other nests could be seen, but I will not be surprised if the first Goslings do not come on parade within the next week as one bird was already sitting when I was there on Mar 20 and the incubation period is 30 days (the nest was low down at the water's edge of the southern of the two 'bays' west of E Building where it is not easily seen). Better news was of the arrival on site of a male Reed Bunting. +++

Sussex news for Apr 14 was of the laying of a third egg in the Barn Owl nest box at Pulborough Brooks (eggs laid on Apr 8, 11 and 14, and hatching will be similarly spaced out, the chick from the last egg having least chance of survival if food is short)

In Sussex what was probably a Honey Buzzard put in a first appearance a little north of Rowlands Castle. John Simons writes .. '17:45 Just got out of my car at my front gate at Dean Lane End when I was immediately confronted by two large raptors flying toward me, one mobbing the other. One was a Common Buzzard the other almost certainly a Honey Buzzard. Immediate comparison by eye was easy as the two birds were close together until lost from sight. The probable HB had a smaller, well protruding head, longer flatter wings, longer tail. However without bins I would not allow myself to jump to a conclusion.'

Still with news for Apr 13 I see that Steve Gaucher had a Tree Pipit on Thorney Island and was impressed by the sight of Shelduck in their hundreds. +++

April 11 brought the first Garden Warbler to the Finchdean area north of Rowlands Castle, heard by John Simons who on the same day watched a male Hen Harrier fly from Hampshire into Sussex (he says it was going west but I guess he means east). A couple of days earlier John had another sighting which might be of interest to Martin Hampton (who was interested in the frequency with which Herons make purposeful long distance flights). John says that on Apr 9 five Grey Herons flew south over his home at Dean Lane End at an estimated height of 1000 feet - he says he only noticed them because one of the five was flying a bit lower and calling to the others.

WED 14 APR

Several recent reports of Common Sandpiper sightings could possibly have been of newly arrived migrants but I suspect that all have been of wintering birds getting restless and perhaps moving about to show up in places outside their normal winter haunts. One reason for suspecting this is that the migrants do not normally start to arrive from the south until mid-April, peaking in early May, but a report today of one seen at Whale Chine, close to St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight, does sound as if the first migrant has flown in. There have been no regular sightings of winter Sandpiper anywhere on the Island other than a single bird seen at Fishbourne near Ryde on Jan 3. The finder of today's bird was well known locally but is only named as the 'National Trust Glanville Fritillary man'. +++

The first Nightingale to be reported on the mainland was seen at Pulborough Brooks today by Dick Jackson - there had been just one earlier sighting on the Isle of Wight (on Apr 4 at Newtown Harbour). +++

A more dubious pair of winter visitors are reported to have flown over the Chichester bypass today . . . 'Quite a day so far here at Kingsham (just south of Chichester), 2 Whooper

Swans flew over calling at 8.40am. They came from the direction of Ivy Lake, so I assume they are the same pair that hung around the area in the winter. My husband, Pete, also heard them early Saturday morning.'

I did express some doubt over their origin when they were being reported from the Chichester Lakes between Jan 11 and Feb 24, and several things about these two current sightings make me even more suspicious about any wild origin for these two. Firstly, the last dates for similar migrant species seem to have been Mar 5 for the Whitefronts at Scotney and Mar 8 for the last Bewick's Swans (at Pulborough Brooks). Secondly where have these two Whoopers been in the six weeks that they were last seen at Ivy Lake? And thirdly, taken with the previous question, these two current reports of birds apparently commuting between Ivy Lake and somewhere to the west of Chichester, would fit in very well with the birds having a more permanent residence in some local wildfowl collection (possibly the Brook Farm Trout Lakes beside the Ham Brook stream just north of the railway at Nutbourne which was I think the origin of several local sightings of Bar-headed Geese a few years ago).

Still in the Chichester area I see that Brian Fellows went to Fishbourne early this morning to carry out the first of this year's Breeding Bird Survey visits to the 1 km square he has been allocated (including Fishbourne Church and the Roman Palace but not Fishbourne Channel). Of the two significant observations he made only one got onto his recording sheet - a single Swallow settled on a wire and presumably intending to nest there. The other observation was significant but did not get recorded as it was the total absence of Rooks in a small rookery that has been present since Brian took on this square. In 2002 it had nine active nests but today there was no activity at all and only two abandoned old nests.

The abandonment of this Rookery (perhaps only an outstation) is of interest to me as we have seen the same thing happen in the Warblington area and I have a feeling that Rooks are generally declining in numbers in this Sussex/Hants border but I have no real information as to whether there are less Rooks in total or if they are just moving to new sites, nor as to whether persecution of the birds or lack of food are involved. Plenty of Rooks can still be seen, for example around the big Rookery near Rowlands Castle railway station and in fields near Funtington (based on what was recorded as the biggest rookery in the whole of Sussex during the latest national Rook Survey - the one around Hambrook House overlooking the new A27 in the Hambrook area which had 154 nests in 1996), but the number of birds seen in the Warblington area has dropped to near zero in the Warblington area (where a flock of 50 to 100 Crows is a regular sight). +++

The only information I have on the subject comes from the 1996 Sussex Bird Report in which Matthew Sennitt wrote a paper on the survey carried out in Sussex in that year. He starts rather frustratingly by saying that a similar survey in 1976 showed a 42% decline in Rook nest numbers but does not give the starting date for this period of decline (it may cover the period 1945 to 1976). A further survey in 1980 showed a slight up turn in the fortunes of the birds but the 1996 survey showed that, in the period 1976 to 1996, there had been 9% decline in number of Rook nests in Sussex and a 7% drop in number of Rookeries in the county and I'm pretty sure that the decline has continued since 1996. +++

Fifty years or more ago I had the impression that Rookeries were one of the fixed features of the countryside with the birds continuing to inhabit a few large rookeries that had been in the same trees from time immemorial (hardly likely as trees have a limited lifespan, but an apt phrase as the trees were traditionally the 'immemorial elms' which have now vanished thanks to Dutch Elm disease), and in those days the Rook population did not seem to suffer from regular shooting of the birds as 'vermin' or as the main ingredient of Rook Pie. Since then the number of Rooks has declined to the point where many rookeries have been abandoned, and the loss of the elms may have been one factor is causing the rooks to change the old habit of congregating in a few massive rookeries to a new habit of having a group of small rookeries (some with only half a dozen nests or fewer), and to change their choice of tree from Elm to Oak, Pine and Ash (the three top trees of their current choice).

+++

So far as I know Rooks are still on the vermin list and can be freely shot by farmers and landowners, but I think Rook shoots are now few and far between - the last that I heard of was a couple of years ago in the neighbourhood of Binderton House on the main road north of Chichester between Lavant and West Dean, so I don't think shooting is a major cause of continuing decline, though I would hazard a guess that modern agriculture, with its chemical treatments killing off much of the life in arable fields (directly through pesticides and indirectly through filling the soil with so many other chemical substances). +++
In the particular case of the small Fishbourne rookery I note that it is in the grounds of a nursing home, and perhaps the staff there have had some interest in discouraging noise and pollution dropping from the trees? Possibly the total absence of Jackdaws around this Nursing Home in 2002 (where they had been present in earlier years) was another sign of 'tidying up' at that site?

Today was the scheduled date for the monthly Egret roost count, sending me down to Wade Court a good 40 minutes before sunset as the tide would be high and that would encourage the Egrets to come in earlier than usual (normally they arrive in a period starting 10 minutes after sunset and continuing for about 20 minutes, though there are always a few early birds and late comers). Before reaching the roost viewpoint I was surprised to find only one Egret in the fields north of Wade Court - for the past few months there have usually been up to 20 birds in those fields at almost any time of day - and when I got to the viewpoint there was another obvious behaviour change in that some 15 birds which had already arrived were perched high in trees near the roost as they do in the summer and autumn whereas in winter months they tend to queue up on the ground to await the magic moment when they start to go into the actual roost trees (maybe they leave it late so as not to reveal the actual roost site to predators while it is still light?). +++

Another change in behaviour was that a higher proportion of the birds coming to roost came from the harbours (in winter they nearly all feed inland), and the other change was a drop in the total number using the roost to just 33 where counts made by Jason Crook had all been in the range 61 to 69 birds in Jan, Feb and Mar, dropping to 54 on April 7. Not being such a good observer my counts have generally been lower than Jason's but this was also my lowest figure (and next month's will no doubt be even lower as the majority of the birds will be away on nest duty elsewhere). +++

Barry Collins tells me that an Egret count he did on Thorney Island within the last few days only produced 14 birds.

While at Langstone I had the company of one or two Med Gulls calling as they circled the Mill Pond, and somewhere in the reeds a Cetti's Warbler sang from time to time. +++

TUE 13 APR

My recent comment on recognizing the drumming of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has brought some very useful supplementary tips from Graham Osborne who starts by saying that in his experience the sound of a Lesser is always quieter than that of a Greater Spotted. He goes on to say that the speed of the Lesser's drumming is noticeably faster than that of a Greater, and that as well as being in longer bursts there are often two bursts with only a short gap between them. +++

Background news to birding in the Portsmouth Harbour area comes from Dennis Bill with his summary of the March WeBS count. The first item of general interest is that the Paulsgrove rubbish tip, which in recent years has turned into the 'north Portsmouth mountain range' towering over Port Solent and the IBM lake, is to close down in May this year. With the new Portsmouth incinerator nowhere near ready (though the cranes around it can now be seen from Havant!) I wonder where all the rubbish will go - maybe to Southleigh Forest, where the operators are seeking permission to work around the clock, even on Sundays? +++

An exotic visitor to Hampshire was a Common Crane which appeared over the Beaulieu river at around 4pm, and at around 8:30pm settled to roost beside the River Test at Bransbury Common near Andover where David Thelwell was the lucky observer. In recent years Cranes have been annual visitors to Sussex but few have been seen in Hampshire so I

was surprised to see that when one was reported on the Hants/Dorset border at Avon Causeway in Dec 2000 the status information for this species in Hampshire showed that more than 86 had been seen in the county since 1950, but on checking further in Birds of Hampshire I see that figure is misleading in so far as 50 of the 86 came in one exceptional influx in the autumn of 1963 when there were estimated to be 500 Cranes in Britain. That book also shows that there was a 'run' of Hampshire sightings with at least one in each year from 1984 to 1991 (these sightings totalling another 13 out of the 86), so a more accurate picture of the frequency with which these birds visit Hampshire is something like 1 bird every 1.8 years, with the chances of seeing one being highest on spring or autumn passage when the birds are moving through Europe on their way to or from winter quarters in Spain and get drifted north by the wind. +++

Another news item for yesterday (Apr 12) comes from Bob Chapman's latest Farlington Marshes news bulletin in which he tells how a party of Bearded Tits took off from his reserve and flew north east (Pulborough Brooks next stop? or non stop to the Norfolk Broads?). Luckily there are some left at Farlington.

News for Sunday (Apr 11) includes an update on the Chichester Peregrines from Graham Roberts in which he reminded us that the fourth egg, completing their clutch, was laid on Apr 4, with the birds expected to start hatching in early May (when we will possibly see them again on BBC South TV). Similar news comes from Pete Hughes at Pulborough Brooks regarding the Barn Owl nest which can be seen on video cam at the Pulborough visitor centre - the first egg was laid in that nest on Apr 9 and a second appeared on Apr 11, so it will probably be mid-May before the first chick hatches. +++

I occasionally get emails from people who have found this website useful in encouraging their interest in bird watching and I was especially pleased to have one from someone in Berkshire who had decided to visit Titchfield Haven last Saturday (Apr 10) where, in his words, .. 'at about 12.30 in the meadow hide I watched a Marsh Harrier fly upriver towards the owl boxes where 2 more Harriers flew up and performed some incredible acrobatics, 1 bird appearing to turn upside down so as to be almost claw to claw with the bird above it!' This is especially interesting as while other people have reported single Marsh Harriers at the Haven on Apr 7,8,10 and 11 no one so far seems to have seen three, and certainly not this display.

Going back to Apr 10, when early morning rain after a clear start to the night caused a fall of migrants along the Hampshire coast, Bob Chapman describes the birds which were seen at Farlington Marshes, saying .. 'The fall on Saturday at Farlington produced at least 37 Willow Warblers, 14 Blackcaps, 10 Wheatears, 3 Sedge Warblers and a few each of Swallows, Sand Martins, White and Yellow Wagtails, a Redstart and a Water Pipit. There were also two Spotted Redshanks, an Avocet and a Greenshank on the reserve.' He then goes on to say something which I was not aware of .. 'The largest active migration during the day was a passage overhead of Meadow Pipits, over 470 were seen flying north, whilst the residents on the reserve were busily nest building. Many of these passage pipits are probably going to Iceland, as are the White Wagtails, meanwhile on the marsh they pass flocks of Black-tailed Godwits, which will also shortly be off to Iceland.' I had never thought about where all the Meadow Pipits that we see at this time of year end up, and I had always thought that the the White Wagtails we see were accidental vagrants which had crossed the channel by mistake and would be heading back south as soon as possible, not heading onward to Iceland. (Bob does not mention another regular migrant to Iceland from our area, namely Pete Potts who has as usual gone to watch 'his birds' arrive at their nests)

MON 12 APR

Steve Mansfield seems to have been the first to hear a Cuckoo in Hampshire (at West Worldham near Alton today), although there have been a couple of earlier reports - Steve Keen saw one fly silently low over his garden at Sway as early as Mar 16, and one was recorded near Lewes in Sussex last Wednesday (Apr 7). Going on to Woolmer Pond Steve had the luck to see two male Yellow Wagtails in their spring plumage, with Swallows and Sand Martins, Snipe and Redshank also present. +++

SAT 10 APR

There seems to have been a major arrival of Willow Warblers this morning - two different observers at the west end of the Isle of Wight gave counts of 73 and 115 Willow Warblers respectively and they also reported 232 and 310 Meadow Pipits, and other reports indicate that Linnets have been moving north in their hundreds. +++

A couple of items from yesterday are also worth mentioning for local Havant area interest. Bernie Forbes had a Little Ringed Plover on the flooded field visible from the main road on Thorney Island north of the Little Deeps, and Brian Fellows had a Kingfisher in the Peter Pond area at Emsworth. Bernie was attracted to Thorney by promise of an Osprey and was not disappointed - one of the two Ospreys which arrived there on Apr 4 was still present, but Bernie warns that the military gate on the west side of the island was not working so everyone had to come and go by the east gate. If you are intending to visit you might be well advised to check the situation by ringing the Army guard post on 01243-388269

PLANTS

THU 15 APR

Meadow Foxtail put out anthers to scatter its pollen on the wind at Brook Meadow in Emsworth today. This news from Brian Fellows who tells me that after finding the non-flowering flower heads of Ribwort Plantain in the Isle of Wight last Saturday (Apr 10) he found this plant properly in flower at Stansted on the following day (Apr 11).

MON 12 APR

(Apr 14) A quick early morning walk around the Hayling Billy trail immediately behind my garden gave me two unexpected finds, the more significant being a single bright yellow flower just open on one of the many Wintercress (Yellow Rocket) plants that grow beside the track immediately south of where it goes under the East Street road bridge. I used to list this as American Wintercress because all leaves are pinnate but last year Martin Rand pointed out that American Winter-cress is a much taller plant up to 1 metre tall whereas these only grow to about 40cm and although I have not measured the petals I suspect that they would not pass the test for American Wintercress of being greater than 5.6mm in length, nor would I find fruits longer than 4 cm. +++

Up on the south side pavement of East Street, at the foot of the wall immediately east of the entrance to the Museum, etc, there is currently a stupendous display of Common Whitlowgrass flowers - a dense white band a good couple of inches high and perhaps a yard long. It does seem that this plant is having an exceptionally good year as I seem to be seeing it almost everywhere I go in great quantities.

(Apr 13) A phone call from Rosemary Webb yesterday (Monday) told me that at least one Green-winged Orchid was out on Sinah Common south of the Golf Course, and as I had to visit Hayling this morning I decided to see if I could find it which I did, along with a second larger plant just showing the colour of its flowers in bud.. +++

Starting from the area south of Staunton Avenue I immediately found Bur Chervil in flower (new to my list) with lots of the Spring Beauty which Brian Fellows had first found on Apr 7. I then added three more firsts in the area south of the public mini-golf course - Sea Champion, Shepherd's Cress and Sweet Vernal Grass. +++

Heading west onto the beach area south of the main Golf Course I found closed buds of Thrift and masses of fresh Sea Kale leaves plus more Hoary Cress in flower to support yesterday's first find. At the orchid site I found the perfect but small flowering Green-winged Orchid where Rosemary had told me and then found a much bigger plant, full of promise and colour in its flower buds but not yet in flower. Near the Ferry Inn more Eastern Rocket was out and the 'roundabout' had a mass of Early Forget-me-not, Storksbill, etc. At the turn from Ferry Road into the 'anglers entrance' for the Sinah Lake the large bush of Tartarian Honeysuckle was covered in light pink flowers, and in St Catherine's Road one brilliant pink flower of Herb Robert caught my eye. Back in the West Town Station carpark Hedge Mustard was flowering and several plants of Ribwort Plantain had

raised their flower heads but showed no sign of putting out the ring of anthers that we will soon see everywhere. +++

Back in Havant I found a few plants of Smooth Sowthistle in flower (not my first), and this evening in the Stansted Forest Groves I not only found a couple of Early Purple Orchids in flower but added Three-veined Sandwort and Germander Speedwell to the year list (a very early report of the latter being found on Hayling was a mistake!). Over in Pits Copse there was a great show of flowering Lesser Periwinkle and by the main Racton Lane one plant of Bush Vetch had an unopen flower bud.

(Apr 12) A cycle ride today from Havant to Broadmarsh added two new flowers to the year list - Hoary Cress and Broom - and I half expected to find Common Vetch flowers among the many well grown plants.

SUN 11 APR

Brian Fellows made a final count of Butterbur flower spikes at the Emsworth Brook Meadow site today, achieving a total of 434. He has counted these plants since 1999 and while this total is slightly below the 458 in 2001 and the 451 in 2003 it is well above the counts of 240 in 2002 and 298 in 1999.

I have been asked to lead a walk next Sunday in the Hollybank Woods for the 'Friends of Hollybank' so I went to check the lie of the land today and was pleased to find one plant of Early Purple Orchid already in flower (with many more to come). Another speciality that I was hoping for was pure white Common Dog Violet and I found just one of these. Two other expected flowers were on trees - an unusually good show of Alder Buckthorn in flower (all these flowers will probably have dropped by next week!) and the usual show of Wild Cherry (Gean) flowers on an old tree which was I think blown down in the 1987 storm but has retained sufficient root to support what appears to be a row of half a dozen flowering trees (each is in fact a branch of the original tree now growing up vertically instead of being parallel with the ground). Much less conspicuous were the first flowers on Red Currant bushes at several places in the woods where they are self sown. One final noteworthy find was of strange galls on the tips of the branches of a Yew tree - these are the work of a tiny midge (body 6mm long but with very long legs) called *Taxomyia taxi* whose tiny orange larvae spend their childhood in the galls.

SAT 10 APR

Brian Fellows visited the Isle of Wight today and walked from Ryde to Bembridge along the north east coast of the Island, finding one major new flower of the spring - Red Campion. He also found Ribwort Plantain plants which had raised their flower head but had not yet summoned up the strength to exert the anthers that will soon form a ring around the flowerhead.

INSECTS

WED 14 APR

Today brings more confirmation of the widespread arrival of Speckled Wood butterflies, joining the large numbers of Brimstone, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma that have been out for some time. All these species were seen by Andrew Brookes and others on an inaugural walk of a new butterfly transect in the MoD Defence Munitions site on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour at Gosport (still known to some as the Bedenham/Frater site), and Richard Carpenter saw all of these except Comma when at Hook (Warsash) today, and in his Hill Head garden Richard had Speckled Wood, Brimstone and a Small White.

Brian Fellows joined a Friends of Stansted Forest walk today led by Michael Prior, the head Forester, not in the Forest but in the Arboretum contained within the private grounds of Stansted House. Brian says .. 'One interesting observation was of literally thousands of bees flying around the grassy bank in front of the Stansted Garden Centre by the car park. I presume these were the ground nesting type of bee. They were relatively small in comparison with a honey bee and had shiny black abdomens with broad pale bands across

them. My tentative identification is *Halictus scabiosae* (Chinery's Guide to Insects p.244).' On April 2 I wrote in these notes about a similar sight seen by Ken Hearne at Pulborough Brooks and on re-reading that I see that I made a very misleading statement in saying that these insects were 'solitary wasps' when of course I meant bees (if you look back now you will hopefully find that I have corrected the error. +++

In suggesting a name for the species that he saw Brian has also I think unwittingly chosen a bad example as, for those familiar with Chinery's 'Collins Guide' (as opposed to his other popular book entitled 'A Field Guide ...') they will know that Chinery indicates the status in Britain (as opposed to Europe) of each species by placing a triangle symbol against all species found in Britain and *H. scabiosae* does not have one. The species name that I use for these small solitary mining bees (perhaps more because I like the name rather than serious study of the bees on my part) is *Halictus rubicundus* (makes them sound cheerful little creatures!)

MON 12 APR

Down on the coast at Broadmarsh on the shore of Langstone Harbour I too had a good show of butterflies with a Painted Lady, 2 Tortoiseshells and singles of Brimstone, Peacock and Small White +++

Further south in a Hayling garden Rosemary Webb had two Speckled Woods, and yesterday one was seen in a Southbourne garden just east of Emsworth. Apart from a couple of odd sightings of Speckled Wood in February these are the first I have heard of this spring after a single seen at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter on Apr 2.

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 14 APR

At this time of year the remains of Cuttlefish start to appear on our shores, usually in the form of the 'cuttle fish bone' which (when the salt has been washed out of it) is often fed to cage birds as a sort of mineral supplement/beak sharpener. Occasionally the soft body of the cuttle fish (in which the 'bone' serves as a buoyancy aid, not a 'backbone') is washed up in a smelly disintegrating state and I can vouch for the fact that foxes love to carry off these remains for use as an 'air freshener' in their dens. +++

Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes has just found a very recently dead specimen which still had a complete body with tentacles and has put a photo of it on the HWT website (go via the Wildlife Reserves button to Wildlife News) which shows two long tentacles extending forward from the head of the creature, but from what I read about these creatures these two tentacles are normally retracted and not seen as the Cuttlefish swims in search of prey - when the prey comes within range they shoot out and grab it, holding on to it by suckers in the spoon-shaped ends of these two tentacles. I also see that Bob attributes jet propulsion to them as their normal means of getting about but, while in common with other 'Octopus species' they have the ability to shoot out a cloud of black ink to cover them from predators, I think they normally use a rippling action of the 'frill' around their body to propel them forwards through the water. In emergency, as well as sending out a cloud of ink, the cuttlefish can expel a powerful jet of water from a funnel on the underside of the head, shooting in backward at high speed.

I thought I might find that these creatures have a life cycle that only brings them close to the shore in the spring in order to breed and subsequently die (this would account for the spate of their remains appearing on our shores in spring) but as far as I can see they are present in shallow water in the English Channel all year round...

WEEK 15 APR 5 - 11

BIRDS

FRI 09 APR

The first Common Whitethroat song of the year was heard today by Mark Rolfe, not on the coast at one of the birding hotspots but in a small piece of woodland called Oxley's Coppice on the urban edge of Fareham and on Mark's route when he walks from his Fareham home

down the Meon Valley to Titchfield Haven (for those who know that area it lies west of Peak Lane, south of Rowan Way and east of Ranvilles Lane - I don't know this wood but it looks as if you can get into it from Rowan Way). +++

Walking down the canal path from Titchfield Mark found a female Pintail still present on the north fields, and, also in the north fields, he noticed a Common Sandpiper. In Wednesday's notes I said that I thought the Common Sandpiper seen at Pulborough Brooks was probably a winter bird although there had only been one winter report of one there on Feb 17, but at Titchfield I know of no winter sightings (last one in my database was on Sep 14 last year) so this could well be a first migrant though it could perhaps be one of the two that have been wintering at Curbridge on the Hamble - as with the migrant birds that will be coming across the channel all our south coast wintering birds are still migrant by nature and will be flying north to their breeding areas, and before doing so are likely to be getting restless and moving about locally. +++

Another Common Sandpiper was seen today by Will Walmsley at Budds Farm on the shore of Langstone Harbour, and that too could have been a migrant but is more likely to be a winter resident (one has been seen hereabouts in each month since last October). Also on the Budds Farm pools Will was impressed by the presence of at least 20 Little Grebe in bright summer plumage, some of them trilling. +++

I suspect that Will was hoping to see the Garganey that was at Budds Farm on Wednesday evening (Apr 7), and while he did not see it today I have, since I wrote about it in Wednesday's notes, discovered that one of the two people who saw it then was Jason Crook, and also learnt that there was, according to Bob Chapman, another sighting of a drake Garganey on the Budds Farm pools on Apr 6 (though Bob may have got the date wrong in his weekly bulletin on the HWT website)

Mark Litjens heard at least 5 Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers drumming, and one Firecrest singing, when he was in the New Forest today, reminding me of my own inability to confidently recognise either of these sounds. As far as the Firecrest is concerned I think my lack of experience is purely down to the fact that I have never heard Firecrest song, and would probably recognize the sound if I heard it as I understand it is very different from the Goldcrest song which I do know. As I understand it where the quiet high notes of the Goldcrest come out as 'tiddly tiddly tiddly trrrreee' the Firecrest has a simpler but louder song based on repetition of its 'zit zit' call note with increasing speed and volume, sometimes with a little trill at the end, sometimes without it. +++

I have no difficulty in recognizing the 'Pee pee pee pee' call of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (I think the only possible confusion would be with a Kestrel), but have never managed to isolate its drumming and 'chik' call from that of Great Spotted. Hopefully someone out there can give me some further clues but all I can gather from reading is that each burst of drumming by a Great Spot lasts about 1 second whereas each burst of Lesser Spot drumming last more like 2 seconds and is usually quieter (though the range of volume achieved by the Great Spot varies greatly with the resonance of the wood it is drumming on - not to mention John Eyre's case of one which had learnt to drum on the metal base of an outdoor Tannoy type loudspeaker which not only enhanced the sound but gave it direction, the woodpecker choosing a speaker facing directly towards a rival's territory).

We have had a further warning on HOSLIST not to advertise the location of sightings of Red Kite as they start to settle into Hampshire as regular breeding birds, and while I support this ban on any encouragement to disturbance of the birds (by photographers, tickers and listers as much as by eggers or chick stealers) I think it will be a pity if such a ban prevents us from getting a feel for the progress of this colonization process as it happens. I am not just thinking of the Kites but also of birds like Ravens and, in the opposite sense, birds like Turtle Doves, Spotted Flycatchers and Willow Tits where many people have an interest in understanding the progress of their decline. +++

Taking Willow Tits as an example I have mixed feelings about recent news on the SOS website of their presence in the West Dean Woods - even I, the most sedentary of birders, feel an urge to visit the woods in the hope of seeing them, and without precise knowledge of where they are to be found that could lead me off the public paths in a way that I would

not approve of if I found others doing it, and which could result in disturbance to many other species as well as the target one. +++

What I would like to suggest is that such information is published in a way that succeeds in giving a feel for the advance or decline of species without being specific enough to lead the average birder to search any one particular area (I know that the real die-hard pursuers of rarity with their cameras and climbing irons will home in on likely areas regardless of how much news suppression is achieved). +++

The way I would suggest doing this is by naming the location by reference to a major town within ten miles of the actual location - thus a bird seen at or near Titchfield Haven, Bishops Waltham, Shawford, Timsbury, West Wellow, Bramshaw, Brockenhurst or Beaulieu would be reported as being in the Southampton area. Other such reference towns for Hampshire could be Portsmouth, Petersfield, Aldershot, Basingstoke, Andover, Salisbury. Ringwood, Brockenhurst and Winchester. +++

Going back to the Willow Tit example the news of a find of two pairs would be reported as 'in the Chichester area', and I cannot see that that would caused increased disturbance in the West Dean Woods. With this system there would be a need to remind people that, if they put their name to such a report, they are likely to be pestered by strangers to reveal more, and they must not reveal the actual location to anyone they do not know (whatever rules we have in place it will be difficult to stop anyone telling their best friends, and those best friends passing on the news to their trusted confidants, but such is life!) +++

And to test reaction to this I will say that during this week I have heard of two Ravens flying east together in the Portsmouth area, and of two separate Red Kite sightings in that same area.

This being the Easter weekend, and this being a bird news page, I will not mention Easter Bunnies but will say that the Mallard duckling season is now upon us. I hope you all see a family of them on the water before their many predators devour them (I wonder what the mean life span of a duckling is? sometimes I fear it is below ten hours!). The score sheet for sightings known to me now reads: - Mar 24, first of year seen in Dorset. Mar 26, family out on IBM Lake. Mar 31 some seen at Lymington. April 3 two families by the Hamble River. Mar 8 some on Woolmer Pond and Mar 9 some on the Itchen at Winchester. seen by Dave Unsworth's young son Paul (giving hope that a new generation of WeBS counters is on the way!)

Finally for today I enjoyed one of my rare field trips to make the required preliminary visit to my Breeding Bird Survey square lying southeast of the Harting Down carpark. Nothing of real note seen but I enjoyed my first Willow Warbler song and ticked 26 species including Marsh Tit and Yellowhammer, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Buzzard (four soaring together). Bird song included lots of Skylark, one weak Meadow Pipit, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Chiffchaff and Goldcrest

THU 08 APR

Bob Chapman put his latest weekly bulletin of news from Farlington Marshes on the HWT website today and in it he seems to imply that the wintering Sandwich Terns in Langstone Harbour have now been joined by summer visitors. To quote his report .. 'Out in the Harbour Sandwich Terns are starting to appear over the islands along with the huge flock of Black-headed Gulls, which now numbers many thousands, and something approaching a hundred Mediterranean Gulls. Also in the Harbour the young drake Eider remains, sometimes standing with the Cormorants on Nap Island, and there has also been a Common Scoter since at least Sunday (Apr 4). Almost all the winter birds have gone, the Brent, Wigeon and Pintail now down to just the odd pair or handful of stragglers. In the Harbour most of the waders have gone but a count of 300 Bar-tailed godwits in the week was good and there has been a Spotted Redshank regularly on or near the Lake.' +++

Mention of the Spots Shank drove me to check up on when the last of these should leave, and I see that we are now just entering the peak season for them (mid April to early May) when the few winter birds are supplemented by passage birds but we are unlikely to see parties of more than five birds on spring passage (though a flock of 52 has been seen on autumn passage in June 1978) +++

A highlight of Bob's news is that a single Yellow Wagtail flew north over Farlington Marshes on Apr 3 (he has now written off the chances of any staying to breed although as recently as the 1980s up to 15 pairs could be expected each summer), and on Apr 2 a single Fieldfare was a surprise transient. Also on Apr 2 a single Osprey flew north over the harbour and 1 Little Gull, 1 Water Pipit and 2 Ruff were seen.

Sad news from the Isle of Wight is that a Hoopoe was found dead in a Barn near Quarr Abbey (between Ryde and Fishbourne Creek). No further news (did it die because it got shut in by mistake, or of old age, or killed by a cat?) and we do not know if it is the same bird that has been performing as a travelling circus recently. +++

Another very unexpected piece of news from the Island is on the notice board at the Alverstone nature reserve - it says that a Snowy Egret can be seen at Merstone, but no supporting information is given. So far as I know we have had just one Snowy Egret in Britain and I last wrote about it on 13 Dec 2001 when I said .. 'Thanks to Derek Hale who has passed me a copy of info from the Birdguides website about the find in Scotland of a bird never before recorded in the British Isles. This is a Snowy Egret which is an American bird that has previously only been found on this side of the Atlantic in Iceland and the Azores. It was discovered some 9 days ago at a place just south of Oban and was still there today. 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 question . how do they do that? .. is not an uncommon one for birdwatchers. How, for example, does a Kingfisher manage to allow for the change in direction of the light waves showing it a fish under water as those light waves move from water to air? How does a Reed Warbler tie the knots which secure its nest to the reeds? And in Robin Turner's case, posing the question today on Hoslist, how can a Cetti's Warbler achieve the volume of sound which strikes your ear if you are within a few feet of it as I once was when walking a narrow path through tall reeds at the RSPB's reserve at Radipole? +++

I make no claim to understand the physics involving the air pressure, vibration and resonance which determine a scientific answer, and, like Robin, would welcome an answer from someone who does know, but I remember reading in the Collins New Generation Field Guide to Birds (I can't lay my hands on it at the moment) that a bird's breathing and vocal arrangements are different to ours. The main difference is that birds do not breathe in and out as we do, but are designed with a continuous airflow, with air going in and out all the time in a continuous stream. This has several advantages as a way of obtaining the oxygen needed to fuel its bodily functions - when having to make a sudden effort to escape a predator it not only provides a 'turbo charger' effect, and avoids our 'out of breath' puffing and panting, but it also allows birds on migration to fly at great heights where oxygen is scarce. One example of this that everyone has seen, even if they have not appreciated what they are seeing, is a Skylark rising almost vertically from the ground while in full song, and even continuing to sing when being pursued by a predator, say a Merlin. +++

Coming to how the song is created there is again a fundamental difference between land mammals and birds (let alone whales!). As I understand it our human sounds are created in the same way that a violin is played - the strings are our vocal chords which we can tighten or relax in the same way that the violin string is lengthened or shortened by the position of the player's fingers on the string, and the bow which sets the violin string vibrating is in our case the air flow coming from the pressure chamber created by the muscles of our diaphragm and rib case. With the exception of the Flute and Recorder all other musical instruments have a means for vibrating the air column and altering its length - with drums the vibration is achieved with a drumstick (and you have to have a set of

drums to move quickly from one note to another as the air column length is fixed), with a brass instrument the vibration is made with the lips and with a Clarinet or Saxophone with a reed. With a Flute, associated with the 'god' Syrinx, there is no vibrating mechanism and the sound is achieved by directing a non-vibrating column of air against a fixed object (the carefully shaped metal lip plate, though you can demonstrate the same effect in a rough and ready way by blowing across the open mouth of a bottle). +++

Going back to bird song you may now see how sounds can be achieved without vocal chords and without diversion of effort from the main purpose of breathing (i.e. to fuel the muscles of the bird). The more oxygen a bird needs the faster will be the continuous flow of air into and out of its body, and if this airflow happens to be through a voice box designed like a flute (i.e. a Syrinx in which sounds are created by the air striking fixed plates, rather than a Larynx which requires extra effort to work the vocal chords and which to a degree impedes the airflow), then you can understand why the Skylark can continue to sing while 'running for its life' from a Merlin. +++

All of which does not begin to answer Robin's question about the volume of sound, how the bird can create so many and varied sounds - perhaps someone else will know take up the story?

Returning to a more normal subject I see that an untimely Glaucous Gull was seen at the Lower Test reserve last Tuesday (Apr 6). The news comes via Paul Winter and Al Claxton but I have no knowledge as to whether Al actually saw it or was, like Paul, just a link in the reporting chain. Also no details of age, etc +++

Another piece of news from Paul which was a first hand sighting was of a single Little Tern in the Hurst spit area on Saturday Apr 3, making it one day earlier than Daryl Short's sighting of two there on Apr 4 (which I reported in the notes for that day).

WED 07 APR

The first Hobby of the year is said to have flown in over St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today, a good week earlier than the average date of first arrival in Hampshire (Apr 15) or Sussex (Apr 14), but not exceptionally early for either county. Last year the first was reported over Southampton on Mar 25 and another arrived at Rye on Mar 26 (becoming the earliest ever for Sussex) but we then had to wait until Apr 12 for the next Sussex arrival (and Apr 14 in Hampshire). +++

Also arriving today was the third 'migrant' Merlin, seen by Richard Ives at Shoreham Harbour. This bird, and the two others seen at Selsey Bill on Mar 30 and Apr 3, were all described as 'hunting other birds' as they came in. +++

Much more unusual for the time of year was an Iceland Gull found amongst Herring Gulls at Keyhaven by Stephen Piggott and a party of HWT members, and later seen by Pete Smith. Unfortunately neither source gives any indication of the age of the bird, which might have provided a clue as to whether it was a newcomer to Hampshire or the Gosport bird getting restless. That Gosport bird was also in the news yesterday when it was seen by Gary Calderwood and by Lee Evans (who has now re-classified it as a second summer bird - something to do with the clocks having been put forward!). It could well have flown down to the Lymington area early this morning, especially now that we are into April (most Iceland gulls are seen on the south coast in Jan Feb or Mar, though some records exist for both April and May).

Here in the Havant area a male Garganey was reported by Anon to have been at the Budds Farm pools in the evening - especially frustrating for me as I had been there in the late afternoon and made a special effort to check through the eight remaining Teal that I could see in case a Garganey was among them (I did however have my first two Swallows there - almost exactly two months after the first of the year arrived in Somerset on Feb 8). +++

As people may have gathered I am running a book on the chances of any Little Terns nesting at the Hayling Oysterbeds this year, but news from Pete Ryder today probably means that all bets are now off (as I was expecting!). Pete found more than 100 Med Gulls on the 'Little Tern' island, no doubt with ten or twenty pairs of Black-headed Gulls which have already claimed nest sites there, and if all these Med Gulls attempt to nest there (only three or four pairs had definitely claimed nest sites when I was last there), there will be very little

room left for any terns. Pete does not say if these gulls were claiming territory - they may well have turned up to a house warming party held by one of the pairs already settled there.

+++

Another bit of local news is that Jason Crook made an unscheduled count of Egrets arriving at the Wade Court roost this evening, getting a total of 57 birds. His previous counts for this year, supplementing Pete Carr's survey data, show the following results: 53 on Jan 6, 61 on Jan 18, 68 on Feb 6, 69 on Mar 21. +++

Counts made by Barry Collins in the 1990s show that the number of roosting birds on Thorney Island remained roughly constant through Jan, Feb and Mar, then dropped to perhaps 75% of the winter figure in April before plummeting in May and June, with the birds returning in force in July and peaking in August or September. Jason's figures show that the number has not yet dropped by much, but the fact that I saw what looked very much like two pairs of Egrets in full breeding plumage sitting out the tide on the South Moors today may be an indication that some of the Wade Court based birds are just about ready to head off to their breeding sites.

Even if they had arrived back at Langstone Pond Jason would have been unlikely to hear Reed Warblers singing at dusk this evening, but it looks as if they will be back at local sites any day now. I have already reported the first arrivals on the Isle of Wight on Apr 4 and at Hook (Warsash) on Apr 5, and today brings the first report of them singing in Sussex (at Rye Harbour). Sedge Warblers turned up on Thorney Island today (heard by Barry Collins singing at the Deeps), and that was probably part of a large scale arrival which brought them to Pulborough Brooks on the River Arun, Beeding Brooks on the Adur and to Rye Harbour (where they had already been heard on Mar 27 and Apr 4 after the first of the year arrived at Coombe Haven near Hastings on Mar 23) +++

Perhaps even more exciting than the expected Reed and Sedge Warblers was the song of a Willow Tit, heard today by Matthew Silk in Tilgate Wood adjacent to Wakehurst Place and the Ardingly reservoir north of Haywards Heath. The far carrying 'piu, piu, piu' song of the Willow Tit (entirely different to the rapidly repeated high pitched notes of the Marsh Tit) is reminiscent of the call note of the Wood Warbler whose earliest ever arrival date in Hampshire is Apr 9 though last year they did not arrive until Apr 23 (a pleasure still to come at the very few places where Wood Warblers can still be found) +++

Matthew also saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and heard Siskin song in Tilgate Wood, while James Havers noted a small flock of 13 Brambling near Colgate in St Leonard's Forest to the east of Horsham today.

On the coast I see that there were still 6 Purple Sandpipers at Bembridge Foreland and that 6 Bonxies flew past St Catherine's Point, while the two Ospreys which arrived in Chichester Harbour yesterday were still there today +++

Another winter bird still present inland was a Common Sandpiper at Pulborough Brooks - Pete Hughes notes the sighting of one there on Apr 1 in conjunction with news of the arrival of Blackcaps on Apr 2 and Little Ringed Plovers on Apr 5, but this would be an early date for migrant Common Sandpiper and one was reported at Pulborough on Feb 17 and was probably wintering somewhere in the area. +++

An interesting arrival at Pulborough today was a party of 5 Little Egrets - surprisingly there has only been one report of any there this year (on Jan 13) but there has been a winter roost of up to 8 Egrets at Burton Mill Pond and possibly some disturbance there has caused them to move east along the Rother valley until it meets the Arun at Pulborough. Alternatively, in view of the Egret found dead, seemingly of starvation, at Warblington on Monday, these are birds coming to the RSPB in the hope of being fed! +++

Other news from Pulborough is that the winter wildfowl have all but vanished - only 25 Teal, 25 Wigeon and 15 Shoveler are still there with 4 pairs of Shelduck which are presumably hoping to nest there in rabbit burrows or similar holes in the ground. +++

A final item for today comes from Bob Marchant who was at Old Winchester Hill before 6:30 am and saw a Barn Owl at work near the carpark. He also saw a party of 6 Greylag Geese fly over, going west.

TUE 06 APR

Today's big news is that the drab female Bluethroat at Church Norton has acquired a mate and the pair were seen today by Peter Edmonds who writes .. 'Church Norton churchyard at about 4.00 pm at the top of a tall tree above the gate two Bluethroats seemingly displaying - the male singing intermittently. It was impossible to see colours as they were in silhouette against the sky but the characteristic drooping wings and flicking tail were clearly visible. I watched them for about five minutes before they flew off.' +++

Peter also took a look at the Sidlesham Ferry pool where a single baby Coot (no doubt giving a cartoon impression of a mini-vulture) had just hatched out. One Spotshank was still present with 4 Avocet (the group of five that were seen by a good many people seem to have only stayed from Mar 28 to 30, since when there has only been one sighting of two birds on Apr 2).

Today seems to have brought a major influx of Swallows with 70+ reported to be at Rye Harbour. Before last Sunday (Apr 4), when Ian Pibworth saw 16 at the Testwood Lakes, the biggest number seen at any one site was 6, and the great majority of sightings were of ones and twos. +++

Also today at the Chichester Lakes Richard Prior reckoned that 80 Sand Martins were present, but that is not so impressive as there has already been an estimated 50 there on Mar 22 and 40 on Mar 28 (while there was a flock of 200 at the Testwood Lakes on Mar 21 with two subsequent counts of 120 and 150 there) +++

Rye Harbour also had a Short-eared Owl today.

A great sight on the Isle of Wight today was a flock of 35 Golden Plover at Newtown Harbour in their summer plumage. Also at Newtown was a 'small' flock of 21 Med Gulls (intending to nest?) and another of 12 Brent (intending to stay the summer?). These were seen by Derek Hale who then went to Ryde and found 82 Sanderling still present. +++

Across the Solent today's most newsworthy sighting was of Lee Evans at the Gosport Cockle Pond, ageing the Icleand Gull that was still there.

MON 05 APR

A female Bluethroat arrived on the shore of Pagham Harbour yesterday and was still there today when it was no doubt seen by many more than Jeff Goodridge and Daryl Short who were good enough to tell me of it though I had seen Tony Wilson's brief note on the SOS website yesterday. It would seem that this traditionally skulking nettle creeper allowed people more and better views than usual. I have no info on who discovered the bird nor if she has any blue on her throat but I gather she was frequenting the scrubby trees along the shore where the board walk runs past the church and hide. Luckily the tide was nowhere near spring tide height or some people might have got even wetter than most of them did from the rain! +++

Most Bluethroats are seen in the autumn and this spring sighting is rather unusual - staying overnight is also, I think, unusual and it will be very surprising if the bird stays for any length of time.

The first Reed Warblers arrived today with at least one in the Brading marshes area on the Isle of Wight and two heard singing at Hook (Warsash) by Andy Collins (Richard Carpenter also heard or saw one at Hook). +++

The first definite Yellow Wagtail seems to have been the one heard by Andrew Grace on Mar 31, and two more have been seen since. Matthew Silk saw one at Wivelsfield Green (just south of Haywards Heath) yesterday and Peter Edmonds had another today at Wisborough Green on the west side of the Arun north of Pulborough. +++

More common migrants that may soon be settling around human habitations are House Martins, and signs of this may be seen in a report of eight at Bishopstoke across the Itchen from Eastleigh, and one at Alresford. Maybe these birds were just passing through, but yesterday Stephen Harwood at Catherington had a much more promising sign of Swallows returning their nest sites when one appeared in his garden.

Probably just vagrants, though they could be arriving here to nest, were two Black Redstarts seen by John Shillitoe at Sandy Point on Hayling Island today. Maybe one of these headed

north to the mainland where it was seen by Tony Gutteridge during our Common Bird Census visit to the Warblington farm fields. Other than a few singing Chiffchaff and one male Blackcap no other summer visitors were seen at Warblington though I did spend some time searching the ground around the feet of the cattle in one shore field after a briefly heard squeak reminded me of the remote possibility of Yellow Wagtail (which I'm pretty sure this bird was not as I remember hearing some last spring when I was not expecting them and instantly recognizing the sound) +++

Many of the birds at Warblington were still winter left-overs, especially two Brent Geese all by themselves on the shore, almost certainly not intending to migrate but to spend the summer here. 50 Stock Doves were still in one field and 15 Linnet is another. I only saw four Egrets but Tony Gutteridge found a group of around twenty plus one dead corpse - he said there was virtually no flesh on its bones, making us wonder how well fed the other Egrets are. +++

Other winter birds still on farmland in the Meon valley were seen by Will Walmsley in the Long Road fields at Soberton today - 300 Common Gulls, 150 Stock Doves and 5 Lesser Blackbacks (these last might of course have just arrived to nest on local rooftops, though I doubt it!) +++

One other winter gull that is still with us is the second winter Iceland Gull which re-appeared on the Gosport scene recently (see these notes for Apr 1) and which was seen again today by Peter Raby at the Gosport Cockle Pond (where there was no sign of the oiled Ring-bill). +++

In the New Forest Jeff Goodridge had a ring tail Hen Harrier, possibly the female of a Hen Harrier pair seen in the same area by Derek Wilson last Saturday. Does anyone know about the sexual relationships of large raptors? I get the impression that they have long-term relationships but do not show it by e.g. hunting together. Do pairs stay together through the winter in the sense of sharing a common night roost and making their migratory journeys together?

SUN 04 APR

One migrant whose arrival is keenly awaited by a number of birders living in the Havant area is Little Tern - will there be any room for them at the Hayling Oysterbeds when they do arrive? and what breeding success will they have this year?. We shouldn't have to wait long now as today Daryl Short saw the first two fishing in the Keyhaven area. +++

Another migrant whose arrival is eagerly awaited each year by nearly all birders is the Nightingale, and today Kris Gillam tells us that one arrived at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight yesterday and was 'observed' there by him today. I saw observed as he does not say if he heard or saw it, though my guess is that if it was singing he would have said so. +++

Another good bird seen on the Isle of Wight today was a Hoopoe which turned up at Wroxall near Ventnor yesterday and was still around Wroxall Manor Farm today. This could well be the same bird that was first detected at the Sandown Golf Course on Mar 20 and may have wandered first to Hill Head on the Hampshire mainland, then back to Newtown Harbour before trying Wroxall, managing to hide away for several days between each stage appearance. +++

I have already mentioned (in Monday's notes above) the Yellow Wagtail which Matthew Silk saw today near his Wivelsfield Green home between Brighton and Haywards Heath but I did not say that he also had three Tree Pipits passing over his home village, nor that today Chris Bentley saw single Sedge Warblers at two different places in the Rye Harbour reserve +++

Now much more widespread than the migrant arrivals mentioned so far are Willow Warblers. Today Simon Woolley heard two singing at Eyeworth near Fritham in the New Forest, Mark Litjens had one at Titchfield Haven, Ian Pibworth had another single at the Testwood Lakes and Derek Hale had one in the Brading area of the IoW. Yesterday 4 Willow Warblers were singing at Woolmer Pond, heard by Jeff Goodridge, and at least one more was heard singing at Waltham Brooks (south of Pulborough) by Bernie Forbes +++

Simon does not mention Common Redstarts back at Eyeworth, but Keith Vokes today found

five at Matley Wood to the south east of Lyndhurst. +++

Keith Vokes also saw two Ospreys today just west of Southampton Water. Heading west from the Hythe area this morning he had a good view of an Osprey, complete with large fish in its talons. perched on a telegraph post beside the minor road from the Applemore roundabout to Beaulieu Road station, and at the end of the day what was presumably a second Osprey flew over his house at Marchwood. Two more Ospreys were in Chichester Harbour today, seen by Barry Collins.

Going back to winter birds it would seem that a fresh wave of both Fieldfare and Brambling have been moving through over this weekend. As well as the Redstarts which Keith Vokes found in Matley Wood there were 30 Fieldfare in that area, while Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes had 250 of them (with just 21 Redwing) and Trevor Carpenter had more than 110 on Wheely Down at the north end of the Meon Valley - another 10 were seen at Titchfield Haven by Mark Litjens (Mark Rolfe had 19 there yesterday). +++

There were no equivalent large flocks of Brambling but nevertheless John Shillitoe was impressed when the two Brambling which had only recently moved into his Meon valley garden increased to 13 today. This is probably not just a chance movement of birds from the local woods into his garden as Robin Turner at Grayshott on the Surrey border north east of Petersfield suddenly found a total of 12 Brambling in his and the adjoining garden. +++

One final winter bird deserving a mention, if only because it may be the last of the season, was a single Purple Sandpiper seen today by Derek Hale in the Bembridge Foreland area of the Isle of Wight.

SAT 03 APR

I have already mentioned in Sunday's notes above that a Nightingale was found at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight today, and that a Hoopoe was in the Wroxall area near Ventnor, but I haven't mentioned today's most tantalising sighting, made by Ian Calderwood from the shore of Stokes Bay at Gosport - this was a ringtail Harrier which could have been a Hen Harrier but could also have been a Montagu's. We know Hen Harriers are still with us (Derek Wilson had a pair in the New Forest today), but no one has had a definite Montagu's yet and that is not surprising as the earliest ever date for this species in Hampshire is 8 Apr back in 1979 (and they do not normally arrive until May). +++

Derek Wilson heard the first Snipe drumming in the New Forest today. We here in the Havant area are unlikely to hear Snipe on territory but we still have a chance of hearing the lovely song of Woodlark, and they may even be extending their foothold in the country north of Havant and south of the Downs. A couple of days ago I was told that one had been heard at a site north of the source of the River Ems, and today I see that they have been heard at two other sites north of the Stansted Forest (and in past years they may have bred within the Stansted estate). These three sites seem to have a total of at least 8 singing males between them. Interestingly these sites are not the typical 'woodand edge in heathland sites' but are more commonly found farmland habitats - mainly set aside of various degrees. +++

Another now rare species that is still managing to maintain a foothold not too far from Havant is Willow Tit. Bernie Forbes gives me hope of hearing one again when he confirms that he found two pairs today in conifer plantations along the South Downs ridge north of Chichester.

Another rare sight in our area was enjoyed today by Simon Wright in the form of a Slavonian Grebe in its 'Horned Grebe' summer plumage on the water of Hayling Bay. +++

Much less uncommon, but always a delight to see, are baby Mallard, and I see that the Havant Wildlife Group found a family of seven tiny ducklings (and another family hiding under their mother's wings) when they were by the River Hamble at the Warshash Bunny Meadows. +++

Other miscellaneous items for today are the sighting of another Manx Shearwater flying past St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight and, below the West High Down near the Needles,

several Cormorants carrying nest material (seaweed?) to cliff ledges. (With many Cormorants now nesting inland, some on cliffs, others in trees, I wonder what nest materials they choose?) +++

Across the Solent on the Gosport shore Ian Calderwood saw two Pale Bellied Brent heading east (presumably birds now conditioned to thinking of themselves as Dark Bellied and heading for Siberia), three House Martins flying in, and 28 Sanderling making a local movement, heading west.

Finally for today here is a quote from the SOS website written by Sarah Patton (Pagham Harbour warden, referring to her home at Kingsham by the Chichester bypass). She writes .. 'Four members of my family watched a Rook take pieces of food which had been put out in the garden (Yorkshire pudding actually!) and deliberately hide them. It would put them in small holes in the rockery or similar places, and cover them up. It was then seen retrieving and eating them on subsequent days. There were other rooks in the garden, but none of these acted in the same way.' +++

David Parker, who lives below a rookery based around Forestside church, commented .. 'the Rooks in my garden at Forestside have now learned to hang on to the seed feeder and balance there whilst taking the seed on offer.' +++

All I can add is that a few years ago I was given as a Christmas present a book about the Crow family entitled 'Bird Brains' and having a quote on its frontispiece reading .. 'If men had wings and bore black feathers few of them would be clever enough to be Crows'. Much of this book is about social co-operation among corvids, but I guess Sarah's maverick was looking after its own interest more than those of the tribe - unless of course it had been delegated to study the ways of Squirrels and was trying to figure out the advantages of having food larders before running a course on the subject for the rest of its group. If so this particular rook probably remembered that Sarah's email address was at one time 'Squirrel' and thus chose her garden as the study site at which it was most likely to get expert professional help. +++

One un-related news item from yesterday comes from Wes Attridge who saw a Short-eared Owl near Greatham Bridge (south of Pulborough) and this reminds me that there has been no further news of the Short-eared Owl which Jeff Goodridge saw at Thornham Marshes on Mar 29 - probably that was making a one day stopover as this one my well be doing. If you do go to look for it you might also like to know that Bernie Forbes had a pair of Garganey at the nearby Waltham Brooks today and they could well be the same pair that was seen there on Mar 28 (and so could stay longer...)

PLANTS

FRI 09 APR

John Goodspeed has just sent me a photo of a plant which he found today on Catherington Lith, asking for opinions on its identity. Before looking at the picture the subject line of his email made me wonder if he had come across the unusually named Abraham, Isaac, Joseph (a relative of Lungwort and Borage) which grows on the Lith, but when I looked at the picture I realised that this was something I had not seen before. +++

Before saying any more about the plant and its identity I must explain that Catherington Lith has a very strange botanical history. Before the 1940s war it was a wooded site on a steep chalk hillside, but when the Blitz hit Portsmouth and many people were made homeless or feared they would die if they stayed in the city, there was a mass exodus of people, some of whom settled here in a sort of shanty town hidden in the woods. When the war ended two or three years after these people arrived here many of them no longer had homes to return to, while others had come to love the rural setting, and many stayed on creating more permanent, but still primitive homes for themselves. Most of these tiny properties made up for lack of bricks, mortar and conveniences by having gardens which became the main focus of the settlers efforts at home-making. Quite a few of these unorthodox habitations and gardens were still occupied long after the war (I think well into the 1970s in some cases), and so it is not unexpected that strange plants are still to be found here, the more so as no property development has been permitted and, much more recently, conservation

volunteers have done a lot of work to restore the site to open woodland, allowing the light to reach the ground on which these plants grow. +++

Coming back to the identity of the pictured plant I expected it to be a garden survivor, and it appeared to be a Comfrey (certainly a member of the borage family) standing upright to an estimated height of not much more than 30 or 40 cm and having very distinctive flowers in dense cymes, coloured brick red in bud but opening to long pale yellow tubes with deeply cut calyx teeth, plus long stemmed ovate leaves. I found a good coloured illustration of the flowers in the new Fitter, Fitter and Blamey, and an uncoloured illustration of the plant's form and leaves in Stace, all pointing to *Symphytum grandiflorum* (or *ibericum*) with english name of Creeping Comfrey, and when I subsequently read the full text of John's message and saw that that name had already been proposed I decided to go along with that. +++
I see that John also found Solomon's Seal plants preparing to flower and quite a lot of Toothwort already flowering on the lith, along with a great show of Primroses and Wood Anemones.

I had a pleasant walk this morning in the Round Down area immediately south east of Harting Down, checking the habitat of the one km square in which I will be doing a BTO bird survey. Unlike Tony Gutteridge, who found the first genuine downland Cowslips already flowering on the nearby downs on Wednesday, I could only find them in tight bud but I did enjoy a lovely show of Hairy Violets on the open grass and of Wood Anemones in woodland. I also found some fairly small, but bright green leaved Strawberry Plants and could not immediately decide if they were Barren or Wild Strawberries, having forgotten the 'leaf tip test' which helps to separate them - the leaves of both plants have sharp 'teeth' all around their edges, and the test is to look at the extreme tip of the leaf to see how long the endmost tooth is in relation to those on either side of it. If this tip sticks out further than its neighbours the plant is a true Wild Strawberry in the *Fragaria* family, if the final tip does not stick out beyond the others the plant is a Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*). Backing up this test you should find the leaves of the Wild Strawberry are a shiny green and the white petals of the flowers overlap, hiding the green calyx whereas in the Barren Strawberry the leaves are duller in colour and the green teeth of the calyx show through gaps between the smaller white petals. While the flowers of the Wild Strawberry are generally more than 12mm across and those of the Barren are often less than 10mm there is a size overlap in the 10-12mm width band.

THU 08 APR

Tony Gutteridge scored a first today with Sanicle in flower near Up Marden, north of the source of the River Ems. He also found a good show of Moschatel here and some more Toothwort. +++

No one has yet to my knowledge found the lovely flowers of Yellow Archangel in wild woodland but Brian Fellows noticed open flowers on what was probably the garden escape version of this plant which can be distinguished by having white blotches on its leaves, and I too have seen this in flower around existing gardens recently.

Yesterday (Apr 7) Brian Fellows went to Sinah Common on south Hayling and found Spring Beauty out in profusion, and on Tuesday (Apr 6) he found the first fertile cones of Field Horsetail had come up in damp ground at Brook Meadow in Emsworth, along with the lovely Cuckoo Flower (or Milkmaids, etc) +++

Also yesterday Stream Water Crowfoot (*R. penicillatus*) was starting to flower in the Langbrook stream just south of the A27.

WED 07 APR

A walk from Havant to the Langstone South Moors today gave me a chance to look at the female Butterbur plants growing beside the Langbrook stream which are now at their best in the place where the so called Giant Butterbur has now entirely vanished beneath the leaves of this 'ordinary' species. On the stream bank at this point Kingcups are now flowering with one magnificent specimen reminding me of the wonderful show that we would have had in the nearby wet land had the Autoliv factory not been built on it. +++
Continuing south onto the South Moors proper I found tiny white flowers under my feet and decided they were Sea Mouse Ear, and on the bridge which leads into the small unused

field at the end of Mill Lane I found Danish Scurvygrass newly established there as well as the Whitlowgrass which I was expecting. I was also surprised to see what a good show of flowers was still on the nearby English Elms that are still alive. +++

Coming back along Mill Lane I found one Arum (Lords and Ladies) whose spathe had parted to reveal the fertile, purplish spadix (for the first time this year I saw several as yet sheathed flowers of Lords and Ladies during my walk, but only this one open for business). The other 'first of the year' was Crosswort which had a few of its tiny yellow flowers open beside the Hayling Billy trail. Further north, beside the Lymbourne stream my first Greater Stitchwort was in flower and elsewhere I saw flowers on Yellow Corydalis and what Rose calls Yellow Oxalis and Stace names as Procumbent Yellow-sorrel (both these last two are presumably just garden escapes). I also found the first flower stem arising from the leaves of Greater Plantain. +++

One favourite plant which I have not yet seen and which Richard Carpenter found as early as Mar 9 is Moschatel (the Town Hall Clock plant), and I was reminded of this today when Tony Gutteridge found it to the north of the Downs at Treyford.

TUE 06 APR

Today Richard Carpenter scored another first with the Garlic Mustard which will soon be flowering everywhere. I see that he uses a couple of its many different English names - Hedge Garlic and Jack-by-the- Hedge. As with Elder, I have seen tightly closed flowerheads on this plant, but none with open flowers yet. Richard's find was inland at Bishops Sutton on the A31 just east of Alresford - perhaps the warm water welling from the springs which feed the cressbeds in this area bring on plants earlier than elsewhere? Up on the chalk of Abbotstone Down the other side of Alresford Richard found his first Hairy Violet which started to flower on Portsdown some time ago.

Yesterday Tony Gutteridge was near Uppark House on the downs above South Harting and found his first Toothwort, and taking this in conjunction with Phil Budds recent find of an albino specimen (see notes for Apr 4) I guess this strange plant is now pushing up from the ground under many of its hosts.

MON 05 APR

Walking round the Warblington farm fields today for our third Common Bird Census visit of the season I found my first Cuckoo Flower in the wet SSSI next to the cemetery, and over by the eastern stream nearer Emsworth I found a cluster of Marsh Valerian in flower with just a couple of Kingcup plants just starting to open their flowers. +++

Another lovely sight, though on council planted roadside trees, was the yellow of Norway Maple flowers. Among other finds were male catkins on Crack Willow, more Field Madder in the fields with what I think was my first Charlock of the year. +++

Going back to the SSSI I spotted the first small leaves of Brookweed plants but could not find any flowers on the Celery Leaved Buttercups which also abound here and flower much earlier.

SUN 04 APR

In the Botley Woods today Richard Carpenter enjoyed Bluebells, Wood Anemones, Wood Spurge, Ground Ivy and Primroses but could not find any Wood Sorrel actually in flower (unlike the plants flowering in the Wendleholme/Holly Hill woods yesterday). +++

Yesterday, however, Richard did lay claim to the first Cuckoo Flower (we never heard if the flowers in Lynn Fomison's Ropley garden actually came out).

Phil Budd has just told me of an interesting find that he made on Mar 28 in the Dundridge area north of Bishops Waltham - albino Toothwort. At the best of times Toothwort looks very pallid with no hint of chlorophyll in it but it does have a pale pink flush and perhaps a hint of yellow in its flowers, and a pure white specimen would probably contrast strongly with the normal plants. It will be interesting to see if this strain survives over the years, and perhaps to know if it was using the roots of an unusual host plant as its food source. (I will refrain from commenting about weak beer at the Hampshire Bowman pub!) +++

Another plant which Phil showed me a good few years ago, growing beside a road known as Sailor's Lane leading south west from Beacon Hill in the Meon valley, and flowering at this time of year, is apparently thriving and has had an official seal of approval put on the

identity which Phil originally ascribed to it - Glory of the Snow or *Chionodoxa forbesii*. I think the point of this official identification is that there can be confusion between this plant and *Chionodoxa luciliae* (Boissier's Glory of the Snow), and perhaps with other garden cultivars. Regardless of its name this is a lovely blue and white flower and I am glad to hear it is flourishing at Sailor's Lane (an odd place for a garden throwout so perhaps planted by a Jay which had run out of Acorns!). +++

Next time anyone with an interest in these plants is near Havant Railway Station they might like to look at a nice show of this plant growing on the south side of Elmleigh Rd just west of Leigh Rd outside a small garden with no claims to horticultural fame - I enjoyed their bright colour quite recently and they might be of some botanical interest like the Rue Leaved Saxifrage which is currently starting to flower in the East Pallant carpark area here in Havant (with a blaze of Great Forget-me-not flowers, *Brunnera macrophylla*, surviving against all the odds in an old garage entrance)

SAT 03 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group met at Warsash today and walked up the Hamble through the Bunny Meadows area and into the Wendleholme/Holly Hill woodland where Gwynne Johnson tells me they found both the first Wood Sorrel and Wild Strawberry flowers of the year. I haven't visited the Holly Hill park for some years but Gwynne tells me that they found Snakeshead Fritillary planted there already having flowers in tight bud. Several trees were newly in flower with Gean, or Wild Cherry, taking pride of place. Hornbeam catkins were at last definitely open and the feathery flowers of some Ash trees could be seen. I suspect the flowers that were noticed were the large fuzzy female flowers, the male flowers do not open into such a large tangled filligree of purple strands, but it is difficult to tell what might have been seen as Alan Mitchell's section on the flowers and fruit of this tree starts with the phrase "Total sexual confusion, ome trees all male, some all female" and goes on to say that any combination can be found - any one particular branch can be male one year and female the next! +++

Although not seen here Gwynne told me that she has already seen Larch roses elsewhere and it is not too late to look for this lovely rose red tufts among the green of freshly opening Larch leaves.

INSECTS

FRI 09 APR

Today brought two more reports of Orange Tips following Gwynne Johnson's first of the year at Soberton on Mar 31 (see my notes for Apr 1). Normally it is not until some time after the male Orange Tips appear on the scene that people start to see the females but perhaps this year is different as Gwynne's was a female and so was one of the three which Tom Muckley saw today in the churchyard at West Liss where their larval foodplant, Cuckoo Flower, was present. Yet another female was probably seen by the River Itchen at Eastleigh today by Stephen Harvey (who indicates some degree of uncertainty about the identity of his sighting by placing a question mark in front of the entry in his list. +++

At Liss Tom also saw Small White, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell and at Eastleigh Stephen had two Brimstones, a Small Tortoiseshell and what were probably two Peacocks.

THU 08 APR

In his news bulletin from Farlington Marshes today Bob Chapman reminds us that a couple of years ago he had unusually early sightings of Large Red Damselflies in March but had not seen any yet this year - nevertheless it's worth keeping an eye out if you have a sun warmed garden pond ...

In my most recent entry for Apr 4 I reported a probable sighting of Holly Blues flying in a Fareham garden on Mar 31, and today the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website

carries news of a definite sighting of one at Ryde on the Isle of Wight on Apr 1, seen by Ian Pratt, while the HWT website carries news of an Orange Underwing moth seen at Pamber Forest on Mar 31, coinciding with Cliff Oakley's sighting of 8 on that day (see my notes for Mar 31)

SUN 04 APR

The recent great outburst of butterfly sightings seems to have died down a little and today, when Andrew Brookes made his first visit of the season to the Huntbourn Woods west of Denmead, he only found two Peacocks and one Comma. +++

Richard Carpenter, in the Botley Woods today (normally a good butterfly place), only managed one Red Admiral - he did however list around 20 Bee-flies, a similar number of Drone Flies, 15 Red-tailed Bumblebees and a Greenbottle (flies of all sorts seem to have survived the winter in unusual numbers this year - maybe the rain forecast for the coming summer will prevent them reaching plague numbers!)

Best news reaching me today (though not definite) comes via Andrew Brookes who tells me that a friend of his living in Fareham claims to have seen 'two blue butterflies' in her garden on Mar 31. Certainly Holly Blues should be out by the end of March and a sheltered garden is a likely spot - anyone else seen them yet?

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 09 APR

Although I had been under the impression that the upper reaches of the River Itchen were one of the surest places to see Water Voles in recent years it may well be that the success of a campaign to trap Mink which had taken up residence in the lower reaches of the river has brought about a further increase in the numbers of these (loved) animals at the expense of the loss of the (hated) Mink. +++

Back on Feb 15 Simon Woolley told us that Water Voles had re-emerged from their winter rest, and he had on that day seen four of them where the river passes Winchester (one of the Voles was suprisingly up a tree at least a foot of the ground). +++

Today Dave Unsworth, not a frequent visitor to this part of the river although he lives downstream at Bishopstoke, enjoyed his first sight of one of these Voles in more than ten years, and just before reading Dave's news I had seen a news item in the Wildlife Trust's Natural World magazine describing how the Game Conservancy had designed a floating raft to act as a trap to catch Mink. The news item goes on to say that these traps had been used experimentally on the Itchen and the trial resulted in catching 'every breeding female Mink on a nine mile stretch of the river'. The implication is that this system can possibly rid us of the menace of the Mink inflicted on us by the stupid activities of the Animal Liberation people who have raided a number of Mink farms and released the animals. If any one wants to follow this up we are told that more details of the raft traps can be found on the Game Conservancy website (www.gct.ork.uk) +++

While on this subject I see that Brian Fellows is slightly concerned about a lack of Water Vole sightings at Emsworth in the past few days but there was a good show of them when the voles came out of winter quarters and I have no reason to suppose that the voles have suffered any serious setback at Emsworth (they probably forgot to alter their clocks when we switched to summer time and are now appearing before we are up or after we have gone home!)

THU 08 APR

The HWT website today carries news of the first sightings of Great Crested Newts for the year, seen at the Swanwick Nature reserve near the Hamble just above the M27.

SAT 03 APR

Very little to report today but Tony Wilson tells me that yesterday he found just one Common Lizard in the Benfield Valley area of the Downs near the A27 where it runs past Hove. Back on 6 July 2002 he also found just one Comon Lizard in this area, but when he turned his attention to looking for them (moving carefully so that he could see them before they saw or felt his presence through the ground) he discovered 89 of them in a half mile stretch).

Reflecting on the fact that we normally overlook the presence of large numbers of these reptiles he attributed his luck in seeing such a large number partly to his fieldcraft but more to the fact that lots of them come out to 'recharge their batteries' by sunbathing when the sun re-appears after periods of cloud and rain. When there is plenty of sunshine you are far less likely to see them. +++

Andy Horton's recent count of 50 Common Lizards on the walls of Shoreham Fort (on Mar 30) probably reflects the extra need for battery re-charging after the winter.

Another news item which I noticed today comes from Simon Ingram at Eastleigh where Mar 29 brought the first Slow-worms of the year to his attention. These may, like the Lizards (which they are) have just emerged from a garden compost heap or similar wintering place, and have been stocking up on sun warmth, unlike the dead specimen which Steve Keen saw on Mar 13, possibly the victim of some over enthusiastic gardener who felt the need to dig in his compost or otherwise tidy up his garden before the Slow Worms were awake enough to take evasive action. (On the other hand there will be those who feel that the poor creature was a victim of some chance arrangement of the stars occurring on an inauspicious date - but do Slow Worms use the same calendar that we do?)

One more report of Boxing Hares comes from Phil Budd who, on Mar 28, saw a Jill resisting the advances of an amorous Jack near the Corhampton Golf Course on the ridge north of Bishops Waltham.

WEEK 14 MAR 29 - APR 4

BIRDS

FRI 02 APR

The seawatching season seems to have started in earnest on Mar 31 in Sussex and on Mar 29 on the Isle of Wight, and by now it is impossible for me to do more than comment on the more unusual reports, and one such item is a note of 17 Whimbrel passing Seaford this morning which is the first real indication that Whimbrel passage is under way. Admittedly Keith Hackett, the lucky chap able to seawatch from his bed in a Bexhill seafront home, did see one Whimbrel go past on Mar 31 but that could have been a wintering bird leaving some local site, and I share Bob Chapman's view that the single Whimbrel seen by Martin Gillingham at Farlington Marshes yesterday is more likely to have been a bird wintering there than a new migrant, even though I have not seen a definite report of a wintering bird in Langstone Harbour since Jan 1 (for one thing migrants are more likely to be seen in small groups rather than as single birds). +++

Maybe the Spoonbill which made a one day stand at Titchfield Haven on Mar 7 has been exploring the Midlands and has decided that it's better off down here as today it flew into the reserve from the north. (Of course there is no way of telling if this is the same bird but if it is it may well not stay at the Haven this time). More conventional visitors there today were 4 Willow Warblers and 5 Swallows, and still present were at least 54 Wigeon and 70 Teal. A more casual caller was an adult Little Gull. +++

Other seabird news comes from Glyn Horacek-Davis who noted the return of an interesting pair that bred on Southampton centre rooftops last summer - a Lesser Blackback paired with a Yellow Legged Gull. Great Blackbacks also bred on the rooves there last year and one or more pairs are now back. +++

Glyn also had a single Swallow over Southampton, as did John Shillitoe in the Meon valley (where a couple of Brambling are still present, unlike the Siskin and Redpolls which seemed to make a general exodus from Hampshire gardens on Mar 30)

THU 01 APR

Another unexpected seawatch sighting was made by Gary Calderwood in the Gilkicker area at Stokes Bay (Gosport). This was of the second winter Iceland Gull which appears to have been wandering in our area from Dec 17 to Mar 11, being regularly seen in and around Gosport from Jan 31 to Mar 6 but often wandering to Titchfield Haven and initially seen on the Isle of Wight on Dec 17 and Jan 24. Gary saw it today flying from the lakes in the golf course area behind Fort Gilkicker going east towards Haslar (and maybe on in that direction to Haslar Creek and the Cockle Pond? We await any news from Peter Raby)

Today saw the latest news bulletin from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes in which he says .. 'Many species of birds are nesting now with about 25 Lapwings on territory and many sitting on eggs out on the fields. Cetti's warblers are very much in evidence at the moment with at least 14 singing males on the reserve, I do not think they will all be able to stay and breed unless some use very sub-optimal habitat.' In his last bulletin, which I reported on Mar 25, he estimated that there were 20 pairs of Lapwing on the Marshes which seemed to show that the species was holding its own there (in contrast to its virtual extinction on most Hampshire farmland), so it is good to see that Bob has now nudged his estimate up by some 5 pairs. The highspot of the week at the Marshes was a quick stopover by a pair of Garganey on Mar 26 (a couple of days before Russell Wynn saw a pair at the Lymington Marshes) and thus is Hampshire's first for the year. +++

Just across the harbour from Farlington Marshes Brian Fellows was at Budds Farm today and noted two pairs of Shelduck back on territory and displaying. Last year two pairs attempted to breed there and two well grown young were present in July. Also on the pools today a Swan was sitting on her regular nest - hopefully she will do better than last year when she was not seen after Apr 13 (perhaps after having her eggs taken by foxes?) +++ On the nearby harbour shore Brian could see a good total of 448 Brent and 86 Curlew, a small part of the mass of waders and wildfowl now on the move.

In addition to the species that move en masse between summer and winter quarters there is a lot more movement in spring and autumn which is not so obvious because it does not involve whole populations and is not easily recognised by the average birder. One example can be taken from Russell Wynn's summary of his March sightings at the Lymington Marshes in which he says .. 'Long-tailed Tits are not normally thought of as migrants but a high-flying party of seven (on Mar 22nd) were clearly on the move.' Another example relevant at this time of year is Grey Wagtail, which most would regard as a sedentary species but of which quite a few are seen by sea watchers at this time of year, obviously on long-distance journeys. +++

We all recognize that in autumn thousands of young birds have to move out into the wide world to find their own homes and food, and when spring comes along there is another urge to move in order to find suitable breeding territory and a mate, and a species that is currently undergoing population growth will find the pressures to move in order to find the basic necessities of life force the birds into longer journeys. In addition to these basic urges habitat change can force migration of whole populations. +++

Two reasons for thinking about this subject at the moment come from observations made on either side of the Hayling Billy line here in Havant this week. One was Martin Hampton's observation of four Herons flying east over the Lymbourne spring this morning. Martin says they were .. 'clearly flying as a 'deliberate' group. I can't recall seeing a party like this before - I've only ever seen Herons in ones or twos.' The other was the observation by Tony Gutteridge, from his home on the other side of the old rail line, of three Sparrowhawks soaring together, which I mentioned in yesterday's notes. +++

With the Herons it could be that this group of four had been resting together, a common sight, and had been disturbed by something that caused them to fly off together as a group, or it could be that they had had a common impulse to migrate to Scandinavia, and without fitting radio trackers there is no way of knowing where they came from or where they went. I think it is not uncommon for Herons and Egrets to commute daily across the Solent and I have read that when they are nesting Herons will make daily journeys of twenty miles or more from the nest to a favourite fishing site, so I think we need to be careful in distinguishing between normal daily journeys with the birds returning to the same base each night and purposeful long distance migration with no return to base.

At the IBM Lake today Kevin Stouse watched the now resident pair of Great Crested Grebe making their neck dipping display, and he also saw a third grebe (perhaps one of last year's young?). +++

The two pairs of Swans that he saw yesterday were down to one pair today (and one of those

two birds flew off) so they have clearly not settled to nesting yet. A more interesting potential nester was a Great Blackback Gull showing an interest in the flat top (circular and a good couple of metres across) of the metal cover above the lights that illuminate the car parks from the top of metal poles that seem to be more than 20 metres high. In the winter Cormorants sometimes perch up there and once a pair of Kestrels seemed to be nesting on the framework of the lamps themselves, hidden below the metal cover. +++
Another unusual sighting was of a Little Egret which remained undisturbed in one of the site drainage ditches within five metres of the path on which people pass on their way from the buildings to the Cosham shops.

Going back to Mar 30 Tony Gutteridge was at Aldsworth Pond, north of Emsworth, and spotted a distant baby Coot on the water. He mentioned this to another birder who was there and it turned out that this person was also watching five baby Coots at another nest. +++

Perhaps more interesting news for Mar 30 comes from an internet exchange of comments on the departure of wintering Siskin and Redpoll from Hampshire. The exchange was started by Derkek Allnut who wrote .. 'It would appear that the 50+ siskins that have been in my West Wellow garden recently all departed Tuesday night (Mar 30)' .. to which David Thelwell added .. 'Also on Tuesday (30/3), at nearby Half Moon Common there were some 50 Siskins and 20 Redpolls in several flocks. They were very restless and noisy in the pines, moving off north and appeared to be on migration.' and Peter Smith in the Lymington area also said that the small group of Siskin in his garden also left on the same night. +++

March 29 brought news from Brighton that the Peregrines in the nest box on Sussex Heights tower block had laid their fourth egg +++

On March 28 another flock of Golden Plover were seen on a ploughed field near Titchfield village, and at the Lymington Marshes Russell Wynn had a pair of Garganey, the second for Hampshire after a pair at Farlington Marshes on Mar 26. Mar 28 was also the date for the first pair to be seen together in Sussex at Pulborough Brooks but there had been four earlier sightings of single drakes in Sussex from Mar 18. March 27 brought Russell Wynn a 'cracking' Lapland Bunting at Lymington - quite likely it was the same bird that had been vaguely reported from the Newtown Harbour area of the Isle of Wight on or after Mar 22. +++

I have already mentioned Bob Chapman's sighting of a Garganey pair on Mar 26, but not Russell Wynn's Caspian Gull at Lymington on Mar 21 (possibly the same bird that had been seen at the Lynbottom rubbish tip on the Isle of Wight on Mar 6 and previously on Jan 15 after which it may have wandered down the Sussex coast to appear at Bexhill and Roedean on Jan 19 and Feb 22 respectively - all these sightings were of a first winter bird) +++

Finally for today I see that Lawrence Holloway was in Chichester on Mar 18 and watched a noisy scene as the male Peregrine flew around the cathedral carrying prey with the female also present. This was one day earlier than the observation of a food pass and mating which we reported earlier.

WED 31 MAR

Rough-legged Buzzards are pretty uncommon in Hampshire, and when they do get reported there is often some doubt as to whether they are not Common Buzzards with unusually pale plumage or hovering habits so it is good to know we have all just missed one moving through the county today on its journey back to its northern breeding grounds. The bird concerned was seen at 13:30 today flying east near Braishfield (east of Romsey) and the id should be good as the person who saw it was Dave Billett (to anyone not familiar with that name Dave was one of the founder members of the famous Portsmouth Group which established modern birding and conservation in Hampshire, and was for many years warden of Farlington Marshes). +++

To indicate the scarcity of this species in Hampshire the two most recent records before this were of one in the Beaulieu River area on 5 Apr 2002 and of one over Fleet Pond on 5 Oct 1998. I did not hear of any Hampshire reports during 2003 but to illustrate the difficulty of correctly identifying this species I see that one seen several times in the Ashley Warren

area north east of Whitchurch in the early months of 2002 was eventually rejected as being an unusually pale Common Buzzard, while neither the one reported to be in the Avon Causeway area of the Avon Valley on 25 Mar 2002 nor the pager report of one in the New Forest on 2 Nov 2002 made it into the official report, presumably for lack of proper evidence.

At the IBM Lake Kevin Stouse found that both pairs of Swan were back and will presumably be starting to make up for lost time over nest building. The Langstone Mill Pond bird has been sitting for the best part of a week now and I guess the Emsworth Peter Pond pen has also laid her eggs by now but the pair at the Budds Farm Pools had only just started nest building when Martin Hampton was there yesterday, and the Aldsworth Pond pair had apparently deserted their nest when Brian Fellows was there today (he had seen a bird sitting on a nest there as early as Mar 5). +++

Also on the IBM Lake were the pair of Great Crested Grebe with two Cormorant and two Common Gulls still present. Around the site were three Blackcaps (a lone male singing and a silent pair together) which were probably migrants, and Kevin was very pleased to hear a Skylark singing over the west end of the site where several pairs used to nest in the past.

Paul Heyes had a pleasing garden tick today when a Red Kite flew over his Clanfield house close to the A3 (just north of the end of the A3M), and Tony Gutteridge had an unusual garden sighting when three Sparrowhawks flew over his Havant garden with no apparent conflict between them (could they have been a group of last year's young still sticking together as siblings, not yet feeling the need to breed?). I myself had a fairly dramatic raptor interaction at Stansted Forest over the approach road to the House (not the visitors route past the garden centre). A pair of Kestrel here were very excited and calling continually all the while I was in the area, but when two Buzzards drifted over in close formation at tree top height both Kestrels shot up to intercept them with Spitfire like speed and manoeuvrability, screaming abuse at the intruders. Tony Gutteridge also recently saw much excitement shown by the Kestrel pair at Warblington - in particular he noted the male flying fairly low with rapidly fluttering wings and a zig-zag course over a field near the nest site to which the female was flying - perhaps to lay her first egg?

Anyone who has walked around Farlington Marshes on a winter's day when the tide is up will probably have seen a huddle of perhaps twenty Herons standing patiently waiting for the tide to turn so that they can resume fishing, and there are many other places where a similar 'siege' of Herons can be seen sheltering from wind or tide but today Richard Carpenter was surprised to see 18 Herons 'laying siege' to Titchfield Haven as he walked up the Canal Path to Titchfield. I too am surprised that this is not a common sight in the area - perhaps the birds have been evicted from their regular resting place by human activity? +++

A couple of other unusual sights today were the appearance of a Yellow-legged Gull off the Royal Oak pub at Langstone, seen by John Chapman, and of several Great Blackback gulls in the Itchen valley around Eastleigh - Stephen Harvey saw two over Brambridge today and another over his Chandlers Ford house (the latter actually seen on Apr 1). I wonder if this means that these heavyweights are intending to join the nesting colony of Herring and Lesser Blackback gulls on the rooves of the Chickenhall Lane industrial estate? +++

Going back to John Chapman's Langstone sightings I see that he, like myself, has not seen the pair of Kingfishers around the pond or mill recently (last known sighting was on Mar 22 when one bird was still fishing the mill stream outflow) but he has heard song indicating that the Cetti's Warblers which bred successfully hereabouts last year may do so again +++

Another snippet of good news comes from Brian Fellows who saw two Ringed Plover on the Little Tern nest island in the Hayling Oysterbeds today to show that they have not been frightened off by all the gulls which have decided to nest there this year.

TUE 30 MAR

Much against my lack of liking for Coots I must record that the first of their young have today left two nests on Aldsworth Pond to the north of Emsworth. Tony Gutteridge and another birder whom he did not know met at the pond view point today and both saw young Coot

emerging from nests but when they compared notes it became clear that they were both looking at different nests, one of which had produced five young and the other, more distant, nest had at least one. +++

Another first for the year was a Tree Pipit seen at Newhaven on the East Sussex shore. This is the first definite claim of one arriving on the south coast but yesterday (Mar 29) Malcolm Dixon and Robin Turner saw a Pipit which they could not identify at Sandy Point on Hayling. The message about this said .. 'we saw what we thought initially was a Meadow Pipit but it appeared to have longer legs and bill and a generally more streamlined appearance.' Later they said .. 'We considered but dismissed Tree Pipit. This bird seemed considerably larger with a longer bill and legs.'

Not far from Sandy Point, at the north end of the Thorney Channel which runs down the east side of Thorney Island, but on the Chidham side of the channel, Simon Woolfries saw a bird which has probably been in the Langstone/Chichester Harbour complex since at least Dec 18 but has only been reported on four occasions prior to today's sighting. This is the hybrid Ruddy Shelduck which Keith Betton found at the Kench on Dec 18 and which has since been seen in Langstone Harbour on Jan 6 and 20 (both at the Kench) and 'somewhere in Langstone Harbour on some date before Feb 19' (you will recognize the typical precision of one of Bob Chapman's reports!). The most distinctive difference between this individual and a true Ruddy Shelduck is that this hybrid has a dark top to its head. running up from the base of the bill, over the crown and down the nape to top of the neck - it also has a pink base to its bill - this description is taken from the picture which Alistair Martin sent me after seeing the bird at the Kench on Jan 6, and this ties in with Simon's remark that it differed from a normal Ruddy Shelduck in having a 'dark head and neck' though he thought this might be temporary discoloration caused by feeding in the wet mud.

Both Kevin Stouse and Martin Hampton enjoyed long walks around the Havant area today and both commented on high numbers of Black-tailed Godwit in the Langstone part of Chichester Harbour - Martin counted 84 while Kevin, starting from Warblington, reckoned there were more than 106 along with more than 30 Bar-tails. Kevin also saw 4 Knot and 15 Merganser but only 6 Shelduck though there were plenty of Brent and Teal still around. +++

From Langstone Kevin went to the Oysterbeds where he upped the Ringed Plover score to three and also saw three Red-legged Partridge in the field landward of the coastal path and just north of the Stoke Common woodland - these may well be offspring of the pair which nested in other fields south of Stoke village last year and which are I think back there this spring. +++

After a pint at the Royal Oak on the way home Kevin walked past the Wade Court Egret Roost as the birds were in their pre-roost assembly in the fields and counted at least 26 without hanging around to get a total. +++

Martin Hampton's walk took him to the Budds Farm Pools after seeing 8 Stock Dove in the Wade Court fields and a Bullfinch in the scrub along the Langbrook stream near the Langstone West Mill. At the pools there were still 35 Shoveler but only 1 Pochard with the Tufties, Teal, etc, however he did see the Swan pair nest building and saw at least one pair of Canada Geese looking territorial. +++

From the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea James Wheeldon tells me that today brought the first singing Blackcaps to the playing fields, where he has seen none earlier in the year and so reckons these are definitely newly arrived migrants. The arrival of our summer Blackcaps was noticed at Farlington Marshes by Jason Crook when the first two of the year turned up there yesterday along with 4 Willow Warblers, 21 Wheatear and a transient White Wagtail. At the mouth of Langstone Harbour Martin Gillingham saw a summer plumage Sandwich Tern - probably a migrant, but not yet (it seems) wanting to cease its journeying and so not coming into the harbour. +++

Two migrant arrivals in Sussex were a Willow Warbler heard singing at Stanmer (adjacent to the University of Sussex site at Brighton) and a Merlin (seen to fly in off the sea at Selsey Bill by Simon Woolley), while among the winter visitors now leaving us were some 40 Fieldfare seen at Brockwood (north west of West Meon) by Richard Carpenter who also

found 5 Bramblings near Old Winchester Hill further down the Meon Valley. Further evidence of Brambling on the move north, but not yet making a long distance journey in a large flock, comes from Geoff Rogers at Harestock on the northern fringe of Winchester - yesterday at the well stocked bird feeders in his garden he saw four female Brambling in one group and three different males (distinguishable by the varying amounts of black on their heads) - none of these birds had been seen there before

Other news for yesterday (Mar 29) comes from Peter Raby in Gosport. His last reported sighting of the Ring-billed Gull, which had been a daily sight at the Gosport Cockle Pond early in the year, was on Mar 12 and he assumed it had left the area, but today it was back with heavy oiling on its head, neck and mantle. I assume it can still fly and so will be impossible to catch for cleaning (at least without some form of cannon net) and we can but hope that it does not ingest so much oil when trying to clean its plumage that it poisons itself, but I am pretty sure that if anyone can get it to Brent Lodge it could be saved. +++

Much better news came from Jeff Goodridge who had been to Sidlesham (five Avocet still on the Ferry Pool) and to Chichester Lakes (four Little Gulls - two winter adults and two first winters - the highest count there so far). His best sighting was perhaps on the way home to Waterlooville when he stopped off at the Thornham Marshes and found (at 5:30pm) a Short-eared Owl preening itself on a fence post near the old landing lights. +++

I have already mentioned the arrival of Blackcaps, Wheaters and Willow Warblers at Farlington Marshes yesterday but Jason Crook also had a good show of raptors including a male Marsh Harrier, a large female Peregrine and (sitting tight on the Islands to avoid being mistaken for prey by the larger predators) a Merlin +++

While on the subject of raptors I have had a note from Kevin Stouse which confirms my hunch that the Harris Hawk which Simon Wright saw over Northney on Hayling Island recently (see yesterday's notes) was not an escapee. Kevin tells me that last summer he met this bird with its owner on the Hayling coastal path and gathered that bird and owner are Hayling residents. +++

MON 29 MAR

Three Grebe sightings were reported yesterday - just one Red-necked flew past Brighton marina, a Black-necked in near summer plumage was seen by Mark Litjens at Park Shore (just west of the mouth of the Beaulieu River) and another was seen off the Hayling Oysterbeds by Val Lowings +++

Med Gulls could not be missed by anyone in the area of the Hayling Oysterbeds today. George Spraggs counted 46 and when I cycled down in the late morning there were at least twenty spiralling in a thermal above my head, three pairs standing possessively on what must have been nest sites on the Little Tern island in the lagoon, and others scattered around. +++

Coming back past the Oysterbeds towards lunch time I stopped briefly to chat to some birders, and while doing so they spotted a Buzzard flying north over the northern end of the the Billy Line, mobbed by a couple of Crows +++

George Spraggs walk from Langstone over the bridge to the Oysterbeds gave him a Wheatear and a male Blackcap as well as 5 singing Meadow Pipits, but his best sighting was of a pair of Egrets displaying to each other on the mud of Stoke Bay immediately south of the Oysterbeds +++

I could not see any Ringed Plover on the Little Tern island (perhaps they too will be ousted by the number of gulls claiming nest sites there this year) but there was one in the largest of the old pools. Just south of the path to the 'West Lane bends' two Great Spotted Woodpeckers flew ahead of me down the track and further down the coastal path three Yellowhammers were singing (my first song from them this year though one was heard at Titchfield Haven as early as Mar 5 and another at Brighton on Mar 16). At West Town station a Jay flew across the grass area near the coastal path gates and a Mistle Thrush got up from the grass verge of Staunton Avenue just north of Bacon Lane.

At Fleet Pond today Chris Jones heard something which I have never heard in my life - the song of a Jay. I was not even aware that Jays have anything that could be called a song but a check on my bird books turned up several references to this unusual phenomenon -

the fullest description was in the new Collins Bird Guide which says of the song that it is .. 'heard in late winter - quiet, does not carry far - odd mixture of clucking, knocking, mewing and raucous sounds' while another source writes of .. 'weak gurgling and harsh notes'. Although there will probably be further sightings of winter thrushes in April they are getting very thin on the ground now. Today's reports only mention a single Fieldfare seen at Widewater on the Sussex coast west of Shoreham, and yesterday a small flock of 20 were seen by Chris Jones at Tundry Pond to the west of Fleet. One other reminder of winter came yesterday from Ian Pibworth at Testwood Lakes where the flock of 200 Stock Doves was still present. +++

Water Pipits seem to have already left the Isle of Wight - the last to be seen at the Brading sewage works were there last Friday Mar 26 - but there were still 21 at Coombe Haven near Bexhill today and 8 or 10 at the Sidlesham sewage works yesterday.

Yesterday morning Simon Wright saw a Harris Hawk (wearing jesses) over Northney on Hayling Island. Gary Wearn probably saw the same bird over the Oysterbeds on Feb 14 and other occasional reports last year suggest to me that this is not an escaped bird making a prolonged stay in the area (surely it would be seen more frequently?) but a falconer's bird being flown and reclaimed by its owner - maybe someone on the Island or maybe someone who only visits occasionally (though maybe it is not wise to fly a hawk in a strange area?) +++

Another slightly unusual sighting in the Hayling Oysterbeds area on Saturday Mar 27 was of a Tawny Owl, seen by Rosi Woods

SUN 28 MAR

Today's headline news was the arrival of the first Ring Ouzels. One was seen somewhere on west Hayling by Andy James and Steve Hall and two more (males) were on Sullington Hill above Storrington in West Sussex, seen by Pete Hughes +++

Other arriving migrants were Willow Warblers, with seven heard singing at Sandown today, the first to follow up the single bird heard singing at Peacehaven near Brighton on Mar 22. Two other single Willow Warblers were seen on the Island today (one at Bembridge and one in the Brading Marshes area), and Hampshire had its first record with one at Fleet Pond seen by Chris Jones on Mar 29 +++

Many other passerine migrants arrived this weekend, illustrated by reports from Mar 27 of 52+ Chiffchaff at Beachy Head, and, on Mar 28, of 30 Wheatear at Farlington Marshes and 150 Sand Martins roosting at the Testwood Lakes at dusk. Those three species are now numerous all along the coast but Swallows are still newsworthy, though I have seen 19 reports of them since one arrived on the Devon coast on Feb 8. The first to reach Sussex was reported on Feb 18 and the first in Hampshire on Feb 22 with 7 Hampshire sightings before today when news arrived of 4 at Farlington Marshes and 2 at Testwood plus several at Bembridge on the Island yesterday and 2 at the Chichester lakes on Sat Mar 26.

Another first, for this year, was a family of Mallard ducklings seen on the IBM Lake on Friday Mar 26 but probably by now all serving as food in the stomachs of various predators - a Heron was eyeing them up as they appeared on the water and very few survive on this lake. +++

From the Kench on Hayling Island Simon Wright passes on news of a Long-tailed Duck which he had from a reliable source, and from Sussex come reports of a pair of Garganey seen today at the Waltham Brooks, just south of Pulborough, and of a male at the Pett Levels near Hastings yesterday - maybe the same bird which flew past Beachy Head also yesterday (Mar 27) +++

70 Eider were still off Hill Head today, and yesterday Trevor Carpenter noticed a pair of Red-crested Pochard on a small pond within the grounds of the School of Navigation alongside the Hamble River at Warsash while further up that river John Faithfull had a pair of Mandarin that were I think newcomers to that site.

While on the subject of Fulmars, and referring back to the major wreck of Fulmars in the North Sea which I wrote about on Mar 3 and 4, I hear from Kevin Stouse that one Fulmar was taken to the Brent Lodge bird hospital recently in a very weak and hungry condition, probably an outlier from that disaster. +++

I have always wondered why Brent Lodge is so named and last Wednesday when Penny Cooper (the warden of the hospital) gave a talk about Brent Lodge to the Havant group of Hampshire Wildlife Trust members, I learnt the answer. Quite a few years ago Dennis Fenter, who is the owner of the Brent Lodge property and guiding spirit of the venture, had a small wildlife rescue centre at Eartham to the north east of Chichester. In those days wildfowling was permitted at Pagham Harbour, and one day two boys in that area were confronted by a couple of Brent Geese which had been shot but were still alive. These boys managed to capture the geese and somehow carry them on their bicycles a good ten miles to Eartham, and this concern for wildlife demonstrated by the boys was the trigger for Dennis Fenter to acquire the property at Sidlesham and name it Brent Lodge - the boy's good deed being the tiny seed from which a massive and lasting project has grown.

Two Purple Sandpipers were at Southsea Castle when Val Lowings was there today, and yesterday wintering Common Sandpipers were still to be seen at Havant's Broadmarsh (one on the Hermitage Stream seen by the Havant Wildlife Group) and two were seen by John Faithfull at Curbridge on the River Hamble where there was also a Green Sandpiper and 8 Greenshank +++

Five Avocet were showing well in the Sidlesham Ferry Pool when Ian Julian went to Pagham Harbour today. Wheatears and Chiffchaff were also in the Sidlesham area, and Ian went on the the Chichester Lakes where many Sand Martins were enjoying a feast of midges.

+++

On Portsdown Hill today Trevor Carpenter found a flock of over 300 Linnet near Swivleton Lane on the north west shoulder of the hill. More widespread sightings of passerines were of Meadow Pipits whose northward journeying is now obvious everywhere. At the Testwood Lakes Ian Pibworth reckoned that more than 100 went northwest during the day, along with around 20 Goldfinch, and on Baddesley Common near Romsey Barrie Roberts estimated there were over 120 Meadow Pipits and 25 Redpoll with Goldfinch. Over the Sussex border at the West Dean Woods Philip Thompson found 8 Brambling among Chaffinches close to Staple Ash Farm, and Brambling are still appearing in several gardens (including a new addition to John Shillitoe's garden list when two appeared at his home on the edge of the West Walk Woods in the Meon Valley on Mar 29)

SAT 27 MAR

With the increasing numbers of Grey Wagtail everywhere more people have a chance of hearing their song. Unlike some cock birds which sit and sing as their main occupation in springtime Grey Wagtail are sparing in their vocal efforts but Trevor Carpenter heard one singing at Brownich Pond, just west of Titchfield Haven today. +++

A much rarer vocal effort (at least in Britain) was heard by Cliff Dean in the Pett area near Hastings today from the Shore Lark which has been a regular feature of the seawall area at Pett since Nov 16 (the small group of 3 Snow Buntings that were with it from Nov 27 were last seen on Mar 13 and seem to have left). Cliff saw the Lark today and writes .. 'I hadn't seen the Shore Lark for a couple of weeks and had never seen it fly above knee-height, but neither had I heard it so vocal. The familiar pathetic pipity calls were stronger and now linked with twiddly bits – could this be the beginnings of song? I've never heard Shore Lark singing, so look forward to my next encounter.'

An impressive sight that more of us have a chance of seeing was a flock of 133 Golden Plover seen in the Chilling area on the east Solent shore today by Trevor Carpenter - he says many of them were already in summer plumage. Earlier in a long walk from Bursledon down the Hamble and along the shore to Titchfield Trevor found 2 Knot in the Bunny Meadows area north of Warsash. The flock of around 200 Knot that was being regularly reported from Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight was last mentioned on Mar 2 (and by Mar 21 there was apparently only 1 to be seen there) and there have been no other reports of Knot anywhere since the beginning of March.

The SOS website today has news of a second Hoopoe which was seen on Mar 24 in the Bevendean district of Brighton (at the foot of Falmer Hill). I say second as I think it possible that the sightings of one at Sandown on Mar 20, one in Newtown Harbour Brickfields at an unspecified recent date, and one in a Hill Head garden across the Solent on Mar 26 could

have been all of the same bird, and I doubt it flew to Brighton and back before its Hill Head appearance.

PLANTS

SAT 03 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group met at Warsash today and walked up the Hamble through the Bunny Meadows area and into the Wendleholme/Holly Hill woodland where Gwynne Johnson tells me they found both the first Wood Sorrel and Wild Strawberry flowers of the year. I haven't visited the Holly Hill park for some years but Gwynne tells me that they found Snakeshead Fritillary planted there already having flowers in tight bud. Several trees were newly in flower with Gean, or Wild Cherry, taking pride of place. Hornbeam catkins were at last definitely open and the feathery flowers of some Ash trees could be seen. I suspect the flowers that were noticed were the large fuzzy female flowers, the male flowers do not open into such a large tangled filligree of purple strands, but it is difficult to tell what might have been seen as Alan Mitchell's section on the flowers and fruit of this tree starts with the phrase "Total sexual confusion, ome trees all male, some all female" and goes on to say that any combination can be found - any one particular branch can be male one year and female the next! +++

Although not seen here Gwynne told me that she has already seen Larch roses elsewhere and it is not too late to look for this lovely rose red tufts among the green of freshly opening Larch leaves.

THU 01 APR

Before writing these notes (on Friday 2 April) I have been out in Havant and found the first purple flowers of Honesty growing by the Homewell stream and seen a mass of Black Mustard flowering along the edge of Solent Road opposite the Tesco store (reminding me that more and more Rape in the fields around Havant is now in flower - it started to show a good week ago). I also noticed today that Common Whitlowgrass growing near Havant railway station is already setting seed.

On Apr 1 (after the midday watershed for jokes) I found the first minute white flowers opening on the inch high plants of Rue-leaved Saxifrage along the pavement edge at the foot of a wall in the East Pallant street here in Havant, and on an older wall found two new flowers on Ivy-leaved Toadflax, re-appearing after a short winter break.

WED 31 MAR

Jim Berry is the first to tell me of Wild Bluebells in flower, having seen them today in The Holt woodland lying between Rowlands Castle and Blendworth along the Horndean Road (with Havant Thicket on its other side). +++

My own finds during a walk through the Warblington fields were two fertile spikes of Giant Horsetail pushing up among the remains of last year's plants, and just two flowers open on roadside planted Hawthorns on the way home. A third find, the one which pleased me most, was of a mass of Barren Strawberry flowers along the path running north from Nore Barn to the A259 Emsworth Road where I had looked to no avail only a few days earlier. In the meantime Richard Carpenter got in with the first find yesterday! +++

Today Richard remarked on a fine show of flowering Alexanders on the Solent shore near Gilkicker Point at Gosport (to even things up with his find of the Strawberries I had seen the first flowers on this back on Mar 20 by Tipner Lake, and no doubt it can now be seen in many coastal locations)

TUE 30 MAR

As mentioned above Richard Carpenter found Barren Strawberry flowering in Brockwood (to the north west of West Meon) today, and in Emsworth Brian Fellows made a careful count of the Butterbur spikes flowering beside the Ems - last year his equivalent count was 451, this year he could only find 296 but there is no fear that the plants are under any threat - it's just one of those poor years.

MON 29 MAR

The bus turn-round island in the road outside the Ferry Inn on Hayling Island came up trumps again today with the first Early Forget-me-not (*M. ramosissima*) of the year - if all goes well

the island will soon have a mass of these tiny, heavenly blue flowers but today I could only see two plants with flowers not fully open. Last time I mentioned this roundabout island it was to point out that anyone who was not familiar with Common Whitlowgrass could not avoid finding a great mass of it covering much of the island at the moment, and today I will add to that the same remark about Mossy Stonecrop which gives a reddish base colour to the whole surface of the soil and is normally even easier to overlook than the Whitlowgrass!
+++

On the north side of Ferry Road right opposite this roundabout I saw the first flowers on Eastern Rocket, and among the grass of much of the Sinah Common area Sea Mouse-ear was flowering. +++

Back in Havant I found my first Greater Celandine in flower below the footbridge taking pedestrians high over the Langstone roundabout but under the A27 which 'flies over' the roundabout. It can be found on the south side of the sliproad bringing westbound traffic off the A27 to turn left for Hayling. Nearby I found two other plants that will soon be in flower - one was Garlic Mustard forming its flowerheads and the other was Meadow Buttercup with a flower head bearing half a dozen unopen flowerbuds about two feet off the ground. With no flowers open to see if the sepals were reflexed or not I judged the plant to be Meadow rather than Bulbous Buttercup on the shape of its deeply divided many lobed leaves but I see that I could also distinguish the two species by checking the flower stem (grooved in Bulbous, not so in Meadow). +++

Today also brought the Field Woodrush (*Luzula campestris*) into flower on my lawn and gave Richard Carpenter Greater Stitchwort and Ground Ivy at Brownwich near Titchfield Haven

SAT 27 MAR

Greater Pond Sedge (*Carex riparia*) was in flower at Titchfield Haven today, seen by Richard Carpenter, and in Havant Dove's Foot Cranesbill was out (as reported in yesterday's notes). +++

Another significant early spring flower that is worth looking for now is Cuckoo Flower (aka Ladies Smock and other names) and while I cannot say that it has been seen in flower Lynn Fomison mentions (on the Butterfly Conservation website in connection with hopes of soon seeing Orange Tip butterflies) that Ladies Smock was 'coming into flower' in her Ropley garden.

INSECTS

FRI 02 APR

The first Speckled Wood of the year was seen today by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven, which site also claimed the first Speckled Wood last year as early as Mar 6 (though the general appearance last year did not start until Mar 23). +++

Richard also noted the emergence of the first Pond Skater at Titchfield, while at Pulborough Brooks Ken Hearne noted the first mass of small mining bees gathered round the exposed earth plate in the roots of a recently fallen tree. Ken could not be sure of the species but said they looked like *Lasioglossum calceatum* which is illustrated in Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects. These insects and several similar species are technically solitary wasps but once or twice a year they do gather in large groups, attracted by patches of exposed soil in which it is easy to dig the tunnels in which they lay their eggs, placing pollen in the cells with the eggs to feed the emerging grubs before abandoning them to their fate, the adult females heading off to pursue their lonely lives until they die. +++

In his Field Guide to Insects Chinery writes that this group of species .. 'are all solitary and make their nests in the ground, usually selecting light, sandy soil. There may be many nests close together, giving the impression of communal life, but each female is working alone to excavate a small burrow with perhaps half a dozen earthen chambers ... there is no contact between parent and offspring, the female bee showing no interest in her burrow after she has made and provisioned the cells.' Most of the species emerge from the burrows (in which they were laid last year) in the early spring, mate, and immediately set about digging the holes for the next generation which may emerge in July (to repeat the process for a second generation in that year) or may not emerge until next spring if they are

not parasitised by minute insects called Stylopids that are closely related to Beetles. Today brought another small flurry of Hummingbird Hawkmoth sightings but with no clue as to whether these were insects that had hibernated here or were new migrant arrivals. Today Sue Clark saw one at Lower Froyle near Alton, Doug Robertson had one at Hambledon and Mike Collins saw one at Goodwood near Chichester. Another was seen yesterday at Milton Keynes and on Mar 31 Adrian Thomas had one feeding at Primroses in his Peacehaven garden east of Brighton. Mar 29 brought sightings in Shropshire, Essex and at Portland in Dorset where one was also seen on Mar 28.

THU 01 APR

Darrin Madgin is an experienced Sussex birder but I will leave it to those experienced in butterfly matters to judge the taste of the 'meat in the sandwich' when he says .. 'Saw my first Swallow over Burgess Hill today (Apr 1) along with a comma and clouded yellow. Over the last few days I have noted long-tailed tits nest building. One of the nests being fully completed.' So far this year I have only heard of one Clouded Yellow, and that in Cornwall, but it is not impossible that one was in mid-Sussex today, however it is also possible for people to confuse Brimstone with Clouded Yellow and as Darrin does not express any surprise at his sighting that may indicate that his heart is not yet into butterfly watching - my apologies to Darrin if I am mistaken.... +++

Another much more likely sighting is reported by Gwynne Johnson from her home at Soberton in the Meon valley where she says a female Orange Tip was in the conservatory of the house yesterday (Mar 31). Gwynne tells me she had a good look at the 'Christmas card sparkle' type decoration on the underside of the hind wing and also saw the black wing tips, but I suppose there is still a possibility of confusion with Green Veined White. My only reservation is that I usually see many male Orange Tips before I find a female, but there is always an exception to nature's rule of having expendable males on duty before allowing the much more important (to survival of the species) females to appear.

The night of March 31 brought another good crop of moths to traps and with them the first Garden Carpet of the year, recorded by Peter Hooper at Bishopstoke (Eastleigh), while Russell Wynn on the Lymington Marshes took 23 Plume Moths. There have been plenty of earlier reports of the Brown Plume Moth (*Emmelina monodactyla*) so I guess this new haul was of the White Plume moth though other species of Plume Moth do exist. On the previous day (Mar 30) I see that Lawrence Holloway at Bognor found a mating pair of Plume Moths (presumably also the white ones) in his garden +++

WED 31 MAR

Eight reports from across the south of Hampshire (from the Lymington Marshes to Waggoners Wells on the Surrey border) indicate a further mass emergence, greater than yesterday's, of hibernating butterflies. Some of those seen today will be re-appearances of ones seen yesterday but, although it may seem that every Brimstone that ever hibernated has suddenly emerged on the same day I am pretty sure this is not the case, and a remark made by Lynn Fomison bears this out. Yesterday several Peacocks were flying in her Ropley garden but she writes .. 'Interestingly the Peacock that hibernated all winter on the shed door is still there. Perhaps it is a strategy for survival that all butterflies do not emerge on the first sunny day' I suspect that the main factor in bringing them out of their winter sleep is temperature and it may well be that the temperature required to rouse the insects of one species is the same for each individual, but the ambient temperature in the many different places that the insects chose for hibernation can be very different - hidden deep in ivy on a south facing brick wall the temperature will rise rapidly in response to sunshine, but if the insect chose to spend the winter in a Victorian ice house it might never wake at all in a typical British summer! +++

My headline gives the total numbers reported as seen today, and they are 40+ Brimstone, 27 Small Tortoiseshell, 24 Comma, 5+ Peacocks, 1 Red Admiral and 1 Small White. Of these 20 Brimstone (including 3 females) were seen by Jim Berry in The Holt at Rowlands Castle (where he also estimated 20 Commas), and another 16 Brimstone were seen in the Waggoners Wells area by Cliff Oakley, who also saw 8 Orange Underwing day flying moths (associated with birch trees). At Hedge End Mark Litjens reckoned that some of the

9 Small Tortoiseshells that he saw were paired and in Hollybank Woods Brian Fellows saw two Tortoiseshells chasing each other (I stand to be corrected but I think this behaviour probably means that the two were of opposite sexes, whereas with Speckled Wood the chase is more likely to involve a male chasing off an intruding male - or does he make the same sort of attack on a female but get a different reaction?) +++

Although the numbers are impressive I note that no one has yet seen Speckled Wood, Small Copper, Holly Blue, Green-veined or Large White, nor the Orange Tip that really marks the coming of spring in the butterfly world. All these species could well appear before the end of March in a 'normal year' (whatever that is!). It seems that Red Admirals are far fewer than normal.

One non-butterfly to appear on the scene today was the fascinating Whirlygig Beetle, spotted by Richard Carpenter in the Titchfield area. I myself ticked my first Beefly, but that had already been seen yesterday.

TUE 30 MAR

Today's rollcall of newly emerged hibernating butterflies (pardon my including 1 Small White in the list!) reads 50+ Brimstone, 18 Small Tortoiseshell, 7 Peacock, 3 Comma and singles of Painted Lady (on the Isle of Wight), Red Admiral and Small White (which will of course have been newly emerged from a chrysalis and not an over-wintering imago). 20 of the Brimstones were seen by Mark Litjens in a walk from Hursley to Olivers Battery at Winchester, and perhaps the first female of the season was seen by Jim Berry in the Chilgrove area north of Chichester among six males. +++

James Wheeldon, working at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilsea in northern Portsmouth, found unspecified Shieldbugs in the foliage and also scooped the prize for first Beefly of the season - always a delight to see. +++

At Brook Meadow in Emsworth Brian Fellows found more of the Flea Beetles which inhabit that site though sharp eyed children had already seen them there on Feb 14

MON 29 MAR

Warm air today brought a few more butterflies out of hibernation - I saw a Small Tortoiseshell at the Hayling Oysterbeds in the morning and a Peacock in the Hayling Billy trail behind my house in Havant in the afternoon and Rosemary Webb told me of a Peacock in her Hayling garden while Richard Carpenter had another Small Tortoiseshell at Brownwich on the east Solent shore.

While I was cycling on Hayling in the morning it was clear that a host of freshly emerged flies were in the air - not only did I have to avoid breathing them in as I cycled along but where thermals carried the flies up into the air gulls were also spiralling up to eat them. Normally the majority of gulls that I see doing this in the Havant area are Black-headed but it is a sign of changing times that one thermal over the Hayling Oysterbeds had at least 20 Mediterranean Gulls making their cat-like mewling calls, with none of the raucous calls of Black-headed heard by me.

Warmer nights are also bringing out plenty of moths but the only newcomer to the scene which I have heard of was a Pine Beauty moth which came to Derek Mills' trap at Farnham on Friday night (Mar 26)

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 02 APR

On Mar 21 I wrote about a Seal seen well inland up the River Arun at Pulborough Brooks, wondering if it held the 'furthest inland' record for Seals in Britain. Today David Tolcher tells me of another contender for this title, but failing to win it by miles, seen in the River Hamble in the Bursledon area where it dramatically interrupted a pleasant afternoon's fishing for David's son and anyone else fishing in the area. David says the Seal was seen near the Green Dragon Bridge which (not being familiar with Bursledon) I assume to be the first bridge across the Hamble as you go upstream. If so I guess the seal was no more than 4km from the sea while the one at Pulborough must have been around 20 km inland. +++

I read in Russell Wynn's summary of his March sightings at the Lymington Marshes that he twice saw an immature Common Seal in the sea there (Mar 14 and 27), and while there is

no way of showing this was the same creature, the presence of a youngster in the Solent makes me wonder if these upstream sightings are all of young Seals exploring the world (and probably deciding that rivers are not the best place for them). +++

Going back to David's news I see that the Newts are back in his Warsash garden pond and that he has seen his first Adder out basking in a field in the Hook Park area.

Writing on Mar 30 Jim Day, Warden of the HWT Study Centre at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) says that the first Frog tadpoles are now out and that clusters of yellow eggs laid by Bullheads can be found under rocks in the Dockens Water stream that flows through the Study Centre area on its way from Fritham in the New Forest to the River Avon. +++

Another new report on the HWT website comes from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes and includes a reference to Britain's biggest Wood Louse species, the Sea Slater. This looks just like the common Woodlouse found in gardens but is much bigger - up to 25mm or 1 inch in length. It lives on the seashore, hiding by day but coming out by night to work as a beach cleaner. In some years these occur in vast numbers and I remember one newspaper headline saying that they were threatening the lives of people living in the Fareham area, being likely to erupt from Fareham Creek and overrun nearby houses and gardens. Perhaps this will be such a year as Bob comments that, while he was not surprised to find a lot of them on the Little Tern island in the Hayling Oysterbeds when preparing it for the return of the Terns, he was surprised to find one on the seawall of Farlington Marshes in the middle of the day. +++

Today's final item comes from the excellent Woodland Diary page of the Friends of Hollybank Woods website. In this Andy Brook and others describe their daily finds in this north Emsworth woodland, and on Mar 28 I see that Andy came on Fallow, Roe and Muntjac deer all in the same walk - for this and much other interest visit www.hants.org.uk/hollybank-woods

TUE 30 MAR

Jim Berry drove past the source of the River Ems (between Walderton and Soughton) to the large grass carpark at the northern foot of Bow Hill (which towers over Kingley Vale on its southern side). From here he walked east along the north edge of the woodland on Bow Hill ridge to emerge on Chilgrove Hill high above the Chichester to Petersfield road where it passes Chilgrove hamlet, and on this hill he found a big bunch of 28 Fallow Bucks which had been enjoying a peaceful morning until Jim appeared, at which point they made a leisurely retreat across an open field, leaving it with an easy jump over a metre high barbed wire fence. Deer can jump much higher than this but I don't know about their stamina should they be entered in the Grand National this weekend.

Less numerous but equally impressive sightings were of a male Stoat, half as big again as a female, seen by Richard Carpenter on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley, and one or more Adders seen at the Church Norton Severals just west of Pagham Harbour by Simon Woolley (now on his Easter hols from teaching duties at Winchester? A teacher's life is not all that bad if the pupils are of the 'better sort' and no more dangerous than Vipers) +++

Further east along the Sussex coast Andy Horton went to look for Wall Lizards at Fort Shoreham following my recent comments on their re-emergence at the site where they have survived since 1975. Andy found at least 50 Common Lizards but not knowing the precise location of the 'special wall' which they inhabit he probably did not see the Wall Lizards, and as I do not know that secret either I cannot help him. I think it is probably as well that I do not know the exact location as I would hate to broadcast it and then find that these special Lizards, whose ancestors escaped from bondage as 'pets' many years ago, should be retaken into slavery. Even worse they might be captured as food for some larger 'pet' (I recall several years ago some youngsters on Hayling Island who had some exotic carnivorous pet were seen combing the seafront grass in search of Common Lizards to keep the aforesaid pet alive)

MON 29 MAR

Good news came today from Ken Hearne concerning the Wall Lizard colony on the Shoreham seafront. In my notes for Mar 21 I lamented an apparent decline in numbers of these Lizards based on a first count of the season. Today Ken writes .. 'In view of your

recent note that the numbers of wall lizards at Shoreham may be declining I visited the site this morning. I counted 11 when children came and played by the wall. I had nearly finished searching the area so there may have been one or two more, making the total close to my count of 14 in 2002. I feel the population is stable and that low counts are probably due to less than ideal weather conditions.'

A couple of other items that have recently come to my attention are, starting with the bad news, an indication that hibernation may be going out of fashion as global warming diminishes the chill of our winters (until, that is, the Gulf Stream ceases to function!). I can remember when Grey Squirrels used to vanish from the scene for a couple of months each winter, but in recent years we are lucky if they 'stay in bed' late enough on cold mornings to allow the birds for which we put out food to get a share of it. The latest sign of this trend comes from Brent Lodge wildlife hospital where, so Kevin Stouse tells me, they have already had a female Hedgehog brought in with several of her young that had already grown a first coat of prickles, indicating that they must have been born at the start of February or even earlier. +++

Better news, at least in the sense that it does not involve a tale of woe, comes from John Goodspeed who recently found a white Fallow deer in an area where I have not heard of them before. They have for many years been regularly reported in the Stansted area and in the New Forest, but the one which John saw was by the Wallington River in a field close to the northern edge of the Southwick Woods, south of Denmead and north of Portsdown. +++

My understanding is that, as with Grey Squirrels, a small proportion of any population of Fallow are likely to have pure white coats without being albinos. What would interest me is to know if white Fallow have ever been found among the Parham House tribe which were for a couple of hundred years confined within the bounds of Parham House (just east of the River Arun at the north foot of the Downs). Inbreeding among this confined population has produced animals with an almost black coat among which a white beast would look impressive, but in recent years these animals have started to run free in the Arun valley on Amberley Wild Brooks and up to Pulborough, so the intensity of black among the population may now have diminished.

SAT 27 MAR

When the Havant Wildlife Group were taking their regular Saturday morning in the Broadmarsh-South Moors area of the Langstone Harbour shore today Brian Fellows made a very interesting find at the west end of the new footpath across the north end of the old IBM playing fields (now called the 'western meadow' in view of its new role as part of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust 'South Moor' nature reserve). +++

Brian found a number of 'nuts' which had been carefully gnawed by some mammal interested in eating the kernel of the nut, and he has given me a couple of examples to see if I can comment on his deduction that they are the work of Wood Mice +++

The creature concerned is clearly small as the hole in the nut is only 5mm across, and it is a very neat worker leaving a very smooth gnawed surface around the hole with only slight grooves made by its teeth in an otherwise smooth surface. The two books which I have on the subject of animal tracks and signs both clearly indicate that such careful carpentry must be the work of a small group of mammals comprising Wood Mouse, Yellow-necked Mouse, Water Vole and Hazel Dormouse, and in view of the fact that Wood Mice are by far the commonest they are the most likely, but the examples that Brian has given me have a remarkably smooth gnawed surface with little in the way of grooves, and this is a characteristic of the Hazel Dormouse. Further, most mice carry off their nuts to a safe eating place where a pile of nuts can be found together whereas the Dormouse nibbles its food in a tree or bush, allowing the nut to fall to the ground at the end of the meal, so the shells are likely to be found scattered, with some in open ground. +++

Brian says that the nuts were found on the open path near the Southmoor Lane end, and if that means they were close enough to have fallen from the hedgerow trees I suppose there is a faint possibility that they are the work of a Dormouse, but it is far more likely that these were the work of Wood Mice (which are also called Long-tailed Field Mice to show that they

are by no means restricted to a woodland habitat).
The most interesting thing about this find, as far as I am concerned, is that the 'nuts' concerned are almost certainly the 'plum stones' of the Cherry Plum fruit which is abundant in the hedgerow here.

WEEK 13 MAR 22 – 28 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 26 MAR

Best bird today evaded the twitchers and nature reserves, turning up at a private garden in Hill Head. This was the second Hoopoe of the year, following the one seen briefly at the Sandown and Shanklin golf course on Mar 20 (and of course it could well be the same bird). News of today's bird reached me via Brian Fellows and Margaret Baggs but there can be little doubt of its authenticity as the person who saw it is familiar with the species, having seen it during holiday visits to the continent, and I can't think of any confusion species.

To the casual viewer it may seem that all the Brent have now left but at least 400 were to be found by those looking for them in Langstone Harbour today if we include the water off Langstone village as an extension of Langstone Harbour (anything east of Langstone Bridge is technically in Chichester Harbour). Brian Fellows saw a total of 310 in the south west corner of Langstone Harbour around Eastney Lake and along the Milton Shore, and I counted at least 70 from the Warblington shore of Chichester Harbour this morning - the majority of them on the Langstone village shore. In the afternoon I found more than 80 at Langstone with another 20 on the west side of Langstone Bridge at the mouth of the Langbrook stream where I could also see half a dozen Merganser and at least four Wigeon (no Wigeon remain on the Warblington shore)

Brian also found 18 Common Gulls in the Eastney area to show that they have not all yet left us for their northern nesting cliffs, and as they move out two large and smartly dressed Greater Blackback gulls had moved in - seen by me this morning off Warblington and possibly intending to nest in either Langstone or Chichester harbours to the detriment of other gull and tern chicks. +++

Tony Gutteridge and I made our second visit to the Warblington CBC plot this morning. I haven't yet heard of any special sightings made by Tony in the fields which he covered but I enjoyed my outing which started with a lovely view of a pair of Red-legged Partridge moving through the long grass of the second field on my route - all I could see were the distinctively marked heads of the birds, lit by glorious sunshine. My second good sighting was of four Snipe, only passing through but each one marking the urgency of the spring journey to breeding grounds with its harsh call and fast flight as it took off to head onward. Where they had been I was pleased to hear the song of one Meadow Pipit that will hopefully stay to attempt breeding in contrast to the others that were moving north overhead, and it was also satisfying to hear at least four Skylarks singing over three fields where they still try to nest each year - all three fields must look uninviting to them as they still have standing stubble of last years Sweetcorn crop and are liberally covered in smelly slurry (presumably the birds can't think ahead and realise that the present condition of the fields implies a great upheaval of ploughing and planting in the near future - perhaps just when they have laid their first clutch in nests that will inevitably be ploughed up). If past history is repeated they will probably make another nest and lay another clutch on the almost bare earth of the newly sown fields where the nest is easily visible to foxes wanting eggs for breakfast. No wonder the skylark is in decline. +++

Also in these slurry covered stubble fields I found birds that are benefitting from the state of the fields and will not nest in them - a flock of over 50 Linnet - and in the biggest of these three fields a flock of over 50 Stock Doves and around 20 Pied Wagtails were obviously finding food. Despite the cattle now being out on fresh grass in other fields I only saw two, maybe three Egrets where in winter we can have 20 or more. This may have been just chance as later in the day, when the tide was high, I found 13 Egrets apparently finding food in the pony fields north of Wade Court. +++

A female Sparrowhawk soared over the fields near the Church, drifting south west in the wind, and from the shore fields I counted 17 Shelduck on the nearby mud with 25 Teal on the same mud. Oystercatchers were still plentiful but Redshank are now few and there were no Turnstone or Ringed Plover. A few Curlew were still around and several Black-tailed Godwit were in evidence with a lone Grey Plover. The Wigeon had left.

THU 25 MAR

Hampshire news includes a regular weekly bulletin from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes telling us that Lapwings there are starting to make nest scrapes and will soon be laying their eggs (a little later than in some years). Bob estimates that around 20 pairs are holding territory on the Marshes, and in view of the general decline of these birds as breeders in Hampshire I am pleased to see that this is roughly the same number that attempted to breed there in 1990 and in 2000 (I haven't checked other years). Furthermore Birds of Hampshire quotes Dave Billett as saying that annual counts of pairs at the Marshes from 1975 to 1990 never exceeded 50 pairs (in 1985). It is of some interest to note that before 1985 the Hampshire Bird Reports show no interest in breeding success, only in large flocks and movements. It seems that for the moment breeding Lapwing numbers at Farlington are roughly holding their own, but I don't know how much longer that will continue as I understand that foxes quarter the marshes so effectively that few eggs or chicks survive to fledge. Bob Chapman's news can be seen on the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website which carries moderately frequent news bulletins from several Trust reserves, and this week there is an additional report from the Lower Test Marshes telling us that at least one Little Ringed Plover was there on Mar 21, three days before they were seen at Testwood Lakes only half a mile away. Titchfield Haven still has the credit for the first Hampshire arrival of the year (on Mar 20). +++

WED 24 MAR

Richard Carpenter was on the Canal Path at Titchfield Haven with some 70 Sand Martins, 6 Chiffchaff and a Swallow flying around and the hoots of a Tawny Owl providing unexpected background music. +++

Along the coast at Sandy Point on Hayling Island Alistair Martin enjoyed watching a female Black Redstart but as the bird had probably just flown in and was recovering from 'jet lag' by remaining more or less motionless, preening its feathers, and was not a smart male, the scene began to lose interest after a time.

TUE 23 MAR

The first Sedge Warbler of the year was found at Coombe Haven (between Hastings and Bexhill) by Kevin Johnston today. Also present there were more than 10 Water Pipits (winter numbers now diminishing - there had been 30 last week) and more than 25 Chiffchaffs +++

In Emsworth Brian Fellows was pleased to hear Coal Tit song in the Brook Meadow area - not the normal habitat for this species. A Chiffchaff was singing on the meadow (first for the site), and a Kingfisher was still around (they may well breed in the Lumley area upstream of the meadow). I am pleased to hear that the Peter Pond Swans new nest in the reedbed looks high and substantial enough to survive any likely spate or flood.

Yesterday two separate inland Little Gulls were seen (both first winter birds). One was at Ivy Lake at Chichester, the other more surprisingly at Fleet Pond, seen by Steve Mansfield. Owen Mitchell saw the Ivy Lake bird, and with it were more than 50 Sand Martins. Owen also reported 45 Shoveler and a Green Sandpiper at the Drayton gravel pit east of the city and James O'Driscoll was at the Runcton Lake where he added a Swallow to the Sand Martins (of which he had only 3). +++

Over the course of the past two winters we have heard of Blackcaps eating every imaginable type of food, but today Adrian Thomas added a further twist to their diet list when, in his Peacehaven garden east of Brighton, .. 'a female Blackcap, after three months happy munching on strung-up apples, today switched to sipping nectar (or licking pollen?) from

flowering cherry - much preferable to the Blue Tits who rip out the nectary and discard the petals!

MON 22 MAR

The first Willow Warbler of the year was heard singing today on the East Sussex coast at Peacehaven where yesterday there were still some 20 Tree Sparrows enjoying the Piddinghoe Avenue site in the area which has been chosen for the building of a new sewage works. +++

At Budds Farm pools I could not see the Scaup or Fudge Duck which Mike Collins found still there yesterday, nor were the Swans on site (though there were two pairs of Canada Geese), but the male of one of half a dozen pairs of Shoveler still left was doing some neck bowing to his female and several Little Grebe were whinnying their songs. From trees alongside Southmoor Lane I heard my first Goldcrest song of the year and strong Skylark song came from the old IBM playing fields. From Budds Mound at high tide I could not see a single Brent Goose anywhere in Langstone Harbour, but passing through Langstone village in the evening at low tide I found at least 150 in the remaining water. One Kingfisher was still by the Mill and the Swan was again on her Mill Pond nest.

SUN 21 MAR

At the Budds Farm pools Mike Collins saw both the female Scaup and the hybrid Ferruginous Duck x Pochard - last spring this 'Fudge Duck' was not seen after Mar 12 according to my notes. Mike also enjoyed the sight of his first Wheatear on the South Moors

SAT 20 MAR

Today Brian Fellows battled with the wind to carry out the south east Hayling WeBS count on the scheduled day and was rewarded with good views of a Red-throated Diver off the Mengeham shore (between Black Point and Tournurbury). Despite the weather there was still quite a good selection of birds on this lee side of Hayling, including 24 Sanderling, but as at Wittering across the water only 26 Brent could be found where there had been 1147 on the previous Feb 21 WeBS count +++

A Hoopoe arrived on the Isle of Wight today and was discovered by someone walking one of the paths across the Lake Common area between Sandown and Alverstone. It was first seen in flight near the club house of the Sandown and Shanklin Golf Course and then seen again flying over trees northwest of the club house, heading north east towards Adgestone across the Yar valley. Although Hoopoes do occasionally appear in southern England in winter the great majority turn up for brief visits in the spring, starting about now and peaking in frequency from the second week in April to the second week in May.

A regular, but uncommon, migrant seen by Heather Mills today at Titchfield Haven - a Little Ringed Plover which must have arrived there this morning. It is the fourth to come to my attention this spring, following one at The Vyne near Basingstoke on Mar 13, another at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 16 and a third in the Pannel Valley west of Rye on Mar 17. Also seen at the Haven by Heather were at least 100 Black-tailed Godwits. Other good birds at the Haven today included both Sand and House Martins, and the two Avocets which have been there since Mar 17 when they were described as a pair (when seen together it should be possible to sex them as the male has a longer bill and his head markings are always neat and all black - the female may have brownish 'highlights' in her hair). These two may well be just stopping off on passage eastwards but it would be nice to think that they are one of two pairs which have nested in Hampshire in each of the last two years at a secret location (known as TNS which stands for 'The nest site' - see Trevor Carpenter's article in the 2002 Hampshire Bird Report), and in both years have suffered disturbance and predation at TNS, then sought safety at Titchfield Haven - perhaps they have had the common sense to try to nest at the Haven this year. As a reminder of the past years here is what I wrote on July 30 last summer .. +++

Despite today's strong gale and light rain I turned out for the scheduled WeBS count, not only visiting the IBM Lake but first going to Tipner Lake to stand in for John Nundy who was unable to be there today. Tipner Lake was fully exposed to the gale and the most exciting

bird I noted there was a Med Gull which called to identify itself as the wind carried it over me. 50 Brent Geese were in the relatively sheltered corner of the lake at the end of Horsea Lane and a few Herring and Black-headed gulls were on the water at the north end where the wind had driven them - with them were four Lesser Blackbacks in smart breeding plumage as a token reminder of the large numbers of this species now moving east up channel. At the IBM Lake the best birds were the pair of Great Crested Grebes in full summer dress on the water close to where they nested in recent years (extreme west end of the lake), and despite the wind there were at least 11 Little Grebes, 19 Teal and 3 Pochard to be seen (but no Swans). 40 of the 61 Coot were still in winter mode, feeding together as flocks on the grass but most of the 43 Mallard appeared to be paired as were all of the 17 Canada Geese - the odd bird was the only one actually sitting on a nest, the others were all scattered around the site in pairs keeping their distance from the other pairs. +++

PLANTS

FRI 26 MAR

Before getting around to writing up these notes on Saturday Mar 27 I took a quick walk around Havant and found just two flowers on one roadside plant of Dove's Foot Cranesbill. Today (Fri 26 Mar) I added two species to my flowering list for the year with Field Madder in the Warblington Farm fields and Sow-thistle here in Havant +++

Also in Havant, in the pavement edge at the foot of a wall in the Pallant (a one-way street opening off Beechworth Road), leaves of a dozen plants of Rue-leaved Saxifrage are now well up though no flowers have yet appeared. Beside them both Common Whitlowgrass and Thale Cress can be seen as well as the omni-present Hairy Bittercress, and 100 yards round the corner into Fairfield Road (where the Sow Thistle is flowering) you can also see and contrast Wavy Bittercress.

Yesterday, at Havant Railway station, I was pretty sure that I could see Oxford Ragwort flowering between the tracks, and today Brian Fellows confirmed that this plant is flowering by finding it at Eastney, near the ferry across the mouth of Langstone Harbour.

THU 25 MAR

Taking a midday break from writing these notes I added five, maybe six, species to my flowering list for the year. Here in Havant I found a clump of Spanish Bluebells in full flower, then came on both Common Fumitory and Green Alkanet.

Over in Emsworth the English Scurvygrass was out on the Nore Barn saltings, and beside the Wayfarers Way path where it passes the north side of the Nore Barn copse there was a patch of Common Dog Violets. The possible sixth species was Oxford Ragwort - I'm pretty sure of its id though it was growing between the rail tracks at Havant Station and I was viewing from the footbridge over the tracks without having my binoculars with me - all I could see was a bushy green plant with bright yellow flowers dotted around it (not clustered at the top).

In the same outing I found Early Dog Violets in the Denvilles area and saw a good display of Lesser Periwinkle along the north side of Southleigh Road immediately east of the East Leigh Road junction. Here Ground Ivy was in flower but no Greater Stichwort (this is where I saw it first last year).

WED 24 MAR

At this evening's Wildlife Trust meeting in Havant Gwynne Johnson told me that, despite wind and weather, last Saturday morning's Havant Wildlife Group outing to Purbrook Heath had found three firsts for the year - Greater Stichwort, Early Dog Violet and Ground Ivy (so my claim to the first of this latter plant in yesterday's notes no longer stands) +++

Earlier in the day today I noted two finds that may be of interest - the first was that what I call Garden Forget-me-nots had started to flower in several places both in and out of gardens, and at the Lymbourne Spring triangle site close to the Hayling Billy trail here in Havant I was surprised to see several plants of Red Dead Nettle with pure white flowers (something I have come across occasionally in other places but never here - perhaps it came as a

bonus with last year's wildflower seeds).

Brian Fellows was in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth today where there was a good show of Primrose flowers and the first few Wood Anemones. +++

Not yet flowering, but a significant indication of the advancing season, were the first few Meadow Foxtail flowerheads which Brian Fellows found yesterday in Brook Meadow at Emsworth when he was making a count of the flowering spikes of Butterbur beside the River Ems - his total of 224 was down on last year's March count of 318

TUE 23 MAR

A short walk around the Havant area in today's midday sunshine discovered a great show of flowering Ground Ivy on a sheltered south facing roadside bank just south of the Stables in Pook Lane (across the road from the great show of Sweet Violets which has been out for some time). +++

Also on this walk I saw the single Cowslip plant flowering where wild flower seed was so liberally sown last year at the Lymbourne triangle site just across the Billy Trail from Grove Road in Havant. Cath Cooper had told me of this flower yesterday. +++

Back at home there is once more a single Creeping Buttercup flower opening.

MON 22 MAR

Walking on the north side of the Emsworth Road here in Havant and passing the only garden with a lawn coming to the pavement edge between the Wheelwright's Arms and the end of Wade Court Road I saw a patch of tiny bright white flowers, none of them more than an inch high, at the pavement edge. My immediate re-action was that they were Whitlowgrass, but something seemed odd about them so I picked one to have a close look. The main thing that was odd was that the plant had three long thin leaves on its stem, and the leaves of the basal rosette had saw like (dentate) edges, so despite its tiny size and the large number all clustered together I decided this must be the first Thale Cress of the year. +++

In the same walk I went down Hallett Road in Denvilles and was pleased to see my first patch of pure white Sweet Violets in the roadside grass - I have the impression that the white flowered variety flowers a month or so later than the violet type, but can anyone confirm this?

SUN 21 MAR

Brian Fellows Brook Meadow Conservation Group newsletter for the past week remarks on something I have wondered about in past years - namely whether the Wallflowers now flowering on the stone walls of the Mill House (as distinct to the big house called Lumley Mill) in Lumley Mill Lane at Emsworth are our naturalised plants (Erysimum cheiri aka Cheiranthus cheiri) or self sown plants of the garden Siberian Wallflower (E. x marshallii).

Back on Mar 7 you will see that I asked the same question in these notes about plants growing by the Ferry Road on Hayling, and thought I had settled the question by collecting a flower stem and having a close look at it before deciding they were Siberian on the test given in Stace as to whether the two lobes at the point of the stigma are pressed together or divergent, but looking at Stace again today in conjunction with several other flower books I have come to the conclusion that Stace is (for once!) totally confused and misleading. +++

For the moment I feel I must go along with Francis Rose's 'Wildflower Key' and with Fitter's 1974 'Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe' who both seem to agree that the rare naturalised plant of old walls (a) always has yellow flowers only and (b) these flowers are considerably smaller (not more than 2.5 cm across the whole flower) than the variously coloured flowers of the garden escape Siberian Wallflower. Rose and Fitter are both backed by my Clapham, Tutin and Warburg 'Excursion Flora', though none of these mention the stigma lobes. Whether or not Stace's test concerning the divergence of the two lobes of the stigma tip does distinguish the naturalised plant (divergent) from the Siberian plant (pressed together) remains a moot point (from other apparent errors in his text it may well be that he has got it the wrong way round - at least in the second edition of

his Flora which is the one I use) +++

On flower colour and size I am pretty sure that both the Hayling and the Lumley plants are Siberian, but it is worth another look at the Lumley ones, and if any doubt remains we should perhaps organise a commando style raid on these walls (where the plants grow too high to reach from the ground) and capture a prisoner and torture the truth out by dissection of its stigma.

SAT 20 MAR

Visiting Tipner Lake (alongside the M275 serving central Portsmouth) today I found my first creamy flowers on a couple of plants of Alexanders - a fairly normal date for them to be seen but an early one for a odd branch of a Hawthorn tree to be carrying open flowers. Later, around the IBM Lake, several Hawthorns were in full leaf and covered with flower buds (none yet open), but these were a group of trees which, in several past years, have been in flower in January and were possibly planted as cultivars of the Glastonbury thorn.
+++

Along the A27 between Havant and Portsmouth Blackthorn was in full flower beside the road but many Blackthorn bushes have not yet started to flower. +++

One plant of Cow Parsley was flowering in a sheltered spot below the Hilsea Lines and over at Titchfield Haven Heather Mills saw a good show of Kingcups - sadly the plants in the canal ditches at the IBM North Harbour site have been cut since last month in a much needed clearance of these ditches

On Thursday (Mar 18), beside the Langbrook stream at Langstone, Brian Fellows found the female Butterbur (P. hybridus) plants were very numerous and in the best of health but the Greater Butterbur (P. japonicus) plants were definitely past their best - maybe my clearance on Feb 23 of brambles which had started to cover them had exposed them to subsequent frost but they were already mostly in flower on Feb 11 so have had a good run for their money.

INSECTS

WED 24 MAR

The only item for today is a single Comma seen in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth by Brian Fellows

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 24 MAR

Brian Fellows was in the Longcopse Hill area of the Hollybank Woods and disturbed a group of 8 Fallow Deer Andrew Brook tells me he has regularly seen up to 30 Fallow outside the rutting season... +++

More deer news from the Hollybank Woods came this evening from Sue Drewett who told me that she has very recently seen another Muntjac in her garden on the fringe of the woods. The most surprising part of her observation was that the Muntjac spotted her and rushed for cover. but only to shrubs at the edge of the garden where it remained watching her (or maybe listening and smelling for the approach of danger as its eyesight was maybe too poor to see her though she could still see it)

HAVANT WILDLIFE GROUP WALK SATURDAY MARCH 27 - BROADMARSH AREA

The weather was cool and dry, but slightly misty at first for this morning's walk by the Havant Wildlife Group around the Broadmarsh area attended by 10 members and led by Ros Norton and Rowena Horrocks.

There was a good collection of birds on the mudflats off Broadmarsh car park, including Brent Geese, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Shelduck, Teal and Wigeon. I counted

156 Brent Geese at Broadmarsh plus another 210 at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream making a grand total of 366. These are probably birds passing through the region on their way north. 12 Red-breasted Mergansers were out in the channel. About 20 Black-tailed

Godwits were feeding on the mudflats, many of which were acquiring their orange summer plumage. None were ringed that we could see.

While walking up the Hermitage Stream to the bridge to look for Kingfisher (which we did not see), a Sparrowhawk flew across from east to west, probably a female from its large size.

Ros pointed out the White Poplars by the path which were covered in catkins. These trees were planted, but spread through suckering. A couple of Little Grebes were under the A27 bridge. While walking back to Hart's Farm Way, we all had good views of the "resident" Common Sandpiper bobbing away on the far shore of the Hermitage Stream.

The Alders by the side of Hart's Farm Way had particularly large cones. Buds of Hoary Cress were showing, but no flowers as yet. A number of very handsome White Comfrey plants were flowering alongside the path by the Brockhampton Stream. Some of the group had views of a Chiffchaff feeding among the branches over the stream. Ground Ivy was in flower. We stopped for break at the seats overlooking the mouth of the Hermitage Stream where a Willow was covered with yellow pussy catkins. Removing the bark from a twig revealed ridges which makes this Grey Willow, as opposed to Goat Willow. There was a freshly dug large hole behind one of the seats, probably made by a Fox, though Rabbit droppings were noted nearby. From this high vantage point we had a good view of the pure white heads and soft expression of the Common Gulls.

Arriving at Budds Farm Ponds a Mute Swan flew over our heads towards the harbour as we climbed the steps to the mound. There were no other Mute Swans on the ponds. On the ponds I counted 14 Shoveler, 4 Pochard, 18 Tufted Duck and about 30 Teal. A Chiffchaff was singing from the bushes. In Southmoor Lane two Goldcrest were heard calling in a conifer tree. In contrast, a Green Woodpecker was loudly yaffling over the moor for all to hear.

We found a puzzling collection of nibbled nuts at the start of the new footpath across the South Moors. The oval nuts were about 15mm long and 5 mm wide and each one had a small oval nibbled in its shell, with tiny tooth marks just visible. From my "Tracks and Signs" book Wood Mice would seem to be the most likely candidate? Another puzzling observation was a hole bored into one of the solid wood poles holding the electric cables at the eastern end of the new path. Surely, not a Woodpecker hole? A Snipe was seen by some members of the group on the moor.

We walked north up the concrete path to see the large patch of female Butterbur, which were still very impressive, near the Langbrook Stream. In contrast, the Great Butterbur flowers were hard to find. Common Stork's-bill was in flower at the start of the pathway back to Southmoor Lane.

A total of 47 bird species was recorded during the walk. Jim Berry kept the plant list.

WEEK 12 MAR 15 – 21 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

SAT 20 MAR

A Hoopoe arrived on the Isle of Wight today and was discovered by someone walking one of the paths across the Lake Common area between Sandown and Alverstone. It was first seen in flight near the club house of the Sandown and Shanklin Golf Course and then seen again flying over trees northwest of the club house, heading north east towards Adgestone across the Yar valley. Although Hoopoes do occasionally appear in southern England in winter the great majority turn up for brief visits in the spring, starting about now and peaking in frequency from the second week in April to the second week in May.

Hampshire's top bird today continued to be the Alpine Swift which was seen again today in the Abbotts Worthy area just north of Winchester, not far from where it was first discovered by Anthony Clements on Mar 18 +++

A more regular, but uncommon, migrant was seen by Heather Mills today at Titchfield Haven - a Little Ringed Plover which must have arrived there this morning. It is the fourth to come to my attention this spring, following one at The Vyne near Basingstoke on Mar 13, another at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 16 and a third in the Pannel Valley west of Rye on Mar 17. Also seen at the Haven by Heather were at least 100 Black-tailed Godwits. +++

Other good birds at the Haven today included both Sand and House Martins, and the two Avocets which have been there since Mar 17 when they were described as a pair (when seen together it should be possible to sex them as the male has a longer bill and his head markings are always neat and all black - the female may have brownish 'highlights' in her hair). These two may well be just stopping off on passage eastwards but it would be nice to think that they are one of two pairs which have nested in Hampshire in each of the last two years at a secret location (known as TNS which stands for 'The nest site' - see Trevor Carpenter's article in the 2002 Hampshire Bird Report), and in both years have suffered disturbance and predation at TNS, then sought safety at Titchfield Haven - perhaps they have had the common sense to try to nest at the Haven this year. For those who prefer more exotic species Heather also saw the Flamingo (from Chile via a 'puppy farm' at Lymington) and the feral geese (from Baffinsland - in Portsmouth) still present at the Haven.

Despite today's strong gale and light rain I turned out for the scheduled WeBS count, not only visiting the IBM Lake but first going to Tipner Lake to stand in for John Nundy who was unable to be there today. Tipner Lake was fully exposed to the gale and the most exciting bird I noted there was a Med Gull which called to identify itself as the wind carried it over me. 50 Brent Geese were in the relatively sheltered corner of the lake at the end of Horsea Lane and a few Herring and Black-headed gulls were on the water at the north end where the wind had driven them - with them were four Lesser Blackbacks in smart breeding plumage as a token reminder of the large numbers of this species now moving east up channel.

At the IBM Lake the best birds were the pair of Great Crested Grebes in full summer dress on the water close to where they nested in recent years (extreme west end of the lake), and despite the wind there were at least 11 Little Grebes, 19 Teal and 3 Pochard to be seen (but no Swans). 40 of the 61 Coot were still in winter mode, feeding together as flocks on the grass but most of the 43 Mallard appeared to be paired as were all of the 17 Canada Geese - the odd bird was the only one actually sitting on a nest, the others were all scattered around the site in pairs keeping their distance from the other pairs. At least one male Stonechat was seen, probably passing through though they have bred here in past years, and three different Chiffchaffs were singing. Also seen was at least one pair of Long-tailed Tits.

FRI 19 MAR

Reports from Titchfield Haven for today tell me that 15 Sand and 3 House Martins were present, and that four Buzzards were soaring together over head - Richard remarks that this would have been unheard of five years ago. The Flamingo and Baffins Gang were also present. More Sand Martins, at least 20, were seen in the Brading area of the Isle of Wight with at least 3 White Wagtails.

Three Bitterns were still present at Burton Mill Pond, west of Pulborough, yesterday and from the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website I see that Jim Day, the warden at the Blashford Lakes site in the Avon valley, saw a Bittern there on Mar 15 - the only sighting there this winter (last winter there were sightings at the Blashford Lakes in both Feb and Mar of a bird that seemed to stay for over a month) +++

News comes from Graham Roberts, announcing that a nesting pair of Peregrines are back at the nestbox on the Sussex Heights tower block in Brighton where they have nested regularly since Graham installed the box in 1998. When the video camera was switched on yesterday the female was perched close to the nestbox and one egg was already in the nest. The birds have used this box in every year since 1998 except for 2002 when they nested on Brighton's West Pier. +++

Yesterday (Mar 18) Brian Fellows was at the Budds Farm pools here in Havant and found the Mute Swan pair that are likely to nest there were back on the water with a reduced numbers of ducks - still 24 Shoveler but only 8 Pochard and no Tufted. Another pair of Swans could be seen in the Langbrook stream and I guess this is the same pair that seem to have 'owned' that site for several years but have never to my knowledge nested there - in one

year they did create a nest of sorts at the northern tip of the shingle bank on the west bank of the stream but never laid eggs in it, and they have not repeated the exercise since to my knowledge. They seem to lose interest in the site by the time the Langstone Mill Pond pair have hatched their cygnets, as the first thing the Mill Pond birds do each year is to take their cygnets from the pond (which is surrounded by foxes and lots of cover for surprise attacks) and take over the Langbrook mouth 'territory'. +++

Interestingly Brian also found a Kingfisher still based at the Langbrook (which has no known Kingfisher nest site), and by now I would have expected the bird to have moved elsewhere to at least attempt nesting (though this could be one of the birds that may nest along the lower stretches of the Hermitage stream)

WED 17 MAR

The first sound I heard when I opened my back-door on this very misty morning was Chiffchaff song, and I gather that this was the case over most of southern England. The first migrant Chiffchaffs seem to have crossed the channel on Sunday, followed by a major arrival yesterday and much bigger fall today, probably enhanced by the mist which will have brought the birds down from the air as soon as they reached land (whereas in good visibility many of them would have flown onward and not been noticed here on the coast)
+++

One of the places where Chiffchaff song was heard today was Emsworth and from there Brian Fellows tells me that the pair of Swans which have for years nested on a small island in Peter Pond have rejected attempts to make their nest less prone to flooding (by artificially raising the height of the island), and have instead built a substantial nest in a nearby reedbed where they are probably more likely to be flooded out. The problem here is that the water flowing through Peter Pond into the Slipper Mill Pond is part of the River Ems (diverted in the past to work the Lumley Mill) and when there is heavy rain the flow of the river increases but this branch of it is prevented from flowing into the sea by sluice gates at the southern end of the Slipper Mill Pond - if they are not opened at the right time the water backs up and can block the A259 road (to say nothing of swamping birds nests).

TUE 16 MAR

If my arithmetic is right today saw the arrival of at least 102 Wheatears and 51 Stonechats on the Isle of Wight, spread over 11 different sites, while Sussex had 51 Wheatears and 39 Stonechats. No doubt there were a good number also in Hampshire but the star of Hampshire migrant arrivals today was a Cuckoo which happened to fly almost over the head of Steve Keen as he was working in a New Milton garden - luckily he was watching the sky as the bird did not make a sound. Steve's only disappointment was that this arrival was just one day later than Hampshire's earliest ever Cuckoo which had been seen on Hayling Island by Pete Potts and Pete Durnell back on 15 Mar 1989 +++

I have just heard that the Army authorities on Thorney Island have sanctioned a 'cut and burn' operation to clear dead elm trees from the famous original Egret roost at Thorney Great Deeps regardless of disturbance to the birds - leaving the pyre of dead wood burning through the night in the centre of the roost area to help drive the birds away.

There are now more than 50 (possibly 100) Med Gulls in the Langstone and Chichester Harbour area as they gather prior to the start of nesting on the Langstone Harbour islands so it was no surprise when Alistair Martin went to the Hayling Oysterbeds today and saw 16 of them. What was interesting and potentially worrying about this observation was that the birds were all on the Little Tern nesting island and behaving as if they might be thinking of claiming nest sites there (as at least a dozen, maybe 20 pairs of Black-headed gulls have already done). No Med Gulls have nested at the Oysterbeds in the past but at least 14 pairs of Common Terns (plus a number of Black-headed Gulls) nested there last summer, and if the Med Gulls join in the competition for nest sites this summer it may well prove disastrous for the Little Terns, which may be forced to move back to the RSPB islands where, in addition to the problems of high tides and rain that they face wherever they nest, there is a greater chance of fox and Peregrine predation.

Last year the Little Terns started to arrive from Apr 12 but I see that the earliest ever date in Hampshire is Mar 23 so maybe we will get a chance to see where they decide to settle

within the next few weeks

Today brought 5 Wheatears to Southsea Castle, seen by Richard Hallett while he was enjoying the sight of 7 Purple Sandpipers. More evidence that early migrants have started to arrive in Hampshire came from the Warblington fields where at least five Chiffchaffs and two Stonechats were found during the Common Bird Census visit (see below), and in the morning mist on Mar 17 (as I write these notes) there is continuous Chiffchaff song from the Hayling Billy line behind my house - the first I have heard this year.

With the calendar having reached mid-March and the weather forecast for today being reasonable Tony Gutteridge decided to make his first visit to the Warblington Castle farm for this year's Common Bird Census, and as I help out with this census I was down there in the drizzle at 7:30am (not much point in starting earlier in view of the rain!). Luckily the rain effectively finished as soon as I arrived and the sun broke through by 8am to give me a very pleasant four hours tramping round the fields. I have already mentioned the Chiffchaffs and Stonechats (the latter being very unusual here) but we also had a small bunch of a dozen Meadow Pipits passing through and 45 Redwing were still present but not a sign of the Snipe that are usually present in the marshy SSSI field on each of our early visits to the site. Tony found our resident Little Owl in a field where it used to nest a good few years ago and I was lucky to spot the male Kestrel leaving the Castle Tower in which a pair of Kestrels regularly nest. A female Sparrowhawk soaring over the edge of the site was probably not one of 'our birds'. +++

At least 15 Little Egrets were still using the farm fields as their feeding area, and along the shoreline there was a record count for this winter of 74 Shelduck (presumably evidence of spring passage of Shelduck heading back to the Scandinavian coasts that they abandon in winter). A dozen Turnstone that we do not normally see here in winter were also probably moving through as may have been the 120 Brent that were on the water (the hundreds which have been grazing the shore fields of the farm for some time have ceased to do so - presumably they have moved on and the 'strangers' now on the water do not have the confidence to come ashore). A flock of some 40 Curlew that were feeding in one of the fields may have been ones that have been here through the winter or could have been fresh birds acclimatising themselves to the forthcoming months of living inland after a winter spent on mud. The few Redshank on the shore were noisy with their spring 'song'. +++

Well over 100 Black-headed Gulls were on the fields when I arrived but I only found two Med Gulls among them (with the tide high, and 45 or more Med Gulls likely to be present on the mud off nearby Langstone at low tide, I had hoped to see more on these fields but they must go elsewhere - perhaps north Hayling? - when the tide is up). Another large flock which we always see along the shore of these fields is of Carrion Crows and today I watched at least seventy of them get up from the fields when they decided the tide had dropped enough for them to move back to the saltings where they seem to find most of their food. One other shoreline sighting was of a single Rock Pipit which flew low, making its wheezing call, from the field in the extreme south east corner of the farm out onto the saltings off Nore Barn. +++

A couple of unexplained oddities were, firstly, a pair of Linnets which settled on a tree top with the male singing as if they had left their winter flock and were already back on breeding territory - surely a bit early for that? The second oddity was the appearance of a flock of 18 Pied Wagtails in one of the fields - maybe on passage or maybe still in winter mode attracted to these fields which are liberally strewn with slurry (incidentally I saw my first cowpat covered with fresh Yellow Dung-flies here this morning) In the farmyard one pair of Pied Wagtails were clearly already in breeding mode. +++

The mild winter means that plenty of Long-tailed Tits have survived and I came on two pairs that are probably nesting, plus a single bird visiting a fat-ball hung from one of the trees in the cemetery (you never know what you will see there - today I found a new gravestone carved into the shape of a 'life-size' Suzuki motor-bike painted in racing bike colours! Another more conventional gravestone has a surprise on the back where the phrase 'Gone fishing' has been added)

MON 15 MAR

One pair of birds that seems to have decided to stay and breed at Langstone Mill Pond, where they have never done so before and where (so far as I know) there is no available nesting place, is the pair of Kingfishers that have given many people much enjoyment through close views of them recently. This evening at dusk these two birds were dashing here and there over the pond, with lots of sharp calls, proving that they are still here long after winter birds would normally have left the coast and returned to traditional breeding sites. Perhaps these are young lovers - desperately in love but as yet with no home of their own to return to? +++

Also on Langstone pond the female Swan was on her nest for the first time and I see she has chosen the small island immediately outside the back gate of the Mill building (the same site as last year). +++

The reason for my being at Langstone pond at dusk was that I had come down to make the monthly check on the number of Egrets coming to roost at Wade Court. The official day for the census count is the 14th of each month but yesterday the rain made it impractical. Knowing the weather forecast I had come down on Saturday night (Mar 13) and stood for the full time watching the roost but had only seen 20 birds arrive in it until it was too dark to see any more movement, but as I had already counted 26 birds in the fields north of the roost on my way to the roost view point all this count proved was that it is easy for the birds to sneak into the trees for the far side (away from the view point) without being seen. This evening I was luckier, finding 20 birds feeding in north fields on the way to the viewpoint and another 16 in the south field, standing patiently waiting for the appropriate time to enter the roost (though I could see four birds already in the trees). This gave a count of 40 birds definitely present, and with the tide high there were unlikely to be more birds to come in from the harbour so I went back to the north fields where one more bird dropped out of the sky to give a total of 41 - surprisingly high at a time of year when I would have expected most birds to have left their winter site and returned to nesting areas (abroad or in this country)

SUN 14 MAR

Trevor Carpenter who went to Southsea Castle and found 9 Purple Sandpipers there - the record count for this winter (though I guess these birds are probably on passage eastwards, stopping off here for a few days only rather than having been here all winter) +++

SAT 13 MAR

Hayling Island had three good sightings today starting with a White Wagtail in the pony paddocks alongside the Sinah Warren stables and then a Pale-bellied Brent at the Oysterbeds, both birds being seen by Simon Wright. Subsequently the famous Anon arrived on the Island and claimed a Black Brant seen in Chichester Harbour off the Mengham Sailing Club (just north of Black Point) - this was probably the one that has been in the West Wittering area through the winter though it has not been seen there since Feb 21 (perhaps because it has been on the less watched east Hayling shore?) +++

Richard Ford found 45 Med Gulls on the east side of Langstone Bridge, and over on the west side, where Langstone Harbour begins, Mike Collins found what were probably another 19 off the mouth of the Langbrook stream +++

From Brian Fellows' weekly newsletter for the Brook Meadow site at Emsworth - yesterday he found a .. 'Mallard pair sitting together on the west bank of the River Ems in Palmer's Road Copse with an egg close by. Later there were two eggs, but both had been broken, I suspect, by Crows.' So far the prize for first Mallard duckling of the year is still up for grabs but it doesn't seem likely that this pair will win it. I have known inexperienced Swans to lay eggs away from their nest but this is the first time I have heard of Mallard not knowing the facts of life.

PLANTS

SAT 20 MAR

Visiting Tipner Lake (alongside the M275 serving central Portsmouth) today I found my first

creamy flowers on a couple of plants of Alexanders - a fairly normal date for them to be seen but an early one for a odd branch of a Hawthorn tree to be carrying open flowers. Later, around the IBM Lake, several Hawthorns were in full leaf and covered with flower buds (none yet open), but these were a group of trees which, in several past years, have been in flower in January and were possibly planted as cultivars of the Glastonbury thorn.

+++

Along the A27 between Havant and Portsmouth Blackthorn was in full flower beside the road but many Blackthorn bushes have not yet started to flower. +++

One plant of Cow Parsley was flowering in a sheltered spot below the Hilsea Lines and over at Titchfield Haven Heather Mills saw a good show of Kingcups - sadly the plants in the canal ditches at the IBM North Harbour site have been cut since last month in a much needed clearance of these ditches

On Thursday (Mar 18), beside the Langbrook stream at Langstone, Brian Fellows found the female Butterbur (*P. hybridus*) plants were very numerous and in the best of health but the Greater Butterbur (*P. japonicus*) plants were definitely past their best - maybe my clearance on Feb 23 of brambles which had started to cover them had exposed them to subsequent frost but they were already mostly in flower on Feb 11 so have had a good run for their money.

THU 18 MAR

On Tuesday (Mar 16) John Goodspeed led a walk around Lowtons Copse to the north of Clanfield, finding at least five spikes of Toothwort there and seeing promise of a great display of Wood Anemones there in the near future - presumably only a few were open this week. When I was last there on Feb 15 I could even then see white showing in the closed flower buds of some Barren Strawberry there and I am pretty sure that could now be found in flower there with the possibility of early Ground Ivy on the banks of Little Hyden Lane which runs past the west side of the wood.

TUE 16 MAR

Walking around the fields of Warblington Castle Farm this morning, carrying out the first of this spring's Common Bird Census visits, I added two new first flowers for the year to my list. In the cemetery, where I first came across the plant last spring, one patch of Slender Speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*) had flowers among its trailing stems with their distinctive kidney shaped leaves. Out in the fields where it occurs each year the first Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*) was flowering, very easily separated from the mass of Red Deadnettle by its much smaller, paler flowers and greener leaves even without a close look. +++

While in the Warblington fields I met a couple of local ramblers who told me they had recently seen Wood Anemones in the Hambledon area, adding a second find of these flowers to Richard Carpenter's find of the first near Botley on Mar 6.

INSECTS

FRI 19 MAR

The first Clouded Yellow of the year was seen on the south coast of Cornwall at Seaton, not far west of Plymouth, on Mar 16. With 98 records of Painted Lady in southern England before the end of February I have been a little surprised that no Clouded Yellows have been seen, and when I first saw the news of this current sighting I wondered if it was possibly a local emerging insect rather than a migrant but the information that I have is that those that are now overwintering in this country do not appear until mid-April so I have to assume this is a migrant but cannot be sure it is not one which pupated in some sun trap that has brought it out a month earlier than expected. +++

Other recent butterfly sightings were of a Comma at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields yesterday (Mar 18) and on Mar 17 another Brimstone was seen at Wadhurst in Sussex.

THU 18 MAR

A rough check on the long list of butterfly sightings that appeared on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website for last Tuesday (Mar 16) shows that at least 63 Brimstone butterflies emerged in response to the warm weather with a much smaller number of

Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshells plus a single Red Admiral and maybe two Small Whites. The number of Brimstones was considerably boosted by Peter Eeles count of 32 in Pamber Forest (where he also saw 3 Commas and 3 Small Tortoiseshells) and by 14 found in the Hursley area by Mark Litjens (who also saw the Red Admiral). At Hook in north Hampshire Peter Vaughan had singles of Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell as well as Brimstone, and at Bentley Station Meadow butterfly reserve near Alton Janet Jones also had both Peacock and Comma. A possible Small White was seen by Stephen Harvey at Chandlers Ford along with 7 Brimstones, while Alan Thornbury is more certain than he saw a Small White in the Fareham area (but the sighting was while driving along the busy A32) +++

TUE 16 MAR

Today's big news was my personal find, while in the fields of Warblington Castle Farm, of a fresh cowpat covered with my first sight of a horde of fresh Yellow Dung-flies +++

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 18 MAR

Richard Carpenter today saw two Hares and nine Roe Deer (in one bunch) on the hills west of the Meon valley in the Warnford area. My only comment is that the ratio of the figures probably tells us something about the decline of the Hare population and the rise of Roe Deer numbers here in Hampshire.

MON 15 MAR

Further news of deer from Andrew Brook of the Friends of Hollybank news is especially interesting as he tells me that there is a fairly inaccessible area of the woods in which the female Fallow deer congregate and where they give birth to their young. For many years I have come across groups of Fallow bucks in the Stansted Forest area during the months when the sexes live separately but I have always been puzzled as to where the females get to at this time and have assumed, through occasional encounters with small groups of females in many different areas, that they did not gather together like the males but spent much of the year wandering in small bands. What Andrew tells me also ties in with several sightings of road casualties beside the Emsworth Common Road which the deer must cross to reach their harem/maternity hospital.

WEEK 11 MAR 8 – 14 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 12 MAR

So far this spring I have only seen one mention of Peregrines back at Chichester cathedral - a terse statement from Richard Goodwin stating that one was perched on the cathedral on Feb 16. On March 9 Lawrence Holloway checked the spire but could see no Peregrines (though he did record Grey Wagtail there), and I have also looked and failed to see them. Today, however, David Parker did see one land on the building, and as my 'Boys book of Bird Nests' tells me that Peregrines start to lay their eggs in late March, both birds will hopefully be a daily sight in the near future.

Another popular nest with public viewing is that of a pair of Barn Owls in a nest box at the Pulborough Brooks RSPB visitor centre where a video camera keeps a constant eye on the nest and a screen in the visitor centre lets everyone watch the progress of the family. Pete Hughes tells us that one of the birds has already taken to sleeping in the box, hopefully this is the female that will eventually lay eggs there.

Today's Hampshire news is of Blackcap song from a bird in Keith Betton's garden in north east Hampshire - for added interest the garden had an inch or more of lying snow at the time, so perhaps the bird was genuinely grateful to be fed! +++

THU 11 MAR

A HOSLIST message from Geoff Rogers says .. 'Today at 4pm a Common Buzzard circled low over the M3 at junction 12 and perched on a lampost on the northbound slip road. It seemed to be looking at the passing traffic.' Maybe this is not such an unusual occurrence

as some might think, as on Jan 6 I had a note from Nick Papps, who lives in the Chandlers Ford area and uses Junction 12 daily, saying .. 'You may be interested to know of a buzzard that has been regularly perched on a lamppost on the slip road at Junction 12 leading to the south-bound carriageway of the M3' Trevor Carpenter, who commutes along the M27 from Fareham to Southampton, is well aware of another Buzzard which keeps an eye on the M27 from a tree within 50 metres of the motorway where it passes the southern edge of Southampton airport, and another road watching Buzzard was noted by Bill Marjeram who on Jan 20 remarked on a .. 'Buzzard sitting in tree opposite White Swan, Mansbridge.' (the White Swan is a pub beside the old A27 where it crosses the Itchen). I also recall from past years that Mike Collins told me of a regular Buzzard perch in a dead tree overlooking the Emsworth Common Road where it crosses the River Ems. +++

While Buzzards generally kill and eat live meat (from rabbits down to worms) they are very happy to eat carrion, and it sounds as if these birds have realised that the most likely place to find freshly killed meat is on the roadside. I don't want any more carnage on the roads so I won't offer a prize to the first birder to witness a Buzzard eating a dead fox or badger as they drive to work, but maybe they can offer lifts to friends or neighbours who will be asked to pay for their free ride by keeping an eye on the roadside verges.

WED 10 MAR

The Titchfield Haven website first commented on Brent gathering on the shore there, a sign that they are thinking of migration, back on Feb 29 when the count was over 200, and by Mar 3 the count was in excess of 300. By Mar 3 there was definite news of Brent starting to fly east past Hastings (following a possible observation of movement past Pagham Harbour on Feb 27), and yesterday (Mar 9) brought a report from Richard Ives of a flock of 120 Brent going east past Brighton. Today Richard Carpenter watched a flock of over 350 Brent on the shore at Titchfield Haven and remarked on .. 'small numbers flying in and away all the time' .. being a visible sign of migration.

Although substantial numbers of Brent will be in our harbours for some time (a few migrants are usually still here at the beginning of May, especially in the north Solent), I am pretty sure that the flocks we are now seeing contain a fair proportion that are 'here today and gone tomorrow, but replaced by newcomers'. At the moment this probably does not apply to the family groups which still have their young with them - the youngsters need all the time they can get to feed up for the long journey - but even they may move off after March 19 (a magic date often quoted by Richard Williamson as the day on which the Brent leave our harbours - rather like the tradition which insists that Rooks start their breeding season punctually on Valentine's Day each year)

In Portsmouth Brian Fellows visited Baffins Pond today, finding 26 Shoveler and 76 Tufted Duck but nothing else of much note other than that the Swan pair were away from their nest, so presumably have not yet started laying or incubating. +++

In Bridge Road car park in Emsworth Brian heard a Blackcap in full song for the first time this year. He suggests it is probably a wintering bird, but spring migrants could have started arriving by now and there is always a considerable overlap between the arrival of the first birds from the south, which will breed here, and the departure of the last winter birds heading east to breed in central Europe (which is still pretty cold!)

Here in Havant a male Sparrowhawk, in magnificent spring colour and backlit by the early morning sun, allowed me a lengthy view as it perched twenty yards from me in an apple tree quite unaware that I was watching it through my bins from inside the kitchen - a superb start to the day.

TUE 09 MAR

News of 250 Barnacle Geese seen on the Isle of Wight in the Nettlestone area east of Ryde.

This flock is not made up of birds that breed in Greenland, but of exhibits at the Flamingo Park in the Seaview area of the Island, close to where they were seen, and the birds seem very content with the life they lead there as there has been no evidence of any trying to make a break from captivity despite the fact that they can fly. +++

Other wildfowl which have succeeded in making a break out from captivity in the past, and which are more welcome and less destructive than large flocks of grazing geese, are the

Mandarin ducks which can be seen at Eyeworth Pond in the New Forest. The number present on that pond has crept up from the 11 which returned there on Jan 27 and seemed to have stabilised at 14 (7 pairs), but today Peter Hutchins found an additional male present making 15 in total. Both here and in East Sussex there seems to have been a slight increase in numbers present as the breeding season approaches this year, but with huge numbers of these birds present in the neighbouring county of Surrey (and spilling over into Hampshire during the post breeding dispersal period to give counts of 60 or more on Passfield Pond) there is suprisingly no hint as yet of mass colonisation of Hampshire or Sussex. +++

Peter also found 4 Goosander still present at Eyeworth, so presumably the flock of over 20 based at the Blashford Lakes (of which the Eyeworth birds seem to be part - just making day trips to Eyeworth) is still around and that could mean that Goosanders are going to breed in Hampshire again this year (maybe more than one pair this time).

MON 08 MAR

This evening, passing the Royal Oak pub on the Langstone village shore, I paused to scan the sunlit gulls, waders and wildfowl enjoying low tide in this part of Chichester Harbour. The most active birds were gulls bathing in the fresh water of the Lymbourne stream flowing out from Langstone Mill and the first three birds to catch my attention were summer plumaged Med Gulls - one of them considerate enough to finish its toilet as I watched to give me excellent views as it flew low over the mud to land among the loafing Black-headed and Common Gulls. My first thought on seeing these birds was that some lucky birder would, in the next day or so, put out a similar message to those which appeared on HOSLIST last March reporting how 69 Med Gulls had been seen by Barry Collins on this same mudflat on Mar 24 , and by Trevor Carpenter on Mar 25 reporting another view of the same flock numbering 63 gulls, so I was not surprised when I returned to my computer and found that this very morning Barry Collins had been at Langstone and had seen 44 Med Gulls (plus another two in the Emsworth Harbour area). With the same set of messages was a report from the Pett area near Hastings commenting on the return yesterday of several Med Gulls that had suddenly appeared among the local gull flocks. +++

Turning to face the brick arch through which the Lymbourne stream flows under the mill I was delighted to see that the evening sun was falling on a pair of Kingfishers on fishing posts within a yard of each other, the female with her pink lower bill facing me and giving a very good imitation of the bright orange ball that the setting sun would soon become, the male to her left perched on the other side of the stream giving me a profile that showed off the blue of the back, the orange of the breast, and the black and white of the bill and neck flash - one of the best views of Kingfisher that I have ever had, all the better because I had thought that these Kingfishers that have been around Langstone Mill all winter had by now left for some inland nest site. These two were obviously paired, not only because they were tolerant of each other's presence on the some fishing beat, but also because of the quiet chat that was going on between them. Even before I saw them I was aware, from an anonymous report on the Nature Notes poster that I had just pinned up at the Langstone West Mill by the South Moors, that they were still in the area despite the fact that there is no suitable bank for a nest hole along this stretch of the stream. Maybe they have found a site in one of the private gardens near the source of this stream - maybe one of the streamside trees has fallen in the winter, pulling up a sufficient earth ball around its roots for the birds to dig their nest tunnel (as I understand it the birds need sufficient earth to make a tunnel at least one - preferably two - metres long with its entrance at least four feet above the water level to avoid flooding if the stream suddenly rises after heavy rain, the site being preferably in a secluded side stream rather than an open 'river bank', and it can be in an earth cliff some way from water). +++

So far I have seen no sign of nest building by the Langstone Mill Pond Swan pair (though the dense reeds provide plenty of cover for an unseen nest) but along at the Brockhampton stream another pair of Swans were seen by Heather Mills today starting to gather nest material. More than once in recent years a pair has tried to nest here in an exposed

situation on the west side of the old 'Corn Wharf' - the first year that I saw them try here it seemed that the nest was destroyed by human vandals but the site is very open to attack by foxes which can walk straight up to it (no water or other barrier to land access). I suspect that this current attempt at nesting will just be another practice run until an older pair with a superior nest site loses control of it (through accident or old age) when a series of Swan pairs forming a 'chain' will all move up one in the chain of nest sites and the youngsters currently learning the art of parenthood at this site will move to a more defensible one (and have more experience at defending their nest and young).

A note from John Eyre on Hoslist today expresses some confusion over the status of Firecrest in Hampshire and says .. 'In the last couple of days I've heard two singing males in areas where they held territories last year. If these birds were migrants it would make them just about the earliest of the returnees - earlier even than Chiffchaff - which seems unlikely. On the other hand, if they are resident, why don't we see more of them in winter?' +++

The status of this species given in the latest Hampshire Bird Report is .. 'A scarce resident, passage migrant and winter visitor', and while we can all agree with the word scarce there seems to be doubt as to which of the three elements in that definition is the main status. John himself seems to add to this confusion by his use of the word 'migrants'. The official definition seems to imply that those Firecrests which breed here are 'resident' which means that they stay in the county all year, so any birds now arriving would only be passage migrants, yet he seems to imply that the singing birds he has heard are migrants and are likely to stay on breed (in the territories where he found them last year). +++

I am not trying to pick a quarrel on this matter, nor to 'nit pick' on the use of terms, but I am trying to point out that birders in different part of the county may have very different views on the main status of this species, and at the same time to echo John's plea for more information. +++

While I know that some Firecrests breed regularly in the New Forest and in other parts of inland Hampshire, my own impression of the status of Firecrest in coastal Hampshire is that it is a regular and increasingly common winter visitor, probably re-inforced by passage birds in spring and autumn, but a very rare breeder and certainly not a resident. Inland birders probably do not find many winter birds (even in sheltered gardens) and only expect to see the birds during the breeding season (and of course in both cases the word 'expect' is important as you only see what you are looking for, especially in the case of such an elusive species) +++

Another factor affecting our understanding of the status of rarer birds is the ban on mentioning them during the breeding season - that will do a lot to influence the number of mentions they got - plenty in the winter, few in summer. +++

My own impression is very strongly that Firecrest are winter visitors to Hampshire with very few breeding birds in just one or two areas. That comes from what I see on Hoslist and my own few observations. Last year I logged 70 reports of Firecrest, 50 of them winter birds (pre March 16 and after Oct 11) and all but one or two of those would be what I would class as coastal (from Titchfield Haven, Lower Test Marshes, Warsash, Hilsea Lines in Portsmouth, Gosport, Southampton and the Lymington Marshes) I also include as coastal birds in the Meon valley up to Wickam and those visiting Doug Munts at West Wellow. During this winter period I only have one 'inland record' from Dave Pearson at Fritham on Dec 6.

Of the twelve reports between mid-March and the end of September last year five were from coastal sites, and so for the whole year only seven were from inland sites (five in the New Forest, one at Hartley Witney, and one from Harestock at Winchester). +++

SUN 07 MAR

A probable illegal immigrant was an adult Spoonbill which appeared at Titchfield Haven today and was seen there by John Shillitoe (I assume his mention that it had a yellow tip to its bill is intended to confirm adult status?). John also mentions the continuing presence of the usual ferals and escapes which I take to include the Flamingo and the Baffins gang. +++

An interesting report from Ian concerns a sad accident to a gull and shows the omnivorous nature of the Grey Heron. In Ian's own words what happened was .. +++

'A Black-Headed gull hit the pylon wires and landed in the lake with a wing almost detached at the shoulder. It swam ashore only to be immediately confronted by a pair of Magpies. It managed to get back in the water, but every time it came back to the edge of the lake, either a Magpie or a Crow had a go. The Gull managed to stay on shore for some time in the company of two Shelduck. At dusk, when the shelduck left, a crow came down and forced the now weak gull back in to the lake. I will spare you the details of the Grey Heron waiting in the shallows. Nature can be so cruel.' +++

I hope the Heron choked to death, though I myself recall the sight of one Heron which had swallowed the head of an adult Moorhen and stood for hours by the IBM Lake, in view of the office windows, seemingly unable to get the bird in or out of its throat and bill. Another account of Heron behaviour which I did not witness, but which sticks in my memory, concerns a young Heron with no established fishing beat of its own. It repeatedly attempted to land close to an adult which owned a prime stretch of river fishing, only to be chased away. Eventually that patience of the adult (which I like to think was father of the youngster) snapped and it flew off after the youngster, cornered it in a field, grasped the head of the youngster in its beak and with one squeezed cracked open the skull of the youngster - so far as I know it did not attempt to swallow it. +++

SAT 06 MAR

The Havant Wildlife Group went to Fareham Creek this morning. walking down the east side of the creek from the Delme area to Cams Bay, then north to the A27 and back along it to the start. Wigeon, Teal Redshank and 5 Black-tailed Godwit were in the Delme pool area, and at the 'water feature' pond on the golf course a lone Egret was accompanied by a lone Brent (presumably one that has already decided it will not be making the trip back to Siberian this spring). Overhead two Buzzards soared. Looking across the to Fleetlands shore a flock of 30+ Lapwing had at least 11 Golden Plover, and in the Creek here (or maybe in Cams Bay) two male Goldeneyes were throwing their heads back and pointing their bills to the sky in the hope of attracting a mate (the presence of female Goldeneye is not mentioned so maybe this was just practice - or even brotherly love?). Inland of Cams Bay a Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in the trees separating the public open space from the golf course, and nearby both Rooks and Long-tailed Tits were seen collecting nest material. All in all that sounds like one of the group's better outings birdwise even without the Greenshank, Kingfisher, Stonechat, Little Owl and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker that could possibly have been in the area.

Further east in the Meon valley near Wickham Graham Osborne heard Siskin song and saw a pair of Crossbill somewhere in the West Walk (Forest of Bere) woodland, and in the northern section of the Meon valley (north of Exton) Trevor Carpenter came on a flock of well over 300 thrushes (mainly Fieldfare with a few Redwing), and saw 11 Buzzards, a Raven, with 3 Brambling and a Siskin. +++

A couple of late entries worth passing on are the first report of Yellowhammer song for the year (reported on the Titchfield Haven website under yesterday's date - Mar 5 - along with news of both Blackcap and Chiffchaff song), and a fascinating account from David Holland of how he .. 'during half term (18th February) went for a walk near Alresford Pond and along the River towards Arlebury Park. +++

PLANTS

FRI 12 MAR

The Hampshire Wildlife Trust website has a recent report on its Isle of Wight reserves and among news of such great endeavours as the building of a cattle corral on Arreton Down there is a snippet of wildlife news announcing that Toothwort can now be seen in Eaglehead Copse. +++

Another item, contributed by Bob Chapman, tells us that cattle are now grazing the old IBM playing fields on the Langstone South Moors nature reserve. Although I imagine that a lot of topsoil and turf was imported during the construction of the neat and level playing fields the underlying ground has never, so far as I know, been ploughed or seriously polluted, so hopefully a few years of grazing and cowpat dropping will give wild flowers a chance to

appear.

WED 10 MAR

The first flowering Cowslips of the year were seen on Portsdown by John Goodspeed as early as Jan 19 this year, and in past years I have seen January Cowslips by the Lymbourne stream here in Havant, but these are not the same species as the wild downland plants which I did not see (on Harting Down) until Apr 23 last spring. Richard Carpenter enjoyed finding Cowslips in flower in the Brownwich area near Titchfield today, but was quick to point out that these too would have been planted or garden escapes.

Brian Fellows was at Southsea Castle today and found Danish Scurvygrass flowering under the influence of natural sea salt rather than the road de-icing salt which has caused this plant to spread along most of our south coast roads (and miles inland).

Hazel catkins, the male flowers, started to open from Jan 10 this year and on Feb 1 Brian Fellows mentioned that the tiny female flowers from which the nuts will develop were already starting to go over. My reason for mentioning this now is that I love to see the 'scarlet eyelashes' of these tiny female flowers and searched quite a few catkin covered Hazet trees during Jan and Feb for the female flowers but have not seen a single one until I found them by chance on a tree in my own garden today, long after I had given up hope of seeing them and after the male catkins had apparently exhausted their pollen supply.

This over-late appearance of the female flowers is something that I have noticed in other years and I wonder if any one has any ideas on the subject. Is it just that my eyesight is failing? (I saw the flowers clearly enough today without searching). Is it that the female flowers time their appearance to co-incide with a pre-global warming calendar whereas the ever-eager males respond to the first hint of warmth (they are trained to start flowering before the females, as in many other species, so that pollen is available as soon as conditions are right for the female plants to open)? Or what? All suggestions welcome!

SUN 07 MAR

Today's first flowering was of Hairy Violet, seen on Portsdown Hill by John Goodspeed +++ Stephen Harwood tells me that a Bullace tree on Catherington Down has been in flower for some time +++

I myself cycled down to Sinah Common this morning but failed to find any early Shepherd's Cress or Spring Beauty (not really expecting them yet) but I did find that the leaf rosettes of the Green Winged Orchids south of the Golf Course near Gunner Point were well advanced (several seemed to be hiding incipient flower stems) and promise a good and early show. +++

My best find was at the bus turnround Island by the Ferry Inn where the whole surface of the centre of the roundabout was covered with the flowers of Common Whitlowgrass - for anyone not familiar with these flowers (which are difficult to spot if you have not seen them before!) this is a good place to get familiar with them. +++

Heading back east along Ferry Road a number of Wallflower plants were flowering as usual along the sandy banks of the north side of the road (starting opposite the roundabout) and as I have often wondered if these could be genuine wild Wallflowers rather than escapes of the garden Siberian Wallflower I took a specimen home but found that the petals were too large, and the twin lobes of the stigma tip were closely pressed together (not divergent), so this was an example of the garden escape.

SAT 06 MAR

The first Wood Anemone flowers of the year were found today by Richard Carpenter alongside a country lane called Chancellors Lane running east from the B3354 south of Horton Heath in the Botley area (the second turning east south of Horton Heath, not the one with the roundabout). Further east, at Durley Mill by the upper Hamble southwest of Bishops Waltham, Richard found the first Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage in flower (he found more of this tiny plant in Hook Valley near Warsash on Sunday Mar 7)

INSECTS

TUE 09 MAR

Today saw the emergence of the second Brimstone butterfly of the year, seen by Sue Clark in Alton, and it also gave Brian Fellows his first Small Tortoiseshell, seen in Brook Meadow at Emsworth

SAT 06 MAR

David Holland was the lucky finder of the first Brimstone butterfly of the year, seen today in Southampton near Taunton's College. Yesterday David was less certain about the identity of a butterfly seen briefly at the Lower Test Marshes but thinks it was a Painted Lady in a tatty state. +++

Also flying today was one Peacock butterfly in a north Emsworth garden, a Small Tortoiseshell at Hook in North Hampshire and another Small Tortoiseshell at a golf course in Liphook.

An unusual find was in Paul Boswell's moth trap at Greywell - this was a Dor Beetle, a species of cow-dung beetle in which the adults do not normally appear until April (and die out by November), so maybe beetles are also putting forward their clocks in response to global warming?

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 12 MAR

My remarks in last Monday's notes about the Muntjac deer seen by Sue Drewett in her garden, which borders the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth, have brought a very informative note from Andrew Brook of the Friends of Hollybank Woods. Andrew tells me that at least four Muntjac are known to be present in the woods - two males, a female with a distinctive left ear giving her a personal identity tag, and a young male to which she gave birth last summer.

MON 08 MAR

Sue Drewett has suspected that Muntjac Deer have visited her north Emsworth garden, on the fringe of Southleigh Forest, in the past and today she sent me a note saying that she has just had .. 'another very clear and prolonged sighting of a single muntjac deer, alas, in our garden. It was unhurried in its activities and came out of the hedge on one side and disappeared eventually into the hedge on the other side of the garden. It looked round and fat, with sleek, thick fur compared to the roe deer which we are more used to seeing. Its antlers were clear to see.' Sue last reported a Muntjac in her garden on May 25 last year.

WEEK 10 MAR 1 – 7 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 05 MAR

There have been plenty of recent indications that flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare are moving north, and today Richard Carpenter witnessed one sure sign of their imminent departure when he came on a flock of Redwing by the Titchfield canal path filling the air with the chattering subsong that tells you that they cannot wait any longer to get back home and set about the business of raising a family. The birds were relatively few in number (only 14 in the group that Richard saw) but the message was re-inforced by the sound of Chiffchaff song +++

Plenty of other winter birds were still in the Titchfield area today - Richard comments on the presence of around 300 Wigeon, 87 Teal, 70 Black-tailed Godwit, 70 Eider, 5 Pintail and 126 Lapwing. He also tells me that the first winter Iceland Gull which has often been seen recently at the mouth of Forton Lake in Gosport seems to have been at the Haven yesterday (when Bill Marjeram saw it there) and again today. Also reported there today was a Red-necked Grebe offshore. +++

I was interested to see that 70 Eider are still off Hill Head as when Val Lowings was there on Wednesday (Mar 3) she saw 21 of them flying (but west, not east) so perhaps we will once again have a notable number of these duck in the Solent through the summer? Val also commented that she could not see the Flamingo anywhere at the Haven on Wednesday ... +++

I mentioned Chiffchaff song above and while there is still no proof that these have started arriving as migrants they are starting to appear in places where none were known to be overwintering. Today brought a report of this from Ian Pibworth who found one today in his Southampton garden, and yesterday Philip Ray heard one singing in a Lewes garden - the first he has heard this year (and in exactly the same place that he heard his first last spring). On Monday Mar 1 a Chiffchaff appeared searching the rose bushes for insect food in a Portsmouth garden close to Baffins Pond where it would have been noticed had it been present through the winter. Of course one reason for these birds appearing in new places at this time of year is that those that have wintered here will currently be feeling the call of spring and the urge to move in the same way as those that have to cross the channel - birds wintering here will probably breed in Scotland or across the North Sea.

Another indication of restlessness among migratory birds comes from Pete Hughes, the RSPB warden at Pulborough Brooks, who last Sunday (Mar 29) came on 44 Bewick's Swans on the River Arun south of the downs near Offham where the flock had been building up (presumably collecting other birds that had been wintering elsewhere to form a more substantial group before undertaking the long distance journey). Today Pete tells us that some 50 Bewick's have been on the River north of the downs near Pulborough for the past few days - almost certainly the Offham group, perhaps moving locally in search of other Swans to join the main migrant flock, perhaps just putting in a little flying practice before they set off. +++

Another intriguing observation of Swans comes from Ryde on the Isle of Wight where today 60+ Mute Swans were on the canoe lake - it may well be that some Swans are regular residents there but but it seems strange that they should never have been mentioned before as Derek Hale is a regular visitor there and has noted the presence of Tufted Duck on many of his winter visits. I am aware that many Swans regularly move from inland waters to the safety of the sea for their annual summer moult when they become flightless and vulnerable to foxes, etc, and that Swans are forced to the sea in winter if the inland waters freeze, but I have always thought that these journeys were relatively short ones (each Swan being faithful to just two sites, one for breeding and inland living, the other at a nearby seaside site for emergency use only). This idea seems to be supported by Birds of Hampshire which quotes the evidence of ringing recoveries to show the great majority of Swans never move more than 34km, and only one or two exceptional ones fly more than 100km. So where did these Swans at Ryde come from, and why did they suddenly appear in a location never normally used by Swans? +++

In an attempt to answer my own question I had a look at the distribution map for Mute Swan in my Collins Bird Guide and discovered that Mute Swans do breed extensively in central and eastern Europe, and around the south coast of Scandinavia, where they cannot survive the winters, so there must be a substantial number of Mute Swans that are in fact migratory and travel distances comparable to the Bewick's and Whoopers. Presumably these birds normally winter along the north European coast or perhaps in the Mediterranean, but that does make it possible that the Ryde swans were long distance migrant flock (perhaps having a little navigational or weather difficulty). +++

Coming back to matters that we know a bit more about I see that Brian Fellows today visited Aldsworth Pond to the north of Emsworth and found the Mute Swan pair that normally breeds there have established their nest and that the female is sitting. I was particularly interested to hear this as, of the three islands in this pond, two are now completely overgrown with willow trees and the third seems to be more heavily vegetated each year - so much so that I was wondering if the Swans would be able to trample out a nest site for this year (this same effect can be seen on the two islands in the westmost of the Budds Farm pools - Canada Geese used to nest on the one nearest the sea but I think the brambles will now have defeated them!) +++

Another bird that is less easily deprived of its nest sites is the Coot as it builds its nest offshore where the land based vegetation is not the problem (though water level can be). Brian found one occupied Coot nest at Aldsworth Pond and Bob Chapman tells us that one or more have by now started nesting at Farlington Marshes.. Other birds on Aldsworth Pond

today were 14 Canada Geese, 6 Gadwall and 12 Tufted Duck and no doubt Mallard, Moorhen and Little Grebe were also present.

THU 04 MAR

Today brought a Wheatear to Worthing beach in Sussex and yesterday Tony Hale arrived at Shatterford in the New Forest to hear from birders already there that they had seen the first Hampshire Wheatear of the year before Tony arrived (and it had since disappeared).

These may well mark the start of the normal arrival of early Wheatears but are almost a full month after the very first arrived at Prawle in south Devon on Feb 8 to be followed by one at Ferring (Worthing in Sussex) on Feb 9 and another in Devon on Feb 10.

No spring migrants are reported by Bob Chapman in his latest news letter from Farlington Marshes but he does write about Lapwing making their display flights over the reserve and says that the calls of Oystercatchers, heard at night in the dark but seemingly heading east, are an indication that winter waders are now leaving Langstone Harbour +++

Miscellaneous news items for today and yesterday concern the spring movements of birds.

The only item observed today was in fact of non-movement - Bernie Forbes found a Sandwich Tern and two Little Stint still in Chichester Harbour when he visited East Head today (the Tern is more likely to be one of the Chichester Harbour winter birds than a new migrant as, while migrants are no doubt currently passing up the channel, it is usually a long time before these early migrants enter our harbours - last year the earliest records from the top of the local harbours were dated April 18 - one at Prinsted in Chichester Harbour - and April 19 - one at Farlington Marshes) +++

Another sign of return passage was the presence of two Black-necked Grebe on Arlington reservoir in the Cuckmere valley just west of Beachy Head - less obviously a migrant (but very probably one) was a Woodcock flushed by Martin Baggs on the shore of Chichester Harbour at Old Park Wood near Fishbourne.

WED 03 MAR

Peter Carr is back from a birding trip to Ascension Island and has just sent out the results of the February count of Egrets at their night roosts. Looking at the January and February results alongside each other I do not think there are any obvious conclusions (and if there were any they are masked by differences in weather, coverage of the sites and - in my own case, using a different viewpoint for the February count).

The overall total of birds counted was 249 in Jan and 235 in Feb, and at some sites the number seen was less in Feb than in Jan but the Itchen Valley (Allington Lane) roost, which had 35 birds in January, was apparently not counted in February and that fact alone should have reduced the overall total from 249 to 214 (where it was 235). Another big drop (of 22 birds) was recorded at Pagham Harbour where the 41 birds seen in Jan went down to just 19 (and that should have reduced to overall total to 192 where it was in fact 235 so there must have been a balancing increase of 44 somewhere). +++

An extra 9 birds came from the Tournerbury roost on Hayling (not counted in January), and another 16 were added at Sowley Pond (also not counted in January). Interestingly the count at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight went up from 14 in Jan to 28 in Feb (25 of these flew over from the mainland to roost there), and my own count at Wade Court (Langstone) was 13 higher in February because I chose a better viewpoint and managed to see on the count day a similar total to that which Jason Crook had seen throughout January. An extra 6 birds roosted at Horsea Island in Portsmouth Harbour but only 2 went into Elson Wood where there had been 3 in Jan, and none could be seen at the Badnam roost near Bursledon on the Hamble. +++

My own guess was that the February total would be down on the January one as a good number of our winter birds moved away to nest (some in Britain but mostly on the continent), and I think this may have been the cause of the drop in numbers at Pagham (41 down to 19) and at Alresford Pond (down from 45 in Jan to 36 in Feb). A similar drop was seen in the Meon Valley where 24 went down to 18, but I see that John Shillitoe comments that if the count had been a week earlier in Feb the number would actually have gone up to 29 (which he found there on Feb 8). +++

As Pete Carr wisely says it is too early to draw any conclusions, and I would add that we

need to include the birds roosting on the Wey downstream from Alton (at least half a dozen?), and the birds whose roost(s) has not yet been discovered which are seen by day at Old Basing and on the River Blackwater between Farnborough and Camberley (at least 16 known to be missed there?)

TUE 02 MAR

Brian Fellows paid a brief visit to Baffins Pond today but was there long enough to see that the Swan pair have made their island nest though there is no proof that the female has yet started to lay eggs.

Perhaps one reason for not having much time to spend at Baffins was that Brian had earlier found five Purple Sandpipers and a Sanderling feeding on exposed weed at Southsea Castle as the tide fell, and had met an old friend at Eastney Lake in the shape of a Grey Plover with a distinctive set of red plastic rings on its leg. This bird was ringed as an adult of unknown age at the Kench (just across the water from Eastney) back in 1998 and has returned to the same area each winter since then so it is now more than six years old. The fact that it returns to its old haunts is one more of many examples of birds being very site faithful to both their winter quarters and nest sites, but I also find it interesting that such an easily identified bird is so infrequently seen by birders - this winter Brian saw it on Oct 31 but not again until today (and I have heard no other reports of it). +++

Re Brian's sighting of the Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle I mentioned that a Sanderling was feeding with them. We normally expect to find Sanderling dashing about on sand when feeding but I don't think sand is essential to their feeding environment in the same way that certain types of mud are essential to wader species which only feed on creatures living in that type of mud. Sanderling are perhaps better regarded as 'general beachcombers' ready to feed on whatever small meat offerings the tide may wash up - a good stretch of open sand combined with their clockwork legs maximizes their chance of finding such offerings but is no reason for them not to feed in other places such as the relatively smooth stone facing of the Southsea Castle seawall slope, especially if there are Purple Sandpipers there disturbing the small creatures hidden in the seaweed - any not grabbed by the Sandpipers will drift off in the water to be picked up by a Sanderling. (I wouldn't expect to see Sanderling trying to feed on a natural rocky shore to which their legs and feet are not adapted but I have seen Sanderling feeding near Southsea Castle on flat areas of concrete over which the waves are washing - the concrete probably offers a surer footing than does sand). +++

While on the subject of Sanderling feeding habits George Spraggs on Hayling Island has noticed other interesting facets of their behaviour. Sitting quietly on the Hayling Bay shore near the Inn on the Beach he had six Sanderling running about within ten feet of where he was sitting and could not only see how they would run into the water to wash small scraps of food they had picked up before eating them (I had not previously thought about the problem of getting the sand out of their sandwiches before eating!) but even more interestingly he watched one 'bully boy' Sanderling pull food out of the bill of another and make off with it (a new 'Skua-ling' species in the making?)

In his 'agony aunt' role on bird matters Adrian Martin has been presented with an old problem to which there is, I think, no easy answer. The person with the problem is suffering constant attacks on the windows of their home by a Blackbird which presumably is seeing a reflection of itself in the windows and is attacking this intruder into its territory with a violence that is in danger of marking the glass (and causing the window sill to become covered with Blackbird droppings?). The homeowner has tried putting various things such as badly stuffed imitation cats inside the window to no effect and is desperately wanting effective advice to deter the bird (but would probably draw the line at covering the window sill with birdlime, then giving the bird the short, sharp shock treatment when it is unable to fly away) +++

Hopefully someone has an answer (if so address it to Adrian at apm1@soc.soton.ac.uk) but all I can suggest is that any deterrent needs to be outside and not inside the window (the reflection is probably such that from the Blackbird's viewpoint it cannot see in through the window which must be acting as a mirror). Perhaps a low net curtain on the outside of the

window would do the trick - alternatively an angle-poise light could be situated to shine on the inside of the window and so change the reflective characteristics of the glass (serious science involved in that one but surely Southampton University must have physicists who would love to take on this challenge?). Another thought would be to fit the equivalent of a 'stinger mat', as used by police to stop cars, on the windowsill - if that is getting too close to the bird lime then change the suggestion to a pressure pad which will cause a recording of cat noises to be played when the Blackbird lands on it (perhaps one could adapt one of those kits you can get to record rude messages in a birthday card, and which play the recording when the card is opened?) Slightly more seriously you could try sticking to the outside of the window one of these hawk silhouettes that are designed to prevent birds flying into office windows... Probably anything on the outside of the window would work (wind chimes, old CDs, bird feeders with a sucker to go on the outside of the glass).

MON 01 MAR

I have not yet heard Chiffchaff song (sadly the improvements to the Budds Farm sewage works here in Havant in recent years have more or less destroyed the winter Chiffchaff habitat which used to attract up to twenty birds in some winters) but a Mistle Thrush was singing near my garden both this morning and yesterday morning, along with the first Chaffinch to be heard from the garden. At Langstone this afternoon a Blackbird was singing in the late afternoon, and I see that Brian Fellows has heard a Blackbird at Emsworth on two evenings this week - he says that all the regular resident species at Brook Meadow have now begun to sing, and the summer migrants are eagerly awaited!
+++

Not a summer migrant, but as close as you will get at the moment, was Blackcap song from a winter visitor heard twice this week by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven. Richard first heard one singing on Feb 27 and then again yesterday. +++

Richard also tells me that the Flamingo is still very much in evidence at the Haven and seems to be getting the right kind of shrimps to eat as the pink of its plumage is all that the visitors expect. Being a Chilean species I guess it will not be feeling to call of spring (and possibly moving off in search of a mate) until next November (the month in which it arrived at the Haven, and perhaps the reason for doing so?)

Northern hemisphere birds are feeling the approaching spring, and I had three reminders of this today when at the Langstone West Mill on the edge of the South Moors. +++

The first came while I was pinning up the weekly Nature Notes poster on the fence of the West Mill I heard the unmistakable sound of low flying Swans and looked up to see two Mute Swans flying up the Langbrook stream in line astern. As there is no water large enough for them to land on further up the stream I watched these two and saw them veer to the right in a 360 degree turn which brought them back over my head and then out across the South Moors. As Swan generally appear to fly directly from A to B I can only assume this was some sort of courtship chase - possibly a 'first time' pair combining their chase with a search for a nest site? +++

The second observation actually occurred at the main road end of Mill Lane - as I crossed the main road into Mill Lane I noticed movement in the normally empty grassland of the large field which lies between the main road and the Langbrook stream (I think some call the field Southmere) and I found a flock of more than 25 Lapwing which I have not seen there all winter and which I took to be 'travellers' stopping there for no more than a day +++

The third sight required more imagination and wishful thinking to turn it into a sign of spring. What I saw was two Egrets flying overhead, again following the line of the Langbrook stream and also in close line astern. These two were probably heading for the Wade Court night roost, but the fact that they looked like a pair and were heading for the place where, several years ago, a pair were rumoured to have nested, put my imagination into overdrive. I am as sure as I can be that I am not violating the rule about not revealing sensitive breeding sites in mentioning this incident, but I'm sure that many people will be pleased if I am guilty in this respect ... +++

The story of Egrets breeding in Havant by this Langbrook stream goes back to the mid 1990s when the news of breeding on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour and at the Frater site in

Gosport had not been released but everyone was expecting to hear that the Egrets had bred somewhere. What I was told, by someone living in Brookmead Way (the southern branch of Langbrook Close, and also having houses whose gardens run down to the Langbrook stream), was that he made a once a year Christmas time visit to have tea with an elderly lady who lived in the house at the very end of this cul de sac on the streamside. The subject of Egrets was raised and this lady said that she had watched a pair feeding a youngster in her garden for a week or so in the spring of the year just ending. +++

To make this story the more convincing Egrets were and still are to be seen in that part of the stream for much of the year, and the land downstream of her garden was and is for about 200 metres a stretch of dense untended woodland with a very swampy ground making it almost inaccessible (the public path is on the other bank of the stream). +++

You can imagine the frustration of all birders who heard this story roughly nine months after the event and had no way of verifying its accuracy ... while I think the lady concerned was 'seeing things' that were not Egrets there remains that nagging doubt, and even now (eight or nine years later with no indication of Egrets nesting there in the intervening years) the sight of this 'pair' of Egrets heading upstream once again roused my curiosity - after all the main purpose served by Egrets seems to be to lead birders on and, every time a birder thinks he can predict their behaviour, to deceive them by acting contrary to expectation! +++

I went home from Mill Lane this evening via Langstone Mill and found the tide had fallen but had left a bank of green weed (*Enteromorpha*) below the seawall. Whether they were feeding on the weed or not there was a flock of around 50 Brent much closer to the seawall than I would have expected and more Black-tailed Godwit than usual were probing the wet mud. I may be imagining things but at the end of winter I sense a change in the behaviour of the Brent which makes me think that the birds I am seeing are not the ones that have been present here throughout the winter but are ones already on the move, though any change in behaviour could well be just a result of local birds feeling the need to feed up and put on weight for the journey ahead of them.

SUN 29 FEB

Peter Raby found eight Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle today, along with three Sanderling, and Matt Coumbe had another unexpected sighting in the entrance channel of Langstone Harbour where a Red-throated Diver was fishing. Matt was taking part in a survey of the Hayling shore looking for dead or oiled seabirds and for litter - luckily they found no dead or dying birds and little litter so all looks well for Hayling to retain its blue flag status to indicate the cleanliness of its beaches

In the Arun valley south of the downs Peter Hughes found 44 Bewick's Swans in the floodplain between Burpham and Offham (where the river splits into two branches form an island about 800 metres wide and the same length). David Parker happened to be in this area yesterday and counted 42 Swans where the previous highest count had been only 26 (as recently as Feb 26) +++

Most winters bring a substantial flock of Bewick's to the Amberley area north of the downs but this winter the birds seem to have favoured the Offham area south of the Downs. The first two were seen at Pulborough Brooks on Dec 12 and on Dec 15 ten Swans were in the northern area, but in January all sightings were south of the downs and the peak count was still only 15. More birds arrived at the start of February and on Feb 7 there were more than 24 at Offham and another 5 at Waltham Brooks to the north. Feb 11 found 39 birds in the normal Amberley area and 3 Swans were back on the Pulborough reserve on Feb 17 but on Feb 26 the count was 26 Swans all at Offham where there were 42 yesterday and 44 today.

The current increase in numbers probably indicates that the return passage has already begun and that birds from further west are moving east in stages - perhaps the birds are as puzzled by the weather as we are and cannot believe it is really safe to set out on a long journey. +++

Golden Plover sightings are probably also showing that these birds are already on passage. On the Isle of Wight a flock of Golden Plover at Newtown Harbour grew from 106 on Oct 14

to 480 on Dec 16 but in January none were reported there and only 20 seem to have been present on the Island (in the Atherfield/Whale Chine area). On Feb 10 just 2 Plovers re-appeared at Newtown but today there are 210 there, presumably having come from further south. +++

In East Sussex a huge flock of around 2000 birds were regularly in the Rye area in November and in January, but the biggest count in February was of around 100 birds and yesterday Cliff Dean told us that all Golden Plover had left the Pett Levels. +++

Here in Hampshire there have been plenty of big flocks of Golden Plover seen recently - for example the flock of more than 450 in the Posbrook Lane area at Titchfield on Feb 22, a flock of 163 at Hook Park near Hamble on Feb 24, a flock of over 100 at Keyhaven on Feb 25 and a smaller flock of 41 found today by Richard Ford near Liss - but these flocks all seem to be sudden appearances in places where there have been few or none in recent weeks, suggesting to me that they are travelling bands heading north.

Another possible but unlikely report comes from John Simons at Dean Lane End north of Rowlands Castle - John writes .. 'In my garden; a bird which unfortunately just wouldn't stay still enough for me to see it properly but for all intents had the jizz of a Lesser Whitethroat. Are these birds starting to winter here?' As John probably knows from the 2002 Sussex Bird Report and other sources there was proven over-wintering of a Lesser Whitethroat in Ken Hearne's garden at Worthing where one bird was seen from 17 Nov 02 to 14 Apr 03, and with the recent arrival of so many extraordinarily early summer migrants why not one more... I hope the bird re-appears and gives John a better view. +++

Two other birds which are teetering on the edge of extinction in Hampshire are Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow, and both get a mention in current news. In the Fritham area of the New Forest around Eyeworth Pond Dave Wheatley found a flock of Marsh Tits around a nut feeder and thought that one bird had a larger bib than the others and might have been a Willow Tit but unfortunately it made no sound to confirm this guess. In the north east of the county however Chris Jones had better luck - he writes .. 'Spent the afternoon at Straits Inclosure in search of Willow Tits - not much luck until about 5 o'clock, when I heard one calling adjacent to the track that runs in from the eastern boundary of the woods.' +++

Sadly there are no Hampshire Tree Sparrow sightings so far this year though Jason Crook did have two birds at Farlington Marshes on 16 Oct 03 and John Norton had a possible (one bird which flew off before he could be sure) in Gosport on Dec 1. The best we can do on the south coast at the moment is a flock of eight (possibly ten) near the mouth of the Sussex Ouse in the Piddinghoe/Peacehaven area yesterday, and there could well still be 25 or more in the Rye Harbour area from which there have been frequent reports up to Feb 22.

SAT 28 FEB

An unusual sighting (on Feb 26) was of three Mergansers on the Town Millpond at Emsworth. Plenty of Merganser can be seen daily in our local harbours and from now on there will be increasingly large flotillas in which the birds chase each other across the water in their display and courtship activities but strangely they very rarely show on the waterside ponds (does anyone know how frequently they appear on the lake at Farlington Marshes?). I'm not sure what was going on to bring these three onto fresh water but it caused me to think that as soon as they arrive back in the tundra areas where they breed they will have to change their behaviour and learn to live on or near fairly small freshwater bodies far from the open sea. In checking out their behaviour I learnt that Mergansers are ground nesters, unlike Goosanders and Goldeneye which both nest in tree holes. Although Mergansers mainly eat fish (those sawbills look fairly specialised fish catching implements) I see they will take worms and the like so are perhaps not totally dependent on living near water with a supply of fresh fish.

PLANTS

FRI 05 MAR

Richard Carpenter has heard that Coltsfoot is now flowering en masse along the Chilling Cliffs to the west of Titchfield Haven, and the flowers are said to be attracting many bees (I

suspect these will be some species of small mining bee rather than Honey Bees)
Brian Fellows was on the southern fringe of Stansted Forest today and found a few more flowers of Lesser Periwinkle than I did on Feb 8 (when I could only see one flower adorning the acres of leaves covering the ground there in Pits Copse), so I guess this is not going to be one of those years in which this plant excels itself. +++
Later Brian found a few more flowers of Common Whitlowgrass in the Hollybank Woods at north Emsworth.

TUE 02 MAR

A cycle ride in today's sunshine took me down beside the Brockhampton stream where (see notes for Feb 23) I recently saw my first example of Common Whitlowgrass in flower. Today I found just six flowering plants at this site with the promise of many more to come in the form of tiny leaf rosettes. In East Sussex, however, I read in the February monthly summary from Rye Harbour that much of the Whitlow grass there has already passed the flowering stage and the plants are showing empty seed cases. +++

This difference in dates is something I have noticed on more than one occasion on Hayling Island - in particular the Shepherd's Cress plants are usually in seed well before the date given in books for the start of flowering, and similarly the Childing Pink plants are well over there before those at the mouth of Pagham Harbour start to flower.

MON 01 MAR

A personal first which I always look forward to is the opening of the first Hornbeam catkins and I saw mine today on the mature tree which overhangs the 'kissing gate' at the west end of the path across the Wade Court north fields (close to the bridge over the Lymbourne stream). I suspect this was by no means the first to flower but the other trees that I have seen recently, all looking as if their catkins were opening, have not actually had flowers open for business as this one did today.

SAT 28 FEB

The Havant Wildlife Group met today at Stoughton village near the source of the River Ems, and walked north through Inholmes Wood where they found Wild Daffodils in flower. There were relatively few other flowers to be seen but they did see some Coltsfoot of which I have seen only one example so far this year. Dave Savage, one of the group, was of this opinion that most wild flowers were later than usual in flowering this year and in general I would agree - I can certainly remember years in which swathes of Coltsfoot have been out before the end of January

INSECTS

TUE 02 MAR

James Wheeldon today saw both Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady at the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at Hilea by Tipner Lake on the north west corner of Portsea Island, and Ray Hamblett saw another Painted Lady in the Lancing area on the West Sussex coast east of Worthing. These are two local examples of the continuing stream of Painted Lady sightings still appearing on Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website from which I cannot resist quoting one sighting from Wales on Feb 26 which was said to have been seen .. 'in a brief sunny spell, between snowstorms'

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 04 MAR

On Monday of this week (Mar 1) Brian Fellows found the sluice gates of the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth open and both the Slipper and Peter Pond almost empty as the water had drained into the sea. They have now been closed again to restore a normal water level but the low level did reveal one of the specialities of the Slipper Millpond. A number of wooden posts at the southern end of the pond, normally under water and out of sight, were exposed to view and seen to be covered with a mass of what appeared to be some form of barnacle. In fact these are the cases of an unusual tubeworm called Ficopomatus enigmaticus - uncommon enough to have no entry in either of my general books of marine life.

WED 03 MAR

Mark Litjens, who works at the IBM Hursley site to the southwest of Winchester, put a message on HOSLIST today asking if anyone could explain the origin of an increasing number of roadside rabbit corpses he has noticed recently in the Hursley area. He says these are not just ordinary road casualties but some have been partially skinned by something unknown, and it is this phantom rabbit skinner that he is interested in. +++

I can't give Mark a positive answer but would suggest that Badgers are the most likely culprits as I think they are more likely to eat where they find food whereas Foxes are more likely to carry their finds back to their dens (as are Stoats which are well known for lugging rabbit corpses twice their size for hundreds of yards). Both Foxes and Badgers are likely to give birth to cubs at this time of year, and hence be in search of extra food, and if Badgers are prepared to kill and eat live Hedgehogs (and to scavenge around dustbins or in farmyards) they would have no difficulty in skinning and eating a dead rabbit found at the roadside
+++

Not all the rabbit corpses seen by Mark showed signs of being eaten - some were just corpses lying in the roadside vegetation, and while these may just be normal road casualties there is the possibility that he is seeing the effects of some disease spreading among the rabbits in that area - either causing them to drop dead from disease or making them more vulnerable to death on the roads through loss of hearing/sight or inability to move fast.

MON 01 MAR

I am sorry to say that small piles of mouse poison can be seen on and around my computer table since my computer Mouse started to leave a trail of mouse droppings over the table a few days ago. Out in the garden however I frequently see rats cleaning up food put out for the birds and I do not feel any need to deter them, nor I imagine does Richard Carpenter who tells me that he is proud to have a Yellow-necked Mouse visiting his Hill Head garden bird feeder - and doing so in bright sunshine with no attempt at concealment. Another person who welcomes Wood Mice onto his patio at Bognor is Lawrence Holloway - he is quite happy to feed them just as long as they will allow him to get close enough to take photos of them...

SUN 29 FEB

At Lymington Marshes today Russell Wynn watched his second Common Seal of the month - he also saw one there on Feb 9 (maybe the same animal which John Shillitoe saw close off Titchfield Haven on Feb 11?)

SAT 28 FEB

Christoph Harwood saw three Hares in open fields south of East Meon today but the Havant Wildlife Group went one better with a sighting of a bunch of four Fallow does of which one was pure white. Nearby was a separate bunch of seven bucks (although not all of the group carried antlers I think the Fallow keep in unisex groups when not involved in their autumn rut and last year's young bucks - with little to be proud of on their heads - will probably be with the males rather than with their mothers). These deer were seen by the Havant Wildlife Group in fields between Inholmes Wood to the north of Stoughton and the northern slopes of Kingley Vale.

WEEK 9 FEB 23 – 29 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 27 FEB

Top story comes from Kevin Stouse who watched a pair of Great Crested Grebes displaying to each other on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth today. A pair of these Grebes have nested at the IBM Lake since 1998 and have had young in at least two years but have been remarkably elusive throughout and it is good to know they are back for another year.

The one or two pairs of Swans expected to nest on the IBM Lake are not yet back there regularly but this week Brian Fellows found the pair at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth giving the impression that the female was settled on her nest - I suspect that was just a practice for the real thing but it will not be long before Swans everywhere start to lay eggs.

Also this week Brian watched the Swan pair on Peter Pond at Emsworth displaying to each other and noted that they have at last managed to chase off the two cygnets from last year's brood which have been reluctant to set off into the wide world on their own, but he has not yet seen this pair settling on their nest so the big question remains unanswered - will they continue to use the old site which is low lying and subject to flooding or will they move to the higher site which has been built up for them close to the old site - the safer site was created before last spring but was not used then.

Sussex news begins with a correction to the report which I carried last Tuesday (Feb 24) of a male Scaup seen on the east Trout Lake at Chichester - it has since been looked at more closely and is now declared to be a hybrid Tufted Duck (presumably Tufted x Scaup) +++
Sparrowhawks are becoming more and more noticeable as they show off and 'beat the bounds' of their breeding territories, and as they hunt more frequently with the need to build up strength for mating and egg-laying (later, when the females are sitting and then rearing their chicks the males will be hunting even more frequently to feed several hungry hawks, not just to satisfy their own hunger). +++

These remarks are prompted by a small spate of Sparrowhawk reports coming my way recently - the latest being from Richard Hallett who this evening had .. 'a close view from my bedroom window of a male Sparrowhawk feasting on a cock Blackbird in my Denmead garden just now at 17.30. My wife saw the Blackbird throwing leaves around in search for food in a flowerbed. Next moment sadly he was dinner.' (and I cannot help adding that the next moment news of this event could have been received in Australia, thanks to the internet - as it was Richard just sent the news to me but I note it was sent within 15 minutes of the kill, such is the immediacy of modern birding news even amongst those who do not own pagers and mobile phones). +++

Brian Fellows has similarly had a Sparrowhawk visit his Emsworth garden on two successive days this week, and on the Sussex Downs south east of Pulborough Pete Hughes (the RSPB warden at Pulborough) watched a female Sparrowhawk displaying - the display including .. 'tail-flagging and stooping gloriously'. I only wish that more people who feel impelled to communicate sightings which have caught their attention would include this sort of detail which helps the reader to share the excitement of the moment and to learn more about bird behaviour. Before reading this I had thought that the display flight of a female Sparrowhawk consisted in simple soaring to survey her territory followed by a falcon like stoop down to the chosen nest site, so Pete's remark about tail flagging has aroused my curiosity (which is yet to be satisfied) on this aspect. +++

Another report of increased Sparrowhawk activity comes from Martin Hampton in central Portsmouth where he now regularly sees a Sparrowhawk soaring over the University. He will, however, have to do better than that to outdo Martin Gillingham's sightings from his office window (overlooking Victoria Park just west of Portsmouth's Guildhall Square) in the spring of 2002. On 17 April 02 Martin wrote .. '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' In fact his most interesting sighting did not come later but earlier in that year - on March 11 Martin wrote .. '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'. +++

Coming back to Martin Hampton and the present I see that he adds to his Sparrowhawk news .. 'Lesser Blackbacks seem to be forming a slightly larger proportion of my 'from-office' gull sightings' - a timely reminder of the increasing number of rooftop nesting Herring and Lesser Blackbacks in our south coast towns. When I was in Chichester last week Herring

Gulls were noisily present on rooves and chimneys, and I suspect that they will by now also be back on the Chickenhall Lane industrial estate at Eastleigh.

THU 26 FEB

And finally for today a mystery - what has happened to the Titchfield Flamingo? A note from Ed Griffiths has just reached me posing this question in a rather strange way. Ed says .. 'One bird I haven't seen you mention is the Chilean Flamingo currently resident at Titchfield Haven.... A very definite escape, but it was proving very popular with people looking for it from along the seafront last Saturday - anything sparking an interest in birdlife can't be bad. The display in the centre informs us it came from Lymington and I believe it rejoices in the name of Tufty (!)' +++

The reason that I have not mentioned it is that I have not heard of it since Feb 11 and I do not know if it is still there or if absence of news is because no one is any longer interested in reporting its presence. I cannot make out from Ed's message if anyone actually did see it last Saturday (Feb 21) but he does not actually say so - only that people who were infrequent visitors to the Haven had seen a mention of it on the notice board and were, like twitchers in pursuit of the Scarlet Pimpernel, seeking it everywhere with no success. +++

As my summary of its stay at the Haven has now rolled off my current web pages into semi-oblivion, here is a recap. I wrote on Jan 29 .. Another snippet of info came from the TV news today which revealed that the origin and name of the Flamingo that has been at Titchfield Haven since Nov 7 is thought to have been discovered. The bird is said to be called 'Fluffy A' and to have been given that name by a lady living at Lymington who has a back garden full of what looked (on the TV) like at least fifty Flamingos and who said she had hand reared this individual from a chick. When the bird first appeared at Titchfield Mike Rafter suggested that it might have been the same bird that had been previously seen on the Beaulieu River, and while that may or may not be true I am surprised that we don't have more of these birds appearing on the Hampshire scene. I believe there is money to be made from 'puppy farming' with an endless demand for puppies from child-pestered parents, but I am very surprised to think that it can be worth while devoting your life and garden to breeding flamingos - perhaps someone can tell me how you make a living out of keeping them. +++

Any current info on this exotic illegal immigrant will be gratefully received and posted here...

WED 25 FEB

An interesting item of Hampshire news comes from George Spraggs on Hayling Island where he watched a Cormorant join a group of gulls spiralling up in a thermal before it flew off at a great height. Normally Cormorants fly low over water but quite a few of them do fish, and nest, far inland and they can sometimes be seen heading inland from the coast, flying high in the sky - perhaps partly to see where they are going and to spot likely ponds as they go, but also because the energy saving low flight over water is impractical over the land.

George asks if others have seen Cormorants gaining height in this way and Doug Robertson says .. 'The Cormorants used to do this over the Gosport peninsula. I would see this quite often in the early summer when watching around the Leesland area. It is quite a weird sight.' Neither George nor Doug actually say that the birds flew inland after gaining height but I myself recall one instance of this which I saw over the Warblington shore east of Langstone - in that case two Cormorants flew at a fairly low height to a thermal rising over the Warblington fields, then spiralled up together before flying inland. That was also in spring time and I wondered at the time if it was some sort of courtship behaviour but I suppose it could have been an entirely accidental meeting of the two birds. +++

Another local query comes from Mike Collins who was surprised yesterday to see a flock of around 30 Curlew feeding in a muddy pony field near Southdowns College by the A3M to the north of Portsdown Hill - Mike wonders if it is unusual for Curlew to feed away from the harbour mud, to which the short answer is no. This particular field seems to attract them (the last mention of a flock feeding here came from John Goodspeed who saw around 40 there on Jan 18) and similar numbers can regularly be seen on fields at Warblington and Hayling Island. Another place that I have seen them in the past is by the Wallington River where it heads up towards Denmead through the Southwick Woods. In a few months time

these same fields will probably attract passing flocks of Whimbrel. +++

I am not sure if this is a regular winter feeding strategy adopted by certain groups of Curlew who prefer land to sea worms (or who, like the Egrets, prefer the less exposed and warmer land to the open mud of the harbours in cold weather), or if it is a casual strategy adopted when (as at the time that Mike saw them) they are hungry after a very cold night and their feeding in the harbour is curtailed early in the morning by the rising tide, but since the birds will soon be returning from the shores to inland heath and bog nesting places, they must be adept at finding food away from the coast. +++

I myself took advantage of a glorious sunny winter morning to walk to the Staunton Country Park on the northern fringe of Havant, returning via the Lavant stream flowing down from Rowlands Castle alongside the railway. Several Chaffinch were singing (along with the Robin, Dunnocks, Greenfinch, Blue Tits, Collared Doves and Starlings) as I walked through the built up area, and as I walked in through the gates of Leigh Park Gardens - which are part of the country park - I was greeted by strong Mistle Thrush song from the top of a massive Plane tree. Alongside the entrance up to 20 Redwing were feeding among cattle and both Song Thrush and Blackbirds were taking Ivy berries. Down on the lake a pair of Swans were in residence and I disturbed a Heron from its fishing. In woodland north of the lake Stock Dove and Coal Tit were singing and a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming. Here I turned east and crossed the Long Avenue (which joins the gardens to Havant Thicket) into Hammonds Land Coppice where I had close views of Marsh Tit and the briefest of views (after much searching for the origin of tiny bird sounds) of what must have been a Firecrest from the bright mossy green of its back feathers (all that I managed to see!). +++

Out on the Gipsies Plain fields separating the woodland I was in from Havant Thicket to the north the usual crowd of well over 100 Corvids were feeding distantly (these are I think the Rooks that will soon nest near the railway in Rowlands Castle, supplemented by many Jackdaws). Taking the road south east from the Staunton Arms (Whichers Gate Road) I was intending to follow it to the railway but as I passed the small fragment of woodland opposite the Prospect Lane road junction I heard noises of Nuthatch and was attracted in to find a Tree Creeper climbing a tree right in my path with a Goldcrest working a Holly bush next to it and a Green Woodpecker calling in the distance. +++

Coming back out of the woodland I continued along the road to where the path turns south beside the Lavant stream and here I found more Redwing with some ponies, and a Grey Wagtail in a tiny tributary stream. Nothing more until I came out on the Bartons Road playing fields where I had glorious views of a male Bullfinch after seeing a pair of them fly into a Blackthorn thicket. The male stayed on the sunlit branches nibbling unopen Blackthorn flower buds for some time, then flew into denser cover. As I turned to walk on I heard strange, quiet noises coming from where the bird had gone, causing me to stand still for several more minutes as the sounds continued intermittently. The best way I can describe them is to compare them to the sound of a metal gate intermittently moving on rusty hinges in a light wind, and I am pretty sure that I was, for the second time in my life, hearing Bullfinch song (maybe subsong or practice song). Only once before have I heard Bullfinch making any noise other than their quiet piping contact notes (which I hear quite frequently - much more often than I actually see Bullfinch!), and on that occasion the male Bullfinch was perched openly on a yew tree making a reasonably loud and continuous jumble of sound which must have been song. What I heard today was both quieter and more intermittent but certainly not just contact notes (and it received no answer though the female was presumably close by).

TUE 24 FEB

From the SOS news webpage I learn today that a male Scaup was on the east Trout Lake at Chichester today while the two Whooper Swans remain on Ivy Lake, and - from Owen Mitchell - that 118 Shoveler were on the Drayton gravel pit to the east of Chichester. +++
Probably on Feb 21 something caused around 2000 Brent to crowd into the shoreline field south of Warblington cemetery which they have not used previously this winter (the most I have seen ashore here this winter is up to 600 in the middle of the three shoreline fields

between Pook Lane and the Church though in previous winters I have seen 1500 or more Brent in the field south of the Old Rectory)

MON 23 FEB

White Wagtails are normally to be seen as vagrants along the south coast in April, but I see that Birds of Hampshire says that they are occasionally seen from 'early March', nevertheless one which arrived on the Isle of Wight yesterday was a very early bird (and further proof that birds are struggling across the channel against the prevailing northerly winds). This bird was seen at Brading sewage works yesterday and again today, and Kris Gillam has an excellent photo of it (showing the light grey back, nape and crown) on his website today. Derek Mills may also have seen one today at the other end of the Island (at Yarmouth) but only rates it as a 'possible'. +++

I myself made a quick visit to the Budds Farm area today and happened to meet Jason Crook by the Brockhampton stream where amongst other things he told me that he had seen over 100 Shoveler on the Budds Farm pools earlier in the day and that both the hybrid Ferruginous Duck and the female Scaup were still there. As I headed towards Budds Mound along the shore a Kingfisher took off from the 'rocks in nets' seawall over the high tide. On the mound I found the small flock of 20 Linnets still present but it was then after midday and the Shoveler (which may have been feeding earlier) were all resting around the edges where many of them could have been hidden in the vegetation so I could not see more than about 60 of them. I did not spot the 'Fudge Duck' but did see the Scaup out on the open water, not asleep like the other duck. Also present were at least one pair of Gadwall but not the pair of Swans that had been here when John Gowen's walk party came by on Saturday - the Swans will no doubt soon be back to nest as they have done before.

SAT 21 FEB

Other birds in Hampshire today included four Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle seen by Nigel Peace - the highest number of these birds spotted there this winter, but maybe just passing through rather than staying to let others enjoy them. They were there about three hours before high tide when the rising water would have been arousing any little creatures that had been dormant during the low tide hours.

Just across the water at the southern tip of Thorney Island Barry Collins was making his high tide WeBS count and recording 696 Knot, 798 Bar-tailed Godwit and other birds including 66 Sanderling and 400 Common Gulls (presumably pausing on passage back to northern nest cliffs). Also on Pilsey sands were three Sandwich Terns (at roughly the same time Trevor Carpenter watched one fly into Langstone Harbour to make at least four in our local area). Barry indicates that he thinks these Terns may be ones which have wintered in Chichester Harbour and refers to seeing a group of 5 in the Emsworth Channel on Dec 4, and as this sighting never got into the public domain he may have seen them regularly through the winter, but the reports I have picked up from the SOS News and HOSLIST show just one flurry of three sightings of single birds in the south of Chichester Harbour on Dec 28 - 30 with no reports during January or the first half of February until now. During that period I saw five reports of wintering Sandwich Tern in Langstone Harbour, spread out from Jan 7 to Feb 1, and since then there have been two reports (one from the mouth of the Beaulieu River on Feb 8 and one from Brighton on Feb 10) which look as if they were of early migrants as there had been no winter sightings in those areas. With so many early arriving migrant species I would not rule out the chance that today's birds could have been new arrivals, though admittedly migrants are more likely to have continued along the coast rather than coming into the harbour.

Continuing his WeBS count on the Thorney Deepes Barry found 547 Lapwing, 440 Wigeon, 426 Redshank and 208 Pintail with 5 Gadwall, 11 Greenshank and 3 Spotted Redshank, and in the Emsworth Channel he saw a Red-throated Diver - the only one I have heard of in Chichester Harbour this winter other than a single oiled bird seen from East Head on Dec 5. +++

Barry also tells us that a party of 12 Avocet which had been in the Thorney Channel (probably since Dec 30 when I first heard of some in Nutbourne Bay) have not been seen since Feb 18. I also see that neither Ewan nor Barry mention any Golden Plover - I guess that the

flock of around 500 being reported in the Wittering area at the beginning of January have already departed (as early as Jan 27 Lawrence Holloway remarked on signs of these birds growing their summer plumage). +++

Over on the Hayling side of Chichester Harbour Brian Fellows made his WeBS count for the Black Point to Mill Rythe sector where he saw over 1000 Brent and had counts of 400 Dunlin, 204 Lapwing, 140 Redshank, 71 Oystercatcher and 64 Grey Plover but surprisingly few wildfowl - no Wigeon at all, 10 Teal, 7 Shelduck and 1 Merganser (they had probably gone elsewhere to escape the strong wind). +++

A couple of items from recent sightings that have only just reached me come from Brian Fellows and Gary Wearn. +++

Yesterday Brian went to Nutbourne where there were plenty of the wildfowl that he could not see off south east Hayling today - 100 Wigeon and 100 Teal in the wet meadow and 13 smart Pintail out in the bay amongst other birds which included 24 Ringed Plover on the spit where the Ham Brok flows into Nutbourne Bay. +++

On Thursday Brian was in the Hollybank woods and heard the hooting of a Tawny Owl in daytime - at this time of year the female owls may well be already sitting on eggs and don't want the company of their males in the nest holes. The males can sometimes be seen perched in open situations on tree branches at this time of year, and I recall one spring visit to this same part of the Hollybank Woods when, walking close to the trunk of an old tree, a Tawny Owl that I had not seen decided that I was too close for its comfort and took off, almost brushing my head as it did so. +++

On Wednesday Brian was at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth where the feral geese were still away at Titchfield Haven but the Tufted Duck population had increased to a site record 92, sixteen more than were there on Feb 3. +++

Gary Wearn's news concerns the presence of a Harris Hawk in the north west Hayling area. Last October both Martin Hampton and Alistair Martin saw a Harris Hawk, complete with jesses, at the Oyster Beds on Oct 16 and 18 respectively, and Gary now tells me that he has seen what is probably the same bird at the Oysterbeds on Feb 14 following an earlier sighting of it this year soaring with a Buzzard further south over west Hayling. It could be that these sightings all relate to a bird being flown by a local falconer and taking a little time out on its own, but equally this could be a long term escapee finding plenty of rabbit food and so far not suffering any problem with its jesses.

PLANTS

FRI 27 FEB

There are currently some massive displays of Sweet Violets to be seen around Havant. John Goodspeed remarked recently on one of the largest and best patches which is on the west side of Pook Lane (south of the A27) at Warblington just south of the pony stables - if you come down the tarmac road from Church Lane past the Old Rectory you will see them on the far side of Pook Lane as you turn right towards the stables. This reminded me of another local patch where the plants are not the usual deep violet but are all of a pale pink tinge half way between the violet ones and the white ones which flower a little later. +++

To find these pink ones go to the extreme south west corner of the Nore Barn trees just west of the Emsworth seafront. At this extreme corner there is a well trodden unofficial path into the wooded area and you follow this path for perhaps thirty yards until you have passed two substantial oak trees on the left of the path and you will then see the violets, again on the left of the path. Today it was the metre wide patch of leaves that first caught my eye with relatively few flowers but by the time you get there you will probably find a mass of flowers.

WED 25 FEB

A walk in today's sunshine today brought me a second find of Common Whitlowgrass flowering on the roadside of Petersfield Road dual carriageway in Leigh Park here in Havant, and on grass outside nearby houses, where bird food is regularly put out, a number of Rape plants had grown up and were flowering - not the first I have seen this spring but I don't think I have reported them before.

MON 23 FEB

For some time I have been checking the carpets of Common Whitlowgrass leaf rosettes that cover dry areas of very thin soil in the hope of seeing flowers and today I found just one flower open in a typical situation - this one at the landward end of the lower (i.e. downstream) of the two bridges over the Brockhampton stream (not the one that carries the public path but the one which now leads to nowhere thanks to new fencing) +++

A more significant new plant to appear in the Havant area was seen by me yesterday morning in the 'central reservation' of Park Road South where it meets the Langstone roundabout. Crossing the road on foot just south of where the central reservation is entirely made of concrete I found the very thin soil covered with the tiny white flowers of Danish Scurvygrass, and no doubt other people will by now have found this plant along the edges of roads and motorways throughout Hampshire where salt from the roads has created an artificial seaside environment. +++1

Also yesterday I spent some time in clearing the brambles which are threatening to engulf the Giant Butterbur (*P. japonicus*) plants in the small parcel of 'waste land' by the Langbrook stream (I already know it falls outside the HWT South Moors nature reserve and today I spoke to George Hedley who farms the South Moors - he told me it is not his land). +++

Alongside the Giant Butterbur the unusual female plants of normal Butterbur are showing their heads through the soil but none have yet started to shoot up (their flower heads will be much taller and thinner than those of the normal male plants). I was also pleased to see that several plants of Marsh Marigold are growing by the streamside here, though none as yet have flowers.

SAT 21 FEB

Walking around the IBM site at Portsmouth for today's bird count I came on many orchid leaf rosettes. Many were the broad leaves of Bee orchids which I have seen earlier in the winter but others were the thinner and longer leaves which are almost certainly of the Pyramidal orchids that are abundant on this site. +++

Out on the islands in the lake I found my first Coltsfoot flowers and by the canals Marsh Marigolds were flowering. In the carpark area the Nootka cypresses which were still covered with thousands of bright yellow flower buds a month ago are now looking relatively drab as these buds have shed their pollen and become brown husks. I see that Alan Mitchell gives late April as the time for pollination to take place - just another of the many books in need of a re-print to catch up with global warming. +++

Last Wednesday Brian Fellows found the first flowering spike of Butterbur had pushed up clear of the soil at the Emsworth Brook Meadow site.

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 27 FEB

The last report of Water Voles seen by the River Ems in Emsworth last year was (in my records) dated Oct 3, and this year the 'mass emergence' of the voles seems to have occurred in the week ending Feb 15 (I think the first at Emsworth was seen on Feb 11 and several were in the Itchen at Winchester on Feb 15). The voles are always difficult to see during the winter but I don't think they actually hibernate and I see that Ros Norton reported a sighting of one at Emsworth on Jan 1. +++

The point of all this is that these voles are now fairly easy to see if you know where to look and have the patience to wait quietly for some time when there is no disturbance in the area and I see that Brian Fellows had two sightings at Emsworth this week (on Monday and on Friday). As with any shy creatures dawn and dusk are good times to search for them.

WED 25 FEB

March is not far off and reports of Hares are starting to come in. Today Richard Carpenter saw 8 Hares in a ploughed field near Brockwood Copse - six of them were patiently sitting out the daylight hours motionless in the furrows of the plough but just one Jack felt frisky enough to annoy a Jill who was not ready to receive his advances and sent him off with a cuff round the ears in a brief burst of 'boxing'.

BIRDS

SAT 21 FEB

My WeBS count visit to the Portsmouth IBM Lake in a chill northeast wind today had a couple of pleasant surprises. The first came as I drove into the site and was met by a Little Egret flying across the approach road - so far as I know the first to visit the site this year though by no means a newcomer there. The last surprise came at the end of my visit as I was walking back to my car and put up a Kingfisher from the small water channel alongside the same section of the approach road on the south side of the easternmost carpark (used at Christmas by non-IBMs for park and ride shopping visits to Portsmouth).

In between these two I heard a Water Rail screaming like a pig in reeds at the east end of the lake and may have had an adult Yellow-legged Gull on the lake - a large adult Herring Gull coming in to land among a swirling crowd of over 500 other gulls (mainly Black-headed) put down a foot which seemed pure bright yellow but when the gull had settled it had a pale, not dark grey, mantle and wings and was probably a normal argenteus race bird. +++

Four pairs of Canada Geese were clearly guarding widely separated nest sites and a single bird on the canal system far from any others probably had a hidden mate nearby. Five other Canada Geese were flying around the site like a gang of 'yobs' making a lot of noise. Had I not walked around on the islands I would probably have recorded just two Teal, but the reeds along the outer fringe of the northern island held at least another 35 which got up only when I was too close for comfort. Six Pochard and 7 Tufted Duck were also seen but no Swans, Snipe or Great Crested Grebe today. Little Grebe, however, were more plentiful than expected with at least 17 seen and 73 Coot was more than expected though 22 Moorhen was as expected. Just one adult Heron and four Cormorant were present.

The latest issue of British Wildlife came in the post today and I have not had time to read it fully but it does have an article on Grey Squirrels that suggests that they may have a serious impact on the breeding success of woodland bird species which have relatively exposed nests in trees (Spotted Flycatcher and Hawfinch are both mentioned as suffering from Squirrel predation), and they are also thought to have reduced Bullfinch numbers by eating seeds which the Bullfinches rely on. In gardens they also take eggs and young birds but they are not thought to be endangering the overall populations of common garden birds.

FRI 20 FEB

John Goodspeed took a walk along the Warblington shoreline and came on three Chiffchaff actively working their way along the shoreline Tamarisks. This is not a regular place to see them and I was reminded of a visit to Warblington on Mar 14 last year when I watched a party of 5, some of them singing, in these Tamarisks and concluded that they were part of a mass migrant arrival (two others were on the Warblington fields that day). The current strong northerly winds make it most unlikely that Chiffchaff are pushing north across the channel (and I have seen no other reports to suggest that is happening), but these could be newly arrived migrants, perhaps blown east from an intended arrival point in Kent or Sussex –

I'm not sure when John visited Warblington but I went there independently at around 2pm, as the tide was starting to fall, to carry out one of the Chichester Harbour 'Mid-tide counts' on the mud flats south of Pook Lane. Although I had seven wader species on my list, including 350 Dunlin and a few Ringed Plover, the main interest for me was the behaviour of the Brent Geese. With the tide high some 300 were strung out along the tideline feeding on seaweed of some sort but within half an hour the tide had fallen and the upper shore was drying and for no apparent reason the great majority of these geese took off and flew towards Hayling (perhaps blown there by the strong northerly wind which caught them as they rose from the partial shelter of the north shore). I assumed they would settle on Hayling fields, but maybe they found the Northney Marsh area which is one of their favourite feeding places was too exposed to the wind, for within ten minutes they all flew back to settle and feed on the grass meadow only a hundred yards north of the tideline on which they had been previously feeding. Gradually many others flew in to join them and

when I left the area at least 600 were feeding in this meadow (which bears the marks of many days feeding there - hardly any grass left on much of the field!) +++

When John Goodspeed was there he noted 11 Egrets in what I assume to be the large field opposite the Old Rectory at Warblington, in the angle of the old unmade section of Pook Lane and the tarmaced road joining it to Church Lane - this is a favourite with both Egrets and Herons seeking high tide rest and shelter from the wind. +++

John also tells me he has had five separate Sparrowhawk sightings in the course of yesterday and today - all around his home on Portsdown hill - as the birds display and establish their territories (as well as normal hunting). The males have a distinctive display flight which is slightly reminiscent of a Woodpigeon soaring up into the sky to lose momentum and fall away, gathering energy for another upward sweep, while the females restrict themselves to soaring high in typical spirals.

Siskins in gardens

Tom Muckley at Petersfield today tells me of the arrival of Siskins in his garden where they are feeding on peanuts, and Tom wonders how many others are enjoying their presence in gardens as I have not commented on them very much in these web pages recently. I think the answer to this is 'quite a lot' but while I have seen quite a few similar reports of the birds suddenly arriving at bird feeders the pattern this winter has been unusual, with the reports spread out from early December until the present, giving me no 'big story' to report (unlike the traditional pattern of events in which none are seen in gardens until February when they suddenly appear in many gardens feeding on peanuts in redmesh holders). +++

Since the start of October I have noted 163 reports of Siskin in my database. In early October there were reports of many on the move in Sussex and Hampshire, with 30 feeding in alders around the Testwood Lakes as early as Oct 5 and 20 in a similar waterside situation at the Eastleigh Lakeside Park on Oct 6. 58 were seen at Barton on sea golf course on Oct 12 and 60 flew east over Hastings on Oct 15 (on that same day Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes commented that they were moving in greater numbers than usual, while on Oct 16 Martin Hampton watched around 30 fly north over south Hayling). On Oct 20 at least 80 flew east over Climping near the mouth of the River Arun and 40 were again seen moving east at the same place a week later. In his November summary of birds on the Lymington Marshes Russell Wynn gave a total of 130 which he had seen moving over the marshes during the month. +++

The first report of a garden Siskin came from John Shillitoe on Nov 15 but his garden near Wickham in the Meon valley is right on the edge of woodland and in November the birds were still mainly in big flocks in places where alders grow near water - Doug Robertson wrote of many seen at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 9, Ian Pibworth had 80 at Testwood Lakes on Nov 23 and David Thelwell had 25 at the Fishlake Meadows by the Test at Romsey on Nov 28. By Dec 8 Ian Pibworth had over 150 at Testwood., but the latter half of December saw the flocks begin to break up and the birds start to appear in gardens. On Dec 15 John Shillitoe had six back in his garden, then on Dec 28 Glyn Roberts at Fleet in north Hampshire and Paul Winter in the Rownhams area of Southampton both had birds in more urban gardens, followed by the first in Richard Ford's garden at Whitehill, east of Alton, on Dec 31 (Richard commented that they came immediately he put up peanuts in those red-mesh holders that traditionally attract them - though this year other such holders have been ignored). +++

Reports of garden birds continued to filter in through January. Jan 4 brought them to Eastleigh, Jan 5 to Barton on sea and Jan 6 to Winchester. Then came a lull until Keith Vokes had them in his Marchwood garden on Southampton Water on Jan 27 and Brian Fellows had one in Emsworth on Jan 28 followed by a report of one or more coming to feeders at Wade Court in Langstone. Two other undated reports from Bournemouth and Crawley relate to this end of January period. +++

Feb 1 brought reports of Siskin song from Hook near Warsash (several males singing in a flock of 10 Siskin in the Hook valley) and from Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough in Sussex. Also on Feb 1 John Simons reported the first in his garden at Dean Lane End north of Rowlands Castle while Feb 3 brought news of them in a garden here in Havant and

from Grayshott near Haslemere. The first were in a garden near Salisbury on Feb 6 and the first six were seen at Titchfield Haven (were there had been none since the end of October) on Feb 11. Feb 12 brought them to Colin Allen's garden at Dibden Purlieu on Southampton Water and today brought the first to Tom Muckley's Petersfield garden. +++
If you haven't seen any in your garden yet don't despair - they are normally still with us until early April but which time the males are extremely smart in their black and yellow and will probably be seen singing in the treetops.

THU 19 FEB

Possibly an early migrant, a Marsh Harrier was at Titchfield Haven today - according to my database the first seen there since Sept 21 last year. This news comes from Richard Carpenter who also tells me that the second winter Iceland Gull was seen again at the reserve and that the 102 Eider which had been off Hill Head on Feb 13 are now down to 19 in number - maybe these ducks are intending to revert to standard practice and leave the south coast waters empty of Eider this summer? +++

On the scrapes the high tide wader roost had a high count of 80 Turnstone with 103 Oystercatcher today, and in his Hill Head garden Richard saw a strangely plumaged Greenfinch with lots of white on its head and breast - I guess this was just an abnormality rather than a hybrid with a Snow Bunting! +++

The wardens at the Haven now believe that three separate Bitterns are present though there has been no concurrent sighting of all three. +++

A news bulletin from Bob Chapman on the HWT website tells us that the strange hybrid Ruddy Shelduck, first seen by Keith Betton at the Kench on Dec 18 and seen there twice since on Jan 6 and 20, has recently been seen again at Farlington Marshes. Also at the Marshes the first Pochard of the winter has turned up, four Avocet are still around, and Bearded Tits are still being seen by visitors.

On Feb 15 Bob Chapman watched a male Peregrine bring down a Lapwing on the mud off Farlington Marshes, and then noticed the rings on the Peregrine's legs showing that it was one of the young birds ringed by Graham Roberts at Chichester cathedral last summer (in case you see it it has a metal ring on the right leg and a black plastic one, with 06 in white on it, on the left leg) +++

Going back to Feb 13 Bob tells us that he saw a Bittern near reeds behind the building at Farlington Marshes - he also saw one by the stream on Jan 17 making me wonder if he has a winter resident?

WED 18 FEB

I had to visit Chichester today but did not see a Peregrine despite several checks on the cathedral spire. To make up for that Mike Bending has sent me an excellent digiscoped shot of one of the breeding pair there last year, taken on the 'open day' organised by the RSPB last June. As far as I can remember there was a whole week in which volunteers were present to show people the falcons through telescopes, and if anyone is interested I guess the RSPB will be doing the same this year (the birds permitting!). If I hear of a similar request for volunteers I will put it out on this website so keep tuned. +++

On the way back from Chichester I stopped at Aldsworth Pond where I could see at least 11 Gadwall and 10 Tufted Duck, with 26 Canada Geese in the field west of the pond. +++

While there a Buzzard soared over the pond but was rapidly carried south towards Westbourne, still circling on broad outstretched wings, in the fresh northerly wind. One Buzzard is hardly noteworthy nowadays - over the Downs at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight 13 were airborne together yesterday, and last Sunday (Feb 15) Brian Fellows saw three over Stansted Forest and John Simons in the Finchdean area west of Stansted watched a pair attempting to mate.

TUE 17 FEB

Brian Fellows today saw at least one Purple Sandpiper at Southsea Castle when the tide was low - it was motionless, apparently asleep on a rock, and difficult to pick out. When the tide was in Brian could not see one at all, and they may well have flown out to rest on the nearby structure of the pier but in the past I have found them sitting out the tide on the sloping seawall in front of the castle in a shallow gully running down the face of the

stonework so that they cannot be seen from anywhere but on the promenade directly above this gully (under a seaward facing gun), and even from there you have to know what you are looking for as their cryptic camouflage plumage is very effective when the birds are motionless. The same comment applies to the Sanderling and Ringed Plover that people come to the Southsea shore to see - when in their high tide roosts they can be almost impossible to see among the shingle and you have to know where they may be roosting before you can hope to pick them out - unless a dog puts them up! Even if quite a few people are walking on the shore the birds seem to choose roost sites sufficiently far from the parts of the beach on which people walk and so are not often disturbed. +++

While at Southsea Castle Brian saw a Treecreeper working the branches of one of the Elm trees on the Common. Later he heard Mistle Thrush song from the area around the Camber Docks in Old Portsmouth but I do not find that surprising as these birds seem to have little fear of humans and their activities - I remember once seeing a picture of a Mistle Thrush sitting on a nest built on top of a set of traffic lights in a busy town centre situation - no doubt the warmth from the lights that are never normally switched off would make this a cosy nest with underfloor heating.

John Shillitoe saw a Shag perched on a buoy just inside the Langstone Harbour entrance (normally one or two are a regular sight there during winter months but this is only the second report I have heard this winter - the other was a sighting by Martin Gillingham of one fishing in this area on Jan 30). John also saw a Med Gull thereabouts and had four more Slavonian Grebes off south Hayling.

Another surprised birder early today was Tom Muckley who happened to stop at the South Mimms service station on the M25 at 3:30am. Stopping the engine of his car, with little noise from other traffic at that time of day, he was surprised not only to hear the chattering of many Sparrows in the bushes but to have a Blackbird and two or three Song Thrushes in full song. I myself live close to a Postal sorting office which is lit and busy all night, and that has all night bird song from Robins and others through most of the year, and more than once I have been told that a Nightingale has been heard there by people who do not expect anything but Nightingales to sing at night (and are equally surprised when you tell them that Nightingales often sing more by day than by night!)

In Emsworth Brian Fellows tells us the Swan pair that are back at their Peter Pond nest site are still having difficulty persuading two of last year's cygnets to leave them alone, though the pair on Langstone Mill Pond seem to have succeeded in chasing off their one remaining cygnet, and last time I passed the pond I could only see one adult Swan on the water, so possibly the other was already at a hidden nest site.

MON 16 FEB

Cycling about half a mile to my home at dusk this evening through the residential area of east Havant I heard three different Blackbirds singing a quiet evening song and then heard a fourth from my garden, and I reckon that must mark the start of regular Blackbird song for the year, albeit only at dusk for the first week or so. +++

Occasional Blackbird song has been heard earlier - one was singing in Emsworth in the week ending Jan 18 and birds were heard singing strongly at dawn in the Shirley area of Southampton on Feb 6, then at dusk on Feb 7 (a different bird by the Civic Centre). Also on Feb 7 one was in full song in a Petersfield carpark in mid morning, and during the past week another was singing strongly in Emsworth, but all these were individual birds whereas this evening's song came from four different birds and I suspect many others were singing elsewhere. We shall see if they keep it up during the coming week! +++

The very first Reed Bunting song that I have heard of for this year was noted by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven today, helping to confirm the impression (of these birds returning from winter flocks to breeding sites) that I have had since Tony Gutteridge found a massive flock of 110 Reed Bunting near West Wittering on Feb 9, the same day that I heard one calling from the reeds around Langstone Pond where there had not been one during the winter. Feb 12 brought a report from Kevin Stouse of one back at the IBM Lake and now we have Richard's report of song (maybe not from a newly arrived bird as I suspect that a flock of them has been at the Haven through the winter, encouraged by daily

feeding there as at Farlington Marshes). Out of interest the first Reed Bunting song at Titchfield last year was heard on Feb 14.

SUN 15 FEB

An anonymous report on the SOS website today says that there were two Whooper Swans with an Egyptian Goose on Ivy Lake at Chichester. Whoopers are few and far between in Sussex and there are feral birds present in the county, so confirmation would be needed to record these as wild birds dropping off on their way back to breeding quarters. Mention of them with the Egyptian Goose could even imply that these swans were old friends of the Egyptian bird, dropping in to chat about the old days when they were together in the same PoW camp! +++

Another report from Chichester is of a Peregrine seen at the cathedral. I see that the first report of one there last year was dated Feb 17 after which the pair and their four youngsters achieved great fame and publicity, but surprisingly I can find no mention of their presence there after May 2. I assume that they only frequent the city during the nesting season and spend the rest of the year in places like Pagham and Chichester Harbours.

One of the early spring delights of any birder's year is to find a Long-tailed Tit's nest, and now is the time to start looking as the first two reports of these birds gathering nest material have reached me today. One comes from Simon Woolley in Winchester, the other from the Lewes area where the SOS website intriguingly states .. '2 Northern Long-tailed Tits still at Cockshut Road. One collecting nest material in wood by sewage works.' Does that mean that one of the (up to four) northern race birds that have been there since Jan 24 is thinking of settling down in Sussex? More likely it was one of the many 'normal' birds there.

As birds that will breed here start to sing, so we are also noticing more reports of winter thrushes on the move. Most of the Redwing and Fieldfare that spent the winter in the New Forest seem to have left (few if any seen by this week-end's Shrike surveyors in the Forest) but I get the impression that many of these thrushes that wintered south of the English Channel are now moving through. Jeff Goodridge came on a flock of 200+ Fieldfare in the Cheesefoot Head/Longwood Warren area today, and over on the Isle of Wight Derek Hale found some 70 Redwing in the Rowlands Wood area by the Steam Rail line south west of Ryde. (On Monday Feb 16 I met someone who had seen a small flock back in the Wade Court fields at Langstone). +++

One bird species that seems to have been in short supply everywhere this winter is Snipe, and I see that when Kris Gillam took a walk on the Isle of Wight Sandown marshes today he specifically noticed how few there were compared to this time last year.

SAT 14 FEB

It seemed that Hampshire was likely to miss out on the early migrant boom until Peter Raby had a House Martin over Gosport on Feb 10 (and a Serin was anonymously reported flying over Southampton on that same day). Until today those (and possibly a Sandwich Tern in the west Solent) were the only summer bird migrants to be recorded in Hampshire, but today seems to have brought another House Martin, seen flying east along the south shore of Langstone Harbour near Sinah Warren by George Spraggs. George sent me a sketch of the bird he saw, showing all white underparts with dark wings and tail, and saying .. 'It called as it flew past and sounded very like a House Martin, but not exactly the same. Its flight was very fluttery with very short glides' The fact that two of the six House Martins that have been at Bembridge Foreland disappeared today makes it more likely that one of them flew the short distance to Hayling Island. +++

Mike Collins was also on Hayling this morning and saw 226 Golden Plover on the saltings between Northney and Warblington.

The Havant Wildlife Group walking around Farlington Marshes heard song from six different Cetti's Warblers

Two other reports from the Havant area for today are of the results of today's Egret Count in which I managed to see 52 birds arrive in the Wade Court roost at dusk but Mike Collins only saw 9 fly into the Tournerbury Wood roost. As a footnote to the Egret roost survey I see that several birders visiting Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough recently (to see the four Bitterns) have commented on a small Egret roost there, the highest count being six Egrets

on Feb 12 - I wonder how many more such small roosts exist in Hampshire without being recorded? +++

A much more exciting sighting by myself today actually took place on the Isle of Wight on Feb 11 - what I saw today was a video clip kindly sent to me by Derek Hale to illustrate his report of a Barn Owl being attacked by a Buzzard which was attempting to steal the Owl's prey. I guess Derek had seen the owl go down on its prey and focussed his video camera on it to record a fairly normal event, but as he was filming he actually recorded a most extraordinary event. The film starts with the owl on the ground and immediately you see the large brown shape of the Buzzard sweep in and seemingly land on the Owl while it is still on the ground with its kill. Although you can't see the fine detail of what happened next you do see the Buzzard make a sharp jump backwards off the owl, and my guess is that the Buzzard got a nasty bite in the belly from the owl. Derek says that the owl then flew off with its prey, the Buzzard making no further attempt to steal the vole!

Bob Chapman issued his latest Farlington Marshes newsletter in which he refers to two or three bird feeding stations around the reserve and in particular one close to the reserve building intended to support Reed Buntings - Bob reports that it has attracted up to 16 Reed Buntings recently and that another such station north of the A27 has attracted a Redwing (fairly unusual at the Marshes) which was netted and ringed as the price for its food. Another feeding station, however, has failed to bring back the Twite which I do not think have been seen on the reserve since Feb 1. +++

PLANTS

SUN 15 FEB

This morning I went to Lowton's Copse, between Clanfield and Butser Hill, on the offchance of seeing Toothwort (which I did not see!) but I did enjoy the sight of tiny delicate Pignut leaves and unopen flower buds on Barren Strawberries. In the afternoon I cycled to Hayling where Primroses were beginning to open their flowers in the tiny shoreline Oak copse south of the Oysterbeds and north of the copse at Saltmarsh Lane. Coming back via Langstone a few flowers were opening on one plant of Cow Parsley in Wade Lane

SAT 14 FEB

I suspect that I accidentally introduced an Early Dog Violet into my garden some years ago and it has now developed into a large clump of plants growing from a crack in a little used part of the garden path - on Christmas Day this clump had a single flower out. That flower wilted before the New Year but today I happened to notice that a new flower has sprung up and is about to open, tying in with Richard Carpenter's find earlier this week.

Another and more unusual flowering was observed by the Havant Wildlife Group when on north Hayling a week ago (Feb 7) - I only heard this morning that they found Germander Speedwell in flower close to the Texaco garage at the southern end of Langstone Bridge. Normally this is the last of the common Speedwells to go on the year list and last year I did not see it until mid-April.

INSECTS

THU 19 FEB

Steve Nash's national migrant moth website continues to report Painted Ladies with six reports totalling a dozen insects seen on Jan 17, 18 and 19. One sighting was at Coastes Common in West Sussex but the rest were in the west country plus a first report from Ireland (two butterflies at an island on the Cork coast). I guess this means that a few of the many blown here recently are surviving and pushing on with their instinctive journeying.

Yesterday (Feb 18) another Painted Lady, not on Steve's list, was seen on Portsdown by the conservation volunteers working there, and also on Feb 18 a Peacock butterfly was on the wing at Rye in East Sussex.

SAT 14 FEB

Children of the Havant area WATCH Group went to plant trees at Emsworth's Brook Meadow site today, and while there they noticed a number of tiny, metallic-sheened beetles in the grass and low vegetation. Brian Fellows is pretty certain that these are of the Flea Beetle

species Altica oleracea which he has found in the meadow in the two previous years, but never earlier than March. Whether it was the mild weather or the children's activity that brought them out today is not known...

OTHER WILDLIFE

TUE 17 FEB

When Brian Fellows arrived home yesterday a large Frog was sitting on his doorstep (not necessarily wanting to get into the house!). At this time of year many frogs which have finished spawning will be making their way back to the places where they will spend the summer doing part of our gardening for us by eating other unwanted creatures in return for nothing more than a spot of damp shade, so it is probably not unusual to find Frogs in strange places while 'on passage', but knowing that Brian's front door opens more or less directly onto a road I did wonder if this frog had learnt (as the Homing Pigeons of Oxfordshire are said to have done) to navigate using our road maps rather than streams and other 'natural highways'.

SUN 15 FEB

Today brought the first reports of spring activity by Water Voles from both Emsworth and Winchester. The first at Emsworth were a pair seen by Brian Fellows on Wednesday Feb 11 swimming in the River Ems where he says a number of new burrow holes can be seen in the river bank. +++

Those in the Itchen at Winchester were seen by Simon Woolley today. He saw a total of four voles and remarks that one had climbed into a riverside bush and could be seen a good 30cm above the water (I bet that would have made a substantial plop had it fallen in!)

Another mammal emerging from 'hibernation' today was Red Squirrel on the Isle of Wight where Derek Hale saw seven in Rowlands Wood near the steam railway line south west of Ryde. I am not sure if Red Squirrels make any more serious attempt at hibernation in these mild winters than the Grey Squirrels do, but this is the first mention of them I have seen this year.

Back on the mainland Mike Collins was surprised to see a Badger corpse by the roadside in what he terms 'central Gosport'. As he was visiting Forton Lake I suspect that the Badger was one from the old established sett on the north side of the lake in the Felicia Park urban farm run by Sue Hitchman. When I knew the site it was surrounded by acres of abandoned MoD land, once part of the Priddy's Hard naval armaments factory and depot. Since then many new houses have been built on that land though I think Felicia Park still exists as a tiny enclave of wild habitat that has lost its hinterland. I wonder how many Badgers still survive there, and for how much longer? (This is by no means the only Badger colony in Gosport Borough, as is indicated by the name of Brockhurst which still applies to a district of the Borough as well as to the old Fort). +++

Very much alive was a Weasel out hunting by the Itchen at Winchester today, seen by Simon Woolley when his attention was drawn to it by noisy Nuthatches mobbing it from trees a safe distance above the Weasel's head and teeth.

WEEK 7 FEB 9 - 15

BIRDS

FRI 13 FEB

Twelve Black-necked Grebe were in Langstone Harbour this morning, seen from the Oysterbeds by John Shillitoe with 2 Slavonian Grebes and an Eider also on the water. Two more Slav Grebes were in Hayling Bay and a single Guillemot was off Black Point. With the report of 35 Slav Grebes off Church Norton yesterday it would appear that many of these birds are probably moving east along the channel at this time... +++

John also saw a Little Owl in trees near the Oysterbeds (at a guess those on the far side of the 'Brick Field' on the east side of the Coastal Path, and possibly the same bird which uttered the noise heard by the Havant Wildlife Group last Saturday and confusingly described as a 'screech'). Later John saw two more Little Owls, probably a pair together, at a regular spot in the East Hoe Manor area north of Hoe Cross near Hambledon. +++

In my notes for Feb 6 I described how Brian Fellows had seen a well marked Black-headed Gull in Emsworth Harbour - the bird had a bright orange breast, a metal ring on one leg and a red plastic ring on the other. Today Ed Griffiths tells me that this bird was .. 'almost certainly one of a batch dyed yellow at Hedgerley Tip, next to the M40 near Gerards Cross in Bucks (yellow dye fades to orange in about a fortnight). ' +++

Ed goes on to say that you can find out more about this marking scheme at www.berksbirds.co.uk under 'more news stories' and he adds that the scheme is .. 'A bit controversial up here in Bucks - the company subcontracted to run this study have had spokesmen put out stories at conferences calling gulls 'feathered rats' (story in Daily Telegraph late last year) and there is suspicion this is linked to bird control for Heathrow.'

THU 12 FEB

A total of 25 Med Gulls were said to be present in Pagham Harbour today, well exceeding the report of 13 there on Jan 18, giving us another sign of the return of these birds for another breeding season. As far as I know the only established breeding colony of these birds in Sussex is at Rye Harbour where 12 pairs bred in 2002 but other pairs have shown an interest in the Pett Level area in the last few years. In 2002 one pair showed a definite interest in a tern nesting raft at the Arundel Wildfowl reserve but I have heard nothing of these birds trying to nest in Chichester or Pagham Harbours. +++

Another peak count reported today was of 35 Slavonian Grebes on the sea off Church Norton where there have been up to 29 birds in late January. With them today were 2 Long-tailed Ducks +++

From the IBM Lake at Portsmouth Kevin Stouse tells me that one of two pairs of Mute Swan that nested there last year has just returned. The fact that they were in the area of the longer established nest site at the west end of the lake makes it likely that they are the 'senior' pair for the site. Less welcome returnees are 25 Canada Geese, 18 of them seemingly already paired and likely to nest.

An interesting observation by Kevin today was of a Heron which, unlike four other Herons present, did not perch on the wooden boarding around the lake edge (keeping its feet dry!), but instead stood motionless and showing no sign of fishing in deep water that covered its long legs and came part way up its breast. Kevin watched it for five minutes or more and saw no sign of movement from the bird. I wonder if anyone can explain this behaviour?

Trevor Carpenter has kindly sent me an interesting summary of the current 'early migrant invasion' which he found on the Bird Guides site, and this adds several facts that I did not know. The first is that the total of House Martins that have arrived is around 40, whereas there have only been 4 Swallows and a couple of Wheatear with other species only reported as singles. These other species include four that I was not aware of. There is a Red-rumped Swallow in Cornwall which arrived on Feb 8 and was still there on Feb 11. There has also been a Yellow Wagtail in Kent (Feb 7) and a Cattle Egret on Guernsey (Feb 6), while Southampton has apparently had a Serin on Feb 10.

WED 11 FEB

Last Sunday a Sandwich Tern was seen on the west Solent shore near Lymington and I commented that it was probably a newly arrived migrant but, in view of one or more wintering in the east Solent harbours, I could not be sure. Today however one is reported flying east past Southwick in the Brighton area and that surely is a migrant. Further west on the Sussex coast two more House Martins flew in today at Lancing and last Monday a very early female Wheatear landed at Ferring (west end of the Worthing shore) +++

Still with winter birds in Sussex I see that the Bewick's Swans in the Arun valley waited patiently downstream at Offham until after Kevin Stouse had led his annual trip to see them at Amberley Wild Brooks last Sunday, and today a herd of 39 were seen on the Brooks - presumably these include the 24 birds that have been at Offham, but others have presumably arrived to join them, including six cygnets. Maybe the extra birds have flown east from the Avon valley, where a herd of around 20 birds has been seen recently, and are already on their way back to their breeding grounds (On Feb 6 John Collman could only see 9 on the Avon where Jim Day had reported a maximum of 23 sometime before Feb 4) Yet another bit of wintery news from Sussex is that 4 Bitterns were seen at Burton Mill Pond

today but that was offset by a spring sighting of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at the same site, and a mile or so east of the pond two Woodlarks were singing at Coates Common where 15 Crossbills were seen. This is the third report of Woodlark song that I have heard this spring, following on John Simons' report of song heard on Feb 1 on the Hampshire/Sussex border north of Rowlands Castle and John Shillitoe's first heard in the Meon Valley on Feb 7 - the winter flock there peaked at 17 birds but they will by now have dispersed to breeding areas.

Isle of Wight news today has a couple of Owl reports, the first being an observation of a Barn Owl being attacked by a Buzzard on the Brading Marshes - unfortunately there is no flesh on the bare bones of that report which leaves me wondering whether the Buzzard felt that its territory was being violated, or was it envious of the golden brown dress of the Barn Owl? (a fashion conscious female Buzard feeling that it's dull brown plumage was rather dowdy compared to the Owl's). More seriously could the Buzzard have been attempting to steal prey from the Owl? - I will never forget seeing a Barn Owl hunting in bright sunshine on a hard winter's day at Amberley Wild Brooks - eventually the Barn Owl caught a large vole and rose into the air with it only to be 'head butted' by a Kestrel which had flown at high speed towards the owl and literally collided with it in an attempt to seize its prey. The outcome was probably fair, the owl flying off with its meal, the Kestrel with what appeared to be a bit of vole skin. +++

Returning to the subject of owls I reported (on Monday 9 Feb) Hugh Venables' suggestion that the reason why the Short-eared Owls at Bransbury Common near Andover were refusing to hunt in daylight this winter was that they were in fact Long-eared Owls. So far there has been no positive or negative response to that suggestion from people such as Glynne Evans who are 'in the know' about such secrets (well, maybe!), but Trevor Carpenter has asked for general hints and tips on identifying owls glimpsed briefly in the dark and has had an excellent response from Ian Pibworth and I hope Ian will not mind my quoting his contribution in full. Ian writes ... +++

'A few years ago, I watched Long-eared Owls hunting after dark. To have any chance of seeing them, I found I had to sit down in a low spot, so as to view as much sky as possible. Cloudless moonlit nights were best, but it was still difficult and frustrating and it took me about three months to get the full picture. When hunting they would fly quite slowly and steadily in an almost straight line on stiff wings, and then hover for a few seconds, before plunging down on their prey. What surprised me though, was the height at which they hunted. I would say between thirty and sixty feet. They would then carry their meal to a favourite post. It took me a while to find a favourite post, but when I did, I found I could sit about thirty feet away without disturbing the bird and it would even allow me to shine a torch on it, without it flying off. It knew I was there, but was quite fearless.' +++

'A short-eared Owl arrived and stayed for a week in this same area. Its perched silhouette and hunting technique were quite different. The broad bulkiness of the Short-eared contrasted with the slender elongated silhouette of the Long-eared. When hunting the Short-eared would twist and turn erratically whilst flying between five and ten feet above the ground, before dropping on to its prey. It also spent a lot of its time on the ground.' +++

'The area both these Owls were hunting was downland and teeming with voles. I don't know if the hunting technique of the Long-eared was typical, or just used in this kind of habitat. In an area of bushes and rank vegetation they might use different techniques. One day I hope to find out.' +++

I wonder if there is anyone out there who can recall the winter of 1986/87 (when seven Long-eared owls roosted together at Farlington Marshes)? I recall hearing at the time that after dark some of these owls could be seen hunting in the light of the street lights around the Eastern Road/A27 roundabout close to the Farlington Marshes entrance, and if there is anyone still around who saw them doing this they might comment on the birds operating height. One other comment is that I have heard of three Long-eared owl road casualties in which the birds were hit by cars - that suggests low flying roadside verge hunting, but could equally be chance involvement with birds rising from the ground after plunging on prey.

+++

A final comment from Ian Pibworth on watching owls by night reads ... 'I think all Owl species are fearless at night. I have watched Little Owls by torch light, for hours hunting on the ground.'

Turning to today's Hampshire reports I see that Richard Carpenter found the 'white' Canada Goose was still with the Cams Hall golf course flock of Canada Geese by Fareham Creek today, and in West Wellow (actually seen on Thu 12 Feb) Doug Munts had a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in his garden +++

The job of writing up these notes takes much of my time when I could be out seeing birds, but today I took a local walk to Budds Farm and managed to see a few birds of interest. I started down the Langbrook stream from the A27 in Havant seeing a Green Sandpiper, plus the regular Little Egret and Grey Wagtail, in the stream not far south of the old IBM site entrance road. Emerging onto the grassland of the South Moors I happened to go across to the line of dead elms on the west side of the very first small field and stayed there for perhaps ten minutes watching a Firecrest working the bramble bushes within a couple of yards of me at times - during that time the bird was nearly always in clear view though darting here, there and everywhere. +++

Moving on to the wet 'orchid field' west of this hedge I quickly put up three Snipe (my first of the year!), and at Budds Farm I reckoned there were about 40 Shoveler but fewer Pochard and Tufted Duck than on recent visits (and I could not spot the Fudge Duck - perhaps because I did not have a scope with me and the light was dull). One unexpected sight here was of a small brown bird flying low and not very strongly over the water to pitch in the thick vegetation of the bank separating the westmost pool from its neighbour - near the probable Swan nest site. As the bird landed it fanned its all brown tail and I wondered if it might be a Cetti's Warbler but I can find no reference to this tail-fanning as a characteristic of that species (and I am not suggesting that we have something like an early Grasshopper Warbler!!) +++

Going on to the mouth of the Hermitage Stream opposite the Broadmarsh slipway two first summer Med Gulls stood out amongst the gulls on the water by virtue of their 'junior burglar' outfits (jet black balaclava and bright red heavy bill for breaking into locked premises). Just round the corner by the gravel quay, where the Brockhampton flows into the main Hermitage stream, I had my first view this year of the wintering Common Sandpiper.

TUE 10 FEB

Today seems to have brought Hampshire's first House Martin, seen by Peter Raby over Gosport. That brings forward the county earliest ever date for this migrant species from 2 Mar (in 1990) by exactly three weeks. +++

As in Sussex (see my notes for Feb 11 above) the early summer birds are overlapping with winter visitors, and today there was another reported sighting of the Iceland Gull at Titchfield Haven +++

More in keeping with the season, but very rarely heard, was a Long-eared Owl heard by Doug Robertson in the Hambledon area last night. My old 'Popular Handbook of British Birds' says that this owl's most characteristic note is .. 'the song, a long-drawn, low "oo, oo, oo, ...", a cooing moan rather than a hoot, the notes spaced at regular intervals of about one every third second.' I have been told that it is possible to imitate this song by half-filling with water one of those small Schweppes Tonic Water bottles and blowing across the mouth. I think the pitch is pretty low but the main feature must be the two second pause between each of the identical repeated notes.

Cliff Oakley brought his Petersfield Wildlife Group on a visit to the Langstone South Moors today and they disproved my recent suggestion that the Black-necked Grebes have already left Langstone Harbour by seeing five of them on the water with six Little Grebes and three Great Crested. On the shore they recorded 7 Rock Pipits and 32 Linnets, and on Budds Farm Pools they counted 62 Shoveler but only ten Pochard and twelve Tufted Duck. Other sightings included the Common Sandpiper, a Kingfisher, 7 Goldeneye and 47 Shelduck +++

In the Havant area I was pleased to see ten Rooks circling noisily above a tree above the footbridge joining Eastern Road with Third Avenue in Denvilles. Recently I have been moaning that Rooks are deserting Havant rookeries so I am pleased to see that some are still interested in this one tree rookery which holds at most four or five nests. +++

In Emsworth Brian Fellows had an unusual observation when he .. 'watched a Cormorant swimming flat on the surface of the water in the Slipper Mill Basin for at least 3 minutes and for all that time its head was submerged beneath the surface of the water. I think it must have been taking quick breaths for I could see bubbles arising. I recall having seen a Cormorant behaving in this manner a few years ago on the Great Deeps' +++

Also today Brian walked to Westbourne and back to Emsworth following the River Ems, finding a Green Sandpiper, two Snipe, a Grey Wagtail and a Heron along the stream. He also heard two Chaffinches singing (they are still not singing widely) and in his garden was pleased to have three Siskin, one a brightly coloured male.

Going back to Feb 8 there is a report of Firecrest and Red-crested Pochard at Chichester marina on the Fishbourne channel of Chichester Harbour. Unfortunately whoever reported the Pochard seems to have been one of those birders whose only interest lies in ticking the species on a list without noting anything of interest about the bird itself - in this case it would have made the sighting more interesting to know if the bird was a male or female, and whether there were any indications of this being a genuine wild bird or another of those plastic imitations (maybe static at this marina throughout the year!) +++

In stark contrast to that sort of barebones reporting which shows little interest in the birds and their behaviour I love to read the regular reports on the SOS News from Cliff Dean (not forgetting a few others who clearly take an interest in the environment as a whole). Cliff adds a touch of real poetry to his news, and if anyone is not aware of his writing here is the briefest example of how he describes looking out over Rye Bay ... 'Speeding bands of sunshine picked out rolling rafts of scoters riding the swell and glittered from the white necks of grebes and divers.' That sense of the place and the moment is not at the expense of the facts - e.g. his painstaking count of 680 Great Crested Grebes noted above.

MON 09 FEB

Very soon now any farmer who starts to plough a field anywhere around Langstone Harbour will probably have a small flock of Med Gulls following his plough as they start to gather in preparation for nesting on the islands in the harbour, and those who are interested in the progress of that return may like to know that an adult Med Gull in breeding plumage was seen by Kevin Stouse at the IBM Lake in Portsmouth today, and Barry Collins tells me he is beginning to see more of them on Thorney Island now. If anyone out there does see a farmer ploughing in the next few days do let us know ... +++

I see that last spring numbers being seen did not increase significantly until late March. The first double figure count came from Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight on Mar 22, and this was followed on Mar 24 and 25 by counts of 69 and 63 seen from The Ship inn at Langstone. On May 22 Chris Cockburn estimated that he had 20 breeding pairs on the Langstone Harbour islands and the final figures for breeding pairs in recent years have been - 2002 (19 prs with 11 juvs), 2001 (46 prs with 20 juvs), 2000 (38 prs with 48 juvs), 1999 (14 prs with 17 juvs), 1998 (14 prs with 12 juvs), while 1997 saw the first recorded breeding in Langstone Harbour with just 2 prs and 3 juvs. +++

The peak counts of birds in Langstone Harbour occur in mid-summer when the young from the previous year and other non-breeding birds seem to gather with the breeders and juveniles for a summer holiday. The most interesting entry in my database for Med Gulls in Langstone Harbour last summer is a count of 145 birds on July 12, and the source for this was an email sent out by Jason Crook on July 17 to which he added as an afterthought .. 'PS, a record-breaking 145 Meds was recorded in Langstone by the RSPB warden and myself last week, and this was not including the newly fledged juveniles!'

More than 110 Reed Buntings were in the Ella Nore area on the shore of Chichester Harbour northwest of West Wittering today when Tony Gutteridge was there. This is not quite a world record as I see that there was a flock of 250 in Ashdown Forest in Jan 2002 but the biggest count in 2001 was only 60 though in Jan 2000 a flock of 100 was found by the

Sussex Ouse. My own database tells me that the largest flock recorded in Sussex in 2003 was just 30 birds seen by Chris Corrigan at Rodmell, also in the Ouse Valley, on Jan 11. I guess the birds seen by Tony today were on the move and are unlikely to stay where they were seen but that movement is probably the reason why I have a note of a Reed Bunting heard by myself at Langstone Mill Pond this evening. +++

Also at Ella Nore Tony saw two Grey Plovers fanning their tails in courtship display, as well as at least 8 Corn Buntings and 40 Stock Doves - by chance I have just met Barry Collins who tells me that he has had a peak roost count this winter of 36 Corn Buntings on Thorney Island (in view from Ella Nore across the water) and I know he has had up to 200 Stock Doves last October (and these may well have stayed on through the winter) so it will be interesting to find out if there has been a flock of Reed Buntings on the island. +++

Another thing which I heard indirectly from Barry Collins a little while ago was that there have been one or two Short-eared Owls on Thorney this winter but they have not been showing in the daytime as they usually do, and this was relevant to similar reports from Bransbury Common near Andover where a party of up to five Short-eared Owls were said to be behaving differently from previous winters in that they too did not come out to hunt until it was almost too dark to see them. Without further evidence I came to the conclusion that the mild winter was allowing the owls to survive on less food (a lower heating bill in a mild winter!), but Hugh Venables has posed an alternative reason for the behaviour change of the owls at Bransbury - he suggests that they may in fact be Long-eared (which don't hunt until nightfall) and not Short-eared at all. Hugh is only raising this as a possibility when he writes on HOSLIST .. 'A thought about the owls at Bransbury Common. Despite reporting them as Short-eared, I would have trouble, from what I saw yesterday, saying that they weren't Long-eared. One sat upright on a post and the ears were visible but the one that flew across the path did look pale. Has anyone seen them well enough (at dawn perhaps) to say that they are definitely Short-eared. It would explain their nocturnal habits but if they are roosting on the ground then that would be odd for Long-eared.' This seems a reasonable question as I am not aware of anyone having seen them as more than distant silhouettes in flight in the dusk, and it would explain their behaviour.

Here in Havant Nutchhatches are continuing their spread to new sites in an area where they have always been uncommon in the past - Barry Collins came across one at the site of the old Oak Park School (about half a mile due north of the Havant railway station), and over at the Portsmouth IBM site Kevin Stouse found six Canada Geese back (probably three pairs claiming their nest sites). +++

At Black Point on Hayling Island John Shillitoe watched a Guillemot and four Razorbill in the Chichester Harbour entrance channel before seeing two Slavonian Grebes off Hayling Bay. Stopping at the Oysterbeds on his way off the island John could only see one Black-necked Grebe which (with Bob Chapman's report that only two were seen during a low tide count on Feb 1) makes me wonder if most of these birds have already left us. Compared to the flocks of up to 40 that used to visit Langstone Harbour in past winters the population here has dropped considerably and only one report for this winter has been of more than 8 birds +++

Having some time before lunch after finishing my weekly 'garden gate' poster I cycled to Bedhampton and on to Broadmarsh in this morning's sunshine. A Green Sandpiper was feeding in the Hermitage Stream just above the Water Works entrance bridge and a pair of Gadwall were still on Bedhampton Mill Pool (no Swans back to nest there yet), and at Broadmarsh a pair of Pintail were on the water of Chalk Dock among the Brent and near the high tide wader roost - surprisingly I only saw one Great Crested Grebe where there is usually a winter flock so maybe they have all returned to nest sites. Later in the day I went past Langstone Pond where I could hear a Reed Bunting calling in the reeds, but the best bird item of the day was evening song from a Blackbird in gardens by Wade Court Road.

SUN 08 FEB

In West Sussex Kevin Stouse led a party of HOS members on a visit to Amberley Wild Brooks where he found more water than he can remember seeing in past years on previous regular February visits. They did fairly well for passerines with several Bullfinches and two

different Tree Creepers as well as Redwing and Fieldfare but the hoped for Bewick's Swans were nowhere to be seen (almost certainly down near Arundel at Offham where 24 were present yesterday), and they also missed seeing any Ruff which had been there in January (Graham Roberts saw 34 on Jan 28) but did have 4 Black-tailed Godwit. Among the wildfowl they did see were 26 Gadwall, 20 Greylags and 40 Canada Geese and they also watched Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. +++

This morning I went to Stansted Groves and found myself among a large extended tit flock with many Long-tailed, Blue, Great and Coal Tits and (perhaps not moving with the others) two Marsh Tits which were singing loudly and probably territorially. Another puzzling sound came from another two widely separated birds which I could not identify - the calls sounded like those of very young pheasants, both birds making identical high pitched piping, but then both birds changed to a double note and they continued to echo each other. In the end I decided they were Nuthatches, which can make almost any noise, but there was no hint of the spring whistling that I would expect from them. As I decided to abandon the attempt to see these mystery birds I had a good but brief view of a Tree Creeper, my first for the year(!) +++

Later I had a look at Aldsworth Pond where the usual pair of Swans were back though the island on which they traditionally nest is now very overgrown. Some 15 Canada Geese were also there as were 7 Tufted Duck and a similar number of Gadwall plus a few Mallard and Moorhen and at least 15 Coot (but no Little Grebes) +++

At dusk I took a brief walk around Havant in the hope of hearing Blackbird song (which I did not) and witnessed a flock of Pied Wagtails coming to roost at the (now closed) Texaco garage on Park Road South (the main road into Havant from the A27 roundabout). Once or twice in the past I have seen Wagtails roosting here but I had forgotten about this rather unlikely site. What attracted my attention was a flock of around 35 Wagtails flying low over this busy road - I thought they would head on towards Budds Farm sewage works but they circled around, and after a lot of hesitation most of them plunged into the thick 'laurel hedge' around the disused car-wash building though some landed on the roof of the multi-storey carpark (out of sight from the ground) and others pitched on the pavement or the garage roof. It could well be that what I saw was just one of many parties coming to roost here and if anyone knows more about this roost I would like to hear from them. I know Wagtails like to make their winter roosts in places that are slightly warmer than average, which usually means around or in the courtyards of buildings, and like to be near water, but this laurel hedge is on the exposed southwest side of the building and is right alongside a pavement and busy road so I cannot imagine why they choose to go there (especially now the car-wash is no longer functional and there is no 'water feature' to attract them)

SAT 07 FEB

On the River Arun 24 Bewick's Swans could be seen at Offham, a little north of the Wildfowl reserve at Arundel, and where up to 15 Bewick's were present on Jan 4, 6, and 26 (I think they have stayed there all the time and not been at Amberley at all this winter - certainly not since New Year). +++

Moving up to Pulborough and then west along the Rother Valley to Burton Mill Pond there were two Bitterns present today (the first arrived there last Thursday, Feb 5). At the pond there was also a possible sighting of a Great White Egret

Martin Hampton took a long walk today partly in Hampshire and partly in Sussex, heading north from Havant through Stansted Forest to West Marden where he turned west and came back via Idsworth. Maybe the most exciting of his observations was of Buzzards proclaiming their choice of nest site by vertical dives from high above the chosen woodland spot. Less exciting but more noisy were some 60 Rooks around the extended rookery near Rowlands Castle railway station, and more colourful was a flock of 17 Yellowhammer close to St Hubert's Chapel at Idsworth, near which a regular pair of Kestrels were hunting. Good to see, but maybe dubious in origin, was a covey of 5 Grey Partridge on Nore Down (the steep hillside west of the road coming up the valley from Walderton as it nears West Marden after passing Oldhouse Lane). I say dubious as the fields on the other side of the

valley road at this point often have large numbers of Red-legs in them which are definitely there for the benefit of the Watergate shoots and while I am not suggesting that the people at Watergate violate the unwritten rule that Grey Partridge are not to be shot nowadays I would not be surprised if these had been introduced (maybe even survivors of the 50 released at Old Idsworth Farm a couple of autumns back).

Turning to Hampshire news Tom Muckley tells me that a Blackbird was in full song at 9:15am this morning in a Petersfield town centre carpark, and in Southampton (where he heard Blackbird song at dawn yesterday) David Holland today heard one singing at dusk close to the Civic Centre. +++

The Havant Wildlife Group spent their morning on north west Hayling, and at one stage they heard an owl utter what is described as a screech. The word screech can mean different things to different people but in connection with owls it suggests to me the high-pitched, hissing, sound of a Barn Owl (said to resemble the last desperate cry of a woman being strangled but I have never heard a woman in that plight). Having had a similar discussion about an owl heard by John Goodspeed at Cams Bay earlier this week (which John now tells me was in his opinion probably a Tawny), and not having heard either of these two owls myself, I won't give an opinion on what the group heard but I will say that not only have there been Barn Owls in this part of Hayling in recent winters but I have just been told by Jason Crook of a recent encounter that he had with a Barn Owl hunting over the Langstone Harbour shore between Chalkdock Lake and the A27 road. +++

Lastly for today John Shillitoe tells us that 22 Little Egrets were together in the field which abuts Soberton Church - at a guess they were there in the company of cattle and maybe finding food items where the cattle had churned up the wet ground. The rest of John's regular extended cycle around the fields east of the Meon was pretty uneventful - just a Stonechat and a few singing Skylark (no Black Redstart, Little Owl, Golden Plover, Corn Buntings or that gorse-shunning Dartford Warbler on the wire fences at Big West End farm). More seriously John has not mentioned Woodlarks for some time ...

PLANTS

SAT 14 FEB

I suspect that I accidentally introduced an Early Dog Violet into my garden some years ago and it has now developed into a large clump of plants growing from a crack in a little used part of the garden path - on Christmas Day this clump had a single flower out. That flower wilted before the New Year but today I happened to notice that a new flower has sprung up and is about to open, tying in with Richard Carpenter's find earlier this week.

Another and more unusual flowering was observed by the Havant Wildlife Group when on north Hayling a week ago (Feb 7) - I only heard this morning that they found Germander Speedwell in flower close to the Texaco garage at the southern end of Langstone Bridge. Normally this is the last of the common Speedwells to go on the year list and last year I did not see it until mid-April.

WED 11 FEB

A Kingcup was in flower today near Crofton Church (I think this is near where Ranvilles Lane joins the main Titchfield to Stubbington road on the east of the Meon valley), seen by Richard Carpenter, and I too enjoyed 11 bright yellow flowers on a single Kingcup plant at the Langstone South Moors in the wet ground just south of the Autolive factory, itself built on the site of some 600 Kingcup plants which I once enjoyed seeing at this time of year. My plant was an oddity which had opened its first flowers before I saw it on Jan 16 - in a few weeks time it will hopefully be surrounded by quite a few others of which I cannot yet see the leaves. +++

Other flowers seen by myself today started with a single Goat Willow pussypaw with its anthers fully out, even attracting the statutory bumblebee, here in Havant close to a roadside 'pavement crack' from which a plant that seemed almost dead had put out a spray of deep bright blue small flowers identifying itself as Greater Forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla*). Later I walked down the Langbrook stream to count 59 flowering plants of Greater Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*) and to see the first knobbly mauve heads of the

female Common Butterbur plants beginning to push through the surface of the damp ground. Further upstream, where an earth bank separates the steamside path from the Langstone Technology Park carpark, I enjoyed more tiny bright blue flowers on Green Field Speedwell growing on that close mown earth bank, and later in my walk I was pleased to see (and brush against) English Elm flowers overhanging the bottom of the steps coming down the west side of Budds Mound near the shore

TUE 10 FEB

On Stephen's Castle Down north of Bishop's Waltham (presumably at the southern end of the down near the hamlet of Dean) Richard Carpenter had the pleasure of finding the first wild Dog Violets today though he does not say if these were the Early or Common Dog Violets - I used to assume that both these normally flowered before the Sweet Violets appeared but that is clearly wrong as many Sweet Violets have been in full flower since mid-January.

+++

Today Brian Fellows was the first to see faint yellow clouds of pollen coming from a shaken branch of a Yew tree in Westbourne, just north of Emsworth. In that same village he saw Maidenhair Spleenwort growing from old walls in New Road (actually an ancient winding track, hardly a road, in the centre of the village) but when he had walked down Whitechimney Row and turned right into the unmade Lumley Mill Lane I suspect he did not see the Polypody Ferns which once grew on the old buildings on the north side of the road there (recently converted into modern dwellings). Not all is lost however, for if you look south from here to a tall isolated tree in the middle of a field you can still see three huge growths of Mistletoe on it - far too high up for vandals to steal. +++

Yesterday Brian was somewhat surprised to see several rather tatty plants of Common Ragwort still bearing their yellow flowers near the junction of the Horndean and New Brighton Roads in Emsworth.

MON 09 FEB

White Comfrey was starting to flower at three more sites in Havant today after seeing the first at Langstone yesterday, but today's 'first' for my personal list was wild Primrose with one plant having several flowers open beside the railway line just east of the Mill Lane bridge over it leading to Bedhampton Mill. In the past many plants covered the trackside here close to the Wayfarer's Way path, but most of them have lost out to ground covering ivy.

+++

In the nearby sluice taking surplus water from the water company springs into the Hermitage Stream the Stream Water Crowfoot has already regrown to fill most of the sluice but has not yet developed flowers, and this reminds me that I had a note from John Goodspeed today apologising for a slip-up in his notes for last Thursday when he was at the Chichester Lakes - I was puzzled by his claim to have seen Crowfoot flowering there, but I am less puzzled by his corrected version - for Crowfoot read Coltsfoot.

As early as Jan 5 this year Richard Carpenter found some Blackthorn in flower on the shore at Brownwich, west of Titchfield Haven. He confirmed that the flowers were of Blackthorn, not Cherry Plum, but he could not explain why these plants had an error in their biological clocks, coming out a couple of months early (a couple of winter's back some Blackthorn came out in late November!). Today Richard found more Blackthorn blossom there, as I did yesterday on Hayling Island.

SUN 08 FEB

A visit to Stansted Groves this morning was aimed at checking on the progress of the Early Purple Orchids (plenty of well developed leaf rosettes seen) and the more immediate hope of finding Lesser Periwinkle in flower, which I did though I could only see one flower in the acres of ground covering leaves in Pitts Copse. +++

Having seen that I went to Walderton and up the steep Woodlands Lane, stopping at the brow of the hill. Right opposite where we stopped, without the expected walk along the lane, there was a magnificent full grown specimen of Green Hellebore with three large and perfect flowers (later I found more equally good specimens under the laneside Hazel trees) and near it was a small plant of Spurge Laurel again well laden with flowers - the bright yellow anthers showing in the long narrow pale flower tubes. +++

Later in the day I cycled to north Hayling wondering if both Blackthorn and Cherry Plum were both flowering in the Oysterbeds area where Dave Savage had yesterday produced samples of both in flower (which he had picked at some unspecified elsewhere). Although not expecting to see Blackthorn I did in fact come across one individual tree in flower among hundreds that showed no sign of buds or flowers, and also found a nice clump of Ivy-leaved Speedwell in flower when looking in vain for Coltsfoot by the shore carpark. On my way back through Northney I found the church Strawberry tree had finished flowering but as I neared the hotel I passed a plant of flowering Cow Parsley in the roadside ditch.
+++

Back on the mainland White Comfrey was in flower outside the Old Farmhouse in Wade Lane, and north of the A27 in Wade Court Road the tall and ancient Grey Poplar, which overhangs the entrance to the path leading between houses to the Pook Lane/A27 footbridge, had begun to open its topmost catkins which had extended and were showing bright red scales.

SAT 07 FEB

Richard Carpenter today found Coltsfoot and Primroses both flowering in the Botley Woods, and on Hayling Island Blackthorn blossom had been imported from an unspecified source for educational purposes. Dave Savage, a regular member of the Havant Wildlife Group, joined the group who were meeting at the Hayling Oysterbeds this morning, and he brought with him examples of both Cherry Plum and Blackthorn blossom to show other members how to distinguish one from the other. No doubt they learnt from this object lesson but I remain frustrated over the one fact that I want to know - namely, where did the Blackthorn come from as it is exceedingly scarce at this moment and probably will be for another month. Interestinly the group do not appear to have noticed one tree covered in Blackthorn blossom that stands alone among hundreds of other lifeless-looking Blackthorn trees along the edge of Stoke Common wood where the Hayling Coastal path runs beside the wood.

INSECTS

FRI 13 FEB

When I was about six years old and living in Hastings I can remember being fascinated by concrete walls along part of the seafront esplanade which had been decorated with bits of broken coloured glass bottles set in the concrete, and I imagine this attraction has survived until now as I read in the SOS website about 'Bottle Alley' at Hastings. The reason for the mention is that when Andy Phillips was there this morning he found three different migrant moth species resting on these decorated walls. Two of the species were no surprise, Silver Y and Dark Sword-grass, but the third was Bordered Straw and that has only been reported twice so far this year - the first was at Weymouth on Feb 4, the second was at Middleton on sea in Sussex on Feb 11.

THU 12 FEB

A tiny insect appeared on the housing of my computer screen as I worked at it tonight and my first thought was that it was one of the tiny ladybird species but a look through a magnifying glass showed that it was in fact a moth of some sort which I thought I had no chance of identifying since it was at most 4mm long and the only features that might help were its strange hump-backed shape (suggesting a tiny ladybird) and very indistinct brown mottling on its rather feathery wings. As luck would have it I was reading the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website on the screen at this time, and having given up hope of finding out more about my tiny moth I turned back to the screen where the next thing I read was a mention of Winter Gnats and Owl Midges seen by Tim Walker at Winchester. Neither gnats nor midges interest me much but I am interested in names and I had never before come across the name 'Owl Midge' so I turned to Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects and there was an illustration (much magnified) which looked very like my tiny moth. Reading the description I found that these insects are abundant at sewage works (our house and garden do not quite fall into that category), but also that they come to lighted windows at night, and on the assumption that Tim Walker does not live in a sewage works

but still has these insects coming to his light I persuaded myself that my insect was an Owl Midge - a new entry for my insect 'life list'

WED 11 FEB

The biggest surprise yesterday (Feb 9) was however a genuine sighting of two Speckled Wood butterflies in a south Devon lane near Kingsbridge. Martin Catt writes that as he was driving along a .. 'sheltered sunken Devon lane I noticed two butterflies engaged in a spiralling "battle flight". They had to be Small Tortois at this time in the year but somehow the jizz was wrong. I stopped my car and was amazed to find a fresh male Speckled Wood basking on Harts Tongue fern, the second one soon returned and the aerial battle was rejoined!' +++

While on the subject of Speckled Wood I have just heard from Kevin Stouse that Peter Gardner's apparent identification of the butterflies seen in Rackham Woods near the river Arun last Sunday as Speckled Woods was not as I reported it. I'm not sure how well, if at all, Peter saw the butterflies but it seems that his contribution was effectively to say that at this time of year in woodland it was more likely that Speckled Wood rather than Painted Lady would be seen (though both were improbable). Anyway, now knowing of the Painted Lady invasion, Peter is quite happy to go along with Kevin's identification of them as Painted Ladies. +++

News for Feb 8 on the SOS website includes a yet more unlikely report (which may well be true in this improbable season) of a Meadow Brown seen at Paghham Harbour. I wonder what Sarah Patton will have to say about that observation on her reserve!

Also on the SOS website, coming from Cliff Dean in the Pett area near Hastings on Sunday Feb 8, is another example, to add to one I have already quoted in the bird news page, of the sort of wildlife reporting that I enjoy reading - true to the facts but presented in a way that makes you feel as if you were there and seeing what Cliff saw and enjoyed. The quote this time is .. 'Yet another Faded Lady, bleached and cryptic, tumbled through a storm of whirling ash-keys' +++

And finally news from Feb 4 of two other 'first of the year' migrant moth sightings. In the Scillies a Nutmeg was found and in Somerset a Ni Moth

MON 09 FEB

The number of Painted Lady sightings which I have seen reported on the internet over the past weekend totals over 100 butterflies seen from Cornwall to Kent and it is clear that these have been blown in on the strong winds from Iberia or further afield and are not emerging from hibernation. Responding to a query on the SOS website about the origin of these butterflies Sarah Patton tells us that in her opinion they are migrants and she goes on to say .. 'I hear that there is a lot of migrant activity in Portugal at the moment with moths arriving from Africa and we would seem to be getting the 'few' that get caught in weather fronts and are brought this way.' +++

I myself put up a Painted Lady from a gorse bush on the shore of Langstone Harbour in this morning's sunshine and amongst others who have seen them today are Barry Collins and Pat Morrissey in Havant, John Shillitoe on Hayling, Mike Collins at Goodwood, Richard Carpenter with 2 on the Titchfield shoreline and Ron King with more than three near the mouth of the Beaulieu River while Ken Hearne reports a sighting on the Brighton seafront. +++

Yesterday 20 were logged at Durlston in Dorset, and at Farlington Marshes Andrew Howard and others not only saw at least one Painted Lady but also a Hummingbird Hawkmoth which appeared to be reading the notice boards in the reserve building. +++

A particularly interesting sighting was made by people walking with Kevin Stouse in the Amberley Wild Brooks area on Feb 8 when they were in the Rackham Woods. Kevin noticed a butterfly and his immediate thought was of Painted Lady, followed swiftly by the thought that 'it can't be one at this time of year'. One of the people with him who also saw it was the butterfly expert Peter Gardner, and Kevin tells me that Peter pronounced it to be a Speckled Wood - without getting into an argument about the evidence I find it very interesting (in view of Tony Wootton's claim to have seen two Speckled Woods in the

Bognor area on Feb 1 - see my notes for that day) that there is the possibility of confusion between the two species. Personally I would have thought that the flight patterns of the two species would have separated them but some of the Painted Ladies now arriving are very battered, may not look like Painted Ladies nor fly like them, but nevertheless the odds must be stacked against seeing Speckled Wood in early February. +++

Going back to Saturday's sightings I see that they include a well authenticated Painted Lady at Cosham seen by Graham Roberts through binoculars in his own garden. Other local reports for Feb 7 were from Richard Carpenter who saw two in Botley Woods and from Martin Hampton who saw one in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth and two more in Stansted Forest where there was also a lone Red Admiral. Other reports account for over 20 butterflies on Saturday (Feb 7) with 6 at Arne in Dorset, 6 at Ryde on the Isle of Wight (plus 'many' at Bembridge Foreland), 4 at Brighton and 2 in Kent plus another 10 or so singles. One of the early reports in this saga came from Tony Wilson who was waiting on Portslade station about 7am on Feb 6 for his train to work when a Painted Lady flew by....
+++

Among all the reports of Painted Ladies I have seen remarkably few reports of Red Admirals (they usually form the bulk of winter kamikaze butterfly sightings) but a couple of Small Tortoiseshell sightings have come to light - both at East Dean near Eastbourne on Feb 6 and Jan 17 respectively

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 11 FEB

John Shillitoe today saw a Common Seal off Titchfield Haven, where Seal sightings are I think very uncommon. Of 23 Common Seal sightings that I recorded last year none were on the Gosport to Warsash shore though there was one at Puckpool Point on the north-east corner of the Isle of Wight at about this time of year (Feb 15). 19 of the 23 sightings that I know of were in Chichester or Langstone Harbour. The other three sightings (excluding the one at Puckpool in February) were in October and November, spread along the Sussex coast at Worthing, Brighton and Rye Harbour. I know the data is totally inadequate to prove anything other than that there is an established colony of up to 14 Seals in Chichester Harbour, but the other sightings suggest to me some sort of autumn movement between the North Sea seal population and the Chichester Harbour offshoot, while the sightings to the west of Chichester/Langstone may indicate that spring brings an urge to some members of the Chichester group to seek fame and fortune (not to mention food) further west. +++

Another factor determining the chances of seeing Seals off the Hampshire coast is the outbreak of Seal distemper that occurred in 2002 and reduced the overall population in the North Sea (and thus any pressure for them to move west). Looking back to 2001 I see that Common Seals were seen from Stokes Bay in Feb and March, and one was off Titchfield Haven on 19 April 01, with sightings in the Lymington area in July and November (when one was regularly seen off Keyhaven).

TUE 10 FEB

Last Friday at Kings Pond in Alton around dusk Steve Mansfield watched a bat and wondered both what species it was (it did not fly like a Pipistrelle or low over the water like a Daubenton's) and if it was unusual to see one at this date. I have not consulted any bat expert on this but from what I have heard I am not surprised that a bat should be on the wing in view of the unusually high temperatures since the beginning of the year. In any case I have also heard that no bats sleep right through the winter, but all of them quite normally wake up once or twice on warm days during the winter and take a short flight, not so much to stretch their wings or to feed as to empty their bladders to prevent a build up of poisons in their bodies. +++

As to the species Steve tells us that the bat appeared at 5:45 pm on Friday 6 Feb when it was getting pretty dark (my estimate of sunset on that day was 5:01pm), and he goes on to say that the bat .. 'was among trees and over the water at the West end of the pond. Flying at approx 12 feet high rather than low over the water. Slower, more fluttery flight and larger

compared to the (presumed) Pipistrelles I get around my home in Alton in summer.' +++
I would be interested to hear from anyone who can confidently identify it, but until I do so my money is on it being a Brown Long-eared Bat. In A A Wardhaugh's book on Bats in the Shire Natural History series the description for this species includes the following .. 'It can be seen from about thirty minutes after sunset, often flying slowly around tree canopies where it has the characteristic habit of taking insects from the leaves, sometimes hovering as it does so.' If it is a Long-eared then there should be a chance of seeing those huge ears sticking up if the bat can be viewed in silhouette against the sky with a pair of binoculars.

MON 09 FEB

The Frogspawn race is definitely hotting up (that's a good mixed metaphor). Among news from the past weekend and today there is a report from Graham Roberts at Cosham that 120 clumps of frogspawn and one male Toad were in Theo Roberts' garden pond by last Friday (Feb 6) and that by Sunday (Feb 8) two pairs of Toads were already mating in the same pond. +++

Also on Feb 6 Tony Wilson found the first frogspawn in his pond at Hangleton (Hove in Sussex). Tony comments .. 'Over the last 5 years the first dates have been 13th, 14th, 10th, 9th and this year 6th - global warming in action!' +++

On Saturday (Feb 7) Stephen Harwood found the first frogspawn in his garden pond at Catherington to the north of Waterlooville, and this morning Margaret Baggs found frogspawn in her pond on Portsdown above Farlington.

Getting away from amphibians, but seen in riverside fields by the Test below Romsey, were the first 'boxing' Hares, seen on Feb 8 by Paul Winter.

WEEK 6 FEB 2 – 8 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 06 FEB

On Wednesday I wrote that I was surprised that, in view of the exceptionally warm weather, Blackbirds were not yet singing, and today I have a note from David Holland in the Upper Shirley area of Southampton saying that he was woken early this morning by strong Blackbird song which continued until 7:30am. One Blackbird on its own does not prove that spring is here and David's observation does go against my experience that when the Blackbirds do come 'on song' they are usually heard first at dusk rather than dawn (which is preferred by most other first time singers), so I await confirmation by popular vote that the Blackbirds are singing generally. Nevertheless I envy David his 'alarm clock' (can you get bird song ringing tones for mobile phones? If not there's a great marketing opportunity waiting to be taken up)

Malcolm Dixon saw an Iceland Gull at Titchfield Haven today (not distantly over the sea but from the Meadow Hide at midday). Malcolm does not give an age for the bird but Richard Carpenter has heard that it was a second winter bird, so presumably not the bird seen at the Gosport Cackle Pond on Jan 31 and Feb 1 by Simon Ingram and Mark Litjens who both said it was a first winter (that would have been 'splodgy coffee coloured' all over where a second winter would be mostly white)

Malcolm also had a Bittern sighting from the Meadow Hide, and Richard adds 70 Eider still offshore but his more interesting news is that the Barnacles and the hybrid Bar-Head goose are back at the Haven from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth but came without the Snow Goose - it does sound as if there has been a bust-up of this Baffin's Gang and the majority are doing their best to drop the Snow Goose from membership. (Brian's note: the Snow Goose was all alone at Baffins Pond on Sun 8 Feb and the rest of the gang were at Titchfield.) Reports from other visitors to the Haven today mention Firecrest and Sanderling.

In Portsmouth this morning Martin Hampton watched a Peregrine fly over the university buildings (Ravelin House) where he works and last Friday (Jan 30) he noticed one perched on the Guildhall. With Peregrines now breeding regularly on Chichester Cathedral Martin wonders if another pair will nest on the Portsmouth Guildhall. Ian Thirlwell also saw one

perched on the Guildhall on Christmas Eve, and there are plenty of pigeons both there and in the dockyard, but the Peregrines do not necessarily have to nest among their prey. Last May Roger Webb watched a Peregrine fly in over the South Parade pier as if it had come from a base on one of the Spithead Forts (which must offer luxury apartments for high class raptors), and there are also those Peregrines of unknown origin which use the electricity pylons on the northwest slopes of Portsdown and which are known to make sorties down the Wallington river taking them out into Portsmouth Harbour in full view of the city centre and dockyard. For the future what better use for that Spinnaker Tower than to be topped with a Peregrine eyrie (I hope Graham Roberts has ensured that a nest box is included in the plans!)

A bird that maybe in the running for the job of Court Jester to the Great Blackback was seen today by Brian Fellows in Emsworth Harbour. This was an orange breasted Black-headed Gull, and it brought back memories of a frontpage photo in The News of a light emerald green version of a Black-head taken on the still active Broadmarsh rubbish tip back in the 1980s. At that time there had been other sightings of gulls dyed all over in smart fluorescent colours and I remember coming to the conclusion that these gulls had acquired their colours when bathing in a small water reservoir alongside Shaftesbury Avenue in the Purbrook area of Waterlooville - the colour dyes had been introduced into the water to trace leaks downstream of the reservoir.

That theory may or may not have been true, but nowadays the spraying of birds' plumage with colour dyes in order to discover the movements of the birds has become quite popular (remember all those 'yellow arsed' Brent?), and the fact that this gull not only had a BTO ring on one leg and red plastic ring on the other suggests that the dye was part of its involuntary participation in some scheme of bird study. I often refer to those people who undertake very useful and much appreciated physical conservation tasks, but who are required to do what they are told and not to question why (or if there is a better way of achieving the objective - or even what that objective is), as 'conservation slaves', and with a similar tongue in cheek thought I suggest that this bird was a conservation slave protesting at the way it was being used by standing in a way that Brian could not read the vital yellow letter on its red plastic ring.

I myself took a stroll in this morning's rain around the Warblington fields - the main intention being to follow up my first sight of a substantial flock of Brent on one of the grass fields there last Wednesday, and while I once again saw at least 80 Brent descend on that same field I proved to my own satisfaction that they are not feeding on any of the other fields of that farm though I have yet to track down where those that arrive from inland do come from.
+++

Other birds seen at Warblington were an increased flock of 30+ Linnets, one of 35+ Curlew and at least 20 Stock Doves. One Skylark was singing its heart out and the large flock of 50+ Crows that is nearly always there or on the shore had been joined today by perhaps 50 Jackdaws.

Today brought the first results of this year's Egret roost survey which took place on Jan 14 (further monthly counts are planned for the 14th of each month of 2004). It shows a total of 249 Egrets recorded at seven of the known roosts in Hampshire plus those at Pagham Harbour and Thorney Island in Sussex and Salterns Wood at Yarmouth on the Isle Wight. Unfortunately it seems that no one was available in January to count the potential roosts at Tournerbury Wood on Hayling Island, the Ashlett Creek site near Fawley on Southampton Water, Sowley Pond near Lymington, Midgham Wood near Fordingbridge and Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight, let alone the newly discovered roosts at Old Basing and Upper Froyle in north east Hampshire. Hopefully better coverage will be achieved in future months as it seems to me that the essence of trying to monitor these adventurous birds is to at least keep up with their latest moves rather than counting the rearguard left in the older established roosts (which, as we have seen in the case of the original Thorney Island site, could cease to be used at any moment - and we would still want to know where the birds had gone to)

One thing that the new survey has already shown us is that the roost with biggest count at this time of year is the inland one at Alresford (45 birds) while the original Thorney Island roost had only 34, in contrast to the previous survey in the autumn of 2001 when Thorney had a minimum of 140 birds and Alresford a max of 10 (and no site other than Thorney ever had more than 91 birds). It also shows a much more even spread of birds between the roosts with counts at five of the ten sites each having between 35 and 45 birds, and it reports counts of 24 from the roost near Mislingford Bridge on the Meon and 35 in the Itchen Valley country park area, neither of which were known at the time of the 2001 survey. I have never seen any count from the rumoured Midgham Wood site across the Avon from Bickton south of Fordingbridge, but it is in such good Egret country that I would not be surprised if it did not turn out to be the biggest roost in the county this year (a pure guess, but I think we should be including it in the survey!)

THU 05 FEB

John Goodspeed led a mid-week birding walk around the Chichester Lakes today but it seems he may have left it a little late in the winter to see the mass of wildfowl that are usually there. The only species which he mentions is Gadwall, saying that he could only find 20 of them where there had been at least 115 on Jan 24 and around 220 on Jan 31, so if that was the general measure of the departure of the wildfowl it must have been a disappointing trip.

On Tuesday Feb 3 John Goodspeed was in the Fareham Creek area and noted a Greenshank in the 'Delme pool' as well as the presence of that 'white' Canada Goose with a flock on the Cams Hall golf course. Even more interestingly he says that .. 'An owl was screeching from trees in the copse at the back of Cams Bay. I hung around hoping to see the bird but failed.' To my ear the only owl which 'screeches' is a Barn Owl, and when Cams Hall was in disrepair and what is now the golfcourse was abandoned farmland I remember that (as part of the planning enquiry by the prospective developers) the Hampshire Wildlife Trust sent Dennis Bright to check for Barn Owls there, and that Dennis found a pair nesting in an old cupboard in one of the upper rooms whose windows were broken. Maybe John heard the ghost of that evicted owl (though a condition of granting the planning permission was that the owls should be offered alternative accommodation and I believe that if you visit some of the new office building in the grounds you will see purpose built owl entrance holes in some of the buildings, so maybe the owls are still there and could even be reading these notes as they are transmitted across the web by Cisco systems who have their UK base there)

Bob Chapman on Feb 4 put a further news bulletin from Farlington Marshes on the HWT website, and in it he tells us that a cannon netting session on Feb 2 captured 19 Brent Geese which have now been fitted with green and yellow plastic leg rings.

On Sunday (Feb 1) the three Twite which were mentioned in his previous report (see my notes for Feb 3 when I discovered Bob's report which I had not been searching for as he had previously included me in a distribution list to receive his news bulletins directly) were still present and two Black-necked Grebe and a young male Eider could both be seen from the reserve, and the 'half-pint' Cackling Goose was still on the reserve.

WED 04 FEB

On the upper reaches of the Itchen at Ovington Richard Carpenter heard Blackcap subsong, then heard the bird burst into its explosive full song, while near the mouth of the river in Southampton Ian Watts heard a Chiffchaff singing. The one thing that surprises me is that there has not yet been an outburst of Blackbird evensong (they usually start their year's singing with a chorus at dusk rather than dawn), but perhaps they know better than to get carried away by the current extraordinary warmth which is forecast to die back in the next few days and could well be succeeded by a real cold spell in February (not just the one day wonder of last week). +++

Despite today's very strong wind the weather was fine and the tide time allowed me to put another 300 entries into my database for the last weekend's news, and to have some lunch, before heading for the Warblington foreshore to carry out my first 'mid-tide count' of Chichester Harbour shorebirds from the Warblington shoreline. The fact that the wind was

too strong to use my telescope made little difference as it was also too strong for the birds to come and feed on the exposed mud here as the tide fell, but that does not mean that there was nothing to see.

The high tide and high wind has combined to drive the Brent from the shore to feed on inland fields and as the tide began to fall they started to appear overhead and to drop onto the tideline but after the first half-hour many of them clearly thought better of their decision to return to the shore and moved onto one of the shoreline grass fields in which a large area of short, rather brown, grass (compared to the lush green of other parts) showed that this is not their first foraging expedition here - the same marks could be seen in the adjacent field although no geese were there at the moment. I walk around this area about once a week and even on my last visit on Sunday (Feb 1) there was no such evidence of the geese using these fields so I guess this is more a reaction to the strong winds rather than a desperate search for food after the seaweed supply has run out +++

After an hour counting the Brent and the few Dunlin, Redshank and Oystercatchers that dared to use the mudflats I headed home along the shore towards Langstone where the village gave some shelter from the wind and this gave me my first sight of Golden Plover on the mud for this winter - there were 86 of them, presumably driven by the wind from wherever they would normally have sat out the daylight hours and finding this part of the shore preferable. There were also a few Bar-tailed Godwit feeding here in the relative shelter and out in the exposed water of the Sweare Deep/New Cut channel was a party of what I think were three Merganser though one of them gave me the distinct impression of being a redhead Goosander with clear cut separation of dark head from a light coloured neck and battleship-grey body.

On my way to Warblington there were 21 Egrets in the Wade Court fields, presumably preferring to search for food there rather than struggle through the air to other feeding grounds though during the morning I watched one Egret fly over my garden, going south down the Billy Line towards Wade Court. I was reminded of this bird using the old rail line as a guide back to base when I heard on the radio tonight that researchers at Oxford University had come up with evidence that homing pigeons use our trunk roads as guides to their homes. This was discovered by fitting the birds with cunning devices using GPS to record their position every few minutes during their flight (though it seems that these flights were only of ten or twenty miles distance, and presumably made only during daylight hours).

TUE 03 FEB

Brian Fellows went to Baffins Pond in Portsmouth today and found the 9 Barnacle Geese, 1 Snow Goose and the Bar-head hybrid, which normally operate as a team and have earned the name of 'The Baffins Gang', have flown back from their winter holiday at Titchfield Haven. Last year they returned on Jan 21 but they obviously had a disagreement about the length of their holiday this winter - the Snow Goose flew back on its own on Jan 8 but when the others did not join it the Snow Goose went back to the Haven on Jan 23 and has taken some time to persuade the others to get back to work.

The presence of a single Grey Wagtail at Baffins Pond was a first for Brian's list (built up over many years of visits) of birds seen at this urban pond - perhaps further proof of the rapidly growing numbers of this species. Other wildfowl were more or less as expected for this time of year with good flocks of Mallard (130 today against 112 last week), Tufted Duck (76 against 74) and Shoveler (26 compared with 20). As elsewhere most of the Shoveler appear to be paired with the birds circling each other in pairs on the water to stir up food for their mates to eat. Last year the spring peak of Shoveler numbers at Baffins was around Feb 19 (that day saw both the peak count of 20 at Baffins Pond and an extraordinary count of 428 on the Blashford Lakes).

The Sandwich Tern which was recently seen in the west of Langstone Harbour, not far from Baffins Pond, was today in the north of the harbour where Jeff Goodridge saw it off Broadmarsh Slipway. In the entrance to Chichester Harbour John Shillitoe saw two

Slavonian Grebes and thinks that a third was present, while over on the Isle of Wight at the Bembridge Foreland which is in view from the Chichester Harbour mouth, the lone House Martin had stayed overnight and was seen this morning

Highlights from Farlington Marshes, put on the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website by Bob Chapman on Jan 29 with snow lying on the ground after the storm of the previous night. The most intriguing item is a mention of a party of 4 Twite which had been reduced to three birds by the time he wrote his summary - Bob seems to assume we have previously heard of these birds but I for one have not (two were said to have been seen on Nov 17 but I understood they were a one day wonder and have not heard of any others since then). The six Avocet which have been mentioned many times are said to have left Langstone Harbour on Jan 24, and Jan 25 brought sightings of 12 Bearded Tits, one or two Water Pipits and a Spotted Redshank. By Jan 29 counts of Wigeon were 1000+, Pintail and Shoveler both 120+, and a lone Eider in the harbour gets a mention (two Eider were seen in the southeast of the harbour from a Sinah Lane garden on Jan 26 - that same garden had two Fieldfare in it in the snow on Jan 29)

MON 02 FEB

A House Martin was found and photographed today by Kris Gillam at Bembridge Foreland on the Isle of Wight. Where it came from is anyone's guess (we have had some strong south westerly winds) but Kris says .. 'It remained all day feeding over the beach in the lee of the wind immediately northwest of the lifeboat station.' +++

At the Wade Court Egret roost at Langstone in my home area I was pleased to see 27 Egrets as I passed at dusk when they were starting to enter the roost.

SUN 01 FEB

John Simons, a 'junior member' of the important Portsmouth Group of birders from the 1950s, was out in his home area to the north of Rowlands Castle today and has some interesting news for us which I saw on the SOS website. Top of his list was song from two Woodlarks - the first of the year I think - and a sighting of a Golden Pheasant (possibly a recent escape/introduction as I was under the impression that the Queen Elizabeth Country Park colony had died out a good ten years ago and those at Kingley Vale were last seen in 1998). Nuthatch were starting their spring 'song', a pair of Kestrel were displaying and at least one Brambling was among the local finch population.

Mark Litjens had a ten minute look at the first winter Iceland Gull which was still at the Gosport Cockle Pond at first light this morning though it was not seen by anyone after 8am. It had been discovered there by Simon Ingram just after lunch yesterday (Jan 31) when it was showing within ten feet of his car. This could be the restless individual which was briefly at the Lynbottom rubbish tip on the Isle of Wight on Jan 24 (Kris Gillam did not give an age for that one) but it may still return to give a repeat of the 1991 saga when a first winter bird stayed at this same urban pond from Feb 23 to Mar 17.

In the Havant area I was doing more counting of bird flocks flying over the Warblington fields. Clearly seen circling close to me was a flock of 40 Skylarks (another single bird was singing nearby) and there was a smaller flock of just ten Linnets but a larger flock of 70 pigeons never gave me a clear view - earlier I had no doubt about the identity of 23 Stock Doves over one of the fields and I think the whole group of 70 birds were Stock Doves (smaller and neater than Woodpigeons and with faster wing beats) but I could not be sure. I could be sure that the Carrion Crow count was up to 70 with not a Rook or Jackdaw among them. Only four Egrets were present and despite trudging the length of the very wet SSSI field I did not put up a single Snipe. +++

A pair of Kestrel regularly nest in the Warblington Castle tower but are normally reluctant to show themselves in the vicinity of the nest (I have a theory that they fly south to Hayling to feed and that these may be the birds often seen at the Oysterbeds just 2.5km away). This morning I was very surprised to find half a dozen people standing on the seawall path between Pook Lane and the path to the church, several pointing cameras at the male Kestrel hovering for several minutes not much more than 20 yards from them and only 20 feet above the ground. After looking at the male I walked on and saw the female also

hovering but at a more normal height and distance a good 200 yards away over another field. I hope this means they are both feeding up prior to breeding...

Another counter in Havant was Martin Hampton who was very pleased to have a flock of 22 Greenfinch in his garden, ending a complete winter dearth of these usually numerous birds.

Sensibly not attempting to count the components of a large mixed finch flock on top of the hill to the north of East Meon Christoph Harwood tells me there were many Brambling among the Chaffinch and Sparrows together with a few Yellowhammer and Goldfinch

SAT 31 JAN

Paul James was at the Chichester lakes yesterday and could not find the Yellow-browed Warbler anywhere. The last sighting of it that I have heard of was on Jan 25 so I tend to agree with Paul that it may well have moved away.

PLANTS

FRI 06 FEB

The unexpected sight of half a dozen pink flowers on a roadside Herb Robert plant as I neared home, soaking wet, after a stroll around Warblington in this morning's rain, went a long way to making up for the state of my clothes, and the yellow of a Creeping Buttercup flower, in my own garden when I reached home, did the rest to cheer me up.

The Herb Robert was a first for the year and another first this morning was a tree full of Mimosa blossom - not a wild flower but just as attractive. Not yet out, but nearly there, are the catkins on an ancient Grey Poplar in Wade Court Road and the flowers on fresh Fumitory growing in the Warblington Farm fields. Also of note was a good display of Dog's Mercury flowering along Pook Lane below a row of Cherry Plum trees that are now sufficiently covered with flowers to stand out as white beacons as far as the eye can see them. One other tick this morning was of a third site where Ivy-leaved Speedwell is in flower - this one beside the A259 between Havant and Emsworth.

THU 05 FEB

John Goodspeed mentions in his note about the walk which he led today around the Chichester gravel pit lakes that he saw a few flowers of Water Crowfoot there and I have been wondering which species they might be. We can rule out the common one that thrives in fast flowing streams (*R. penicillatus*) and I think it was probably not *R. baudottii* which favours brackish still waters so I am wondering if it might be 'Common Water Crowfoot' (*R. aquatilis*) which is described as 'very local' in the Hants Flora and is mapped as occurring in just 18 of the county's 1025 tetrads.

Another intriguing report of early flowering comes from Jim Day, warden of the Wildlife Trust study centre at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood. Jim says that Wild Daffodils were already starting to flower there on Feb 2, which I would have thought to be unusually early but I have no experience against which to judge this. All I know is that people who visit Wild Daffodil sites usually begin to comment on them at the end of March (last spring I was told that they were already flowering at the West Dean Woods north of Chichester on March 23, and that was the first news I heard of them anywhere).

WED 04 FEB

More and more flowers of species already in flower before this week are now to be seen everywhere - Celandines are now numerous in Brook Meadow at Emsworth and along Wade Court Road in Havant - but no new species have opened their flowers this week to my knowledge.

Last Sunday (Feb 1), however, buds of the tiny yellow Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage were seen by Richard Carpenter in the wet bottom of the Hook Valley at Warsash and could be open by now. Another species that might have flowers is Lesser Periwinkle, or possibly Green Hellebore, but so far no one has claimed sight of them.

MON 02 FEB

As I write this on Feb 3 I have noticed that the ever warmer air has had a dramatic effect on banks of Chickweed everywhere in Havant. The bright green leaves were out in profusion before Christmas and the plants were covered in closed flower buds. Now, after some six

weeks of waiting, those flowers have all started to open, presumably just in response to the air temperature as there has been little or no sunshine for several days. +++

I was not out much on Monday but Brian Fellows, walking in the Long Copse Lane area of north Emsworth and Monks Hill road in the adjoining village of Westbourne, noticed much the same effect with two large patches of Celandines all in flower. Brian also found Wavy Bittercress and tells me that the tiny red female flowers on some Hazel trees have already been fertilised and are beginning to develop into nuts - certainly many of the male catkins are already 'blown out'.

SUN 01 FEB

I was pleased to find the very first tiny pale violet flower on Ivy-leaved Speedwell in Havant today and to add that species to the list of Common Field, Green Field, and Thyme-leaved Speedwells that can all be seen in flower within a few hundred yards of my front door. Walking from Havant to Emsworth and back I noted an upsurge of Red Dead Nettle blossom but I still have not seen an example of flowering Cow Parsley of which Brian Fellows still has one in Brook Meadow at Emsworth.

INSECTS

THU 05 FEB

Yesterday (Feb 4) brought two new reports of Red Admiral from East Sussex and Cornwall and thirteen more Painted Ladies including one seen by Steve Copsey on the Titchfield Haven canal path (not yet on Steve Nash's national list as I learnt of it direct from Steve Copsey). The other Painted Ladies were seen at seven sites in Kent, Sussex, Dorset, Devon and the Scillies. The Sussex site was at Piddinghoe beside the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes and just inland from Newhaven and here one observer saw six separate specimens.

SUN 01 FEB

Tony Wootton, a member of the Brook Meadow conservation group at Emsworth and also a rambler, was walking at Felpham near Bognor today and is pretty confident that he saw two Speckled Wood butterflies on the wing. While he would not claim to be an entomologist he is familiar with these common butterflies and their behaviour and says he cannot think that what he saw was not a couple of Speckled Woods. Checking my butterfly books, and especially my set of Hampshire Butterfly Reports for the years 1992 to 2002, I cannot find an earlier record of this species than Mar 9 (back in 1992) with the first sighting normally occurring in the second half of March. I have not seen the official Hampshire report for 2003 yet but my own records show that, although the general emergence of Speckled Woods did not start to appear until Mar 23 there was an isolated report from Bill Marjeram of seeing one at Titchfield Haven on Mar 3, and as these early butterflies come from pupae that have been waiting over winter for the temperature to trigger their emergence it is not inconceivable that the abnormally high temperatures through most of January have in fact given the signal to these two insects. I wonder if there will be more seen in February? One thing that I learnt in investigating this report is that one reason for the Speckled Wood having more 'broods' per year than most species is that, although most of the caterpillars each autumn pupate and overwinter as chrysalises a proportion of them overwinter as caterpillars, only pupating in the early spring and thus providing a second emergence each spring earlier than could be achieved by the efforts of the first butterflies to emerge (and this ripple effect of overlapping generations continues through the year).

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 06 FEB

A note from Steve Boswell in Lyndhurst today put back the date for 'first frogspawn of the year' by a whole week from Martin Shave's claim of Jan 31 to Jan 24 when the first clumps were seen in Andrew Walmsley's garden in Lyndhurst. Steve Boswell, also living in Lyndhurst, had to wait until Jan 26 for his first sight of spawn.

SUN 01 FEB

The first appearance of frogspawn in your local pond is one of the most encouraging signs of spring and the new life that it brings, and at least three people have now had the pleasure of seeing the masses of jelly bulging above the water of their ponds, but I wonder how many more people would by now have enjoyed that pleasure if we could put the clock back 50 (or even 20) years?

The first person to see spawn this year was Martin Shave who discovered it yesterday (Jan 31) but unfortunately he gives no clue as to which part of the world he saw it in (probably Hampshire, but that's a big place!). The other two, who found their first spawn today, were Alan Thurbon in Portsmouth and Colin Bates in Eastleigh, both in urban areas that may have fractionally higher overnight temperatures to warm up the frogs. +++

Bob Chapman saw his first active frog at Farlington Marshes as early as Jan 7, and I am pretty sure that given the mild winter we have had there would have been spawn in some ponds at that early date (or even back in December) fifty years ago before we started the serious business of polluting our water and thinning the ozone layer to let through the sun's harmful rays which are thought to be a main cause of the epidemics of frog death in recent years. +++

I am not suggesting that I can seriously read anything into the few reports of frogs that we have heard this winter but the mere fact that there have been so few suggests that Frogs ain't wot they used to be, and today's messages from a couple of people who have not seen frogspawn add to that feeling. Mike Collins, living here in Havant, tells me .. 'the frogs in my pond are busy grabbing everything in sight at the moment, but as yet no sign of frogspawn. but my large carp could have something to do with that.' The Carp might well be part of the problem in that they would probably eat any spawn that appeared in the pond, but Mike's message suggests that there is more to it than that - I think his problem is that he has a pond full of male frogs with no females, and you can't get life started with just two boy-scouts to rub together. I have heard of this problem before, and it will probably become more of a prime mover in the spiralling decline of frog numbers as those numbers continue to decline. The other mention of a frog today comes from Pete Smith in the Lymington area - he says .. 'when walking down to buy a paper this morning I saw a dead adult frog on the pavement - flushed out of hibernation by the heavy rains?' I don't know what the cause of this death was (though I haven't heard of frogs dying from too much water before) but I read this is just another statistic - one less Frog to keep the species going.

RALPH'S EXTRA FOR SUNDAY 8 FEB

I went to the Stansted Groves this morning and found one flower of Lesser Periwinkle in Pitts Copse, then had my first Tree Creeper (not singing) and Marsh Tit song in the Groves where the leaves of Early Purples are looking good.

On to Walderton where we parked at the top of the hill and had a magnificent example of Green Hellebore in flower across the road from the parking place (plenty more flowering further up in the usual place under the Hazels). Spurge Laurel flowers also out here.

Stopping at Aldsworth Pond on the way back I found the Mute Swan pair back with 15 Canada Geese, 7 Tufted Duck, at least 5 Gadwall and at least 15 Coot.

In the afternoon I cycled to the Oysterbeds then via Daw Lane, Verner Common and Northney. At the Oysterbeds just one tree of Blackthorn was in full flower amongst the huge mass which lines the edge of Stoke Common Wood and there was a big patch of Thyme Leaved Speedwell in flower on the landward side of the windsurfers carpark. (Incidentally, Brian, I see you refer to

the unnamed Windsurfer's Bay as Stokes Bay - this may be because, since I cannot find a name for it, I call it Stoke Bay - Stoke being the name of this part of Hayling - but Stokes Bay is likely to cause confusion with the genuine Stokes Bay at Gosport).

I can't comment on the 'unusual Dunlin' other than to say that Dunlin do vary quite a bit - could the black patch have been oil or dye put on by ringers? I think you said that it flew and

if so you should have seen a white rump if it were Curlew Sand (which you had already ruled out).

Continuing my ride I had 2 Fieldfare in Woodgason Lane and a single flowering plant of Cow Parsley in the ditch as I neared the Northney Hotel.

Coming up Wade Lane the first White Comfrey was flowering outside Nik Knight's house (Old Farmhouse) and the big old Grey Poplar opposite North Close was opening its first catkins (lengthening and showing red).

On Saturday evening (Feb 7) I noticed White Comfrey with buds about to open, and lots of flowering Sweet Violets, both in St Faith's churchyard in the centre of Havant (just behind where the street flower seller operates).

After seeing that I happened to be passing the now closed Texaco garage on Park Road south and watched 30+ Pied Wagtails coming to roost in the 'laurel hedge' surrounding the old car wash (at the corner where you join the main road after leaving the multi-storey carpark). A couple of years ago I found Pied Wagtails roosting here and guess they do so every night in the winter but I do not normally walk past just at dusk!

BRIAN'S REPORT ON SATURDAY'S WALK AT HAYLING OYSTERBEDS.

15 people turned out for this morning's walk by the Havant Wildlife Group. The weather was fine, but there was a strong and very chilly NW wind blowing across the harbour which made bird watching a little uncomfortable. The walk began at the car park behind the Esso Garage, from where we went along the shore, through the oysterbeds and across the road to the Northney shore. We returned via the Hayling Billy Line.

Birds

On the shore at Stokes Bay we found the usual collection of Brent Geese and waders among which I noted 10 Ringed Plover, 4 Turnstone and 2 Knot. A pair of Red-breasted Mergansers were the main attraction in the first lagoon where we also noted a flock of 90 Redshank and a few Oystercatchers. A flock of about 1,000 Dunlin provided the group with a fine display of formation flying.

Out in the channel we saw small numbers of Red-breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe and Goldeneye. A flock of around 30 Rooks flew across the channel towards Broadmarsh. Near the northern end of the Hayling Billy Line Heather and Ian heard a screech which they thought could have been made by a Barn Owl. Unfortunately, no further sound was heard.

On the Northney shore we found a good flock of 200 Brent Geese along with 32 Shelduck and Lapwing and Teal. A small flock of Black-tailed Godwits were perched on a small grassy island until it sank beneath the waves. On the way back down the Hayling Billy Line John Gowen's sharp eyes spotted a fine Green Woodpecker perched on the side of one of the telephone poles in the wet ("Shrike") field to the east of the path.

An unusual Dunlin?

The most puzzling bird of the morning was a single Dunlin-like bird which we found perched on a rapidly diminishing mud island in the far northerly lagoon near the Hayling Bridge at SU716037. The bird displayed a very conspicuous dark patch on the upper part of its breast, much higher up its body than the black belly of a summer-plumaged Dunlin. As the island finally disappeared the bird flew to the shore quite close to where I was standing and allowed me to get some reasonably good digiscoped photos. The photos showed the bird had brown-grey upperparts and pure white underparts and a long black bill with a distinctive downward kink near the tip. There was no obvious head pattern apart from brown areas beneath and in front of the eye and a hint of a supercilium. I considered alternative identifications to Dunlin. Curlew Sandpiper would need a stronger supercilium and is rarely seen in Europe in winter. The kinked bill-tip suggested a possible Broad-billed Sandpiper, but there was no sign of this bird's distinctive head pattern. My conclusion is that the bird was an unusually solitary Dunlin with a dark upper breast, but I would appreciate other suggestions.

Comment from Ralph Hollins

I can't comment on the 'Dunlin' other than to say that Dunlins do vary quite a bit - could the black patch have been oil or dye put on by ringers? I think you said that it flew and if so you should have seen a white rump if it were Curlew Sand (which you had already ruled out)

Plants

Gwynne Johnson kept a wild flower list which included the expected Sweet Violets by the metal gate along the Hayling Billy Line. Gwynne also identified a Milk Thistle rosette on the edge of the mound with conspicuous milk-white veins on its leaves. F. Rose (p.388) describes this plant as rare to locally frequent, possibly native near the sea in SE England, introduced in the rest of the British Isles. The New Flora Atlas describes it as an annual or biennial, found in rough pasture, on grassy banks, in hedgerows and on waste ground. It is locally well-established and persistent, especially in coastal habitats in S. England, but is also a widespread casual. Lowland. Archaeophyte (change -0.07). *S. marianum* occurs as an introduction with wool shoddy, bird-, grass- and oil-seed, and as a garden escape. The large number of pre-1987 records is unlikely to reflect a decline in this species, but rather it represents the accumulation of casual records over many years. Native of the Mediterranean region; naturalised or casual throughout much of Europe and in N. America and Australia.

Before the walk began Dave Savage showed us examples of Cherry Plum and Blackthorn twigs in flower which he had brought with him. The main differences between the two plants were shown clearly in Dave's twigs. Firstly, the new growth was distinctly green on the Plum (with the older wood being a grey brown) whereas all the wood on the Blackthorn was dark, if not black. Secondly, the flowers of the plum were larger (2 to 3 cm across) than those of the Blackthorn (around 1 cm across).

WEEK 5 JAN 26 - FEB 1 (Edited Version)

SUNDAY 1 FEB

I myself walked the :Langstone - Nore Barn shoreline this morning and came back through the fields. In the big field with the path on its southern edge there was a flock of 40 Skylark (heard one singing over other fields), another small one of 10 Linnets, and what may have been 70 Stock Doves (certainly 23 of them and the others seemed the same in flight). A Chaffinch was starting to sing at Nore Barn and there were 16 Swans there to add to the Emsworth count. One Brent was dead on the tideline and just two Brent (presumably retired from migration!) were in the field south of the cemetery. Best sight of the walk was the male Kestrel from Warblington Castle hovering about 20 feet above a hedge within 50 yards of people on the seawall path who had stopped to take photos of it. The female was also hovering over another field at the same time - maybe both are feeding up in preparation of mating and egg-laying. In Havant I found my first Ivy-leaved Speedwell flower of the year (Thyme-leaved still flowering outside the Museum) and saw single Celandines in four different locations.

Brian's report of Saturday walk

SATURDAY JANUARY 31 - CHICHESTER GRAVEL PITS

I was the only person to turn up for this morning's walk by the Havant Wildlife Group. This was hardly surprising in view of the dreadful weather, with rain and strong winds. However, since I was there I decided to carry on and do the walk on my own. It was quite good fun actually, battling against the wind and rain. As usual at this time of the year, there were hundreds/thousands of birds on the lakes, but the conditions made accurate counting impossible.

However, Ralph Hollins reported that Petersfield Wildlife Group went to the Chichester Lakes last Saturday (Jan 24) and did some counts. They reported 23 Cormorants, 670 Coot, 189 Tufted Duck, 115 Gadwall, 82 Shoveler, 65 Pochard and 2 Pintail. There was also 1 Scaup in addition to just 29 Canada Geese, 7 Greylag and two each of Egyptian Geese and Kingfisher.

The group did not see the Yellow-browed Warbler though it was anonymously reported as still there on Jan 25 (the day after the group visit).

Although the conditions this morning did not allow me to make any formal counts, it was my impression that the Petersfield counts underestimated the numbers of some of the species that were on the lakes today. Maybe more birds have moved in since last week. The Sussex Bird Report for 2002 gives the January counts for the lakes as a whole as 2533 Coot, 569 Gadwall, 269 Shoveler, 476 Tufted Duck and 483 Pochard.

I personally do not recall having seen so many Gadwall and Shoveler on the lakes. There were at least 150 Gadwall on New Lake alone and a further 70 or so on Runcton Lake and plenty of others on Ivy Lake. I just wish the light had been better to see the plumage of these lovely ducks.

I counted 10 Greylag Geese, two of them in a "family group" with a Mute Swan pair. There were only 2 Canada Geese and no sign of the Egyptian Geese, Pintail or the Scaup. I also noted 60 Mute Swans, about 20 Great Crested Grebe and a few Wigeon.

The Petersfield Group also reported 40 Rooks, but I did not see one this morning. Small birds were not much in evidence this morning, though I did see one large mixed tit flock working their way through the trees while I was looking at New Lake. No sign of Yellow-browed Warbler.

Comment from Ralph Hollins

I agree with Brian that the Petersfield Group counts at Chichester were low - I think they may not have looked at the New Lake, Runcton and Vinnetrow lakes, and I would not be too certain of the Scaup which no one else has seen (they don't even say if it was male or female)

BIRDS

FRI 30 JAN

A Bittern was seen by Charles Cuthbert coming in to roost at Alresford Pond this evening for the first time this winter. Charles points out that Bitterns have used the pond as a roost in past winters (he saw one there on four dates last winter) but this is the first time that he has seen four Heron species present at the same time on his doorstep. Quartet is the proper word to denote a group of four but to me it suggests a group of chamber musicians so I will stretch the English language and use 'squad' (appropriate if you take the 's' off the front), and the members of this long-legged, plodding, squad are Grey Heron, Great White Egret, Little Egret and Bittern all present at the same time, the Little Egrets numbering at least 25.

A Purple Sandpiper was seen with a Rock Pipit by Martin Gillingham at Southsea Castle and 18 Sanderling on the beach to the east. Further east, at the Eastney side of the Hayling Ferry, Martin was the first this year to see the expected Shag back in the Langstone Harbour entrance channel (the only Shags in this area that I have heard of this year were 2 seen by Roger Webb off the South Parade Pier on Jan 7, and the only Purple Sandpipers were two at Southsea Castle seen by Peter Raby on Jan 1) +++

From Titchfield Haven comes news that a Siberian Chiffchaff reported there on Jan 14 and 16 was seen again today, as was one Bittern.

THU 29 JAN

Two different Bitterns were seen at Titchfield Haven today

Brian Fellows heard his first Chaffinch song of the year in Emsworth today and had both Goldfinch and Siskin in his garden (the first Siskin of the winter came to his garden yesterday). Just three Redwings were seen in Brook Meadow as a result of last night's snow.

Brian Fellows had the first Siskin of the winter in his Emsworth garden and then went to Portsmouth where there was a Med Gull with 46 Swans at the Southsea Canoe Lake and an increased number of birds at Baffins Pond (in particular 74 Tufted Duck, 20 Shoveler and 112 Mallard plus 10 Cormorants and 10 Canada Geese).

Graham Roberts saw 34 Ruff on the east side of Amberley Wild Brooks (seen from the roadside near the Sportsman Pub), and at Rye the Whitefront count was up to 86 with 5 Hen Harriers coming to roost. +++

It seems that this year's 'winter' is likely to have passed us by in a half hour burst of thunder.

lightning, fierce wind and heavy snow last night with the snow and ice only having a real effect on wildlife for one day so I am not expecting to hear stories of major hard weather movements of birds or of small passerines dying in their thousands. In my own garden a male Sparrowhawk shot through in the early morning but failed to catch anything, and in the mid-day sunshine a male Blackcap came to sit on the bare branches of a small tree to warm up. In the afternoon I walked down the Langbrook stream, passing half a dozen Egrets, a single Green Sandpiper and a Kingfisher, and coming back from Langstone pond up Wade Lane I saw just one Fieldfare and one Redwing. (P.S. On Friday Jan 30 I heard that a flock of 40 Redwing have arrived on the fields north of Wade Court as they usually do late in the winter) +++

What I did not see were the nine or more Egrets that are usually in the fields around Wade Court throughout the day, and this reminded me of a conversation I had last Tuesday with someone who lives on Wade Lane and is out dog walking each morning and evening. On that evening I did see ten Egrets, but not the 30 to 40 that have come to roost through the first three weeks of January. The dog walker also takes an interest in the number of Egrets he sees each day and he remarked on a recent sudden decline in numbers from the average of around 30 (he had a peak count of 52 this month), and this decline seems to co-incide with an increase in the number of Egrets showing signs of spring plumage so I am wondering if there has been a general movement of these birds to their breeding sites (some in this country though I think that a lot of them still fly south over the channel to nest) or if they had a premonition of the cold snap and have flown south in advance of it?

The Blackcap in my own garden today was by no means the only one to surprise garden birdwatchers - in today's batch of HOSLIST messages Norman Hunt at Winchester, Derek Allnutt at Wellow near Romsey and Steve Lankester in the Lymington area all remark on newly returned garden Blackcaps (and others comment on the appearance of more garden Siskins). I know that some lucky people have daily sightings of Blackcap in their gardens through the winter but I think there are many more who have Blackcaps resident in their area but only see them occasionally because (a) the birds tend to spend the majority of their days in thick cover, only coming out when they are forced to seek food or want to warm up in the sun and (b) those Blackcaps may use a number of different gardens as their feeding area, appearing only occasionally in each of them (not forgetting that seeing a bird is a two way deal - you have to be looking out at the time the bird appears!) +++

Nuthatches are much commoner and more visible winter visitors to many gardens than are Blackcaps, but Nuthatches also show a reluctance to live near the sea so they are very uncommon in the southern parts of Havant. One place where a pair seems to have been resident for several years is Wade Court and today as I walked past that area I was thinking that I had not heard them there for some time so I was very interested to hear from Martin Hampton that he had had one last week in his Lymbourn Road garden only a few hundred yards down the Billy Trail from my garden here in Havant. Martin says this is the first time he has had one in his garden in the years he has lived there, and the news is more interesting as this morning he heard one in the grounds of the Townend House (Social Services offices) across the Billy Line from his garden.

TV news revealed that the origin and name of the Flamingo that has been at Titchfield Haven since Nov 7 is thought to have been discovered. The bird is said to be called 'Fluffy A' and to have been given that name by a lady living at Lymington who has a back garden full of what looked like at least fifty Flamingos and who said she had hand reared this individual from a chick. When the bird first appeared at Titchfield Mike Rafter suggested that it might have been the same bird that had been previously seen on the Beaulieu River, and while that may or may not be true I am surprised that we don't have more of these birds appearing on the Hampshire scene. I believe there is money to be made from 'puppy farming' with an endless demand for puppies from child-pestered parents, but I am very surprised to think that it can be worth while devoting your life and garden to breeding flamingos - perhaps someone can tell me how you make a living out of keeping them. I wonder if the various strange parakeets that are regularly to be seen in Lymington come from the same source? and what about those Speckled Teal that appear on the Lymington

marshes?

WED 28 JAN

Concerning the one-legged, colour ringed, Greenshank at the Thorney Island I have also heard the full and true story of this bird from Barry Collins. Barry tells me that .. 'this bird has had an injured or damaged left leg since the spring of 2002, and this winter it has lost this leg. It was ringed at Thorney Deeps on 27 Sept 2001, by the Farlington Ringing Group. The combination was Red over Yellow on the Left Leg, and Yellow over Orange on the remaining leg.'

Another odd but easily recognisable bird has turned up again at Titchfield Haven, seen today by Steve Copsey. This is the 'albino' Canada Goose which has been seen at the Haven and in the Fareham Creek area since Sue Morrison discovered it at the Haven on 30 Aug 2002. She recorded it as having the pink eyes of a true albino but other sightings since have suggested that it is not a pure albino and that hints of Canada Goose head markings can be seen in less pale shades of white. In 2002 it was noted twice at Titchfield Haven and several times in the Fareham area. In 2003 it was at the Haven on Jan 9 but not seen again until July 23. In Oct 2003 it was seen twice (Oct 16 and 19), and today's sighting is the first appearance since then. I wonder where it goes between these few sightings?

At the Budds Farm Pools this afternoon I had no difficulty in spotting the 'Fudge Duck' among 44 Pochard but I could only see three Tufted Duck on the pools and am wondering if we are seeing the expected change of habitat caused by the new sewage treatment plant. I understand that Pochard mainly feed on vegetation and Tufted Duck on animal matter, and if the new Budds Farm plant achieves its aim of preventing any sewage from getting into the harbour (or the pools) then this must diminish the food available for the 'meat eaters' as the sewage which fed the tiny invertebrates is cut off. Incidentally one of the three Tufties on the pools must have been a young male as, although I marked it as a female at first glance as it turned sideways on it showed the beginnings of the white flanks of a male. On my way home I saw there were still four Gadwall on Bedhampton Mill Pool. +++

Regarding the national Gull Count in Portsmouth Harbour on Jan 17 and I see that the overall total count was around 20,000 gulls, not too far from expectation, but 10,000 of them were there to feed on the huge Paulsgrove rubbish tip, not coming from afar to roost in the harbour (though they did roost there). I wonder if the reason for very low roost counts from Langstone and Chichester harbours (and from Pegwell Bay in Kent) is associated with the increasing size of other rubbish tips - could it be that the huge numbers of gulls feeding there by day now feel sufficiently safe (on account of their numbers) to spend the night huddled in huge flocks on some of these tips. If they do this on the nights when there is no disturbance at the tips and the weather is favourable, but on other nights fly off to the coast or nearby reservoirs, this would account for the unpredictability of coastal counts. +++

Another major factor affecting coastal numbers in tidal harbours is of course the tide and weather there. This is brought home by a message from Barry Collins telling me that the 400+ Great Blackbacks, seen on Jan 3 by Trevor Carpenter in the Sweare Deep channel area between North Hayling and Warblington, have not left Chichester Harbour but are more usually seen where they are less subject to the tides. Barry says that .. 'The Hayling birds are pushed off the saltings on a rising tide and then come over to me.' On Jan 26 for example he saw 360 of them roosting on Stakes Island that runs east from the southern tip of Thorney Island towards Cobnor Point and another 72 on Pilsey Sands

TUE 27 JAN

Yesterday 15 Bewick's Swans were in the Arun Valley, but downstream near the small farm bridge over the river at Offham (just north of the WWT reserve) rather than on the Amberley Wild Brooks where Kevin Stouse will be leading the annual pilgrimage from Havant to see them on Feb 8. +++

The count of Mute Swans at Emsworth made by Brian Fellows was just 58 (including the pair on Peter Pond which still have their two cygnets from last year with them) and this is very slightly under the number there in January last year when there were never less than 60 birds (but I think the figure of 58 excludes as many as a dozen Swans that may be in the Nore Barn area at the west end of the Emsworth shore).

Last Sunday Brian Fellows took a longish walk from Compton (in the valley leading north from Emsworth to South Harting) east to Up Marden and back. In view of my concern about a decreasing number of Rooks here in Havant I was pleased to see that he found plenty of them just north of Compton (I suspect these are associated with the large rookery at Littlegreen School, about a mile up the road north of Compton) I don't know which route Brian followed to get to Up Marden but if he had followed the road all the way past Bevis' Thumb and Fernbeds Farm to take the right turn south to Up Marden he should have seen signs of another large rookery in trees overlooking East Marden on that southward stretch to Up Marden.

The Petersfield Wildlife Group went to the Chichester Lakes last Saturday (Jan 24). They too saw some 40 Rooks that were presumably from the smaller rookery in trees overlooking the nature reserve (New Lake) at the junction of the track coming south from the Selsey Road layby and the one coming north from North Mundham. Among other birds they found were 23 Cormorant which may well have been night roosting here though when I looked at the latest (2002) Sussex Bird Report I found that the large night roost which I remember here had peaked at 346 birds in Dec 1996 and has greatly diminished since. Immediately after that peak the lakes froze and the count for Jan 1997 was just 6 birds though 285 were back in Feb but since then the fishermen have done their best to get rid of the birds. Shots were deliberately aimed at the birds in Oct 2000 and in Sept 2001 rockets were fired over the roost trees (to avoid charges of illegal shooting!). No birds were seen to roost there in the autumn of 2001 or at the Ivy Lake island site in 2002, but the 2002 report says 'there were signs towards the end of the year that a roost was re-establishing in trees and bushes around New Lake' (the SOS/SWT nature reserve). If you love Cormorants enough to see them in real strength nowadays the main roost in West Sussex is now at South Stoke, where the River Arun cuts through the Downs south of Houghton Bridge near Amberley (in Jan 2002 the count there was 266, though in Jan 1997 when the birds were frozen out of the Chichester roost there was an exceptional peak count of 332 at South Stoke) +++

Other counts by Cliff Oakley and his Petersfield Group were of 670 Coot (not sure if they counted all the lakes or just the Ivy/Trout Lakes section - the comprehensive peak count for all lakes here in Jan 2002 was 2533 birds and I would have expected at least 1000 to be there), 189 Tufted Duck, 115 Gadwall, 82 Shoveler, 65 Pochard and even 2 Pintail. There was also 1 Scaup in addition to just 29 Canada Geese, 7 Greylag and two each of Egyptian Geese and Kingfisher. Unluckily the group did not see the Yellow-browed Warbler though it was anonymously reported as still there on Jan 25 (the day after the group visit). +++

Another piece of late news for Jan 24 comes from Alan Stewart who was making the Portsmouth Harbour WeBS count in the Gosport area and found a Little Auk on Haslar Lake (the long inlet creek running west from just inside the harbour mouth). Whether the Auk touched down for a breather and took off again, or whether it was so exhausted that it died and sank without trace, I do not know but no one else has reported its presence.

MON 26 JAN

Two Black Redstarts, a smart male and a dowdy female/immature, were seen today in the North End area of Portsmouth by Mike Wearing in allotments close to the south side of Burrfields Road (opposite Toys'R'Us in the Ocean Park shopping centre) and it might be worthwhile for any birders visiting the shops to pop across the road, though Mike stresses that this was a one off sighting and there is no evidence that the birds will be seen there again. +++

Mike last tried to contact me on Christmas Eve when he had just seen a Waxwing eating white berries in a neighbour's garden in the North End area of Portsmouth. At the time I was out and so I only got the bare bones of the message, but today he told me that there was no doubt about the identity of the bird, whose arrival had caused the owner of the garden to ask Mike to come and have a look at it, but it seems that it vanished almost as soon as it arrived and I have not heard of any other Waxwing sightings anywhere in Hampshire before or after Christmas. Early in Jan 2003 quite a few birders enjoyed watching a Waxwing at the Anchorage Park housing estate on the banks of Ports Creek, about half a mile from this sighting, but this recent sighting sounds more like a brief appearance of an

escaped cage bird - does anyone know of Waxwings being kept in captivity? +++
January is normally the month in which we see large numbers of Great Blackback gulls in our southern harbours and this year seemed to be no exception when Trevor Carpenter saw 460 of them in Chichester Harbour off north Hayling on Jan 3 but since then I have heard no reports of large numbers until today when a flock of 75 were on Ryde Sands - the lack of them may be in part due to the efforts of the Environment Agency to deter gulls from congregating at rubbish tips by measures such as regular flying of Peregrine falcons at the tips. I'm pretty sure those deterrent measures at rubbish tips were not responsible for the disappearance (at least for the recent national gull census) of 90% of all the gulls that normally congregate in our harbours, and on that subject I was very interested to hear from Daryl Short (a Hampshire birder currently based at the Sandwich Bay bird observatory in Kent) that their gull count in Pegwell Bay only recorded 3,000 gulls where 30,000 were expected.

George Spraggs was out in the Sinah area of Hayling today and tells me that a few more Tufted Duck (but only around ten of them) were on Sinah Lake and half a dozen Shoveler were in the currently flooded low ground of the Golf Course across the road from the Kench but I was most interested in the fact that ten Canada Geese were also on that pool. Previously I had had the impression that Canada Geese remained in large winter flocks until around the beginning of March, but on looking at the evidence I find that there is quite a lot of movement by these birds during winter months. These particular birds could be part of a flock that would normally be on Verner Common (on the east coast of Hayling Island) during the winter, but I happened to be there on Jan 18 and found sheep grazing the area that is normally ungrazed (in the winter) and with none of the geese (Brent and Canadas plus Golden Plover and Lapwing) that are normally present - I was also puzzled by the presence of a good dozen people with half a dozen or more estate cars with open boots that had driven out onto the common. At first I assumed it was a shooting party but there was also a small horsebox attached to one car, suggesting that it had been used to bring or take away the sheep. Hopefully that normally 'human free' area has not been permanently lost as a winter wildlife refuge.

SUN 25 JAN

This morning I heard my first Chaffinch song of the year from at least three different birds in the Staunton Country Park on the northern fringe of Havant, and in Emsworth at least one Grey Wagtail was singing loudly enough to attract the attention of a non-birder who told me she had heard a Yellow Wagtail, getting a close view of it perched on a rather flimsy rose arch in her garden - she said the bird was 'wagging its tail' energetically enough to make the whole arch sway.

Elsewhere in Emsworth Brian Fellows watched a flock of more than 40 Collared Doves perched in a Silver Birch tree in a neighbour's garden where they not infrequently congregate during the day to descend on various gardens in which bird food is put out.

Brian took a walk up the Ems valley to Westbourne and back today, enjoying views of a pair of Bullfinches and flushing a Snipe from the Watercress beds at the northern end of his circuit where there were some 50 Redwings in the treetops. I also had perhaps 15 Redwings in the Leigh Park gardens and later saw a few Fieldfare at Swanmore when visiting my son there.

A count of 28 Slavonian Grebe on the sea off Church Norton today made by Paul Bennett sent me to check recent Sussex Bird Reports as I was under the impression that ten years or so ago a flock of around 30 Slav Grebes could be expected there on any winter visit, but that numbers had dropped off considerably and nowadays you might not see any at all on the day you chose to visit. It would seem that I was very wrong in thinking this as the peak counts in recent years are much higher than I expected. In 2002 maximum counts for this site were 32 in Jan and 54 in March, in 2001 we had 31 in Feb and 44 in Dec, in 2000 the figures for Jan, Feb and March were 44, 43 and 60 while in 1999 the March peak was 76 birds. I'm not sure how much the figures vary from day to day, but it is clear that Paul's count was not exceptional. It may be that there were good numbers at other sites today as I happened to meet a stranger who told me he had seen what was either a Black-necked or

Slavonian Grebe in Fareham Creek today... +++

This is the time of year at which Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are easiest to detect as they begin to call and drum with no leaves on the trees to obscure the view of them in the topmost twigs. The first report I heard for this year was from Adrian Martin in the New Forest on Jan 19, then yesterday John Faithfull had one at Bishops Waltham sewage works and Paul Winter had one at Moorcourt by the R Test just north of the M27, and today John Faithfull had another sighting in the Hook Park area near Warsash.

Returning to the subject of Merlins and Martin Hampton's query (see notes for last Tuesday - Jan 20) as to whether these birds of the desolate moors are often seen in towns I have a note from Ed Griffiths who writes .. 'I recall reading of Merlins in Lancashire coming down to feed on starlings over the rooftops of valley towns in winter (so perhaps an urban area like Portsmouth isn't so surprising)' +++

SAT 24 JAN

Two Buzzards were seen over Pit Hill Farm to the north of Denmead, and I see that when Brian Fellows was carrying out his WeBS count on the south east Hayling sector he heard that a Buzzard has been seen around Tournerbury Woods more than once recently - possibly the same bird that has been reported (via John Goodspeed) in a West Town garden across the other side of south Hayling. The chances of having Buzzard breeding in Tournerbury Woods seem to be increasing! +++

At least one Song Thrush has been singing strongly in my garden early each morning for the past week just before the sky starts to lighten and this morning another Song Thrush could be heard competing from somewhere within a couple of hundred yards. Maybe it was this competition that made 'my bird' continue singing until after the sun was up, but it could be that it is already paired as, while it was singing from a favourite perch in the next garden, I watched another silent Song Thrush on my garden wall (at one time seeming to take a snail from among ivy on the wall). I see from Simon Ingram's weekly report from the Eastleigh Lakeside site that Song Thrushes have also become suddenly vocal there this week - he writes of having six different birds singing there. +++

After lunch I went to carry out the WeBS count at the IBM Lake in Portsmouth where there were few gulls (perhaps 50 Black-headed, 5 Common and 1 Herring Gull) but a good show of 16 Little Grebe where we usually have three or four. I was also pleased to see two Great Crested Grebe (albeit at opposite ends of the lake) but a closer look showed that only one was in breeding plumage - the other was very scruffy and must have been one of last year's young. Six Cormorant, but only 1 Heron, were seen and no Swans or Canada Geese. Mallard numbered 36, Pochard 16 and Teal 18 with only 3 Tufted Duck but both Coot and Moorhen were well represented with counts of 58 and 26 (20 years ago, before the Canada Geese destroyed most of the lakeside grass, I can remember expecting 120 Coot in January!). There were few other birds though I enjoyed close views of a silent troop of Long-tailed Tits and saw my first Sparrowhawk of the year (!) as a small young male flew over (no blue back or reddish breast, and it had lost one primary) but no sign of Kestrels. One factor influencing the birds was that there had been much clearance of reeds along perhaps half the total length of the canal drainage system.

PLANTS

FRI 30 JAN

From the Butterfly Conservation website I learnt that Celandines at Gosport had been seen in flower on Jan 24 by David Tinling with (Creeping?) Buttercups out on the same day along with a range of garden plants likely to provide food for butterflies

WED 28 JAN

A brief cycle ride to Broadmarsh and back via Bedhampton showed me that quite a few Cherry Plum trees were starting to flower around the Broadmarsh 'mountain', especially the approach road to the slipway, where several Hawthorn trees were in almost full leaf, but I found no new flowering species though I searched the clumps of Primrose leaves that grow by the railway below the Mill Lane bridge over the railway at Bedhampton.

TUE 27 JAN

The first single Lesser Celandine flower was found by the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth today, and some Alder catkins there were starting to lengthen and turn yellow. I have still seen no more than two flowers on the Lymbourne Steam Celandines near Wade Court here in Havant.

SAT 24 JAN

Visiting the Portsmouth IBM site in today's sunshine for the monthly count of birds on the lake I checked the relevant places for early Coltsfoot, flowers on the Glastonbury Thorn trees and signs of early Cowslips but could find no trace of them or the Marsh Marigolds that are often flowering there as early as December. The 'bulbiferous' Lesser Celandines could be located by leaves, but there were no flowers, and quite a few Bee Orchid leaves could be found. Two trees that were starting to open their catkins were the Common Alder with its purple catkins showing yellow in places, and the Grey Alders whose closed catkins are green and the old cones are large - I see that Alan Mitchell remarks that this tree does well on dry and difficult soils and is often planted on coal tips and land reclamation sites (very suitable for the IBM land in its early days!). Another planted species now catching the eye on the site is the Nootka Cypress with its mass of tiny bright yellow male flowers that are colourful from autumn onwards but do not shed pollen until perhaps April. +++

Just two plants were flowering well - the inevitable Winter Heliotrope and a line of English Elms along the border with the main road. Two or three of these trees are quite dead but several tall specimens still look quite healthy and were covered with flower buds while the lower more sheltered branches were covered with fully open flowers in profusion. +++

Driving up the old A3 onto Portsdown on my way home I glanced at the roadside Alexanders that in some years flower this early (the first are usually to be found here) but there was no hint of flower umbels among the shiny green leaves.

Over in the Meon Valley near Wickham Christoff Harwood today found an Elder bush in full leaf in the West Walk woods, and Brian Fellows has also found the first Elder leaves starting to show in Brook Meadow at Emsworth

INSECTS

SAT 24 JAN

A Small Tortoiseshell was flying in the West Walk woods near Wickham in the Meon valley today when Christoff Harwood was there and a Peacock was seen by Richard Hallett working its way along a hedge near Pitt Hill Farm to the north of Denmead.

OTHER WILDLIFE

SAT 24 JAN

The Havant Wildlife Group took a walk in the eastern half of Stansted Forest today and noted 15 species of fungi. Of the half dozen notable species which Jim Berry names I thought it odd that they should find the Sulphur Polypore (Chicken of the Woods) at this time of year as I usually expect in May so I checked the season given by Roger Phillips for each of those listed by Jim and found that the majority were 'out of season'. For Chicken of the Woods Phillips gives the season as late spring to autumn; for Wrinkled Club he gives Late summer to late autumn; for White Spindles he just says Autumn. Less out of season was Glistening Ink Cap (Late spring to early winter), and for Maze-gill he says from Spring onwards (presumably specimens are fresh in spring but can persist for more than a year as old buckets on oak). Finally a rather pretty pure white sponge-like resupinate called *Coriollus albidus* is listed as 'all year'

WEEK 4 JAN 19 – 25 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

SAT 24 JAN

At least one Song Thrush has been singing strongly in my garden early each morning for the past week just before the sky starts to lighten and this morning another Song Thrush could be heard competing from somewhere within a couple of hundred yards. Maybe it was this competition that made 'my bird' continue singing until after the sun was up, but it could be that it is already paired as, while it was singing from a favourite perch in the next garden, I watched another silent Song Thrush on my garden wall (at one time seeming to take a snail from among ivy on the wall). +++

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FRI 23 JAN

When at school in Canterbury just after the war one of the birds that we used to see on the north Kent coast each winter was Hooded Crow and the image of that variant of our normal Carrion Crow remains impressed on my mind as a symbol of bleak winter weather so the news that one has turned up today at Rye Harbour fits in well with the forecasts for next week of bitter weather (with the possibility of the Thames freezing over). Sadly this bird hardly ever reaches Hampshire but maybe next week will bring one... +++

The raft of Eider off Hill Head/Titchfield Haven has averaged around 25 birds this month with a peak of 50 birds in the first week, but today the figure has shot up to 83. Looking back to last year I see there was a similar rise in numbers at the end of January (with 90 reported on Jan 24) and this maybe reflects the start of movement back to northern breeding areas with birds that have wintered further south or west now moving through. Last year's figures show wide variation from day to day during the early spring (with a peak of 158 on Mar 21 but down to single figures on other days) and this might be due to birds moving locally in the Solent though the fact that there were no counts of 100 or more after April 6 must imply a fair amount of movement out of the Solent (in the average year nearly all would leave, last year was exceptional with more than 50 birds probable present right through the summer - there were counts of 30 in June and 44 in July, and these were probably counts of just one of several flocks scattered through the Solent) +++

Other news from Titchfield Haven today is that the lone Snow Goose has returned from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth to rejoin the 9 Barnacles and the hybrid Bar-Head which together form the 'Baffins Gang', and for more serious birders he says that the female Ruff (much less common here than the smaller and more colourful males) is still present, along with a Greenshank, while the local Barn Owl was seen on two different occasions today. +++

John Gowen walked around the Langstone South Moors and Budds Farm area. His main sightings were of a male Blackcap in the old and totally overgrown orchard by the Langbrook stream just south of the cattle bridge, and of a Tern off the South Moors shore. John says the Tern was a Common but I am not sure of his confidence - we know there is at least one Sandwich Tern in the harbour this winter but I have heard no other reports of Common Tern anywhere on the south coast since Oct 12 when Peter Raby had one at Gilkicker (the last in Sussex was on Oct 8 at Brighton)

THU 22 JAN

Andrew Brookes saw two Fulmar off Ventnor and thought them unusual at this time of year

but I think his sighting is just another reflection of the spread of Fulmar around the coasts of the British Isles in recent years. Here in Hampshire the 'Birds of Hampshire' shows how (in the period prior to 1992 when the book was published) Fulmar were only expected in any numbers on spring passage starting at the end of March with a peak in mid-April - very few were seen in the autumn. While that is still generally true for Hampshire at least 100 pairs of Fulmar breed in East Sussex and those birds are now back on their cliffs with many hundreds more passing through the Channel in the first few months of the year (the 2001 Sussex Bird Report gives totals of over 1300 recorded off Brighton in Jan + Feb, increasing to over 5000 in the Mar-May period). I also notice that the first Fulmar report for Hampshire last year was off a bird seen by Steve Keen on Mar 3 apparently inspecting the Hordle Cliffs area west of Milford on sea for possible nest sites ... +++

Bob Chapman has put out his latest weekly summary of birds seen at Farlington Marshes and today he confirms the impression I already have that last weekend's national Gull count will show much lower than expected figures for the birds roosting in the southern harbours.

Bob says he was expecting up to 20,000 gulls to arrive in Langstone Harbour but only around 2,000 were recorded. The big question remains as to how the large numbers of gulls that are undoubtedly present in Hampshire managed to avoid the census. Maybe they were hiding in the harbours out of sight of the counters who arrived on the shore in the early afternoon - maybe they delayed their flight into the harbours until after dark or spent the night out at sea - maybe they have found inland roosts within Hampshire or have decided to use e.g. the large London area reservoirs at night. Any factual information gratefully received!! +++

While at Farlington Marshes for the gull count (presumably on Saturday Jan 17) Bob had a bonus in the shape of a Bittern which he alone saw flying along the streamside reeds at the Marshes, and he also tells us that all six Avocet are still present as is the half-pint Canada (aka Cackling) Goose, a Spotted Redshank and at least one Greenshank +++

Yesterday (Jan 21) the Gosport Ring-billed Gull was still present and seen by Val Lowings who went on to Titchfield Haven and had a sighting of a Bittern (sightings there are getting more frequent).

WED 21 JAN

The story reminds me of another Bittern seen here in Havant quite a few years ago. After there had been a few Bittern sightings at Sinah Lake on Hayling what may have been the same bird turned up in damp fields south of Whichers Gate Road at Rowlands Castle and west of Prospect Lane where the only people to see it were dog walkers whose dogs disturbed it. This went on for about a fortnight at the end of which a final sighting was made by a lady driving along Prospect Lane in daytime who had to swerve around it as it stood on the tarmac road, bill pointing skywards in a very ineffective disguise posture. My guess at that time was that the bird was old or ill

A week ago I wrote about the Egrets gathering in the fields at Wade Court here in Langstone prior to roosting and commented on how their occasional disturbance by passing cars, people and dogs made it difficult to count them as they flew short distances when a potential threat got too close, and I ended that piece with an observation of watching a small flock of Egrets happily searching for food in a damp field with myself in full view twenty yards to one side of them and a hungry Fox sitting watching from the same distance on the other side. That twenty yard distance seems to be a constant safety zone outside which they will take little notice of potential enemies unless a loud noise as of gunshot is heard. +++

Today Robert Watson had a first hand experience of this 'tameness' with a Little Egret fishing the small lakes and narrow connecting stream in Eastrop Park right in the centre of Basingtoke. I wonder if they are yet to be seen around the Serpentine or St James' Park lake in London? If not I suspect that it will not be long before they appear there.

On Hayling Island two more pairs of Robins are now regularly seen by George Spraggs

showing every sign of having abandoned the animosity that each individual Robin shows to all others in the winter season - in his garden one pair can be seen sitting happily side by side on the same tree branch, and if there is no sudden winter blizzard arriving from across the Atlantic I expect it will not be long before only one is sitting on the branch and the other bird is hidden away on a nest. George has also noticed a pair of Blue Tits preparing a nest box for use in a neighbour's garden. +++

Elsewhere on Hayling Island a Buzzard has twice been seen perched in a tree in the garden of someone who rang John Goodspeed to report the sighting as news for the Nature Notes posters which John circulates each week. Of course the sighting may be of some other large brown bird (possibly a Tawny Owl, female Sparrowhawk, or some escaped raptor like the Eagle Owl which spent time in the West Town area of Hayling a few years back) but if it is genuinely a Buzzard which has taken up residence on the Island and stays to breed that will be I think a first for Hayling (they occasionally fly over the Island and may take prey there but I have never heard of a resident bird).

Brian's note on Buzzards on Hayling Island: Following the WeBS count on Sat 24 Jan, Sue Phillips of Tournurbury Farm told me she had seen a Buzzard on a couple of occasions in the past month over the farm estate.

TUE 20 JAN

Gannets are common enough as winter visitors on the Sussex coast and quite a few non-breeding birds can be seen offshore at other times of year, but in 1998 one individual female bird made a nest on the chimney of a house in Cricketfield Road in Seaford though she remained a lonely spinster despite much calling and displaying. This same bird has continued to return and offer her love in vain to any male that will have her each year since then, and if the bird seen today was that sad individual this will be her seventh year of trying to found a Sussex colony. The fact that she was seen over Saltdean is not unexpected - to while away her lonely hours the bird has often been seen exploring the Brighton area - in 2001 it regularly flew backwards and forwards between Seaford and Kempton. +++

In Brighton today is a Collared Dove's nest with eggs (I doubt that it is the only one!). In case of any difficulties with the birth of their young the birds wisely chose to build in the grounds of the County Hospital. +++

A small flock of a dozen Tree Sparrows were seen in allotments in the Rye Harbour area and that 130 Common Scoter (with one Velvet) were in Rye Bay off Pett.

From a University building in the centre of Portsmouth Martin Hampton has a view over the United Service playing fields towards the busy Gunwarf Quays shopping complex and in the past two or three years he has seen five species of raptor from his window (Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Buzzard, Peregrine and even Hobby). Today he added a male Merlin to the list and wonders how often Merlin are seen in city centre areas - perhaps others could comment, but I know of at least two cases where Merlin have been seen perched in a small suburban garden at Highbury in Cosham (the home of Kevin Stouse's parents). I reported a sighting there of a Merlin perched for two hours in a garden apple tree as recently as Jan 4 this year. +++

On the Langstone Harbour side of Portsmouth there has been another sighting of the strange hybrid between a Shelduck and a Ruddy Shelduck. This bird was first seen by Keith Betton on Dec 18 and then by Alistair Martin on Jan 6. Today Richard Creer saw it in the same area (the Kench) at high tide - Richard tells me that .. 'Among the Shelduck roosting on the spit in the Kench this morning at around high water there was a large duck which I can best describe as orange in colour. It looked like a Ruddy Shelduck - right colour, white wing patch, black rear end - except it had a dark brown head.' Presumably this bird has been in Langstone harbour since at least mid-December but it seem that only three birders have spotted it in that time - a good reflection of how little we see of the wildlife around us! +++

There is apparently a widespread change of behaviour by Short-eared Owls this winter.

Before this winter I think many birders shared my belief that Short-eared Owls did most of their hunting in daytime - usually appearing soon after lunch on a winter's afternoon and giving us a good couple of hours viewing time before dusk. Barn and Little Owls could also

be expected to hunt at times when there was plenty of light for us to see them, but Long-eared were strictly nocturnal. For whatever reason this pattern of behaviour seems to have changed in two respects. Firstly Barn Owls have become much more diurnal, hunting by day all round the year and not just when there are hungry young to be fed. Secondly this winter has brought a much more sudden change in Short-eared Owl habits. This has been noticed most at Bransbury Common where birders could expect prolonged views of three or four birds in the afternoons during the first four months of 2003 - this winter the birds have returned there (David Thelwell saw 6 on Dec 14) but are refusing to stir until it is almost too dark to see them. Today I hear from Mike Collins that the same behaviour change is being shown on Thorney Island. Last weekend Mike met Barry Collins and learnt that there are two Short-eared Owls spending the winter on Thorney, but they too only appear when it is too dark to have much chance of seeing them +++
George Spraggs saw an Egret off the west Hayling shore bearing its fancy plumes to show it was ready for spring - George does not mention the colour of the lores (the bare patch at the very base of the bill close to the eyes) which turns reddish during a brief courtship period, at all other times the colour is greyish.

MON 19 JAN

At the start of the Christmas school holidays I noticed that half a dozen Little Egrets soon moved in to feed on the grass around Bosmere School here in Havant and I see that they have decided to continue to use the site despite the noisy return of many children - today three Egrets were lined up on the bank at the edge of the grass watching a hundred or so children engaged in some sort of team game on the tarmac playground next to the grass and only 50 yards from the Egrets.

I was watching the Egrets from the short path connecting Park Road South (the main road into Havant from the Langstone roundabout on the A27) to the Parchment housing estate. This path runs beside the small stream coming from the Homewell spring in the centre of Havant to take the water (no longer needed for Parchment making) into the Langbrook stream near Tesco's, and the stream is overhung by a line of ancient Alders on which the first catkins have just opened. As I looked up at the catkins I began to notice a flock of small birds working the trees high above my head - I think there were three Chiffchaffs and at least four Goldcrest all moving around fast among a flock of maybe 20 Long-tailed Tits with the occasional Blue and Great. One bird that came into my field of vision briefly (seen only from below) seemed to be a Blackcap male and one of the residents of the flats later told me that she regularly sees a female Blackcap here.

SUN 18 JAN

More Skylark song heard over the Langstone South Moors by Richard Hallett who adds his voice to that of all naturalists opposed to the proposals for development of the Broadmarsh area into a Port Solent type marina and shopping/leisure complex. Incidentally the representative of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust who appeared in the TV interviews on the subject was Rob Stoneman, the Trust's Chief Executive, showing that opposition to the proposals is seen as a top priority by the Trust. +++

It will be a good few years before we learn how much weight will be given to the views of those who think the natural world is a more valuable source of the quality of human life than shops, cinemas and luxury boats, and in the meantime we can all do something to influence that decision by using our voices and votes to remove from power those politicians who see the world through accountants money-tinted glasses, and to replace them by those who have the long term interests of humanity at heart. I see that one of my ward councillor's who is backing the Broadmarsh plan just happens to be managing director of Port Solent and I have him on my list for removal (not that I voted for him in the first place!).

More seriously I am trying to say that we as a society hold an untenable belief, as the mainstay of our lives, that we can all have more of whatever we want every year indefinitely. The result of that belief is that we all expect our politicians and businessmen to deliver more every year, but while there is potential to provide a certain amount of extra

goodies (whether they be in the shape of food, medicine or just toys for big boys and girls) through technological advance the rest has to come from selling the family silver (and the development of Broadmarsh is definitely in the latter category). +++

I don't know how we get away from the universal belief that the only measure of success is a demonstrable increase in tangible wealth and regain an appreciation of what the natural world has to offer us 'for free' but unless we do so soon the 'family silver' will run out. I am delighted to see that in the latest issue of the HWT magazine Rob Stoneman has taken a firm position on the importance and value of the natural world to all humans (as one example he quotes research showing the people who have a view of greenspace have up a 50% better chance of recovery from cancer than do those imprisoned in a man made concrete jungle, but his view is much broader than that).

I have never agreed with the attitude that regards wildlife conservation as an end in itself, or seen the main task of a Wildlife Trust as the creation of a series of separate tiny worlds in which some wildlife can flourish and wildlife experts can 'do their thing' apart from the world in which the majority of humans have to live. To my mind the natural world is there for the benefit of mankind as a whole, and the major task of the conservationist is to persuade the mass of humanity that nature is of inestimable value to them. I only hope that Rob Stoneman and all those who are opposed to the Broadmarsh development can succeed in that task in time!

Among the 40 bird species seen by Richard Hallett in the South Moors/Broadmarsh area was the Common Sandpiper which I have still to track down, as well as the small flock of Linnets that have been there since New Year's Day, and a Kingfisher. On the shore were more than 40 Ringed Plover and offshore at least two Black-necked Grebe.

Sometime during the past week Brian Fellows has again heard Blackbird song in Emsworth At Hythe on Southampton Water Colin Allen seems to have been the first to see a Cormorant in full spring dress with a full white 'judge's wig' on its head as well as the white thigh roundel which has been visible on some birds for some time. I was interested in Colin's description of the bird as having a 'small black crest' - this is something I have not noticed before but I see that it is illustrated in my Collins Guide. +++

On the other side of the New Forest Adrian Martin seems to have been the first to record the spring call (song?) of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Adrian refers to the sound as 'yickering' which makes me think of the noise that Great Spotted Woodpeckers sometimes make when they get excited (a very fast 'chit,chit,chit' which can go on for some time), but I guess he heard the high pitched 'pee-pee-pee-pee' call which territorially minded Lesser Spots make around this time of year.

I enjoyed a cycle ride around north Hayling, noting ten pairs of Rooks back to guard their nests at the Northney rookery, and seeing some spring colour coming into the plumage of at least one of five Little Grebe on the Oysterbeds lagoon.. On my way home I saw a female Kestrel perched above the fields north of Wade Court - possibly the bird that normally nests in Warblington Castle. They do tend to change nest sites every few years (perhaps to avoid the parasites that can accumulate in a regularly re-used nest) so I will keep a watch out for a move to the Wade Court area this spring.

Since 1953 there has been a winter census of gulls present in Britain once every ten years.

The first three counts (1953, 63, and 73) were limited to inland sites (none in Hampshire) but the 1983 census was extended to coastal roosts and so we have figures for Langstone Harbour, Portsmouth Harbour and Southampton Water (plus minor roosts along the North Solent and inland at Alresford Pond and Yateley gravel pit) in 1983 and 93. This weekend a further count was made and we await the results +++

Looking back over past counts two things are obvious - the first is a great increase in the overall number of gulls as more and more of them feed inland (and so are not restricted to the food on offer on the coast), and the second is a great drop in the number of Common Gulls and an equal increase in the number of Lesser Blackbacks. Back in the 1950s some counts of Common Gulls in Langstone Harbour were 10,000 in Nov 52, 12,607 in Jan 53, 14,150 in Mar 53 and 6,500 in Oct 53. The Jan 93 count of Common Gulls in Langstone Harbour was only 1,700. For Lesser Blackbacks there was no Hampshire count of more

than 1 bird prior to 1983 when the county had a total count of 31 (21 in Southampton Water and 10 in Langstone Harbour), but by 1993 the county total was up to 210 (202 of them on Southampton Water). Looking at the latest 2002 HBR I see that the roost count of Lesser Blackbacks at Ibsley Water had risen to 5500 in October (though the January figure was only 7 - the birds having presumably already moved back to their breeding areas.).

Today's count of Lesser Blackbacks at Ibsley Water was 161. +++

Brian Fellows and I made small contributions to the census. Standing at the mouth of Fareham Creek with Mike Collins yesterday I was expecting several thousand gulls to come pouring into Portsmouth Harbour towards dusk, and was surprised to record only 1078 Black-headed, 35 Herring, 14 Common, 4 Lesser and 3 Greater Blackbacks (with 2 unidentified Large Gulls).

I see that Brian made his count on Friday at Emsworth and he too had a smaller count than I would have expected with just 572 birds, nearly all Black-headed. It will be very interesting to see the overall totals when they are available. Not all gulls feed inland and Dennis Bill, making his count from the Gosport esplanade at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, was unable to make an accurate count of a swarm of gulls entering the harbour from the open sea after it was too dark to see properly, many of them flying low over the water where it was even more difficult to spot them. +++

On Saturday Mike and I had a bonus when a single Buzzard, accompanied by a single Crow, flew north up the centre of Portsmouth Harbour - goodness knows where it had come from! We also had a good view of hundreds of corvids pouring into the Elson Wood roost from the north, and at one stage saw a cloud of at least 2000 Starlings milling around the base of the new Spinnaker Tower.

SAT 17 JAN

In Langstone Harbour Steve Mansfield today saw the lone female Common Scoter back off the Oysterbeds area, and added to several recent sightings of Razorbill in the harbour mouth - Steve saw one there. +++

Just in Chichester Harbour Alistair Martin today watched a female Scaup actively diving close to the quayside carpark of the Ship Inn at Langstone and at first sight thought it was a male, so silvery was its back, but he then noticed the large white face and realised it must be a female, presumably the one that has been in the north of Langstone Harbour and on Budds Farm Pools for some time. This certainly confirms that female Scaup can have the silvery back shown in the Collins Guide illustration but I'm not sure that the absence of a silver back is sufficient proof that the bird is a hybrid. +++

In Sussex the Havant Wildlife Group today went to the Nutbourne Bay area of Chichester Harbour where their main finds were of a Cetti's Warbler (and a probable Bearded Tit) in the reeds at the mouth of the Ham Brook, and in trees west of the marsh they came on a flock of 50 Linnets - helping to confirm that the birds which I saw there distantly on New Year's Day (but did not count in my score) were Linnets. Redwing and Fieldfare were both seen in the marshy meadow but not in the orchards, and Pintail were still present in the bay.

Some 50 Brambling were seen in the West Dean Woods, north of Chichester, yesterday and on Thursday (Jan 15) a single Black Swan turned up on Widewater (the beach lagoon in the Lancing area just west of the mouth of the R. Adur). Above it flew what may have been a Whooper Swan, possibly one of the two that have been at Pagham Harbour (last report from there was on Jan 14 - this sighting was on Jan 15)

PLANTS

SAT 24 JAN

Visiting the Portsmouth IBM site in today's sunshine for the monthly count of birds on the lake I checked the relevant places for early Coltsfoot, flowers on the Glastonbury Thorn trees and signs of early Cowslips but could find no trace of them or the Marsh Marigolds that are often flowering there as early as December. The 'bulbiferous' Lesser Celandines could be located by leaves, but there were no flowers, and quite a few Bee Orchid leaves could be

found.

Two trees that were starting to open their catkins were the Common Alder with its purple catkins showing yellow in places, and the Grey Alders whose closed catkins are green and the old cones are large - I see that Alan Mitchell remarks that this tree does well on dry and difficult soils and is often planted on coal tips and land reclamation sites (very suitable for the IBM land in its early days!). Another planted species now catching the eye on the site is the Nootka Cypress with its mass of tiny bright yellow male flowers that are colourful from autumn onwards but do not shed pollen until perhaps April. +++

Just two plants were flowering well - the inevitable Winter Heliotrope and a line of English Elms along the border with the main road. Two or three of these trees are quite dead but several tall specimens still look quite healthy and were covered with flower buds while the lower more sheltered branches were covered with fully open flowers in profusion. +++

WED 21 JAN

Phil Budd from Southampton paid a visit to Havant and Hayling Island yesterday and corrects an error which I should not have made had I checked my facts more carefully. This concerns the white-flowered Petasites (Butterbur) species which I wrote about in last Friday's notes (Jan 16) after finding it in flower by the Langbrook stream alongside the Langstone South Moors. Phil points out that the plants are not White Butterbur (*P. albus*) but are Giant Butterbur (*P. japonicus*). +++

When I found the plants for the first time last year I was uncertain of their identity but after a second visit to the site on Mar 17 by myself and Brian Fellows I wrote in these notes .. 'The object of our visit was mainly to have a look at the other species of Butterbur that is also flowering there, of which we found 60 plants and I convinced myself that most if not all were Petasites japonicus (Giant Butterbur) though it is possible that a few of them could be the White Butterbur (these will have been planted by the landscape gardeners acting for IBM in the 1980s or earlier, and if they planted a mass of female Butterbur (*P. hybridus*) and *P. japonicus* plants why not go the whole hog and throw in a few *P. albus* as well?). We should be able to separate the species when the leaves appear.' The reference to the leaves concerns the feature by which Stace differentiates *P. albus* from *P. japonicus*, namely the shape of the 'sinus' formed where the leaf stem joins the leaf blade. If the shape of this indent into the leaf blade is an inverted 'V' or the leaf edges are parallel to the invading petiole then the plant is *P. albus*, but if the leaf edges are 'convergent' (which I take to mean being nearer to the petiole at the outer limit of the leaf than they are say half way to the edge) then the plant is *P. japonicus*. This test should back up the less reliable interpretation of flower colour (white or creamy). I clearly decided last year that the plants were almost certainly *P. japonicus* and this was confirmed when I came to add the current sighting into my database and found that the only previous entry was for *P. japonicus*. +++

Both I and Phil were too early this year to see the great mass of female Butterbur plants (*P. hybridus*) which will soon line the stream at this point with their tall thin flower spikes and which I had until now thought to be the only examples in Hampshire but Phil tells me that he knows of another site for female plants at Whiteley (just north of Fareham on the edge of the Botley Woods) so I have learnt two things from Phil's visit.

TUE 20 JAN

I have been looking for the first Cherry Plum flower to open since last Friday when I first noticed many buds showing white and this morning I found just one single flower fully open in the lower section of Wade Lane at Langstone (which will soon become a bridal tunnel of pure white!). Also seen this morning were two more Elder bushes showing the tips of fresh green leaves.

MON 19 JAN

A brief walk round the west of Havant town centre this morning gave me my first sight of fully open Alder catkins on the huge old trees lining the Homewell stream near the Dolphin pub (opposite Tesco's store) as you drive into Havant from the A27. Further west along Solent Road Wild Radish had a full show of white flowers and near the Langbrook Stream Black Mustard had tight yellow flower buds. Everywhere Petty Spurge is flourishing and I added

an extra tick to the year list with one flower of Yellow Corydalis.

John Goodspeed's Nature Notes poster records the flowering of early Cowslips on Portsdown sometime last week, and some form of Melilot was surprisingly found somewhere on the hill. Driving up the old A3 onto Portsdown on my way home I glanced at the roadside Alexanders that in some years flower this early (the first are usually to be found here) but there was no hint of flower umbels among the shiny green leaves.

SUN 18 JAN

I had a pleasant cycle ride around North Hayling this morning with nothing new to go on the year list but a very pleasant sight of at least 40 Sweet Violet flowers on North Common (south east of Northney Marina). Many thousands of these plants enjoy at south facing bank here, sheltered from north winds by a thick brambles, and soon the scent of the flowers on a sunny day will be overpowering. +++

Just one flowerhead of Red Valerian caught my eye by the roadside and the cottage garden which had several plants of fresh Borage in flower on my recent December visit still had a mass of flowering Feverfew and some flowering Lungwort but it looked as if all the Borage had been gathered in to make some magic potion for a New Year party. Further south in the village there were still many flowers on the Strawberry Tree at the east end of the church.

WEEK 3 JAN 12 – 18 (Edited Version)

BIRDS

FRI 16 JAN

Today's sunshine not only gave me my first full Syklark song from a single bird over the Langstone South Moors.

I also had an excellent close view of the Budds Farm 'Fudge Duck' which converted me to the ranks of those who believe it is a pure Ferruginous male. On previous visits I have always noticed the sharp demarcation between the rich colour on the breast and distinctly paler flanks, but in today's sunshine I could not see that demarcation and the flanks were the deep reddish brown of a pure bred bird while the head and neck glistened with a metallic sheen. The undertail white was very prominent, extending to each side of the tail area but finishing where the tail feathers ceased on either side. I did not observe the bill tip detail but did see that both eyes were showed bright yellow - which probably puts the bird back into the hybrid category though I can't say if that was the colour of the eye itself or the 'nictating membrane' (i.e. the eyelids).

I did not see the Scaup today but looking at the Ferruginous hybrid illustrations in the Collins Guide my eye strayed to pictures of female Scaup and made me think that on the only occasion that I have seen it this year on Budds pools I was quite happy with the white face and large, domed, totally tuftless head and did not look too closely at the rest of the bird but my recollection is that the bird's back when on the water was pretty well as dark as that of a Tufted Duck, not the pale colour that the illustrations show (they seem to indicate that the female is almost as 'silver backed' as the male and I am sure I would have noticed that).

So I am now a believer in a pure Ferruginous but a hybrid Scaup!

One other bit of bird news that came my way today concerns Great Spotted Woodpeckers - I was surprised to hear one drumming on New Year's day and have since heard that Rob Edmunds heard one drumming in Fleet on Jan 2 while David Parker had one drumming intermittently for an hour in his garden near Rowlands Castle on Jan 4. Those observations seemed to indicate general territorial behaviour much earlier in the year than usual, and today this was confirmed by Rosemary Webb who tells me she saw a pair actually mating in Hayling Park before New Year's Day.

More improvements have been made to the presentation of news on the Titchfield Haven website - the barebones listing of bird species seen there has been fleshed out with useful background info and, removing one of my worries about the new format, the news now includes observations by the Haven staff as well as what appeared to be just casual reports

from visitors - my thanks to those responsible for this service! +++

The above remarks are triggered by the inclusion in today's news of a full wildfowl census for the reserve, showing 600 Wigeon, 255 Teal, 240 Mallard, 53 Pochard, 26 Gadwall and 25 Shoveler plus 8 Pintail and 7 Shelduck. Other birds present today include 235 Black-tailed Godwit and 33 Curlew with (among many other passerines) four Chiffchaff, one of which Richard Carpenter tells me is a Siberian bird. Richard also tells me that the nightly Cormorant roost is up to 37 birds, while the Little Egrets seem to have disappeared - possibly moved inland? A couple more notes from Richard tell me that a Black Redstart was seen today in Hill Head harbour and that the hybrid Bar-Head Goose of the Baffins Gang is still at the Haven with the Barnacles while the Snow Goose has not come back from Baffins Pond (to which it returned alone on Jan 8)

Here in the Portsmouth area Theo Roberts tells me that there are now at least nine Blackcaps resident in his Cosham garden - seven of them are ringed and can be identified individually, and there is at least one unringed male and one unringed female though there could be more with only one appearing at any one time.

Another garden bird item comes from Simon Woolley in Winchester where a Goldcrest is regularly feeding on fatballs - I think this may be a first for this species and I'm sure many people hope this habit catches on!

'HENFIELD PARISH BIRDWATCH'

There is what sounds to be a really good wildlife conservation exercise that I would like to see extended to as many local communities as possible - called the 'Henfield Parish Birdwatch' and involves getting all in Henfield to contribute their bird observations to Mike so that he can compile a record, repeating the exercise every five years to build up an ongoing picture of the ups and downs of wildlife in the parish.

All of us who are interested in wildlife would like to see more done to protect the habitat and species that we have and to encourage better use of the local landscape to make it more wildlife friendly. Over recent years we have seen much done towards that end through national and county based conservation organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, by a very large number of local groups such as the Brook Meadow Conservation Group at Emsworth, and through Government based organisations (English Nature and County/District Countryside Services), all their activities operating within an overall framework of legislation and planning procedures. Without diminishing the achievements of our existing wildlife conservation efforts we would all agree that more could and should be done, and my personal view is that there is much scope for improvement in three areas. The first of these is what I will call 'cross-discipline co-operation', i.e. getting the bird, butterfly, beetle, plant, mammal and marine enthusiasts to work together, sharing information to build up an overall picture of the importance of existing habitat and the possibilities of enhancing it.

The second is the need to 'convert' the vast mass of the general public to the fact that wonderful wildlife exists all around them (not just on TV or in a few isolated nature reserves) and that it really does affect their 'quality of life'.

The third need is to make effective use of local knowledge in our planning system. One aspect of this is the focussing of public opinion on matters of wildlife concern (making the politicians know that wildlife issues do influence votes), the other is by having available as much local data as possible to provide ammunition for the professional representatives of the wildlife cause to argue their case. +++

I know that one of the penalties of being a human being is that we have 'tunnel vision brains' that have developed to solve problems by concentrating on some aspects of a situation while ignoring others. We also have limited time and energy to devote to any one aspect of our complex lives, some aspects of which conflict with what we would like to see happen to our natural habitat. Nevertheless we are all eternal optimists, and a real spark of optimism was struck in my mind when I read the three words Henfield Parish Birdwatch - surely, I tell myself, we are not incapable of achieving within our local communities the three tasks that I outline above +++

The first of these was cross-discipline co-operation. I am sure the willingness to share information is there, and all that is needed is for someone or some group to provide the facilities to collect and collate the data. I know that if we are all beavering away at our own preferred activities it will be difficult to get anyone to set aside the time and effort to provide a 'local data centre', but at least we now have computers that make the task possible (and can be used to automate much of the work) +++

The second task is that of converting the public to the awareness of how important a healthy natural world is to their quality of life, and here we already have a mechanism for preaching to the public through the local media and through the vast number of walks, talks and conservation activities that already take place. What is needed is agreement between the many organisations and individuals involved in these activities to indicate their support for the concept of a united local front on wildlife conservation issues and as part of that to extend their efforts to get a message across to the general public. Perhaps the local newspaper can be persuaded to run an ongoing series of articles on wildlife, focussing on different organisations and activities in each issue, with a common thread of local wildlife news. A series of library displays, and shared stalls at local summer shows, could be set up, and advertising of talks, walks and other activities could be done on a co-operative rather than a competitive basis. And finally on this subject it seems that the Henfield Parish Birdwatch is making a direct appeal to the public to contribute wildlife observations, from which they presumably get feedback to encourage more public input... +++

The third part of this is more of a technical subject - it involves having an effective recording and database system and a small team of enthusiasts prepared to operate the necessary systems as well to keep alive the spirit of the enterprise +++

My final word on this subject (for the moment!) is that when the idea of a local wildlife group was first mooted here in Havant one thing that I felt was really important was having an end product from the group - it's all very well to learn about aspects of wildlife and to go out and make observations, but my feeling is that if such a group is to contribute to wildlife conservation it must have some useful output in the way of organised knowledge and data on local wildlife. A project such as Henfield Parish Birdwatch (or Havant Borough Wildlife Co-operative - easily remembered as the 'Havant WC') could provide that essential end product

THU 15 JAN

News from Titchfield Haven and from Richard Carpenter today tells of 200 Golden Plover over the Brownwich area and of 285 Lapwing at the Haven, while from the Warren Down area east of Winchester Bob Marchant gives us another estimate of 700 Brambling despite John Eyre's recent suggestion that the birds might have exhausted the food supply from the planted sunflowers and be in the process of moving elsewhere. +++

A good sighting in the Havant area is of a Dartford Warbler seen today by George Spraggs on Sinah Common (Hayling Island) across the road from Staunton Avenue,

Today we have a correction to the identity of the unusual food source attracting Blackcaps in Gosport. Yesterday I reported that this was the seeds of Yucca plants, but I see there is a correction to this and the plant whose seeds are being eaten is a species of Cordyline (shrubs which resemble small palm trees).

WED 14 JAN

The Hampshire Little Egret survey, which sets out to monitor the overall number of these birds in the county this year by making a monthly check on the numbers entering every roost at dusk (or leaving the roost at dawn), recommends that the roosts should be counted on the 14th of each month (though it allows the counter to choose another date in mid-month if weather or other circumstances make the 14th impractical). So today was the scheduled date for the first of these twelve monthly counts over the coming year and I duly went to the Wade Court area at around 3pm to give me plenty of time to find birds in the fields around the roost prior to their final sudden movement into the trees. +++

On arrival I found 13 Egrets already searching the flooded meadows north of Wade Court for food, and seven Grey Herons (but no Egrets) in the southern fields. It only took me about

three minutes to cycle along Wade Lane between the northern and southern fields on each of several passes to check on both areas, so I spent most of nearly two hours scanning the fields and sky, yet I never saw a single Egret fly in from elsewhere. Despite that the total number of Egrets to be seen in a single ride from the southern shore to the northern edge of the fields grew from 13 to 39 before they started to fly into the trees and I felt I could go home (37 were in the north fields and only two were in the south). At the end of the session, in semi-darkness I was amused to find myself on Wade Lane looking across a fieldful of counter-marching Egrets to a long line of rabbits which had emerged from scrub on the far side, and to see in the middle of this line of rabbits, wistfully watching the Egrets, a patient fox sitting out in the open knowing that he would be wasting his energy making a dash for either rabbit or egret for his supper. +++

Three reasons for not seeing any Egrets arrive from elsewhere were, firstly, because these bright white birds, so easy to see against green grass, are extremely difficult to see against the low grey cloud which filled the sky. Secondly, there is no one place that you can watch the whole area - the northern fields are 300 metres long and have hedges, bushes, pony sheds and humps and hollows to obscure the view, and thirdly (although the birds sometimes stand patiently like a 'siege of Herons') these birds were continuously on the move, all marching in different criss-crossing directions as they searched the wet ground for worms and regularly taking wing either to search a new area or to avoid cars on the road or walkers on the path across the fields. +++

This chore of trying to count the Egrets had a few bonus items - on the way to the site I found my first Celandine flowers of the year on the banks of the Lymbourne stream, on the seawall by Langstone pond the high tide had brought one of the Kingfishers to use the edge of the seawall path as a fishing perch, the Green Sandpiper was again at the edge of the flooded hollow in the northern field, and at the end of the session there was a visit from a hungry Kestrel apparently trying to catch small birds going to roost (or at least alarming them as it flew through the trees) . +++

The only other roost from which I have so far seen count details is that at Alresford where Charles Cuthbert tonight counted 48 Little Egrets plus the Great White (on Dec 14 he counted 44 Little Egrets and the Great White there). Charles says .. 'Prior to roosting, the egrets assembled as a group, perhaps sheltering from the cold wind, in the meadows below Drove Lane. At about 5.00 p.m. they all flew up together, separating into two flocks. Some went to roost in Arlebury Park, but most roosted in trees beside the river, close to the old railway embankment.' +++

Before the end of Jan 2002 the only Egret roost at Alresford was at Alresford Pond and numbers using that roost built to 56 birds on 17 Jan 2002, but disturbance caused by a duck shoot at the pond drove the birds to the trees on the rail embankment by Borough Farm and though they did return to the pond a week later they seem to have oscillated between these two (and perhaps other sites in the area) ever since - as has happened on Thorney Island where they were all faithful to the original roost by the Great Deeps for years but now alternate between that roost, one in the Thorney village churchyard, and others such as Tournurbury and Wade Court, often for no apparent reason. +++

And finally on the subject of Egrets I see that Dave Unsworth has had two sightings of a Great White Egret in the Itchen Valley country park south of his home at Bishopstoke on Dec 21 and Jan 11, while Richard Mould-Ryan has told us of two other sightings there (by Dennis Garratt over the M27 on Nov 5 and by a river keeper on Nov 24), also hinting at other reported sightings. Dave suggests that these sightings are all of the Alresford bird making occasional long distance day trips, and while I am not aware of anyone prepared to give the bird an alibi as being seen in Alresford on the two dates on which one was definitely seen in the Itchen Valley country park it seems unlikely that it is the same bird at these two sites which are at least 20km apart with plenty of other good fishing sites along the river Itchen between them. Great White Egrets clearly make long distance journeys when they feel like it, but the evidence seems to be that when they settle down at a site they tend to stay close to it - the bird at Mockbeggar Lake which arrived there on 21 Aug 2003 seems very site faithful, as does the Arlebury Park bird which arrived on Dec 13 (just a couple of days after

Norman Hunt saw one on the move over Hurst Spit which might well have gone on to settle at Arlebury). While these two birds have been at these two sites very few birders have been to look for them and not found them present, and as the Itchen Valley bird was first seen on Nov 5 and was seen again there at least once in November long before a bird was seen at Arlebury, it could be argued that the Arlebury bird comes from the Itchen Valley rather than vice versa. My opinion based on the slender available evidence about the Itchen Valley bird is that it is different to either the Arlebury or the Mockbeggar lake birds but just happens to hang out in an inaccessible area.

TUE 13 JAN

This winter has been a pretty good one for Hampshire sightings of Red-throated Divers with nine separate reports between mid-October and the end of December, the first being the most impressive (on Oct 15 Pete Ryder saw a group of 15 touch down briefly on the water of Hayling Bay before being disturbed by a wind surfer). Nevertheless we have had nothing so far to equal the sighting of 72 seen on Jan 4 off the East Sussex shore east of Pevensey Bay, but today brought the first three Hampshire sightings for the New Year. These may have been three sightings of the same bird as the first was seen flying west off the south Hayling shore by John Shillitoe (no time given), then Bob Marchant may have seen it still going west past Stokes Bay at 10:20am, and possibly the same bird was seen in the Hurst area by Mike Rafter but again no time is given. +++

Still in Hampshire but on a more domestic note Giles Darvill tells us that, despite a strong wind, he today watched a Wren carrying nest material into bramble bushes on the cliffs near Milford on sea, presumably to build a nest in a cliff crevice concealed by the bushes. Not perhaps conclusive evidence of breeding as I understand that male Wrens can build a number of 'cock nests' before they can persuade a female to mate and lay eggs in one of them, but someone here in Havant told me they had already watched a pair of Blue Tits scurrying in and out of a nest box as if planning to nest there.

From Sussex comes news of a Brant in the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour (maybe a newcomer or perhaps a bird taking a break from the West Wittering area?) and from the Pulborough Brooks area Pete Hughes reports hundreds of newly arrived Pintail on flood water (he says the Arun is getting close to overtopping those high flood banks which line the river for many miles)

Last Sunday (Jan 11) Kevin Stouse led a successful HOS walk from Broadmarsh in Havant around Farlington Marshes. Before they reached the reserve they had good views of 10 Pintail and a Little Egret in Chalkdock Lake, then saw all six Avocet in Shutt Lake on the other side of the reserve. The 22 Gadwall which have been on the lake were down to seven birds but there were plenty more birds on and around the water. The main marsh of the reserve was covered with hundreds of Shelduck and also there the half pint (Cackling) Canada Goose was seen among the flock of Brent with which it has signed up as official mascot. Among the many other birds seen were a few Knot and a single Rock Pipit (which I still haven't got on my own year list!)

MON 12 JAN

Recent heavy rain which has flooded fields and forced worms and other soil-living creatures to the surface (dead or alive!) may well have been responsible for a change in the daily habits of both Little Egrets and Black-tailed Godwits. Today Richard Carpenter tells me that the number of Black-tailed Godwits on the wet meadows at Titchfield Haven has suddenly increased (150 today against some 30 on Saturday - Jan 9) and this evening I was surprised to find 39 Egrets in the fields at Wade Court compared to an equivalent evening count of only 20 on Jan 5 and a total of 22 (seen during the day and including those on Warblington Farm fields as well as at Wade Court) on Jan 10. +++

Flooding may not be the only cause of increased Egret numbers - it could be that there has been an influx from abroad, or just disturbance at one of the Thorney Island roosts could have triggered some or all of the Thorney roosters to move to Wade Court -

SUN 11 JAN

In my local petshop here in Havant, where I went to get more bird seed recently, the owner

told me how one of his customers had watched a Goshawk catch and eat a Blackbird in their Havant garden and I expressed my doubts, saying it was almost certainly a Sparrowhawk, and I did not expect to see a genuine claim for a Goshawk on anyone's garden list this year but I have been proved wrong by Martin Pitt who had a male Goshawk over his garden today - I think I might be safe in placing a bet that no one will actually have one kill and eat prey in a garden! As far as I know Martin lives somewhere in the Whitchurch area, not too far from the Ashley Warren raptor hotspot! +++

SAT 10 JAN

On Dec 21 the HOS walk led by Kevin Stouse from Warblington church enjoyed views of two female Long-tailed Duck just offshore near the church, and on the same day Simon Wright saw the same birds from the Hayling side of the water at Northney (Simon added that he had heard of another sighting of these ducks in the same place a few days earlier). Nothing more was seen of them until Jan 2 when Lucy James found them back in the same area (though she did add a little confusion by saying they were in Langstone Harbour, probably as they were off Langstone village and she did not realise that the division between Langstone and Chichester harbours occurs at Langstone Bridge). Today Roger Webb from Southsea saw them again in the same spot, but again made the same mistake about which harbour they were in and said they were in Langstone Channel of Langstone Harbour whereas they were in fact in Swear Deep of Chichester Harbour, a good 2 km from where the Langstone Channel ends in The Deeps off the Oysterbeds. +++

Some people may say this is pedantic rubbish, but to me it is not only misleading but also shows how much people who do not use maps are missing - to me their use is an essential part of any birder's fieldcraft and while I do not carry field guides about with me I would feel undressed without a map when in an area I am not familiar with. If I see a bird that I am not familiar with I think it far more useful to use my time watching it and making notes rather than trying to look it up in a book (which I can do back at home without letting the book influence what I see and without taking my eyes off the bird itself) but I do find the map useful in the field not only to get an accurate fix on the place where the bird was so as to tell others and to submit a proper record with a map reference, but also as a guide to the terrain showing me where I can go, what I may see (based on the habitat features shown on the map), and most importantly how to get home again! Perhaps one reason that so many birders limit their birding to a few well known sites, rather than exploring the countryside (particularly around their homes but also wherever they may be) is that they have not learnt to read the landscape using a large scale map!

A local group that would not need a map to guide them around Hayling Island is the Havant Wildlife Group who took their regular Saturday morning outing today around the Sinah area of the Island, starting from the carpark to the north of Sinah Lake where they heard a Mistle Thrush in full song from the tall trees of Sinah Warren and saw a local Kestrel overhead but little on the lake - a single Pochard and a few Tufted Duck. +++

Moving on to the Kench they did much better with a good view of a wintering Sandwich Tern on a buoy north of the harbour entrance. Also out in the harbour Brian Fellows got a glimpse of what was probably one of the two drake Goosander that have been in this area, and in the Kench itself the waders included some 150 Bar-tailed Godwit and a few Knot plus a surprising sight of three female Shoveler feeding in the sea water. A single male Shoveler was behaving more conventionally by feeding in the temporary pool that forms inside the golf course just across the road from the Kench in the part of the golf course that is one of the smaller Hampshire Wildlife Trust reserves!. +++

As they were leaving the Kench and walking west along the Ferry Road a Peregrine made a spectacular stoop towards waders on the mudflats but gained nothing from its effort - presumably it was trying to stir the waders into the air where it might get one in a second dive but Brian does not say what effect the falcon had on the shore birds, merely that it was seen off by three Black-headed Gulls (sounds as if the Peregrine was a juvenile and none of its potential victims took it seriously!) +++

In the harbour entrance channel a Razorbill was seen well as it was swept in by the tide but there was no sight of the Shag that is often here in the winter (Roger Webb has seen a

couple of them off Southsea recently). Continuing around the south of the golf course they saw a pair of Stonechats on the fence (but make no mention of Barn Owls perched on the line of Barn Owl boxes on tall posts which the Golf Club has so generously donated as part of their wildlife support programme). Near the end of their round trip, in the small copse alongside the short Links Lane giving access to the course, they heard a Jay noisily remonstrating at the presence of the Kestrel, now perched atop one of the trees (Brian makes no mention of the new track through this strange copse of oak trees, apparently growing from shingle, which allows a better view of any birds in the copse than you get from the roadside pavement).

In the large L-shaped field of Warblington Farm which opens onto the A259 near the westbound layby was a large pre-roost collection of gulls - seemingly several hundred when I first saw it from a distance but when I later took a close look the numbers were down to perhaps 50 Great Blackbacks, 10 or so Lesser Blackbacks and a few Herring Gulls. +++
A couple more items for yesterday (Jan 9) are a sighting of six Little Gulls at Selsey and, closer to home, the sound of Chiffchaff song from one of two birds seen by Brian Fellows at the Thornham sewage works on Thorney Island (or the mainland part of it!). Nearby were a few Redwing, possibly part of the flock I saw further east at Thornham Farm on New Year's Day.

PLANTS

FRI 16 JAN

Walking down the Langbrook stream from Havant to the South Moors today I ventured off the path into the normally ignored small patch off wet wasteland immediately north of the concrete track and bridge by which the cattle which graze the South Moors go to and from their 'byre' close to the entrance to the Mallards housing estate. Here I discovered White Butterbur flowering last year, and today I again found 23 small pale cabbage like growths within which the Butterbur flower heads were developing - the first one I looked at carefully definitely had some flowers open. I did not find the plants until later in the season last year and did not appreciate that they start to flower so early (no sign of the female Butterbur plants which will appear later on the south of the cattle track). Both these plants were introduced by IBM when they acquired this Havant site in the 1960s, presumably to show their green intentions! +++

After visiting the Budds Farm Pools I set out to return to Havant across the north of the new HWT reserve using the new path starting from Southmoor Lane where I looked closely at the Cherry Plum trees, many of which were covered with flower buds already showing white, but I could see no open flowers. Going from the road onto the new path, the entrance to which has been created by cutting a hole in the tree line along the roadside, I was really delighted to see that an old friend had not been destroyed in the process of cutting down many of these trees - this friend is a Goat Willow tree which always flowers very much earlier than others, and looking up right above the entrance to the path there were several branch tips liberally laden with fully open, large, golden Pussy Paws. +++

At the far end of this path I went through the complex of new kissing gates into the South Moors proper and turned left to check the 'orchid field' (south of the Autolive factory) for possible Snipe in the flooded grass. No Snipe, but I did almost tread on one Marsh Marigold plant with at least three open flowers - the plant had been nibbled by the cattle and was almost underwater so that I did not see it until I was about to tread on it - that and the Pussy Paws were real surprises. +++

My the last find was no surprise - one fully open Lesser Celandine flower by the Lymbourne stream where I had seen buds last Wednesday. By chance I learnt later in the day that Lesser Celandine flowers had been seen yesterday on Hayling Island (when I'm pretty sure the Lymbourne flower would have been open).

THU 15 JAN

A quick stroll to the local bottlebank this morning to get some fresh air before settling down to write these notes gave me an unexpected new tick for my year list with a couple of plants of Thyme-leaved Speedwell flowering outside the Havant Museum on a south facing patch from which trees were cleared last autumn giving the ground flora a clean patch on which

to take up residence. Normally I find Ivy-leaved Speedwell as the earliest of that family but I have seen none of that yet, and in this continuing mild weather I can still see flowers on Green Field Speedwell growing as a weed in a garden just up my road (the front of Glenhurst School for anyone who is interested! +++

Yesterday afternoon, heading down the Billy Trail to undertake an Egret roost count at Wade Court, I made my usual check on the banks of the Lymbourne just upstream of the footbridge to Wade Court where I have watched the leaves of Lesser Celandine growing for a good month, and today I found two fully grown flower stems with flower buds on them that looked as if they would certainly have been open had the sun been shining on them.

TUE 13 JAN

Today Brian Fellows found his second clump of Cow Parsley in flower at Emsworth following his find of some in Westbourne on Sunday. I have yet to come across any though I now expect to do so soon, but I doubt that a few finds in January will bring forward the main flowering season (which normally starts in April).

SUN 11 JAN

Brian Fellows had the pleasure of seeing the first Cow Parsley in flower today on the outskirts of Westbourne village to the north of Emsworth. Like Richard Carpenter's Blackthorn flowering at Brownwich last Monday this Cow Parsley is not the herald of a general outburst of flowering but a very pleasant oddity. Also in Westbourne village Brian found Maidenhair Spleenwort growing on the wall of 12 New Road (the narrow winding road leading east from the village Square to Whitechimney Row, and for Brian's benefit I can add a further local site for this fern to the list that he gives - look on the old wall of Jeram's Farm along Ranelagh Road at its junction with Brockhampton Road in Havant. +++

I also found a new flowering plant for the year list today - that was Dog's Mercury whose male flowers were growing at the west end of Warren Down where the track coming past the stables at Forestside becomes a narrow path.

SAT 10 JAN

I am still checking the local 'early Celandine' sites but as yet I have not even seen a flower bud but I did think I had a chance today until a single small yellow flower turned out to be a Creeping Buttercup - nonetheless that was a year first for me. +++

Another first flowering for the year was of Common Chickweed - I saw just one flower open last Monday (Jan 5) and I see that Brian Fellows found it in flower at Emsworth this week (on Jan 7 or maybe earlier) +++

On Radio Solent this morning Norman Goodland suggested that we could find Elm flowers out at any time from now on, so if you can still find a living English Elm it's worth looking skyward to see if you can detect a fuzziness to the outline of its twigs - and if you see get your bins on the twig to see if the fuzziness is caused by those tiny purple pincushions that serve it as flowers.

INSECTS

THU 15 JAN

Both Theo and Graham Roberts (who live in adjacent houses at the southern foot of Portsdown) have given me butterfly news. The first to contact me was Theo who said that two Commas had been flying in the garden last Saturday (Jan 10) though he did say that they were not seen together. Later I received a copy of Graham Roberts email reporting two early sightings to Nick Bowles at Butterfly Conservation HQ - he only claimed one of the two possible Commas and he also reported a Peacock out on Jan 7. Nick Bowles replied that the Comma was the earliest reported anywhere in the UK this year - he must know of earlier reports of Peacock though Graham's sighting on Jan 7 is earlier than the only report I have seen of one flying in Hampshire (one at Gosport on Jan 10).

Nick Bowles name was also mentioned in my last notes in connection with the advice that Derek Mills quoted as coming from Nick on the subject of releasing hibernating butterflies that wake prematurely in our houses. I have now found my copy of the December issue of British Wildlife mag in which he gives the advice. When I first heard it I wondered if Derek had quoted Nick out of context but here is the full quote from British Wildlife - make what

you like of it!. Nick says .. 'Any butterflies seen fluttering indoors during the winter should be released on sunny days if the temperature is about 12 Centigrade or above, or else be confined in a cardboard box and placed at the northern end of an unheated room, well away from any sun. Once settled again they can be removed from the box and placed on the back of a piece of timber leaning against a north wall.' I still have my own reservations about this but I realize that it is difficult to give simple advice to people who know little or nothing about the ways of butterflies.

OTHER WILDLIFE

FRI 16 JAN

Quite a few fungi are enjoying the current weather and today Rosemary Webb told me of these species which she had noticed growing beside Hollow Lane on Hayling Island.

Velvet Shank is to be expected in winter, and even seems to enjoy frost, so that was no great surprise but is nevertheless a cheering sight on a dull day. Less common and equally colourful is Tripe Fungus, but an uncommon and quite unexpected species was *Agaricus placomyces* which normally fruits in summer and in woodland. You might mistake it for one of those 'Chestnut Cap' mushrooms sold in supermarkets but don't try to eat it as it could be harmful - one telltale warning is the fact that it bruises yellow, and Roger Phillips says both taste and smell are strong and unpleasant. +++

Another observation came from David Parker who was driving home along the road through Stansted Forest last night when a Badger lumbered across the road just in front of his car, crossing from the pony fields at Warren Down into the woods. It won't be long now before David is telling us of Frogs and Toads crossing that road to get to the Brick Kiln pond at the south of the woodland.

WEEK 2 JAN 5 – 11

BIRDS

SAT 10 JAN

Maybe of local interest to birders in the Langstone area is the news that this afternoon I found a total of 22 Little Egrets in fields around Wade Court and Warblington Church. The tide was high and that may have accounted for five of the Egrets in the field south of Wade Court but not for another ten in the fields north of the house (where the Green Sandpiper was once again resting beside the small pool in the field below the A27 embankment between Wade Lane and the Lymbourne Stream). The remaining seven Egrets were in three fields around Warblington Church.

In the large L-shaped field of Warblington Farm which opens onto the A259 near the westbound layby was a large pre-roost collection of gulls - seemingly several hundred when I first saw it from a distance but when I later took a close look the numbers were down to perhaps 50 Great Blackbacks, 10 or so Lesser Blackbacks and a few Herring Gulls.

FRI 09 JAN

Kevin Stouse has sent me news of his sightings on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth for the past three days. The most significant item to my mind was the presence on Jan 7 of a Cormorant wearing its full spring plumage (grey wig as well as thigh roundels) - surprisingly I noted the white thigh patches on a bird there on Dec 6, and Brian Fellows saw one on Dec 9, but this is the first report of a 'judge's wig' being seen (not all breeding birds develop this feature but I think the majority of the British birds and all the Continental race do).

Another bit of good news from Kevin is that two Great Crested Grebe were there on Jan 7 (presumably the pair that will hopefully breed again on the lake this year), though he could see neither of them on Jan 8 and only 1 today. This variableness in numbers seen from day to day applies to all the waterfowl on this lake (even full sized Swans) and is mainly accounted for by the large extent of the reed beds around the waters edge in which hundreds of birds can disappear from sight. Another factor is the length of the lake (900 metres from one end of the main open water to the other) plus the fact that its shape means that you have to walk more or less all around it to see the whole surface and even then

many birds can hide around the fringes of the two big islands at the west end, or anywhere along another 1500 metres of canals which drain this site (all below sealevel) into the lake (from which the water has to be pumped under the M27 into Tipner Lake and thus into Portsmouth Harbour).

Peak counts seen over these three days were 16 Pochard, 10 Teal, 6 Tufted Duck and 1 Goldeneye (a short stay drop in?). There were also 5 Herons (but no Egret), 6 Cormorant (different birds each day to judge by their plumage) and 12 Canada Geese. There would also have been plenty of Blackheaded and Herring Gulls with a few Common (but only one Great Blackback and no Lessers), and good numbers of both Coot and Moorhen plus a few Little Grebe and probably a few Snipe hiding on the islands.

THU 08 JAN

One bird that was in the eastern Solent was a Little Gull seen from Titchfield Haven where the only other item of birding interest was the absence of the Snow Goose and maybe the Bar-Head hybrid from the same 'Baffins gang' as that is not on the Haven website list though the Barnacle Geese and the Flamingo were still there

Brian Fellows confirmed the absence of the Snow Goose from the Haven by going to Baffins Pond in Portsmouth this morning and finding it back there. Other birds of note on that pond were 68 Mallard, 54 Tufted Duck, 5 Shoveler, 3 Canada Geese and 2 Swans - of special interest were 11 Cormorant, probably preferring to fish here than out in today's stormy seas, but I see that a year ago in January 2003 Brian had counts of 12 and 14 Cormorants with 14 remaining the record high count. +++

Also in Brian's news is a note of Coal Tit song heard in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Jan 6 - not perhaps of special interest as I think that Coal Tits, like Blue and Great, can be heard singing in their woodland habitat through the winter months.

WED 07 JAN

Bob Chapman's latest bulletin of news from Farlington Marshes tells us that one wintering Sandwich Tern is still in the harbour, though the Shutt Lake Avocets seemed to have reduced from six to two today. Bob also tells us that last Sunday (Jan 4) ringers caught a Firecrest at the reserve (first there this winter) and they also netted a Reed Bunting which was already ringed (more of its origin anon).

On the subject of ringing Bob reminds everyone to keep a lookout for colour ringed Brent Geese, and if you are in doubt as to what to look for he says .. 'They have two rings, one on each leg. Each is a colour (usually red, green or white) with an engraved number, letter or band(s). The combination is unique to each bird. If you see one note the combination of colour and code, conventionally noted left leg then right leg (of the bird) and let us know. For example a bird with a white ring on the left leg with a black 7 on it and a red ring on the right leg with a white D would be W7RD. This information along with the time and place of the sighting and your name can then be entered onto the database. If I have other information on the bird I can arrange for you to be sent the known history of the bird.' So send your sightings to RobertC@hwt.org.uk (and I suggest you copy the news to Pete Potts at ppotts@compuserve.com as he probably did the ringing and keeps the records, though I am not sure of this). +++

Other news for today from Langstone Harbour comes from Richard Hallett who saw the two drake Goosanders at the Kench (where Ron King had seen them on Jan 5) with the tide fairly high. +++

Just outside the harbour Ian Thirlwell noted more than 70 Sanderling at what I presume was a high tide roost on shingle just east of the South Parade Pier at Southsea.

I was also out in the Bedhampton area of Havant today adding Gadwall to my yearlist with nine birds on Bedhampton Mill Pool (as seen by John Goodspeed on Jan 1). I then went on to the Hermitage, Brockhampton and Langbrook streams in the hope of a Common Sandpiper (no luck, but I did see Kingfishers on both the Brockhampton and Langbrook). I had better luck passing the seaward side of Budds Farm Pools, getting a good view of the female Scaup from the bottom of the steps leading up onto the mound. +++

I did not see the 'Fudge Duck' today but Bob Marchant made an interesting contribution to a

debate raised recently by Peter Raby who, when he saw the bird on these pools, commented that he could not see why it was not accepted as a genuine pure Ferruginous Duck rather than a Pochard hybrid. Bob says he would not go along with this as .. 'The Fudge duck there on 6th November had all the features of an adult male Ferruginous except one - it was missing the white undertail patch!' .. and this sent me scurrying to search back for descriptions from those experts who decided it was a hybrid

The one bird which I assume to be the subject of this debate (though I am not excluding the presence of more than one) first arrived at Farlington Marshes on 23 Nov 1999 and has returned each winter since. In Feb 2000 I wrote .. 'Since the FERRUGINOUS DUCK turned up at Farlington Marshes Deeps on Nov 23 last year it has been regularly reported as a first winter drake, based on the judgement at that time of Jason Crook who discovered it. He expected to see changes in its plumage during the winter which have not occurred - it seems it has in fact become less like an adult over the winter, and I gather that Jason now believes it to be a hybrid. This news comes from Arizona where Jason's brother Nigel lives and Nigel, who saw the duck on Feb 5th when over here, is pretty certain that the features which he then saw 'point to hybridity'.' +++

(Long quote from Nigel Crook follows ... not included here.)

So much for what Nigel Crook had to say, and which agrees with what Keith Vinicombe says in his 'MacMillan Guide to Bird Identification' which I do have (though I do not subscribe to British Birds as I do not pretend to be a 'proper birder'). Their descriptions of the contrast between the breast and flanks, and the presence of the small male type white undertail patch (much smaller than a true female Ferruginous on which it would extend round the sides of the tail) describe the feature which I associate with this bird, and much as I respect Bob Marchant I think he must have been looking at a different bird. +++

One conclusion that I draw from all this is the sad one that local birders here seem very reluctant to stick out their necks and actually describe the unusual birds they see so that we can all learn and profit (or state our points of disagreement!), unlike the American attitude shown by Nigel Crook in his detailed contribution. This bird has been around now for some five winters and still many Hampshire birders do not have a good description to go by when they come to look for this bird christened by Lee Marshall as the Dodgey Fudge Duck (by the way, does anyone know what has happened to Lee who vanished without trace on 7 June 2002 and is still missed by myself and probably many others)

Finally for today a reminder that the once every ten years National Gull Count is taking place on Sat 17 Jan. I have had my arm twisted by Dennis Bill to do a stint at Portsmouth Harbour but today Dave Unsworth has put out an appeal for any and everyone who can recognize gulls as of the 'large' or 'small' variety (no need to pick out the Auduoin's from the Bonaparte's as they fly to their watery roosts in thousands) to contact him with offers of help anywhere in the county where roosts occur (though particularly on Southampton Water). The address you need is David_Unsworth@mcga.gov.uk and the time to send your offer of help is now! +++

Talking of roosts, but of Egrets rather than gulls, Pete Carr's Hampshire Egret survey gets under way on Jan 14 and again your help is to be hoped for, if not in counting roosts at least in trying to locate them. I'm sure there are several unknown roosts in Hampshire, and others may start up at any time at a whim of these unpredictable birds. Only this week I heard of two possible new sites. The first came to my attention in connection with Peter Hutchings report of a Smew at Blackdam at Basingstoke - in his message about the Smew Peter added .. 'A Little egret over ENE at 15:55, sixth for site, was presumably going to roost with Grey herons in the trees to the east of the Millstone PH, Basing (SU 662 532).' The second arose in casual conversation with Tony Gutteridge who said that at dusk on a recent day when he was in the Emsworth area he watched an Egret fly off deliberately heading north, not south to Thorney Island or southwest to Langstone, so maybe there is a new roost in the Ems valley, perhaps in the trees around Aldsworth Pond, or even at Brick-kiln Pond in Stansted Forest.

TUE 06 JAN

Hampshire news for today consists of three 'oddities' (two normal birds in unusual situations

and one very oddly plumaged bird). +++

At Chandlers Ford Nick Papps tells me of a Buzzard that has taken to watching the M3

commuters go by - he says .. 'You may be interested to know of a buzzard that has been regularly perched on a lamppost on the slip road at Junction 12 leading to the south-bound carriageway on the M3. Friends have independently seen it and we all agree it is a buzzard as they are not uncommon; however, the markings, particularly the chest feathers are very interesting and appear very similar to those of a rough-legged buzzard - has anyone else reported this bird?' I have not heard of this particular bird before and would be interested to know if any raptor experts have seen it and can offer an opinion on its plumage? +++

I think we should rule out Common Buzzard before suggesting that this is a rarity, but you never know. Keith Vinnicombe, in his MacMillan Guide to Bird Identification, shows examples of Common Buzzard in which the breast (and nearly all underparts) are almost pure white in one case and black in the other, and he says of Rough-legged Buzzards that the majority seen in this country in winter are young birds which are paler than adults and which can be picked out from Common by five characteristics that can be seen from below in flight - (1) White tail with thick white terminal band, (2) Predominantly whitish underparts (3) Large black carpal patch (halfway along the leading edge of the wing underside) (4) Blackish belly in many cases but not all (5) Black tips to the underside of the primaries and secondaries (seen as 'fingers' when soaring and contrasting strongly with the white wing underside). As pale Common Buzzards are a problem when picking out Rough-legged Keith gives two important factors to look for - most important is the strongly contrasted black tail tip band and pure white base of the tail (visible both from above and below), the second (seen only from above in flight) is a series of pale bands at the base of the primary feathers on the Rough-legged - in his illustration these remind me of the bands across the closed wings of young Brent which are the sure-fire way of picking juveniles from adults. I will have to leave Nick and his friends to devise means of getting the bird to take off and soar above them as they drive to Southampton in the morning rush! (Perhaps there is somewhere on Boyatt Lane from which a pedestrian can see this bird?) +++

The second normal bird in an odd situation was a Dartford Warbler seen by John Shillitoe who

says .. 'While cycling this morning near Big West End farm (W of Hambledon), I was surprised to find a Dartford working its way along a path between two very large arable fields. The path is separated from the fields by wire fences with occasional short stretches of low hedge - otherwise very open habitat.' +++

Maybe this was a young bird on its long journey in search of a suitable place to set up its own home in the same way that all those Bearded Tits do, and perhaps it is more surprising that so few are ever found in transit than that this one was seen. Last autumn I was told of a Dartford Warbler seen well for an hour or more in a small suburban garden here in Havant - the garden in question just happened to have a great show of mature heathers, and this suggested to me that the bird had been flying high overhead, felt weary, and saw this garden as a 'motorway service station'. Maybe John's bird was so weary that it was no longer capable of prolonged flight and was reduced to hopping along hedges, only flying to cross the gaps? +++

The third oddity was seen by Alistair Martin at the Kench on Langstone Harbour today and

was almost certainly the bird which Keith Betton saw there on Dec 18 and described as being very like a Ruddy Shelduck but with a green head. Alistair has gone a lot further with his description and has (I think) used a technique of recording the look of the bird that could be a useful for others who do not have their digital cameras with them (or get too brief a view to have time to set up the camera). He seems to have scanned a picture of a Ruddy Shelduck into his computer and used Paint Shop Pro (or equivalent) to change its appearance and colour to give a photo-fit image of what he actually saw. From Keith's description I imagined the whole head and neck of the bird to be a dark Shelduck green colour, but seeing Alistair's picture (and assuming it is the same bird) I see that the green is only on the crown and a bit of the nape. +++

In view of the sightings of Black Swans mentioned in yesterday's notes I used my lunch break from writing these notes to drive to West Ashling where I saw the pair of adult Black Swans

but could not see any cygnets as I did a year ago (nor any of the ugly Muscovy Ducks that were there then - today there were only Mallard, Coot and Moorhen).

En route to Ashling I stopped at Farm Lane in Nutbourne to have another look for the Avocet which Richard Creer tells me were within 50 metres of the shore where the Ham Brook flows into Nutbourne Bay at midday on Sunday (Jan 4). He saw three of them at first then three more joined them to make up the regular party of six. Needless to say I did not see them (though I have no doubt they were close at hand) but my trip was worthwhile in adding Pintail to my year list - a good half dozen present in the bay where I saw five males and one female though there were so many Brent, Wigeon, Shelduck and gulls in the narrow stream of water left by the falling tide that I could have missed several more. On the exposed mud I also added Bar-tailed Godwit Fieldfare could be heard from the direction of the orchards and a Stonechat was in the reeds by the stream where I was surprised to see four Roe Deer (a regular local dog walker told me they had been there for some time). +++

At Funtington - no shortage of Rooks in the fields west of the village, not surprising in view of what was (and may still be) the biggest Rookery in Sussex being located just south of these fields in trees around Hambrook House. +++

One other item of local news for today comes from Brian Fellows who remarks on the first signs of Robins pairing seen in his Emsworth garden.

In Hampshire on Jan 4 a female Merlin spent a couple of hours resting in an apple tree in a small garden in the densely packed housing at Highbury (around Highbury College north of Portsmouth). Sounds unlikely but this area is just across the east end of the M27 from Ports Creek and the Hilsa Lines which are the wildlife motorway between Langstone and Portsmouth harbours. I'm pretty sure this is not the first time a Merlin has been seen in this same garden - several winters ago - but without searching all my Merlin records I can't recall when. +++

Richard Carpenter (who has been incommunicado with his computer out of action) tells me that on Jan 2 he heard a Bullfinch doing its very best to make a song from its repertoire of jumbled notes - this was at Titchfield Haven. He also says that on Jan 1 there was a positive sighting of two Bitterns in flight at the same time within the Haven.

MON 05 JAN

Black Swans are rightly classed as 'plastic' by 'proper birders' but they still attract my interest both for their elegance and for the dignity with which they maintain their antipodean tradition of breeding in the winter, so I am very grateful to Andrew Howard for telling me that on Dec 31 one downy cygnet could be seen with one parent on Benbow Pond (on the eastern edge of Cowdray Park visible from the A272 just east of Midhurst). The SOS website also tells me that two adult Black Swans were seen yesterday on the River Arun at Offham (just north of the Wildfowl Trust reserve at Arundel) while three adults were at Jury's Gap (in the Romney Marsh area east of Rye) on Saturday Jan 3. At both sites Bewick's Swans were also to be seen, providing an excuse for the birders to see the Black Swans while checking 'real birds' - I think there are still six Bewicks at Jury's Gap and there were 9 Bewicks on the Arun at Offham with 5 more flying over. +++

One reason for my interest in Black Swans is that one was a regular sight at Emsworth for several years (I think it was taken there from the Brent Lodge Wildlife Hospital after it had recovered from some trauma and was accused of 'bed blocking' and eating food donated for sick birds). That bird has not been seen since 4 March 2002, and another old faithful (a female which had been on the River Test for perhaps 12 years up to March 2000, laying infertile eggs each autumn) has not been mentioned recently, though there are widespread reports of single birds or small groups appearing at sites scattered through Hampshire and Sussex. Last year I heard of them at 9 different places - Broadlands on the Test, Titchfield Haven (4 birds), Frater Lake on Portsmouth Harbour, Kings Pond at Alton, West Ashling pond near Chichester, the R Arun at Bury, the R Adur at several sites and Rye Harbour as well as Benbow Pond near Midhurst. Strangely there were no reports from the Hampshire Avon although in March 2000 Dave Stone told us that at least six adults were on that river with one pair successfully nesting in the wild near Salisbury in both 1998 and 1999. Perhaps these six decided to leave en masse as in July 2000 Heather Mills was surprised

to see six together in Langstone Harbour (Chalk Dock lake) on one day only. Genuine wild birds seen in Hampshire today were two drake Goosander seen in the south of Langstone Harbour (in or near the Kench) by Ron King who went searching for the Snow Bunting but failed to find it (I think that bird can now be written off). Ron also had a single Red-necked Grebe in Hayling Bay off what I assume to be the Creek Road area as he mentions 'amusement arcades', and he went on to see six Avocet still at Farlington Marshes/Shutt Lake area. +++

The first thing that I saw this morning here in Havant was a pair of courting Collared Doves on a rooftop across the road - they have been singing increasingly in recent days and yesterday I noticed several of them making display flights, and I would not be at all surprised if some are not already nesting. +++

Later in the day I took the new Nature Notes posters to Langstone and found the regular Kingfisher, despite fading afternoon light, hopefully waiting for fish to come out of the mill stream after passing under the mill building. As dusk was approaching I stopped in Wade Lane north of Wade Court and south of the A27 to watch any Egrets go to roost. About half a dozen were in the pony fields, and I do not think any had entered the roost, so I positioned myself where I could watch the fields and also spot any flying into the roost trees. Fairly soon four Egrets flew into the trees from these fields, and by then I had seen a group of around ten searching for food around a pool that is hidden from the view of casual watchers on Wade Lane (behind a thick hedge on the east side immediately south of the only house by the A27). While waiting for these to leave I saw another single bird fly north high over the roost to come and join them, and 20 minutes after the first birds had gone into the roost these eleven birds followed them. Thinking it was all over I was getting on my bike to leave when another group of five flew in, seemingly coming from somewhere inland in the Emsworth area, giving me an overall count of 20 birds. By now it was really dark and the last thing I heard was the noisy departure of the Green Sandpiper which had been where I saw it last Saturday, on the edge of the pool in a depression of the field nearest the A27 on the west side of Wade Lane (persons of short stature may not be able to see the bird in this hollow without climbing a little way up the A27 embankment!)

SUN 04 JAN

9 Bewick's Swans (plus 5 more flying over them) on the River Arun at Offham, just north of the Wildfowl Trust reserve at Arundel. With them were two Black Swans. Another group of 6 Bewicks were seen on Jan 1 in the Lewes Brooks area. +++

Further upsteam at Pulborough Brooks both male and female Hen Harriers were seen, along with 9 Ruff, a lone Black-tailed Godwit and a Barn Owl +++

My New Year's Day outing failed to see the Avocet that had been in Nutbourne Bay on Dec 31, but Sod's Law saw them back there today. Richard Creer saw all six at around midday today (tide falling from high around 9:20am) where the Ham Brook flows into Nutbourne Bay, and Brian Fellows was in the same area to see some 70 Fieldfare in the orchards where I had seen a paltry 7 on New Year's Day. +++

Tony Gutteridge was also out birding in Sussex today on the northern edge of the downs around Duncton (on the Chichester to Petworth A285 road). In the vicinity of Upwaltham Farm stubble fields held at least 110 Skylark - a very respectable number which caused me to check last year's records in which I can only see five larger flocks (200 at Sleaford in East Hants seen by Richard Ford in Jan, 150+ seen by Bob Marchant in the Cheesefoot Head area in Jan with 120 seen there by Mark Rolfe and 200 seen by Will Walmsley on Feb 9, and last autumn the only count exceeding 100 was of 140 seen by Adrian Thomas in the Lee Farm area south of Storrington) +++

Heading north from Upwaltham towards Seaford College at East Lavington Tony passed through Tegleaze Wood where two Marsh Tits were singing against each other, and then a third was heard singing near the A285 below Duncton Down. To crown these sightings Tony drove east to Bignor and climbed the steep hill there, having a Willow Tit come to within two yards of him after he had identified it by its calls. +++

While thinking of the first Marsh Tit song of the year I hear from David Parker that a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were in his Forestside garden with the male heard drumming

repetitively over a period of an hour today. David asks if this is very early in the year to which my answer must be yes, though I have already reported that I heard one brief burst at Langstone on New Year's Day and Rob Edmunds heard one in Fleet on Jan 2.

At Titchfield Haven a Merlin was seen today - the first recorded there since Dec 3, and I must congratulate the people who run the Titchfield Haven website for taking a step in the right direction. Up to the past autumn their website was often not updated for several weeks at a time but eventually a complete day by day record was available. That ceased recently and what we have been getting is a series of individual day lists such that if you did not visit the site daily you missed the info for those days when you did not visit it. Today I see that several such daylists are available together and if this is maintained on a rolling weekly basis (i.e. whenever you visit the site you see the lists for the past five days or so with one day being deleted as a new day is added) I for one will be greatly pleased! +++

As a result of this change I can see, in addition to today's Merlin, that yesterday the Pochard count had gone up to 44 (highest previous count this winter was 37 on Dec 15) and that both Water and Rock Pipit were present. +++

With fairly bright overcast and little wind I went to Budds Farm to pick up a couple of birds that I had missed on New Year's Day (Shoveler and Pochard) and came back with eight extra ticks. In addition to the two ducks that were guaranteed I quickly added Turnstone on the shore, Great Crested Grebe on the water and Kestrel overhead before having two pieces of good luck -the first was a small flock of around 20 Linnet which flew from the South Moors to Budds Mound and the second came when scanning the harbour for the Black-necked or Slavonian Grebes which I never saw - there between Budds Mound and the Oysterbeds was the female Common Scoter which I last saw there on Dec 3 and which no one seems to have seen in the harbour since Dec 16. My eighth new bird was Grey Wagtail seen in the Langbrook stream. +++

SAT 03 JAN

Right on the county boundary in the Ems valley by the A27 passing north of Emsworth, Brian Fellows today found a Green Sandpiper back in one of its usual haunts by the stretch of the Ems that is artificially diverted along the north side of the new A27 before flowing under it.

A little further north a Snipe was in the disused watercress bed south of Westbourne. +++

To the west of Emsworth Trevor Carpenter was impressed by the presence of some 460 adult Great Blackback Gulls in the huge gull roost which assembles each evening on saltings in the Swear Deep area of Chichester Harbour (between Warblington on the mainland and Northney on Hayling Island). Surprisingly only 35 of these birds were immature (normally the majority of large gulls wintering on the Hampshire shore are youngsters) +++

At lunchtime I was watching a party of Long-tailed Tits passing through my garden when I spotted a male Blackcap in ivy at the end of the garden, and while taking a short walk after lunch I not only saw a small party of Redwing in the pony fields north of Wade Court but also saw a Green Sandpiper standing motionless and silent at the edge of a pool in a depression in those fields. +++

Yesterday (Jan 2) Matthew Silk visited Thorney Island and reports (on the SOS website) two finds of local interest to those in the Emsworth area - a single Yellow-legged Gull and a Black-necked Grebe, both I think in the Emsworth Channel. +++

PLANTS

SAT 10 JAN

I am still checking the local 'early Celandine' sites but as yet I have not even seen a flower bud but I did think I had a chance today until a single small yellow flower turned out to be a Creeping Buttercup - nonetheless that was a year first for me. +++

Another first flowering for the year was of Common Chickweed - I saw just one flower open last Monday (Jan 5) and I see that Brian Fellows found it in flower at Emsworth this week (on Jan 7 or maybe earlier)

On Radio Solent this morning Norman Goodland suggested that we could find Elm flowers out at any time from now on, so if you can still find a living English Elm it's worth looking skyward to see if you can detect a fuzziness to the outline of its twigs - and if you see get your

bins on the twig to see if the fuzziness is caused by those tiny purple pincushions that serve it as flowers.

MON 05 JAN

The first real plant news of the year comes from Richard Carpenter who today found Blackthorn in flower in the Brownwich area of the coast west of Titchfield Haven. Richard assures us this was Blackthorn, and not the more expected Cherry Plum, but I have as yet seen no sign of buds or flowers on either. Cherry Plum usually starts to flower in January and Blackthorn not until March, but I recall a general outburst of Blackthorn flower along the Hampshire and Sussex coast in November 2001 when it was accompanied by both Cherry Plum and Hawthorn blossom in December. Last year I saw my first Cherry Plum on Jan 24 and Blackthorn on Mar 7, and it will be interesting to see if Richard's specimen continues to flower and is a forerunner of spring, or if it disappears again, leaving a gap of a month or more before the season for it opens generally.

One other plant that I am expecting to be flowering in some sheltered woodland or country lane is Dog's Mercury - that is often out in early January.

OTHER WILDLIFE

WED 07 JAN

In some years the first frogspawn has appeared before Christmas but this winter I have heard no mention of these creatures until today when Bob Chapman says he saw his first Frog of the year at Farlington Marshes

TUE 06 JAN

An unexpected find today in the reeds along the Ham Brook stream where it flows out through the wet meadow south of Farm Lane at Nutbourne was four Roe deer. I have never seen them here before but a local dog walker told me they had been around for some time. They certainly have a fairly safe, if damp, place to hide away during the day here and perhaps at night they emerge to scump apples in the nearby orchards? +++

Another unusual deer sighting reached me today from Andrew Brook of the Friends of Hollybank Woods at Emsworth. I know there are many Fallow Deer in Stansted Forest and in the Southleigh Forest which is only separated from the south of Stansted by one field and a road that is little used at night, but to get into the Hollybank Woods from the northern part of Southleigh Forest deer have to cross the Emsworth Common Road which is busy both by day and night. The traffic noise no doubt keeps the deer at bay, and those that do attempt to cross often suffer the penalty of death - early in the morning of New Year's Day in 2003 I cycled along the road early in the morning and saw the roadside corpses of two Fallow Deer with half a mile of each other, and no doubt accidents occur regularly but the corpses are hopefully removed. +++

Roe Deer are I think resident in Hollybank Woods and can sometimes be seen in the fields south of the wood along Long Copse Lane, as well as disturbed in the wood, but until last year I had not heard of Fallow Deer there. Today Andrew tells me that, as well as earlier sightings of other Fallow, he saw a white animal there on Dec 28 - I'm not sure if these white-haired deer are strictly albinos but I think they are not uncommon as 'sports' among the Fallow population. I have in the past seen them both at Stansted and in the New Forest (in the Ober Heath area between Brockenhurst and Rhinefield)

WEEK 1 29 DEC 2003 - 4 JAN 2004

BIRDS

FRI 02 JAN

With most of the New Year's Day sightings and list totals now in I have far too much detail to record in full and I have spent my time preparing checklist of all the bird species that seem to have been around in Hampshire, Sussex and the Isle of Wight on New Year's Day. My list includes all the species reported as seen by observers on Jan 1, plus those seen on Jan 2 which have been reported in the last few days of December and are unlikely to have

moved away between the two dates, and a few resident species which must have been present somewhere in the three counties though they have not appeared on recent lists (e.g. Nuthatch and Marsh Tit, but not Willow Tit) This list indicates that the indefatigable, all seeing birder, moving at the speed of light between the various sites in the three counties, could have seen up to 168 species during the day. +++

Of the 168 nine species are rather dubious - these are Black Swan (is there still a pair at East Ashling west of Chichester, or at Benbow Pond at Cowdray Park east of Midhurst?), Common Scoter (no reports since Dec 14), Ruddy Duck (again not seen at Blashford Lakes or Rye Harbour since Dec 14), Black Kite (just one sighting on Dec 21 of the bird that was around Cheesefoot Head through the previous winter), Sandwich Tern (with a sighting on Dec 31 surely one of these was still around), Long and Short Eared Owls (both must be present), Siberian Chiffchaff (not reported from Coldwaltham sewage farm since Dec 16), and Little Bunting (Ben Rackstraw almost convinced himself that there was one on the Downs south of Storrington today). Deducting these nine leaves us with a target of 159 for the perfect score against which individual results should be measured! +++

Before looking at the various scores that have been reported two birds deserve an aside. The first is Long-eared Owl which, David Thelwell tells us, was the subject of a news item in the Hampshire Chronicle for the past week. The paper tells us that one of these owls, ringed in Latvia to prove its origin, was found enmeshed in fruit netting in a garden close to Winchester cathedral. It was taken to a wildlife rescue centre in Overton - end of story so far. The other bird is the Little Bunting seen/heard by Ben Rackstraw who says .. 'I heard a 'tsik' call, reminiscent of the first note of a Corn Bunting song, coming from behind me as I passed through the small copse at TQ073121. Got a quick glimpse of the bird making the call, not a Corn Bunting, but a 'Reed Bunting' type, before it flew along the hedgerow. Followed it down there and managed to get about half a second view in the scope, when saw that it had an eyering and chestnut ear coverts and very neat black streaking on white underparts. Was pretty sure it was a LITTLE BUNTING, having recently seen 100s of these in China, but wanted to get the full suite of characteristics to make certain. Unfortunately the bird had other ideas and disappeared from view. A few minutes later I relocated it by its call, but this time it was coming from the other side of the hedge and I didn't get a view of it through optics before it disappeared again. This was at 11am, and I spent the next 2.5 hours trying to relocate it without success.' All this occurred today on the downs south of Storrington (between Kithurst Hill and Lee Farm) where a large flock of finches has been present since Nov 30. Whether or not the Little Bunting was there Ben definitely heard two Corn Buntings singing and saw a single Tree Sparrow in the Lee Farm area. +++

The nearest to the 159 total was an Isle of Wight team, including Derek Hale, which clocked up 104 between them though Derek's personal total was just 100. Next highest score was 83 achieved by John Norton and Peter Raby in the stretch of coast from Titchfield Haven east to Budds Farm, centred on Gosport), and this same total is given by Bob Chapman as being present in the Farlington Marshes to Langstone South Moors stretch of the Langstone Harbour shore (as far as I can tell no one person or team saw all of these but they are the sum of reports reaching Bob Chapman). No doubt there were many other listers out who achieved scores in the 80 to 100 region but the only other totals that I am aware of are my own (63), Nigel Johnson (61), Brian Fellows's walk party (Emsworth to Thorney Deeps) which listed 55 (no doubt Brian and others in the party had higher scores when they included species they saw in addition to those seen during the walk), and John Goodspeed (53 in the Bedhampton-Budds Farm area). +++

In my website I have included the table of 168 possible species here but will not include it in the Word document version.

Today's best Hampshire news is of the arrival of two Whitefront Geese in the Avon valley for the first time this winter. The news came from David Taylor but the finder was Ian Southworth who saw the geese with Greylags somewhere south of Ringwood and north of the Avon Causeway. +++

The Titchfield Haven list for today includes a Black-throated Diver (probably the bird that was seen from Fishbourne and Newtown on the Isle of Wight on New Year's eve and in Hayling

Bay on Christmas Day) and a Guillemot as well as 50 Eider +++
Other Hampshire news is of two Razorbills actively fishing off Southsea Castle (seen by Brian Fellows) and a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming at Fleet (heard by Rob Edmunds).
Further Sussex news for today starts in the east with 26 Smew at Rye Harbour (until last week the record number seen there was 17 then on Dec 29 that went up to 25 and now today there is another one!). Also in the Rye area six Bewick's Swans were seen, the male Red-crested Pochard re-appeared (last seen in November), two Little Gulls, two Long-tailed Duck, a Bittern and a Black-necked Grebe were seen and 14 Egrets came to roost. Nearby at Pett both the Shorelark and the Red-necked Grebe were seen. +++
At Newhaven two unusual items were a Dartford Warbler and two Gadwall on the sea and inland the Great Northern Diver was still at Weir Wood reservoir and the Gill's Lap Great Grey Shrike was seen in Ashdown Forest. In the west of the county the Yellow-browed Warbler was still showing well at Ivy Lake, Chichester.

THU 01 JAN

The Isle of Wight birders team (including Derek Hale) scored 104 species today and I will not attempt to list them but their Red-throated Diver, Fulmar, Black Redstart and Tree Creeper appeared on no other lists. They also appear to be alone in listing both Grey and Red-legged Partridge. In Sussex Ben Rackstraw did well with 2 (maybe 3) Hawfinch near Staple Ash Farm by West Dean Woods (more than 20 Brambling were in the woods) and at Coates Common he had the only Crossbills of the day (a group of 17 with an unexpected Little Egret flying over).

In Hampshire one of the less expected New Year's Day sightings came from Alistair Martin who saw the drake Goosander take off from Sinah Lake where it was last reported on Dec 8. Alistair also sent me a nice picture of a Med Gull taken from the comfort of his car in the beach carpark across the Seafront road from Chichester Avenue. +++

More local sightings come from Bob Chapman's list of 83 species seen today in the north of Langstone Harbour. One of the less expected was a Buzzard which decided to perch in the section of Farlington Marshes north of the A27 where three Chiffchaffs are present. The wintering Whimbrel was off the Point of the Marshes and around 1000 Knot were in the harbour. A total of 22 Gadwall were on the lake, an estimated 50 Pintail were near the Deeps, and as well as the Dark-bellied Brent two Pale-bellied birds were present (plus the half-size Canada - aka Cackling - Goose). Avocet were still present - I think seven were seen - and both Peregrine and Merlin flew over with two Kestrels also seen. Surprisingly only one Snipe was seen but some 400 Bar-tailed Godwit flew into Langstone Harbour from Chichester Harbour. The female Scaup was on Budds Farm pools with the 'Fudge Duck' and a Common Sandpiper was in the tidal channel of the Brockhampton Stream (John Goodspeed had a Green Sandpiper on the Langbrook). Linnets are hard to find at the moment but Bob says that a small flock was on the South Moors, off which 9 Black-necked and 1 Slavonian Grebe were seen. +++

John Goodspeed noted Shoveler and Pochard on the Budds Farm pools and saw a Kingfisher on the Brockhampton stream as well as a few Gadwall on Bedhampton Mill Pool. +++

The walk led by Brian Fellows from Emsworth to the Thorney Deeps west attracted 24 people and started with a Sparrowhawk low over the meeting place. Among other birds they had encounters with up to 5 Kingfishers, a close up of a Greenshank, and less good views of Bearded Tits at the Little Deeps (where a Grey Wagtail was a bonus).

Peter Raby's high scoring outing recorded a Dartford Warbler at Stokes Bay, a Green Sandpiper in Bridgemary (almost on his home doorstep), and 2 Purple Sandpipers plus 11 Sanderling at Southsea Castle. Had he stayed at home he might have seen a Peregrine perched in trees overlooking his garden (his wife saw it while he was out), but Trevor Carpenter was at home to see what was probably the same bird fly south over his north Fareham home (the first bird of the year for him!) +++

Simon Woolley does not tell us the details of his daylist but deserves a special prize for seeing some 750 Bramblings in the Longwood Warren area where he also noted Lesser Redpoll +++

Other good birds in Hampshire were two Corn Buntings at Cheesefoot Head seen (with Yellowhammers) by Colin Allen who went on the tick the Great White Egret at Alresford. Tony Hale saw the other Great Egret at the Blashford Lakes and also saw 13 Bewick's Swans at Ibsley +++

Another successful day was had by John Faithfull at Curbridge on the River Hamble - his list included 6 Greenshank, 2 Common Sandpipers, 70 Redwing and 30 Fieldfare.

Setting out for my own New Year's Day bird listing cycle ride at 7:20am with the rain still falling and no hint of dawn lightening the sky I expected to be back home, drenched and disheartened, within a couple of hours. Ten minutes later I was on the shore at Langstone, the rain had stopped and a woodpecker (assumed to be Great Spotted) was drumming in the trees along the Lymbourne stream to welcome the dawn. An hour later the sky was cloudless and a bright sun was shining, and although I saw a couple of bright rainbows later in the morning the rain which caused them did not reach me - just to show this interlude was purely for my benefit serious rain began again as I was cycling home, continuing for about ten minutes until I reached home around 12:30. +++

My five hour ride took me along the shore east from Langstone to Nutbourne Bay and gave me a reasonable list of 63 species, the best items being Bearded Tits and Cetti's Warbler, and among the inevitable species that I missed were Kingfisher, Pochard, Snipe, Turnstone and the Avocet which had been seen yesterday at Nutbourne Bay (though I did have a chat with the person who had seen them yesterday and who told me that they had been off the south-west point of the bay where the the shore path turns south down the Chidham peninsula towards Cobnor point, and they were seen at low tide). In the Nutbourne area I did see both Redwing and Fieldfare, plus Knot and Goldeneye in the bay, and at Thornham Point a small flock of at least 6 Reed Bunting gave me a tick that I was not expecting. A much bigger flock of more than 50 small birds seen distantly in flight over the Prinsted shore fields remained unidentified, though I am pretty sure they were Linnets. +++

One reason for leaving home before it was light was the hope of seeing the Egrets leaving the Wade Court roost and getting a better count than the 20 or so birds that I have seen entering the roost at night recently - perhaps if I had stopped for half an hour or more to watch the north side of the roost I would have done so, but with no birds to be seen on my arrival I went on to look for other birds in the Langstone area, and when I came back to have another look I could only see 13 Egrets - some of these set off inland as I watched but I have no idea how many had already gone by then. +++

Greenshank were found scattered round the shore from Warblington to the Thorney Great Deeps - I saw and heard at least six - but gulls (other than Black-headed) were in short supply. I did not find a Common Gull until I got to Emsworth Harbour where I saw my only Lesser Blackback (a pale British bird) and I only saw two Great Black-backs flying over. Med Gull was not on my list though I had hopes when I saw that one bird on Langstone Pond had the typical black shawl around the back of its head but it did not have the characteristic heavy bill and the mantle was the same shade of grey as the surrounding Black-headed (one of which at Emsworth already had a full black face mask).

Recent Hampshire news that I have just seen is of the two Snow Buntings still being present on Hurst spit yesterday, seen by Tony Hale, and Simon Woolley tells us that on Dec 28 when he was at Cheesefoot Head he saw a Red-kite being mobbed by corvids which included two Ravens. +++

Sussex news for yesterday (Dec 31) includes 23 Whitefront and 27 Barnacle Geese at Rye, where Black-throated and Great Northern Divers were both seen, and at Climping near the mouth of the River Adur Owen Mitchell came on 20 Grey Partridge.

WED 31 DEC

An item which caught my eye on the SOS website today was the first news of Avocet in the Nutbourne Bay/Thorney Channel area this winter. Today Peter Bulfield saw six of them near Chidham Point (the south west point of Nutbourne Bay) at low tide, reminding me that a flock of around 12 were in the Thorney Channel a couple of winters ago (early Jan 2002 when there was also a flyover sighting of 25 birds) and a flock of 17 were seen by Barry

Collins on 1 Jan 2003 (with 14 still there on Jan 3). Maybe these birds lurk in Chichester Harbour for much of the winter without being seen as it seems likely that regular sightings on or around New Years Day (and not at other times) may be more observer than bird related! +++

Off Church Norton 13 Slavonian Grebe were seen today but I see that there were 15 there on Nov 18 so no new record has been set

Today saw a mini-influx of Purple Sandpipers into Hampshire and the Isle of Wight with two seen at Southsea Castle (with the tide low) by Richard Hallett and three seen by Derek Hale on the Bembridge Foreland - these three were the first to appear on the Isle of Wight this autumn, and at Southsea there have only been three previous sightings, all of single birds, on Nov 9, Dec 8 and 19. There has been no shortage of these birds in Sussex (on Nov 24 there were 9 at Newhaven and 11 at Brighton, and on Dec 8 the count at Newhaven was 12 birds) +++

Other birds seen on the Isle of Wight by Derek today included a Common Sandpiper at Fishbourne (the first report this year of a wintering bird on the Island), and also at Fishbourne a Black-throated Diver was on the water - possibly the same bird was also reported from Newtown Harbour but that could well have been a different bird as the two places are around ten miles apart. The 'pelagic' Black-necked Grebe was once again on the sea off Ryde.

Tim Norriss went to Black Point on Hayling today and found two Red-necked Grebe in Chichester Harbour north west of Black Point off Tournerbury marsh/golf course with a total of 5 Razorbills out on the water and a single Sandwich Tern flying over it - presumably the same bird which Chris Corrigan saw from Cobnor Point yesterday and probably one of the four that seem to have based themselves in Langstone Harbour this winter (but wander widely to the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Chichester Harbours). On the shore at Black Point Tim saw a few Knot and one Sanderling (possibly in the roost at Seagull Island west of Black Point). +++

Tim could not find the Snow Bunting at the Kench but went on to the Oysterbeds where he saw a Kingfisher, and offshore he saw two groups of six and four Black-Necked Grebe respectively - the smaller group had a Slav Grebe with it as 'leader of the pack' so maybe both the Slav Grebes that Mike Collins saw on Christmas Eve are still around. +++

Other Hampshire sightings for today were of a Red Kite seen by Stephen Harvey over Cheriton (south of Alresford), and of a small flock of 29 Siskin and 4 Redpoll seen by Bob Marchant by the River Itchen near Eastleigh. At Testwood Lakes Ian Pibworth has been regularly seeing much larger flocks of Siskin (80 to 150 birds) through the winter but a couple of recent reports of 'first Siskin in gardens' seems to indicate the arrival of more of these birds in Hampshire and Bob's sighting could well be part of this influx as Colin Bates has not mentioned Siskin in the Brambridge area by the Itchen since October. I also see that Simon Ingram's sightings at the Lakeside Country Park in Eastleigh included 20 to 40 Siskin through much of November, but since Dec 8 he has not seen more than two Siskin there - perhaps they too are about to return in strength (though it could equally well be that the birds that were there have exhausted the food supply from the Alders around the lakes and just moved to those along the Itchen!) +++

One place where the seed supply has not yet run out is Longwood Warren where today Mark Litjens noted several hundred Brambling on the sunflowers planted as a 'game crop'

Thinking that the weather would not permit an outing on New Year's Day I made a tour of the inland area north east of Havant, going through Westbourne and up the Ems Valley to return through Stansted East Park and the Southleigh Forest. Several bird species seemed to be enjoying the sunshine and I heard song from Mistle Thrush and Coal Tit as well as the expected Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon. In the past I have said that I do not count Greenfinch as singing unless that song is given in the characteristic song flight above the bird's territory - this morning one was in full song except that it remained perched! +++

The biggest surprise of this outing was to find Aldsworth Pond still empty of water despite all the recent rain, but that area gave me a close encounter with three Bullfinch in the hedge of

the road leading to Sindles Farm, and the sight of some 2000 gulls on the meadows near the farm (one Lesser Black-back, perhaps 300 Common Gulls and the rest being Black-headed - I thought I heard the mew of a Med Gull among them but could not spot one). +++

Climbing to the hill top east of Aldsworth Pond I came on a rarity for the Havant area - an active Rookery with at least 50 Rooks. These birds seem to have vanished from the rookeries in Emsworth.

TUE 30 DEC

A list of sightings at Rye Harbour for today comes from Sam Smith and on it I read of 111 Snipe and 6 Jack Snipe. 40 Snipe were at Rye on Nov 20 and 81 were reported by Sam on Dec 9 but today's count sounds as if a lot more birds have arrived recently (probably from the continent). This may not apply to the Jack Snipe as I see that Andy Mayo reported 7 there on Nov 23 +++

Less good news from Rye was that Sam could only find 20 Corn Bunting where there were 68 on Dec 18, but this is balanced out by a count of 250 Linnet (the highest count this autumn easily beating an estimated 100 in September). +++

In Chichester Harbour Chris Corrigan took a walk around the Cobnor peninsula (to the north of Itchenor) and reports that he saw both a Sandwich Tern in the Chichester channel off Cobnor Point and a Water Pipit in the flooded field inside the seawall path at the Point. +++

Also in Chichester Harbour John Shillitoe saw a Red-throated Diver in the harbour entrance off Black Point on Hayling

Hampshire news for today is limited to a sighting of the Langstone Harbour female Scaup having a rest on Budds Farm Pools (seen by Bob Marchant) and a further sighting of the long staying Great White Egret at Alresford (seen today by Simon Woolfries in Arlebury Park) Sightings of this bird have often been of it skulking in a ditch but around midday Simon saw it fly into a tree and give 'full frontal' views

News from the Isle of Wight for Dec 28 is of a male Velvet Scoter off Seaview, and of 14 Grey Partridge plus 2 Water Pipits and a single Corn Bunting in the Whale Chine area just west of St Catherine's Point +++

On Dec 27 Richard Ford found seven Grey Partridge and more than 10 Brambling in the Kingsley area to the east of Alton (close to Sleaford on the A325) and over the Christmas holiday John Gowen was surprised to find a Little Egret by the River Churn (a tributary of the River Severn which it joins near Gloucester) when he was walking between North Cerney and Cirencester. +++

I know that Little Egrets have now spread well north round both the east and west coasts, and heard earlier this year of successful breeding in north Buckinghamshire which (as Ed Griffiths remarked when telling me this news .. 'is about as far inland as you can get in England'). I have no idea of the current size of the British population of Little Egrets, nor of where their front line has now reached as they move northwards, but I see in the latest issue of British Wildlife mag that 18 different breeding colonies were known nationwide in 2001, and that this summer a total of 22 pairs raised 60 young at just two colonies in Norfolk. Recent roost counts listed in the same Bird News column show that 400 birds were roosting in Essex on Oct 18, 104 birds were at Holkham Pines in Norfolk on Nov 3 and 60 were at a north Wales site (Aber-Ogwen reserve in Gwynedd) on Oct 10.

MON 29 DEC

Yesterday's Sussex news of a very large finch flock feeding on the downs south of Storrington may be an indication of hard weather soon to come, and today we may have had another warning from the birds as a new record was set at Rye Harbour for the overall count of Smew on Castle Water. The previous all time record had been 17 of these ducks seen there together but today there were 25 present (three of them 'White Nun' drakes). I hope that some of them will have the decency to move west to the Chichester Lakes so that we can enjoy them - I think the last time they were seen there was in the winter of 2000.

SUN 28 DEC

On Nov 30 Adrian Thomas discovered a large finch flock on the Sussex Downs near Lee Farm (south of Storrington and Kithurst Hill) and among them he saw 50 Brambling. A

week later Bernie Forbes upped the estimated Brambling count to greater than 70 and on Dec 11 he thought that 150 were present. This flock has remained in the area and today Bernie Forbes made a further visit, finding 250 Brambling, 300 Chaffinch, 200 Greenfinch, 200 Linnet, 50 Yellowhammer, 50 Corn Bunting and 20 Reed Bunting. Most of these Finches and Buntings are feeding in Sweetcorn (Maize) belts, but elsewhere in that area were flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing, 3 Ringtail Hen Harriers, 4 Buzzards, a Sparrowhawk and a Merlin.

Here in Hampshire a Yellow-browed Warbler was seen this afternoon by Doug Robertson working its way along the vegetation in a ditch visible from the Knightsbank Hide at Titchfield Haven. Although I have seen twenty reports of this species from Sussex this autumn (11 of them being of the one bird at the Chichester Ivy Lake area), and three from the Isle of Wight this is only the second Hampshire sighting I know of this autumn. The first report came from Mark Edgeller on Oct 5 when he saw one on the Brownwich cliffs near the Sea House and watched it for 25 minutes - I just wonder if this bird has been in the same area ever since, evading the notice of all birders until today? +++

Another bird that has probably been around, unseen or at least unreported for several weeks, is a Sandwich Tern which John Shillitoe saw this morning at Sandy Point on Hayling Island (entrance of Chichester Harbour). In mid-November Bob Chapman told us that up to four Sandwich Terns were still around in Langstone Harbour. Since then I have not heard any reports from Langstone Harbour but three of these birds were reported to be off the northeast tip of the Isle of Wight on Nov 28, and there have been three reports of them in Portsmouth Harbour on Nov 26, 29 and Dec 6 (two of these reports were of single birds, one was of two birds). I suspect that John's bird was one of the group of four that seemed to have settled down to winter in and around Langstone Harbour - if so it has been doing a good job of evading detection this month as I have not heard of any since Dec 6. +++

John Shillitoe also found the Snow Bunting still showing at the Kench today but there have been no recent reports of either the hybrid Ruddy Shelduck which Keith Betton saw near the Kench on Dec 18, nor of the male Goosander that was on Sinah Lake from Dec 6 - 9. Ian Pibworth's weekly dawn to dusk Sunday vigil at the Testwood Lakes today gave him a count of 124 Tufted Duck leaving the lakes between 6:30 and 7am and not returning until after dark (just four remained at the site during the day). Unlike Pochard, which spend the day sleeping and feed nocturnally or in the half-light, Tufted Duck seem to feed actively in the day time and presumably rest at night so I assume they use the Meadow Lake at Testwood as a safe place to sleep and move to feed elsewhere by day - can anyone comment on their habits, and say if this use of different sites for feeding and sleeping is usual with the species? I have previously thought of them as staying on the same water day and night for lengthy periods. +++

Ian's count of 124 birds is double his other counts there this year (65 on Jan 19 and around 60 on Dec 12) so it may indicate the arrival of lots more of these duck in our area, but it could well be that he has not seen the majority of the birds on other visits when they have flown out or returned outside Ian's 'working hours'. +++

Also on Ian's list today were two Ravens passing over and 40 Meadow Pipit presumably staying to feed. The Ravens were seen in mid November (and one flew over on March 30), but they are not regular at this site. +++

At Eastleigh Lakeside today Simon Ingram saw 300 Golden Plover - this number have been in the area since the beginning of December.

Winter sunshine from a sky recently cleared of clouds by a fresh northerly wind invited me to walk the shore from Langstone to Emsworth at low tide this morning. The two highlights were a close view of a one-legged Greenshank at Langstone Mill and a flock of some 50 Skylarks over the Warblington farm fields. Also noteworthy was the re-appearance of at least 150 Teal in the Wade Court south meadow from which they have been strangely absent in the past few days. +++

The Greenshank must be the bird I last saw off Nore Barn at Warblington on Nov 28 - it only has a right leg but this is conveniently ringed with yellow over red. This morning it was in the Langstone Mill outfall stream and having difficulty in moving about against the strong

flow of the stream and the northerly wind, and it had to use its wings to assist the start, and to steady itself at the end, of each hop. When I got to the place where I saw it in November (in the similar outfall stream from the eastern fields of Warblington Farm which runs in front of the Nore Barn woodland) there was a different Greenshank. +++

In between these two ends of the shore that I walked there were more than 200 Brent and perhaps 100 Lapwing but few other birds. The Wigeon were down to around 20 and there were no Dunlin or Bar-tailed Godwit but I did see three Ringed Plover with the expected few Redshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Curlew plus some 30 Shelduck. +++

Looking inland over the fields I saw at least 44 Skylark in one flock above the largest field on the Warblington Church to Nore Barn path, probably put up with some 100 Wood Pigeons by passing dogs, so the Skylark flock may have been considerably larger but I did not go along that path to see. At the end of my circuit I once more saw the male Kestrel fly off from the Old Rectory area in Pook Lane - maybe it is attracted by the presence of mice around the Pook Lane stables?

I think a few more Green Sandpiper have recently moved into the area around Portsmouth - in addition to the Havant newcomer that I found by the Langbrook stream on Christmas day (see notes for Dec 25) Peter Raby today found a newcomer at a pool in the Bridgemary area of north Gosport. I also see from recent messages that Mike Collins had another new Green Sandpiper in Havant on Dec 25 - one back in the Lavant stream where it flows alongside New Lane in West Leigh. This influx does not seem to have reached the Lower Test marshes which Paul Winter visited today and found only two Sandpipers (Simon Harthill had three there on Nov 30). Paul also found 5 Water Pipits - no change from the Nov 30 count

The only other news for today that I have seen so far comes from Derek Hale on the Isle of Wight where he had a Firecrest in Paradise Walk on the sloping cliffs above St Lawrence (between Ventnor and St Catherine's Point). Inland in the Godshill area more than 70 Fieldfare (but only one Redwing) were seen near Leechmore Cross - I think a lot of the coastal Fieldfare on the mainland have now moved inland but these birds on the Island may be wise to remain there if it is going to turn cold in the New Year.

SAT 27 DEC

Mike Rafter was in the area east of Cheesefoot Head today and found three Twite among the big finch flock feeding on Sunflower seeds at Longwood Warren - on Nov 4 Mike thought he saw a group of half a dozen Twite out on Hurst Spit but the birds flew off before he could be sure, and on Nov 17 Bob Chapman saw two Twite with a group of Linnet on the Farlington Marshes seawall but they have not been seen again. +++

Maybe some of the up to 200 Brambling that have been in the Longwood Warren area have moved on as Mike could only find around 80 today, but to balance these out there were some 60 Golden Plover. Mike also watched an exciting chase of a Merlin by a Peregrine though he did not see the full drama - it seemed that the Peregrine forced the Merlin to abandon its prey and then caught the small bird before it hit the ground (that is all conjecture based on the Peregrine being last seen making off with a small bird which it did not have in its talons when first seen chasing the Merlin)

On the Hampshire coast John Faithfull had a very good tick at the Hook Links in the shape of a Bittern. John's sighting was at 11:50, and around 12:45 Bill Marjeram also saw a Bittern at Titchfield Haven. We can only guess if they were the same bird but it could be that one flew in from distant parts and touched down at Hook, decided it was not the best place to stay and moved on to the Haven. If so there should now be at least two Bitterns at the Haven as one has been reported there on six different days from Oct 21 to Dec 12. (Of course the Hook sighting could have been of that original bird taking a short day trip) +++

Doug Robertson was also at the Haven and found a Water Pipit in Hill Head harbour sheltering from wind and rain in the lee of a boat, offering further proof that Water Pipits do occasionally appear on the shore.

In reply to a query posed yesterday by Steve Mansfield as to whether Little Egrets can be seen at Woolmer Pond Richard Ford said they were rarely seen there but added that up to three regularly roosted at Forest Mere which is only some four kilometres southeast of

Woolmer but happens to be just inside the Sussex boundary. I presume Richard means a night roost, and if so I think it is interesting to have confirmation that at least some of the Egrets which move inland in the winter months are happy to spend their nights in small groups close to their chosen feeding areas rather than to fly long distances to larger, longer established roosts. I rather suspect that there are more of these small roosts waiting to be discovered.

More Sussex news on the SOS website reveals the presence of another Great Grey Shrike - this one on Heyshott Common not far south east of Midhurst. It was seen by Tony Deleiros who also watched a ringtail Hen Harrier working the common and saw 8 Dartford Warblers and six Stonechats there. (Although no Shrikes have been reported from Heyshott Common this winter one was seen on nearby Ambersham Common by Pete Brown on Nov 19) +++

Tony also reports the presence of more than 400 Canada Geese and over 200 Greylag with many Wigeon, Shoveler, Pintail and Teal on Amberley Wild Brooks near his home at Bury. +++

Anonymous reports say that the Yellow Browed Warbler is still at the Chichester Lakes and that at least two Brant are still at West Wittering

PLANTS

THU 01 JAN

A five hour cycle ride along the north shore of Chichester harbour from Langstone to Nutbourne today gave me some good birds but very few wild flowers. The only two items of interest were the Winter Heliotrope flowers at Wade Court, Langstone, which were giving off a strong scent in the early morning, and the bright colour of Greater Periwinkle flowers in Thornham Lane on Thorney Island. +++

Brian Fellows was the first to remark on the scent of Winter Heliotrope flowers (at Brook Meadow in Emsworth) in his newsletter for Christmas week and I also smelt those at Wade Court during that week on the morning of Christmas Eve - both then and today the scent was powerful but at other times during the week I have passed the plants without smelling them and I wonder if the scent is only given off in the early morning (or maybe overnight to attract moths?) +++

Other flowers which went on my list today were the inevitable Annual Mercury, Hogweed and Common Gorse plus a single flower of Common Ragwort that persists on a plant that was earlier mown on my lawn, plus a few roadside Daisies and some Scentless Mayweed

WED 31 DEC

Happening to cycle along Woodlands Lane from Walderton (in the Ems valley) towards Stansted House I stopped at the top of the steep hill up from Walderton to cast around for signs of Green Hellebore leaves under the Hazel trees lining the lane but found none, nor were there any flowers yet on the mass of Lesser Periwinkle carpetting the ground on the other side of the lane. One clump of Spurge Laurel had a good show of buds, but again none had opened their long tubes to reveal the bright yellow anthers. +++

One thing that I did see here was a Hazel tree covered with fully open catkins, and I cannot believe that this is not a native specimen - certainly it is not a 'Council planted' specimen but an outcrop of a large block of what was once Hazel coppice in Lordington Copse to which the lane acts as northern boundary.

MON 29 DEC

I wonder if anyone can comment on a strange item of botanic folk-lore which I heard on the radio this morning? The discussion in which I heard it was focussing on hangover cures and one contributor said that the dried and powdered stems of Milk Thistle served as a good antidote for both alcohol and mushroom poisoning. I am not sure if a pinch of salt would help or hinder this cure but I think I would take one with it!

INSECTS

FRI 02 JAN

In my notes for Dec 22 I passed on details of the life cycle of the Lesser Stag Beetle which

John Goodspeed had discovered in a Readers Digest Butterfly book and today Rob Edmunds has sent me similar information about the larger Stag Beetle. Rob says .. 'They leave their food (wood) in August and make a cocoon in the soil. It is about the size of a hen's egg! The pupal stage is only about 6 weeks and then the beetle crawls out of its pupal skin (it can take two days to do so). The wings then harden over the next 24 hours and it then leaves its cocoon, but remains underground for the next 8 months. This has given rise to the story of hibernating Stag beetles, and accounts for the fact that Stag beetles can be dug up in winter.'

THU 01 JAN

The first moth of the year to be reported on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website was seen today by Paul Boswell on the outside of a window at his home in Greywell, near Fleet. The species was *Agonopterix heracliaria* which will mean little to any but moth enthusiasts who will know it as one of the *Oecophoridae* - a large group of small moths (including the Brown House Moth which has a reputation of eating our clothes) which have a flattened or depressed appearance. Last year the first report of this species (also by Paul) was on Feb 8 but I don't know if this one is exceptionally early.

WED 31 DEC

A message from John Goodspeed today tells me that he currently has a collection of four Hawkmoths in his garage - three as pupae from caterpillars found earlier in the year and the latest being a Hummingbird Hawkmoth which was found hibernating on the outside wall of his son's garage in Kent before he brought it back to Portsdown and (presumably) persuaded the sleeping insect to re-attach itself to a different garage wall. +++

Searching back through earlier notes from John I see he took in a *Convolvulus* Hawk caterpillar on Sep 22 and a Privet Hawk on Aug 7 but I cannot recall what the fourth species might be.

In my entry for Dec 24, before being overwhelmed by the holiday season, I reported Derek Mills' find of what looked like a Winter Moth but was clearly different. Derek got an answer to his request for the moth's true identity by Boxing Day - Tim Norriss told him it was a Mottled Umber, a species that can be variable in its appearance and which is on the wing at this time of year. Even I can add that it was a male as this is one of the species in which the female is wingless and may be found climbing oaks and other trees after dark

OTHER WILDLIFE

THU 01 JAN

Among Bob Chapman's list of birds seen today in the north of Langstone Harbour he includes a mention of a Common Seal, seen eating a flatfish off the Langstone South Moors. As with yesterday's note about White Squirrels, Phil Budd's friend would very much like to get a photograph of a Common Seal to put alongside a photo he already has of a Grey Seal (much less common in this area) seen in the past off the Isle of Wight. If anyone knows of a spot where Common Seals haul out regularly enough to make a trip to photograph them worthwhile please let me know.

WED 31 DEC

Back on Dec 13 I passed on a news item which I had seen on the SOS (Sussex Ornithological Soc) website reporting the presence of a pure white Grey Squirrel in Eastbourne - one had just been seen in Hampden Park in that town and someone else commented that the white strain had been present there for a good many years. +++

This news prompted Phil Budd (as seen on TV recently!) to ask me if I knew of a reliable site at which a white one could be photographed by a friend of his who already has pictures of the black variety (taken at Norton Common near Letchworth by the A1 in Hertfordshire just over the county boundary from Bedfordshire in which the Black Squirrels originally escaped from the Woburn collection). +++

I am aware of many sightings of white squirrels in the Portsmouth area over the past twenty years but I do not know anywhere that they can be seen regularly enough for it to be worth suggesting that someone travel here to photograph them - can anyone out there help with a reliable site?

