

## RALPH HOLLINS NATURE NOTES FOR 2008

### SUMMARY FOR DEC 22 - 28 (WEEK 51 OF 2008)

#### Highlights:

Early signs of spring this week include **Shags raising their crests in display** and **a pair of Buzzards in aerial display** while a **Blackbird has joined the list of songsters**.

New behaviour (new to me!) came in a report of a **Kestrel mugging a Short-eared Owl**, but failing to steal its prey, and in a description of **800 Rooks taking a dawn cold bath** in a stream at Lymington.

**Rarities** include the **first reported Golden Plover in Hampshire since 2002**, and **oddities** include a **black and white Coot** at West Ashling pond. Here in Havant **40 Golden Plover were on the Langstone mud** and **at Southsea Castle the Purple Sandpiper count increased to 15**. More **Waxwings have arrived at seven south coast sites**.

Moths continue to come to traps and this week I learnt that at least one species that does not normally appear until February (**Hebrew Character**) has **a trick that allows it to take advantage of any warm spells earlier in the winter**. Instead of a gradual development of the adult moth throughout the pupation period it becomes fully formed within the pupa at an early stage (late autumn) and can thus emerge as soon as conditions are right.

We have not quite reached the 100 mark with the **December flowering plant list but are on 94**, and this week added **Meadow Buttercup, Common Rampion, Fumitory, Dog Rose** and **Cow Parsley** plus **Water Forget-me-not, Blue Fleabane** and **Red-hot Poker** as well as the **first fully open cultivated Daffodils**.

Other wildlife also has news of **Great Crested Newts having already having laid their first eggs** and **Frogs already back in garden ponds**. We also have a biology lesson on the development of **Swan Mussel larvae**.

#### **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** The flock off the Titchfield to Warsash shore is normally spread out over a large area and is difficult to count but it had at least 161 birds on Dec 24

**Slavonian Grebe:** The highest count so far of the flock on the sea off Pagham Harbour was of 28 on Dec 24

**Black-necked Grebe:** The flock in Langstone harbour was seen south of Budds Mound on Dec 22 when it had 13 birds in a tight line-ahead group. On Dec 26 it was seen again from the Hayling Oysterbeds, the count then being of 12 (on Dec 1 there was a count of 14 from here)

**Shag:** Birds at Durlston are **already displaying**, raising their prominent crests.

**Bewick's Swan:** No recent reports from the Arundel area but there were 11 on Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 21, probably in addition to 6 at Pulborough Brooks. A family group of three were at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 26 and 27

**Whooper Swan:** One of these was a surprise visitor to Pulborough Brooks on Dec 23

**Black Swan:** A passing look at West Ashling pond (west of Chichester) on Dec 23, found only one of these birds on view

**Whitefront Goose:** Three reports of birds flying east over the Isle of Wight on Dec 26 may have been separate groups of 5, 6 and 7 birds respectively - one may have stayed to be seen at the Bembridge Marshes on Dec 27

**Pale Bellied Brent:** Ferrybridge at Weymouth had a total of 33 on Dec 27, the biggest group anywhere so far this winter.

**Brant:** The Farlington Marshes bird was again seen near the reserve building on Dec 22, the Pagham Harbour bird was seen on Dec 26 and the Gosport bird was on the Sultan Playing fields on Dec 27

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Lymington bird was back again in the Normandy area on Dec 27 after a week in which it seemed to have left the area.

**Velvet Scoter:** A first winter bird has been on the Solent between Titchfield and Warsash from Dec 22 to 27 at least

**Smew:** The Dungeness RSPB reserve had six birds (including one male) on Dec 22

**Goosander:** The number roosting at the Blashford Lakes was up to 85 birds seen leaving at dawn on Dec 23. A new report this week was of five on the Dorset Stour downstream of Blandford in the Shapwick area on Dec 21

**Hen Harrier:** One was hunting in the Kingley Vale area north of Chichester on Dec 21

**Goshawk:** After a recent report of one at Ebernoe Common (north of Midhurst) on Dec 17 one was seen over the Lewes Brooks on Dec 23

**Buzzard:** A **pair were displaying** in the West Grinstead area near Pulborough on Dec 21

**Kestrel:** I am aware that **Kestrels will 'mug' Barn Owls** in attempts to rob them of prey they are carrying, and are sometimes successful but I had not heard of them

doing this to **Short-eared Owls** until Dec 26 when one was photographed making an unsuccessful attempt.

**Golden Pheasant:** On Dec 24 a female was flushed from Ampfield Woods (north east of Romsey) to become the first to be reported in Hampshire since a single male was seen near Ropley in east Hants in 2002.

**Crane:** Birdguides reported a party of four Cranes flying south over Lyndhurst on Dec 27 - so far no other sightings of them

**Coot:** A leucistic bird seen at West Ashling pond (west of Chichester) on Dec 23 had the normally all black plumage of its mantle and wings broken up by a regular pattern of white lozenge shapes

**Avocet:** Around 20 were seen at Farlington Marshes on Dec 22 (same count reported on Dec 13)

**Golden Plover:** A flock of around 40 was on the mud east of Langstone Mill Pond on Dec 27 (a flock of 80 appeared on the Sultan playing fields at Gosport that same day)

**Purple Sandpiper:** A count of 15 at Southsea Castle on Dec 26 was the highest at this site this winter and was one more than a count of 14 made by another observer on that day. On Dec 27 only 12 were seen there

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A count of 214 at Pulborough Brooks on Dec 27 was by far the highest there this autumn (previous max of 70+ on Nov 30) and easily exceeded the early year maximum of 170+ on Feb 1

**Med Gull:** A few of these may have flown west in response to recent cold weather but the effect so far has been marginal - the number at Pagham harbour is reported to have gone down from 85 on Dec 16 to 60 on Dec 27; on Dec 26 Portland reported 28 passing the Bill while the number at Ferrybridge increased from 28 on Dec 26 to 109 on Dec 27 (though there had been 132 there on Nov 16)

**Lesser Blackback:** These seem to be moving east in response to the cold - following mid-month reports of passage east over the Isle of Wight a flock of 800+ was at Arlington Reservoir, north of Beachy Head, on Dec 20 while the number coming to roost at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood was up to 2500 at dusk on Dec 23

**Glaucous Gull:** One at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Dec 21 was the first reported in Dorset this winter.

**Auks:** 316 were seen heading south past the North Foreland in Kent on Dec 25 when 80 were seen off Christchurch Harbour (going east) and on Dec 27 a total of 750 were reported passing Hengistbury Head

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** One drumming in a **Tree of Heaven** 'somewhere in Sussex' on Dec 25 was the fifth to be reported drumming since the first was heard on Nov 19

**Waxwing:** Since Dec 21 small parties of these have been seen at seven new sites - Folkestone (6 birds), Brighton (5), Firlie village north of the Sussex Downs (1 passing), Beaulieu (12 birds stopping a group of racing cyclists in their tracks), Lordshill in Southampton (6), Christchurch Harbour (5 over on Dec 26) and Gosport (16 on Dec 27). The 6 birds at Folkestone on Dec 21 had increased to 27 on Dec 26

**Stonechat:** A possible sighting reported from Warblington Farm on Dec 27 (on posts of shoreline fence east of Pook Lane)

**Blackbird:** Song was reported at Bosham on Oct 10 and in the Worthing area on Oct 14 but no further reports until Dec 24 when one was again heard in the Worthing area

**Song Thrush:** Song reported in the Highcliffe area of Christchurch on Dec 20 and at Emsworth on Dec 23

**Blue Tit:** These have been singing regularly in the Emsworth and Havant area since Dec 23 (**Great Tits** have been heard since Dec 10)

**Great Grey Shrike:** One was seen at a new site for Sussex on Dec 27 (Glynde Reach of the Ouse near Lewes) to become the seventh Sussex site at which there have been sightings this winter. In Hampshire only 3 birds were found in the New Forest survey over the weekend Dec 20/21 and Lee Evans tells us that he is only aware of five different birds currently in the county (all of them in the New Forest).

**Rook:** I recently learnt of the Rook's winter bedtime routine of congregating on areas of open grassland at dusk and only flying into their roost trees when it is effectively dark. Now, on Dec 27, Colin Allen tells us that he was in the Keyhaven area at dawn and was impressed by a congregation of some 800 Rooks at the mouth of the Avon Water stream in which they were having their morning bathe.

## INSECTS

### Moths

**Double-striped Pug (1862 *Gymnoscelis rufifasciata*):** I was not aware of any Pug species being found in winter but the trapping of one in the Newhaven area on Dec 23 elicited the fact that they can be found in all months of the year.

**Hebrew Character (2190 *Orthosia gothica*):** This was also trapped at Newhaven on Dec 22 and was unexpectedly early though the report told me that the species passes the winter as a pupa in which the moth is fully formed at an early stage in the autumn and is thus able to emerge at any time in the winter in response to warm weather.

**The Brick (2262 *Agrochola circellaris*):** This moth is normally on the wing in October and is very rarely seen in December though one was trapped at Portland on Dec 22

### Caterpillars

**Large White:** At least one was still eating cabbages in the Seaford area on Dec 23 and on Dec 25 I saw a large patch of Brussels Sprouts in the New Lane allotments here in Havant which had had every vestige of leaf eaten very

recently, leaving fresh green midribs with no green leaf around them - this must have happened within the past couple of weeks.

## PLANTS

**My count of wild plants flowering in December has now reached 94** (excluding several grass species and some dubious records of what look like **Wavy Bittercress**, having very wavy long stems, but which have less than the six stamens that most Wavy plants are supposed to have)

**Meadow Buttercup:** One tall and flourishing specimen flowering near the Langbrook Stream in Havant on Dec 22 was an addition to the month list

**Lesser Celandine:** In addition to the plants already reported by the Lymbourne stream and on south Hayling I found several more in flower on Dec 23 at the junction of Eastern Road and New Lane in Havant

**Common Ramping Fumitory:** A good addition to the month list found at the New Lane allotments on Dec 25

**Early Dog Violet:** Included in the list as I have seen at least half a dozen flower buds opening on a clump of self sown plants in my garden this month though birds seen to peck off the petals before they are fully open, leaving the empty calyx.

**Dog Rose:** I expect to see a few flowers of this in December and on Dec 22 I found two open flowers on otherwise leafless bushes near the mouth of the Langbrook stream (close to the vandalised bench)

**Hazel:** In addition to the tree overhanging the bus shelter at Langstone the tree by the Hayling Billy Trail at its junction with the path from Grove Road to Lymbourne Road was in full flower on Dec 22

**Cow Parsley:** One plant beside East Leigh Road (just north of its junction with Southleigh Road at Locks Farm) had six umbels in bud on Dec 25 with the topmost having flowers already open.

**Fool's Parsley:** I had found just one plant in Havant on Dec 1 but none since so one found by Brian Fellows flowering in Emsworth on Dec 23 was 'almost' a first for the month

**Water Forget-me-not:** This would probably have continued to flower by the Langbrook stream had it not been cut down during stream clearance at the end of November but it has got on the list now with one re-grown plant flowering on Dec 22

**Blue Fleabane:** A single plant flowering in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Dec 23 was an addition to the month list.

**Red-hot Poker:** What must be a self sown plant growing up through brambles near the north end of Church Lane at Warblington has been seen in flower both this year and last. I recorded it in both August and October and now found it again in flower on Dec 27

**Cultivated Daffodils:** Always eye-catching I spotted three plants in full bloom beside the road to Chichester through Funtington village on Dec 23

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common Frog:** Three of these, along with **three Common Newts**, were back in a pond in the Hastings area on Dec 26 (the newts started to return on Dec 15)

**Great Crested Newt:** Some of these had already laid eggs in water at Romney Marsh, east of Rye Bay, on Dec 26

**Swan Mussel:** The sight of several hundred large shells exposed by reed cutting on the banks of muddy ditches in the Pett area on the shore of Rye Bay provoked an interesting entry on the RX website from Cliff Dean who wrote: ..

"These large freshwater bivalves lead an uneventful life, nestling in the ditchbed ooze, whence they siphon food from the cloudy waters. Their shell is thin compared with their marine relatives, since it never has to contend with crashing waves. They are able to drag themselves about in the water using their muscular foot, but once dredged onto the banks are doomed to death by desiccation or to be smashed by Grey Herons which always shadow the diggers.

**"Their tiny larvae, however, get wafted along in the water by a long thread, a bit like little spiders drifting on gossamer, or clamp onto the fins of passing fish. They remain safely embedded in the fish's skin until they reach maturity, at which point they drop down into the mud.**

"I imagine them to be slow-growing and read somewhere that they can be aged by counting the ridges on the shell (I can't find any reference to this at the moment). This is not so simple however, since there are thick and thin ridges, but many shells exceed 10cm in length. Since the ditches are managed on a regular basis, I would have thought that they would never have the chance to grow so big.

"Such a large and fleshy animal is obviously appreciated as a food item by some birds, but seems never to be recommended for human consumption. However, Swan Mussel shells have been found among other food debris at a Roman military archaeological site".

Cliff has a link to a review of **a new book which may be of interest to some of you and from which he got his info on the life history of the larvae of these Mussels - it is called "Leeches, Lice and Lampreys: A Natural History of Skin and Gill Parasites of Fishes" By Graham C. Kearn** Published by Springer, 2005 ISBN 140202925X, 9781402029257 432 pages. If you visit <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=YAXtYd9gRaQC> and enter Swan Mussel in the search box where it says 'Search in this book' you will be able to see the full text of the book on that subject.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 22 - 28 (WEEK 51 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 27 Dec**

#### **Golden Plover at Langstone and Red Hot Poker in flower**

A phone call from Sue Kent at Lanstone told me of a **possible Stonechat** seen this morning on the shore fence line of the Warblington fields just east of Pook Lane and this settled my choice of outing this afternoon. I did not see the Stonechat but did cycle around the complete periphery of the Warblington fields and added a new flower to my December list with a self sown **Red Hot Poker in flower** at the north end of Church Lane where it comes up through bramble bushes.

Before that I had around **40 Golden Plover** on the mud east of Langstone Pond (with the tide at its lowest) but nothing else unexpected though I noted some **50 Lapwing** in the air and **25 Shelduck** on the mud, and at the Maisemore Gardens stream east of Nore Barn I found the regular colour ringed **Black-tailed Godwit** (but not the **Spotted Redshank**).

Along the north side of Nore Barn Wood the leaves of the **Hairy Garlic** can be seen now that the nettles have been cleared, and one **Sweet Violet** flower caught my eye as I cycled by.

### [Thu 25 Dec](#)

#### **Cow Parsley and Common Ramping Fumitory in flower**

When coming home from Chichester on Tuesday I passed a single plant of **Cow Parsley** which was clearly in bud, and as this was close to home (at the junction of Southleigh Road and East Leigh Road) I took advantage of this morning's sunshine to cycle round there to see if it was now in flower.

On the way there, under the fence of an industrial unit plot, I passed a flowering plant of what I call **Garden Forget-me-not** (the cultivar of **Wood Forget-me-not** which is frequently found as a garden escape), and when I got to the **Cow Parsley** I found that was a large plant with at least six umbels in bud, the topmost of them having a few open flowers. Then, coming home via the New Lane allotments, I stopped for a look for anything of interest and found a third flowering plant new to my December list - **Common Ramping Fumitory**.

Also seen in the allotments was a plot of **Brassica plants whose leaves had seemingly been stripped by Cabbage White caterpillars** (elsewhere in the allotments were cabbages with typical bird peck damage but the ones I am referring to had been completely stripped of all vegetation on the leaves other than the thin midrib vein to show where the leaves had been. This exceptionally late 'plague' of caterpillars has been reported from at least two sites in Sussex since Nov 19, and most recently from one Hampshire location at Corhampton in the Meon valley on Dec 17 - as I have a look at the New Lane allotments whenever I pass them I am pretty certain that the caterpillars here have been active within in the past fortnight (this was confirmed by the still fresh green of the remaining mid-rib veins on the cabbages)

### [Tue 23 Dec](#)

#### **Daffodils in flower and a black and white Coot**

A Christmas shopping trip to Chichester took me along the back road through Funtington where, on the grass bank of a bend in the road at the east end of the village, **three Daffodils were in full flower**. To the west of the village the extensive pig fields had attracted the usual large flocks of **Gulls** and **Rooks**, but

amongst them I noted a new addition in the form of a flock of at least **100**

### **Lapwing.**

On the way home I bypassed Funtington to take the route past East Ashling Pond where I could only see **a single adult Black Swan** among the farmyard mixture of Geese and Ducks but I was interested to see **a Coot whose plumage (at least on the mantle and wings) was patterned with alternate lozenges of white among the normal black.**

Later in the day I had a look at the Eastern Road cemetery here in Havant, finding both **Blue Fleabane** and **Hedge Bedstraw** in flower - the first was new to my December flowering list. While there I looked for, but failed to find, **Early Dog Violet** in flower, nevertheless I have added it the month list as the self-sown plants in my garden have had several flower buds starting to open but never becoming mature flowers as something (presumably birds) pecks the petals off, leaving just the calyx to show where the flower would have been.

Also seen today were more **Sweet Violet flowers** in St Faith's churchyard and at least **three newly flowering Lesser Celandine plants** at the junction of Eastern Road and New Lane

### **Mon 22 Dec**

#### **Dog Rose in flower and Black-necked Grebes off Budds Mound**

In today's gloom I cycled down the Billy Line to Langstone then along the South Moors shore and back via Southmoor Lane. As soon as I reached the Billy Line at the end of Grove Road I found a **Hazel tree with its catkins fully open** but further down the line there was still only one plant of **Lesser Celandine** in flower.

Along the South Moors shore I heard and saw several **Meadow Pipits** flying high overhead and I also heard the wheezy note of a **Rock Pipit** somewhere among the seaweed on the shore, and it confirmed its id by remaining there, not flying up and inland like the **Meadow Pipits**.

Budds Farm pools had at least **20 Pochard** and **8 Gadwall** but only a couple of **Shoveler** among the other expected wildfowl - I also watched what I think was the **Fudge Duck** but it remained persistently asleep and distant, refusing even to rotate to show any white under the tail. I had better luck looking out over the harbour from Budds Mound, finding a group of what I am fairly certain were **13 Black-necked Grebe** coming up the Broad Lake channel past Long Island, heading towards Chalkdock but going no further than the middle on three channel marker posts that lie due south of Budds Mound. The size and 'dumpy but long-necked' look and their close line-ahead formation was all I had to rely on for identification but I cannot think they could be any other species.

Going back up Southmoor Lane I found fresh plants of **Corn Cockle** and **Corn Marigold** in flower with an older plant of **Cornflower** retaining one flower. The **Autumn Ox-eye daisies** and **Small Nettle** were still in flower here, and when I got back to the 'water wheel' on the Langbrook Stream near Tesco I found **Water Forget-me-not** still out despite stream clearance. On the landward side of the path here I had a bonus in the shape of a tall **Meadow Buttercup** with a fresh single flower

## SUMMARY FOR DEC 15 - 21 (WEEK 50 OF 2008)

### Highlights:

Cold weather has brought a **mass exodus of seabirds from the North Sea** bringing, amongst other species, some **2000 Common Scoter** into Rye Bay and **increasing the flock of Great Crested Grebes there to over 750** while the **number of Velvet Scoter off Pagham has increased to 6** (and, for quality rather than quantity, **lovely male Smew have appeared at Rye Harbour and on gravel pits east of Canterbury**).

At Pagham Harbour the second **Glaucous Gull** of the winter for the south coast has been seen.

Near Lewes a flock of **120+ Corn Buntings** has been seen (not too many years ago that number could be expected at Fishbourne near Chichester) and several other passerine species have increased in number (even bringing **two small flocks of Greenfinch to the Havant area**).

A recent increase in **bird song** has brought reports of **Mistle** and **Song Thrushes, Stock** and **Collared Doves** with **Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming**, plus **Wood Pigeons, Dunnock, Wren, Robin, Blue** and **Great Tits** and even a **Yellow-browed Warbler**.

Reports on the Trektellen European migration website of **Osprey, Crag Martin** and **Blue Rock Thrush** led me to discover that one reporting site listed as European (and technically Spanish) is located on the Moroccan shore of North Africa, while at the other end of the spectrum ringers in Estonia spent five whole hours with their nets up but only caught nine birds, all of them **Great Tits**, and six of those were local birds getting caught repetitively.

I was also surprised to see that many **Great Skuas** are currently in the Mediterranean. **Recovery of a dead Lapwing shows that they can live to the age of 21 years.**

Several **butterfly and moth caterpillars are still actively feeding** and the week has brought a **major emergence of Winter Moths**. On Portsdown an out of season (?) **Plume moth** was seen this week

Interesting plant news dates back to early October when **a fern growing behind a drain pipe near Winchester cathedral was identified as only the third of its species known to be growing in this country** (it is a species of **Shield Fern from Asia much used by Florists**). Locally one plant of **Cow Parsley** and one of **Wayfaring Tree** were opening flowerbuds on Portsdown

The only other significant report of the past few days is of the first **Common Newt** returning to a garden pond but there is interest in the origin of a **'Purple Squirrel'** seen at Stubbington.

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Cold weather seems to have forced a major exodus of **Divers, Auks, Gannets, etc** from the North Sea and through the Straits of Dover. On Dec 14 someone on the Worthing seafront counted **40 Red-throated Divers** (and **one Black-throated**) flying west, on Dec 16 the sea off Pagham Harbour had at least 14 going west and on Dec 17 watchers at Le Clipon near Calais recorded a stream of 334 going by (with at least 14 seen from Portland that day). 10 (plus **2 Black-throated**) were off Selsey Bill on Dec 18, and on Dec 20 around 15 were on the sea off Christchurch Harbour.

**Great Northern Diver:** On Dec 14 at least 10 were seen off the north-east of the Isle of Wight (including a raft of seven together off Seaview). The Dorset coast had at least 14 that day.

**Great Crested Grebe:** The flock in Rye Bay continues to grow. On Dec 14 the estimated count was 500 and on Dec 17 a more accurate count was of 782. A separate flock off Sandwich Bay held 138 birds on Dec 19. No further reports from the Solent off Titchfield Haven since the count of 118 on Dec 11 but on Dec 15 around 20 were off Pagham Harbour

**Red-necked Grebe:** One was off Pagham Harbour on Dec 14 and 15 with another flying past Christchurch Harbour on Dec 14 and one at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Dec 16

**Slavonian Grebe:** At least 11 were still off Pagham Harbour on Dec 14

**Black-necked Grebe:** The number at the Blashford Lakes increased from 2 to 4 on Dec 20 and 17 were in Studland Bay on Dec 19

**Fulmar:** 13 flew west past Dungeness on Dec 13 with the general exodus from the North Sea and on Dec 16 there were 20 around their nesting cliffs east of Hastings.

**Balearic Shearwater:** Plenty of these currently in their 'homeland' - on Dec 13 three sites on the south east coast of Spain reported them (1121 seen at Cullera, 592 at Punta de Calaburras and 212 at Cabo Sacratif).

**Bittern:** Single birds were seen at the following six sites on Dec 14 or 15 - Sheppey (Capel Fleet), Poole Harbour (Hatch Pond), Weymouth (both Radipole and Lodmoor), Rye Harbour (Castle Water) and Pulborough (Chingford Pond which is close to Burton Mill Pond). On Dec 17 two birds were seen at Hatch Pond.

**Night Heron:** The bird at west Hythe (Folkestone) was still there on Dec 20

**Little Egret:** A sign of these birds moving from the coast to more sheltered inland sites was reported on Dec 14 when Michael Prior (Head Forester for Stansted Forest) had one perched for several hours in an Oak in his garden at the Rowlands Castle end of Woodberry Lane - this is close to where the Lavant stream flows across Woodberry Lane when it has water in it and the presence of the Egret makes me wonder if this 'winterbourne' stream is now starting to bring water from the higher ground near Idsworth Chapel north of Finchdean. I see that on Dec 14 the River Arun burst its banks at Pulborough, flooding the nature trail at the RSPB

reserve (though the water soon abated). Another inland report is of around 46 going to roost at Arlebury Lake (Alresford area) on Dec 18

**Bewick's Swan:** 13 were at Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 15 and 52 were seen at Slimbridge on Dec 18

**Whooper Swan:** The pair which were staying on Ivy Lake at Chichester throughout the day last week had on Dec 14 resumed their more normal habit of hiding at an unknown location during the day and only flying in to roost on Ivy Lake at dusk

**Black Swan:** A pair seen in courtship display on the River Avon north of Fordingbridge on Dec 13 (there used to be several feral breeding pairs in the Avon valley above Salisbury but I have not checked the dates or numbers)

**Bean Goose:** On Dec 8 a single **Pink-foot Goose** was seen at the Blashford Lakes in the Avon valley after a group of four had been seen intermittently in the lower Avon Valley from Nov 23 to 28. On Dec 14 a single **Bean Goose** (among 30 **Greylags**) was seen at the Blashford Lakes, giving Bob Chapman and others sufficiently good views to be sure it was a '**Tundra**' (**Rossicus**) **subspecies** bird rather than a '**Taiga**' (**Fabalis**). Separation of the subspecies is difficult and relies on slight differences in size and structure - one obvious difference in the amount of orange in the bill is unreliable! To complicate matters for the normal birder who is not familiar with these geese in all their forms it is easy to confuse **Bean** and **Pink-foot** though the pink legs (**Bean Goose** has dull orange legs) are a reliable indicator while the paler mantle of the **Pink-foot** should be a good indicator in flight. On Dec 19 Lee Evans told us that the **Tundra birds seem to have had a good breeding season** this year.

**Pink-foot Goose:** We may not have any flocks in Hampshire but Lee Evans tells us that Norfolk currently has the **largest number ever recorded in Britain** with around 178,000 birds

**White-front Goose:** A flock of up to 1500 birds could be expected in the Avon Valley during the 1970s and early 80s but none are expected nowadays so it may be of interest that a flock of 2148 birds was recorded in Holland on Dec 18

**Brent Goose:** More than 1000 were in Pagham Harbour on Dec 20 with **2 Pale-bellied** and **1 Brant**.

**Red-breasted Goose:** Still present in the Normandy area of the Lymington marshes on Dec 20

**Wigeon:** 700 were in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Dec 18

**Gadwall:** 53 were on Alresford Pond on Dec 18 with another 15 on nearby Arlebury Lake and a dozen on Northington Grange Lake to the north.

**Pintail:** The cold weather seems to have brought more of these into Hampshire with 75 at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 14 (previous high count of 24 there on Nov 16). A count of 70 in the Avon village area downstream from Ringwood, also on Dec

14, may have been additional but these birds may roost at Blashford. Outside Hampshire high numbers in November (e.g. 150 in the Pulborough area on Nov 17) may have decreased as Dec 15 brought a count of only around 50 at Pulborough Brooks (though the November WeBS count included birds in the Amberley area)

**Ring-necked Duck:** The bird which was found at Passfield Pond in east Hampshire on Dec 10 was still there on Dec 17

**Common Scoter:** The exodus of birds from the North Sea (and Baltic?) seems to have brought lots of Scoter into Rye Bay giving an estimate of 2000 there on Dec 17

**Velvet Scoter:** A single bird was first seen in the Selsey area on Nov 22, increasing to 2 off Pagham Harbour on Dec 9, then 4 on Dec 15 and now 6 on Dec 16

**Goldeneye:** A pair, with the male throwing his head back in courtship display, was off the Warblington shore on Dec 16 and four Goldeneye (seemingly all females) were seen off Langstone on Dec 17. By Dec 18 three birds had penetrated to the top of the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester

**Smew:** A single female had been at Dungeness RSPB since Nov 10. Recent cold weather brought two to Rye Harbour on Dec 13, increasing to five there on Dec 17 (with a magnificent male among them). On Dec 20 at least one male was on the Seaton Pits near Wickhambreaux east of Canterbury.

**Goosander:** The number of these has increased dramatically with a count of 72 leaving the Blashford Lakes roost at dawn on Dec 17

**Osprey:** An unexpected December report among the European birds recorded on the Trektellen website was a sighting of one at Melilla in Spain for Dec 13 - however when I checked the location of Melilla I found that (although it is a Spanish town) it is located on the north coast of Africa in Morocco.

**Avocet:** The winter flock in Nutbourne Bay (just east of Thorney Island) had increased by three to 21 on Dec 18. Latest news of the Farlington Marshes birds was a count of around 20 on Dec 31 but the weather was foul that day and there may well have been the 25 seen there on Nov 23

**Golden Plover:** The highest count of the winter so far (3500+) comes from Pegwell Bay in the Thanet area of Kent on Dec 16. In Hampshire the usual winter flock has appeared on the Downs north of the Itchen at Alresford (around 150 seen on Dec 15) and the flock on the Lymington marshes was around 400 on Dec 17. A couple of birds seen off Langstone on Dec 17 were presumably part of the Chichester Harbour flock which was estimated at 400 birds over Thorney Island on Oct 31 and 350 on Dec 5 - these birds feed as individuals on fields by night, coming together to roost by day at different places depending on the state of the tides and the locations where they were feeding the previous night so it is not unusual for one or two birds to fail to rejoin the main flock on a particular day (especially when it is misty)

**Lapwing:** The biggest flock I had seen reported so far this winter up to Dec 19 was of 2000+ birds in Pegwell Bay (Thanet) on Dec 16 - presumably local numbers there swollen by birds fleeing continental cold - but on Dec 20 Pegwell Bay had **8200 Lapwing**. An entry for Dec 19 on the Rye Bay website reports the finding of a dead bird on the shore at Winchelsea - a ring on its leg (put on when the bird was a chick) showed it to be 16 years and 5 months old (adding that the oldest ringed bird so far was 21 years and 1 month old).

**Jack Snipe:** An SOS walk party at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Dec 16 had good views of one flying over them on Dec 16 and on Dec 20 one was seen at Herbury Gore (close to Langton Herring) on the shore of The Fleet north of Weymouth

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Still quite a few at the coast. On Dec 18 more than 50 were in Nutbourne Bay and another 29 at Nore Barn (west end of Emsworth shore). On Dec 20 a flock of 190 was in White's Creek (off Pagham village on the south east edge of Pagham Harbour) and 800 were roosting at the Blashford Lakes.

**Great Skua:** I think of these as northern birds and was surprised to see a count of 50 at Punta de Calaburras on the south east coast of Spain on Dec 13 with another 3 off the Moroccan coast on the same day

**Med Gull:** The flock at Pagham Harbour numbered 85 on Dec 16, an increase on the 50+ reported there in October. Elsewhere the most recent high count was of 130 at Sandown (IoW) on Nov 17 and 132 at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Nov 16. I have heard no more of the flock of 270+ reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 17

**Ring-billed Gull:** The regular winter bird at Gosport was still there on Dec 14

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** A flock of more than 70 was on the Ryde sands (IoW) on Dec 14 after a count of 60 at Sandown (IoW) on Dec 13 while a flock of more than 800 was at the Arlington Reservoir in the Cuckmere valley north west of Beachy Head on Dec 20

**Glaucous Gull:** An adult bird was among the **Great Blackbacks** at Pagham Harbour during the WeBS count on Dec 14. Other than the one seen several times at Lymington at the end of November this current bird seems to be the first on the south coast this winter.

**Great-blackback:** An entry for Dec 15 on the SOS website read.. "**A mating pair of Great Black-backed Gulls** spotted near Hove Town Hall yesterday. Quite majestic in flight!" Not sure if the word 'mating' should be taken literally or not.

**Kittiwake:** 330 flew west past Dungeness on Dec 13 as part of the exodus from the North Sea

**Sandwich Tern:** Reports of wintering birds seen in the past few days come from Chichester Harbour (two in the Emsworth Channel off Thorney Island on Dec 14),

Portsmouth Harbour (one in Forton Lake at Gosport on Dec 13), Poole Harbour (one at Poole on Dec 15) and Kent (one in Pegwell Bay on Dec 16).

**Guillemot:** More than 300 off Dungeness on Dec 20 - maybe coming this way?

**Collared Dove:** I did not record these singing between Sep 9 and Nov 6 with only intermittent song heard until Dec 9. One was heard in Sway (new New Milton) on Dec 11 and on Dec 19 many were singing in Emsworth. Song was also heard from a **Stock Dove** in the Way area on Dec 18 and from a **Wood Pigeon** here in Havant on Dec 17

**Barn Owl:** One was hunting over the Thornham Marshes on Thorney Island on Dec 14

**Long-eared Owl:** The roost at Rye Harbour was up to 4 birds on Dec 19

**Kingfisher:** On Dec 20 one was seen perched on a low branch above the Hermitage Stream close to where it flows under Purbrook Way in Leigh Park.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** One had been heard **drumming** in Southampton (Tanner's Brook near the General Hospital) back on Nov 19 but it is only now that other birds have felt the call of spring with birds drumming at Sway (New Milton) and Climping (mouth of R Arun) on Dec 11 and one heard in the Highcliffe area of Christchurch on Dec 20

**Crag Martin:** A count of 57 on Dec 13 was a surprise entry on the Trektellen website until I discovered these were seen at Melilla (a Spanish town but located on the North African shore of Morocco. The same site also recorded **3 Blue Rock-thrushes** on the same day.

**Waxwing:** In addition to the single bird that has been in a Petersfield residential street from Dec 11 to 16 a couple more have turned up in Sussex, one in the Hove area of Brighton on Dec 15 and another at Seaford on Dec 16. Since then one has been showing well in the Muscliffe Lane area of north east Bournemouth. (This bird also caused me to discover, when trying to find out where Muscliffe Lane was, that the Streetmap.co.uk website has recently been significantly improved and now does something that several people have been keen to see - it gives the location of the street or place in several forms including OS Grid Reference format as well as Lat and Long, plus the nearest Postal Code)

**Dunnoek:** I heard one of the Emsworth birds singing on Dec 16 but have not heard of others yet in song elsewhere in our area.

**Mistle Thrush:** Two more birds heard singing - one at Sway (New Milton) on Dec 18 and another at Highcliffe (Christchurch) on Dec 20

**Blackcap:** A couple of wintering birds (male and female) arrived back in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden last week to enjoy the home-made cake baked specially for them each winter, and on Dec 15 three new arrivals at Portland were thought to have only then reached England from the continent.

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** The bird at the Newlands Farm fishing lakes (south of Fareham) was still present on Dec 18 at least and is reported to have been **singing** there on Dec 17

**Great Tit:** I am amazed at the amount of discomfort and boredom that some birders will endure in pursuit of their hobby - the Trektellen website has regular reports from ringers in the Matsalu National Park in Estonia (located north of the Gulf of Riga) and on Dec 13 the birders there had their nets out for just over 5 hours, catching just 9 Great Tits and nothing else. What's more 6 of these birds were re-captures, presumably residents in that area as when the nets were put out again a few days later the only birds caught were these same 6 which were already ringed.

**Raven:** One being seen regularly commuting over the Stansted estate last week may be attracted to the area by the prospect of taking some of the new born lambs and/or piglets that should soon be appearing in the Ems valley near Racton or the nearby Funtington area pig fields.

**Starling:** Two reports on Dec 20 of the **large pre-roost flocks** giving their spectacular evening performances. 5000+ birds were seen over the New Lane area of Keyhaven (Lymington marshes) and 'vast flocks' were seen at the village of West Knighton to the south east of Dorchester

**Greenfinch:** During the last year Greenfinch seen have to have gone from being the commonest of the finches to the rarest so the sight of two separate small flocks (each of around a dozen birds) seen in the Emsworth and Havant areas on Dec 16 was noteworthy.

**Bullfinch:** Three sites have reported 'many' of these birds in the past week - the Houghton area of the Test valley (just south of Stockbridge) was one (on Dec 14) and the others were Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley (Dec 19) and Durlston (Dec 20).

**Hawfinch:** These are currently being reported in several areas where I have not heard of them in the past - latest is a group of up to seven birds on Bookham Common near Leatherhead in Surrey. Birds continue to be seen at the Testwood Lakes site (Totton, Southampton)

**Yellowhammer:** Breeding birds in southern England seem to have been in short supply this year but they have probably now been supplemented by winter visitors from the continent to give several reports of flocks. On Dec 14 'many' were seen in the Houghton area of the Test Valley (just south of Stockbridge) and on Dec 15 'many' were seen in the Abbotstone Down area north of Alresford. More specifically there were more than 10 at Old Winchester Hill (Meon valley) on Dec 19

**Little Bunting:** An elusive bird which one observer has come across more than half a dozen times in the Old Basing area east of Basingstoke since late October was reported again on Dec 12. The observer, who lives in the area concerned and has more opportunities than other birders to find the bird in an area of large and densely

vegetated private residential gardens, is respected by those birders who know him but who has been accused by those who do not of being a 'stringer'. This last observation in particular aroused dis-belief as the bird was said to have been 'seen' at 4.25pm on a winter afternoon when the light would have faded, but it has now been pointed out that the observation was based on a close encounter during which the bird was identified not by sight but by call.

**Reed Bunting:** These too have started to be reported in good numbers. On Dec 14 there were many in the Houghton area with the **Yellowhammers** and on Dec 17 a flock of around 30 was in a stubble field in the Lymington area. On Dec 16 I had one female in the Conigar Point field at Warbington for the first time this winter.

**Corn Bunting:** Two were seen near Longmere Point during a walk round Thorney Island on Dec 14 when a flock of more than 55 was reported from the Lewes Brooks area immediately south of Lewes town - on Dec 16 this flock was reported to have increased to more than 120 birds of unknown origin.

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Clouded Yellow:** No sighting of the butterfly but on Dec 6 Mike Skelton found a caterpillar feeding on **Bird's Foot Trefoil** at the Boscombe cliffs in Bournemouth.

**Large White: Caterpillars** still feeding on **Broccoli** at Corhampton near the Meon Valley on Dec 17

### Moths

**White Plume moth (1513 Pterophorus pentadactyla):** One active on Portsdown on Dec 17 was maybe not this species as the Hants Moths website shows sightings centre around June with none earlier than April and none later than October. One possible species (though greyer in colour) is **Adaina microdactyla** which is said to be .."Locally common amongst hemp-agrimony Eupatorium cannabinum, especially when the plant is growing in drier localities". Another possibility is **Emmelina monodactyla** which can be found in all months and is said to be .. "Common to abundant throughout. The imago hibernates and comes to light early in the year. The larva is polyphagous on bindweeds Calystegia and Convolvulus, knotgrass Polygonum aviculare and other herbaceous plants".

**Winter Moth (1799 Operophtera brumata):** Although the first of these was recorded on Nov 19 there was a mass emergence in the Newhaven area on Dec 18 with 240 recorded there that evening

**Northern Winter Moth (1800 Operophtera fagata):** Also reported at Newhaven on Dec 18 was the first and so far only specimen of this species but the Northern species is regularly found in the south and is easily distinguished as being much larger than the normal Winter Moth

**Pale Brindled Beauty (1926 Apocheima pilosaria):** This normally emerges in February but an early specimen was found at Edburton (north of the Downs near the R Adur) on Dec 16

**Caterpillars** of both **Treble Lines** and **Large Yellow Underwing** were still feeding in the Newhaven area by night on Dec 16

## PLANTS

**My count of wild plants flowering in December has risen from 84 last week to just 86 this week** (with an additional three grass species flowering during the month)

**Holly Fern (*Polystichum tsus-simense*)**: This was neither flowering nor seen in December but I have only just picked up the report from Martin Rand's Hantsplants website ( <http://www.hantsplants.org.uk/news.php> ) which says about this Fern .. **"Fern guru from the Natural History Museum Fred Rumsey spotted a small plant of Tsus-sima Holly Fern (*Polystichum tsus-simense*) behind a leaking drainpipe in The Square, Winchester in early October.** Fred writes: "I have seen it on two walls in London but am aware of no other records for this...yet! The fronds are used by florists and I think it more likely to have originated from spores from a wedding guests buttonhole than from a garden plant given its proximity to the cathedral. It's still young and is reasonably hardy and somewhat protected from cleaning operations being behind a pair of drainpipes in a small recess...it will be interesting to see how long it survives!" It is growing with some small plants of **Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*)** and could easily be overlooked at this stage". Further investigation on my part took me to the BBC Gardening website where I read .. "Common Name: **Holly fern** (or **Korean Rock Fern**) Genus: *Polystichum* Species: *tsussimense* Skill Level: Beginner Exposure: Partial shade, Shade Hardiness: Hardy Soil type: Well-drained/light, Clay/heavy, Moist Height: 50cm Spread: 50cm

**"Holly ferns** are one of the hardiest ferns around and are ideal for evergreen colour in shady spots in the garden. This particular species is neat and lowgrowing, and has pale green fronds with dark veins and stems. The leaves acquire a silvery sheen as they age, but this simply adds to the plant's interest. To grow successfully, the plant need partial to almost full shade in moist soil with good drainage. **A native of the Far East, it's becoming rare in the wild due to over-collection by plant growers,** so check with retailers that the plant has been grown legitimately".

This species is not yet recorded in Stace's Flora.

**Tamarisk:** This was added to the December list on Dec 16 when I found a few fresh flowers on trees along the Warblington shore

**Cow Parsley:** Not included in the flowering list but will hopefully be added soon as I found a well grown plant with **white showing in its flower buds** on Dec 20. It was found beside the A3 London Road climbing Portsdown behind a Bus Shelter just north of Chalkridge Road

**Wayfaring Tree:** A shrub with a few flower buds starting to open (but not in flower) found by the Churchillian pub on Portsdown on Dec 20. This supports an

entry on the Durlston website for Dec 5 noting .. "The early blooms of a **Wayfaring Tree** as it comes into flower - the pink and white heads noticed in the thick scrub".

**Field Madder:** This was flowering in the Warblington Farm arable field behind Conigar Point on Dec 16

**Knapweed:** Single plants of both **Greater** and **Black Knapweed** were still in flower on Portsdown on Dec 20

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common Seal:** One was again seen in Pagham Harbour on Dec 15 (one also here on Nov 30)

**'White' Squirrel:** On Dec 17 John Goodspeed had a report of a **'White Squirrel'** having been present for at least six weeks in the densely built-up area of Southsea around the Kings Theatre. I see that these white furred creatures were seen in the historic dockyard and in the Victoria Park area of Portsmouth in November 2007 while in 2005 an 'albino' was twice reported in Southsea during May and in June of that year a pair of 'albinos' bred in the Farlington area of Portsmouth giving birth to three young (two of them white and one grey). In Jan 2005 John reported that someone living in the Widley residential area of Portsdown had seen **a Fox catch a White Squirrel and then bury it in a flower pot!**

**'Purple Squirrel':** A photo in the Portsmouth NEWS for Dec 19, taken at Meoncross School in Stubbington (south of Fareham), shows a vaguely 'purple' **Grey Squirrel** climbing an Oak tree. This is an independent school taking children from pre-school age to 16 years and I wonder if some older pupils may have been taking an extra-curricular course in 'mobile graffiti' using their spray cans to target this animal. Another possibility is that the **Squirrel** has been bathing in a local pool into which a purple dye has accumulated as a result of its use by the local Water Company to trace leaks (this practice once produced some startling pink and green **Black-headed Gulls** whose photos also appeared in the same paper many years ago)

**Common Newt:** A very early report of a **Newt returning to a garden pond** on Dec 15 for the start of the breeding season comes from the Northiam area of the Rother valley north of Hastings

**Wall Lizard:** A very late sighting of a **Wall Lizard** in the Boscombe area of Bournemouth was dated Dec 6

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 15 - 21 (WEEK 50 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 20 Dec**

#### **Cow Parsley and Wayfaring Tree coming into flower**

A walk on Portsdown around the London Road area on a dismal raw afternoon was brightened by finding a single plant of **Cow Parsley showing the white of opening flower buds** beside the A3 London Road (behind a bus shelter on the

east side just north of Chalkridge Road) and by more white showing on **Wayfaring Tree buds** by the carparks in the Churchillian area east of Fort Widley (I suspect both were brought on by the fumes and warmth from car engines). Also seen were late flowers on both **Greater** and **Black Knapweed**.

Another bright sight today was not mine but passed to me by Tony Tupper who lives beside the Hermitage Stream in the Purbrook Way area of Leigh Park and who saw a **Kingfisher** perched above the stream with a **Little Egret** nearby (no news of **Green Sandpiper** there so far this winter)

## Tue 16 Dec

### Dismal weather

Today's raw cold in sunless mist was not conducive to enjoyment of wildlife but a Christmas card round took me along the shore from Langstone to Emsworth, then up towards the Hollybank Woods and gave me three good sights. The first and best was of **a pair of Goldeneye** in the low tide channel off Warblington **with both birds throwing their heads back in mutual display**. Also seen on the shore here were a small group of three or four **Ringed Plover** and a large flock of at least five hundred **Dunlin** feeding on the exposed mud well away from the water.

The field behind Conigar Point had a single female **Reed Bunting** (and quite a lot of **Field Madder** in flower) while the channel carrying the outflow of the Warblington east stream past Nore Barn had a single **Greenshank** and the Maisemore Gardens stream where the **Spotted Redshank** is usually seen (but not today) had another **Greenshank** close enough to me to see that it was colour ringed.

In North Emsworth a flock of more than twenty finches in the hedge of Redlands Lane was mainly composed of at least a dozen **Greenfinch** with a few **Chaffinch** and just one **Goldfinch**. Later, in the Denvilles area, I passed a slightly larger flock of **Greenfinch** - this is the first time I have seen more than one or two in this area this autumn or winter but I guess these were just passing through and will not be seen again.

## **SUMMARY FOR DEC 8 - 14 (WEEK 49 OF 2008)**

### Highlights:

A flock of **118 Great Crested Grebe** off Titchfield Haven is a good count for Hampshire but nowhere near the **flock of 1600** near Dungeness in winter 2002-03.

**A town garden near Bognor recently had an exhausted Gannet and a similarly weak Little Auk in it.**

The **Whooper Swans** on Ivy Lake at Chichester are now easier to see as they have been sleeping on the water throughout the day. East Hampshire has a rare **Ring-necked Duck** on Passfield Pond (and Petersfield has had **3 Waxwings** on street tree berries).

A single **House Martin** was still at Weymouth this week.

**Dunnock** are singing in Emsworth and **Fieldfares** are back in the Nutbourne orchards.

Somewhere in Hampshire there may well be a **night roost of 25 or more Ravens** and in West Sussex there are probably far **more breeding Firecrests present in the summer, but migrating south in the winter, than the birds which get much more publicity around coastal sites in the winter months**. And finally we have a new bird to look out for - a **Bengal Eagle Owl** (smaller version of the more frequent escapee and stone statue species).

**Common Darter dragonflies** were seen at both Lymington and Frensham (Surrey) on Dec 6 while both **Red Admiral** and **Peacock butterflies** were still flying this week.

**Lesser Celandines** and **Hazel catkins** are both now flowering and a **Common Dog Violet** was also seen in a Havant garden while what are probably **cultivated Primroses** were flowering in Brook Meadow at Emsworth.

The Emsworth **Brook Meadow nature reserve is proud to announce the arrival of Rabbit on their species list** while **Molehills** are popping up everywhere. A more unexpected report is of **20 Dolphins riding the bow wave of a yacht in the far from tropical waters of the North Sea off the Goodwin Sands** this week

## **BIRDS**

**Diver species:** All three regular species can be seen along the south coast in small numbers. Highest count this week was of 8 **Great Northern**s in Studland Bay near the mouth of Poole Harbour on Dec 13, and on Dec 7 five of these divers were in the Solent off the Ryde/Fishbourne area of the Isle of Wight, but one visitor to Sheppey in the Thames estuary on Dec 10 reported seeing 87 Divers (including at least one **Black-throated**) during his visit.

**Great Crested Grebe:** The number in Rye Bay was up to at least 360 on Dec 8 - on reporting this the RX website added that in the winter of 2002-2003 a huge flock of 1600 birds was in this general area (though that record count was from an area just east of Dungeness). Locally a good sized flock is once again building up in the Solent off Titchfield Haven with a count of 118 there on Dec 11.

**Slavonian Grebe:** A flock of these is accumulating off Pagham Harbour where in past years there have been more than 30. This winter I have seen a count of 13 on Nov 26 and now 22 on Dec 11

**Black-necked Grebe:** No further reports from Langstone Harbour where 14 were seen on Dec 1 but there has been an increase of the number in Studland Bay at the mouth of Poole Harbour - 13 were there on Dec 2, then 17 on Dec 6 and 21 on Dec 7, increasing to 25 on Dec 13

**Gannet:** Storm driven birds are occasionally found in an exhausted condition far inland (I once recovered a **Gannet** from the River Wallington in the Waterlooville area) but a find of **one exhausted Gannet** and a similarly **distressed Little Auk**

both in the same coastal town garden at Middleton-on-sea (adjacent to Bognor) on Dec 13 was surprising!

**Shag:** 34 of these were seen off Christchurch Harbour on Dec 13 after Durlston had reported (on Dec 12) that many of the **Shags** there already had their breeding crests.

**Spoonbill:** At least 13 are still in Poole Harbour (seen in the Arne area on Dec 10)

**Whooper Swan:** The pair at Chichester are easier to see this winter - whereas in previous winters they only used the Chichester lakes as a night roost this winter they have remained on Ivy Lake during the day (at least between Dec 10 and 13) - they are likely to be seen sleeping in the south east corner of Ivy Lake throughout the day.

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The flock of up to 28 birds that was in the Ferrybridge (Weymouth) area at the end of November may be moving to Poole Harbour where 6 were seen in Poole's Baiter Park on Dec 12, increasing to 18 there on Dec 13

**Brant:** One was seen by the Thorney Great Deepes (west) on Dec 12 and on Dec 9 two separate birds were seen in Pagham Harbour

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Lymington area bird was still at Normandy on Dec 11

**Shelduck:** The number in Chichester and Langstone Harbours is still increasing - no total available but 26 were on the Emsworth west shore on Dec 8 plus 35+ on the Warblington shore on Dec 10

**Ring-necked Duck:** A first winter male was reported at Rye Harbour on Nov 16 and a female was in Poole Harbour on Dec 7. The young male may have flown west as it or a similar bird was found on Dec 10 by Mike Wearing at Passfield Pond (in the Bramshott Court area near the B3006 between Liphook and Bordon in East Hants) - it was still there on Dec 13

**Eider:** The number on the sea off Titchfield Haven was up to 12 in October and 13 in November but has now increased to an estimated 30 birds there on Dec 11

**Velvet Scoter:** Two were seen off Pagham Harbour on Dec 9

**Smew:** One has been at the Dungeness RSPB reserve from Nov 10 to Dec 1 at least but now others are being seen - on Dec 10 a redhead flew over Sheppey and one Dec 13 two redheads appeared at Rye Harbour

**Goosander:** In addition to the large flock (max count of 41 so far this winter) which roosts at the Blashford Lakes, and spreads out by day to numerous sites in the New Forest and Avon Valley, there appears to be another smaller group based in the Southampton area - no one has identified their roost site but up to two birds have been at the Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park from Nov 26 to Nov 30, then on Dec 7 a group of 7 birds were on the River Test in the Broadlands estate area at Romsey

and on Dec 9 one was on a fishing lake at Newlands Farm near Stubbington (south of Fareham). On Dec 13 one was seen in the west Solent from Hurst Castle (maybe one of the Avon Valley birds?) and on Dec 12 John Clark found at least 52 in the Hants/Berks border area (Yateley and Moor Green)

**Water Rail:** Of local interest here in Havant the bird seen on Dec 5 feeding in the Lymbourne stream where it runs between the Hayling Billy trail and the Wade Court property was seen again towards dusk on Dec 8 in roughly the same area (south of the footbridge and close to where a channel runs into the Wade Court property to bring water to the Chinese Water Garden feature)

**Coot:** More than 50 were in the Emsworth Harbour area on Dec 8 as frost drives these birds from inland waters to the coast. A similar flock of **Moorhens** can now be seen in the damp pony field beside the Lymbourne stream south of Wade Court

**Avocet:** The winter flock in Nutbourne Bay of Chichester Harbour had risen from 16 on Dec 1 to 18 on Dec 9

**Golden Plover:** Around 275 were on the flat fields of Newlands Farm (between Fareham and Stubbington) on Dec 7 while on Dec 8 the Lymington Marshes had a flock of 363.

**Knot:** A group of 11 were on the Emsworth shore on Dec 8 - the first seen there this winter - but on Dec 13 only 100+ were seen in Pagham Harbour where there had been around 400 on Dec 3

**Little Stint:** One seen where the River Lavant, coming from Chichester, flows into the Fishbourne Channel on Dec 9 was the first I have heard of reported in Chichester Harbour this winter since one was seen from Thorney Island on Aug 31 - there is usually a small group of them in the West Wittering area.

**Ruff:** One seen on the Lymington Marshes on Dec 8 was the first reported in Hampshire since Oct 11 when one was at the Blashford Lakes. Over in Kent there were 26 on Sheppey on Dec 10 (up to 30 there at the end of September)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Around 325 came to roost at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 7, probably after feeding in the Avon Valley south of Ringwood, and on Dec 8 there were only 164 on the Lymington Marshes (where there had been 432 on Dec 5). Locally there was a flock of 120 in Nutbourne Bay on Dec 9

**Spotted Redshank:** One was in the Thorney Deeps wader roost (with **14 Greenshank**) on Dec 12 and two were in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on Dec 9. In Poole Harbour seven were seen in Lytchett Bay on Dec 13

**Pomarine Skua:** One seen leaving the west Solent past Hurst Castle on Dec 13 seems to have been the first seen on the English side of the Channel since October (though there have been odd sightings of singles on the French Side of the Channel and from north and east Kent)

**Little Gull:** A sighting of 6 at the mouth of Pagham Harbour on Dec 13 was the first along the English Channel coast (west of Dungeness) since one was at Lymington on Nov 8

**Little Auk:** A report of one apparently healthy bird flying over the sea off Christchurch Harbour on Dec 11 has been followed by an extraordinary report of a sickly/exhausted bird found in a coastal garden at Middleton-on-sea (adjacent to Bognor) on Dec 13. **Making this latter find even more bizarre was the presence of an oiled/exhausted Gannet with the Auk in the same garden.**

**Long-eared Owl:** Away from the Isle of Wight where this species replaces the **Tawny Owl** (absent from the Island) **Long-eared Owls** are very rare in southern England as breeding birds but do occasionally make themselves 'available' to birders in coastal winter roosts in which several birds will sit motionless throughout the dayling hours before coming out to hunt after dark (unlike the daylight hunting **Short-eared Owls**). So far this winter I have only seen one report of a bird in Hampshire (at the Lower Test reserve) and that was an unconfirmed sighting by a fisherman. By Dec 11 there were at least three birds at Rye Harbour and on Dec 12 at least five birds were seen at Conyer on the north west Kent shore between Sittingbourne and Faversham (across the Swale from Sheppey)

**Great-spotted Woodpecker:** One heard **drumming** in the Climping area near the mouth of the R Arun on Dec 11 - this is not the earliest to do so (that was one in central Southampton on Nov 19)

**House Martin:** One reported at the RSPB Lodmoor reserve at Weymouth on Dec 13

**Waxwing:** Three birds were feeding on berries in the residential area east of Petersfield town centre on Dec 11 and on Dec 12 six of these birds were near a school and church in Botley village on the River Hamble

**Dunnock:** More than one has been heard singing in Emsworth on several days since Nov 26 but so far the habit does not seem to have caught on elsewhere

**Fieldfare:** 27 were seen in the trees around the apple orchards at Nutbourne (east of Emsworth) on Dec 9 and there is a fair chance of them staying there to feed on apples left lying on the ground.

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** One has been showing well for birders in trees around the fishing lakes at Newlands Farm between Fareham and Stubbington from Dec 12 to 14 at least - most visitors have also seen the **Firecrest** there (see below)

**Firecrest:** One at Newlands Farm south of Fareham from Dec 7 on, and another in the Hook Lake valley near Warsash on Dec 9, were good local sightings. On the subject of Firecrest there was an interesting contribution to the SOS website on Dec 7 by Bernie Forbes who wrote .. "In my experience, the past few years have seen **a remarkable increase in Firecrest records, mainly as a breeding species in West Sussex.** In the preferred habitat the density of Firecrest breeding may be as

high as 2/4 pairs per hectare. This habitat is normally non native conifer plantations where the density of breeding birds can be high. They have also been recorded breeding in areas of deciduous trees such as mature oak and beech with plenty of ivy and holly in the nearby environment. Firecrest appear to be spreading east, we have recorded them in the breeding season nearly as far east as the A24 trunk road which runs north in the county and up to the Surrey border. This may place the current breeding populations in the many 100's. **It is strange that the regular coastal and favoured wintering sites within the county do not really reflect this increase in breeding numbers.** My guess is that many of them migrate south to winter."

**Willow Tit:** One in the Arne area on the west of Poole Harbour on Dec 10 was only the ninth I have heard of in southern England this year

**Hooded Crow:** One seen on the Isle of Sheppey on Dec 10 was the first I have heard of this winter and brings back memories of youthful birding along the north Kent coast in the late 1940s when I was at school at Canterbury

**Raven:** In May of this year John Clark told us that there had been a winter roost of **25 Ravens somewhere in Hampshire** last winter. That number was equalled in a report from Seaford in East Sussex on Apr 17 this year and on Nov 25 there was a report of 26 at Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset - these facts were recalled when reading of **20+ Ravens at Tarrant Rushton** on Dec 12

**Hawfinch:** These are back at the Mercer's Way wintering site in Romsey - at least 4 were seen there on Dec 7. Other current reports, showing the widespread presence of small groups of these birds, are from Purse Caundle near Sherborne in Dorset (3 on Dec 7), Testwood Lakes at Totton by Southampton (3 on Dec 9), West Park nature reserve at Burgess Hill near Haywards Heath (1 seen on Dec 10) and a count of 12 going to roost at the Blackwater Arboretum in the New Forest on Dec 10. Latest report is of 8 seen in Silver Birches by the disused railway line running through the south west of the New Forest at Long Slade Bottom (north of Sway) on Dec 13

**Snow Bunting:** None in Hampshire since the Hayling Island bird on Nov 4 but on Dec 9 there was a flock of around 40 on Sheppey and another 14 at Sandwich Bay in Kent

**Escapees:** The Portland website entry of Dec 11 started with .. "There was a very unexpected start to the day when we received a call from a member of the public reporting an owl - claimed to be a **Short-eared Owl** - that had been seen standing on parked cars and a garden wall at Easton; on going to investigate we discovered that the bird was a very tame eagle owl that we were able to pick up and bring back to the Observatory." On Dec 12 the website carried an excellent photo of the bird with the caption saying .. "We thought the bird looked very small in the field; in the hand it turned out to be way below the range of a 'normal' **Eagle Owl** (wing length ca380mm and weight ca1100gm; in **European Eagle Owl** these figures ought to be in the region of 440-500mm and 1500+gm) and further information has revealed that the bird is a **Bengal Eagle Owl**." The diary for that day included .. "Spending

most of the day trying to get rid of a **Bengal Eagle Owl** that nobody seems to want isn't conducive to getting much birding done"

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter:** Last week I passed on a report of a sighting of one on the Lymington marshes seen on Dec 6 and now I read of another being seen on the same day at Frensham Little Pond in Surrey

### Butterflies

**Red Admiral:** Two seen in Peacehaven near Brighton on Dec 7

**Peacock:** A garden in the Lewes area had one nectaring on Heather on both Dec 4 and 5, then on Dec 6 a visitor to a DIY store in Crawley found one in a sorry state (probably just rudely awakened from attempted hibernation among a stack of pallets). After taking the insect home and giving it a more suitable winter hideaway it looked a lot 'happier'.

### Other Insects

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee:** Several were taking nectar from Mahonia plants in Stanley Park at Gosport on Dec 7

## PLANTS

**My December list of wild plants in flower currently has 84 entries**, the best being:

**Lesser Celandine:** One plant with several flower buds, two of them fully open flowers, was seen beside the Lymbourne stream at Langstone on Dec 10. More **Celandines** have been seen in flower on the roadside of Bound Lane in south Hayling - maybe even a few days earlier than those which I saw.

**Bittercress:** Both **Wavy** and **Hairy Bittercress** have been seen flowering this month

**Common Dog Violet:** One flower (with blunt, white spur) seen on an isolated plant in a Havant garden on Dec 9

**Hazel:** Catkins fully extended with anthers showing on a tree which always flowers early and which overhangs the bus stop on the main road from Hayling just north of Langstone High Street.

**Primrose:** Some were flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Dec 10 but these were probably winter flowering cultivars planted by Havant Borough rather than our **native wild Primroses**

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Dolphin:** When I imagine these swimming in the bow wave of a yacht I picture the scene in a tropical setting so I was surprised to read (on the Planet Thanet website) of **20 Dolphins** accompanying a yacht returning from France to Ramsgate off the Goodwin Sands on Dec 7

**Mole:** Brian Fellows comments on a recent increase in the number of **fresh molehills** to be seen everywhere - I am not sure what is the primary cause of this but among the factors are the easier digging conditions in wet soil, the need to create new tunnels to escape from those that have become waterlogged, the need to search for more food in order to survive the winter cold and (perhaps not effective yet) the springtime need to search out a mate (each network of tunnels is normally occupied by a single mole but at least once a year the males must briefly find and invade the tunnels of a female - and she in turn will then have to create a nest chamber)

**Water Vole:** Another sighting in the River Ems at Brook Meadow on Dec 7 and on that day two others were seen in the disused canal running through Romsey past the end of Mercer's Way (the site which attracts **Hawfinches** each winter)

**Hare:** Pete Durnell reminds us that Normandy Marsh at Lymington still has a population of **Hares** but has no **Rabbits**. I can remember **Hares** being present at Farlington Marshes, and more recently seeing them on Eames Farm fields when visiting the Thorney seawall at the west end of the Great Deeps but I believe they are now extinct at both these coastal sites

**Rabbit:** A couple of these seen in Emsworth's Brook Meadow on Dec 8 were apparently the first ever recorded on the site!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 8 - 14 (WEEK 49 OF 2008)**

### **Wed 10 Dec**

#### **Celandines and Hazel catkins in flower**

Despite hard frost last night and with the temperature still very low at mid-day I found one clump of **Lesser Celandine** with several flower buds and two fully open flowers on the bank of the Lymbourne stream during a brief after lunch cycle ride down the Billy Trail to Langstone.

Reaching the main road at Langstone I crossed it as if going into Mill Lane but instead went to the bus stop in the main road layby - the **Hazel tree** overhanging the bus shelter had **around a dozen catkins already expanded and several of them were ready to shed pollen**. I needed my binoculars to be sure of this but soon it will be obvious to the naked eye.

The tide was at its lowest when I got to the harbour. Only one **Egret** was to be seen (most have probably gone inland) but there were approaching **40 Shelduck** on the mud south of Pook Lane and Warblington church, and the pony field north of Langstone Pond (which has had **a single Black-tailed Godwit** feeding in it for a week or so) today had three of them!

### **Tue 9 Dec**

#### **Common Dog Violet in flower**

While delivering Christmas Cards today I was surprised to find a single **Common Dog Violet** (with blunt, white spur to the fresh flower) in one garden and was assured it was an interloper and not planted.

Little else of interest but I enjoyed the sight of **two different 'charms' of Goldfinch** coming to roost in tree tops and chattering musically to each other - a more pleasant noise than that of a **Collared Dove** persistently 'singing' its monotonous song.

## [Mon 8 Dec](#)

### **Water Rail in the Lymbourne Stream**

My own walk around Havant today gave me nothing more interesting than **Sweet Violets** flowering again in St Faith's churchyard with **Spotted Medick** still out by the main road into the town - surprisingly I did not see **Black Medick** which has been common until now but I did tick both **Hairy** and **Wavy Bittercress** and the **Yellow-flowered Strawberries** in Juniper Square.

The interesting sighting was made by Nik Knight - in the Lymbourne stream, just before dusk, he saw the **Water Rail** which had been reported to John Goodspeed last week (seen Dec 5). In both cases the bird was a little south of the footbridge crossing the Lymbourne stream and taking you to Wade Lane from the Billy Trail just south of the A27. It was near the channel which takes water from the stream to feed the 'Chinese Water Garden' within the Wade Court property - no doubt the **Rail** finds this channel a good means of escape from dogs and people by and in the main stream!

## **SUMMARY FOR DEC 1 - 7 (WEEK 48 OF 2008)**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** These are far more numerous than the other diver species though we do not see large numbers in central south England (I believe they can still be found in hundreds in some Cornish bays in the winter). I was reminded of this when reading of a total of 122 flying west along the north Kent coast on Dec 5, while on Dec 6 a much larger number flew west through the Straits of Dover on the French side - 485 were seen from Le Clipon in the Calais area with 5 **Black-throated** among them

**Black-throated Diver:** The last report of the bird which was at Forton Lake (Gosport) from Nov 15 appears to have been on Nov 23 though it may have stayed as one was seen in the north of Portsmouth Harbour near Pewit Island (mouth of Fareham Creek) on Dec 6

**Great Northern Diver:** Up to three were seen in the mouth of Chichester Harbour throughout November along with two **Red-throated** (ongoing) and one **Black-throated** (on Nov 17 and 18 only). On Dec 6 one was seen in Fareham Creek.

**Little Grebe:** More than 52 were present at Cuckmere Haven (between Beachy Head and Seaford) on Dec 1 - other coastal flocks will be building up now inland waters are starting to freeze over'

**Great Crested Grebe:** On Nov 23 a flock of 25 was on the sea off Climping (west side of the mouth of the R Arun) and on Nov 26 a flock of 22 was on the sea off Pagham Harbour. The largest current flock off our coasts seems to be one of 60 birds off Sandwich Bay on Dec 5 after the arrival of 39 there on Dec 5

**Red-necked Grebe:** No south coast reports this week but I read that birders in the Kent Stour valley were excited to see one there on Dec 6 but as soon as they got their bins on it it vanished in a flurry of water - seemingly dragged under and **eaten by a large Pike**

**Black-necked Grebe:** The first report of a winter flock back in Langstone Harbour that I am aware of was of 14 seen from the Oysterbeds on Dec 1 by Jeff Goodridge (last year 13 were there on Nov 17 but in 2006 the first flock - again 14 - was seen on Dec 1)

**Fulmar:** We have already reported that around 10 birds were back near their nest cliffs at the South Foreland in Kent in Nov 29 and I now see that they returned to the Folkestone area on that same day though the first news of them back at Cliff End (east of Hastings) did not come until Dec 1. On Dec 6 Cap Griz Nez across the Channel reported 36 of them.

**Balearic Shearwater:** Although none of these have been reported along our south coast since Nov 25 the Pointe de Hoc site in Normandy reported 26 there on Dec 6

**Gannet:** On Dec 6 there were 3445 at Pointe de Hoc in Normandy and 5400 at Cap Griz Nez near Calais

**Cormorant:** On Dec 6 watchers at Christchurch Harbour watched a flock of **128 Cormorant** approaching them from the south but the birds veered off to the north east and seemed to head for Barton on Sea in Hampshire (no entry on Steve Keen's Blog since Dec 3 at this time)

**Bittern:** What seems to be the first to be reported at Titchfield Haven (or anywhere in Hampshire) this winter was there on Nov 29. Birds are now back at several regular winter sites in other counties but I was interested to be reminded, by a report on Dec 1 from Burton Mill Pond (west of Pulborough) of their habit of climbing the reeds (grasping two different stems, one with each foot) to escape ground based predators (e.g. **Foxes**) during the night while they are asleep.

**Cattle Egret:** One was seen to fly east over the Romsey area on Dec 3, low enough to see the colour of its bill and other characteristics separating it from a Little Egret, but it was not seen to land

**Bewick's Swan:** These have been arriving in southern England since Nov 6 and by Nov 30 the number on the R Arun just north of Arundel had increased to around 24

and on the night of Dec 2 a group of 8 (probably newcomers) roosted at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust site

**Whooper Swan:** Although the first arrivals of this species were seen on the Isle of Wight on Oct 4 numbers up to now have been lower than those of **Bewick's** with a peak count of just 4 seen in East Sussex on Nov 16. The latest news, however, includes a group of 12 coming in off the sea near Portland on Dec 1 and a separate sighting (on Nov 30) of the first two back at Ivy Lake in Chichester - these were seen there again on Dec 2, 4 and 5 - the report on Dec 4 says that they were seen, not on Ivy Lake, but near the Caravan Park entrance (Vinnetrow or Peckham Lakes). It seems that one pair have been wintering in the Chichester/North Mundham area each winter since 2002, and in the 2007-8 winter they brought 3 youngsters with them after having one youngster in the previous winter (but seem to have none this winter). They only use the Chichester Lakes as a night roost.

**Black Swan:** On Dec 2 one was seen on the R Itchen near Northam Bridge in Southampton and on Dec 5 one was on the Widewater lagoon at Worthing

**Black Brant:** Martin Gillingham tells us that the regular bird at Farlington Marshes can usually be seen close to the reserve building

**Red-breasted Goose:** Still present in the Lymington marshes on Dec 5

**Pintail:** Twelve were back for the first time this winter on the Emsworth shore

**Velvet Scoter:** A female or young bird was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour (seen from East Head) on Dec 5 and on Dec 6 four were seen near Calais on the French coast.

**Goldeneye:** By Dec 4 five of these were seen in Fareham Creek

**Peregrine:** What was probably one of the birds which nested this summer on a ledge of the Paulsgrove Chalkpit (south face of Portsdown) was flying around that site on Dec 3 and on that same day Graham Roberts published news that one of the Peregrine chicks he had ringed in the Chichester Cathedral nest in July 2007 has now converted to Catholicism and is based on the Roman Catholic cathedral in Cambridge

**Water Rail:** On Dec 5 one was feeding openly by day in the Lymbourne stream at Langstone - it was under overhanging branches just south of the public footbridge over the stream

**Avocet:** The flock at Nutbourne Bay (east of Thorney Island) continues to increase with 16 seen there on Dec 1

**Ringed Plover:** Of local interest two were seen on the Emsworth west shore for the first time this winter on Dec 6 and on Dec 5 four were on the shingle at the mouth of the Langbrook stream by the Langstone South Moors at high tide - also the first there this winter

**Knot:** On Dec 2 around 200 were at Newtown Harbour (IoW) and on Dec 3 there were around 400 in Pagham Harbour - in both cases a considerable increase in numbers previously reported for these two sites this winter

**Purple Sandpiper:** On Dec 2 Southsea Castle had 3 birds on show and Brighton Marina had 8 but neither was anywhere near the flock of 47 in a high tide roost in the Thanet area of Kent on Dec 1. On Dec 4 the number at Southsea jumped to 10 birds (beating the count of 8 there on Nov 6)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** By Nov 30 Pulborough Brooks had a substantial winter flock of more than 70 birds (presumably birds fleeing the winter cold in the harbours). The rate at which the birds are moving inland is indicated by counts of 35 there on Nov 25, 52 on Nov 27 and now 70+ on Nov 30. This movement inland was also marked on Nov 28 by the first report of a flock of 100 birds in the Avon Valley near the Avon Causeway. The fact that many are still on the coast is shown by a peak count of 432 on the Lymington shore on Dec 5

**Little Gull:** I have not heard of any in southern England since Nov 25 when two were seen in north Kent but on Dec 6 Cap Griz Nez near Calais reported 61 of them

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** More than 2500 roosted at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) on the evening of Dec 6

**Great Black-back Gull:** More than 220 were seen at Cuckmere Haven near Beachy Head on Dec 1

**Sandwich Tern:** Three different birds were seen in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Dec 1

**Winter Doves:** Unlike the two 'white doves' (presumably from a local dovecot) which appeared in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden on Nov 28 a flock of **30**

**Collared Doves** which turned up there on Dec 2 (and a flock of around **70 Stock Doves** seen in the Sandown area of the Isle of Wight on Nov 30) were presumably long-distance refugees from cold weather.

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** I would not be surprised to read of night roosts of a thousand or more of these in the London area but (while I knew some were based on Kent) I was surprised to read of more than 470 going to roost in the Thanet area on Dec 1

**Eagle Owl:** There is a possibility that an **escaped Eagle Owl** is in the Tadley area (west of Basingstoke) after a non-birder contacted the Hampshire Wildlife Trust to say that he had recently seen a very large owl there. (Such escapes are not uncommon)

**Long-eared Owl:** On Dec 1 a driver on a road just north of Chichester (Lavant area) saw an owl in the roadway and not only stopped but found the owl so weak that he could pick it up and place it on the verge off the road. This good Samaritan then phoned a birder he knew (Andrew House) who went to the rescue, found the bird (**a Long-eared Owl**) still immobile, and took it to the Brent Lodge Wildlife

Rescue centre where it has some chance of recovery though Andrew says it was so emaciated that it may well be unable to recover.

**Richard's Pipit:** One seen at Sandwich Bay on Dec 2

**Waxwing:** On Dec 1 a **single Waxwing** was found feeding on ornamental tree berries close to the main south Hayling shopping centre, delighting many birders who came to see in on both Dec 1 and 2. Surprisingly this seems to be the very first time the species has been seen on Hayling Island

**Dunnock:** After one had been heard in full song at Emsworth on Nov 26 two of them were heard there on Dec 2 - these are the fourth and fifth reports of **Dunnock song** I am aware of this winter - soon they should be heard daily everywhere

**Ring Ouzel:** A very late bird was found in the Kent Stour Valley on Nov 30. Many years ago I saw one wintering in the New Forest but that is very unusual (and unlikely to happen in the cold of East Kent!)

**Song Thrush:** One heard singing in Emsworth on Dec 2 was the sixth to do so in southern England this winter but these reports are at widely separated dates and show no sign of the general outburst of song we can expect sometime this month. Another was heard in the Billy Line trees near my garden on Dec 5 after searching for food in my garden.

**Mistle Thrush:** During November I usually hear at least one burst of **Mistle Thrush song** in my home area but until Dec 1 I had not come across any of these birds for months so I was pleased to see one in the Warblington School Playing fields that day. (I have seen **just three reports of song in November** on Nov 9, 11, and 12 but all miles from Havant!)

**Blackcap:** Winter birds are back in some gardens, e.g. one feeding on **Honeysuckle** berries in a Romsey garden on Dec 2 (first seen there this winter). The first such report came from a Locks Heath garden near Fareham on Nov 11 followed by one in a Northiam garden (Hastings area) on Nov 12

**Great Grey Shrike:** A newcomer was at the Pannel Valley nature reserve near Rye on Dec 6

**Hawfinch:** On Nov 30 I read a very surprising report that four of these birds had been seen several times recently at the Testwood Lakes site at Totton (west of Southampton) - making the news more intriguing was the statement that they were usually seen in a tree (near the site Visitor Centre) which has **Mistletoe** growing on it - the birds are said to turn up around 9am daily and to stay there until mid-afternoon (when they presumably fly off to roost elsewhere).

**Yellowhammer:** Until this week the highest count I had seen reported this autumn (since Sep 1) was of around 20 on winter stubble near Pulborough on Oct 28 but we now have a count of 28 at Sandwich Bay on Dec 1

**Escapes:** A sprightly looking sunlit **Cockatiel** was perched in a tree above the entrance to St Faith's Church in Havant, attracting the attention of the Saturday shoppers when it called, on Dec 6.

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter:** An extraordinarily late sighting of one on the seawall at the Lymington marshes on Dec 6 - the last I know of before this was one at Gosport on Nov 19

### Butterflies

**Red Admiral:** Just four of these are the only butterflies I am aware of this week - one was seen at the Queen Elizabeth country park on Dec 2 and on Dec 4 I saw one for myself in the centre of Havant - elsewhere one was in the Eastbourne (Herstmonceux) area on Dec 3 and another in Lewes town on Dec 4.

**Large White caterpillars** were seen in the Seaford area on Dec 1 (marching from the allotments where they had been eating cabbages to climb six feet up to the roof of a garden shed to pupate). At Northiam (north of Hastings) a **Speckled Wood pupa** was found when dead grass was being cleared.

### Moths

**Buttoned Snout (2480 Hypena rostralis):** One found indoors in the Thanet area of Kent on Dec 3 - these moths appear in August and then normally hibernate in IOctober to breed next spring

### Other Insects

**Western Conifer Seed Bug (Leptoglossus occidentalis):** This American insect was new to Britain in 2007 but this year there were ten reports of it at seven sites in October and now another single has been found at Portland on Dec 5

## PLANTS

**In the first week of December I have recorded 79 plants in flower** but one is to be discounted as a grass (**Wild Oat**) while two more were strictly garden flowers (**Druce's Cranesbill** and **Honeywort**) so the real total is around 76 - perhaps it is actually 75 as I find difficulty in believing the report from Durlston of **Ground Ivy** in flower. Good records this week were of **Brackish Water Crowfoot** still flowering in the Homewell spring pool in central Havant and of just one flower remaining on an otherwise dead bush of **Perennial Wallrocket** on the rail line in Havant. Several plants still flowering were the result of wildflower seed sowing by Havant Borough near their Southmoor Lane depot (**Corn Marigold, Corn Cackle, Cornflower** and **Autumn Oxeye** plus a new plant of **Sweet**

**Alison**) while across the road from that sowing both **Pellitory of the Wall** and **Storks Bill** were still out

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Dolphin species:** On Dec 5 a birder on the shore at Splash Point (just west of Beachy Head) found what he described as a **dead Dolphin** washed up but went on to say that **the corpse was only around 70 cm long** which sounded too small for any Dolphin or Porpoise until I guessed this was a youngster, perhaps only born this summer. An adult **Porpoise** is likely to be at least 135 cm long, a **Common Dolphin** measures at least 180 cm and an adult **Bottle-nosed Dolphin** should be 280 cm. However all these creatures take several years to reach maturity - for a **Bottle-nosed** the process takes 12 years and a **Porpoise** takes 3 years (presumably the **Common Dolphin** is somewhere in between). A weak youngster is quite likely to have been washed up in recent storms and once stranded on the beach it would suffocate as it is unable to expand its ribs against the increased pressure of gravity when out of water.

**Common Seal:** One in Pagham Harbour on Nov 30

**Water Vole:** One seen swimming in the River Ems at Brook Meadow (Emsworth) on Dec 2 was the 153rd observation of the species recorded at that site this year and will probably be the last, though as these animals do not hibernate one might be seen again making a foray to restock the larder which they keep for winter sustenance within their burrows where they spend the winter months

**Bat species:** One seen in daylight (3:30pm) flying into a thatched roof in the Hook/Warsash area on Dec 6

**Fungi:** More fresh specimens of **Field Blewit** had come up in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Dec 5 and as I was walking up the northern of the Billy Trail on my way to the cemetery I had a further look at a tuft of yellowish fungi which I had seen earlier in the week and thought were young **Honey Fungus**. This id had been questioned by John Sawtell who thought they were what was shown in his book (a recent publication called the **Dorling Kindersley Pocket Nature: Fungi** - the first book to use the 'new English Names' proposed by the British Mycological Society) - this book called the species '**Sheathed Woodtuft**' (**Kuehneromyces mutabilis**) which I found translates to **Galerina mutabilis** which can be found in Roger Phillips. I now agree with this id. Other finds this week have been the first **Sulphur Tuft** to be found in my garden and yet another outburst of fungi had appeared by Dec 5 on one of the woodchip piles beside the Billy Trail in the Langstone area - a large species of one of the Ascomycetes which I call 'bedpan fungi' from their shape and general appearance - the bowl of the largest specimen I found was 10 cm across and led me to guess it was **Peziza vesiculosa** or **Blistered Cup**

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 1 - 7 (WEEK 48 OF 2008)**

[Fri 5 Dec](#)

## **Havant and Budds Farm area**

First some notes from earlier in the week. Yesterday (Dec 4) I watched a **Red Admiral** butterfly fluttering along the sunlit wall of the Waitrose store near in Havant around mid-day. On Tuesday (Dec 2) I extended a brief trip to post a letter and continued down the Billy Trail to where the Lymbourne stream runs alongside the track just beyond the A27 - here quite a few **fresh leaves of Lesser Celandine** had pushed up in the spot where I expect to see the first flowers of the season but there were no flower buds that I could see. On the other side of the track, however, I did find my first fresh **Sweet Violet flower** for December. Coming back via the A27 footbridge alongside the main Langstone roundabout I also added flowering **Fat Hen**, and coming through Juniper Square I cheated by adding two garden flowers to my list, my excuse being that both had some special interest. The first was a single **pink Cranesbill Flower** which I assumed to be **French Cranesbill (Geranium endressii)** until I looked at it closely and saw the flower was a pale pink colour with no apparent purple veins, making it a specimen of **Druce's Cranesbill (Geranium x oxonianum)**. As both these species can be found as garden escapes and a knowledge of the features which separate them is needed to record them correctly I took this unseasonable flowering, and the reminder of the differences, as an excuse for recording the plant as if it were an escape though it was in a garden! The other plant which I was surprised to see flowering was more blatant cheating as it is not listed in Stace and I have not heard of it as an escapee but as the plant was totally new to me until this summer (when John Goodspeed brought it to my attention) I listed it as proof that I can still recall its name of **Honeywort (Cerinthe major)**.

Today I managed two brief outings. In the morning I walked the northern section of the Billy Line behind my house and had another look at a clump of fungi I had first seen on Tuesday when I thought they were fresh **Honey Fungus**. This time, thanks to a different identification by John Sawtell, I saw that they were what he had decided - **Kuehneromyces mutabilis** (a name I had not come across before but which is the current name for what I know as **Galerina mutabilis** - nowadays it has the English name of **Sheathed Woodtuft**). Incidentally John had got this name and id from new book called **Dorling Kindersley Pocket Nature: Fungi** which is obtainable for about £6-99 and which is highly recommended by its readers (though inevitably its pocket size limits its scope) - from what I saw of it the pictures and text are both good and it is I think unique (at present) in using the 'New English Names' proposed by the British Mycological Society.

In the afternoon I cycled to the Brockhampton Stream and went along the Budds Farm shore, returning along the South Moors shore. During this I took a brief look at the Budds Farm Pools where there was nothing new but good numbers of **Shoveler, Gadwall, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Teal and Mallard**. A quick look at the south end of Southmoor Lane found the wildflower seed **Corn Marigold, Corn Cockle, Cornflower** and **Autumn Oxeye** all still in flower with the usual **Small Nettle** and a newcomer in the form of a tiny plant of **Sweet Alison**. Across the road by the Budds Farm fence close to the height barrier both **Pellitory of the Wall** and **Storksbill** were still in flower.

At the mouth of the Langbrook stream, with the tide up, there was a small wader roost including **four Ringed Plover** with **four Redshank** and singles of **Lapwing** and **Grey Plover** while on the South Moors a flock of around **25 Curlew** spent a little time before flying out into the harbour. On the sea were a few **Merganser** and I noted that they were present (two males resting on the shingle) as the sun was setting - twenty years ago they would not have felt safe in the harbour overnight and would have flown out to sea at least an hour before sunset.

Coming back up the Billy Line I found yet another new display of fungi on one of the woodchip piles - this time a tight cluster of what I call 'bedpan' fungi (brown bowl shaped 'spore shooters') and by their colour and size I decided they were **Peziza vesiculosa**.

## Mon 1 Dec

### Around Havant

While many birders were enjoying the sight of a single **Waxwing** in south Hayling, and at least one of them saw a flock of **14 Black-necked Grebe** in Langstone Harbour from the Oysterbeds, I was taking a quick walk around Havant to start my December flowering plant list.

Among the 54 plants which I found in flower were **Broad-leaved Willowherb** in my own garden, **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** in Juniper Square (with **Feverfew** nearby), **Fools Parsley** and **Spotted Medick** near the **Winter Helitrope** in Park Road South, **Brackish Water Crowfoot** in the Homewell Spring and **Field Madder** in St Faith's church yard (where I also picked up half a dozen coins buried in the soil, discovering them to amount to 1600 Italian Lira - I think now worthless - after taking them home and cleaning them).

During the morning's walk I heard one **Collared Dove** (and several **Robins** and **Wrens**) in song, while a trip to buy Christmas postage stamps after lunch gave me a lovely view of a **large female Sparrowhawk** lazily cruising high over the town centre plus a single **Mistle Thrush** on the Warblington School playing fields (they are usually heard singing around that area at this time of year but I have neither heard nor seen one here this autumn until now).

## **SUMMARY FOR NOV 24 - 30 (WEEK 47 OF 2008)**

### Highlights:

Three **Little Egrets** searching for worms in the wet ground of the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone were the first I have seen in winter mode and a **Tawny Owl** has been seen in the north end of the Billy Trail behind Fairfield School.

A **Whooper Swan** at Farlington Marshes was, I think, a first for the reserve - three more arrived in the Ringwood area and probably came with a small wave of **Bewick's Swans**.

A **Merlin** and **13 Avocet** were both seen by the Havant Willdife Group at Nutbourne on Nov 29.

Single **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** (and a **Night Heron**) are the first to reach southern England this winter and other rarities include a **Pallas' Warbler** on the Isle of Wight and **two unusual Shrike species** in Lincolnshire and the Hebrides.

**Fulmars, Guillemots** and **Rooks** have all been checking up on their nest sites this week. With approaching **1200 Waxwings** now in the UK we may soon find some settling in Hampshire.

Both **Duncock** and **Song Thrush** are expected to become regular songsters any day now.

**Large White** and **Red Admiral** butterflies are the only ones still flying and only one new moth species is in this week's news

The **list of wild plants seen flowering in November has reached 157** (excluding Grasses) with four new species were added this week (**Ornamental Cherry Trees** have also started to flower in gardens but these are not included in the count)

## **BIRDS**

**Black-throated Diver:** On Nov 28 watchers at Selsey Bill saw three of these fishing and five more flying west as well as two **Red-throated** and two **Great Northern** on the sea

**Little Grebe:** The flock in Christchurch Harbour numbered 22 birds by Nov 26 but no recent local reports from Broadmarsh or Ports Creek

**Red-necked Grebe:** Two were in Studland Bay on Nov 28 when one was among **15 Great Crested** on the sea off Ferring (Worthing)

**Slavonian Grebe:** A flock of 13 were on the sea just off Pagham Harbour on Nov 26 along with a flock of **22 Great Crested Grebes**

**Fulmar:** On Nov 29 around 10 were cruising off the South Foreland prospecting for nest sites

**Sooty Shearwater:** One seen off Portland on Nov 23 was the first I have heard of since one at Dungeness on Nov 1 (regular autumn reports of them ceased on Oct 24)

**Bittern:** Reports from five sites this week (none in Hampshire) include a sighting at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough on Nov 29

**Night Heron:** One at Hythe in Kent on Nov 22 and 23 only (near where the **Green Heron** was seen from Oct 26 to Nov 10). This new bird was reported as a **Black-crowned Night Heron** but I see that is just the full modern name for a regular **Night Heron**

**Little Egret:** On Nov 28 I saw three searching for food in the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone - the first I have seen looking for food in wet soil inland this winter

**Glossy Ibis:** Lee Evans tells us that the Ibis which has appeared at Lytham St Anne's in Lancashire for the past two winters is back again for this winter

**Bewick's Swan:** There has been a widespread arrival of these in the past few days. Nov 24 brought news of 15 flying west along the north Kent coast, on Nov 25 there were 2 at Pulborough and a family of 4 were at Ibsley on the Hampshire Avon, and on Nov 26 there were 14 on the River Arun near Arundel with 30 more pausing en route at Dungeness RSPB reserve. The family at Ibsley this week may have been there for some time as a pair with two cygnets were there on Nov 6 (first arrivals in the south of England as far as I know). Latest news is of 18 on the R Arun just north of Arundel with one family having 5 cygnets.

**Whooper Swan:** One turned up at Farlington Marshes on Nov 24 (I think a new species for the reserve) and delighted several people but I have not heard any more of it since then. A similar passing visit was made to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood by three of these Swans on Nov 23

**Pinkfoot and Whitefront Geese:** Four of each were near the Avon causeway over the R Avon on the Hants/Dorset border on Nov 24. The **Pink-feet** were still in the area on Nov 28 and the latest report of the **White-fronts** was on Nov 29

**Brent:** The flock at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) numbered 2300 on Nov 28 with **16 Pale-bellied** and **2 Brant**

**Red-breasted Brent:** The bird on the Lymington Marshes was still there on Nov 29 but moves around and several people have failed to find it.

**Pintail:** The WeBS count on Nov 15 found 27 Pintail on the Thorney Island Deeps but a sighting of just two there on Nov 26 was none the less exciting

**Velvet Scoter:** One female flew east past Selsey Bill on Nov 23 and what was probably the same bird was on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Nov 26 (maybe it will stay around there for a bit)

**Smew:** The first of the winter was reported at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Nov 10 but since then I have seen no other reports other than what was probably the same bird at Dugeness on Nov 26

**Goosander:** 34 were roosting at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 24, the biggest gathering so far this winter in the south of England. Most of these fly out to smaller ponds in the New Forest (and probably in Dorset too) during the day and I suspect that the bird seen on Hatchet Pond near Beaulieu on Nov 28 and 29 spent the night in between at Blashford. Others of the group spend their days on the River Avon (e.g. 3 in the Fordingbridge area on Nov 27). Over at Eastleigh Lakeside two redheads were seen on Nov 26 with at least one there on Nov 29.

**Merlin:** A brown-backed female or young bird perched in trees near Nutbourne Bay was one of the highlights of the walk there by the Havant Wildlife Group on Nov 29 (regular sightings of this species around Langstone and Chichester Harbours compare favourably to the sighting of a total of just two birds in the many New Forest heathland sites covered by birders seeking **Great Grey Shrikes** on the weekend of Nov 22/23)

**Avocet:** A flock of around 26 birds was in Langstone Harbour close to Farlington Marshes on Nov 7, then 22 were there on Nov 14 and 25 were still there on Nov 23. In Chichester Harbour the small flock in Nutbourne Bay continues to grow from three birds on Nov 14, then six on Nov 21 to thirteen birds on Nov 29

**Stone Curlew:** A recent RSPB Press Release tells us that the number breeding in this country reached 351 pairs during the past summer, achieving the target of 350 pairs which the RSPB thought would not be reached until 2015 - however the abandonment of Set Aside and more intensive farming in future years may once again see these birds having less chance of breeding in this country

**Sanderling:** A flock of 225 on the Ryde Sands (IoW) on Nov 26 was the highest count for the Island so far this winter (some of these birds may well show up in high tide counts on the Gosport and Portsmouth shore during the winter)

**Woodcock:** More of these are arriving from the continent. On Nov 21 three were flushed in Stansted Forest, on Nov 22 one arrived at Dungeness, on Nov 23 one came in off the sea at Worthing, on Nov 24 one was seen at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood, on Nov 25 one arrived at Portland and on Nov 26 one was at Warnham nature reserve at Horsham.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Some of these are now feeding in the Avon valley. On Nov 28 more than 20 were in the Ibsley area and with that news was a report that 92 had roosted overnight at the Blashford Lakes 'recently'. On Nov 28 a flock of around 100 was seen in the Avon Causeway area

**Iceland Gull:** The first to be seen in southern England this winter was a first or second winter bird off Reculver on the north Kent coast on Nov 24

**Glaucous Gull:** The first reports of these which I saw this winter came from Holland on Nov 22 (four or five birds) and now one has been seen several times on the Lymington shore this week

**Sandwich Tern:** Four were seen in Portsmouth Harbour (off Priddy's Hard at Gosport) on Nov 22 - the observer assumed they were late migrants but I suspect they will be staying for the winter. Two others were seen in Poole Harbour on Nov 28

**Auks:** On Nov 23 watchers at Selsey Bill saw **83 mixed Razorbills and Guillemots** heading west while Portland Bill reported 400 of them passing that day. On Nov 24 another 75 were seen from Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. This

influx of birds brought a report of around 250 crammed onto the breeding ledges at Durlston Head in Dorset on Nov 28 with more than 150 there on Nov 29 - like the **Fulmars** reported above apparently checking out their nest sites at the South Foreland these **Guillemots** are not intending to nest at the moment!

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** A group of six were seen in the Studland area of Dorset (just west of Poole Bay) on Nov 21 and 29. This is the first report I have seen of this colony this year - on 5 Dec 2007 we were told that there were less than ten birds left there out of a larger colony which was mentioned in a BBC news item dated 22 Mar 2007 in which a resident of Swanage said .. "There has been a small flock of these in Studland Dorset for the past 10 years. They make for locals' fruit trees in the summer, especially the plums - rumour has it a couple escaped from captivity and have set up home by the sea."

**Tawny Owl:** On winter nights in the 1970s I frequently heard **Tawny Owls** calling from the Billy Trail trees at the foot of my garden in Havant but have not done so since then - maybe I will hear one again as this year two people have told me of hearing them further down the Billy Trail in the Grove Road area and this week I was told by one dog walker of a close encounter with one when she was passing the Fairfield School 'conservation area' a few days ago

**Short-eared Owl:** Another close encounter with an owl was described by Andrew House when he visited Pagham Harbour on Nov 29 and came within thirty feet of a **Short-eared Owl** dozing on a fence post within a similar short distance of passing people and dogs

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Although there is always a possibility of confusion between the common **Great Spotted** and the now rare **Lesser Spotted** in sightings reported by inexperienced birders a report of one being seen on Nov 25 in a garden in the Hermitage area of Emsworth near Lumley Mill comes from an area where quite a few old apple trees survive from the orchards that were to be found here not too many years ago.

**Swallow:** Nov 22 brought reports from three coastal sites and the latest was a single at Portland on Nov 24

**Waxwing:** Lee Evans' weekly summary of national bird news on Nov 25 reported a total of **over 1150 of these birds** scattered around the country (mainly in the north and east with 650+ of them in the Glasgow area). Although he does not mention any as being in southern England outside Kent there has been a flock of around a dozen in the Southampton area in the past week and on Nov 26 a flock of around 25 flew over Romsey (these were only probables seen flying over fast)

**Dunnock:** Full song was heard from one bird in Emsworth on Nov 26. I heard partial song from one in Havant on Nov 19 and song has been reported from Durlston on Oct 27 and from a Kent site on Nov 12. Last winter fairly regular song started on Dec 3 after three earlier reports on Oct 4 and 14 as well as Nov 27

**Blackbird:** An all white male (with yellow bill) was seen at the Lower Test reserve at Southampton on Nov 29 raising a question as to whether continental birds are more prone to such aberrations than are our regular breeding birds - no answer so far to that question!

**Song Thrush:** Full song heard in Emsworth on Nov 27 - these, like the **Dunnocks**, should become daily songsters very soon now (last year they were heard daily from Nov 20)

**Pallas' Warbler:** One was in the Isle of Wight Staplers' area (a 'suburb' on the east side of Newtown) on Nov 26

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** One was in a Rowlands Castle Woodberry Lane garden on Nov 22

**Rare Shrikes:** Lee Evans' national bird news for Nov 25 reports the presence of two species that I had not heard of until then. A probable **Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*)** was visiting gardens in north Uist (Outer Hebrides) and a subspecies of **Southern Grey Shrike** known as a **Saxaul Shrike (aka Steppe Shrike - *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*)** was in Lincolnshire.

**Great Grey Shrike:** Only three of these were found in a survey of their New Forest sites last week end - a subsequent report of one at Pitcher's Knowle (just east of Hampton Ridge) on Nov 29 was probably one of the three already reported (the one at Ogden's Purlicu could easily have moved a couple of kilometres north east to the new site). Dorset, however, may have acquired a new bird with one at Troop Heath (not far south of Turners Puddle) on Nov 29

**Rook:** Although these do not normally return to their Rookeries until February, 48 of them were back at their nests at one north Kent site on Nov 25 (like the **Fulmars** and **Guillemots** they may feel it necessary to make sure their breeding sites are still available!)

**Brambling:** The first three figure count for southern England this winter came from the Chichester West Dean woods on Nov 26 when the flock there was estimated at **100 Brambling**

**Bullfinch:** A flock of more than 15 seen at Durlston on Nov 28 was more surprising to me than the **100 Bramblings**

**Hawfinch:** 10 were found in the Chichester West Dean woods on Nov 25 and more than 20 were counted at the New Forest Blackwater Arboretum roost site on the afternoon of Nov 27

**Escapees:** On Nov 27 a **Harris Hawk** was seen at Burgate Manor Farm by the R Avon just north east of Fordingbridge and on Nov 29 another was seen in a roadside tree by the A326 in or near to Totton (Southampton)

## **INSECTS**

## Butterflies

- **Large White:** Five were seen in the Newhaven area on Nov 22
- **Red Admiral:** Two were seen egg-laying in the Newhaven area on Nov 22 after one had been in a Waterlooville garden on Nov 19. Since then Nov 25 brought reports of singles seen at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester and from Brighton town.

## Moths

- **Mottled Umber (1935 *Erannis defoliaria*):** Several reports of this recently but the first of the season seems to have been claimed by Pulborough Brooks on Nov 26

## PLANTS

**157 seems to be the final count** for the plant species which I have found or heard of flowering during the month of November - this figure excludes at least six grass species seen in fresh condition and bearing flower spikelets. New species added to the list this week were ...

**Dark Mullein:** One plant flowering beside the Harts Farm Way/A27 westbound slip road at Broadmarsh on Nov 25

**Water Figwort:** One in full flower in the spillway of excess water pouring from the Bedhampton water works into the Hermitage Stream on Nov 25

**'Wild Garden Forget-me-not':** These are common wild flowers, looking like **Wood Forget-me-not** but actually deriving their ancestry from garden cultivars, are now firmly established in the wild. I found a cluster of them starting to flower on Nov 25 in the ditch between the A27 and the cycleway along the north side of the Langstone Technology Park.

**Oxeye Daisy:** These can still be found flowering in several places (e.g. St Faith's Churchyard in Havant) as can the much taller and larger **Shasta Daisies**, but the plants still flowering among the 'sown wildflower seed plants' along the southern end of Southmoor Lane at Brockhampton do not fit the description of either species and I think they are a different species called **Autumn Oxeye (*Leucanthemella serotina*)** though I will have to check them more closely before I can be sure.

**Three-cornered Leek:** Several plants growing under the roadside hedges of gardens lining Warblington Road at Emsworth (where they have long flourished untended by any gardener) had started to flower by Nov 26 and on Nov 28 several pink flowered **ornamental Japanese Cherry trees** were flowering in Havant gardens (the latter are not counted as wild flowers though the former are!)

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hedgehog:** At least two reported as still active in the past few days - one in Waterlooville (where it has been fairly mild) and one in East Kent (where it must have been much colder though the animal may have gone into hibernation and then been disturbed)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 24 - 30 (WEEK 47 OF 2008)**

**Thu 27 Nov**

### **Mid-week Summary**

#### **BIRDS**

**Slavonian Grebe:** A flock of **13** were on the sea just off Pagham Harbour on Nov 26 along with a flock of **22 Great Crested Grebes**

**Sooty Shearwater:** One seen off Portland on Nov 23 was the first I have heard of since one at Dungeness on Nov 1 (regular autumn reports of them ceased on Oct 24)

**Night Heron:** One at Hythe in Kent on Nov 22 and 23 only (near where the **Green Heron** was seen from Oct 26 to Nov 10). This new bird was reported as a **Black-crowned Night Heron** but I see that is just the full modern name for a regular **Night Heron**

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**Bewick's Swan:** There has been a widespread arrival of these in the past few days. Nov 24 brought news of 15 flying west along the north Kent coast, on Nov 25 there were 2 at Pulborough and a family of 4 were at Ibsley on the Hampshire Avon, and on Nov 26 there were 14 on the River Arun near Arundel with 30 more pausing en route at Dungeness RSPB reserve. The family at Ibsley this week may have been there for some time as a pair with two cygnets were there on Nov 6 (first arrivals in the south of England as far as I know)

**Pinkfoot and Whitefront Geese:** Four of each were near the Avon causeway over the R Avon on the Hants/Dorset border on Nov 24

**Velvet Scoter:** One female flew east past Selsey Bill on Nov 23 and what was probably the same bird was on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Nov 26 (maybe it will stay around there for a bit)

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**Rare Shrikes:** Lee Evans' national bird news for Nov 25 reports the presence of two species that I had not heard of until then. A **Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*)** was visiting gardens in north Uist (Outer Hebrides) and a **subspecies of Southern Grey Shrike** known as a **Saxaul Shrike (aka Steppe Shrike - *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*)** was in Lincolnshire.

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**Rook:** Although these do not normally return to their Rookeries until February, 48 of them were back at their nests at one north Kent site on Nov 25

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies**

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- **Red Admiral:** Two were seen egg-laying in the Newhaven area on Nov 22 after one had been in a Waterlooville garden on Nov 19

## PLANTS

**156 plants have been seen flowering** so far this month (I do not include grasses in this count but you can add on another 5 for **Cock's Foot, False Oat, Wall Barley, Tall Fescue** and **Wild Oat**)

**Dark Mullein:** One plant flowering beside the Harts Farm Way/A27 westbound slip road at Broadmarsh on Nov 25

**Water Figwort:** One in full flower in the spillway of excess water pouring from the Bedhampton water works into the Hermitage Stream on Nov 25

**'Wild Garden Forget-me-not':** These are common wild flowers, looking like **Wood Forget-me-not** but actually deriving their ancestry from garden cultivars, are now firmly established in the wild. I found a cluster of them starting to flower on Nov 25 in the ditch between the A27 and the cycleway along the north side of the Langstone Technology Park.

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## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hedgehog:** At least two reported as still active in the past few days - one in Waterlooville (where it has been fairly mild) and one in East Kent (where it must have been much colder though the animal may have gone into hibernation and then been disturbed)

### Wed 26 Nov

#### Garden birds from the continent?

Yesterday I mentioned the noisy arrival of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** in trees at the end of my garden - possibly a youngster from a local nest now having to find its own territory but equally likely to be a continental bird escaping the harsh winter it would have had in, say, Germany.

This morning **two Goldcrests** caught my eye as they worked their way across the garden, rapidly but diligently searching each branch of the apple trees for any tiny insects - they two could well have flown across the Channel to be here today (and gone tomorrow in their endless roving quest for food)

Further evidence of long distance travel by birds came when adding the latest news to my database - processing Lee Evans latest bulletin of national bird news showed my that **well over 1100 Waxwings** are now in this country (650+

of them in the Glasgow area), and introduced me to two species of **Shrike** currently in Britain but previously unheard of by myself - one is a (presumed - difficult to separate from **Red-backed**) **Brown Shrike** that is to be seen in gardens on North Uist in the Hebrides, the other is called a **Steppe** (or **Saxaul**) **Shrike** and can be seen in Lincolnshire

[Tue 25 Nov](#)

### **Budds Farm and Broadmarsh**

This afternoon's cycle ride added three new species to my list of wildflowers flowering in November - the '**wild form**' of **Wood Forget-me-not** that escapes from garden plantings - seen by the cycle way south of the A27 passing the Langston Technology Park, **Dark Mullein** by the A27 sliproad at Broadmarsh and **Water Figwort** in the overflow from the Bedhampton Water Works springs flowing into the Hermitage Stream.

At the mound overlooking Budds Farm a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** flew across the pools and into the trees - possibly a new arrival in the area checking out its winter territory (the first of this winter arrived in trees by the Billy Trail at the end of my garden this morning) - and on the pools there were at least **20 Pochard** and probably **24 Shoveler** but only **6 Gadwall** and very few **Coot** and **Little Grebes** (only one seen). At one point a number of ducks took off in a **panic** from the water near the north bank but I looked in vain for a **Fox** in the waterside vegetation - the cause of the panic was a **Cormorant swimming under shallow water** where it gave the appearance of a hunting crocodile!

SUMMARY FOR NOV 17 - 23 (WEEK 46 OF 2008)

#### BIRDS

Red-throated Diver: 60 of these were seen at one Dutch site on Nov 22 and 11 were seen off the north Kent coast on Nov 21 showing a significant increase over the ones and two reported so far

Black-throated Diver: The Gosport Forton lake bird has been seen there daily from Nov 15 to 20

Little Grebe: Winter flocks of 20 or more can be seen in the Langstone Harbour area in most winters, particularly off Broadmarsh and in the east end of Ports Creek and a report of 100 already present in the Thames estuary off the Kent coast suggests it maybe worth checking out the local sites - on Nov 20 Jeff Goodridge saw more than 20 off Broadmarsh

Red-necked Grebe: One was in Pagham Harbour on Nov 21 (one had been seen there on Sep 26 but has not been reported since then)

Slavonian Grebe: One or two have been reported recently at each of several sites (Lymington, Poole Harbour, Portland Harbour, etc) but a count of 7 in Pagham Harbour on Nov 22 is the highest count so far and probably reflects a recent influx (worth checking out Langstone Harbour)

Storm Petrel: One seen off the Dutch coast on Nov 22 was the first I have heard of anywhere since Oct 7

Leach's Petrel: Up to three seen from three sites on the Dutch coast on Nov 22

Gannet: More than 500 were feeding off Dungeness on Nov 21 when at least another 100 were off the north Kent coast

Bewick's Swan: Although one Dutch site recorded 156 of these on Nov 11 very few have been reported in southern England so far. The only reports I have seen have been of a family group of four at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 6, two new arrivals at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Nov 14 and a total of 6 at Pulborough Brooks on Nov 17

Whooper Swan: Up to Nov 16 the highest count of these I am aware of in southern England was a pair with one cygnet seen on the Isle of Wight on Oct 4 with a single bird in north Kent from Oct 20 to Nov 2 and one in the Weymouth/Abbotsbury area of Dorset on Nov 9 and 16. Nov 16 also brought a report of four flying over the Cuckmere valley in Sussex and Nov 22 brought a count of 16 from the Dutch coast

Red-breasted Brent Goose: The single bird on the Lymington Marshes was still there on Nov 22. Two new facts about it are firstly that its association with Canadas may be a result of its feeding habits rather than a negative indication of its genuineness as a migrant coming here from Siberia with the other Brent - Alan Lewis tells us that the Red-breasted birds, like Canadas, do not eat the Eel-grass and other marine vegetation which the normal Brent prefer to feed on until the supply is exhausted (driving them to feed on land), but are eaters of land grasses only. The second piece of news is that this bird has probably been here since Oct 31 although the majority of birders were only aware of its presence from Nov 6 (the early sighting is attributed to the eminent Eddie Wiseman)

Ruddy Shelduck: One was seen at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 7 with no more reports until Nov 17 when two distant birds (probably of this species) were seen during WeBS counts on that day. Two 'probables' had been seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 17 and there was a distant sighting of one on Thorney Island on Sep 20

Shelduck: Counts of 500 and 394 respectively at two Dutch sites on Nov 22 may presage the arrival of more birds on the southern English coast

Mandarin duck: Until Nov 16 the highest number of these ducks recorded on Warnham Mill Pond at Horsham had been 18 but on Nov 16 the highest count figure shot up to 47

Pintail: The WeBS count of the Arun valley area covering Amberley Wild Brooks and Pulborough Brooks found 150 Pintail there on Nov 17. No other site has reported 50 or more this autumn and the only counts to reach or exceed that number were all at Pulborough on Oct 7 (just 50 present), Nov 13 (estimate of 100) and the Nov 17 count - since writing that in mid-week there has been a report of 89 at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 22

Ring-necked Duck: The only report of this species that I have seen was of a first winter male at the Kent end of Scotney gravel pit near Rye on Nov 16

Ferruginous x Pochard hybrid: One turned up at Rye Harbour on Nov 17, thought to be the same bird that was there last winter. The Budds Farm 'Fudge Duck' here in Havant was reported by myself on Sep 20 but neither I nor anyone else has reported it so far since then!

Scaup: A count of 150 at a Dutch site on Nov 22 may herald the arrival of more in southern England where the highest count I have seen has been of 9 at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Nov 20

Eider: Two have been in Chichester Harbour and were included in the Thorney Island WeBS count for the weekend of Nov 15/16

Velvet Scoter: On Nov 21 one was seen in north Kent and two more were at Dungeness while Nov 22 brought a female to Selsey Bill and a count of 8 at one Dutch site

Goldeneye: A few are now to be seen in our Solent harbours - on Nov 15 two were seen in Chichester Harbour from Thorney Island, on Nov 16 three were in Pagham Harbour and on Nov 17 more than one was in Southampton Water. By Nov 20 a dozen were seen from Broadmarsh slipway in Langstone Harbour and 57 were reported from on Dutch site

Smew: Nowadays Smew are rare winter visitors to Hampshire (e.g. one day visits to the county by single birds in 2004 and 2006, though they are still regularly seen in Kent and East Sussex) but I have a personal interest in them as from Feb 1981 to Jan 1987 they turned up and stayed through each winter on the Portsmouth IBM Lake when I was working at that site where they had the status of 'garden birds' which could be viewed in any lunch time stroll round the lake. Although I no longer expect to see one for myself I still take a keen interest in all reports of the species and so am pleased to report that the very first of this winter was a female at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Nov 10

Goosander: The redhead seen from West Wittering on Nov 15 had been present since Nov 14 according to Barry Collins. Birds now moving around and not yet settled for the winter gave a surprise inland sighting of 3 at Warnham Mill Pond at Horsham for the night of Nov 21 to 22 (when they left at dawn)

Hen Harrier: These are now widespread in southern England and two ringtails were hunting over Thorney Island on Nov 14 (probably the same two which had been seen there on Nov 9)

Buzzard: On Aug 25 and 27 there were sightings of at least 32 Buzzards congregating in one field at North Baddesley near Romsey and I assumed this was a temporary congregation caused by recent harrowing of the field which would have made earthworms easy pickings for the birds but perhaps there are other factors causing a more permanent cluster of Buzzards here as 16 were seen in the same field on Nov 16

Rough Legged Buzzard: One seen at a Dutch site on Nov 22

Common Crane: Two which landed near the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Nov 17 were also seen at Sandwich Bay and in Thanet that day. They are said to be different birds to the pair which spent the whole month of September at the Dungeness reserve

Avocet: Three were seen at Nutbourne Bay, just east of Thorney Island, on Nov 14 and by Nov 19 a group of ten were there. A small long-staying group (up to 8) were seen there both last winter and the previous winter so there is a fair chance that these birds will stay around through the winter. Elsewhere at least 756 were in Poole Harbour on Nov 18

Ringed Plover: Prior to Nov 19 I had only had one sighting of these in the Langstone/Emsworth/ Northney area this winter (just 5 on the Warblington shore on Oct 6) but on Nov 19 I found more than 20 in a high tide roost in Northney marina area. On Nov 15 a total of 39 were recorded in the Thorney Island WeBS count.

Lapwing: The flock at Pulborough Brooks was estimated at 900 birds on Nov 17 and on Nov 19 there were 500+ at Rye Harbour while over on the near continent one site had around 6900 on Nov 16

Knot: These are now back in full winter strength - I have already reported that (on Nov 11) 230 were in Pagham Harbour and on Nov 15 the Thorney Island WeBS count found 600 (presumably on the Pilsey Sands, along with 140 Sanderling)

Dunlin: The Thorney Island WeBS count found 15,000 of these on Nov 15/16

Woodcock: Reports of singles at four sites (Sandwich Bay, Thanet, Rye Harbour and Bognor) between Nov 17 and 21 indicate a new wave of arrivals from the continent. The bird at Nyetimber in the Bognor area was typically out of its normal habitat, being flushed from a garden vegetable patch and flying into a house window before making its escape

Black-tailed Godwit: Wet weather and oncoming winter may have influenced these birds' movements recently. They normally move inland to feed in wet grassland with the coming of cold weather but recent rain (softening the ground and bringing worms to the surface) may have hastened this movement in the past week or so. A large number of them seem to have moved from Chichester Harbour mud to grassland north of Pagham Harbour and a few have gone inland as far as Pulborough Brooks (just 2 there on Nov 17 but up to 18 on Nov 19 and around 20 on Nov 21).

Bar-tailed Godwit: The WeBS count at Thorney Island on Nov 15/16 found 500 Bar-tails and on Nov 20 there was a block of 142 on the north Kent coast

Whimbrel: At least one wintering bird is at Thorney Island (Nov 15) and two were on the Lymington shore on Nov 16 (the Church Norton bird has not been reported since Oct 31)

Spotted Redshank: 5 were on the Lymington shore on Nov 16 and the regular bird at Nore Barn (Emsworth) was joined by a second on Nov 21 - another single was in Nutbourne Bay east of Thorney Island on Nov 21

Grey Phalarope: Six sites reported this species on Nov 21 and 22 - two birds were seen on the north Kent coast and as many as five at one Dutch site

Little Gull: On Nov 22 four Dutch sites reported counts of 37, 80, 93 and 100 respectively

Kittiwake: A lot of these are on the move down channel at the moment - on Nov 21 a north Kent site reported 208 heading west and on Nov 22 400 were recorded on the Dutch coast

Glaucous Gull: None reported in southern England so far but watch this space as Nov 22 brought four birds to one Dutch site

Sandwich Tern: One seen at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 18 may have decided to leave our shores but a number are likely to remain in Langstone and Chichester Harbours - no recent reports from Langstone Harbour but Chichester Harbour has had sightings of 5 off Thorney Island on Nov 14, 3 at Nore Barn west of Emsworth on Nov 15 and a peak of 7 seen from Thorney on Nov 16

Black Tern: A very late bird seen on the Dutch coast on Nov 22 (the last one before this was on Sep 20!)

Puffin: One in Poole Bay on Nov 20

Wood Pigeon: The peak of their autumn passage is probably now over but 3185 went west over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 19 when at least 1000 were put up from feeding in the Hayling West Lane fields (south of Daw Lane) by the sound of a gunshot

Great Spotted Woodpecker: One was drumming at Tanners Brook near Southampton General Hospital on Nov 19

Skylark: Full song was heard on Nov 19 from one over Bembridge Down on the Isle of Wight and another was singing at Northney (Hayling Island) on Nov 21

Swallow: Portland reported 5 on Nov 18 and 2 on Nov 19 - on Nov 16 there were reports from the Isle of Wight, Kent and Sussex. Latest sightings were on Nov 22 when one was in the Prinsted area (east of Thorney Island) and another in the Cuckmere valley of East Kent

House Martin: 5 were seen at the South Foreland in Kent on Nov 16 and 1 was at Horsham on Nov 20

Pied Wagtail: More than 1000 were seen coming to roost in the shopping centre of Tunbridge Wells in Kent on the evening of Nov 20. There are probably many other smaller roosts going un-reported - maybe the birds are again using the Havant Teso site?

Waxwing: Here in southern England Waxwings have been seen at two places this week - on Nov 19 three birds were seen in an Andover industrial estate and on Nov 20 at least one was in the Lordshill area of Southampton with around 12 in the same area on Nov 22

Dunnoek: Although one was heard in full song at Portsmouth on Oct 9 I have only seen two reports of song since then (at Durlston in Dorset on Oct 27 and at Boughton Park in Kent on Nov 12). I heard my first attempt at song from one in the Langstone area at dusk on Nov 19.

Wheatear: The last I know of in southern England was at Lymington on Nov 9 but this week one was reported from a Dutch site on Nov 22

Ring Ouzel: A late migrant was on Thorney Island on Nov 14

Song Thrush: First song was heard at Havant on Nov 13 and at Singleton north of Chichester on Nov 14 followed by reports from Lymington on Nov 19 and Pett (Rye Bay) on Nov 22

Blackbird: One trapped at Portland on Nov 17 had been ringed in Sweden

Lesser Whitethroat: On Nov 19 one was seen and heard at Barton on Sea (west of Lymington) and has aroused a lot of interest as it was almost certainly a vagrant from the east - the most likely vagrant here at this time of year would be one of the Siberian race (Blyth's Lesser Whitethroat) but the call suggested it was a central Asian bird (grouping of races known as 'halimodendri') and it may have been an even rarer Desert Whitethroat. Another bird was seen in The Fleet area near Weymouth, also on Nov 19. I have seen two other November reports this autumn, both from Kent (and one of these was possibly a vagrant of an eastern race, not one of our summer birds) but the last of these was seen on Nov 6.

Yellow-browed Warbler: Quite a few of these are in southern England at present and I may have heard and seen one moving east along the southern side of the A27 near the Langbrook stream on Nov 18 but it wouldn't stop to give me a good look (the sharp 'dog-whistle' like call was the main evidence of its identity)

Chiffchaff: Birds heard singing on Oct 17 at Durlston, on Nov 9 at Christchurch Harbour and on Nov 19 in central Southampton

Bearded Tit: The arrival of six new birds at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 19 shows that their autumn movements are still ongoing

Marsh Tit: These have become rarities this year but maybe a few have come over from the continent as this week has brought reports of 3 seen on the downs south of Amberley and more than 10 seen at the Warnham Mill Pond reserve at Horsham

Jay: The single Jay which appeared in my garden on Nov 10 has been back on both Nov 17 and 19 and was seen nearby on Nov 22 There are no oak trees anywhere around here so no acorns to attract Jays - this bird seems to feed on Rowan berries which it finds in the grass.

Jackdaw: A flock of 175 seen flying west over Southampton Water early on Nov 22 were assumed to have come from a local woodland roost but in past years there has been much evidence that Corvids from a huge winter roost in the Gosport area travel daily as far as the New Forest to feed

Corvids: More evidence for a large night roost of Rooks and Jackdaws, this time in the New Forest, comes from a fascinating report of more than 200 birds plummeting to earth on a grassy New Forest 'lawn' on Wilverly Plain at dusk on Nov 22 and remaining on the ground until it was dark. One person commenting on this said that these birds are known to plummet down to pre-roost gatherings on open ground and will almost certainly have flown into trees after it got really dark to spend the night in safety (without anyone seeing where they went - that final comment is my own addition!)

Brambling: A flock may be building up in the Chichester West Dean woods where more than 15 were found on Nov 16. On Nov 18 at least 10 Brambling were among 200 small birds feeding on Sunflower seeds at Longwood Warren (near Cheesefoot Head east of Winchester)

Twite: Up to 21 of these were seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Nov 7 with 7 in the same area on Nov 20. In Hampshire one was seen by several people at Lymington on Nov 22

Hawfinch: Five reports this week including an interesting report of one at Woods Mill by the River Adur in Sussex said to be 'feeding in Hawthorns' - if they will eat Haws they might turn up almost anywhere.

Greenfinch: Large flocks of these used to be an autumn feature of our harbour shorelines but this year the only substantial flock seems to be on the beach at Shoreham where around 150 were seen on Nov 5 and 110 were counted on Nov 15

Snow Bunting: Just two reports this week - a very tame male on the seafront at Goring (Worthing area) last reported on Nov 16 and the ongoing flock in the Reculver area of the north Kent shore (15 birds there on Nov 17)

Corn Bunting: One of three birds at the Oare Marshes in north Kent was singing on Nov 12. More recent reports are of 14 at Tarrant Rushton in Dorset on Nov 16, with 5 at The Burgh (downs south of Amberley) on Nov 19 and another 5 at the Lewes Brooks on Nov 20. Latest news is of 88 at Sandwich Bay on Nov 19, 16 at Rye Harbour on Nov 21 and 12 at Maiden Castle in Dorset on Nov 22

## INSECTS

Dragonflies

Emperor: One still flying in the Seasalter area of north Kent on Nov 15

Common Darter: One flying in the Gosport area on Nov 19 (seen by the Apple Dumpling bridge over the River Alver)

#### Butterflies

Clouded Yellow: At least one was photographed at Portland on Nov 16

Brimstone: One seen in the Old Burghclere lime quarry nature reserve west of Basingtoke on Nov 19

Red Admiral: Ten reports this week with a peak count of 8 in the Gosport area on Nov 19. Gosport is said to have had the highest temperature anywhere in Britain this week. At least two of the insects at Gosport were of the *albata* form which has a small white spot in the red band of each forewing

Peacock: Two seen at Yew Hill south of Winchester on Nov 19

Comma: Singles seen at two sites in Sussex on Nov 16 and 19

Speckled Wood: Just one seen in the Gosport area on Nov 10

#### Moths

Carnation Tortrix (0985 *Cacoecimorpha pronubana*): This gets a mention after a report of one in Gosport on Nov 16

Winter Moth (1799 *Operophtera brumata*): First report of this season from the Newhaven area on Nov 19

Scarce Umber (1933 *Agriopis aurantiaria*): Another new species which has been seen at several sites this week (including the first ever for Portland on Nov 19)

Hummingbird Hawkmoth: On Nov 14 one was in a Thanet garden and another was seen in a garden at Kingston near Lewes on Nov 16 - both were first of the year for their observers!

The Herald (2469 *Scoliopteryx libatrix*): Said to be the 'Herald of Winter' the first was seen in leaf litter by day at Sway near New Milton on Nov 20

Caterpillars: More than 1000 Large White butterfly caterpillars were devouring brassica plants at a Seaford allotment on Nov 19 - unusual at this time of year but probably the offspring of a late wave of migrant butterflies. Although it is difficult to stop the damage to the plants (destroying the caterpillars would most likely damage the cabbages) it is likely that many of these caterpillars are already carrying seeds of their own death as the eggs of various predatory insects may well already have become larvae devouring the host caterpillars from inside - three likely predators as named as *Apanteles glomeratus*, *Compsilura concinnata*, and *Pteromalus puparum*

#### PLANTS

My November list of plants still in flowers now has 155 species listed. Additions this week have been Yellow-horned Poppy, Sweet Violet, Wood Avens, Ploughman's Spikenard, Common Poppy, Black Knapweed, Dove's Foot Cranesbill, Procrumbent Pearlwort, Sea Aster, Burnet Saxifrage and Yellow-wort - for more detail see my Diary entries

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Polecat:** There is good evidence that these have been breeding in Hampshire for some years (I recall reporting a find of a lactating female found dead a roadside) so a roadside casualty seen closely by several observers beside the A326 where it passes Hythe on its way to Fawley on Nov 22 is further evidence - one significant part of the observation distinguishing Polecat from Ferret was the dark 'mask' of fur around the eyes.

**Water Vole:** A late sighting of one at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Nov 16. Water Voles do not hibernate but are less active in the winter (when they are not breeding) and make less frequent outings from their burrows during the winter though they have to come out occasionally in order to collect food which they take back to the burrow, not coming out again until they run out of food.

**Hare:** In a discussion about species which are declining in Hampshire Trevor Carpenter told us that, although they have declined throughout the county, he still sees them fairly often on the north slopes of Portsdown and in the Meon Valley

**Bat species:** On Nov 15 and 16 several people mentioned in messages to HOSLIST that they had seen several bats flying in the early evening before it was dark. As one or two said that the bats they saw were large in size it is likely that these were Noctules or Serotines, both of which are large and tend to fly before it is dark.

**Terrapin:** At least one was still 'sunning itself' on an island in Baffins Pond at Portsmouth on Nov 20 - should the winter become really cold these creatures will go into underwater hibernation, burying themselves in mud, sealing their orifices, and closing down their metabolic system

**Fungi:** A fresh ring of Field Blewits had come up in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Nov 21 along with two or three other species that I could not identify with confidence though I think one was *Tricholomopsis platyphylla* (Roger Phillips page 44) on account its white spore print

Sat 22 Nov

Flowers on Portsdown

With cold weather forecast for tomorrow I had a look round the Fort Widley area of Portsdown for flowers and was pleasantly surprised to find several unexpected species. Best find was Ploughman's Spikenard with fresh flower on new growth on a plant whose main stem had been broken or cut some time ago. A similar cause gave me fresh flowers and seeds on Ribbed Melilot while more expected late flowers were seen on Greater and Black Knapweed, Burnet Saxifrage, Yellow-wort and Rough Hawkbit. Common Poppy, Field Madder, White Campion, Rape, Charlock, Dogwood and Sun Spurge also went on the list

Fri 21 Nov

Two more flowers for November and more fungi

This afternoon I had a look at the Eastern Road cemetery in Havant where there is a further good showing of fresh Field Blewit fungi accompanied by three other species which I cannot name with confidence.

Also found on one grave was a cushion of Procumbent Pearlwort with fresh flowers, while under Oak trees beside Crossland Drive I found a plant of Dove's Foot Cranesbill in flower - both new to my November list and bringing the count for the month up to 149 species in flower

## SUMMARY FOR NOV 10 - 16 (WEEK 45 OF 2008)

### Highlights:

The story of a **Great Northern diver** found on a road in Kent provoked a **series of stories of waterfowl landing on wet roads during night-time after mistaking them for rivers.**

A big flock of **Knot** is now in Pagham Harbour and **the regular 'tame' Spotted Redshank** has returned to the Emsworth shore where **three wintering Sandwich Terns** were also seen.

A **Desert Wheatear** has been seen in Kent where a late (possibly wintering?) **Whinchat** has been reported - other rarities in Kent have been a **Radde's Warbler** and a **Penduline Tit.**

Many winter thrushes are now in southern England and a **Song Thrush in full song** in my Havant garden was probably newly arrived from Europe. **Also singing this week were Mistle Thrush, Corn Bunting, Robin, Wren and Dunnock.**

A **Clouded Yellow** butterfly at Portland was a surprise as was a **Common Darter dragonfly** still flying on Nov 12

The **number of wild plant species seen in flower this month is now up to 130** and includes a **Buddleia** still attracting butterflies

Yet another **white coated Grey Squirrel** has been seen in the Portsmouth area, while fungi are still attracting a lot of interest - **Shaggy Pholiota** in a Langstone Village roadside being the latest good find

### Late News

Nov 16: A scan of reports from Dutch sites for today found news of 2 **Velvet Scoters** (a few have been seen off Kent and Dorset since Oct 29) and of **46 Red-throated Divers** at one site. Many Geese are now being seen - max counts at any one site were **Greylag - 1989, Whitefront - 935, Pinkfoot - 931, Bean - 329 and Barnacle - 391.** The ranger's log for Durlston mentions that the first **Horse Mushrooms** were found there today

Nov 15: A female **Goosander** off East Head in Chichester Harbour was the first the Ewan Urquhart has seen there in 20 years of WeBS counting. At Dungeness **7 Swallows** flew south and at Emsworth **Tufted Duck were starting to return** to the Town Millpond (but only 9 so far)

### **BIRDS**

**Black-throated Diver:** One was showing well in the land-locked Forton Lake at Gosport on Nov 15, seen from the Millenium Bridge taking people across the mouth of the lake to the Explosion Museum at Priddy's Hard

**Great Northern Diver:** Latest news is of at least three (maybe five) in Southampton Water on Nov 14 when another four were in Weymouth Bay and two

in nearby Portland Harbour - so far this winter they seem to be more numerous than the **Red-throated Divers**. On Nov 12 a **Great Northern** was released into the wild at Rye Harbour after having been found a few days earlier on the Ashford bypass in Kent by a motorist whose car had gone over the bird without injuring it (it went between the wheels after flattening its neck along the road surface as it would do instinctively if under attack from a predator while on the surface of the sea). The motorist was able to pick the bird up and put it in the boot of his car (luckily without being stabbed by the bird's bill - the bird must have been in a pretty bemused state!) and it was taken to the RSPCA who checked it out, found it was undamaged, and then released it. No time of day is given for the initial find but I guess it was very early morning as I have heard of other cases of waterfowl mistaking wet roads for rivers when flying by night and crash landing on them. This theory is backed up by the following responses I have already received after circulating news of this current incident on the Hoslist news group ....

Paul Winter recalls **2 Mute Swans** landing in Rosebank Close, Rownhams (Southampton) on 15/01/1995. Glynne Evans says... "some years ago, in early morning, I found a **freshly-dead Tufted Duck** on a wet road about 3 miles from nearest water. It could of course have been carried some distance having hit a vehicle elsewhere, but my guess at the time was that it had tried to land on the wet road in the night - and then been hit". Tim Doran tells me ... "I recently went on one of the pelagics out of Kaikoura on east coast of south island New Zealand.

**Hutton's Shearwater** is an endemic which nests on scree slopes in the Kaikoura mountains that are just inland. The skipper of the boat mentioned that in the past - at night - he had found **young Hutton's Shearwaters** sat on the main road (highway 1) that runs north/south down the coast and he assumed they had seen the tarmac on the way down to the sea and thought it was water. Fortunately traffic isn't too bad - it is New Zealand - and he said he was able to pick them up and place them on the side of the road before they got squashed". Another response came from Richard Coomber who says ... "Years ago I was driving towards Southwold, Suffolk, and I found a **live Little Auk** in the road, so I stopped, picked it up and took it down to the sea. I was afraid that one of a number of gulls might have a go at it, but no, it paddled away strongly calling all the time. Within a minute another flew in and landed beside it and the two swam off together!" (This happy scene clearly impressed Richard as one of the high spots of his birding despite his wide experience as a tour guide for naturalists)

**Great Crested Grebe**: The winter flock in Rye Bay (which had some 700 birds in it at the end of January this year) is now building fast and a further 150 birds went past Dungeness towards the bay on Nov 11

**Fulmar**: These now breed at several places along the south coast and there was a peak count of more than 100 off Portland on Aug 13 as they and their young were dispersing at the end of the breeding season. Since then none have been reported at Portland until a single was seen on Nov 14 (hailed as the first back there) and I guess this means they will soon be seen back at their breeding sites to make sure no one takes possession of their chosen nest sites though it will be several months before they claim those nest sites for use (strangely enough, having guarded the sites for many weeks they all vanish for a few weeks immediately before nesting - maybe they go off to good feeding areas to feed up before breeding?)

**Leach's Petrel:** One went past Sandwich Bay in Kent on Nov 5 and two probables were seen in Christchurch Bay from Milford on Sea on Nov 10

**Shag:** Stormy weather on Nov 10 brought a report of **45 Shags** being seen off Christchurch Harbour but I am not sure if this was an exceptional number for the area or if the birders (having nothing better to see) decided to count the Shags that are regularly present there.

**Green Heron:** The bird at Hythe in Kent has not been reported since Nov 10

**Bewick's Swan:** These were seen from five different sites in the Netherlands on Nov 10 or 11. At one site in Holland (called Kwintelooijen) the count was of 156 birds - maybe they will stay there, maybe some are heading our way. (Counts at the other sites were 8, 26, 27 and 38)

**Bean Goose:** 2 were seen at Sandwich Bay (with **14 Pinkfoot**) on Nov 7 and a total of 10 (**Tundra birds**) were in the Kent Stour valley on Nov 10

**Barnacle Goose:** Nov 10 brought a count of **3139 of these geese** from Eemshaven in Holland

**Brant:** One seems to have been in The Fleet area near Weymouth since Oct 25 (still there Nov 15), another at Pagham Harbour from Oct 25 to Nov 14, one arrived in Langstone Harbour on Nov 5 and was still there on Nov 15, and on Nov 11 a regular winter visitor was back on the HMS Sultan playing fields in Gosport, still present on Nov 15.

**Red-breasted Goose:** The bird at Lymington was still there on Nov 15 when (perhaps to its discredit) it was associating with Canada Geese.

**Shelduck:** Brian Fellows saw 42 in the north of Langstone Harbour on Nov 14 when he walked from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes.

**Teal:** The flooded area of the pony field north of Langstone Mill Pond had a full winter complement of more than 80 birds on Nov 14

**Mallard:** These are common enough but on Nov 4 a Kent birder was impressed to find 700 of them on a small lake on which no one can remember ever seeing more than 10 before. The site is called Lake Louisa near Hawkhurst in Kent and it is not far from a large reservoir at Bewl Bridge - maybe the birds had been displaced from the reservoir by activity (shooting?) there but it is possible that they were migrants unfamiliar with the area and had just put down there for a rest.

**Pintail:** An estimate of 100 at Pulborough Brooks on Nov 13 was the first 3-digit figure I have seen this autumn

**Scaup:** A female was reported to be in Nutbourne Bay east of Emsworth on Nov 14 - as I do not recall hearing of **Tufted Duck** in that bay there is less likelihood of confusion with a white-faced female of that species

**Eider:** The Eemshaven site in Holland which had attracted over **3000 Barnacle Geese** on Nov 10 also had **642 Eider** that day

**Long-tailed Duck:** A female was seen in Pagham Harbour on Nov 9 (where one was previously reported on Nov 2) and an adult drake turned up for the first time on the Blashford Lakes on Nov 14 (feeling hungry after its flight and consequently spending most of the day under water!)

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Three were off Langstone village on Nov 14 - the first I have seen there this winter

**Goosander:** The flock in Pagham Harbour had increased from 5 on Nov 5 to 7 on Nov 14 and at least 4 were still at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 15 (no doubt more can be seen there at dusk as they return from feeding sites to roost)

**Ruddy Duck:** Five were at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 15

**Marsh Harrier:** A juvenile was over the Lower Test marshes at Southampton on Nov 8 and a female was over the Arundel Wildfowl Trust reserve on Mar 12

**Hen Harrier:** Two ringtails were seen near the Thorney Island Great Deeps on Nov 9

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** One reported at Sandwich in Kent on Nov 11, seen hovering near the bird observatory

**Merlin:** The bird which I heard and saw in the Warblington Farm area on Oct 31 was probably there again on Nov 14 though this time I only heard the calls when I was at the shore end of Wade Lane

**Common Crane:** No news of any in southern England since Nov 6 (when one was in south Devon) but on Nov 10 the Eemshaven site in Holland had 7 migrants passing through.

**Avocet:** Around 26 were at Farlington Marshes on Nov 7 and 22 were there on Nov 14 when 6 were still at Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour)

**Golden Plover:** Although 1200+ had been reported on the north Kent coast back on Oct 17 and Rye Harbour had 900 on Oct 18 the first counts to exceed 1000 birds at south coast sites were not recorded until Nov 14 when Rye Harbour had 2500+ (with 1500 there next day)

**Knot:** The number in Pagham harbour was up to 230 on Nov 11

**Black-tailed Godwit:** There were still around 500 at Oare Marshes in north west Kent on Nov 12 and on Nov 14 Farlington Marshes had at least 300 though there were few on the Langstone to Emsworth shore that day (one lone bird was feeding in the wet grassland of the field north of Langstone Pond that day)

**Spotted Redshank:** The 'tame' bird which regularly winters in the Emsworth area and can generally be seen on a falling tide close to the shore, feeding in the stream which flows out at the east end of Nore Barn wood, was seen by Brian Fellows for the first time this winter on Nov 8 (but may have returned several days earlier)

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still present at the Cockle Pond on Nov 15

**Sandwich Tern:** 3 (almost certainly intending to stay through the winter) were feeding off the Nore Barn shore of Chichester Harbour on Nov 15

**Long-eared Owl:** This week's news has reports of them at Reculver (north Kent coast) on Nov 7, 9 and 12, at the Southampton Lower Test marshes on or before Nov 8, and one hunting at dusk at Newhaven on Nov 12

**Short-eared Owl:** The first to be reported this autumn at Farlington Marshes was seen there on Nov 15

**Swallow:** Still being seen daily up to Nov 15 when Rye Harbour had 3 and Portland had 5

**House Martin:** Very few recent reports but three were seen near the South Foreland in Kent on Nov 15

**Whinchat:** One was still to be seen at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Nov 7

**Desert Wheatear:** Several birders in Hampshire have been trying to turn recent sightings of normal **Northern Wheatears** (none reported since Nov 9) into more unusual species (**Desert** or even **Isabelline**) but none have succeeded so far but they can draw hope from confirmed sightings of a **Desert Wheatear** at Sandwich Bay from Nov 7 to 11. **Desert Wheatears** have been seen during November in recent years - in 2005 one was at Hayling Bay on Nov 13, in 2006 one was on the shore at Bexhill near Hastings from Nov 1 to 4, and in 2007 there were two in Britain during late November (Norfolk and Yorkshire)

**Fieldfare:** On Nov 7 more than 500 flew west along the north Kent coast and on Nov 12 well over 500 were with a similar number of **Redwings** feeding on berries in the Itchen Valley country park on the northern fringe of Southampton

**Song Thrush:** These continue to pour into Britain from the continent and at dawn on Nov 13 one was celebrating its arrival by blasting out its **full song** at the end of my garden in Havant. My bird was still singing on Nov 14 when another was heard in full song at Singleton (north of Chichester)

**Mistle Thrush:** One was **singing** in Brighton on Nov 9, another at Ringwood (Blashford Lakes) on Nov 11, and another in mid-Kent (Boughton Park) on Nov 12

**Garden Warbler:** A late bird at Portland on Nov 14

**Radde's Warbler:** One reported from the Thanet area of Kent on Nov 2, probably a new bird though one had been in the same area on Sep 26 and another not far along the Kent coast on Oct 12

**Bearded Tit:** On Nov 15 an estimated 15 birds were in the reeds at Farlington Marshes

**Long-tailed Tit:** A count of 38 at Bockhill by the South Foreland in Kent was almost certainly of migrants - if thousands of **Goldcrests** make it over the Channel or right across the North Sea there's no reason why smaller numbers of **Long-tailed Tits** should not do so

**Penduline Tit:** One seen in the Thanet area on Nov 8

**Great Grey Shrike:** One seen in Buckherd Bottom (by the A31 in the New Forest) on Nov 15 may well have been the same bird that was on Bratley Plain on Oct 25

**Jay:** A surprise addition to our garden bird list for this year was a **young Jay** seen on the lawn during pouring rain on Nov 10, apparently feeding on fallen Rowan berries - I assume it was young as it seemed small in size and was still growing its bright blue badge of wing feathers (several of these were still partly sheathed in their 'cellophane wrapping')

**Greenfinch:** These remain few in number but it seems that some have flown in to southern England for the winter. The flock of 150 at Shoreham Harbour on Nov 5 remains the highest count to date but the latest news has four more reports - 50+ in a Horsham garden on Nov 11 and three reports for Nov 12 from Barton on Sea (38 birds), Durlston (20+) and the Itchen Valley country park (more than ten birds)

**Twite:** Five seen at Sandwich Bay on Nov 8 and 60 seen on Nov 10 at Eemshaven in Holland have been followed by a report of two on the north Kent coast at Oare Marshes on Nov 12

**Crossbill:** Of local interest only I watched 10 fly north east over Havant Thicket on Nov 12 - there was a report of 56+ there on Aug 27 and I saw up to 10 on Aug 30 but since then have seen no reports either from there or Stansted Forest.

**Snow Bunting:** The south Hayling bird at Eastoke Corner carpark has not been reported since Nov 4 but may well still be around - latest news is of one showing well on the Worthing seafront at Goring on Nov 15. More may be on their way as a flock of 20 was seen on the north Kent shore on Nov 14

**Corn Bunting:** At least one heard singing in Kent on Nov 12

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter** still flying at Gosport on Nov 12

### Butterflies

**Clouded Yellow:** Reported at Portland on Nov 12 and again on Nov 15 - not sure if this was a vagrant or if there is an established colony there as there now is in both Bournemouth and at Durlston

**Brimstone:** Male seen on Nov 12 on Portsdown and at Mill Hill behind Shoreham

**Red Admiral:** No surprise to see 8 reports of these from Sussex, Hampshire (my garden) and Dorset between Nov 9 and 15

**Peacock:** Reports from Northiam in the Rye Bay area on Nov 12 and from Romsey on Nov 14

**Comma:** Just one report from the Lewes area on Nov 12

**Speckled Wood:** Seen at Gosport and at two Sussex sites all on Nov 12

### Moths

Several species seen this week, including the first record of **The Sprawler (2227 Brachionycha sphinx)** coming to a Sussex trap on Nov 12

### Other Insects

A **Hawthorn Shield Bug** came to a Sussex moth trap on Nov 12 and a **small ground beetle with bright green elytra** had to be rescued from a water bowl on my garden bird table

## PLANTS

**130 species found in flower** in the first half of November

Additions to the list during this week included **Lesser Spearwort, Smooth Tare, Crown Vetch, Tormentil, Cow Parsley** (or was it **Hemlock?**), **Sharp-leaved Fluellen, Hedge Woundwort, Field Woundwort, Wood Sage, Buddleia, Devil's Bit Scabious, Canadian Fleabane, Shasta Daisy, Marsh Thistle**, and a **Hieracium species**. My query concerning the **Cow Parsley** is that I did not see it for myself and it appeared to come from an area of Broadmarsh where I regularly see **Hemlock** (and have been expecting it to flower)

Also seen at Langstone Mill Lane on Nov 10 was a **leaf rosette of a Bee orchid plant**, something I do not normally find until December

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Common Seal:** Observers at two sites commented on the excellent visibility on the morning of Nov 15 - at Durlston they claimed to be able to see field boundaries on the Isle of Wight (some 16 miles to the east) with the naked eye and at Bockhill near the South Foreland in Kent they were able to see more than 60 Common Seals hauled out on the Goodwin Sands at low tide

**Grey Seal:** One seen in Southampton Water on Nov 15

**Muntjac Deer:** I would have some difficulty in being sure that braking noises heard in or near a residential area did not come from a dog but one was confidently claimed to have been heard from a house in Midhurst on Nov 11

**Grey Squirrel:** A **white squirrel** was seen in a Bedhampton garden in Havant on Nov 10. The incidence of **white-coated Grey Squirrels** in the wider Portsmouth area is much higher than could be expected by chance and it seems that they may eventually become commoner in that area than the normal **grey-coated** (in parts of East Anglia this has already happened with **black-coated variants**)

**Fungi:** In my latest Weekly Summary I mentioned that Brian Fellows had found a troop of large fungi in the Nore Barn woods by the shore west of Emsworth and I suggested they were **Clouded Funnel** but on Nov 11 Brian had a further look at them and found that many of the caps were as much as 30 cm across which strongly suggests they are the less common **Giant Funnel (Leucopaxillus giganteus)**. Since then I have seen them and tend to agree with Brian though they lack two of the diagnostic features of **Giant Funnel** in having relatively flat (not funnel shaped) caps and in having up-turned (not down-turned and in-rolled) rims to the caps. Back in my garden the show of waxcaps continues (I have never seen so many **Meadow** and **Snowy Waxcaps** on the lawn) while the number of **Hairy Earth-tongues** is now approaching 100. A late addition to the week's list was found on the afternoon of Nov 16 - a lovely cluster of **Shaggy Pholiota (Pholiota squarrosa)** - now called **Shaggy Scalycap** - at the foot of a small ornamental tree in roadside grass outside 22, Southbrook Road at Langstone. Also seen nearby on the roots of a tree by the Lymbourne stream was **Candlesnuff fungus**

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 10 - 16 (WEEK 45 OF 2008)

Fri 14 Nov

### Around Warblington

This morning the **Song Thrush** which I had first heard from my garden yesterday was still singing, though less aggressively.

This afternoon I set out to pay my respects to the Nore Barn **Spotted Redshank**, combining the trip with a look at the large Fungi which Brian Fellows has found on the northern edge of the Nore Barn wood.

I had only just gone through the A27 underpass when I had my best find of the outing, a plant of **Field Woundwort** flowering from a crack in the road - later I was to find a second fresh plant of this in the Warblington Farm shore field at Conigar Point.

After crossing the A259 Emsworth Road I followed the footpath along the northern hedge of Warblington Farm, and half way along this section I came on a collection of fungi in the roadside grass. One small pure white specimen was **Snowy Waxcap** and near it were very young specimens of what I believe to be the new woodchip fungus **Agrocybe rivulosa**. Also easy to identify were a couple of **Shaggy Inkcaps** but two other species left me uncertain about their identity - one could have been **Entoloma porphyrophaeum**.

Reaching the path along the north side of Nore Barn Wood I almost missed the large fungi which I had come to see as they were almost covered with fallen leaves. When I did see them they did not look like **Clouded Funnels** and they may well have been the **Giant Funnels (Leucopaxillus giganteus)** which is Brian Fellows' best guess at their identity but two features left me puzzled - one was that none of them had the deep central depression (or 'funnel') which is supposed to be obligatory for that species, neither did they have the inrolled rim to their caps (in fact the rims were up-turned, showing the 'bare teeth' of the gills). I think Brian is probably right, and I have no alternative suggestion, but I do not feel fully confident about the id.

The **Spot Shank** was well down the stream when I go there but there was no doubt about its id! Also here were some **20 Swans**, including a group of six cygnets that may have come from the Thorney Little Deeps.

Heading back along the shore I passed a single fresh flower of **Golden Samphire** at Nore Barn, and at Conigar Point I took a walk around the shore field in which **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** and **Field Woundwort** were both flowering. Also scattered around the field were several examples of another fungus which I cannot identify. Emerging from the field I found a recently dead **Teal corpse** on the shore - something had eaten all the meat but the skeleton was still daubed with fresh blood.

Just **5 Shelduck** were with lots of **Brent** on the way back to Langstone, but when I reached the seawall path at the end of Wade Lane I again heard the **sharp calls of an unseen falcon** which may have been the **Merlin** which I encountered here on Oct 31. While looking for it I also heard the more distinctive call of a **Greenshank** over the distant water channel on which were **three Mergansers** before turning inland to find more than **80 Teal** (and a **single Black-tailed Godwit**) around the flood in the field south of Wade Court.

Turning north I found the first three flowers on the **Winter Heliotrope** outside the old Wade Farmhouse

[Thu 13 Nov](#)

## Mid-week Summary

The story of a **Great Northern diver found on a road in Kent** provoked a series of stories of waterfowl landing on wet roads during night-time after mistaking them for rivers. A **big flock of Knot** is now in Pagham Harbour and **the regular 'tame' Spotted Redshank has returned to the Emsworth shore**. A **Desert Wheatear** has been seen in Kent where a late (possibly wintering?) **Whinchat** has been reported - other rarities in Kent have been a **Radde's Warbler** and a **Penduline Tit**. Many winter thrushes are now in southern England and a **Song Thrush in full song** in my Havant garden was probably newly arrived from Europe

A **Clouded Yellow butterfly** at Portland was a surprise,

The number of wild plant species seen in flower this month is now up to 125 and includes a **Buddleia still attracting butterflies**

Yet another **white coated Grey Squirrel** has been seen in the Portsmouth area

## **BIRDS**

**Great Northern Diver:** On Nov 12 one of these was released into the wild at Rye Harbour after having been found a few days earlier on the Ashford bypass in Kent by a motorist whose car had gone over the bird without injuring it (it went between the wheels after flattening its neck along the road surface as it would do instinctively if under attack from a predator while on the surface of the sea). The motorist was able to pick the bird up and put it in the boot of his car (luckily without being stabbed by the bird's bill - the bird must have been in a pretty bemused state!) and it was taken to the RSPCA who checked it out, found it was undamaged, and then released it. No time of day is given for the initial find but I guess it was very early morning as I have heard of other cases of waterfowl mistaking wet roads for rivers when flying by night and crash landing on them. This theory is backed up by the following responses I have already received after circulating news of this current incident on the Hoslist news group ....

Paul Winter recalls **2 Mute Swans** landing in Rosebank Close, Rownhams (Southampton) on 15/01/1995. Glynne Evans says... "some years ago, in early morning I found a **freshly-dead Tufted Duck** on a wet road about 3 miles from nearest water. It could of course have been carried some distance having hit a vehicle elsewhere, but my guess at the time was that it had tried to land on the wet road in the night - and then been hit". Tim Doran tells me ..."I recently went on one of the pelagics out of Kaikoura on east coast of south island New Zealand.

**Hutton's Shearwater** is an endemic which nests on scree slopes in the Kaikoura mountains that are just inland. The skipper of the boat mentioned that in the past - at night - he had found **young Hutton's Shearwaters** sat on the main road (highway 1) that runs north/south down the coast and he assumed they had seen the tarmac on the way down to the sea and thought it was water. Fortunately traffic isn't too bad - it is New Zealand - and he said he was able to pick them up and place them on the side of the road before they got squashed". Another response came from Richard Coomber who says ..."Years ago I was driving towards Southwold,

Suffolk, and I found a live **Little Auk** in the road, so I stopped, picked it up and took it down to the sea. I was afraid that one of a number of gulls might have a go at it, but no, it paddled away strongly calling all the time. Within a minute another flew in and landed beside it and the two swam off together!" (This happy scene clearly impressed Richard as one of the high spots of his birding despite his wide experience as a tour guide for naturalists)

**Great Crested Grebe:** The winter flock in Rye Bay (which had some 700 birds in it at the end of January this year) is now building fast and a further 150 birds went past Dungeness towards the bay on Nov 11

**Leach's Petrel:** One went past Sandwich Bay in Kent on Nov 5 and two probables were seen in Christchurch Bay from Milford on Sea on Nov 10

**Shag:** Stormy weather on Nov 10 brought a report of **45 Shags** being seen off Christchurch Harbour but I am not sure if this was an exceptional number for the area or if the birders (having nothing better to see) decided to count the **Shags** that are regularly present there.

**Bewick's Swan:** These were seen from five different sites in the Netherlands on Nov 10 or 11. At one site in Holland (called Kwintelooijen) the count was of **156 birds** - maybe they will stay there, maybe some are heading our way. (Counts at the other sites were 8, 26, 27 and 38)

**Bean Goose:** 2 were seen at Sandwich Bay (with **14 Pinkfoot**) on Nov 7 and a total of 10 (**Tundra** birds) were in the Kent Stour valley on Nov 10

**Barnacle Goose:** Nov 10 brought a count of **3139 of these geese** from Eemshaven in Holland

**Brant:** One seems to have been in The Fleet area near Weymouth since Oct 25 (still there Nov 10), another at Pagham Harbour from Oct 25 to Nov 9, one arrived in Langstone Harbour on Nov 5, and on Nov 11 a regular winter visitor was back on the HMS Sultan playing fields in Gosport.

**Mallard:** These are common enough but on Nov 4 a Kent birder was impressed to find **700 of them on a small lake** on which no one can remember ever seeing more than 10 before. The site is called Lake Louisa near Hawkhurst in Kent and it is not far from a large reservoir at Bewl Bridge - maybe the birds had been displaced from the reservoir by activity (shooting?) there but it is possible that they were migrants unfamiliar with the area and had just put down there for a rest.

**Eider:** The Eemshaven site in Holland which had attracted **over 3000 Barnacle Geese** on Nov 10 also had **642 Eider** that day

**Marsh Harrier:** A juvenile was over the Lower Test marshes at Southampton on Nov 8 and a female was over the Arundel Wildfowl Trust reserve on Mar 12

**Hen Harrier:** Two were seen at Thorney Island on Nov 9, both ringtails

**Common Crane:** No news of any in southern England since Nov 6 (when one was in south Devon) but on Nov 10 the Eemshaven site in Holland had 7 migrants passing through.

**Knot:** The number in Pagham harbour was up to 230 on Nov 11

**Spotted Redshank:** The 'tame' bird which regularly winters in the Emsworth area and can generally be seen on a falling tide close to the shore, feeding in the stream which flows out at the east end of Nore Barn wood, was seen by Brian Fellows for the first time this winter on Nov 8 (but may have returned several days earlier)

**Swallow:** Still being seen on Nov 12 when three sites (Portland, Durlston and Pagham Harbour) each had 2 birds

**House Martin:** These usual leave long after the last Swallow but none have been reported since Nov 7

**Whinchat:** One was still to be seen at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Nov 3

**Desert Wheatear:** Several birders in Hampshire have been trying to turn recent sightings of normal **Northern Wheatears** (none reported since Nov 9) into more unusual species (**Desert** or even **Isabelline**) but none have succeeded so far but they can draw hope from confirmed sightings of a **Desert Wheatear** at Sandwich Bay from Nov 7 to 9 at least. **Desert Wheatears** have been seen during November in recent years - in 2005 one was at Hayling Bay on Nov 13, in 2006 one was on the shore at Bexhill near Hastings from Nov 1 to 4, and in 2007 there were two in Britain during late November (Norfolk and Yorkshire)

**Fieldfare:** On Nov 7 more than 500 flew west along the north Kent coast and on Nov 12 well over 500 were with a similar number of **Redwings** feeding on berries in the Itchen Valley country park on the northern fringe of Southampton

**Song Thrush:** These continue to pour into Britain from the continent and at dawn on Nov 13 one was celebrating its arrival by blasting out its **full song** at the end of my garden in Havant. The only other report of autumn song I have seen was of one singing weakly in the Pulborough area on Oct 22

**Radde's Warbler:** One reported from the Thanet area of Kent on Nov 2, probably a new bird though one had been in the same area on Sep 26 and another not far along the Kent coast on Oct 12

**Penduline Tit:** One seen in the Thanet area on Nov 8

**Greenfinch:** These remain few in number but it seems that some have flown in to southern England for the winter. The flock of 150 at Shoreham Harbour on Nov 5 remains the highest count to date but the latest news has four more reports - 50+ in a Horsham garden on Nov 11 and three reports for Nov 12 from Barton on Sea (38 birds), Durlston (20+) and the Itchen Valley country park (more than ten birds)

**Twite:** Five seen at Sandwich Bay on Nov 8 and 60 seen on Nov 10 at Eemshaven in Holland

**Crossbill:** Of local interest only I watched 10 fly north east over Havant Thicket on Nov 12 - there was a report of 56+ there on Aug 27 and I saw up to 10 on Aug 30 but since then have seen no reports either from there or Stansted Forest.

## INSECTS

## Butterflies

**Clouded Yellow:** Reported at Portland on Nov 12 - not sure if this was a vagrant or if there is an established colony there as there now is in both Bournemouth and at Durlston

**Red Admiral:** No surprise to see reports of these from Sussex, Hampshire (my garden) and Dorset between Nov 9 and 11

No other insect reports so far this week

## PLANTS

**125 plant species in flower during the period Nov 1 to 13**, among them the following new additions to the November list that were found in Havant Thicket on Nov 12 ...

**Lesser Spearwort, Smooth Tare, Tormentil, Hedge Woundwort, Wood Sage, Devils Bit Scabious, Marsh Thistle** and several plants of a **Hieracium (Hawkweed) species**

**Crown Vetch** was also still flowering in Leigh Park on Nov 12

**Buddleia** was still attracting **Red Admiral** butterflies to its flowers at Newhaven in Sussex on Nov 9

**Canadian Fleabane:** Found flowering by the Hayling Billy Trail on Nov 11 - the first I have seen since July

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Grey Squirrel:** A **white squirrel** was seen in a Bedhampton garden in Havant on Nov 10. The incidence of **white-coated Grey Squirrels** in the wider Portsmouth area is much higher than could be expected by chance and it seems that they may eventually become commoner in that area than the normal grey-coated (in parts of East Anglia this has already happened with **black-coated variants**)

**Fungi:** In my latest Weekly Summary I mentioned that Brian Fellows had found a troop of large fungi in the Nore Barn woods by the shore west of Emsworth and I suggested they were **Clouded Funnel** but on Nov 11 Brian had a further look at them and found that many of the caps were as much as 30 cm across which strongly suggests they are the less common **Giant Funnel (Leucopaxillus giganteus)**

## Wed 12 Nov

### November flowers, a Jay and some Crossbills

Wind and torrential rain last Monday discouraged any outing on my part but it did not prevent a very hungry young **Jay** from appearing on my lawn, apparently thinking it worth getting drenched in order to pick up a few **Rowan berries** which must have fallen from my neighbour's tree more than a week ago. My assumption that the bird was a youngster was based on its fairly small size and the fact that it was only just acquiring adult plumage - the brilliant blue that an adult **Jay** has in its wings was incomplete and some of the feathers had not yet fully emerged from the 'cellophane wrapping' they have before they push up through the skin.

In better weather yesterday a **Red Admiral** butterfly was seen briefly in the garden where some 'self sown' **Early Dog Violets** had put up three fresh flowers. A walk to the shops brought my list of wild plants flowering in November up to 116 species - the best plant seen today was **Canadian Fleabane** (a species that seems to have

been ousted in recent years by **Guernsey** and **Bilboan Fleabane**) - I have not seen the Canadian species since July.

With the sunshine continuing today I took a walk around Havant Thicket, but as I stepped out of my front door a young **Sparrowhawk** shot down the garden path and disappeared between the houses on the far side of the road - I say it was a youngster as it had a plain brown back but did not look large enough to be a full grown female (and a hungry juvenile was the more likely to be chancing their luck seeking prey in the town in full daylight).

In Havant Thicket I soon found one of the plants I was expecting - **Devils Bit Scabious** still in flower - and I went on to find **Smooth Tare, Tormentil, Wood Sage, Lesser Spearwort, Marsh Thistle** and several examples a **Hawkweed** (Hieracium species) also in flower to bring my November list up to 124 species. With most of the trees having lost their leaves I also noticed for the first time the **tightly closed Hazel catkins** waiting for the new year to arrive.

Just before leaving a noisy flock of 10 **Crossbills** flew right over my head.

### **SUMMARY FOR NOV 3 - 9 (WEEK 44 OF 2008)**

#### **Highlights:**

**Red-necked** and **Slavonian Grebe** are newly back in local waters and **the first Bewick's Swans** have chosen Hampshire for their first appearance of the winter.

The **wild geese** are also back on the south coast with news of **Bean, Pinkfoot, Whitefront** and **Brant** as well as the '**childless**' **Brent** but pride of place goes to a **Red-breasted Goose** at Lymington.

No new **duck species** for the winter but this week has brought the first solid evidence of returning **Long-tailed, Velvet Scoter, Goldeneye** and **Goosander** plus a count of **70 Red-breasted Mergansers** in Chichester Harbour.

Southsea Castle and the Bembridge Foreland both had their first **Purple Sandpipers** this week and here in Havant I saw my first **Common** and **Green Sandpipers** for the winter (as well as a flock of **40 Stock Doves** on the Warblington Farm fields).

Others have enjoyed a **Snow Bunting** and three **Black Redstarts** on the south Hayling shore and away from our southern counties **more than 700 Waxwing are back in Britain** (see latest news below)

Only **four butterfly species** have been reported so far in November but both **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter dragonflies** have been seen, as has the first **December Moth**

At least **108 plant species have been seen in flower** in the first 9 days of November. Among them is **Spotted Medick** which I have not recorded since July and **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** which has had flowers in every month of the year so far. Perhaps the most significant flower of the week was the first **Winter Heliotrope** blossom of the new season - its early flowering alongside the main road into Havant being assisted not only by an early frost but also by the warmth and noxious (to us) emissions from the busy traffic on the road.

Among 'Other Wildlife' fungi take a prominent place - finds include the **Wood Cauliflower fungus**, more than **50 Hairy Earth Tongues** on my lawn and a good collection of fungi in roadside grass at Beacon Square in Emsworth

### Latest news (not included in the week's summary)

Nov 7

**Waxwing** heard trilling over Donnington (nr Chichester) at 9pm in darkness and light rain (so we have had at least one so far!)

Nov 8

**Four Swallows** seen from the Portsmouth seafront

Nov 9

**Red-breasted Goose** still at Lymington

**175 Sanderling** on the Eastney foreshore at Portsmouth

**Serin** going north over Sandy Point (Hayling) and a **Red-necked Grebe** was in Chichester Harbour sometime during the past week

Single **Goosander** in Southampton Water

**Mistle Thrush singing** in Brighton - first of the autumn

**Chiffchaff singing** at Christchurch Harbour

### **BIRDS**

**Black-throated Diver: Red-throated** and **Great Northern** have been in our southern waters since Oct 11 (when the first Red-throated was at Christchurch with Great Northerns arriving around that date) but the first **Black-throated** to be reported west of Dungeness was not seen until Nov 1 at Christchurch Harbour with one off Portland next day

**Great Crested Grebe:** A flock of 42 was at Rye Harbour on Nov 4 and on Nov 6 Cliff Dean told us that the expected winter flock in Rye Bay was starting to build up - on Jan 29 this year 691 were reported there.

**Red-necked Grebe:** One seen on the sea off Hurst Spit on Nov 7 seems to be the first in Hampshire waters this winter though one was at Dungeness as early as Aug 17 with more recent reports from there of 2 on Oct 17 and 3 on Nov 3 (see latest news section above)

**Slavonian Grebe:** Three were seen in Chichester Harbour from West Wittering on Nov 6 and the first two had reached Dorset on Nov 7 (seen in Studland Bay)

**Black-necked Grebe:** One of these was being reported at the Pagham Lagoon from Sep 19 to 24, probably staying until Oct 12 after which there were no more reports from there until now when there is a report of one there on Nov 4 (has it been there all the time?). This bird was seen again on Nov 6 when it was found both

on the lagoon and also in the nearby White's Creek. Another indication of new arrivals in the south is that the single bird reported at the Blashford Lakes from Oct 25 to 31 had become two birds on Nov 2. Another increase has occurred in the Studland Bay area where a maximum of 4 were reported up to Oct 27, becoming 5 on Nov 1 (on that day there was also a report of 5 in Poole Harbour). On Nov 5 there 9 in Studland Bay, then 10 on Nov 7

**Sooty Shearwater:** One past Dungeness on Nov 1

**Leach's Petrel:** Two, maybe three, in the Sheppey area on Nov 1 and one off Thanet on Nov 3

**Bittern:** Singles reported at Dungeness RSPB on Oct 30 and at Rye Harbour on Nov 2. One was at Radipole (Weymouth) on Nov 7 - maybe the one that was first reported there on Sep 24.

**Green Heron:** Has been at Hythe from Oct 19 to Nov 4 at least

**Spoonbill:** 15 in the Arne area of Poole Harbour on Nov 1 and 2 at Brownsea Island on Nov 2

**Bewick's Swan:** A family of 2 adults with 2 cygnets were at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 6 - although we have had sightings of **Whooper Swan** in southern England since Oct 4 these are the first **Bewick's** to be reported along the south coast.

**Bean Goose:** The first of the autumn was over Thanet on Nov 4 and a second (Tundra bird) was over Dungeness on Nov 6

**Pinkfoot Goose:** At least 33 over north Kent on Nov 3 and another 21 on Nov 4

**Whitefront Goose:** On Nov 3 there were only 14 at Slimbridge but 54 were there on Nov 4 after small parties had been seen passing over various sites including 31 over Barton on Sea on Nov 4. Other sightings on Nov 4 included 3 going north east over Sandy Point on Hayling, 1 which touched down in the Lymington area, 1 at Lodmoor in Dorset and 42 flying west over Thanet. On Nov 3 there were 100 at Pett on Rye Bay and 90 were recorded over Sandwich Bay. Since then I have heard of 3 going north west from Farlington Marshes on Nov 5 when 7 were seen at Christchurch Harbour, then Nov 6 brought 21 over Dungeness and on Nov 7 Rye Harbour reported another 16

**Snow Goose:** One with Canadas at Lee on the Test south of Romsey was almost certainly a feral Hampshire resident

**Brent Goose:** A major wave of these came into the English Channel area on Oct 31 (2729 passing the French Normandy coast) and Nov 1 (around 1000 seen at the Kent South Foreland with smaller numbers elsewhere). On Nov 2 a flock of 634 was off Ryde (IoW) and by Nov 4 a flock of 286 were in Emsworth Harbour. Although a very few juveniles have come with these new birds it is clear that there has been an almost total failure to hatch young this year. In Chichester Harbour only 7 young may have arrived. In Langstone Harbour Jason Crook tells us that by Nov 5 there was more than one family group to be seen and at least one family has 4 juveniles but he estimates that the percentage of young to old is unlikely to reach

1% even when the remainder of the birds eventually arrive. In the Lymington area a total of 5 young among around 400 birds was seen on Nov 1 and on Nov 5 there were 7 juveniles among 280 Brent at Wittering in Chichester Harbour (these may be in addition to 4 young seen in the Harbour earlier)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** By Nov 2 the total to be seen in Dorset had not increased above the 17 reported in The Fleet on Oct 31. The first Hampshire bird was one at Lymington on Nov 5, reported again on Nov 7

**Black Brant:** One newly arrived bird was seen off Broadmarsh in Langstone Harbour on the morning of Nov 5 and one was seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 25 when one arrived at The Fleet in Dorset (increasing to 2 there on Oct 31, both still there on Nov 2)

**Red-breasted Goose:** One arrived on the Lymington shore on Nov 6 and was still there on Nov 9 - a superb colourful bird which has delighted many birders though the jury is still out as to whether it is a genuine wild bird or an escape from a wildfowl collection (it could well be wild but its tolerance of close human presence on some occasions - one birder said it came within 'bread throwing distance' - and its association with Canada Geese on some occasions - though it is generally with Brent - would indicate a captive or feral origin)

**Wigeon:** Although thousands had been seen at the Thorney Deeps as early as Sep 26 they are only just starting to show up on the Emsworth shore where 3 were seen on Oct 16, increasing to 5 on Oct 31 and now 40 on Nov 4. Local counts on Nov 6 were of 400 in Nutbourne Bay and 580 in Pagham Harbour.

**Pintail:** A count of 15 in Nutbourne Bay on Nov 6 shows that these too are reaching winter numbers now

**Pochard:** There may have been a wave of these moving to winter quarters around Oct 20 (24 were seen at the Chichester lakes on Oct 18 and a count of 1762 was reported from a Dutch site on Oct 22) I did not see any at the Budds Farm pools until Oct 27 (when a token 3 were there). This shortage may soon change as Bough Beech in Kent reported 44 on Nov 2 and Rye Harbour had 59 on Nov 4

**Tufted Duck:** Large numbers of these may be expected in the next few days after a report of 88 at Rye Harbour on Nov 4 - the counts of these and of **Pochard** at Rye Harbour were the first I have seen from that site this autumn (presumably these numbers were a significant increase of what was already there)

**Scaup:** One reported on Pagham Lagoon on Nov 4 and one at Dungeness on Nov 5

**Long-tailed Duck:** First of the autumn was at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Oct 31. Nov 1 brought sightings of singles at Poole Harbour and Thanet, and Nov 2 brought four reports - one near the mouth of Pagham Harbour, one passing Christchurch Harbour and maybe being the one seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth), plus two seen in the Thanet area. The only bird regularly reported after Nov 2 is the one at Abbotsbury

**Velvet Scoter:** The earliest this autumn was off north Kent on Oct 29 and by Nov 2 there had been 7 reports, the latest being of one at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 1 and three off Thanet on Nov 2

**Goldeneye:** First reports for this autumn were on Oct 31 when a female was off West Wittering and two appeared at the Blashford Lakes. By Nov 3 a superb male was among two females at Christchurch Harbour while Nov 4 brought a lone male to Rye Harbour. The number at the Blashford Lakes increased to 4 on Nov 5 and to 5 on Nov 6

**Hooded Merganser:** The young male bird of unknown origin which appeared at Weymouth on June 6 is still there, though now resplendent in adult plumage. He only gets a mention this week through the arrival of an adult female (probably a genuine wild bird) in Fife (Scotland). I wonder what the chances are of it pairing up with out Weymouth bird?

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A count of 70 seen in Chichester Harbour from the Wittering area on Nov 6 is another sign that wildfowl are now with us in full winter numbers (though no doubt many are still on the move).

**Goosander:** This week's reports are of a young bird unexpectedly landing on a small pond near the Sandwich Bay observatory on Nov 3, of two at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 5, with five in Pagham Harbour that day, one over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 6 and one on Southampton Water on Nov 9

**Osprey:** The last report of one in southern England came from the Lewes area on Oct 25 but Lee Evans' bulletin of national bird news on Nov 7 said that a juvenile was still present in Suffolk

**Grey Partridge:** On Nov 4 a total of 126 were found at The Burgh (downs south of Pulborough) with one covey having 40+ birds. In view of the statement (back on Oct 12 when around 60 were seen) that none are either released or shot on the Duke Of Norfolk's estate I can only assume that **Partridges** released elsewhere have heard of sanctuary here and have flown in to take advantage of it.

**Common Crane:** One was seen in flight on Nov 2 in the Albourne area near Hurstpierpoint (north of Brighton) and seen to land in a tree - the long staying pair at Dungeness RSPB have not been reported since Oct 1 and this is the first I know of in southern England since then. Most recent news (from Lee Evans) is of one in South Devon on Nov 6

**Golden Plover:** 200+ still in Pagham Harbour on Nov 2 and 100+ on the Lymington shore on Nov 5 and 6. Inland a flock of 80 flew through the Whitsbury area (just north of Fordingbridge and not far from Martin Down) during the past week

**Sanderling:** 177 were on the west sands at Ryde (IoW) on Nov 2 and on Nov 4 a flock of 424 were seen in the Thanet area of Kent

**Purple Sandpiper:** These have been reported from nine different sites between Nov 2 and 6. One of the reports was of 6 at Southsea Castle on Nov 4 (first there as far as I know) with 8 there on Nov 6. Another local first was of 2 at the Bembridge

Foreland on Nov 6. A count of 39 in Thanet on Nov 2 may well mean that more are on their way.

**Jack Snipe:** On Nov 1 two were seen flying in off the sea at St Catherine's Point (IoW) and one was seen at East Head in Chichester Harbour on Nov 3 with 2 there on Nov 5

**Woodcock:** A definite increase in the number of arrivals from the continent between Nov 2 and 5 with a minimum of 12 reported from seven sites including one at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Nov 4 and one at Eastleigh Lakeside Park on Nov 3 (a new species for that well recorded site). Six arrived in the Thanet area on Nov 2 and another six came in to Portland on Nov 5

**Green Sandpiper:** I have 100 records of these for this autumn but I did not see one for myself until Nov 4 when one flew noisily downstream at Bedhampton in Havant to pitch near Bedhampton Mill

**Common Sandpiper:** I also saw one of these on the Langstone Harbour shore on Nov 3 - it was near the mouth of the Hermitage Stream at Broadmarsh and will probably remain there through the winter.

**Grey Phalarope:** Three new sightings bring the total of records that have gone into my database this autumn to 97 (covering a possible 193 birds). One was at Oare Marshes in north Kent on Nov 1 and one was at Dungeness from Nov 3 to 6, maybe moving on to appear at Rye Harbour on Nov 8

**Little Gull:** We rarely see more than half a dozen in the Langstone Harbour area but elsewhere they must be almost as common as our Black-headed Gulls based on the report of 297 passing Cap Griz Nez in France on Oct 8 and of 96 seen on Nov 2 off the north Kent coast

**Common Gull:** The history of a colour ringed Common Gull seen recently on the south Hayling shore shows that it was hatched some 100 miles south of Warsaw in Poland in May 2004 and was then seen at Farlington Marshes in Oct 2004 since when it has regularly returned to the Hayling area each winter.

**Sandwich Tern:** I do not think these normally winter in the Rye Bay area so one seen at Rye Harbour on Nov 3 was probably a late migrant

**Little Auk:** One had been seen flying past Bournemouth on Oct 20 and now one has been reported at Dungeness on Nov 1 and another at Portland on Nov 2

**Stock Dove:** A flock of around 40 was seen in the second Warblington Farm shore field east of Pook Lane on Nov 8 - in recent winters flocks of up to 140 have been attracted to these fields for lengthy stays

**Wood Pigeon:** It seems as if the main autumn movement died down at the end of October but on Nov 3 more than 6000 flew north over Dungeness

**Collared Dove:** I had not hear one singing since Sep 9 until Nov 6 (when I heard a brief burst from one bird) but they have not yet resumed regular song

**Short-eared Owl:** Plenty still arriving here for the winter - in this week's news I have seen nine reports including one recording the arrival of 5 at Portland on Nov 4 and late news of 4 on Sheppey in Kent on Nov 1. On Nov 7 three flew in at Durlston but **one was so exhausted by its journey that it was forced to the ground by Crows and then killed and eaten by a Peregrine.** On Nov 7 two were seen at the Thornham Marshes on Thorney Island where one seems to have been present since Sep 26 (maybe since Sep 14 when one was near Wickor Point on the west side of Thorney).

**Common Swift:** Lee Evans reports the presence of one in north Yorkshire on Nov 6 but the latest in the south of England this year remains the one in Dorset on Oct 22

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** One was said to have been seen in the grounds of The Rowans hospice at Purbook Heath (Waterlooville area) on Nov 3

**Shorelark:** Other than an isolated report of one flying over St Aldhelms Head in Dorset on Sep 27 the first two reports of the winter come from the South Foreland in Kent on Nov 2 and Sandwich Bay on Nov 4 (possibly the same bird)

**Swallow:** Still being reported on Nov 7 when three were at Seaford near Beachy Head and one was at Durlston (also seen Nov 9)

**House Martin:** At least one seen somewhere on each day from Nov 1 to 7 with one in Hampshire at Barton on Sea on Nov 6 and one at Durlston in Dorset on Nov 7

**Tree Pipit:** One at Portland on Nov 6 was the first to be reported since Oct 17

**Rock Pipit:** Two were back at Southsea Castle on Nov 6 and I had one at Nutbourne Bay on Nov 7

**Water Pipit:** The first to be reported in Hampshire this autumn was a single at Barton on Sea on Sep 25. The next relatively local sighting was at Bembridge (IoW) on Oct 31 and on Nov 6 two or perhaps three were in the Lymington area

**Yellow Wagtail:** Still one to be seen at Bockhill (South Foreland) on Nov 2

**Grey Wagtail:** Most of these have now settled into winter quarters but a pair flying together at Bedhampton on Nov 4 were of interest as the male was uttering phrases of his spring song

**Waxwing:** During a recent Autumnwatch TV programme Bill Oddie muttered something about there being '**lots of Waxwing**' in northern and eastern parts of Britain but the only information that I had been able to discover until the end of this week was that there were 14 at a place called Lintrathen in Scotland on Nov 3 while on Nov 4 two were at Spurn Point, one was seen at Dungeness and three in the Thanet area. Summary counts for October from the Trektellen site show 48 in Germany and 46 in the Netherlands while Nov 1 to 5 showed 22 in the UK, 19 in the Netherlands and 11 in Germany. Hardly the thousands of a **Waxwing irruption** so far! Having written that for my mid-week summary the picture changed dramatically with Lee Evans' latest national bird news published on Nov 6 - he gives us a list of **21 sites in Britain with a total of 737 Waxwing between them.** None however in any southern counties other than Kent - the sites named by Lee range from Essex,

Cambs and Oxon north to the Orkneys and the only site with more than 100 birds was in Scotland (Aberdeenshire). Viewers of the last Autumnwatch programme on TV were treated to close views of half a dozen birds on the Farne Islands (there are no trees there but the National Trust warden had erected artificial trees made of driftwood and fixed apples to them and the **Waxwings** passing over the islands could not refuse the offer of rest and food). PS see latest news at head of Summary for news of one in the Chichester area on Nov 7

**Wren:** These do not often appear as winter arrivals from the continent but there were at least 40 at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2 with 33 there next day

**Robin:** With the influx of Wrens at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2 were 80 Robins with 30 at the South Foreland and 51 at Dungeness the same day. More than 100 were seen in the Thanet area on Nov 4

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** In my weekly summary last Sunday I said that the finder of this Mega rarity at Ramsgate on Nov 1 was the local known only by the pseudonym of 'Gadget' but subsequent entries on the Planet Thanet website reveal that it was first seen by two other birders - the finder seems to have been called Andrew Lawson and his companion was none other than Richard Bonser who was a student at Southampton University a few years ago and who gave the **unofficial name of Larus argentatus bonserii to a leucistic Herring Gull** which has been a feature of Southampton Water over several winters (not sure if it still turns up there). The **Bluetail** was still at Ramsgate on Nov 2 but has not been reported since. Proof that it was **not the only one in Britain** comes from Lee Evans who, on Nov 6, reported two in Britain (one in Lincolnshire and one in Norfolk). He also reported a **Bluethroat** in Aberdeenshire.

**Black Redstart:** I have now seen 63 reports of this species (with a potential total of 155 birds involved) this autumn but until Nov 4 I had not heard of any on south Hayling - on that day Andy Johnson referred to the presence of 3 along the Eastoke promenade. Nov 4 brought news of 7 at Dungeness, 4 at Portland. 3 along the Eastoke Promenade on south Hayling and 2 at Shoreham Fort but I think these birds have not yet settled and I hear that the Hayling birds could not be refound - maybe they flew across the Solent as 3 were seen near the Needles on the Isle of Wight on Nov 5 and on Nov 6 Southsea Castle had 3.

**Wheatear:** On Nov 6 one was still at Barton on Sea and another was at Southsea Castle.

**Ring Ouzel:** Several have been seen each day from Nov 1 to 7 with a maximum of 6 at Folkestone on Nov 2. Locally there were singles at Church Norton on Nov 2 and on Nov 5

**Blackbird:** These are now arriving in hundreds - 200 at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2, around 400 at Portland on Nov 3 and 300 in Thanet on Nov 4

**Fieldfare:** Nothing on the scale of the 4,500 near Canterbury on Nov 1 but latest news does have a count of 600 at Reculver on the north Kent coast on Nov 4

**Song Thrush:** 100+ at Portland on Nov 4 with smaller counts at 9 other sites between Nov 1 and 4

**Redwing:** 700 at Sandwich on Nov 4 with 400 at Portland on Nov 3

**Mistle Thrush:** These remain very scarce with peak counts of 6 at Dungeness on Nov 2 and 4 at Portland on Nov 5

**Dartford Warbler:** An indication that some of these are moving through areas where their normal gorse habit is not available came from a report of one skulking in a field of Cauliflowers in the Thanet area on Nov 2

**Lesser Whitethroat:** One seen in the Thanet area on Nov 2 was claimed as a representative of one of the eastern races (see Collins Field Guide)

**Garden Warbler:** One of these also seen in the Thanet area on Nov 4 and an even later one was photographed at Andover on Nov 6

**Blackcap:** A count of 300 at Beachy Head on Sep 12 probably marked the peak departure of our summer visitors though there were still more than 80 at Durlston on Sep 27. Most counts during October were of 3 or less birds so a report of 10 at Portland on Nov 5 stands out and may indicate the start of our winter visitors arriving from central Europe

**Pallas' Warbler:** The first to be reported this autumn was in the Thanet area on Nov 2. No more sightings in southern England but on Nov 6 Lee Evans listed 9 sites from Norfolk north to the Orkneys which each had single birds

**Hume's Leaf Warbler:** One of these Yellow-browed Warbler look alike was claimed at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2 and another (only 'possible') was on the Isle of Wight seen near St Catherine's Point on Oct 31 and at Sandown on Nov 2

**Dusky Warbler:** One claimed at Thanet on Nov 2 (just one previously this autumn at the South Foreland on Sep 26&27). On Nov 6 Lee Evans also listed one in Norfolk and one at Spurn Point

**Goldcrest:** On Nov 4 Thanet had more than 250 and Sandwich Bay had 200+

**Firecrest:** Plenty of these around but the autumn's peak count so far was 17 at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2

**Marsh Tit:** Now that these seem to have become rarities the presence this week of 2 in the Chichester West Dean Woods and 1 at the Blashford Lakes may be newsworthy.

**Jay:** These have at last started to arrive from the continent in serious numbers with 20 at Durlston on Oct 28 and 50+ in Thanet on Nov 2

**Raven:** The Havant area seems to be one of the very few places not to have regular Raven sightings so a sighting of one over the East Head area of Chichester Harbour, flying towards Hayling Island on Nov 5, is of local interest

**Starling:** 3000 were seen to fly in off the sea at Thanet on Nov 2 and another 550 flew in to Portland on Nov 4 with several similar reports of birds arriving at other coastal sites (Barton on Sea had 209 on Nov 4 and 674 on Nov 5)

**Serin:** One flew over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 6

**Greenfinch:** There are by now a few more around which have arrived from the continent and a report of around 150 feeding as a flock on the shore near Shoreham Harbour on Nov 5 is encouraging news after this autumn's dearth of the species. The next highest count was of 42 at Barton on Sea on Nov 4 when 30 were seen at Christchurch Harbour

**Goldfinch:** In contrast to the low numbers of **Greenfinch** none of the 11 counts of **Goldfinch** I have seen for the Nov 2 to 6 period is less than 160 with counts on Nov 3 of 2300+ at Dungeness and 1500+ at Durlston (Sandy Point on Hayling had 997 on Nov 4, along with **121 Siskin** and **131 Linnet**)

**Twite:** First to be reported in southern England this winter was one at Dungeness on Nov 3 (on Nov 6 Lee Evans reported one at Rainham Marsh in the London area)

**Lesser Redpoll:** On Nov 4 there were more than 250 (maybe 400) in Buchan Country Park at Crawley. On the same day 313 arrived at Sandwich Bay and 170 were seen in Thanet

**Common (or Mealy) Redpoll:** On Nov 2 there was a total of 5 birds at 3 sites in East Kent

**Hawfinch:** Four were seen in the Chichester West Dean Woods on Nov 5

**Snow Bunting:** On Nov 3 one appeared at the Eastoke Corner carpark on south Hayling and it was still there on Nov 4. Thoughts that this was one of the two which have been at East Head on the Sussex side of Chichester Harbour entrance were refuted by an increase in the number at East Head from 2 to 3 on Nov 3 (three still there on Nov 6). Elsewhere during the Nov 2 to 4 period one new bird was seen to fly in off the sea at the South Foreland on Nov 2 and the number on the north Kent coast increased to at least 9

**Little Bunting:** Nov 1 brought the fourth recent sighting of one in the Old Basing area east of Basingstoke - so far all the sightings have been made by one experienced birder and confirmation by others is made difficult as there is a lot of private property in the area where the bird can escape attention

**Corn Bunting:** More than 15 were in the Sussex Ouse valley between Southease and Rodmell on Nov 2 with a few still to be seen on the Sussex Downs near the River Arun on Nov 4

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Migrant Hawker:** A very late individual was still flying sluggishly at Rye Harbour on Nov 4. This was not the last for the year as one was active at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 7

**Common Darter:** At least one of these seen at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 7

### Butterflies

#### Just four species named in recent reports

**Large White:** Just one seen in Gosport on Nov 2

**Red Admiral:** Of 18 seen in the most recent reports 13 of them were dotted around the Gosport area on Nov 2 and one was active at Ringwood on Nov 7

**Small Tortoiseshell:** One seen in a Havant garden on Nov 2

**Speckled Wood:** After one at Gosport on Nov 2 there were three seen on Nov 7 (two seen at Portland and one in the Kingston area near Lewes)

## Moths

**Caloptilia rufipennella (0284):** First mention for the year in a Thanet area trap on Nov 3

**Scrobipalpa costella (0819):** First I have heard of this year taken at Pagham Harbour on Nov 4

**London Dowd (0874 Blastobasis lacticolella):** First at at Thanet trap on Nov 3 This species was previously called Blastobasis decolorella

**December moth (1631 Poecilocampa populi):** First report from the Newhaven area on Nov 3

## PLANTS

**108 species recorded in flower so far in November**, including ...

**Annual Wall Rocket:** Found flowering in more than one place around Havant on Nov 3 and 4 (not seen in October)

**Perennial Wall Rocket:** Still flower on the rail lines at Havant on Nov 6

**Thale Cress:** One plant seen in Havant on Nov 5 (not seen in October)

**Early Dog Violet:** Three flowers have appeared on self-sown plants in my Havant garden at the end of the current week

**Musk Mallow:** Still flowering in Nov 3

**Tufted Vetch:** More than one plant still flowering on Nov 4 by the cycle way alongside the A27 near Broadmarsh

**Melilot:** Both **Ribbed** and **White** species flowering at Broadmarsh on Nov 4 (neither seen in October)

**Spotted Medick:** Flowering in Havant St Faith churchyard on Nov 6 for the first time since mid-July

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** Just one flower (among a lot of fruit) seen in Juniper Square on Nov 3 - I have recorded this species flowering at this site in every month of this year so far.

**Stone Parsley:** More than one fresh plant flowering this month.

**Wild Parsnip:** Not reported in October but flowering at Durlston on Nov 1 and at Broadmarsh on Nov 4

**Greater Mullein:** Another species flowering at Broadmarsh on Nov 4 but not seen in October

**Hybrid Water Speedwell:** Another species not seen in October but flowering in the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton on Nov 4

**Field Scabious:** Reported as flowering at Durlston on Nov 5

**Common Fleabane:** Although I had seen this as late as Oct 8 I was very surprised to see one plant still flowering on Nov 4

**Golden Samphire:** Just one fresh plant with a single new flower seen at Nore Barn (Warblington shore) on Nov 8

**Winter Heliotrope:** First flowers of the new season seen beside Park Road South in Havant (outside the demolished Texaco garage) on Nov 3

**Chinese Mugwort:** This species never flowers before October and this year I failed to see it at the Broadmarsh cycleway site in October but found it flowering (most flowers already over) on Nov 4

**Slender Thistle:** More than one plant still flowering beside Southmoor Lane on Nov 3

**Greater Knapweed:** Still flowering at Durlston on Nov 5

**Mouse-ear Hawkweed:** Flowers seen on Nov 3 in St Faith's churchyard in Havant where they started re-flowering on Oct 21

**Wild Oat:** One heathy fresh plant seen by a Havant roadside on Nov 3 but not included in the flowering count as none of the many spikelets were open

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Daubenton's Bat:** At least one flying low over King's Pond at Alton around dusk on Nov 4 so they are not yet in hibernation

**Common Newt:** Some months ago (late summer) when clearing grass in a corner of my garden I found a **torpid Newt** which had presumably climbed the brick wall from my neighbour's garden where there is a healthy pond. Having interrupted the creature's rest I put him back in some dry grass which I then put inside a glass jamjar which I left lying on its side (without a lid) in a secluded and hopefully frost free situation under shrubs. I mention this now as on Nov 3 the Durlston website records an observation of a **very lethargic Common Newt** seen 'walking sluggishly' across a path. I have no idea when Newts normally go into hibernation (I believe most remain active after they have left their breeding ponds until around

October) but I guess this one was leaving it a bit late if others seek repose before the summer is over.

**Fungi:** In addition to the **five species of Waxcap** and the **Yellow Club, Orange Mosscap** and most recently the **Hairy Earth Tongues** seen in my garden so far this year I think I have failed to mention that I have some very small **Jew's Ears** (now called **Jelly Ears**) growing on dead Buddleia wood. They have been present for some time but this week did bring a good find outside the garden - another example of the **Hairy Earth Tongue (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*)** found in the grass of St Faith's churchyard here in Havant on Nov 3. On Nov 4 I also found **Fairy Ring toadstools** in the Bedhampton area. In the Emsworth area a specimen of **Wood Cauliflower fungus (*Sparassis crispa*)** was found on Nov 3 in the hedgebank of Long Copse Lane.

On Nov 8 I had a look at the grass verge outside 15, Beacon Square in Emsworth where Brian Fellows had found good examples of **Fly Agaric** recently - when I got there the single **Fly Agaric** which he had photographed as a round headed 'bud' had grown into one of the most perfect specimens of this charismatic toadstool. It was, as expected, growing at the foot of a Birch tree and on the other side of the same tree was another fungus that lives in a symbiotic relationship with Birch, the **Brown Birch Bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*)** which was also in perfect condition with pale brown cap, white pores which did not change colour when pressed, and a whitish stem with black flecking (outside 17 Beacon Square were three older examples of this species in which the cap had cracked into a crazy paving pattern and the pores had become a dirty pale yellowish colour). Back with the **Fly Agaric** were other fungi including **Spotted Toughshank** and **Poison Pie** which I could identify and at least two others that I could not. One troop of medium sized, rich brown coloured caps with 'crimping' around the edge, looked to be **Brown Rollrims** but a closer look showed that the gills were not decurrent and the nearest I have come to naming these is **Lepista irina**. The other un-named species was a tiny grey **Mycena** with a white edge to its conical cap and resembled photos of **M. oortiana** (also called **M. archangeliana**) or the commoner **M. galopus**, but both these species grow on twigs and wood debris whereas this appeared to grow from the grassy soil.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 3 - 9 (WEEK 44 OF 2008)**

### **Tue 4 Nov**

#### **Green Sandpiper at Bedhampton and more wild flowers**

This afternoon I went via Bedhampton Mill to Broadmarsh and back, getting two surprises when at the point where the overflow from the Bedhampton water works joins the Hermitage stream. Here a noisy **Green Sandpiper** flew overhead and dropped into the stream just south of Bedhampton Mill, and as its sharp calls ceased I heard **two Grey Wagtails** flying towards me, **one of them uttering fragments of its spring song** in addition to the normal call note.

At Broadmarsh the **Chinese Mugwort** was at last in flower (in fact most of it was over) and along the cycleway I found **Blue Fleabane, Wild Parsnip, Tufted Vetch**

and **Hemp Agrimony** in flower. Coming back along this track and following it along Harts Farm Way I was surprised to find a single plant of **Fleabane** still in flower. I have not yet added to my database the flowering plants seen yesterday and today so I am not quite sure of the total (I hope to put the current total in the mid-week summary tomorrow) but we are doing pretty well so far.

[Mon 3 Nov](#)

### **First flowering of Winter Heliotrope and a Common Sandpiper**

The majority of wildflowers start to blossom in the spring or summer but there are some which start their season in the autumn, the most obvious being **Ivy** (though that started in mid August) and the least obvious being **Butcher's Broom** (which I saw first on Sep 23 this year). **Winter Heliotrope** is a real winter flowering species and seems to need a frost before getting going so I was not surprised to find flowers out today.

Another couple of notable finds today were made in St Faith's churchyard here in Havant - one was a single flower of **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** and the other was the **Hairy Earthtongue fungus Trichoglossum hirstum** which I recently found on my garden lawn but have never previously found elsewhere until today when I happened on a specimen in the churchyard

This afternoon I was out again collecting observations for my November flowering plant list in the Southmoor Lane area but I also had a look at birds on the Budds Farm pools and along the neighbouring shore where I had close views of a wintering **Common Sandpiper**.

## **SUMMARY FOR OCT 27 - NOV 2 (WEEK 43 OF 2008)**

### **Highlights:**

The arrival of visitors on Sunday afternoon when I should have been working on this summary means I am late in completing it and do not have time for either writing a Highlights section nor listing any late records so you will have to work through the list unaided and pick out the bits that interest you.

### **BIRDS**

**Divers: Great-Northern, Black and Red-throated** are all being seen along the south coast, usually singly but with reports of up to **4 Red-throated** off the Normandy coast of France on Oct 31

**Slavonian Grebe:** A single bird has been seen off the Lymington shore from Oct 9 (latest report on Oct 30) but the only other bird that I have heard of was one at Dungeness on Oct 10

**Black-necked Grebe:** The only birds being reported currently are 4 in Studland Bay (Dorset) and 1 at the Blashford Lakes though there are probably 2 or more in Langstone Harbour and perhaps some at the Dungeness RSPB reserve

**Balearic Shearwater:** There has been a lot of concern expressed about the status of this species but all the reports this autumn show that it is far more likely to be

seen off the coast of southern England than is Manx Shearwater. One illustration of this comes from the totals of the two species seen by Russell Wynn (of the Southampton Oceanographic Centre) when he was sea-watching from the extreme south west tip of Cornwall (Gwennap Head near Porthgwarra) from Oct 4 to 17. He had **182 Balearics against just 22 Manx**). Looking at all the observations that I have recorded along the south coast from Aug 1 to Nov 1 I have a total of **993 Balearic to 573 Manx** though for this year to date overall I have **1852 Balearic** (highest count was just 66 off Portland) on Aug 30 to **42494 Manx** (this includes a **single report of 25,000 west past Portland on May 1**) and so I think that the recent figures really reflect the fact that we are on a route chosen by the relatively few **Balearics** while the great mass of **Manx** commute between the open Atlantic and the Welsh coast without normally entering the English Channel.

**Leach's Petrel:** Perhaps half a dozen of these were off the north Kent coast between Oct 31 and Nov 1, being seen at three different sites

**Green Heron:** The bird which was first reported on Oct 25 (but is thought to have been present since Oct 19) was still showing well by the Royal Military Canal in the West Hythe area of Kent on Oct 31. This vagrant from America is a new species for Kent and (I believe) only the eighth ever seen in Britain (though the BTO Bird Facts website gives only three records - first in Cornwall in 1889, then one in Yorkshire in 1982 and one in Lincolnshire in 2001). At least one more was in Anglesey on Nov 2005 (see an excellent photo at <http://stevenround-birdphotography.com/Green%20Heron.htm> )

**Spoonbill:** 15 of these were in the Arne area of Poole Harbour on Oct 28, probably in addition to the one at Brownsea Island shown this week on the Autumnwatch TV programme (18 were reported at Brownsea on Oct 11, easily beating the maximum of 12 in Poole Harbour last February)

**Mute Swan:** It would seem that the Langstone Pond pair which have had six cygnets with them until recently now only have five but I am not sure if the sixth is defunct or has just gone off on its own.

**Whooper Swan:** One was still at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Oct 29 but a few more may be on their way as 4 were reported passing Hamburg on Oct 29

**Black Swan:** One seen at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Oct 31 was a newcomer there (perhaps feeling the call of its antipodean spring and moving in search of a mate?)

**Bean Goose:** No reports from southern England but I see that 25 were seen passing the Belgian coast on Oct 31

**Barnacle Goose:** A total of 977 went past one Belgian site on Oct 30

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose:** A report of 209 passing Dungeness on Oct 28 marked the start of a large second wave of birds arriving for the winter. The peak of this wave reached southern England on Oct 30 when the following counts were reported - Sandwich Bay had 1862, Dungeness had 1700 and Reculver on the north Kent coast reported more than 1000 flying west. On Oct 31 more than 1500 were reported from the West Wittering area (not sure if these were new or were the

flock of around 1400 that was first seen there around Oct 18) and an additional 2729 were seen off Normandy (presumably heading for the French Atlantic coast). New arrivals in southern England on Oct 31 included 375 at Sandwich Bay, 330 at Dungeness and 223 on the north Kent coast. Nov 1 saw an estimated 1000 at the South Foreland in Kent and 581 in the Thanet area (North Foreland). Nearer home Nov 1 brought **5 juveniles** (in a flock of around 400) to the Lymington area and **1 juvenile** in the first flock of 98 birds to arrive in Emsworth Harbour

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Although there have been 11 reports of this species since the first on Sep 25 all have been of single birds or families until Oct 31 when a flock of 17 was at Abbotsbury in Dorset. Maybe this flock are the first representatives of the Canadian birds coming via Ireland and overshooting to France. Certainly most of the previous reports have been of birds seen among **Dark-bellied Brent** and on Oct 25 a family seen in The Fleet near Weymouth consisted **one Dark and one Pale parent with 4 mixed juveniles**.

**Brant:** On Oct 25 single birds were seen at Pagham Harbour and in The Fleet near Weymouth. On Oct 31 **two Brant** were reported to be in The Fleet

**Shelduck:** These are now returning from their moult - on Oct 28 a count of 21 flying west over north Kent coast was reported and on Oct 29 I saw 26 on the Northney shore of Hayling with others at the Oysterbeds and the mouth of the Langbrook stream. Also on Oct 29 17 went west past north Kent and 13 went past Dungeness, and on Oct 31 there was a count of 34 passing the Normandy coast of France

**Wigeon:** On Oct 29 there were still some 100 of these in the Langbrook stream mouth area where I counted 102 on Oct 25. Also on Oct 29 there were some 800 in the Thorney Deeps and on Oct 31 Sandwich Bay recorded another 119 (with 236 passing the French coast) while on Nov 1 there were 100 at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight

**Pintail:** Some 50 had reached Pulborough Brooks by Oct 7 and 27 were reported at Dungeness on Oct 10 but there have no other significant counts until Oct 31 when 34 were reported at Oare Marshes on the north Kent coast and one Dutch site had 61 passing

**Pochard:** Three at the Budds Farm Pools here in Havant on Oct 27 were the first I have seen this autumn.

**Scaup:** A juvenile male was in the Lymington area at the end of September and this week there has been an adult male there on Nov 1 with a report of one at Sandwich Bay on Oct 30 and another flying past Portland Bill on Nov 1

**Goosander:** These too are now arriving in the south to supplement the few that stayed to breed on the Hampshire Avon. On Oct 27 there were 14 redheads roosting at the Blashford Lakes and on Oct 28 one was seen briefly in Pagham Harbour before flying north.

**Eider:** A report of 5 males on the north Kent coast (and one at Dungeness) on Oct 31 may show that these are starting to come south for the winter.

**Long-tailed Duck:** The first two reports of these for the winter come from Abbotsbury in Dorset on Oct 31 and Thanet in Kent on Nov 1

**Velvet Scoter:** The first of the winter was off north Kent on Oct 29, then on Oct 31 one was seen off Sandwich and another went past Christchurch Harbour. By Nov 1 there were three off Thanet and one was again seen at Christchurch

**Goldeneye:** After an odd sighting in the Lymington area on Oct 9 there were no reports until Oct 31 when a female was seen in Chichester Harbour from West Wittering and another turned up at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood. On Nov 1 two flew east past Barton on Sea (east of Christchurch) and maybe the same two were seen passing Christchurch Harbour

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Although a few of these have been seen since the end of August only one of the 32 reports up to Oct 29 was of more than 5 birds (the exception being a count of 15 in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 22). Oct 30 brought a report of 15 off Sandwich and on Oct 31 there were two reports (12 at Oare Marshes and 15 at Seasalter - both on the north Kent shore), and on Nov 1 11 were seen in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight

**Goosander:** Winter birds started to reach the south coast on Oct 25 when 19 were seen at the Blashford Lakes with at least 14 still there on Oct 27. On Oct 28 a single redhead was in Pagham Harbour and on Oct 30 a flock of 16 was reported on the continental shore

**Honey Buzzard:** A late bird was seen over the Horsham area on Oct 28

**Marsh Harrier:** These are numerous throughout the year in Kent but I thought it worth noting that on Nov 1 a total of 12 were seen in the Kent Stour valley with five of them hovering low over reed beds trying (unsuccessfully) to catch some of the **Starlings** roosting there.

**Buzzard:** These are now moving over the near continent to escape the coming winter and on Oct 31 one Dutch site had 34 passing over it.

**Merlin:** I had some local excitement when what I am almost certain was a **male Merlin** was hunting over the Warblington Farm fields on Oct 31 - see my Dairy for that day for more detail

**Water Rail:** Despite the small wings and dangling legs which must make long distance flight a difficult business many of these move long distances to winter quarters and on Oct 28 Steve Keen almost certainly saw a 'non-resident' bird at Barton on Sea near Christchurch - it was seen nowhere near the small ponds in that area but clambering about in bramble bushes! A good many years ago at this time of year I found the corpse of one below the glass walls of the IBM buildings at Portsmouth - it had probably decided to stop off at the small lake by the main reception entrance but had been deceived by the reflection of the lake in the glass walls and had crashed into them, breaking its neck.

**Common Crane:** Their migration over the continent is not yet over - two were seen over Holland on Oct 30 and 6 on Oct 31

**Golden Plover:** These are getting more common in the Hampshire and West Sussex area. On Aug 30 a flock of 78 were seen in the Stockbridge area of Hampshire and on Oct 31 some 400 were seen from West Wittering airborne over Thorney with another 50 over the Selsey west fields.

**Knot:** On Oct 31 there were 30 in Pagham Harbour seen from Church Norton

**Purple Sandpiper:** None have been reported at Southsea Castle yet this autumn but four were seen at Folkestone on Oct 28 after three had been seen at Newhaven on Oct 26 (Last week I wrongly reported this sighting as being at Brighton Marina). Last year there were sightings of passing birds at Southsea on Aug 15 (!) and Oct 21 but the regular winter reports there did not start until Nov 14. On Oct 30 1 was seen at Sandwich and another at Portland, then on Oct 31 2 were at Bockhill (South Foreland in Kent)

**Woodcock:** Continental birds will now be feeling the onset of winter and be coming over here - several reports provide some evidence for this. One bird was recorded at Dungeness on Oct 27 and another was flushed from a hedge bottom on the Isle of Sheppey on Oct 28. Since then Oct 30 brought reports of 2 at Bockhill (South Foreland) (though one of these was then taken by Peregrine) with another three seen at Dungeness that day. On Oct 31 singles were seen at Reculver (north Kent) and at Portland.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A flock of 40 were feeding on the mud of the main pool of the Hayling Oysterbeds as the tide fell on Oct 29 - maybe the first back here this winter?

**Grey Phalarope:** During the Oct 4 to 17 period when Russell Wynn was at Gwennap Head (tip of Cornwall) he saw a total of more than 65. More recently one was at Chesil (Portland) on Oct 27, then on Oct 29 there were probably three birds on the north Kent coast and finally one was at Normandy (Lymington) on Oct 30

**Kittiwake:** Some 440 of these flew west past Dungeness on Oct 28 - the largest number reported on the south coast since last March

**Common Tern:** A late bird was off Dungeness on Oct 25

**Arctic Tern:** One off north Kent on Oct 31 may have been the last of the departing migrants

**Stock Dove:** Small numbers of these are now moving west with the **Woodpigeons.** On Oct 21 32 were seen in the Kent Stour Valley, on Oct 25 there was a count of 39 from a site in Holland, and now more than 25 have been seen at Barton on Sea on Oct 28. Numbers increased on Oct 31 with 29 over the Selsey area and 65 at Christchurch Harbour

**Woodpigeon:** The autumn passage seems to have started in earnest in southern England on Oct 25 when some 3000 went west over Hastings (and on that day a count of 27,056 was recorded in Holland). Oct 28 brought counts of 6300 from Barton on Sea, 3000 from Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, 1870 from the Bournemouth area and 1685 from Christchurch Harbour. On Oct 29 Steve Keen at

Barton on Sea recorded the highest count reported in southern England this autumn with 9385 (one of them being an albino!)

**Skylark:** Their autumn passage has been fairly muted so far with the highest recent count in southern England being 337 at Barton on Sea on Oct 28 (though one Dutch site reported 2756 on Oct 22 and there was a report of 1894 over West Bay in Dorset on Oct 17)

**Swallow:** Reports continue to come in daily but the latest I have seen was of 3 over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 1 (with one over Barton on Sea)

**House Martin:** Latest is one at Portland on Nov 1

**Richard's Pipit:** One flew west over Barton on Sea on Oct 28

**Rock Pipit:** One was back on the South Moors shore at Langstone on Oct 27, giving me close views as it perched on driftwood

**Scandinavian Rock Pipit:** Two were reported at Pagham Harbour on Oct 26

**Grey Wagtail:** The expected winter birds have now returned to Havant. I have heard several overhead this month and on Oct 29 I saw one back in the Lymbourne stream (they do not breed there, though at least one pair still breeds on the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton). Although they do not nest away from fast running streams you are now as likely to hear them over the centre of Havant as by the Lymbourne stream during the winter months.

**Waxwing:** Just one bird reported so far though not in England - one was seen over the Hamburg Marina in Germany on Oct 31

**Dunnock:** The first and so far only **report of one singing** after their moult came from Durlston on Oct 27

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** I have never seen a report of this species before and at first I thought someone had mis-spelt **Bluethroat** but the name is correct (the French name is translated as '**Red-flanked Nightingale**' which gives a better indication of what sort of bird is being described). The report I am referring to is of a bird seen at Ramsgate on Nov 1 when one of the regular Thanet birders (who delights in the pseudonym of Gadget) braved the dismal rainy morning for a walk round his local patch to be rewarded with a 'Mega'. I believe that less than 20 birds of this species have ever been recorded in Britain though they may become more frequent as this is the third for this year (one was in the Orkneys in September and another in Norfolk in October) and three were also found last year (all during October in Scotland, Yorkshire and Wales)

Wikipedia has this to say about the species: "The **Red-flanked Bluetail (Tarsiger cyanurus)**, also known as the **Orange-flanked Bush-robin**, is a small passerine bird that was formerly classed as a member of the thrush family Turdidae, but is now more generally considered to be an Old World flycatcher, Muscicapidae. It, and related species, are often called chats.

"It is a migratory insectivorous species breeding in mixed coniferous forest with undergrowth in north Asia to the Himalayas and western China. **Red-flanked Bluetails winter in southeast Asia.**

"The species' range is slowly expanding westwards through Finland. It is a very rare but increasing vagrant to western Europe, and there have been a few records in westernmost North America.

"The **Red-flanked Bluetail** nests near the ground, laying 3-5 eggs which are incubated by the female.

"It is slightly larger in size than the **European Robin**. As the name implies, both sexes have a blue tail and reddish flanks. The adult male has dark blue upperparts and white underparts. Females are plain brown above and have a dusky breast.

"The male sings its melancholy trill from treetops. Its call is a typical chat "tacc" noise."

**Blackbird:** We should soon be seeing more of these in our gardens as numbers arrive from the continent. On Oct 30 Dungeness recorded 170, Christchurch Harbour had 160, and at least another 75 were seen in Kent. On Oct 31 Portland had 100, Dungeness had 55 and Beachy Head had 50 with 35 at Christchurch. Then on Nov 1 the number at Portland was up to 150 ....

**Fieldfare:** Oct 28 seems to have brought another influx of birds from the continent with several reports from Kent, in particular 1620 flying west over Reculver on the north coast and another 1200+ were reported there on Oct 30 when 60 were seen at Bransbury Common near Andover. Latest news includes a count of around 4,500 in the Kent Stour valley on Nov 1

**Song Thrush:** These are also arriving daily, the highest recent reports being on Oct 30 when 450 were at Dungeness and 160 at Bockhill (South Foreland).

**Redwing:** Reculver also had 948 of these on Oct 28, when Thanet reported 1047, and on Oct 29 there were 1026 passing Reculver. Oct 30 brought 900 to Dungeness and in Dorset 400 were seen near Weymouth on Oct 31. On Nov 1 the Kent Stour Valley had an estimated 2800

**Mistle Thrush:** These remain very scarce both here and on the continent but Dungeness had 15 on Oct 30 when another 11 were seen at the South Foreland. Highest count so far was of just 34 at a Dutch site on Oct 31

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** One had been seen in Thanet on Sep 17 and now another has spent a day at Dungeness on Oct 27

**Bearded Tit:** A small party of four birds were seen to fly high from the east into reeds at Christchurch Harbour before later continuing westwards.

**Marsh Tit:** In central southern England these seem to be following **Willow Tit** into virtual extinction but I see that the Warnham reserve at Horsham had more than **7 Marsh Tits** and **1 Willow Tit** on Oct 29. I have also been told that there was **no scarcity of Marsh Tits in the Wye valley** by someone who was there last week

**Great Grey Shrike:** A 'new arrival' was one at Heyshott Common near Midhurst on Nov 1

**Jay:** Still no reports of any large numbers on the move but a report of 20 at Durlston on Oct 28 was clearly an increase on the local resident population.

**Starling:** Following a report of 26,000 passing over one Dutch site on Oct 25 there has been an arrival of around 20,000 at Dungeness on Oct 28 followed by 4,000 there on Oct 29 and 1,700 on Oct 30 when 700+ came in off the sea at Portland and another 1,100 arrived at Durlston. On Oct 31 Dungeness had another 2,200 and that evening a swarm of around 17,500 came to roost at Brighton's West Pier

**Greenfinch:** These continue to be in very short supply with a peak recent count of just 30 at Durlston on Oct 27 and a continental peak of only 32 passing Hamburg in Germany on Oct 31. So far this autumn I have only seen two counts of over 100 birds, both at Durlston (220 on Oct 6 and 112 on Oct 10)

**Twite:** None reported yet in southern England but Oct 31 brought a second report from the continent where 1 was seen on Oct 11 and 7 on Oct 31

**Mealy Redpoll:** Christchurch Harbour reported one on Nov 1

**Bullfinch:** A count of 17 at Durlston on Oct 28 shows that a number of these are on the move along with the thousands of **Chaffinch** and **Goldfinch** being reported everywhere.

**Snow Bunting:** It seems that at least 9 of these had arrived in southern England between Oct 9 and 27, the last being one over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 27. Since then a couple turned up at East Head in Chichester Harbour on Oct 29 and were still showing well on Oct 31. Also on Oct 29 I think 3 arrived on the north Kent coast with another at Dungeness. Here in Hampshire the first was seen at Barton on Sea on Nov 1

**Yellowhammer:** These remain very scarce so a flock of around 20 seen on winter stubble near Pulborough on Oct 28 was by far the highest count of the autumn in southern England (the only other report exceeding 10 was of 10+ also near Pulborough back on Sep 21)

**Little Bunting:** Three unconfirmed recent reports of one in the Old Basing area near Basingstoke in the week prior to Oct 31 have not so far led to any definite report

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter:** 11 still active in the Gosport area on Oct 31

### Butterflies

In addition to some interesting recent reports from Gosport just **seven species have been seen so far this week (Large White, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma and Speckled Wood)**

**Clouded Yellow:** One was seen on the Gosport shore at Stokes Bay on Oct 22

**Green-veined White:** One at Gosport on Oct 17 may well be the last for the year as may be other late reports from Gosport given below

**Common Blue:** One at Gosport (Gilkicker) on Oct 22

**Holly Blue:** Two in the Haslar area of Gosport on Oct 16

**Small Copper:** Still to be seen at Cissbury Ring north of Worthing on Oct 29

**Red Admiral:** A good number were flying on Oct 27 - there was a report of 13 in the Ferring area west of Worthing and I saw half a dozen in the Havant area. At least 12 were reported on Oct 31

**Painted Lady:** One in Gosport on Oct 18

**Small Tortoiseshell:** One at Beachy Head on Oct 28

**Peacock:** Four at Ferring (Worthing) on Oct 27

**Comma:** One at Gosport on Oct 27

**Speckled Wood:** Still active in the Gosport and Lymington areas on Oct 31

## Other Insects

**Volucella zonaria:** One of these hoverflies was on Ivy at Durlston on Oct 28

**Drone Fly:** This smaller and commoner hoverfly was seen at Durlston on Oct 30

**Yellow Dung Flies:** Still swarming on cowpats at Warblington farm on Oct 31 along with one **Common Wasp**

**Field Grasshopper:** One still 'singing' at Durlston on Oct 27

## PLANTS

**My final count of wild species reported in flower during October was 211**

**Yellow-horned Poppy:** Both this and **Sea Kale** have been extending their range around the shores of Langstone Harbour and until now I thought that the Poppy flowering on shingle just south of Stoke Bay was the furthest north that could be seen but on Oct 29 I found one in flower just south of the Hayling Oysterbeds

**Crown Vetch:** A few flowers still to be seen on the plants beside Wakeford's Way in Leigh Park on Oct 28 were a new addition to the October list

**White Bryony:** White flowers seen on this at the southern end of Southmoor Lane outside Budds Farm on Oct 27 were also new for October

**Wild Parsnip:** No report of this in October but it was listed at Durlston on Nov 1

**Rock Samphire:** Another species which I had not seen flowering in October until Oct 27 on the South Moors sea wall

**Wild Thyme:** Not reported in October but list at Durlston on Nov 1

**Tufted Forget-me-not:** A lot of this was flowering at the Langstone South Moors on Oct 27 so I was surprised to see it was a newcomer to the October list

**Devil's Bit Scabious:** Just one flower seen on the South Moors on Oct 27 shows that the species can still be found there

**Bilbao Fleabane:** Having 'discovered' this in Havant last week further searching this week makes me wonder if I have not been mis-identifying lots of this as Guernsey Fleabane for a long time!

**Chicory:** During the summer a great mass of this was flowering at the Warblington Cemetery extension after wildflower seed had been sown in the previous year but the mass of plants was mown down in September so it was not until Oct 31 that the species got onto the October flowering list as a result of just three plants having partially regrown and opened a few flowers

**Red Hot Poker:** This also just got on the October list on Oct 31 when some self sown plants growing among brambles alongside Church Lane at Warblington were seen to be re-flowering.

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Minke Whale:** Russell Wynn from the Southampton Oceanographic Centre spent Oct 4 to 17 at Gwennap Head (the extreme south west tip of Cornwall a few miles south of Land's End) where, in addition to birds, he saw a **Minke Whale** as well as many **Common Dolphins** and **Porpoises** and some **Basking Sharks** (but only two **Grey Seals**)

**Fungi:** Larger species are now appearing in addition to a good show of **Meadow, Parrot** and **Snowy Waxcaps** with **Orange Mosscaps** that continue to cover my lawn. To avoid confusion I will break this week's finds down by species.

**Black Earth Tongue (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*):** This also started to appear on my lawn on Nov 1. It is uncommon but has appeared on my lawn in just three of the forty years that I have lived here - as it has almost certainly persisted under the ground throughout the forty years and has only felt the need to show itself above ground in three of those years it may well be that its supposed rarity is due to its reluctance to show itself!

**Fly Agaric:** The first to be reported locally were growing on roadside grass in Beacon Square at Emsworth on Oct 29 (some had been found in Kent on Oct 9)

**Tawny Funnel:** A fresh troop found in Warblington Cemetery on Oct 31

**Field Mushroom:** Two buttons found in Warblington Cemetery on Oct 31

**Magpie Inkcap:** An fine fresh specimen found in the Sling area of Stansted Forest on Oct 31 by Brian Fellows

**Leafy Brain (*Tremella foliacea*):** Also found in Stansted by Brian Fellows on Oct 31 - this uncommon relative of the Yellow Brain fungus looks similar in shape but has none of the yellow colour (it varies from a very light to a very dark brown colour) and is said to be commonly found on Beech and Brian found it on a fallen Beech trunk.

**Beech Woodwart (*Hypoxylon fragiforme*):** Lots of this also found by Brian on the same fallen Beech trunk on Oct 31

**Lepiota leucothites:** A couple of these large, all white, toadstools found on Oct 27 at the Langstone South Moors (under the planted shrubs between the Havant vehicle depot and the new gravel path from Southmoor Lane)

**Field Blewit:** A ring of these had re-appeared in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Oct 28 (I saw them here in March this year)

**Weeping Bolete (Suillus granulatus):** A substantial troop of these found at the south end of Langstone Bridge on Oct 29 - they were under Monterey Pines on the west side of the road almost opposite Northney Road and when I identified them as this species I resolved a long standing problem as I had found the same species in past years by the IBM Lake at Portsmouth where they also grow under Monterey Pines but I failed to identify them at the time. One of the identifying features is that they exude tiny drops of 'oil' from the top of the stem.

**Poison Pie (Hebloma crustuliniforme):** A fresh troop of these was also under the same pines by Langstone Bridge on Oct 29

**Agrocybe rivulosa:** This recently discovered species which is now abundant on woodchip piles throughout Britain is still putting up fresh specimens on the chip piles beside the Billy Trail in the Langstone area

**Oak Mazegill:** Several good specimens found in Stansted Forest Pond Copse area during the previous week (around Oct 23) by Michael Prior

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## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 27 - NOV 2 (WEEK 43 OF 2008)

### Fri 31 Oct

#### Warblington - possible male Merlin

A walk to Warblington Farm this morning took me past Langstone Pond and along the shore, then inland via the cemetery and church before heading up Church Lane to the farmhouse before coming back along the main Emsworth to Havant road.

My first note, made at the southern end of Wade Lane, was of a **rapid, sharp 'kee,kee,kee' falcon call** from an unseen bird coming from Langstone village and heading for the Old Rectory at Warblington. At the time I assumed it was a **very excited Kestrel**, but more of it anon.

Next came at least **55 Curlew** flying in off the shore to spend the coming high tide in the Wade Farm meadow west of Pook Lane, and after I had passed Pook Lane and was on the seawall south of the Warblington Farm field immediately east of Pook Lane I had my **second encounter with the mystery falcon**. I was looking north and saw a **flock of perhaps 100 Starlings moving very fast in a 'tight ball'** (like the balls of fish rounded up by Dolphins). I could not see much detail as they were at least 400 metres away but **as soon as I saw them the 'ball' burst in all directions and a larger bird came through what had been the centre of the flock**. Again I saw nothing to identify the falcon other than its speed and behaviour which convinced me it was **not a Kestrel** (but was **smaller than a Kestrel**).

I did not see where the falcon went after it disappeared behind trees but about a minute later I saw **what might have been a Sparrowhawk** flying away from me about three feet off the ground and close to a hedge hiding it from any prey that might be in the next field. This time I was able to get my bins on it and see that it had **blue upper plumage and that its flight did not have the jizz of a Sparrowhawk** - further, when it reached the north end of the hedge it turned sharply through the gate into the next field and in so doing showed **wingtips more pointed than the**

**round tips of a Sparrowhawk.** My conclusion was that **it must be a male Merlin** but I could not swear to it as I am unfamiliar with **Merlins** (though once, several years ago, I had a similar view of what must have been a **female Merlin** coming out of the trees lining Pook Lane and flying low above the ground at high speed across this same field)

Nothing more of special bird interest but in Warblington Cemetery I came on my first troop of **Tawny Funnel-cap fungi** (listed in my three main books at **Clitocybe flaccida** but now listed in the new list of English names for fungi as **Lepista flaccida** or **Tawny Funnel**). Also in the cemetery were a couple of 'buttons' of what I am pretty sure would become **Field Mushrooms**. Before reaching the cemetery I noticed lots of **Yellow Dung Flies** still active on fresh cow-pats, and after leaving it I went to the new cemetery extension where I found **Phacelia tanacetifolia** still flowering (though planted on one of the 'natural burial' graves in the far south east corner of the field) and near it three plants of **Chicory** had re-grown (and one was flowering) after the recent mowing of the great mass that had been planted as wild-flower seed.

One more plant that I count as a wild flower was seen at the north end of Church Lane - a plant of **Red Hot Poker** having its second flowering among bramble bushes by the roadside and not near any house or garden.

[Wed 29 Oct](#)

### Returning Shelduck and more fungi on Hayling

Cycling round north Hayling this afternoon I headed for North Common from which you can get a good view of Sweare Deep (the channel connecting the Emsworth Channel to the Langstone area) and here I came on a flock of **26 Shelduck** where there have only been one or two during the summer but where 100 or more can be seen in the depth of winter. This number was definite proof that these birds are starting to return from their late summer moult on the north German coast, and this was confirmed by the fact that the whole flock moved on west within half an hour.

While in the North Common area I noticed that **a lot more Gorse has come into flower** since I was last there and among the gorse I glimpsed a bird that I am pretty sure was a **Stonechat** though I only saw it in briefly in flight. At the extreme east end of the area you can see where Sweare Deep joins the Emsworth Channel and here I had another distant view of a bird that did not stop to be identified - it may have been a Cormorant but it persuaded me that **it could have been a Great Northern Diver** by its size and way of sinking into the water without making any 'jump' and by spending long periods under water (I only saw it on the surface twice despite waiting a couple of minutes for it to resurface).

In Northney village the cottage garden on the left before turning south past Northney Farm had a good crop of flowering **Borage** and the **Strawberry Tree** outside the church was liberally covered with white flowers but there was nothing else of note as I crossed the fields from the church to Northwood Farm and then followed the main road to the Oysterbeds. Here, at the north end of the shore path from the carpark to the Tern lagoon, I was surprised to see **Yellow-horned Poppy** in flower (the more so because I recently commented that this plant had extended

its range north up the west Hayling shore to the south end of Stoke Bay and here was one at the north end of that bay!)

In the main pool of the Oysterbeds, now drained of water as the tide was falling, a flock of **40 Black-tailed Godwits** were feeding (the first I have seen back here since the spring) among other waders and **six more Shelduck**.

Leaving the Coastal Path I found a notice saying that the southern end of the Path (from around half way down the West Lane fields to West Town Station) will be closed for repairs throughout November (though it may be passable at week ends).

At the south end of Langstone Bridge, where there is a small plantation of **Monterey Pines** across the road from the junction of the Northney Road, I spotted **a big ring of toadstools on the grass under the pines** so I climbed the metal fence to see what they were. I found three species of which I have not identified the smallest species but (after checking specimens back at home) was able to name one as **Poison Pie (Hebeloma crustiliniforme)** and the other as **Suillus granulatus** (now given the English name of **Weeping Bolete** on account of one of the features that helped me to identify it - it has glands at the top of its stem which exude drops of an oily substance). This is said to be a very common species under pines and I used to come on it annually under **Monterey Pines** beside the IBM Lake when I worked there but I never properly identified it there so I am pleased to have solved a very long standing puzzle.

A distant look across to the mouth of the Langbrook stream showed that the large flock of **up to 100 Wigeon** are still there along with a few more **Shelduck** and a lot of **Brent**

## [Tue 28 Oct](#)

### Field Blewit mushrooms in Havant cemetery

A cycle ride on a circuit north of my home started with a look at the Eastern Road cemetery where the only flower of any note was **Lesser Stitchwort** but the visit was made worthwhile by the sight of **a large ring of Field Blewit mushrooms** making a second appearance for the year where I found them in March.

Continuing north **Weasel's Snout** was still flowering at the New Lane allotments and **Crown Vetch** beside Wakeford's Way, as was **Devil's Bit Scabious** by the Lavant stream alongside the Barton's Road playing fields.

## [Mon 27 Oct](#)

### Langstone South Moors and Budds Farm

A bright sun in a blue sky this morning encouraged me to walk to Budds Farm and back, rewarding me with my first **Pochard** and **Rock Pipit** of the winter plus four new flowering plants for October, half a dozen **Red Admiral butterflies** on the wing, a new toadstool (**Lepiota leucothites**) for this autumn and a close encounter with a **Fox**. I also looked at many examples of what I have been calling **Guernsey Fleabane** and wonder if the majority of them are in fact the **Bilboan Fleabane** whose existence I only recognised on Saturday (the jury is still out on that one!) Among the 66 flowering plants I listed during the walk were the **Brackish Water Crowfoot** in the Homewell Spring and **Stream Water Crowfoot** in the Langbrook stream besides which **Common Comfrey** was still in flower. Reaching the South

Moors I found several plants of **Yellow Flag** in flower among the mass of **Tufted Forget-me-not** (which has much smaller flowers than the **Water Forget-me-not** that was also seen in the Langbrook Stream).

One of my targets was to see if **Devils Bit Scabious** could still be found on the South Moors and so I took a walk round the 'orchid field' and it was here that I disturbed a **Fox** sunbathing in at the edge of the field from which it quickly vanished into a bramble clump when it noticed me. **The Scabious was there** - just one flowerhead seen!

Heading for Budds Farm I found **the 'bird-seed' crop has been erased from the north end of the old IBM playing fields**, the whole area now being down to grass and the fence preventing cattle from entering the northern strip has now gone.

While on the new path past this area I spotted **two fairly large all-white toadstools** under the shrubs on the north side of the path - I managed to get a close look at one and am pretty sure it was **Lepiota leucothites**. Emerging onto Southmoor Lane I found **White Bryony** still in flower in the Budds Farm fenceline, another addition to the October flower list.

Heading up the slope to view Budds Farm pools I passed the first of half a dozen **Red Admiral butterflies** and watched a couple of **Goldcrest** in the bushes. On the pools I found my first three **Pochard** of the autumn as well as a pair of **Wigeon** in addition to the expected **Teal, Shoveler, Gadwall** and **Mallard** - I also heard one of the **Little Grebes trilling**.

Heading home along the shore with the tide high I had a good look at my first **Rock Pipit** of the autumn and later found some **Rock Samphire** still in flower. Turning up beside the Langbrook Stream I watched **what may well have been a female Reed Bunting** fly over the water and vanish in the distance (this was a 'possible only' which I have not recorded but they should be with us soon and at this time last autumn I found a small flock of them just here).

In the final stretch up the Billy Line some **Agrocybe rivulosa toadstools** were still fresh on some of the wood-chip piles and one **Sweet Violet** was in flower near the A27 underpass.

## **SUMMARY FOR OCT 20 - 26 (WEEK 42 OF 2008)**

### **Highlights:**

Four reports of **Whooper Swan** along the south coast all seem to relate to wild migrants.

This may turn out to have been **the worst season for Brent goose breeding success this century**.

Local sightings around Havant include the **first local flocks of Golden Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit** and **the first returning Shelduck** plus a notable increase in **Wigeon and Brent numbers**.

The **first live Little Auk of the year** has been seen off Poole, a **very late Swift** has been seen in Dorset, and a **Hoopoe has appeared near Pulborough**.

On the Isle of Wight **the first Melodious Warbler for ten years** made a brief visit and **the New Forest now has two Great Grey Shrikes** back for the winter.

Among **massive autumn passage counts of Raptors, Pigeons, Jackdaws and Finches** the two species with **the smallest counts both here and in Europe remain Greenfinch and Yellowhammer**

Insect news includes a **tiny burst of Painted Lady reports** and a further report of **this years new 'bug' species (the Western Conifer Seed Bug** which first reached Britain last year and has been seen all along the south coast this autumn)

Plant news includes what seems to be a **newcomer to the Havant area (Bilbao Fleabane)** which I had never seen until I came across it in the Havant Town Hall carpark this week. I was also pleased to find **Treacle Mustard** for the first time this year

Other Wildlife has thoughts on **the technique of 'feigning death' among animals** (sometime to escape death and sometimes to get within striking range of prey). **Several new fungal finds are listed** but nothing spectacular.

**Late news not included in the summary below:**

A **Green Heron** has been near Hythe in Kent since maybe Oct 23 (great pictures on the Rye Bay website)

On Oct 26 a **Snow Bunting** at Selsey and **3 Purple Sandpipers** at Brighton Marina

Also a **Grey Phalarope** at Portland and a rumoured rarity (**Northern Flicker**) in the built up area of New Milton

On Oct 25 a **Black Brant** at Pagham and **4,000+ Woodpigeons** west over the Sussex Downs

Also maybe **2 Sabine's Gulls** at Portland and another **Black Brant** on The Fleet near Weymouth

If you were not at the Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ on Oct 25 you missed the workshop entitled **"Identifying difficult moths by their genitalia"**

## **BIRDS**

**Sooty Shearwater:** Ten were off Portland on Oct 23 when one was seen at Dungeness. These are the first to be seen since the start of October when an amazing count of 644 passing the Brittany coast was reported on Oct 3

**Leach's Petrel:** On Oct 20 one was seen from a cross channel ferry just four miles south west of Durlston

**Cormorant:** Fishermen in Britain often call for a cull of these birds which can be numerous but I don't think we ever have reports of them in the number recently seen in Holland on Oct 22 where 1593 were reported at an inland site called De Hoekse Sluis (Bergambacht)

**Cattle Egret:** A search for the group of four that were in fields north of Pagham Harbour from Oct 8 to 16 has failed to find them, adding to the likelihood that the group of four seen at Rye Harbour on Oct 22 and 23 is the same group which then moved on again to an unknown destination

**Little Egret:** The number using night roosts in the south of England peaks in the autumn after birds and their young arrive back on the coast after breeding, and around now the number drops off as many of the birds begin to move inland to sites where they will spend the winter away from the exposed southern shores. Reports are now starting to show that this may already be happening (but not everywhere). On Thorney Island the number using the roost close to the Little Deeps was 190 on Sep 26 but had dropped to 170 on Oct 21 while at Rye Harbour the roost had 49 birds on Sep 19, then 42 on Oct 3 and 44 on Oct 22 but was down to 24 on Oct 23 and back up to 46 on Oct 25.

**Whooper Swan:** In past years I have assumed that reports of birds in the south of England are likely to be escapes from Wildfowl collections but their appearance at this time of year, and at coastal rather than inland sites, does increase the chances that they are genuine wild migrants. So far this autumn I have heard of a pair with a single juvenile at Newtown Harbour (Isle of Wight) on Oct 4, then a single bird at Scotney Court near Rye, and now one at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Oct 20 where it stayed until at least Oct 23. On Oct 24 another bird arrived at Abbotsbury in Dorset from the south

**Pinkfoot Goose:** Just one report this week of three birds flying south over the South Foreland of Kent on Oct 22

**White Front Goose:** Since Oct 6 there have been numerous reports of these at sites on the near continent but none of these sightings have exceeded 106 birds until Oct 22 when a total of 580 were reported in southern Holland followed by another count of 183 there on Oct 25. In Britain I have only seen two reports so far - 20 birds at Sandwich Bay on Oct 19 and on Oct 22 a single bird arrived at Abbotsbury in Dorset (staying to at least Oct 24).

**Brent Geese:** Although the peak counts in our Solent Harbours occur in the period from November to February the first birds now arrive in mid-September with numbers increasing rapidly during October. **This year, however, October numbers in Langstone Harbour seem to be the lowest this century** (peak October counts for Langstone for the years 2000 to 2006, taken from the Hampshire Bird Report, are 3326 for 2000, then 3800, 1340, 930, 2634, 1024, and 1269 for 2006). I cannot find a figure for 2007 but this year the count so far is around 600. Similar October peak figures for 2000 to 2006 for Portsmouth Harbour are 1121, 208, 397, 73, 646, 72 and 112 with a report of 528 there in Oct 2007 and 259 this year. As there is no indication that continental sites are faring better than Britain it does seem that there may have been more of a crash in Brent numbers this year than a simple breeding failure would account for. One tiny bit of local info which I was not aware of is that a group of 5 birds had returned to the Langstone village shore (east of the bridge) by Oct 18 and has remained there.

Since writing the above for my mid-week summary I gather that **a flock of around 1400 adult birds (but no young) had arrived in the mouth of Chichester Harbour in time for the WeBS count on Oct 18** but this information did not reach me until Oct 23 and I have not heard of any other major increase in numbers elsewhere.

**Shelduck:** It seems that the first few birds have already returned from their summer moult on the north German coast. Newtown Harbour on the IoW reported a count of 20 on Oct 22 (the only recent report I have seen from there was of just 2 adults with 2 juvenile on Sep 25). Maybe the first indication of the return was a report of 5 flying south past the South Foreland in Kent on Oct 6 after 43 had been seen in Pegwell Bay on Oct 1 (though I had no means of knowing if they were new arrivals there). Locally 5 seen at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at Langstone on Oct 25 were probably newcomers.

**Wigeon:** These have been returning in large numbers since mid-September but a count of 102 at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at Langstone on Oct 25 was the first major arrival I have personally noticed.

**Teal:** More local news - on Oct 24 a flock of around 30 were to be seen for the first time this winter on the small area of the rough meadow immediately north of Langstone Pond which regularly floods in winter but has been dry until now. I also noticed on that day how colourful the drakes now are as they come out of eclipse.

**Green-winged Teal:** One was still at Farlington Marshes on Oct 22

**Pochard:** Both **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck** have failed to return to southern England in any significant numbers so far but may be this is about to change as Oct 22 suddenly brought a massive increase in the number being seen in Holland with **1762 Pochard** and **2012 Tufted Duck** recorded at one site in the south of Holland that day

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Since the first bird returned to our south coast on Sep 10 there have been some 20 reports, mainly of single birds with the highest count being just 5, but that could be about to change with a report on Oct 22 of **15 Mergansers** in Portsmouth Harbour

**Sparrowhawk:** At this time of year we hear of small number of migrants at coastal sites in southern England but we may forget that in central and eastern Europe and in Scandinavia the coming cold weather requires them to follow their prey on migration if they are not to freeze and starve. I was reminded of this by counts of Sparrowhawks passing three sites in Holland on Oct 25 - the numbers reported were 11, 19 and 66. Counts of **Buzzards** moving through Holland on that day came from four sites reporting 14, 21, 25, and 79

**Osprey:** At least one was still in Langstone Harbour Oct 22 (the last reports from other sites were from Poole Harbour on Oct 16 and the west Solent on Oct 18)

**Golden Plover:** More than 200 have been in Pagham Harbour since Oct 16 and by Oct 22 a flock of 148 were at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight with 52 at nearby Yarmouth on the same day (probably the same flock of 50+ reported on the Lymington shore on Oct 11) but the only report any substantial flock in the Chichester or Langstone Harbour area that I have heard of so far was a passing flock of 20+ in the Prinsted area (east side of Thorney Island) on Sep 19 so it was frustrating not to have a scope with me when I was at Langstone on Oct 24 and saw what was almost certainly a flock of 50 on the Northney shore (they were not there when I brought my scope with me on Oct 25!)

**Little Stint:** Latest sightings of what must by now be wintering birds were of one on the Lymington shore on Oct 21 and one at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 23 when at least two remained at the Oare Marshes in north-west Kent

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One was in the Kent Stour valley on Oct 18 and 19

**Curlew Sandpiper:** On Oct 21 one was seen at Christchurch Harbour and four were at the Oare Marshes

**Purple Sandpiper:** The first to be seen at Christchurch Harbour this winter was there on Oct 21, increasing to two birds on Oct 24 and 25. Other than a couple of very early reports from Kent in August, and one of two birds at Brighton marina on Sep 28, this is only the fourth I am aware of this autumn (so far none in Hants)

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** My 'possible' sighting of around 20 on the Langstone-Warblington shore on Oct 6 seems to have been confirmed by a sighting of 82 birds there on Oct 21. This is the first flock I am aware of in Hampshire this autumn though there was a single bird on the Lymington shore on Aug 6 and may have been other reports of ones or twos that I have ignored.

**Mediterranean Gull:** I expect to hear of large wintering flocks in the Pagham Harbour area and around Bembridge Foreland, and good numbers have already been reported at Pagham (379 there on Sep 19) and Bembridge (87 on Oct 13), but I was surprised to hear of more than 270 of these gulls in the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 17. Other flocks occur on the Dorset coast and at Badminton Common in the southern New Forest.

**Sandwich Tern:** A single bird going west at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 24 was probably a late passage bird

**Common Tern:** One of these flew west past Christchurch Harbour on Oct 25

**Arctic Tern:** Two first winter birds were still to be seen on Dungeness on Oct 22

**Little Auk:** One is reported to have been off the Canford Cliffs (Poole) on Oct 20. Other than a dead bird found on the Hayling shore on Feb 17 this is the first I have heard of anywhere this year

**Stock Dove:** These are beginning to join the great flow of **Woodpigeons** - on Oct 21 a total of 32 were seen over the Kent Stour valley and on Oct 25 a total of 13 went over Barton on Sea while in Europe that day there were three reports of passage with counts of 9, 12 and 39 birds

**Wood Pigeon:** Oct 22 brought several reports of large scale movement on the near continent including one report of 5922 birds over a site on the Belgian/German border. The highest local count remains that of 950 birds over Sandy Point on Hayling on Oct 18. Since writing that Oct 25 has brought an increase in numbers with 1000 going over Christchurch Harbour in this country while four sites on the near continent reported counts of 1314, 2700, 18,028 and 27,056 respectively

**Common Swift:** One seen over Kingstone Lacy in Dorset on Oct 22 is that latest so far.

**Hoopoe:** One was seen in a garden in the village of Thakeham near Pulborough on Oct 20. This is the first I have heard of since one was in the Dungeness area at the beginning of Sept

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Mark Wagstaff saw one fly across Newgate Lane (running south from Fareham to Lee on the Solent) when his car was stuck in traffic near the Peel Common sewage works on Oct 21

**Skylark:** Still not much passage over southern England where the highest count this week is of 86 over the north Kent coast on Oct 23. No other site has reported more than 33 on this side of the channel but on Oct 25 one Dutch site had a count of 1112 with two others reporting 849 and 820 respectively.

**Sand Martin:** A single late bird was seen at Durlston on Oct 25 along with **40 Swallows** and **10 House Martins**

**Black Redstart:** No local reports from South Hayling yet but on Oct 21 one arrived in central Brighton (outside the RSPB office) and on Oct 22 at least two (probably three) were there.

**Common Redstart:** A late departing bird was at Maiden Castle near Dorchester in Oct 19

**Whinchat:** My remark last week that the bird seen on the Langstone South Moors on Oct 13 might be the last of the season was refuted when one turned up at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Oct 18. (This may not be the end of the story as back in the 1980s at least one wintered in the Hilsea Lines pony fields at Portsmouth)

**Wheatear:** Latest so far were two near the Needles on the IoW on Oct 25

**Ring Ouzel:** Singles were in north Kent and at Portland on Oct 24

**Blackbird:** Counts of 60 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 19 and 25 at Reculver on the north Kent coast on Oct 24 were presumably of migrants just arrived from the continent.

**Fieldfare:** The big influx of **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** already reported for Oct 17 continued on Oct 18 when some **1000 Fieldfare** went over the Stour Valley in Kent

**Redwing:** Around 1000 of these also flew west over the Stour Valley in Kent on Oct 18. Since then there has been a count of 894 over Andover (also on Oct 18) and among other sightings was one of **2 Redwing** over Fareham Creek on Oct 21

**Melodious Warbler:** One seen in the West High Down area near the Needles on the Isle of Wight on Oct 19 is said to be the first recorded on the Island for ten years.

**Yellow Browed Warbler:** Latest report is of one on the Lymington marshes on Oct 25

**Spotted Flycatcher:** The last of these are normally recorded in the first half of October so a sighting of one 'somewhere in Sussex' on Oct 21 was notable though the latest ever for Sussex is recorded as Nov 18 (the Hampshire latest is Oct 29 back in 1961)

**Bearded Tit:** Some are still on the move as six flew over Dungeness on Oct 21

**Red-backed Shrike:** One was seen in the Medway valley upstream of Chatham on Oct 21 and was still there on Oct 23

**Great Grey Shrike:** One has been in the Leaden Hall area (north west of the New Forest near Godshill) since Oct 12 and a second arrived in the Bratley Plain area of the New Forest (on the north side of the A31 about 2 miles north east of Picket Post) on Oct 25

**Jackdaw:** This autumn's unusual (?) Jackdaw passage which saw more than 1000 going west along the Hampshire coast on Oct 18 has continued with counts on Oct 22 of 232 over Barton (east of Christchurch) and 690 over Christchurch Harbour (at least **19 Rooks** also went west over Christchurch Harbour that day). Another 270 **Jackdaws** went over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 25

**Starling:** Many have already reached southern England and on Oct 19 Bockhill (South Foreland in Kent) recorded another 690 coming in but perhaps there are a lot more to come as on Oct 22 five sites on the near continent saw more than 1000 going over with the biggest count being 24,861 over inland Holland though that was exceeded by one count of 26,000 on Oct 25

**Tree Sparrow:** Oct 18 saw counts of 13 at the South Foreland and 34 at Sandwich Bay. On Oct 24 a lone bird was found among finches near Henfield in the Adur valley and on Oct 25 two were reported going over Christchurch Harbour

**Chaffinch:** These continue to be the most numerous of the autumn passage birds though the highest new count in southern England this week is just 936 over Swalecliffe on the north Kent coast whereas two Dutch sites on Oct 22 recorded 13,322 and 28,182 respectively. Since then numbers have decreased and on Oct 26 the highest continental counts I have seen were of 1400 and 1123. Proof that quite a few of these continental birds end up in Britain comes from a count of 1860 going west along the north Kent coast on Oct 23

**Brambling:** On Oct 22 one site on the Belgian/German border reported **176 Brambling** but the highest count in England so far is that of 36 over Andover on Oct 18 though we now have one of 23 at Durlston on Oct 25

**Serin:** I have only seen two reports (both of single birds) since the start of September - one was at Durlston on Oct 13 and now we have one at the South Foreland on Oct 18

**Greenfinch:** These continue to be in very short supply everywhere. Since the beginning of September only two reported counts from any site (including those on the continent) have been over 100 (both at Christchurch Harbour where 220 were logged on Oct 6 and 112 on Oct 10). Reports for Chaffinch over the same period show 56 counts of over 100, 36 over 500, 31 over 1000 and 6 over 10000 (highest being 28182). Here in Havant it was quite a surprise to hear two trilling to each other in St Faith's churchyard on Oct 21

**Crossbill:** Plenty of these still around but of local interest a family group of 4 were feeding near the Hundred Acres carpark in the West Walk woods at Wickham on

Oct 22 (so far no one has reported any in Stansted Forest). On Oct 24 a flock of 13 were in the Itchen Valley country park near Eastleigh and on Oct 25 there was a report of 44 from a Dutch site

**Bullfinch:** Highest count so far this autumn has been of 12 at Durlston on Oct 25

**Hawfinch:** More of these now seem to be moving with counts from European sites on Oct 22 of 20, 21 and 14 birds with another site having 18 on Oct 25

**Lapland Bunting:** One at Bockhill (South Foreland) on Oct 18 (14th report from southern England since Sept 13)

**Snow Bunting:** Three flew in off the sea at the south Foreland on Oct 22 and on Oct 23 one was at Durlston (5th report from southern England since Oct 9)

**Reed Bunting:** A count of 42 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 22 is one of the highest counts in England this autumn (though Christchurch Harbour had 67 on Oct 8, 56 on Oct 6 and 70 on Oct 2 with 110 on Sep 29 and 126 on Sep 25)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker:** Just one new sighting on Oct 22 of one still flying at Stubbermere Pond alongside Southleigh Forest.

### Butterflies

**Ten species seen recently** - 8 of them still active on Oct 22 plus the last **Common Blue** on Oct 11 and **Small Heath** on Oct 19

**Common Blue:** Late news of what is probably the last sighting of one on Oct 11 at East Dean (Eastbourne)

**Painted Lady:** A late burst of four sightings - on Oct 21 one was seen on the northern edge of Lymington near Brockenhurst and another was at Portland, then on Oct 22 one was noted at Newhaven and another at Hooe village in the Pevensey Levels

**Small Heath:** None since Oct 19 when one was seen on Stockbridge Down (west of Winchester)

### Moths

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** Latest single at Ropley (near Alton) on Oct 17

**The Brick (2262 *Agrochola circellaris*):** First I know of this year trapped at Ringmer near Lewes on Oct 21

**Yellow-line Quaker (2264 *Agrochola macilenta*):** Another first at Ringmer on Oct 21

**Barred Sallow (2272 *Xanthia aurago*):** The first I know of, but already worn, at Rye on Oct 19

**Clifden Nonpareil (2451 *Catocala fraxini*):** Fifth for this autumn with the earliest taken in the New Forest area on Sep 6 and the other four all found in the Rye Bay area

### Other Insects

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** One still active on Portsdown on Oct 18

**Western Conifer Seed Bug:** The eleventh report of this new invader comes from the sitting room of a house in the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 22 reminding us that one of the main reasons they are unpopular in their

American homeland is their habit of invading houses to seek winter comfort (over there thousands sometimes try to force their way into one building). The other reason is the damage done to **Lodgepole Pine** and other conifers by their larvae.

**Wasp Spider (Argiope bruennichi)**: On Oct 24 one could still be seen at Durlston attached to the coat of a dog (worrying the dog's owner who was told that while these spiders will kill insects as large as a **Great Green Bush Cricket** they are no threat to dogs or humans). On the morning of Oct 25, after night time frost, a very large specimen was photographed at Rye Harbour coated with frost as it clung to a fence post.

## PLANTS

**The number of plants found flowering by myself and others since the start October is currently 201**

**Love-in-the-mist (Nigella damascena)**: Normally I would dismiss this as a garden flower but plants which have been growing untended in gravel outside the Havant multi-storey carpark entrance for several years, and have just (Oct 21) started re-flowering, deserve a tick in my October flower list (subsequently this has also been seen flowering in Emsworth)

**Brackish Water Crowfoot (Ranunculus baudottii)**: Two fresh flowers on the growth in the Havant Homewell spring on Oct 21- the first I have recorded since May

**Treacle Mustard (Erysimum cheiranthoides)**: Several plants found still having a few deep yellow flowers (but obviously at the end of their lives) in a field by Stubbermere Pond on the east side of Southleigh Forest on Oct 22

**Hybrid Champion**: Just one pale pink and white flower seen in the East Park at Stansted on Oct 22 with **White Champion** flowering close to it

**Green Amaranth**: A single tall stem found in an arable field in Stansted East Park on Oct 22 with Cockspur Grass close to it.

**Cut-leaved Cranesbill**: In most summers this is one of the more abundant species but my perception is that it has almost been a rarity this summer so I was pleased to find a plant in flower on Oct 22. I see that I have only 11 records of it this summer since the start of May and two of those came from Brian Fellows.

**Fluellen**: Both **Round-** and **Sharp-leaved** plants were found in flower in the Stansted area on Oct 22 and later in an arable field at Warblington

**Wall Speedwell**: I found a mass of the tiny, deep blue flowers of this in the arable field by Stubbermere Pond on Oct 22 (the first I have recorded since July 20)

**Changing Forget-me-not**: At this time of year many plants can show uncharacteristic features (especially when at the very end of their lives) so I may be wrong in listing one plant I found at Stubbermere on Oct 22 as **Changing**

**Forget-me-not** but of the last four flowers left all were very small and two were almost white in colour while the other two were pale blue

**Viper's Bugloss:** Still flowering on Portsdown on Oct 18

**Harebell:** One flower still to be seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Oct 19

**Bilbao Fleabane:** A single plant found in the Havant Town Hall carpark on Oct 25 was the first I have ever knowingly seen - see my Diary entry for that day for more detail

**Goat's Beard:** Just one flower seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Oct 21 (the first I have heard of since mid-May)

**Mouse-ear Hawkweed:** Two fresh flowers in St Faith's churchyard in Havant on Oct 21 (the first since June 23)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Stoat:** A very interesting story from Brian Fellows who got it from an Emsworth resident who described how **her cat had caught a Stoat and presented it to the lady concerned as an apparently dead 'offering' but when the lady laid an old coat over the Stoat prior to picking up the body to bury it the aforesaid Stoat suddenly came back to life and shot off into cover.**

Earlier this year we heard **a similar story of a Ringed Plover chick** of which I wrote in my summary for Week 33 "On the morning of Aug 18 Owen Mitchell sat seawatching on a stone wall by the shore at Climping (between Bognor and Littlehampton) for about an hour but when he decided to move on he noticed a **'dead bird' on the ground inches from his feet. He picked it up for a closer look and in doing so realised that it was warm, alive, and watching him - it was a fledged juvenile Ringed Plover obeying its instinct to 'freeze' when danger threatens.** After Owen had taken its photo and returned it to the spot where he found it he started to back away whereupon, in Owen's words .. "it suddenly flapped and fluttered weakly, scrambling over my feet and leaving a large deposit on my boot as a memento, before taking flight and heading for the beach".

**More than one animal species uses the technique of feigning death** both to avoid attack and in the case of the second link below as a means of attracting prey within striking range of a predatory fish (see [http://www.geocities.com/brisbane\\_insects/FeigningDeath.htm](http://www.geocities.com/brisbane_insects/FeigningDeath.htm) and <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q88l145175r52388/> plus <http://www.arkive.org/grass-snake/natrix-natrix/image-A7228.html>) but I have never heard of **Stoat** using this technique and I am wondering if the animal concerned was really a **Stoat** (could it have been a less aggressive **Weasel**?). I suppose the cat may have taken the **Stoat** by surprise and leapt on it from behind - maybe temporarily throttling or semi-paralysing it by pinching a nerve in its neck but I am pretty sure that **in any face to face confrontation the Stoat would have inflicted more damage on the cat than the cat could inflict on it.**

I will never forget **one instance of the way in which a Stoat will stand its ground against anything that gets in its way** - this was many years ago when

the grass along the sides of the Billy Trail was being cut (not with noisy trimmers but with an old fashioned Scythe). **I only saw the Stoat after it had been killed by the Scythe, but even in death the animal had its teeth bared in gruesome snarl of defiance against the mower.**

**Field Vole:** Another anecdote from Emsworth in a similar vein. During grass cutting at Brook Meadow on Oct 19 **one Field Vole was killed and three of their breeding nests were exposed** (one of them sadly still having half a dozen babies in it which did not survive). Last year a disused **Harvest Mouse breeding nest** was found (on Dec 16) in a different part of the meadow (one had previously been found there in Oct 2004).

**Frogs and Toads:** During the same grass cutting session at Brook Meadow both **Common Frog** and **Common Toad** were disturbed from the long grass but neither came to any harm. Maybe indicative of Frogs moving to winter quarters I also disturbed a large **Common Frog** while cutting long grass at the edge of my lawn on the previous day (Oct 18). Oct 23 brought a report of a **Marsh Frog** seen at Monkton on the north side of the Stour valley in the Thanet area - I was aware that **Marsh Frogs** could be found in the Walland Marsh area east of Rye Bay but did not know they were in the Stour Valley

**Slow-worm:** These are now going into hibernation but a sluggish specimen had to be helped out of harm's way on a downland track in the Sompting area near Worthing, also on Oct 19

**Fungi:** Three new finds by the roadside of Wade Court Road (on the site of old tree stumps) here in Havant on Oct 25 were **Honey Fungus, Weeping Widow** and **Spectacular Rustgill** (in my Diary entry I expressed doubt about the latter but a second look at it has convinced me that it is a small specimen of **Gymnopilus junonius**). Earlier on that day I found my first cluster of **Glistening Inkcap** at the foot of a tree planted beside Southbrook Road in Langstone. On Oct 24 I found **Shaggy Inkcap** and **Garland Roundhead (Stropharia coronilla)** beside the A259 between Havant and Emsworth and on Oct 22 I found **Bell-shaped Mottlegill** in Stansted East Park

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 20 - 26 (WEEK 42 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 25 Oct**

#### **A new plant species in Havant and many Wigeon at Langstone**

Walking around Havant this morning I noticed a specimen of **what seemed to be Guernsey Fleabane** but instead of having a cylindrical (or cigar-shaped) inflorescence the flowers were in a flat-topped corymb (the lowest flowering branches being much longer than those at the top). The key in Stace's Flora distinguishes these two shapes but tells me that plants with a corymbose inflorescence should be **Argentinean Fleabane** and have prominent red bracts on the involucre of each flower head which my plant did not. This was resolved when I turned from my 2nd Edition of Stace (published 1997) to Fitter, Fitter and Blamey published in 2003 which does have a description of my find and names it as **Bilbao Fleabane (Conyza bilbaoana)**, describing it as a recent arrival in this country. You

can get an overall impression of the plant from the photo at <http://www.bioimages.org.uk/html/P1/P1633.php> The Southampton Natural History website has a close up of the flowers at <http://sotonnhs.org/alif025.asp> and says the plant is now a very common urban weed. Here in Havant **Guernsey Fleabane** has spread rapidly to be abundant everywhere and no doubt the **Bilbao species** is hard on its heels. My single specimen is easily found in the carpark on the old Billy Line below the Arts Centre and Museum - look for it at the foot of the steps leading up to the Social Services offices.

Other plants seen today included **Water Forget-me-not** and **Stream Water Crowfoot** (just one flower!) in the Langbrook stream by the A27 and one plant of fresh **Common Centaury** at the southern end of the north pier of the old rail bridge at Langstone.

From this bridge pier I scanned a flock of just over **100 Wigeon** in the mouth of the Langbrook stream among some **70 Brent** and **5 Shelduck** (I think these are forerunners of the returning birds). Crossing the road to the Ship Inn area I found at least **20 more Brent** on the water but there was no sign of the **Golden Plover flock** I thought I saw yesterday.

On my way home up Wade Lane I passed the last flowers of **Musk Mallow** and by South Close I came on **Weeping Widow** and **Honey Fungus** plus a cluster of other fungi which had the startling bright reddish-yellow colour that made me think of **Gymnopilus junonius (Specatacular Rustgill)** though I think these were too small for that species and may have been a variant of the **Honey Fungus**.

Elsewhere (in Southbrook Road at Langstone) I found my first cluster of **Glistening Inkcap**.

### [Fri 24 Oct](#)

#### Warblington shore

A cycle ride in the afternoon sunshine took me first to the shore at Langstone from which I could see a flock of around 50 birds tightly massed on the distant Northney shore and I had the distinct impression from the rich brown of their plumage that they were the first **Golden Plover** I have seen here this winter.

Heading east past the pond I found many of the male **Teal** had already acquired much of their bright colour and I saw quite a few more of these on the flood that is now beginning to build up on the rough meadow north of the pond (another first view of a typical winter scene). On the mud east of Langstone, with the tide fully out, the most numerous birds were **Carrion Crows** (well over 50 spread out over the mud and in trees on Warblington Farm. Where the main Warblington stream flows out into the harbour two **Shelduck** were seen (one adult plus one juvenile lacking the orange breast band).

Past Conigar Point I went to search for arable weeds in the field (Field V on my map at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ralph.hollins/warblington.htm> ) in which the Sweetcorn crop has been harvested, finding both **Round** and **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** but little else (and no birds other than a single hedgerow **Dunnock** and three **Skylarks** passing over). Outside along the shoreline the **Tamarisk** is still in flower, and in Nore Barn wood I found **Wood Avens** (but no **Violet** flowers).

Heading north up the footpath towards Selangor Avenue I disturbed a late **Speckled Wood** butterfly, and on the southern side of the A259 west of the path one fresh **Shaggy Inkcap** had come up near a cluster of **Stropharia coronilla**.

### [Wed 22 Oct](#)

## **Stubbermere and Stansted East Park**

An afternoon cycle ride through the Hollybank Woods and on via Stubbermere Pond and the Stansted Sawmills took me to the far side of Stansted East Park and back in lovely sunshine after the first frost of the autumn in my garden this morning. Coming out of Southleigh Forest the gate to the field beyond Stubbermere Pond was open allowing me to wander in and search for flowers beside the pond (over which a single **Southern Hawker dragonfly** was still flying). My target here was **Treacle Mustard** (an uncommon relative of **Wallflower**) and I found a good half dozen plants with their very last deep yellow flowers though the lower parts of the plants were looking woody and dead by this time of year. Other good finds here were **Field Pansy**, **Cut-leaved Cranesbill**, **Wall Speedwell** and **Round-leaved Fluellen**. One dying remnant of a **Forget-me-not** plant had just four tiny flowers left and as two of these were almost white in colour while the other two were a pale blue I stuck my neck out and noted it as **Changing Forget-me-not** (after all, almost any species can re-flower out of season at this time of year). Birds seen here included **Buzzard** and **Kestrel**.

In Stansted East Park the field in which I found **Spreading Hedge Parsley** last year had already been ploughed and sown with a wheat crop whose tillers were already several inches long. Pressing on to the gate across the entrance to Woodlands Lane I had a quick look at the start of the footpath going across a field that has had a **Sweet Corn crop** (but was currently being ploughed up though the ploughs had not yet reached the corner where I was). Both **Cockspur Grass** and **Green Amaranth** were here along with **Many Seeded Goosefoot** and **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** still having some flowers.

Hundreds of **Wood Pigeons** were on the newly ploughed ground from which a number of **Pheasants** had retreated to safety from the noisy tractors. A few **Jays** were heard and overhead **three Buzzards** spiralled high in the blue sky.

## **Tue 21 Oct**

### **Flowering plants around Havant**

A short walk around the town this morning added **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** (two plants newly flowering in the churchyard) and **Brackish Water Crowfoot** (**Ranunculus baudotii**) also starting to re-flower in the Homewell spring pool. In South Street the odd example of **Viola tricolor** was still flowering among weeds by an unused doorstep with **Wall Lettuce** still flowering outside Homewell House (but no **Sweet Violets** in the churchyard). One addition that some will regard as cheating was newly reflowering '**Love in the Mist**' (**Nigella damascena**). Elsewhere **Pencilled Cranesbill** is still flowering at the bus station and **Perennial Wall-rocket** alongside the railtrack.

## **SUMMARY FOR OCT 13 - 19 (WEEK 41 OF 2008)**

### **Highlights:**

Birders are still waiting to see if **Dark-bellied Brent Geese** will have any young with them - there is some evidence that this year's breeding was a total failure but a **family of Pale-bellied birds with three young** has brought up the question again.

This week's 'specials' include **Green-winged Teal, Olive-backed Pipit, Radde's Warbler, Penduline Tit**, a late **Swift** and a possible return of last winter's **White-tailed Eagle** which chose to fly from a nest in Finland to winter at Andover. A more definite expected returnee is a **Ring-billed Gull** at Gosport.

Autumn passage has acquired several new species this week - **Wood Pigeon, Jackdaw**, and **Skylark** plus masses of **Redwing, Fieldfare** and **Chaffinch**. The week's oddity was a **Blackbird in full song**. Signs that winter is now close at hand come with the **first Great Grey Shrike in the New Forest** and the first **Snow Buntings** in southern England.

**16 butterfly species** have been reported during the week and there is a mention of **a study into the decline of the Small Tortoiseshell as a result of parasitisation by larvae of a fly that only appeared in England in 1998**. Among Other Insects we have up to date news of a large bug now invading the south coast (**Western Conifer Seed Bug** which can be 2cm long and is a pest in America, devastating tree plantations in the summer and invading houses in the winter). We also have comment on **several 'nasty' alien spiders** and **an extra-ordinarily long legged harvetsman species**.

Flowering plants seen in October now total 180 with our largest native **Sedum (Orpine)** among the finds. A **good list of fungi** has been found this week and there are notes on **Wild Boar** and late basking **Adders**

#### Late news not included in the summary below:

**Snow Bunting** at Selsey West Fields on Oct 19

**4 Cattle Egrets** at **Rye Harbour** on the morning of Oct 19 may be the group from Pagham Harbour

Another **Yellow-browed Warbler** was spotted at Fareham on Oct 19 in Oxleys Coppice

**Great Grey Shrike** at Ambersham Common near Midhurst and another in Ashdown Forest, both on Oct 18

**Rose Coloured Starling** at Dungeness on Oct 18 (also another **Black-throated Diver** there)

**24 Pochard** at the Chichester Gravel Pits on Oct 18 may have been new arrivals (or been there for yonks?)

The **continuing movement of Wood Pigeons and Jackdaws** (as well as **Redwings and Fieldfare**) is noted at several sites but a count of **1010 Jackdaws west over Southampton Water** on Oct 18 is worth noting.

Sandy Point on Hayling also saw **846 Jackdaws** head west overhead with **950 Woodpigeons** on Oct 18

Back on Oct 13 **Sandy Point had its first Hawfinch** and on Oct 18 **two Hawfinch were seen at Noar Hill** near Selborne

**Durlston news** for Oct 18 included .. "**Lots of Bullfinches down in the gully with 3 spotted flying out to sea!**"

## **BIRDS**

**Cattle Egret:** The group of four which arrived in the Pagham Harbour north fields on Oct 8 were still there on Oct 16 but had moved to the Chalder Farm area

**Spoonbill:** The number in Poole Harbour increased to at least 18 when this number was seen at Brownsea Island on Oct 11

**Pale Bellied Brent:** Two were seen at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25 and one was off Titchfield Haven on Oct 1 but now we have a family party of five seen at Portland on Oct 14 and this has provoked an interesting interchange on the Hoslist message board concerning two factors. The first concerns the breeding success of the **Dark-bellied Brent** during the past summer and involves the accuracy of a report from people who were in Siberia looking at the breeding Brent this year - they report **an almost total failure of breeding** there and this is backed up by the fact that no young have yet arrived on our coasts but people are now saying that relatively **few Brent have reached us so far** and there could be lots of young among those still to come (families with young are always the last to arrive). It could well be that the **Brent** did raise young in other parts of Siberia which the observers did not visit - we will have to wait and see. This question was raised because the **Pale Bellied pair** that have just been seen had three young with them and (while the great majority of **Pale-bellied birds** come to us from the Canadian arctic to spend the winter in Ireland and the northwest coasts of Britain with a few overshooting to the northwest coast of France which brings them over our area in passing) some **Pale-bellied birds** breed in Spitzbergen and come south via the North Sea. If geese can breed in Spitzbergen, some people argue, others can breed in Siberia, but I think everyone can see that it is impossible to produce a convincing argument based on the evidence of one family that has bred successfully in one place and apply it to prove breeding success for other families nesting hundreds of miles from them. The second factor being discussed concerns the origin of the few **Pale-bellied birds** we see on the south coast each winter and again I think the numbers are insufficient to argue a case either way - what is needed is evidence from ringing and radio tracking. Whatever conclusion we reach for the origin and route used by the majority of **Pale-bellied birds** there will still be the vagrants and the 'cross dressers' which decide, e.g. to pair up with a bird of the 'other tribe' to produce the hybrid or intergrade specimens we regularly see each winter. Since writing this for the mid-week summary there have been **two more reports of Pale-bellied birds**, both on Oct 16 when two were seen in a flock of **Dark-bellied birds** passing Dungeness and a single was seen at Christchurch Harbour.

**Wigeon:** Some 400 were in Nutbourne Bay of Chichester Harbour on Oct 15 along with **100 Teal** and **7 Pintail**

**Green-winged Teal:** One of these has been at Farlington Marshes since at least Oct 13 up to Oct 18 but there is no proof of its origin - did it fly across the Atlantic or just from some local wildfowl collection?

**Garganey:** One was still to be seen in the north of Pagham Harbour on Oct 16

**Pochard:** The first to be reported arriving back on the Isle of Wight were three seen on the Sandown boating lake on Oct 14 - so far I have seen no evidence of new birds reaching Hampshire to supplement those already here

**Scaup:** Keith Betton's monthly summary of Hampshire Birds for last month reports that a young male was present in the Lymington area throughout September

**Hooded Merganser:** The bird at Radipole (Weymouth) was still there on Oct 17

**Red-breasted Merganser:** On Oct 18 one was seen in the south of Langstone Harbour near the Kench and another flew west offshore

**Honey Buzzard:** A late migrant flew over Winchester on Oct 13

**Red Kite:** Confirmation that this rapidly expanding species has been breeding in Hampshire (sporadically from 1995 and regularly from 2003), with nine nests known to have been built in 2008 of which five each produced two young, comes from Keith Betton. In addition to the birds introduced from Spain to the area of the Chilterns which have moved south into Hampshire with their British born young Keith tells us that quite a few birds (12 between 2003 and 2005, two of them having paired and bred in the county) have been released into the wild by the Hawk Conservancy (sited near Andover) - presumably the result of captive breeding there. He also tells us that in the early months of 2006 as many as 60 of these Kites shared a common night roost somewhere in northern Hampshire.

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** Following the first report for this winter of one coming in off the sea at Sandwich in Kent on Oct 8 there is now a sighting at East Dean (north of Chichester) on Oct 12 though it was posted by someone whose name I do not recognise as being an expert in raptor identification (and **Common Buzzards** are notoriously variable in their plumage). A claim by a Hampshire birder to have 'definitely' seen one over Cheesefoot Head near Winchester on Oct 18 was queried by several people and answers to their questions made the claim less definite. Two useful websites for identification of genuine Rough-Legged Buzzards came out of this interchange - they are

<http://www.hawkandowl.org/Species/DiurnalBirdsofPrey/Rough-leggedBuzzard.htm> and

<http://www.hawk-conservancy.org/priors/rlbuzzard.shtml>

**Osprey:** Latest local reports are of one at the Thorney Deeps on Oct 15 and one in Langstone Harbour on Oct 18

**Hobby:** More or less daily sightings were still being reported up to Oct 14 when one was seen at Hastings

**Eagle species:** On Oct 16 a '**White-tailed Eagle**' was anonymously reported to have been seen in the Andover area, arousing hopes that the bird that came from Finland to spend last winter in the Andover area has returned

**Grey Partridge:** A total of 62 were seen on the Sussex Downs in the area known as The Burgh south of Amberley on Oct 16 and this seems to indicate that they are

breeding freely there as Bernie Forbes recently told us .. "With reference to the **Grey Partridge** sightings around The Burgh, as far as I am aware, **no Grey Partridges have been artificially reared here**. They are all wild nests, with help from the wildlife management of the 3 farms under direct control of the Norfolk Estates. **Red-legged Partridges are reared** and released on an annual basis (as are **Pheasants**). At the present time the estate have **a ban on hunting Grey Partridge**, although this may change in the future with the welcome rise in their numbers".

**Avocet:** The count at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour was up to 900 on Oct 11 and 905 on Oct 17 while a count of 175 at the Elmley Marshes in north-west Kent on Oct 14 probably indicates there are more still to move west for the winter.

**Golden Plover:** The majority of these are still in Kent and East Sussex (710 at Dungeness RSPB on Oct 13 and 900 at Rye Harbour on Oct 18 with 1200+ at the Oare Marshes in north west Kent on Oct 17) but large flock are starting to come our way - by Oct 14 there were 330 at Maiden Castle in Dorset and on Oct 16 there were 220 in the north of Pagham Harbour.

**Wood Sandpiper:** A late passage bird appeared at the Oare Marshes in northwest Kent on Oct 13

**Grey Phalarope:** One flew south over the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 16

**Common Tern:** A late bird was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 16 and this was the only report during the past week

**Arctic Tern:** What may have been the same first winter bird was seen at Dungeness on Oct 13 and 16 - other than these the only Terns getting a mention this week are a few **Sandwich Terns** that may well stay through the winter

**Ring-billed Gull:** The first to be reported anywhere this autumn was at Gosport on Oct 12, probably the same bird that has been wintering there since 2003/4 (and may have been at other Hampshire sites since it was a first winter bird in 2001 though that conjecture is speculative)

**Puffin:** The two which were unexpectedly seen off Portland on Oct 10 may still be around as two were seen in Poole Bay (south of Bournemouth) on Oct 13

**Wood Pigeon:** These had started to move on the continent a week or so ago and more than 1700 were recorded at the South Foreland in Kent back on Oct 6 with another count of 1141 from Holland on Oct 11. This week 100 were over Dungeness on Oct 16, then Oct 17 brought the first hint of movement to Hampshire with 25 seen heading west over Barton on Sea (west of Lymington) with 186 over Christchurch Harbour that day and more than 300 going west over Andover on Oct 18

**Swift:** Maybe one of our departing summer visitors had a sudden fear that it had failed to turn off the gas at its summer residence and came back to check on Oct 14, being seen heading east over Gosport and then over Edburton village (north of Brighton) that day.

**Wryneck:** The bird which turned up at Farlington Marshes on Oct 9 was still there on Oct 13

**Wood Lark:** Birds were singing at two Sussex sites on Oct 15 and 16 and during the week birds were seen at six different coastal sites

**Skylark:** These also are on the move with a massive count of 1894 on Oct 17 at West Bay (far west of the Dorset coastline) while on Oct 18 22 were seen heading west over Gunner Point on Hayling and 18 went over Andover

**Swallow:** Still plenty around at the start of this week with 1600 (along with 950 **House Martins**) recorded at Durlston on Oct 14 and 200 still to be seen there on Oct 17

**Richard's Pipit:** Brief sightings of single birds at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 12 and at Durlston on Oct 13 could well have been the same bird

**Olive-backed Pipit:** This is a common bird in Asia which normally flies south to Indonesia in our winter but which occasionally turns up here (at least 286 British records). It looks a little like a Tree Pipit but has a more olive-green back and normally feeds on the ground. One was reported by Durlston on Oct 13 and maybe that bird went on to be seen in Yorkshire on Oct 15.

**Rock Pipit:** The presence of 4 in Gosport on Oct 12 is an indication that they should now be starting to appear around the shores of Langstone and Chichester Harbours

**Yellow Wagtail:** What may have been the last of the autumn was seen at Barton on Sea on Oct 17

**Black Redstart:** These are starting to reach us for the winter - five were at Dungeness on Oct 12 and three at Portland on Oct 13 with one at Durlston on Oct 14. On Oct 16 one was at Church Norton in Pagham Harbour and another was at Newchurch on the Isle of Wight

**Whinchat:** One seen on the Langstone South Moors on Oct 13 may prove to be the last of the autumn

**Stonechat:** A count of 28 on Round Hill near Steyning (north of Worthing) on Oct 11 was followed by one of 14 at Durlston on Oct 13, probably indicating a major arrival of the birds that will winter on our south coast

**Wheatear:** Singles on the Kent and Sussex coast were the only reports on Oct 16, showing that these are now in very short supply

**Ring Ouzel:** These, however, are still coming through at the rate of one a day showing the flow of this species is still ongoing

**Blackbird: Subsong** was heard in Bosham village near Chichester on Oct 10 and (at around that date) from one in the Worthing area and by Oct 14 the Worthing bird was heard in **full song** (probably a one off performance not to be repeated until next Spring)

**Fieldfare:** These started to pour into southern England on Oct 17 with many reports including one of 1400 going west over Thanet in two hours. They were still arriving on Oct 18 with 150+ on the north Kent coast and 76 over Andover

**Redwing:** Coming in with the Fieldfare but in much greater numbers - on Oct 17 one observer reported 5000 an hour passing over Thanet and 700 were noted at Sandwich Bay. On Oct 18 the count at Andover was 894

**Mistle Thrush:** These are now almost down to endangered species status so reports from three different sites on Oct 17 were good news (on the Isle of Wight 6 went over Newchurch and 2 were seen at Wootton Bridge with another three at Christchurch Harbour

**Yellow Browed Warbler:** These are now widespread in southern England and this week brought reports of singles from seven sites including one near the visitor centre at Pagham Harbour on Oct 16

**Radde's Warbler:** One was in East Kent on Sep 26 and another is now reported from the Reculver area on the north Kent coast on Oct 12 where it was watched for a full morning before vanishing

**Wood Warbler:** A late bird (the first to be reported since Sept 30) was said to be in the Studland area of Dorset on Oct 17

**Bearded Tit:** Two reports of birds seen in flight on their autumn dispersal come from the Yarmouth area of the Isle of Wight on Oct 11 and from Sandwich Bay on Oct 14. On Oct 17 at least two flew over a modern housing estate in the Margate area of Thanet to give one birder a very unexpected garden tick when he heard them pinging overhead.

**Marsh Tit:** Numbers of this species have declined greatly in the past year or so and the sight of one at the Blashford Lakes on Oct 16 was picked out as notable by Bob Chapman

**Penduline Tit:** Two new reports from Sandwich Bay (a definite sighting on Oct 13) and the West Bay area of the Dorset coast (a probable only on Oct 14)

**Red-backed Shrike:** The Lymington bird has not been reported since Oct 11 but may have moved to the Isle of Wight where one was reported to be at Wootton Bridge on Oct 15

**Great Grey Shrike:** The first reports from the New Forest for this winter probably refer to one bird in the north west area close to Godshill on Oct 12, 13 and 17. Dorset had its first at Hartland Moor (west of Poole Harbour) on Oct 17

**Jay:** A trickle seem to be arriving for the winter with a maximum count of 12 in Thanet on Oct 17 when 9 were seen at Dungeness.

**Jackdaw:** Last week counts of up to 500 were being reported on the near continent and on Oct 17 movement was apparent here with a count of 143 west over Barton on Sea while on Oct 18 south Hayling had 210 west over Gunner Point.

**Chaffinch:** The thousands moving over the near continent last week have started to appear here. Durlston had 212 over on Oct 13, 325 on Oct 14 and 185 on Oct 16 with smaller numbers being noted at other sites

**Brambling:** Several reports of 12 or less from a variety of sites but the peak count for the week was of 36 at Andover on Oct 18

**Serin:** Just a single report of one bird at Durlston on Oct 13

**Greenfinch:** Still in very short supply - just five reports of the species this week with the highest count being 38 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 17

**Goldfinch:** Still many moving along the coast with a peak count of 685 at Durlston on Oct 14 (and 320 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 17)

**Siskin:** Still plenty around with peak counts of 340 at Durlston on Oct 13 and 294 there on Oct 14 (but only 92 there on Oct 17)

**Linnet:** Durlston had a report of 1415 on Oct 13 and 1290 on Oct 14 decreasing to 170 on Oct 17

**Lesser Redpoll:** Peak count for the week was 210 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 17 with 107 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 16

**Bullfinch:** These do move around in the autumn but never in huge flocks so a group of 11 at Durlston on Oct 16 was exceptional

**Lapland Bunting:** The only report for the week was of one at Durlston on Oct 14

**Snow Bunting:** Late news of one on the Isle of Sheppey in the Thames estuary on Oct 9 with another single heading west at Durlston on Oct 13 (these are the only reports that I know of so far this winter)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker:** Four seen at Brading Marsh on the IoW on Oct 12

**Common Darter:** Four pairs seen egg-laying in tandem at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Oct 12 with other still flying in Kent on Oct 16

### Butterflies

#### 16 species mentioned in this week's reports

**Clouded Yellow:** One seen in Chichester on Oct 13 was only the 21st report I have seen for the whole year.

**Brimstone:** Plenty of these being seen recently, though quickly disappearing as they discover good sites for hibernation

**Green-veined White:** One report of a fresh insect on Buddleia in Crawley on Oct 9

**Painted Lady:** One at the Brading Marshes (IoW) on Oct 12

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Two seen at Crawley and two Longstock (Test valley near Stockbridge) on Oct 12 and 13. In Sussex a number of caterpillars were collected in the Ferring Rife area of Bognor and were bred in captivity as part of a scheme to study the impact of the **Sturmia bella fly which lays its eggs in Tortoiseshell caterpillars** which die as the fly larvae eat them up. The fly has only reached us from the continent in recent years (**first found in 1998 on Peacock caterpillars in Hampshire**) but is thought to be the main cause of the recent dramatic decline in numbers of Nymphalid butterflies, principally the **Small Tortoiseshell**. A good photo of the fly can be seen at <http://bedsflorafauna.blogspot.com/2008/09/sturmia-bella.html>

**Dark-green Fritillary:** A dubious but possible report from Durlston on Oct 11

**Wall Brown:** A fresh female found in a greenhouse at Crawley on Oct 9

## Moths

**15 species get their first mention for the year** (to my knowledge) in the latest reports

**Caloptilia elongella (0282):** First taken at Pagham Harbour on Oct 12

**Cochyliomorpha straminea (0936):** First taken at Pagham Harbour on Oct 12

**Acleris sparsana (Tortrix) (1041):** First taken at Pagham Harbour on Oct 12

**November Moth (1795 Epirrita dilutata):** First trapped at Ringmer near Lewes on Oct 12

**Feathered Thorn (1923 Colotois pennaria):** First seen at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne by day on Oct 12

**Autumnal Rustic (2117 Paradiarsia glareosa):** First at Durlston on Oct 12

**White-speck (2203 Mythimna unipuncta):** First at Portland on Oct 15

**Green-brindled Crescent (2245 Allophytes oxyacanthae):** First at Durlston on Oct 13

**Merveille du jour (2247 Dichonia aprilina):** First at Ringmer near Lewes on Oct 12

**Oak Rustic (2246a Dryobota labecula):** First at Durlston on Oct 12

**Flame Brocade (2251 Trigonophora flammea):** First at Portland on Oct 11

**Dotted Chestnut (2260 Conistra rubiginea):** First at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 13

**Red-line Quaker (2263 Agrochola lota):** First at Ringmer near Lewes on Oct 12

**Dusky-lemon Sallow (2275 Xanthia gilvago):** First at Pagham Harbour on Oct 12

**Golden Twin-spot (2428 *Chrysodeixis chalcites*):** First at Hastings on Oct 12

**Red Underwing (2452 *Catocala nupta*):** Sixth report for the year of this lovely large moth comes from Ringmer near Lewes on Oct 12

## Other Insects

**Hornet:** One report from the Thanet area on Oct 11 but I suspect quite a few males are now roaming the countryside on their 'death leave' (freed of domestic duties rearing young) and not able to survive the winter as the females do. I had a good view of one enjoying the sunshine, resting on a bramble leaf in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Oct 17

**Cluster Fly (*Pollenia rudis*):** I also had an encounter with some flies that may have been of this species in the Hollybank Woods on Oct 17 - see my diary entry for that day for more detail

**Harlequin Ladybird:** I suspect that many people will have found these on the walls of their houses, seeking a warm place to spend the winter, on recent sunny afternoons but I have only seen one quantitative report from Tony Wilson at Edburton (north foot of the South Downs). On Oct 12 he found 600 on the walls of his house compared to similar counts taken at similar dates in previous years of 400+ in 2007 and just 50 in 2006.

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** This was one of a **set of 11 species** (the complete set of those to be found at Durlston) all seen at Durlston on Oct 11

**Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*):** Reports of 'first finds' of this bug from Rye Harbour on Oct 12 and Portland on Oct 13 follow one from the Newhaven area on Oct 11 and that was preceded by finds of two at Dungeness and one at Hastings, both on the night of Aug 31, and these seem to mark the first general invasion of our south coast by this large (up to 2cm long) bug. Steven Teale, who made the Newhaven find, has just posted the following on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website - He writes .. "You may recall that on the night of 11th October I recorded a Bug of some sort. I have now identified it as a **Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*)**. It belongs to the Coreidae family of Hemiptera and is **native to North America**, where it is a **pest of trees such as Lodgepole Pine**. It was **introduced to Italy in 1999 amongst shipments of timber** from North America and has since spread across Europe, **arriving in the UK in 2007, where it was recorded at Weymouth College**. This first recording was made early in the year, which may lead to suggestions that it is able to overwinter here. At least two other sightings have been made in recent weeks, both in Kent. These sightings are all likely to be migrants that have flown across the Channel. The species is described as a public nuisance that will invade houses in large numbers when searching for suitable overwintering sites, evoking images of the Harlequin Ladybird. However, with the WCSB measuring in at up to 20mm, those Harlequins look the better option! " A later report is of one found in the

Worthing area on Oct 14 and there are references to **recent finds at Portsmouth** and on the Isle of Wight for which I do not have details

**Poisonous alien spiders:** You may have seen news of two species on BBC TV recently, with the news bulletins giving the impression that the spiders concerned have only just reached this country whereas **Segestria florentina** (a large black spider which builds 'tube webs' in crevices of brickwork and is aggressive towards humans which approach it) has been known in Britain since at least 1984 (it is recorded as being present in Britain in Dick Jones' book published in that year and I heard of it being a nuisance in Gosport at least ten years ago). The other species (**Steatoda paykulliana**, which the BBC call the **False Black Widow** but my researches find at least two other species have been given that same name!) had also appeared in Britain in 1980, though the first two arrivals were fairly harmless males and it is the females which are now established here that are a real problem in that their bite could be dangerously poisonous to humans. A male of a closely related species (**Steatoda nobilis** - one of the three bearing the **False Widow** name) was found at Rye Harbour for the first time on Oct 12.

**Long-legged Harvestman (Dicranopalpus ramosus):** This species of Harvestman is uncommon but had been found in Cornwall, Hampshire, Sussex and Essex when Dick Jones wrote his Country Life guide to Spiders in 1984, and has no doubt spread since then. I have never seen it nor heard of it until one was found at Rye Harbour on Oct 12. One reason why it is not often seen is that it spends most of its time sitting motionless on walls and tree trunks but if you do come across it it is unmistakable with a typical Harvestman type body with fantastically long legs (the maximum body length of a female is 6mm but the leg length can be up to 5 cm). It also has 'pedipalps' - its equivalent of arms and hands - that are as long as the whole body and with these it can reach out and grab passing prey without having to move its legs which are splayed out, at right angles to the body, flat along the surface on which the insect is positioned.

## PLANTS

**Lesser Spearwort:** Found by Brian Fellows flowering on the Langstone South Moors on Oct 13 this was one of several additions to the Oct flowering plant list for which the total currently stands at 180 species

**Pale Flax:** Still flowering at Durlston on Oct 15 and possibly seen in the Bosham area east of Emsworth on Oct 17 by Brian Fellows who is unfamiliar with the species and thinks that the flowers he saw were more likely to be left-overs of a commercial crop as they were lining the edges of an arable field.

**Early Dog Violet:** Still several flowers in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Oct 14

**Field Pansy:** A new addition to the October list on Oct 14, just one plant among the **Cornflowers, Corn Marigolds** and **Corn Cockles** still flowering in Southmoor Lane in Havant

**Procumbent Pearlwort:** I was surprised on Oct 17 to see flowers on the moss like bed of **Pearlwort** in a flower tub outside my front door where the plants have been present all year without any flowers!

**Rosa rugosa (Japanese rose):** This is not a flower that I would normally comment on as it has generally been planted with local council funding to 'brighten up waste land' or has been sown by birds eating the large tomato sized 'rose hips' but it is probably the right answer to a query as to the name of a plant flowering on the Langstone South Moors shore this week

**Tormentil:** I was pleased to see this still flowering in the Hollybank Woods on Oct 17

**Orpine (Sedum telephium):** Also found when visiting the Hollybank Woods on Oct 17 was a cluster of plants which I at first thought were garden chuck-outs of the common **Ice Plant (Sedum spectabile)** as they were found at the side of the Emsworth Common Road close to a car pull in area well known for fly tipping but a specimen taken home had the alternate leaves of the **native woodland Orpine** (not the opposite or whorled leaves of **Ice Plant**) and other characteristics. The native plant can be found not far away in Stansted Forest (Lyels Wood area).

**Holly berries:** No flowers but I was surprised to find all the berries already bright red in the Hollybank Woods on Oct 17

**Cow Parsley:** Brian Fellows had found this re-flowering as early as Sep 10 this autumn and found more on Oct 17 near Bosham

**Common Heather (Ling):** Still flowering on Oct 17 in Hollybank Woods

**Weasel's Snout or Lesser Snapdragon (Misopates orontium):** Still flowering at the Havant New Lane allotments on Oct 14

**Yellow Flag:** The plant on the Langstone South Moors which was in bud on Sep 12 was coming to the end of its flowering on Oct 13

**Green Bristlegrass:** Found by Brian Fellows on Oct 16 flowering where it was seen last autumn in arable fields of the East Park at Stansted

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Wild Boar:** On Oct 16 one was seen devouring acorns in woodland near Newick, a small town on the A272 east of Haywards Heath. I was aware that colonies of these animals are now established on the Sussex/Kent border, in Dorset, Devon and the Forest of Dean but I had not heard of them in this central area of Sussex. There have been one off reports from Surrey and Hampshire but I think these, and the current report, probably refer to single animals rather than colonies (and some reports may be mistaken sightings of unusual breeds of domestic pigs)

**Adder:** These will soon be vanishing underground for the winter but at least one female was basking in sunlight at Pulborough Brooks on Oct 16

**Fungi:** My own visit to the Hollybank Woods (north of Emsworth) on Oct 17 found very few species though I did come across on small white poisonous species that was new to me called **Inocybe geophylla (White Fibrecap)** along with one clump of **Collybia maculata (Spotted Toughshank)** and isolated individuals of several other species including the delicate **Crepidotus variabilis (Variable Oysterling)** growing on dead bracken stems (I usually find it on dead brambles) and the white tips of **Candlesnuff** starting to show on a couple of old logs. I did better in Southmoor Lane on grass close to Budds Farm here in Havant on Oct 14 when I saw troops of **Shaggy Inkcap** and what I think was **Melanoleuca melaleuca** plus singles of **Stropharia coronilla (Garland Roundhead)** and **Panaeolina foenisecii (Brown Mottlegill)**. On my lawn here in Havant **Meadow** and **Parrot Waxcaps** are still coming up with **Yellow Club**, **Orange Moss-cap (Rickenella or Mycena fibula)** and other small unidentified species. Brian Fellows had a very good find in the Bosham area east of Emsworth on Oct 17 when he came on a clump of **Pholiota squarrosa (Shaggy Scalecap)** and in the Thanet area of Kent **Gymnopilus junonius (Spectacular Rustgill)** was seen on Oct 11. A foray in the Hollybank Woods on Oct 19 added **Amethyst Deceiver**, **Clouded Agaric** and **Shaggy Pholiota** to the list seen at that site this month

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 13 - 19 (WEEK 41 OF 2008)**

### **Sun 19 Oct**

#### **Fungus Foray in Hollybank Woods at Emsworth**

Despite my fears voiced in Friday's entry below the number of species seen this morning by the party of 30 adults and children was surprisingly high. The **Porcelain Fungus** had put out three perfect fresh specimens within range of those who had brought cameras and for those who had not there was a good show of **Deceivers** on the ground below - both the brown and the lovely **Amethyst** forms. Further along fresh specimens of **False Death Cap** led us to a troop of **Clouded Agaric** hiding under a Holly bush. Pushing on further into a belt of conifers we found more than one cluster of what seemed to be young **Shaggy Pholiota** though the caps had not yet expanded and acquired their Shaggy look.

Plenty of smaller and 'gone over' specimens were found to pad out the list - these included what I think were **Fairies Bonnets** and a **very dead Pleurotus on which not one but two smaller fungi had found a foothold** to give a 'Three for One' offer to anyone keen to identify mould type fungi.

At the end, when I had left the party early, I came across another clump of the **small white poisonous White Fibrecap (Inocybe geophylla)** which I hope were not spotted by any of the enthusiastic children who might have handled them.

### **Fri 17 Oct**

#### **Hollybank Woods**

In anticipation of a fungus foray next Sunday morning I took a walk around the Hollybank Woods this afternoon, finding few fungi but getting a good look at a

**Hornet** sunbathing on a bramble leaf and seeing **Holly berries bright red** to celebrate a very early Christmas!

I only found just over a dozen fungi but one was new to me - if I identified it correctly it was **Inocybe geophylla** and has the new English name of **White Fibrecap** and is poisonous. The general absence of fungi does not bode well for Sunday's Foray but there will be quite a few birds and flowers still to be seen (though the forecast of cloud and wind will probably preclude the view I had of a couple of **Red Admiral** butterflies sharing a sunny bramble bush with the **Hornet**). Today **Robin** and **Wren** were singing and I had a glimpse of a **Buzzard**. **Common Heather**, **Tormentil** and **Red Campion** were among the flowers seen - less colourful was a lot of **Wavy Bittercress** in flower. Another chance find was a **Deer's leg bone** (almost certainly **Fallow Deer** by the size) - this had clearly been lying on the ground for years but was found by the county boundary stream not far from the dip in the Emsworth Common Road where cars speed downhill to the stream and then up the opposite slope - sadly this is a point where deer often cross the road and **I suspect the bone came from a Deer hit by a car** and only able to get a short distance into the wood before collapsing (on one New Year's Day outing I recall seeing **two roadside Fallow Deer corpses** here).

An insect that caught my attention as **a large fly with a vague black and white chequer pattern on its abdomen**. A swarm of these flies were apparently enjoying the warm sun on the leaves and trunk of a tree and the nearest I can get to naming them is **Cluster Fly (Pollenia rudis)** which is said to swarm in the autumn when it can be a nuisance coming into houses to spend the winter. The presence of a swarm of them, the size and chequered abdomen, and their sluggish behaviour are all right for this species but I was able to get a close look at one and saw no hint of the golden hairs that should clothe the thorax. If they were **Cluster flies their larvae parasitise live earthworms** - most **Blow Flies** in this group lay their eggs in carrion though I see that the **Flesh Fly (Sarcophaga carnaria)** **does not lay eggs but gives birth to live larvae**.

Back at home both **Speckled Wood** and **Large White** were flying in the garden and a mass of **Procumbent Pearlwort** which has been filling much of a flower tub outside our front door through most of the summer with its imitation of a bed of moss has suddenly decided to come into flower.

[Tue 14 Oct](#)

### Southmoor Lane and Havant cemetery

A meeting in the Havant Borough Depot in Southmoor Lane this morning gave me another chance to look at the results of wildflower seed sowing at the south end of the lane (where **Field Pansy** had appeared among the **Corn Cockles**, **Cornflower** and **Corn Marigolds**) but also gave me a good show of fungi in the grass bordering the road outside the depot on the corner of the lane and Penner Road.

**Shaggy Inkcaps** in all stages of development were the first fungi seen at the south end of the site and as I rounded the corner of Penner Road there was a bigger show of what may have been several species though I decided they could all be subsumed under three names, each with specimens at different stages of growth. The easiest to identify was one that grows in my own lawn and has a thin brown stem no more than 5cm high with a smoothly rounded umbrella shaped cap a little over 1cm across having a pale straw colour in the centre and extending nearly to the rim where it becomes a bright brown peripheral ring (it is this contrast of colours

on the cap which make it easy to pick out, but when you take a specimen indoors and it dries out the peripheral brown soon disappears). This species is called **Brown mottlegill (Panaeolina foenisecii)**.

The second species immediately reminded me of one that I have come across occasionally in the past called **Stropharia aurantiaca (Redlead Roundhead)** which is short stemmed and had a bright red-brown cap around 3 cm across but the one seen here had a yellow-brown colour to the cap and was, I think, a common relative of the one that I knew and has the name **Stropharia coronilla** or **Garland Roundhead**.

This left a great mass of fungi that had similar features (basic size and proportions of cap to stem which is one of the helpful indicators of fungal identity) but varied a lot in cap colour and shape though all had a slight 'pimple' in the centre of the cap (what mycologists call an 'umbo'). The freshest specimen had a strong contrast between an almost black cap and white gills and stem and this fits some illustrations of a genus called **Melanoleuca** (which means, I think, 'black and white') so I have recorded the whole show under the name **Melanoleuca melaleuca** as my best specimen closely fits the description and picture of that species in my Collins Guide to Fungi which begins its description the words 'very variable'.

After lunch I accompanied a friend on a botanic tour of the Havant Eastern Road cemetery where I was able to show him that the **Early Dog Violets** are still flowering after which we walked up the road to see the **Weasel's Snout** still flowering at the New Lane allotments and then had a look at the **Perennial Wall Rocket** on the rail track by the New Lane level crossing. While in the cemetery we had close views of a **Jay** that was moving through the area (not normally seen there) and which had possibly come from Germany or further east and had not yet found a place to settle for the winter.

### **SUMMARY FOR OCT 6 - 12 (WEEK 40 OF 2008)**

**Slavonian Grebes** have arrived on the south coast and **all three common Diver species** have been seen this week.

Four **Cattle Egrets** have been seen near Pagham Harbour and a **Rough-legged Buzzard** has been seen in Kent.

**Golden Plover flocks** can now be seen in Hampshire and a late **Wryneck** has been at Farlington Marshes. Masses of departing summer visitors and arriving winter visitors have been reported but the first **Grey Cheeked Thrush** ever seen in Dorset stole much of the limelight. The first **Twite** of the autumn has been seen across the Channel where **millions of Chaffinch** are on the move.

A late **Emperor Dragonfly** was seen in sunshine that brought out **18 butterfly species**. Also in the Insect news is good **evidence that predators which normally take butterflies will not touch any of the White species**.

A report of a **Robin's Pincushion** gives a link to what could be a **useful website called 'Bugs and Weeds'** and other sources have been used for my speculation about the **sex life of spiders**

Some very **unexpected flowers** are being seen this month (**Wood Anemone** and **Grass Vetching** among them) but the high spot for me was a find of a plant that I cannot yet identify (possibly related to **Green Nightshade**) and near this find the Prinited **Moth Mullein** (or its successor) is just starting a new flowering

Sightings of **Roe Deer** tied in with a Radio programme showing that it is now possible to contract the nasty **Lyme Disease** in a suburban garden without going to the New Forest.

The first **Fly Agaric** and **Shaggy Inkcap** finds mark another stage in the autumn show of fungi which gave me my first sight of **Porcelain Fungus** this week

## **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Six were seen at Dungeness on Oct 2 and singles have since been seen at Christchurch Harbour, Milford near Lymington, Seaford near Beachy Head and Bockhill near the South Foreland in Kent. On Oct 6 the Trektellen website reported a count of 20 off Terschelling (the outermost of the ring of islands outside the Waddenzee on the north coast of Holland) and on Oct 8 Cap Griz Nez near Calais reported 5 more.

**Black-throated Diver:** On Oct 6 one was off the South Foreland and on Oct 7 one was seen at Dungeness while on the continent 8 were seen from Cap Griz Nez on Oct 8

**Great Northern Diver:** Just one new continental sighting from Cap de la Hague in Normandy on Oct 4 and one off Portland on Oct 9

**Slavonian Grebe:** First report of the autumn was of 2 off Lymington on Oct 9 (still there on Oct 11). The only other report is of one at Dungeness on Oct 10

**Black-necked Grebe:** On Oct 5 two appeared in Studland Bay for the first time this autumn and on Oct 6 the number in Langstone Harbour had increased from two on Sep 21 to three

**Sooty Shearwater:** Recent sightings on the British coast included six birds off Portland on Oct 7 (when another one was off Seaford) but looking back to Oct 3 the total seen off Roscoff in Brittany was a huge 644 (the highest count on the British side has been 34 off Portland on Aug 18)

**Balearic Shearwater:** The six recent counts off the British coast included a peak of 6 off Portland on Oct 6 but over on the other side a massive 295 were seen from Roscoff on Oct 3

**Storm Petrel:** On Oct 5 one was seen at West Bay in Dorset and on Oct 7 another single was off the north Kent coast

**Leach's Petrel:** On Oct 5 there were three separate sightings of a single bird off Dorset (maybe the same bird) plus four seen from Milford on Sea (west of Lymington), then on Oct 7 two were seen at Christchurch Harbour and another one was off the north Kent coast

**Bittern:** Two at Dungeness RSPB site on Oct 9 (one of them seems to have moved to Rye Harbour for Oct 10)

**Cattle Egret:** Four appeared on the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Oct and were still there on Oct 9

**Great White Egret:** The bird at the Blashford Lakes was last reported on Oct 11 while over in Holland on Oct 8 nine were seen at one site and eleven at another

**Spoonbill:** One was still at Titchfield Haven on Oct 5 but on that day Brownsea Island (where there had been ten at the end of September) reported just one

**Mute Swan:** By Oct 8 the cygnets on Budds Farm Pools here in Havant were looking nearly as white as their parents but the Langstone cygnets were still very much brown on Oct 6

**Pink-foot Goose:** 28 were in the Kent Stour Valley on Oct 8

**White-front Goose:** A flock of 106 was on the Dutch/Belgian border on Oct 8 with counts of 34 and 44 at two other continental sites that day

**Wigeon:** On Oct 5 a total of 287 flew west over the Kent Stour valley along with **18 Pintail**. More than **1200 Teal** were present in the Stour valley that day.

**Pintail:** By Oct 7 the total at Pulborough Brooks was up to around 50

**Garganey:** Three were still present in the Kent Stour Valley on Oct 7

**Goldeneye:** One was seen in the Lymington area on Oct 9 but I suspect this may have been the bird that was at the Blashford Lakes in July rather than an early arrival

**Honey Buzzard:** The last report I am aware of was of one seen over two sites in Kent on Oct 8

**Hen Harrier:** Of 11 reports so far this autumn there have been three from Kent, three from Dorset, three from Hampshire and two from Sussex. Latest sightings were from Alresford Pond near Winchester on Oct 10 and the area north of Christchurch on Oct 11

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** First of the autumn is a confident report of one appearing from the sea at Sandwich Bay on Oct 8

**Osprey:** Two could still be seen at Farlington Marshes on Oct 10 with one over Pagham Harbour on Oct 9 and two at the Thornham Marshes (Thorney Island) on Oct 5

**Hobby:** None reported since Oct 9 when singles were at Poole and Rye Harbours

**Ringed Plover:** A count of 128 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5 indicated new arrivals and on Oct 6 I saw a group of five on the mud east of Langstone village for the first time this autumn

**Dotterel:** One reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 6 was the thirteenth to be reported this autumn

**Golden Plover:** Flocks are now starting to appear in Hampshire with 15 seen in the Alresford area near Winchester on Oct 10 and more than 50 at Lymington on Oct 11 (when 238 roosted at Rye Harbour)

**Little Stint:** Ten south coast sites have reported the presence of singles this week, including Titchfield Haven, Farlington Marshes and Lymington

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** The bird at Puborough Brooks was last reported on Oct 7 and new birds have turned up in the Kent Stour Valley on Oct 7 and at Lymington on Oct 11

**Black-tailed Godwit:** So far this winter the Fishbourne Channel has been the best place to see these birds in Chichester Harbour with counts there of 145 on Sep 13, 124 on Sep 19 (when 114 were in the nearby Bosham area), 234 on Sep 22, 250 on Sep 23, 86 on Sep 29, 90 on Oct 7 and now a peak of 334 on Oct 10

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** A distant group of about 20 birds seen on the tideline east of Langstone village on Oct 6

**Whimbrel:** One seen at Farlington Marshes on Oct 6 will presumably stay in Langstone Harbour for the winter

**Wood Sandpiper:** The first to be reported anywhere since Sep 14 was in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 8

**Red-necked Phalarope:** One at Dungeness on Oct 7

**Grey Phalarope:** On Oct 5 one was seen at Sandy Point on Hayling Island and another on the Lymington marshes, on Oct 6 one was found freshly dead at Portland and on Oct 7 one was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) and two at Christchurch Harbour. I have now seen 88 reports of this species for this autumn covering a total of 118 birds, the latest being by the River Frome in Dorset on Oct 11

**Long-tailed Skua:** On Oct 5 it was thought that four separate birds were in the Hurst area west of Lymington and by Oct 8 I had collected 19 reports of the species for this autumn, covering 35 birds

**Great Skua:** Oct 7 brought a count of 46 birds seen at Portland while over on the French coast Gatteville in Normandy recorded 282 of them on Oct 4

**Little Gull:** Milford on Sea (west of Lymington) had a good total of 10 birds on Oct 7 and on Oct 8 Cap Griz Nez near Calais recorded 297 of them

**Sabine's Gull:** On Oct 7 Christchurch Harbour had a juvenile and Miford on Sea had two more bring this autumn's total of reports to 23 covering some 29 birds

**Sandwich Tern:** We have not seen the end of the migrants yet - on Oct 7 Dungeness recorded 70 passing while Cap Griz Nez across the Channel recorded 144 that day and another 33 were off the Dutch coast on Oct 11. A few Common and Arctic Terns are also still passing but the last date I have for Little Tern is Sep 15 and for Black Tern is Sep 20

**Puffin:** Two off Portland on Oct 10 were the first I have seen reported since July 21

**Short-eared Owl:** Singles seen at eight coastal sites this week with one appearing inland at Woolmer Pond near Alton in east Hampshire on Oct 7

**Kingfisher:** On Oct 6 I was told that there had been two recent sightings of one back at Langstone Mill Pond and on Oct 9 one flew over Peter Pond at Emsworth

**Wryneck:** A late bird turned up at Farlington Marshes on Oct 9 and was still there on Oct 11

**Woodlark:** Birds have been heard singing over sites at Silchester (north of Basingstoke) and at Cuckfield (near Haywards Heath) but the singles seen in Britain are overshadowed by the large number moving west on the continent. Peak count was of 125 flying over central Belgium on Oct 8 but other counts that day were of 51, 29, 26, 23, 9 and 5 while on Oct 11 one site in the south east of Holland reported 63

**Skylark:** No significant reports from British sites on Oct 8 but over on the continent on that day twelve different sites reported a total of around 2500 birds on the move and on Oct 11 nine continental sites reported a total of around 1500 birds. No British site has yet reported more than 100 birds while peak continental counts have been around 500.

**Swallow:** Latest counts were reported on Oct 11 when Christchurch Harbour had 220 and Durlston had 150

**House Martin:** A birder on the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Oct 8 happened to point his binoculars at the skies and only then realised that there were around 200 high flying hirundines milling around overhead (mostly House Martins). Latest counts on Oct 11 are of 56 over Christchurch Harbour and 50 over Durlston

**Meadow Pipit:** On Oct 5 Barton on Sea recorded 1305 going south and on Oct 6 Christchurch Harbour reported 3470 doing the same, then on Oct 8 one site in Holland reported 1032

**Richard's Pipit:** Singles seen at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5, Folkestone on Oct 9, Pagham Harbour on Oct 9, and a site on the Dutch coast on Oct 11 (a **Red-throated Pipit** was also seen at the latter site on Oct 11)

**Yellow Wagtail:** 6 were still in the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Oct 8

**Dunnoek:** Just one report of full song so far this autumn - at Milton Common in Portsmouth on Oct 9

**Robin:** At least another 44 arrived from the continent on Oct 6 to be recorded at Bockhill (South Foreland)

**Black Redstart:** Six were in the Folkestone area on Oct 9 and one was at Portland on Oct 11 (first of the autumn at that site)

**Departing summer visitors:** The following all get a mention in the reports for the past few days .. **Common Redstart, Whinchat, Wheatear, Ring Ouzel, Reed Warbler, Melodious Warbler** (one at Barton on Sea on Oct 8), **Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler** (including one at

Westbourne near Emsworth), **Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher** and **Pied Flycatcher**.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush:** One caught and ringed at Portland on Oct 8 was not only the first ever at that site but also a first for Dorset. Further investigation shows that this species breeds in Canada and Alaska and then migrates to South America. 47 have now been recorded in the UK since the first was identified on Fair Isle in 1953, most of them found in October. Prior to this one at Portland there was one on the Scillies in Oct 2007, one in Hertfordshire in Nov 2005 and one in Norfolk in Nov 2004

**Blackbird:** On Oct 10 one was heard in subsong at Bosham by Brian Fellows

**Song Thrush:** On Oct 6 15 arrived at Bockhill (South Foreland) and 11 at Sandwich Bay but this is trivial compared to the number now moving west in Europe (on Oct 8 one site in Holland recorded 3159 and two other sites both recorded well over 1000 that day while on Oct 11 there was a peak count of 2421 on the Dutch coast). Also on Oct 11 I am pretty sure I heard one giving a short burst of song in the Prinsted area near Emsworth (as soon as I registered the sound I stopped to list but of course the bird then went silent!)

**Redwing:** These started to reach the south of England on Sep 15 and a total of 38 were seen at Dungeness on Oct 4. On Oct 7 a flock of more than 20 flew over Aldershot and on Oct 8 they began to be seen in hundreds at many continental sites with a peak count of 1846 at one site in eastern Holland. On Oct 11 a site in the Zeeland area of south west Holland had a count of 6000 (though no other site reported more than 365 that day)

**Mistle Thrush:** With very few now breeding in southern England a count of 21 in the north west of the New Forest (Hampton Ridge area) on Oct 11 was encouraging though I suspect these may have been long distance travellers passing through

**Dartford Warbler:** Several were singing in the autumn sunshine in the New Forest on Oct 11 when one seen at Beachy Head was probably one of this year's young already dispersing

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** One trapped on the Isle of Wight on Oct 6 was the nearest to Hants so far

**Goldcrest:** On Oct 9 more than 200 were at Portland with at least 180 at Christchurch Harbour but we have not the last of them yet as on Oct 11 a site on the Dutch coast recorded a total of 430

**Coal Tit:** It is now some time since continental birds started to appear in Britain for the winter but more are yet to come as on Oct 11 one site on the Dutch coast had 600 passing through while other sites that day reported counts of 415, 234 and 175

**Blue Tit:** Now moving west in Europe with a count of 193 at one Belgian site on Oct 8 (with **367 Great Tits** at the same site that day). By Oct 11 the peak count of **Blue Tits** in Holland was over 3000 with another site reporting 1500

**Great Tit:** Peak count in Holland on Oct 11 was 1267

**Red-backed Shrike:** The birds on Thorney Island and at Lymington were both present on Oct 5 but not reported since, but new ones have turned up in the Swanage area (Oct 8 and 9) and at Lymington (Oct 9 to 11)

**Jay:** No substantial indication of movement on the continent - highest counts of just 26 and 23

**Jackdaw:** On Oct 8 Steve Keen noted 21 passing over Barton on Sea near Christchurch and on Oct 11 several continental sites were reporting large numbers on the move (counts of 564, 437, 417, 239 and 170)

**Tree Sparrow:** Counts of up to 89 were recorded at 10 European sites on Oct 8 and a peak of 66 on Oct 11

**Chaffinch:** Huge numbers now moving through northern Europe with a peak count of 13,475 at one Belgian site (east of Brussels) on Oct 8 when two other sites reported 13,000 or more and another had just over 12,000. They were still moving on Oct 11 when the peak count was 6000 and others were 4877, 4069, 2996 and 2522

**Brambling:** Just three more arrived in south east England on Oct 6 with counts of up to 57 at eleven European sites on Oct 8, increasing on Oct 11 to 356, 204, 130 etc

**Greenfinch:** Remarkably few being seen this autumn - until 220 were seen at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 6 the highest count reported in southern Britain this autumn was just 35 (near Titchfield Haven on Sep 27). On the continent numbers are equally low with 57 being the highest count reported on Oct 8 and only 41 on Oct 11

**Goldfinch:** The very large numbers seen around English coastal sites recently are not reflected in any continental reports. Counts of 900 at Dungeness and 700 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 10 might be considered to be arrivals from the continent but continental reports for that period show figures of 10 birds or less ...

**Linnet:** These suddenly started to appear in southern Britain on Oct 4 when some 500 were reported at Portland and on Oct 6 Christchurch Harbour had 1120. On Oct 8 counts of up to 500 were being recorded at European sites and on Oct 11 at least three continental sites had figures close to 250

**Twite:** The only report since last March is of a single bird in Belgium on Oct 11

**Lesser Redpoll:** Numbers remain low with Dungeness recording the highest recent figure of 80 on Oct 6 though on Oct 9 Sandwich Bay had 321 with 260 there on Oct 10

**Hawfinch:** A total of around 25 birds reported from continental sites on Oct 8 plus Oct 10. On Oct 10 more than 6 birds were seen at the traditional New Forest roost site in the Rhinefield area

**Lapland Bunting:** Oct 6 brought one to Dungeness and two to Christchurch Harbour

**Ortolan Bunting:** One at Durlston on Oct 8 was the first reported since Sep 20 (also at Durlston)

**Reed Bunting:** The highest count of migrants at British sites this autumn has been 126 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25 but on Oct 11 the total reported at the few continental sites which I checked was over 500 birds

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Migrant Hawker:** One over the Brockhampton stream alongside Budds Farm in Havant on Oct 8

**Emperor:** One still flying at Durlston on Oct 11

**Common Darter:** One in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth on Oct 9

### Butterflies

**18 species mentioned in recent reports, including ...**

**Silver Spotted Skipper:** One which had been late to emerge and had done so in weather that did not allow its wings to expand and dry in sunshine was found as a cripple, unable to fly, at Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley on Oct 3

**Brown Argus:** One seen at Gosport on Oct 2

**Holly Blue:** One flying in Brighton on Oct 9

**Painted Lady:** One seen in Gosport on Oct 1 brings the number of reports I have seen so far this year to 66 involving 84 butterflies

**Small Tortoiseshell:** One seen near Crawley in Sussex on Oct 9

**Wall Brown:** Late specimens seen on Oct 9 both at Durlston and in the Cuckmere valley area near Beachy Head

### Moths

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** One seen in a Langstone (Wade Court) garden on Oct 2 and two more seen in Thanet on Oct 10 brings the number of reports I know of for this year to 43 involving some 48 insects

**The Vapourer (2026 *Orgyia antiqua*):** The females of this species are wingless but the pheromones sent out by one of them attracted several males to her in the Thanet area on Oct 10

**Ruby Tiger (2064 *Phragmatobia fuliginosa*):** This gets into the news on account of being eaten by a Spotted Flycatcher at the Testwood Lakes (Totton, Southampton). This bird was observed over the course of a week devouring every insect that flew past it other than **White butterflies** (which it never attempted to catch). This backs up something I heard recently to the effect that **White butterflies** have a nasty taste which deters predators from eating them.

### Other Insects

**Robins Pincushion gall wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*):** Most people recognize one of these galls when they see one but they may not know much about the life history of the gall wasp involved. Info about this (plus other galls and a variety of other insects) can be seen at

<http://www.bugsandweeds.co.uk/galls%20p1.html>

**Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*):** These are again mentioned in Durlston news on Oct 9 with the remark that they have been present there for several years since they began to arrive from the continent

**Harlequin Ladybird:** On two recent sunny afternoons I have seen numbers of **Ladybirds** flying in to land on the walls and window-frames of my house here in Havant in search of a way into the house in order to hibernate there and on Oct 8 a similar scene was reported from the Lewes area in Sussex where the invaders were said to be **Harlequin Ladybirds**

**Garden Cross spider:** The sight of two spiders on the same web in my garden on Oct 7 sent me to investigate the mating, cannibalistic and parasitic habits of some spider species - see my diary entry of Oct 7

## PLANTS

**166 species found in flower during this month so far**, including those seen by Brian Fellows and others

**Wood Anemone:** A single plant flowering in Kent on Oct 9

**Pale Flax:** Flowering at Durlston on Oct 10

**Sweet Violet:** Three fresh flowers in St Faith's churchyard in Havant on Oct 11

**Lesser Stitchwort:** Flowering on the Holly bank Woods at Emsworth on Oct 9

**Tree Mallow:** Reported by Brian Fellows on Oct 9 (I had a quick look at the plants by the Slipper Mill Pond in Emsworth but could see no flowers though a garden plant of *Lavatera* was flowering in a nearby garden)

**Cut-leaved Cranesbill:** Also found by Brian Fellows on Oct 9

**Common Vetch:** Another addition to the list for October by Brian

**Grass vetchling:** Perhaps the most unexpected flower for October - reported at Durlston on Oct 10

**Strawberry Tree:** The tree growing alongside the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth was recorded as flowering by Brian Fellows on Oct 9 (and seen by me on Oct 11)

***Verbena bonariensis*:** A single plant found flowering in a roadside location at Broadmarsh (far from any garden) was a surprise on Oct 8

**Green Nightshade??:** Visiting the market garden plot at Prinsted (SU763054) on Oct 11 (where I have recorded Green Nightshade in past years) I saw a plant similar to those seen there in the past and notably having many patent white hairs on its stems but having flowers that were mostly of a pale blue colour (similar to those of **Borage** and unlike the dark blue of **Bittersweet**) and not showing any berries. To confuse the issue one cluster of flowers was pure white (I think on the same single plant as the blue ones) and the flowers looked to be longer than those

on **Black or Green Nightshade** (more like some Fuchsia flowers). My investigations so far have not come to any conclusion though **Leafy Nightshade (Solanum sarachoides)** is a very remote possibility. More likely this is either a **hybrid between Green Nightshade and Bittersweet** or maybe the result of 'something in the soil'. Although I could get within a few feet of the plant it was within a wire fence which precluded a close look or examination and I had to do my best with my binoculars!

**Moth Mullein**: The single plant growing near the farmyard entrance close to the Prinsted Market Garden Plot (or its successor) had just started a new flowering when I was there on Oct 11

**Borage**: Still flowering close to where cars exiting the multi-storey carpark emerge onto Park Road South in Havant

**Golden Samphire**: I have not come across any flower since Sep 25 but Brian Fellows found some in the Emsworth area on Oct 9

**Blue Fleabane**: Still flowering by the cycleway from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes on Oct 8

**Shaggy Soldier**: Masses in flower at the Prinsted Market Garden plot on Oct 11

**Butcher's Broom**: When I first found this in flower on Oct 2 I had to search hard among the prickly 'leaves' (which are actually the flower stems) to find a single flower - by Oct 7 it was easy to spot several flowers without touching the plant.

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common or Harbour Porpoise**: Five seen off the North Foreland in Kent on Oct 5 were only the third group to be reported on the websites I visit this year - the previous report was of 2 off Ventnor (IoW) on July 6 and before that 1 was off Portland on May 6

**Common Seal**: Five were hauled up on a sand bank in Langstone Harbour on Oct 6 - I think this is the highest number I have heard of being seen together in Langstone Harbour (as opposed to Chichester Harbour which has a resident colony of over a dozen of these Seals).

**Roe Deer**: These have been regularly seen on the big north Hayling fields since Dec 2004, growing in numbers to at least 12 in the spring of 2007 and with another sighting of 12 on Jan 21 this year. On Oct 6 a bunch of four were seen, one of them being this year's kid to show the number is probably still increasing. Recent sightings in the northern part of Thorney Island show that they are also established there.

**Lyme Disease**: A Radio 4 programme this week told us that the old view that this dangerous disease could only be contracted in the New Forest (by walking around in shorts so that **Deer Ticks** could attach themselves to your skin as you brushed against **Bracken**) is no longer true now that **Deer** are present even in suburban gardens. The message is that you should go to your doctor for treatment after having any tick on your flesh - especially if it causes a noticeable rash

**Fungi: Golden Spindles** (my mistake - these were actually **Yellow Club** or **Clavulinopsis helvola**) appeared for the first time this year on my garden lawn on Oct 9 and a walk around the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth that afternoon gave me my first sight of **Porcelain Fungus** for this autumn - also seen in those woods were several **False Death Cap (Amanita citrina)**, **Yellow Russula** (new name for this is **Ochre Brittle Gill**), **Sulphur Tuft**, **Buttercap** and **Common Earth Balls**. In the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 9 both **Fly Agaric**, **Shaggy Inkcap** and **Amethyst Deceiver** were all seen and are the first I have heard of.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 6 - 12 (WEEK 40 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 11 Oct**

#### **Plants at Prinsted**

This morning a **Comma** was in my garden and a roundabout walk to the Havant shops showed my that **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** and **Borage** were still flowering and that **Sweet Violets** had started their autumn flowering in St Faith's churchyard while back in my own garden **Common Fumitory** was in flower. A spare hour in the afternoon allowed me to cycle to Prinsted for a quick look at the Market Garden plot but before entering the field in which it is to be found I checked the entrance to the old farmyard beside the unmade approach road. Surprisingly the **Moth Mullein** which I had found at the end of its flowering in July seemed to have restarted and had the promise of flowering for some time to come. In the plot, among masses of **Shaggy Soldier** and **Small Nettle**, I found a plant which I have described in my Weekly Summary and which I cannot yet name though it is probably related to **Green Nightshade**. On my way home I found the **Strawberry Tree** which overhangs the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth was in full flower and already had several unripe fruit.

### **Wed 8 Oct**

#### **Budds Farm and Broadmarsh**

A cycle ride round these two areas brought my list of flowering plant species up to 135 for the month of October but failed to add the Chinese Mugwort which still flourishes beside the Broadmarsh to Portsmouth cycleway but does not flower until October at the earliest, but it did add an unexpected find of **Verbena bonariensis** growing alongside the slip road going west from the big new roundabout at the end of Harts Farm Way to join the A27.

On the way out I found **Cornflower**, **Corn Marigold** and **Corn Cockle** still flowering at the southern end of Southmoor Lane, and on Budds Farm Pools I found the **Swan cygnets** which were hatched there have now nearly moulted into white adult plumage. At least half a dozen each of **Shoveler**, **Gadwall** and **Teal** were present with higher numbers of **Tufted Duck** (including **one white faced female Scaup look-alike**), **Mallard**, **Coot** and **Little Grebe**.

On the shore two **Wheatears** were flitting around with three **Great Crested Grebe** and four **Cormorant** on the water plus some 150 **Redshank** at the water's edge with a similar number of **Oystercatcher** on the mud. Both **Large White** and **Speckled Wood** butterflies were both active as was a dragonfly (thought to be a **Migrant Hawker**) over the water of the Brockhampton Stream.

### **Tue 7 Oct**

#### **Arrival of winter Wood Pigeons and Spider sexlife**

This morning 8 **Wood Pigeons** were on my lawn on which I have only seen less than four locally breeding birds since the end of March when a dozen or more came regularly in search of food - another sign of approaching winter as is the occasional call of a **Wagtail** flying over (I heard a **Pied** this morning and have heard **Greys** since the end of August)

More exciting was the sight of not one but **two spiders on a big orb web** blocking my route into the garden to put out bird food first thing this morning - one was the **large female Garden Cross spider** which had built the web, the other was a much smaller creature with the **match-stick thin body of a male** which I assumed was hoping to mate with the female though I would have thought that mating normally occurs earlier in the year.

**If it was intending to mate the male** will have prepared for the event by creating a tiny web of its own, ejecting sperm into the web, then picking the sperm up onto 'hand like' palps which absorb the sperm to keep it until the female is 'to hand'.

Approaching the female is a dangerous procedure as her first instinct when finding a smaller insect on her web is to regard it as prey so males use techniques to let the female know their intentions are 'honourable'. One is to send signals to the female by plucking the strands of the web in a way that tells the female that the origin of the vibration is not prey caught in the web, nor any of the other causes of vibration (wind, a falling leaf, etc), another is to 'sing to her' sending audible signals by stroking 'pegs' on his body in the same way that **Crickets** and **Grasshoppers** **'stridulate'**. In some species the male brings a food offering with him to distract the female's attention while she is eating the offering.

When he reaches the female the male transfers the sperm to her genital opening which is to be found under the front end of her abdomen, and when this has been achieved the male makes a hasty exit.

A less likely reason for seeing two spiders in one web is that the second was a **'Pirate Spider'** which preys on other spiders, killing them with a powerful poison as soon as the prey spider comes within striking distance after being attracted by signals similar to those given by a male of her own species. Only four species of **Pirate Spider** occur in Britain, all belonging to the genus *Ero* and these all have rounded, compact bodies (a little like a **Crab Spider**), not the thin matchstick shape of the intruder which I saw. While on the subject of piracy I see that there are also some spider species that are parasitic on others - several species manage to share a web with a larger species in the hope of being able to get a share of any prey caught in the web of the rightful owner, and there is one tiny species (**Curimagua bayano** - not found in Europe) which lives on the body of the host (**Diplura**) species and which climbs down the 'chelicerae' (the organs through which a spider drinks the soup which the body of the prey has been reduced to) and shares the 'soup'.

[Mon 6 Oct](#)

### **A walk to Warblington and Langstone**

A dull but dry morning for a walk to Pook Lane and back along the shore to Langstone pond then home via the Billy Trail during which I noted **44 plant species in flower** including the lovely raceme of fresh white flowers of a climbing vine-like plant that I wrongly thought was **Chinese Tea Plant (Lycium chinese)** spilling

over a garden wall (this is really a garden plant but, like **Russian Vine**, it soon establishes itself and takes over a hedgerow as it has done near the Seagull Lane entrance to Brook Meadow in Emsworth) - I am still searching for the real identity of the plant. Another plant which just went onto the list was **Pellitory of the Wall** for which I had to get out my hand lens to see if any of the 'flowers' still qualified as 'flowering' and in so doing got a surprise when the lens revealed a **large ant** (previously hidden under a leaf) feebly waving its legs at me.

Going south down Pook Lane I encountered a tiny **Goldcrest** rapidly moving through the hedge foliage on a winter journey in search of food which had probably started on the other side of the channel. Later, on the Billy Trail immediately south of the A27, I also saw a **male Blackcap** which attracted my attention by its loud 'tucc-tucc'ing as it defended a cluster of **Blackberries** that it had probably decided offered sufficient food to justify a few days pause in its southward journey (I don't think our winter visitors from central Europe have yet reached us though I cannot be certain about that).

On the low tide mud south of Pook Lane a scattering of waders included a group of **five Ringed Plover** and another more distant one of what I think were about **20 Bar-tailed Godwits** on the tideline.

At Langstone Pond at least a dozen **Teal** were resting in the cover of the peripheral vegetation and **one Swan was aggressively demanding to be fed** by the path - I was surprised that I could not see its mate until I reached the Royal Oak and **saw the resident family in the mill stream outfall channel** (they were presumably unaware of the interloper). I was also intrigued to see that only five of the cygnets were with the parents and one of the young birds was far away on the Wadeway - I could not make up my mind as to whether it was showing its independence or was perhaps injured and unable to keep up with the family. While by the pond I was told that a **Kingfisher** had been seen there on a couple of recent occasions and that a **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** had been nectaring in a Wade Court garden on Oct 2

### **SUMMARY FOR SEP 29 - OCT 5 (WEEK 39 OF 2008)**

The first **Black-throated Diver** of the winter has arrived to join **Red-throated** and **Great Northern** in our southern waters and the first **Red-necked Grebes** have also arrived.

A **family of Whooper Swans** seen on the Isle of Wight could be heading back to the Chichester Lakes for the winter. Both **Pink-foot Goose** and **Pale-bellied Brent** are now with us.

**Radio tracking of two young Ospreys** heading south from Scotland gives us the **sad news of how one was blown off course by the wind and flew for more than four days out into the Atlantic where its strength gave out** - the other bird is safe in France.

The first two **Purple Sandpiper** have been seen and a tractor driver in Sussex was able to get within a few feet of four feeding **Jack Snipe** without disturbing them.

Another close encounter was with a **Kingfisher** which twice flew into the kitchen of a Herefordshire house, posed to have its photo taken and was tame enough to be picked up by hand and put out of the window.

At Rye Harbour the first **Long-eared Owl** has arrived for the winter and the first **Shorelark** and **Penduline Tit** have been seen in Dorset with an even rarer **Red-throated Pipit** in Hampshire while Kent has had the first **Savi's** and **Dusky Warblers** along with repeat sightings of **Barred** and **Radde's Warblers**. The entries for Raven and Chaffinch may be worth a look for incidental info.

At least 17 species of butterfly were reported this week (including late news of a **Queen of Spain Fritillary** found near Chichester). Both **Small Copper** and **Brown Argus** have produced fresh generations. Moth news includes three new finds of **Clifden Nonpareil**

No freshly flowering plant species but I have already found **109 species still in flower during October**

Other Wildlife news has a very surprising report of **an Otter in the mouth of Chichester Harbour**, some notes on **Roman Snails in Britain** (none in our area!) and of the first find of the rare **Red Cage (Clathrus ruber)** fungus

## **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Following the first of the autumn at Portland on Sep 12 and a second seen off Thanet on Sep 22 we now have three more - one off Christchurch Harbour on Sep 26 and 3 seen off Thanet on Oct 3 and 5 off Worthing on Oct 4

**Black-throated Diver:** First of this autumn off the north Kent coast on Oct 1 with another seen there on Oct 3

**Great Crested Grebe:** The autumn flock in Langstone Harbour had increased to more than 40 birds when the Friends of Langstone Harbour walked around the harbour on Sep 27

**Red-necked Grebe:** First of the autumn were two seen (with a Great Crested) on the sea just off Pagham Harbour on Sep 26

**Sooty Shearwater:** 18 were recorded off Portland on Oct 4 with at least one seen at Christchurch Harbour. On Oct 3 at least **644 Sooties** were seen along the north coast of France along with **295 Balearic Shearwaters** and **1389 Bonxies**.

**Leach's Petrel:** Four were seen off Milford (west of Lymington) on Oct 5

**Cattle Egret:** One in The Fleet area near Weymouth on Sep 28 was only the second report for Sep after one at Brownsea Island on Sep 19

**Whooper Swan:** A family of two adults with one juvenile were seen at Newtown Harbour (north coast of IoW) on Oct 4. Not sure if these are wild birds or escapes. Maybe they will come to the Chichester Lakes on which we has a family of five from 16 Dec 2007 until 10 Feb 2008 (also present in several previous winters - if these are the same pair each winter I think they were first seen in Jan 2002 and since

then have generally been seen only after New Year until they brought young with them for the first time last year)

**Pink-foot Goose:** First of the winter were four flying over the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 29

**Greylag Goose:** John Clark found **400 Greylag** with **250 Canada Geese** during a WeBS count of the Hampshire part of the Avon valley south of Ringwood on Sep 29

**Pale-bellied Brent:** On Oct 1 one was with a group of 8 **Dark-bellied Brent** off Titchfield Haven. It is sometimes difficult to see the breast and belly to be certain that you are looking at a **Pale-bellied Brent** and Bob Chapman gives a useful tip to bear in mind if you only have a rear view of a suspected **Pale-bellied** bird - he points out that a **Dark-bellied** bird will show some darker underbelly feathers extending behind the legs whereas a **Pale-bellied** bird will have nothing but the pure white of the undertail area extending forward to and beyond the legs when seen from the rear.

**Pintail:** On Oct 3 the number at Pulborough increased to 6 and on Oct 4 the first two genuine winter visitors arrived on the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood

**Garganey:** Three were still in the Kent Stour valley on Sep 30 with at least one there on Oct 1

**Scaup:** A juvenile was reported from the Lymington marshes on Sep 27 but has not been mentioned again.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** In my midweek summary I reported "Late news of what may have been the first three to arrive in Langstone Harbour - three were seen from Farlington Marshes on Sep 25" I now see that I was misled by the entry on John Goodspeed's website on which the previous week's dates had not been updated so I think these birds were in fact seen on Oct 2

**Honey Buzzard:** Among others one flew over the Itchen valley country park near Eastleigh on Sep 29 and one went over Dungeness on Sep 30

**Marsh Harrier:** A juvenile was hunting over the Thorney Deeps back on Aug 20 and maybe the same bird was still there on Oct 1. Another was over Pagham Harbour on Oct 2

**Common Buzzard:** 16 seen over the Hastings area on Sep 27 may have arrived from the continent and also that day a group of six over West High Down on the Isle of Wight were seen to be catching insects on the wing.

**Osprey:** On Sep 27 one was fishing in Bridge Lake (Langstone Harbour immediately west of Langstone Bridge) and on Sep 28 two were seen over Thorney Island. Latest news is of 3 again seen over Langstone Harbour on Oct 4. Plenty of other reports but worth noting is **news that I saw on the Folkestone birding news (but which originates from the RSPB website reporting the progress of two radio tagged Ospreys heading south from Loch Garten in Scotland)**. One of these (called Deshar) has been at Folkestone from Aug 23 until Sep 26 when it set out across the channel but kept to a course that was too westerly so the bird failed to see the French coast. The official RSPB blog recording this bird's progress

said on Oct 2 .. "As promised here are the facts about Deshar's momentous flight. He started to show signs of movement at 9am on 26th September, he started at a course of 220 degrees at a speed of 67kph at 238m above sea level. If he had been at 210 degrees it is likely he would have hit France, I suspect the course was very much due to the weather conditions which showed quite a strong north-easterly wind on that day. **He flew for 104 hours non-stop before unfortunately plunging into the North Atlantic Ocean at 17.00 on 30th September, on his 104 hour flight he covered 4,185kms (2600 miles).** The satellite data for between 16.00 and 17.00 on the 30th shows that he had changed his course to 62 degrees at a speed of 18kph". The last sentence implies that the bird realised (after more than 4 days non-stop flying without feeding) that something was wrong and had turned back to retrace its course, but it did so only an hour or so before its strength gave out ... The other bird being tracked is called Nethy and on Oct 2 she was perched near a river close to Angouleme in France. To follow her progress go to <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/lochgartenospreys/index.asp> which shows the map position of the bird but you get nothing by clicking the labels on the map - to find out the story click the 'Read More' link below the 'Latest Blog post'

**Merlin:** One was hunting over the Thornham Marshes on Thorney Island on Sep 28 when another was seen near the Needles on the IoW

**Hobby:** One was still in the Test valley on Oct 3 and another was seen at Durlston on Oct 4

**Grey Partridge:** Martin Hampton saw what he was fairly certain was a **Grey Partridge** in the rough pony field south of Wade Court at Langstone on Sep 28 - while I have not heard of them here before they have been seen on the Warblington Farm fields as recently as last year (and have bred there). I suspect the bird which Martin saw had been released (possibly many miles away) quite recently and had decided not to stay where it was released (wisely if it was released for shooting but may be not so if it was released as part of a well intentioned scheme to reintroduce the species to farmland where no shooting take place)

**Common Crane:** The two birds which arrived in the Dungeness area on Aug 23 and appeared to have settled there flew off on Sep 14 but were back on Sep 28 and still there on Sep 30 - to see photos of them go to <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Dungeness/0809sightings.htm>

**Avocet:** It may be that another wave of these birds is now heading west to winter in our west country. The first wave passing through the Thames estuary area seemed to peak with a count at the Cliffe Pools (on the Isle of Sheppey) of 755 on Aug 1 with no reports of significant numbers there after Aug 4 until Sep 27 when 450+ were reported increasing to 585 on Sep 30.

**Golden Plover:** A few could be seen on the mud beside the Emsworth Channel when looking from the Thorney seawall near the Deeps on Oct 4. This is one of 8 south coast reports this week but the only substantial flock was of 200 in the Thanet area of Kent on Oct 1

**Sanderling:** Around 160 were on the Ryde Sands in the Solent on Oct 2 after 100 had been seen there on Sep 23 - maybe these are now staying here for the winter.

**Little Stint:** Six were recorded at Pulborough Brooks on Sep 30 and Oct 1 but the count was back to 4 on Oct 3. Also on Oct 1 there were three present at Titchfield Haven

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** In addition to single birds at Pulborough Brooks (still there on Oct 1) and Abbotsbury (last reported on Sep 29) a juvenile was seen at the Selsey west fields on Sep 28

**Purple Sandpiper:** Two were seen at Brighton Marina on Sep 28. These seem to be the first on the south coast this autumn although one was seen at the Oare Marshes (north Kent) on Aug 5 and three were reported from Thanet on Aug 12

**Jack Snipe:** One had been seen at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 21 and now a second autumn report comes from the Long Pool near Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on Sep 29. An interesting report for Oct 4 comes from a farmer at Constantia Manor by the Sussex Ouse north of Lewes - **driving his tractor past a muddy pool he was able to get clear and close views of 4 of these birds feeding undisturbed by the very close presence of the large noisy tractor with its human occupant who was unseen by the birds.**

**Spotted Redshank:** One was back in the Emsworth area on Oct 3 but barring across its belly and undertail area showed it to be a juvenile which will not have been here before.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** In addition to the birds at Portland on Aug 12 and at Farlington Marshes on Sep 16 there is now a report of one at Northward Hill (north Kent) on Sep 26

**Grey Phalarope:** The first to be reported since Sep 18 was a juvenile off the north Kent coast on Oct 3. On Oct 4 at least six of these birds arrived on the Dorset coast near Weymouth (3 at Abbotsbury, 2 further south in The Fleet, and one at Christchurch Harbour)

**Arctic Skua:** A surge of Skuas and other seabirds passing west through the English Channel on Oct 4 (the majority being on the French side) brought 24 Arctic Skuas past Worthing and 32 past Portland (probably including 21 seen at Christchurch Harbour)

**Long-tailed Skua:** On Oct 4 six were seen from Christchurch Harbour with 4 probables seen from Portland and one seen from Sandy Point on Hayling. At least one more was seen from Milford (Lymington) on Oct 5

**Great Skua:** 15 went past Portland on Oct 4

**Sabine's Gull:** An adult was seen off north Kent on Oct 3 (with **27 Bonxies** and a **juvenile Long-tailed Skua**)

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** Following Bob Chapman's estimated of around 10,000 of these coming to roost at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) on Sep 24 John Clark counted them on the evening of Sep 29 and saw 7,500 with at least 250 Herring Gulls

**Sandwich Tern:** Ten seen in the Solent off Ryde on Oct 2 and two off north Kent on Oct 3 are probably not intending to winter here though any seen from now on in Langstone or Chichester Harbours may well stay.

**Common Tern:** Also unlikely to stay with us were four still in Southampton Water on Oct 4 and three flying west over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 3

**Guillemot:** One swimming close to the shore at the Lymington marshes on Sep 27 was attacked, killed and eaten by a Great Blackback Gull (not untypical of the behaviour of these large rapacious gulls)

**Razorbill:** One was in Langstone Harbour, seen from the Milton shore of Portsmouth, on Sep 27 and three in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 3

**Cuckoo:** One was still in the East Grinstead area on Oct 1

**Tawny Owl:** On Sep 29 I was told that Tawnies could be heard nightly at present in the area of the Hayling Billy Trail just north of the A27 here in Havant and residents in part of Christchurch will also have heard them when three owls were all calling ceaselessly from 3am onwards on the morning of Sep 29. More night-time hooting was reported at Durlston on the night of Oct 3-4. On Sep 27 **an owl coming to bathe in a garden pond at Denmead (east of the Meon valley) became inextricably tangled in wires around the pond** (presumably put there to deter **Herons** from fishing). Luckily the owl suffered no serious damage and was released after it had been cut free.

**Long-eared Owl:** The first report of the arrival of a wintering bird on the south coast comes from Rye Harbour on Oct 3 though the sighting (by Sam Smith, one of the wardens) is only described as 'probable'

**Short-eared Owl:** Quite a few of these are now coming into souther Britain - nine were found at Portland on Sep 29; two were at Dungeness on Sep 28 when one was seen at Hook (Warsash); and three were at Beachy Head on Sep 27. Back on Sep 26 one was hunting over the Thornham Marshes on Thorney and on Sep 30 Russell Wynn saw one near the Needles on the IoW during a day on which he saw ten species of raptor. Since I wrote that for the mid-week summary there have been three reports from Dorset sites, all on Oct 3, and on Oct 4 one was still hunting over Thornham Marshes on Thorney

**Kingfisher:** On Oct 4 one was seen flying along the 'canal' which connects the Thorney Little and Great Deeps just inside the seawall. Also on Oct 4 Keith Betton made Hoslist readers aware of a story on the Daily Mail website - this told how a Kingfisher had twice flown into the kitchen of a house in Herefordshire, on the second occasion allowing the owner of the house to take a photo of the bird sitting calmly beside a teapot and then allowing the owner (a retired farmer aged 74) to pick the bird up in his hands and put it out. The farmer said that the bird had been coming to take fish from his garden pond since last November - to see the story with photos go to

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1068549/The-kingfisher-came-tea-Britains-shyest-bird-makes-home-kitchen.html>

**Turtle Dove:** What was probably the last for the year was reported by Portland on Sep 27 (one or two do occasionally winter on the south coast)

**Nightjar:** Latest report is of one at Portland on Sep 28

**Swift:** One was seen at Barton in the Christchurch area on Sep 27 and an unspecified 'small group' of them went over Durlston on Sep 29

**Wryneck:** Latest sighting was of one on Thorney Island on Sep 27

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** These have been appearing at coastal sites since July and numbers peaked on Sep 12 when 8 were seen at Sandwich Bay and another 5 at Christchurch Harbour. On Sep 28 one appeared in the Havant area around my home and was heard again next day but not since.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** I had the impression that these remained silent throughout the year other than a couple of months in the early spring but on Sep 21 I reported that one had been heard 'drumming and calling' at Boughton Park (south of Maidstone in Kent) and now Russell Wynn tells us that he heard one drumming in the Brockenhurst area of the New Forest on Sep 14

**Wood Lark:** One was singing for around 20 minutes somewhere in the Horsham area on Oct 1 so maybe someone will hear one at Stansted...

**Skylark:** Counts from Christchurch Harbour of 42 moving over on Oct 2 and 28 doing so on Oct 3 show that they are now starting to move to winter quarters (and may well provoke local birds intending to stay where they are for the winter to sing in defence of their territory)

**Shore Lark:** First to be reported this autumn flew over St Aldhelm's Head in Dorset on Sep 27

**Swallow:** In most places the supply of these seems to have dried up in the last few days but on Sep 30 Durlston reported them flying over at a rate of 2700 per hour for much of the morning and 250 went over that site on Oct 4

**House Martin:** Numbers passing over Dorset and Hampshire have dropped off in the last few days but over in east Kent they continue to fill the sky. On Sep 30 Sandwich Bay reported 55,000 going over while Durlston had just 300. On Sep 29 Thanet had 8200 over with another 1700 at Folkestone but only 220 at Christchurch Harbour. Oct 3 brought a massive surge of these birds over east Kent with one estimate of 20,000 going over Sandwich Bay that day when more than 300 flew over Pulborough Brooks and more than 50 flew south down the Test valley. Latest report is of 120 over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 4 (with 200 over the Blashford Lakes that day)

**Richard's Pipit:** First for the year was at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 29. Breeds far from us in Siberia. On Oct 3 one was flushed from the shore at Climping (mouth of R Arun) and flew west - possibly the same bird was seen at Christchurch Harbour on that day.

**Red-throated Pipit:** Steve Keen was convinced by its calls that one flew over him at Barton on Sea on Sep 29 - if he can convince others this will be the second

record of the species for Hampshire. This species breeds within the Arctic Circle in the extreme north of Scandinavia and Siberia.

**Rock Pipit:** One at Black Point (Hayling Island) on Sep 27 was the first in our local Solent harbours since March. The species breeds on the Hampshire coast west of Southampton Water and may have done so in the Southsea Castle area of Portsmouth but elsewhere around these harbours it is just a winter visitor.

**Yellow Wagtail:** Still being seen on Oct 3 when 3 were at Portland and one was at Climping in west Sussex. Another 3 were at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 4

**Fieldfare:** One had been seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 26 and another has been seen at Sandwich Bay on Oct 3

**Song Thrush:** A count of 76 at Bockhill (South Foreland in Kent) on Sep 27 was the biggest influx I have seen reported so far although the total number of migrant birds reported this autumn since they started arriving on Sep 13 is at least 440

**Redwing:** The first autumn migrant that I am aware of arrived on Sep 15 and the total number of birds reported so far is 95

**Savi's Warbler:** First report for the year was of one at Sandwich Bay on Sep 29. Probably not a long distance wanderer as they breed just across the channel and have bred in Britain.

**Barred Warbler:** Following one at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 and another in Thanet on Sep 18 there has been one at Bockhill (South Foreland) on Sep 26 and 28. This species breeds in eastern Europe but not as far north as Siberia.

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** By Oct 3 I had seen 16 reports covering 18 birds from sites in east Kent and Portland (but so far none from Sussex or Hampshire)

**Radde's Warbler:** I have already reported one at Sandwich Bay on Sep 26 but since then I have seen a report of one in the nearby Thanet area on the same day - maybe the same bird, maybe not.

**Dusky Warbler:** The first for the year was at Bockhill on Sep 26 and 27 - this, like the **Radde's Warbler**, has probably taken a wrong route and come here after breeding in Siberia.

**Wood Warbler:** It is unusual to see these on autumn passage but this year there have been 14 reports - the two new ones come from the Test valley near Romsey on Sep 27 plus belated news of one in the Brockenhurst area of the New Forest on Sep 13

**Goldcrest:** We have seen plenty of reports of these arriving from the continent since Sep 8 but I was surprised to see that there were more than 1000 at Bockhill (South Foreland) on Sep 27 giving a minimum total of 2765 continental birds arriving here for the winter so far. On Oct 4 Southampton Common had **23 Goldcrest** and **1 Firecrest**

**Penduline Tit:** One of these landed briefly at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 29 before continuing west (first report for this autumn)

**Red-backed Shrike:** The one which arrived on Thorney Island on Sep 13 was still being seen on Oct 4 while Sep 27 brought news of three others at Lymington, Sandwich Bay and the Devils Dyke area near Poynings north of Brighton - the one at Lymington was still there on Oct 4

**Great Grey Shrike:** Three reports so far this autumn, maybe all of the same bird which was seen in the Thanet area on Sep 24 and 25, then at Bockhill (South Foreland) on Sep 26

**Raven:** John Clark tells us that he has just finished writing up **Ravens** for the 2007 Hampshire Bird Report and in it he gives a figure of **27 territorial pairs** present in Hampshire that year with 11 of them known to have bred, 7 of them successfully raising young.

**Chaffinch:** No autumn passage reports of more than 100+ on this side of the English Channel so far but the [Trektellen.nl](http://trektellen.nl) website which lists bird sightings at many north west European sites reports **25,288 Chaffinch** heading west through Holland on Oct 4.

To use this website go to <http://trektellen.nl/kaart.asp?site=0&taal=2&land=1> for an overview of where the sites are located (on this and other pages of the website select English at the top left of the page) but for latest counts it is best to go to the homepage <http://trektellen.nl/> which lists reporting sites in order of the latest report from that site - clicking the date will give you the detail of the report. (To see the figure for Chaffinches find the site named Oelemars in those listed for Oct 4 and then click the date which appears in red) The site has many other facilities to explore.

**Brambling:** The first of the autumn was seen in Thanet on Sep 17 and so far I have seen 12 reports of sightings in Kent and Dorset before one was seen in Sussex (heading south over Wivelsfield Green near Haywards Heath on Oct 4). No Hampshire sightings so far.

**Goldfinch:** As usual in the autumn vast numbers of these appear 'from nowhere' and move along our southern coasts. Since Sep 25 the reports I have seen cover a total of around 4982 birds, including one report of 1020 at Sandwich Bay on Sep 29 and 510 over Durlston on Oct 4

**Siskin:** These have been arriving from the south and moving north since the beginning of September and the latest reports include a count of 719 passing Sandwich Bay on Sep 29 (total for the autumn is close to 20,000)

**Linnet:** These too started to be reported at the beginning of Sep but numbers have picked up since 300+ were reported at Durlston on Sep 29 though so far I have only seen 24 reports of a total of 2491 birds

**Hawfinch:** A report of 10 seen near the Chichester West Dean woods on Sep 12 was thought to be a possible indication of local breeding rather than migration but news of 2 passing over Durlston on Oct 4 shows that some are now moving (as does a report of a single **Bullfinch** flying high east over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 1)

**Lapland Bunting:** One flying over Portland on Oct 2 is the sixth to be reported this autumn (first was on Sep 13) but all reports so far are from Dorset sites

**Reed Bunting:** Just 19 reports covering a total of 542 birds since the beginning of September but almost half of the birds are in two reports from Christchurch Harbour (126 on Sep 25 and 110 on Sep 29)

**Escapees:** A **Harris Hawk** was seen over Thorney Island on Sep 28 and a **Fulvous Whistling Duck** was at Hook (Warsash) on Sep 29

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter:** A male seen at Budds Farm in Havant on Oct 1

**Migrant Hawker:** Latest report is of one around Stansted House (north of Emsworth) on Sep 26

### Butterflies

**17 species still being mentioned in recent reports** including ...

**Clouded Yellow:** One again reported at Durlston on Sep 29 - there must be a resident colony there as there is in Bournemouth

**Small Copper:** This regularly has a third generation which emerges in October and counts of 13 at both Barton on Sea and at Lymington on Sep 27 confirm this

**Brown Argus:** Still active at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on Sep 25 and a report of a new brood emerging at Shoreham Mill Hill on Oct 2 (5 seen there)

**Common Blue:** Still to be seen on Portsdown on Sep 28 and at Durlston on Sep 29

**Chalkhill Blue:** Seen at Kingley Vale (north of Chichester) on Sep 28

**Adonis Blue:** 11 seen on Mill Hill at Shoreham on Sep 26 and more than 12 there on Oct 2

**Peacock:** Most butterflies of species which hibernate to breed next spring go into hibernation very soon after emerging (even if they emerge in good weather as early as the end of July) so there was nothing unexpected when a fresh Peacock was seen to fly down into a cold dark cellar in the Eastbourne area on Sep 28 - a look into the cellar showed that it was joining another five already there and 'fast asleep'.

**Queen of Spain Fritillary:** Late news of one found at Brandy Hole copse (north west fringe of Chichester) around Sep 12 - I think it was found alive but soon died. (See my entry in last Sunday's Weekly Summary)

**Wall Brown:** Singles seen at Lymington on Sep 27 and at Durlston on Sep 29 are presumably remnants of the summer brood - there could still be a further brood emerging in October

**Small Heath:** 1 still flying at Shoreham Mill Hill on Oct 2

## Moths

**Oak Lutestring (1658 *Cymatophorima diluta*):** First of year that I know of in the Newhaven area on Sep 25

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** One more report of a Seaford garden sighting on Sep 26 and another at Worthing on Sep 29 brings the total number of reports for this year to just 41 (covering 45 moths)

**Pink-barred Sallow (2273 *Xanthia togata*):** First for the year at Ringmer near Lewes on Sep 27

**Clifden Nonpareil (2451 *Catocala fraxini*):** Following the one seen in Hastings on Sep 17 we now have three more reports. On Sep 6 one came to Russell Wynn's moth trap at Brockenhurst in the New Forest and on Sep 25 and 26 there were sightings at two separate places in the Rother Woods (north of Hastings)

## Other Insects

**Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*):** We have heard much of the large colony of these recent invaders from the continent to be found on the sandy cliffs at Hastings but on Sep 30 they get a mention on the Durlston website and have presumably established a foothold there.

**Grey Bush-cricket (*Platycleis albopunctata*):** One had its photo in a Rye Bay website entry for Sep 28

**Dark Bush Cricket (*Pholidoptera griseoptera*):** One still to be seen at Durlston on Oct 4

## PLANTS

Unsurprisingly no new flowerings have been noted in the past week but I have started my winter routine of recording how many species are in flower in each month from October to March and this count was up to 109 by Oct 4 - see my diary entry for Oct 1 for some of the plants seen on that day. Noteworthy species seen so far this month include **Early Dog Violet, Weasel's Snout, Green Alkanet, Butchers Broom, Fool's Parsley, Pencilled Cranesbill, Greater Willowherb and Water Pepper**

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Otter:** In the late afternoon of Sep 27 Andy Johnson made a stunning discovery which he described (in an email on Oct 28) in these words - "I finished off an amazing day yesterday by finding **an OTTER in Chichester Harbour entrance channel** shortly before 7pm. My attention was drawn to it by a swirling mass of

gulls over the water, and with mirror-calm conditions it was easy to watch it feeding, diving and generally loitering for over 20 minutes before it became too dark. Viewed from the Lifeboat Station, it was way over on the Sussex side of the channel (and may be worth looking for from that side) approximately half way along East Head. This evening it was back in exactly the same place from around 18.50, although the water was very slightly choppy, making the views less satisfying than yesterday. Nevertheless, it may prove to be a regular event". Andy's news prompted Trevor Carpenter to tell us that, around midday on Oct 28, he too had probably seen the same **Otter** off the Mill Rytte area of east Hayling (roughly west of Pilsey Island south of Thorney Island) but could not identify what it was (he said it was diving like a small Seal).

In the past I have heard of **Otters** travelling many miles overland in search of a new river on which to set up territory, and I believe that **Otters** breed on the River Itchen, so maybe one of them set off downstream to Southampton Water, turned left and headed east through the Solent to reach Chichester Harbour. Maybe this is even the same animal which, on Aug 7, gave Colin Bates so much pleasure when it came out of the River Itchen in the Brambridge (Eastleigh) area and climbed onto the tree branch on which Colin was sitting - perhaps it was then already on its journey south from the Winchester area?

**Common Seal:** The Friends of Langstone Harbour made their annual 'round the harbour' walk on Sep 27 and one of their rewards was to see **three Common Seals** in the water off Broadmarsh.

**Red Deer:** I had thought that September was too early for **Red Deer** rutting but Russell Wynn tells us that throughout the past month he has heard the bellowing of a **Stag** (guarding his **harem of 17 Hinds** from the attentions of a **young Stag**) in the area of the New Forest south of Brockenhurst where Russell now lives - he says the bellowing can be heard as much as a kilometre away from the **Stag**.

**Fungi:** A troop of **Parrot Waxcaps** has come up on my lawn this week and on Sep 29 when I was walking on the south face of Portsdown I came on a cluster of what looked like oversize cigars standing vertically around 8cm high and having a similar girth (too fat to get into the normal mouth to smoke!). I am pretty sure these are the stems of what are now called **Pestle Puffballs (*Handkea excipuliformis*)** - listed in Roger Phillips as ***Calvatia excipuliformis***. I read that the stems of this species can persist and look almost fresh for months after the head of the puffball has done its work and disappeared. New fungi seen at Durlston on Oct 5 include **Clathrus ruber (or Red Cage)**, **Dead Man's Fingers (*Xylaria polymorpha*)** and **Yellow Brain (*Tremella mesenterica*)**

**Roman Snail:** This is a non-sighting but it may save others from making the mistake that I nearly made this week. When on Portsdown I came across a very large snail with a light brown colour to its shell hanging from a plant stem and this caused me to wonder if it could be a **Roman Snail (*Helix pomatia*)** which is a close relative of the very common **Garden Snail (*Helix aspersa*)** but is distinguished from it by being larger and having a light brown colour. My snail book (Land Snails of the British Isles by A A Wardhaugh in the Shire Natural History series) tells me that the **Garden Snail** shell measures 3 cm in width and is about 3 cm high while

the **Roman Snail** is 4 cm wide and 4 high, and as the snail which I saw measured just over 3 cm in width, and had a much lighter brown colour than the Snails which I find in my garden, and I read that **Roman Snails** live on chalk grassland, I asked Richard Jones (in charge of the wildlife of Portsdown for Portsmouth City) if **Roman Snails** existed on Portsdown - his answer was that he had never come across them and that Portsdown is far from the areas where they can be found (but he did not tell me where that might be!).

My next step was to consult Google and I almost gave up on this quest as the main interest in this species (as far as users of the internet are concerned) is that this is the edible 'Escargot' species and it is widely farmed and sold commercially. However, on the third page of the hits listed by Google, I came on a pdf document, written by what was then called the JNCC, describing the status of the species in Britain in response to the EEC directive on the conservation of rare species and this has a map showing the areas in which the snail can be found and gives what was described as a population estimate of 51 (at a guess this is the number to 10 km squares in which it may be found rather than a number of individuals!). The areas mapped are the North Downs (running south of London and east into Kent) and a band stretching from near Gloucester north east towards Suffolk (presumably taking in the Cotswold and Chiltern hills). As single small dot may be in the Salisbury Plain area but there are no signs of the species being found in Hampshire or on the South Downs. If you are interested see <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/Article17/FCS2007-S1026-Final.pdf>

Should you ever think you have found a genuine Roman Snail there is one other test to apply, and that is to check if it has an '**umbilicus**' (a small depression similar to our human 'tummy button'). Garden Snails do not have one, Romans have a small one (and several other species clearly have one). To look for an **umbilicus** hold the shell with its top uppermost and look in the centre of the underside (next to the inner side of the 'mouth' of the shell)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 29 - OCT 5 (WEEK 39 OF 2008)**

### Wed 1 Oct

#### A good start to winter flowering plants

I like to keep a record of the number of plant species seen flowering during each of the months from October to March and we started off the October list today with 83 species found while cycling round Havant.

The best selection were found alongside Southmoor Lane on my way to Budds Farm, most of the interesting ones being either garden escapes or from seed probably planted by Havant Borough. Among the latter are the **Corn Cockles**, **Cornflowers** and **Corn Marigolds** on the new soil outside the still unused ne carpark at the south end of the lane. Also flowering here, but not from seed, were a couple of **Slender Thistles** and one plant of **Small Flowered Cranesbill** (seen across the road from the planting and growing 'in the gutter'). Further up the lane the roadside has a good show of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** with **Dove's Foot Cranesbill**, **Storksbill**, **Black Mustard** plus **Garden Lobelia** and **Californian Poppy**.

The Langbrook Stream still had **Stream Water Crowfoot** and **Water Forget-me-not** while Langstone village new housing had **Least Yellow Sorrel** and the Lymbourne Stream still had **Lesser Water Parsnip** and, on the piles of wood chips, the **Agrocybe rivulosa fungi** still persist in large numbers. Back at home **Parrot Waxcaps** are still to be found in the lawn.

The only bird interest came at Budds Farm pools (where a male **Common Darter** was sunning itself on the bare earth where people climb over to view the pools). The **Swan pair** were still present with their five cygnets and the **Coot** numbers were not much over 30 with the usual **Little Grebes** and **Moorhens**. Relatively few **Mallard** and **Tufted Duck** and less than ten each of **Gadwall**, **Shoveler** and **Teal** were seen in a quick glance (and no hirundines!)

[Mon 29 Sep](#)

### A walk on Portsdown

This afternoon I walked west from Fort Widley to a point the mid-point of the Paulsgrove chalk pit, returning by a different route and seeing just under 70 plant species in flower as well as a few butterflies (half a dozen **Meadow Browns**, a **Red Admiral** and many **Whites**), a single **Common Lizard**, and the remains of a cluster of **large Puffballs** (listed in Roger Phillips as **Calvatia excipuliformis** but now known by the generic name of **Handkea** and given the English name of **Pestle Puffball**).

Among the more interesting flowers were many **Harebells** and one fine example of **Nettle-leaved Bellflower** while **Eyebright** was everywhere and there was lots of **Small Scabious**. Of interest to me were three freshly flowering plants of **Common Gromwell** and left over **Ploughman's Spikenard** (also **Tansy** which I noticed when driving past the front of Fort Widley). Two unexpected additions to the list were **Betony** and **Bladder Campion**.

Hanging from the stem of one plant was a large snail which looked similar to the very common **Garden Snail (*Helix aspersa*)** but the shell seemed larger than usual and had a much lighter brown colour, raising the question of whether it could be an example of the rare **Roman Snail, *Helix pomatia***, (which is found occasionally on chalk based habitat in southern England) but this was pretty well ruled out by the fact the **Roman Snail** shell measures 4 cm in width and 4 cm in height against 3x3 for the **Garden Snail** and this one was only a fraction over 3cm in width. This negative answer was backed up by a query to Richard Jones who manages the wildlife and habitat of Portsdown for Portsmouth City - I asked if Richard had ever heard of **Roman Snails** on the hill and he said no. Should the query arise again I see that there is another way of distinguishing the two species - in the centre of the underside of a snail shell there is a small depression called an **Umbilicus** (after our human 'Tummy Button') and the books say that **the Roman Snail has a very small umbilicus but the Garden Snail does not have one at all**.

A Google search for information about **Roman Snails** occurring 'wild' in Britain was hampered by the fact that this is 'the edible snail' which is served in restaurants as 'escargot' and it is therefore extensively farmed with most interest in the species concentrating on this aspect but I eventually found a pdf concerning the wild

species under the EEC Conservation Directive (see <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/Article17/FCS2007-S1026-Final.pdf> ) and this seems to tell me that there were only 51 of these snails known in Britain in the period 1980 to 1999 (I may have got this wrong!) and that they are only to be found in two belts of chalkland - one is the North Downs running from East Sussex into north Kent and the other is a belt running from Gloucestershire to Suffolk which includes the Chiltern Hills.

## SUMMARY FOR SEP 22 - 28 (WEEK 38 OF 2008)

### BIRDS

**Red-throated Diver:** One in summer plumage was off the North Foreland in Kent on Sep 22 and another was seen off Christchurch Harbour on Sep 26

**Great Northern Diver:** One off Portland on Sep 21

**Black-necked Grebe:** At least two in Langstone Harbour from Sep 21 and singles at Pagham Lagoon and Abbotsbury in Dorset

**Leach's Petrel:** The very first to get a mention anywhere this year was off Sheppey in north Kent on Sep 22. I am not certain if the observer was confident that he was seeing a Leach's rather than a Storm Petrel - what he said was .. "The best thing was at 1430 I saw a very distant falcon swooping and chasing low over the water, as it got closer I could see that it was a **Merlin** and later still that it was trying to catch a **Leach's Petrel**. The Petrel avoided all attacks and eventually the falcon gave up and came in over the Hamlet and the Petrel went back out to sea."

**Cormorant:** I have not heard of a roost in trees at Ivy Lake, Chichester, but on the night of Sep 24 the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood had a roost of at least 120 birds

**Bittern:** The first winter visitor to the south is reported to have arrived at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Sep 21 and a second was at Radipole (Weymouth) on Sep 24. There were reports of birds booming in the Kent Stour valley from Apr 10 through to June 13 and one was seen flying there on July 28 but no reports since then.

**Little Egret:** By chance the roost near the Little Deeps on Thorney and the one at Langstone Pond (less than 4 km to the west) were both counted on the evening of Sep 26 with 190 birds at Thorney and 139 at Langstone. Just one of the birds coming from the west towards Langstone ignored the roost there and continued east to Thorney where the presence of a **Marsh Harrier** roosting at the Little Deeps did not on this occasion disturb the Egrets there.

**Grey Heron:** There is undoubtedly a certain amount of autumn movement by these birds with most of the reports of high flying birds seen at coastal sites seeming to indicate that some Herons leave us and head south for the winter but when counting the Egret roost at Langstone on the evening of Sep 26 I noticed that (in addition to the expected three Herons in the nearby trees) there was a 'siege' of six Herons in the saltings off the pond - this is the first time I have noticed them there since last winter and I guess they may be birds which have come south to spend

the winter in the harbour (though I have no proof that they are not local birds which have been elsewhere locally during the summer).

**Night Heron:** One flew east over the Black Point area of Hayling on the morning of Sep 28 and continued past East Head. It flew low over the head of Andy Johnson whose attention was attracted to it by a call which he describes as "a "quaack!" - the sort of noise one might expect to hear from a toy duck!"

**Brent Goose:** By Sep 25 Brent were back on the north shore of Langstone Harbour with 13 in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream just west of Langstone village.

**Pale-bellied Brent:** First south coast report if of two birds seen among Dark-bellied birds at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25

**Shelduck:** Two adults with two juveniles were in the main pool of the Hayling Oysterbeds when it was empty of water at low tide on Sep 25

**Wigeon:** More than 200 were on the Thorney Deeps on Sep 23 and on Sep 26 Barry Collins gave an estimate of more than 2000 in the eastern end of the Great Deeps

**Teal:** More than 100 were in the Mill Rythe area of east Hayling on Sep 21

**Pintail:** Ten were seen flying over Thorney Island on Sep 22

**Garganey:** A very brief sighting of a small duck at Hook (Warsash) scrape on Sep 23 showed the dull brown (no bright green) speculum in its wing before it disappeared from sight. Since then there have been reports of a female at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex on Sep 24 and one at Farlington Marshes on Sep 25

**Goosander:** One was at the Blashford Lakes on Sep 24 but it was probably one that had been breeding locally in the Avon valley (two juveniles had been seen in Christchurch Harbour on Aug 20 and there had been two sightings of an adult female at the Blashford Lakes during June)

**Marsh Harrier:** On the evening of Sep 23 **two Marsh Harriers** (a female and a juvenile) were over the Thorney Little Deeps to the consternation of **Little Egrets** coming to roost there - the **Egrets** are said to have changed their minds and headed off to the Langstone roost (pity no one was there to confirm the total that night). Another female **Marsh Harrier** was over the north of Pagham Harbour on Sep 23 and at least one was seen over the Thorney Deeps on Sep 24 with a second over the south of the island. On Sep 26 one again roosted at the Thorney Little Deeps but this time it did not frighten off the Egrets coming to roost.

**Hen Harrier:** The first to be reported back in the Leaden Hall/Hampton Ridge area near Godshill in the New Forest was seen on Sep 25. This could be the same bird which came in off the sea at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 24 and was seen early on Sep 25 at Barton on Sea. The bird may not stay in the Leaden Hall area as it was being used for low hovering practice by two different helicopters (a problem that has occurred in previous years though letters to the military authorities have

achieved temporary relief - no doubt that approach will be tried again but it may have no effect on any non-military offenders)

**Osprey:** After the peak count of 5 over Thorney Island on Sep 17 there has been a sighting of 4 there on Sep 20 with reports of singles there on Sep 21, 22 and 24. Also on Sep 21 two arrived together over Langstone Harbour and two were again seen there on Sep 25. Other sightings in the last few days have been at Shoreham (over the R Adur), Abbotsbury in Dorset, the Downs near Steyning north of Worthing, and Horsham

**Spotted Crane:** Single birds were seen at Farlington Marshes in Langstone Harbour and the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Sep 20 but neither has been reported since.

**Great Bustard:** News of the re-introduction scheme on Salisbury Plain appeared in the Daily Telegraph on Sep 26 after 18 young birds were released on Sep 25 to join around 20 others that are all that remain of the overall total of 70 that have been released since the start of the scheme in 2004. The males of this large species do not breed until they 4 or 5 years old so the birds released in 2004 were not expected to produce any young until 2008 but one female laid two eggs in 2007 - maybe they were infertile as there has been no news of any young. For this and much more news visit <http://www.greatbustard.com/>

**Sanderling:** The first three figure count since July comes from the Ryde Sands where 100 were seen on Sep 23

**Little Stint:** On Sep 21 around 5 were at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour and 3 were at Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour). Other singles seen this week were at Pulborough Brooks, Ferrybridge and Lodmoor in the Weymouth area, Abbotsbury, and one unexpectedly at Woolmer Pond in East Hampshire on Sep 25

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** The bird seen at Farlington Marshes on Sep 21 has not been reported again but the one at Pulborough Brooks has been seen daily from Sep 20 to 25. Another bird was at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Sep 24 and 25

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** One was seen well enough for a good identification when it flew low (not once but twice) past Steve Keen at Barton on Sea on Sep 26. (First report for this year)

**Jack Snipe:** First to be reported this autumn was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 21 with 14 newly arrived Common Snipe

**Woodcock:** What was probably the first migrant arrival of the autumn was seen in the Brownwich area west of Titchfield Haven early on Sep 27 - Mark Edgeller, who saw it, writes that it "appeared out of the gloom at 7.00, did a couple of circuits over Meon Shore before dropping like a stone into the Haven".

**Black-tailed Godwit:** On Sep 19 a total of 238 birds in Chichester Harbour were equally divided between the Fishbourne Channel and Colner Creek at Bosham but on Sep 22 (when the tide was lower) a total of 234 were in Fishbourne Creek with just 10 in Colner Creek and 12 in Esmworth Harbour.

**Common Sandpiper:** Very few now being reported. Latest news is of 2 at Weir Wood in north Sussex on Sep 21 and singles at Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) and Christchurch Harbour, both these on Sep 23

**Pomarine Skua:** One was around Sheppey on Sep 22 and two were seen at Reculver (further east on the north Kent coast) on Sep 23 - probably part of a mass exodus of Skuas from the North Sea now that the Terns have left.

**Arctic Skua:** A more substantial indication of this exodus comes in counts of 53 at Reculver, 28 at the Oare Marshes and 24 in the Thanet area, all on the north Kent coast on Sep 23

**Long-tailed Skua:** More than one seen in the Thanet area on Sep 23

**Great Skua:** The most impressive count is of 267 of these **Bonxies** off Reculver on Sep 23 (one flock had 61 birds), with 50 reported from Thanet and 6 from Oare Marshes that day

**Little Gull:** At least 50 were on the north Kent coast on Sep 23 (36 at the Oare Marshes and 14 in the Thanet area)

**Sabine's Gull:** Two were seen off Reculver on Sep 23 with another (juvenile) reported at Oare Marshes that day.

**Black-headed Gull:** First report of **gulls following the plough** was of around 450 Black-headed on the fields south west of Fareham on Sep 21

**Audouin's Gull:** A 'possible' reported off St Aldhelm's Head (south of the Purbeck Hills) on Sep 27 - if true this is the first report of the species for the year

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** Bob Chapman estimates that around 10,000 large gulls (mostly Lesser Blackbacks) came to roost at the Blashford Lakes on the evening of Sep 24. Bob adds that the number is inflated by birds on passage as nothing like this number are present in the winter but this year is not, I think, exceptional - peaks of 6500 on 28 Sep 2003 and 2800 on 26 Sep 2004 were recorded by John Clark for Lesser Blackbacks alone. The peak count at Blashford in 2005 was 5098 and came in October, in 2006 it was 3150 in September,

**Sandwich Tern:** The fact that most have departed is emphasised in the low counts now being reported. On Sep 23 the only reports were of 27 in the Thanet area, 11 at Oare Marshes. and just 4 seen off Ryde (IoW). On Sep 24 Rye Harbour had just 24. At least two were in Langstone Harbour on Sep 25.

**Turtle Dove:** Two could still be seen at Portland on Sep 25

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** Two noisily flew east over Hardham (close to Pulborough) on Sep 22

**Cuckoo:** One was still to be seen in the Chilling area near Warsash on Sep 21

**Barn Owl:** One could again be seen hunting over the Thornham Marshes (north east Thorney Island) at dusk on Sep 26

**Short-eared Owl:** Among several recent sightings one was at Titchfield Haven on Sep 24 and another was at the Thornham Marshes on Thorney on Sep 26

**Nightjar:** Further evidence of Nightjars choosing strange places to rest when on migration come from the Crawley area where, at dawn on Sep 12, one was seen sitting on the roof of a silver car outside a house at Warninglid - it remained there for 45 minutes after it was first spotted.. Latest report is of one at Durlston on Sep 22

**Swift:** Late reports of singles over Southampton on Sep 20 and Christchurch Harbour on Sep 23 with one in the Christchurch area near Barton on Sea on Sep 25

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** One is reported to have been heard drumming and calling at Broughton Park south of Maidstone in Kent on Sep 21

**Woodlark:** Small numbers appear to breed on the Stansted estate north of Emsworth but larger numbers seem to winter there. The maximum reported during the breeding season this year was 6+ on July 28 but 14 were there on Jan 1 this year and 12 have now been seen feeding in the East Park area on Sep 19. Latest report was of at least one at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 26

**Skylark:** Migrants noted in both the Titchfield and Hastings areas on Sep 21 and on Sep 26 5 flew north up the Test vally over Casbrook Common (north of Romsey)

**Crag Martin:** On Sep 21 one was seen to circle Beeding Hill (on the west bank of the R Adur north of the Downs) twice before flying east. The BTO Bird Facts webpage says that this species was first recorded in Britain in 1988 (in Cornwall) and that there were only five more records up to 2004 - these came from Wales, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Kent and East Sussex (one there in 1996). The current bird seems to be the only one in addition to the six listed. The Sussex Bird Report for 1996 gives a different version of the BTO Facts, saying that the 1996 bird was in fact seen on 8 Oct 1995 and that the first for the county was at Beachy Head on 9 July 1988, (the 1989 report adds that this one was two weeks later than the first for Britain, seen in Cornwall)

**House Martin:** Huge numbers have been seen along the south coast in the past week with significant reports coming from the Barton on sea area (just east of Christchurch) where an estimated total of around 16,000 were seen on Sep 23 (with one pure white bird among them!). The majority of these birds seem to have been following the Avon and Stour rivers south until they meet at Christchurch and the birds then turn east along the coast. Soon after dawn on Sep 23 around 2000 of the birds seen at Barton were thought to have spent the night clinging to local cliffs and this elicited the fact that no one seems to know where House Martins spend their nights when on migration (they certainly do not join the Swallows and Sand Martins in coastal reed beds). One piece of evidence which I observed sometime in the 1980s was of more than 100 spending an autumn night clinging to the vertical face of a brick building here in the Havant area (I saw them as the early sun was just warming the face of the building and observed that the birds appeared unable to take off until they had been warmed for several minutes by the sun). Further enquiries at that time discovered that House Martins also roost in trees and maybe they also settle on the rooves of houses.

**Tree Pipit:** Peak count of 10 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 24

**Meadow Pipit:** Around 1000 were grounded at Portland on Sep 23 and a peak count of 2800 went over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25

**Rock Pipit:** These are now being seen at coastal sites where they do not breed. One was at Folkestone on Sep 24 and one was at Sandy Point on Hayling on Sep 28

**Water Pipit:** These too are on the move and the first autumn report was from Barton on Sea on Sep 25

**Yellow Wagtail:** Still plenty of sightings with a peak count of only 30 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 21. Latest sighting was of 9 in the Sandy Point area of Hayling on Sep 28

**Grey Wagtail:** Peak count of 14 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25

**Alba Wagtail:** Peak count of 155 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 24

**Dunnock: Robin and Wren** can both be heard singing now and last year **Dunnock** resumed singing on Sep 22 but I have not yet heard one in full song this year - however on both Sep 24 and 25 I heard continuous sub-song coming from dense shrubs and thought the bird singing might be a Dunnock, and since then I have been told that Dunnock do have a sub-song which is similar to their full song

**Robin:** A further influx of 150 Robins was found at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Sep 25 and I am pretty sure that thousands of continental Robins are now settled in English gardens for the winter.

**Common Redstart:** Still plenty of sightings but none of more than 2 birds this week

**Whinchat:** Peak counts of 16 and 10 both at Portland on Sep 21 and 26

**Wheatear:** 50 at Portland on Sep 23 and 62 at Thanet on Sep 26 with plenty of small sightings

**Ring Ouzel:** Ones or twos at ten sites this week including Leaden Hall in the north west of the New Forest and one at a posh housing estate called Glebelands which somehow got planning permission to be built on Ballard Down about a mile south of Studland village - the houses have magnificent views over the sea off the entrance to Christchurch Harbour

**Blackbird:** A number of these have now arrived from the continent but the only report confirming this comes from the Brownwich area west of Titchfield Haven where two presumed migrants were seen on Sep 21

**Fieldfare:** First of the autumn was a lone bird in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 26

**Song Thrush:** A few continental birds started to arrive in the Hastings area on Sep 13 and others were seen at Dungeness on Sep 14, then in Thanet on Sep 16 and at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 17. On Sep 20 a flock of 10 'nervous' birds was noted in the Sheepcote Valley at Brighton, and on Sep 22 a flock of 13 was at Sandwich Bay with a 'noticeable influx' reported in the Thanet area that day and on Sep 22 we

also hear of the first migrants noticed in Hampshire at Barton on sea. By Sep 25 at least 50 were in the Thanet area and 30 were on the Sussex Downs near Cissbury Ring (and I probably saw one at Langstone when counting **Egrets** coming to roost on the evening of Sep 26)

**Redwing:** The first of these was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 15, then one was heard flying over the village of Bury by the R. Arun south of Pulborough on Sep 22, and on Sep 24 two birds were seen at Portland and a peak count of 14 was reported from Thanet

**Grasshopper Warbler:** Latest report is of 2 on Ballard Down in Dorset on Sep 25

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Latest is one at Portland on Sep 26

**Common Whitethroat:** Latest is one at Cissbury Ring on Sep 25

**Garden Warbler:** Two at Portland on Sep 26

**Blackcap:** Ten at Portland on Sep 26

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** These have been in the news since one was in the Thanet area on Sep 16 and by Sep 25 Lee Evans weekly bulletin reported a total of 85 in the extreme northern Isles with several more scattered over the country - latest was at West Bay in Dorset on Sep 26 and there are plenty in Kent but I have not seen any reports for Hampshire or Sussex.

**Raddes Warbler:** One was at Sandwich Bay on Sep 26 one day after the first of the autumn had been seen in Norfolk

**Wood Warbler:** One was almost certainly seen by the River Test near Romsey on Sep 27 to be the seventeenth reported this autumn

**Goldcrest:** The first of these winter visitors are coming to us, like the **Thrushes**, from the south. First report was from Portland on Sep 8 with a total of 30 seen in Christchurch Harbour on Sep 10. Four were seen in the Beachy Head area on Sep 9 but none were noticed at Dungeness until Sep 14 and on Sep 19 around 20 were seen in the Thanet area. On Sep 20 Christchurch Harbour had 43 of them and 10 were at Portland on Sep 23. On Sep 26 Sandwich Bay had a huge influx of 400 birds. From these figures and dates I get the impression that the first wave of continental birds fleeing the oncoming winter head west across mainland Europe until they reach the Atlantic coast of France where some may head bravely out across the ocean to perish unseen but others turn north and cross the channel, not using the short hop across the straits of Dover but heading north from the Cherbourg peninsula on a route that takes them to the English coast between Portland and Christchurch.

**Bearded Tit:** On Sep 21 Bob Chapman was at the Lymington marshes where he saw a group of 9 'high flying' Bearded Tits setting out on an autumn journey into the unknown, then on Sep 27 another group of 9 were seen flying west over the Brownich area near Titchfield Haven. These birds were seen making their spring journeys in the second half of March this year but I was not aware that they also did this in the autumn though I have only to look back to 2006 to find a report of birds 'high flying' at Farlington on Sep 18

**Great Grey Shrike:** The first to be reported this winter was in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 24 and 25. Out of our area a **Lesser Grey Shrike** flew in off the sea at Sheringham (Norfolk) on Sep 25

**Jay:** Although there has as yet been no news of a large scale influx of continental birds there has been an increase in the number of mentions this species gets in birding news since Sep 14 when 23 were noted in the Kent Stour valley. I have seen nine reports since then, including one from Crawley town where someone watching from an office window has seen more than ten birds each day since Sep 19 - they attract attention by busily flying from trees to the ground and back and are thought to be setting up winter stores of food by burying acorns. Two reports from east Kent give counts of 22 at Sandwich Bay and 29 in the Thanet area, both on Sep 25

**Raven:** These are now established and breeding right across southern England and last winter there was a roost holding 25 of them somewhere in Hampshire but still the influx of birds moving east from the west country continues. Most movements are of one or two birds or perhaps a family group but on Sep 22 a single flock of 13 birds went over Christchurch Harbour (giving a day total of 16 birds there) and on Sep 23 the day total at Barton on sea was 9 birds

**Starling:** On Sep 22 a night roost of around 2000 birds was reported from the Oare Marshes near Faversham in Kent and John Goodspeed's website has a report for Sep 27 from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth - it says "A spectacular sight can now be witnessed at Baffins Pond. At dusk countless numbers of starlings gather from all points of the compass in an ariel ballet before plummeting down to roost".

**Chaffinch:** On Sep 25 Christchurch Harbour reported 56 migrants passing over as finch passage gets under way.

**Brambling:** A maximum of three were seen at Sandwich Bay on Sep 25 and two were in the Thanet area on Sep 24 when another was reported at Folkestone. The first report was from Thanet on Sep 17 and the latest is of one at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 26

**Greenfinch:** On my way to Langstone on Sep 26 I saw a couple of **Greenfinch** and realised that it is some time since I recorded these. It seems I was not alone in becoming aware of their return - 14 were noted at Rye Harbour on Sep 13, 12 were at Barton on Sea on Sep 21, and 32 were at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25

**Goldfinch:** Although there had been counts of up to 180 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 the number of passage birds is now starting to build with 413 at Barton on Sea on Sep 26.

**Siskin:** Although these have been moving north into Britain since Sep 7 and there had been a count of 650 at Sandwich Bay on Sep 13 there are still plenty more arriving with another report of 600 at Folkestone on Sep 25. I have 53 reports of more than 100 birds so far this autumn.

**Linnet:** On Sep 25 there were reports of 137 over Barton on Sea and 118 at Christchurch Harbour

**Lesser Redpoll:** Very small numbers of these on the move so far, just nine reports since Sep 13 with a peak of just 20 birds at Beachy Head on Sep 14 and 15 at Rye Harbour on Sep 26

**Common Yellowthroat:** One was found on the cruise ship Aurora on Sep 19 and was still there (being fed by the crew) when the ship was in Southampton Docks on Sep 23 (very unlikely to desert the comfort of the ship for the Hampshire countryside). This is a very common warbler species in north America where 13 different races are recorded. Some of the birds which spend the summer in the north of the continent migrate south at this time of year, others in the south stay put. I see the song is described as a "loud wicheety wicheety wicheety wiche" which might become rather tiring if the birds were resident here.

**Lapland Bunting:** One was at Durlston on Sep 25 and maybe the same bird was at Portland on Sep 26 following two earlier reports from the Dorset coast on Sep 13 and 14

**Reed Bunting:** Although there had been reports of as many as 54 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 these are only now starting to become a noticeable component of the autumn passage. Peak count of 126 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 25

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Migrant Hawker:** These are still active when the sun permits and on Sep 21 a pair were found mating at Broughton Park (south of Maidstone) in Kent

**Common Darter:** These will also be around for a little longer and several were seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Sep 21

### Butterflies

**18 species still being reported, among them ...**

**Brimstone:** 15 were seen at Stockbridge Down on Sep 19 and at least 4 were at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on Sep 20

**Small Copper:** This is one of the more frequently seen butterflies at this time of year and had eight reports in the period Sep 18 to 21 with a peak count of 7 on Stockbridge Down

**Common Blue:** More than 25 were flying on Castle Hill (between Brighton and Lewes) on Sep 21

**Chalkhill Blue:** 12 were seen on Old Winchester Hill on Sep 20 with 2 Adonis Blue still on the wing there

**Adonis Blue:** 4 seen on Castle Hill on Sep 21

**Red Admiral:** Plenty of these around, especially on banks of flowering Ivy (up to 20 seen on one bank at Ryde (IoW))

**Painted Lady:** Six reports in the last few days including one from central Portsmouth, one from Horndean (north of Waterlooville) and another from East Meon near Petersfield

**Comma:** More than 10 were seen at Pulborough Brooks on Sep 21, I think all newly emerged

**Queen of Spain Fritillary:** News coming via Brian Fellows is that one of these rare vagrants from the continent was caught in Brandy Hole Copse (close to the northwest boundary of Chichester city) around Sep 7 and subsequently died so its remains are available for inspection! The news reported by Brian was that this was only the second to be found in Sussex since 1969 but when I looked the species up on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website I could only find reference to one sighting (in the Amberley area south of Pulborough on 18 April 2007)

It is likely that the previous sighting was well before the Sussex Branch had a website though I have a record of one seen in the Ditchling Common area on the 18 July 2006 though on re-checking I should have deleted that record as the photos taken of it showed the experts that it was "a particularly silvery Dark Green Fritillary". To see genuine photos of the April 2007 insects go to <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/butterfly/gallery%20rarities.htm> and scroll down to two relevant photos - a photo of the latest find is promised to appear on Brian Fellows' website when he gets hold of it. Although this species is genuinely rare I have recorded three other reports this century - one on Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on 14 June 2007, one at Gilkicker (Gosport) on 1 Aug 2004 and one at Portland on 23 Sep 2003. Another one (in Suffolk in June 2003) was found to have been a locally bred escapee.

**Meadow Brown:** More than 100 were seen both at Old Winchester Hill and Castle Hill on Sep 20 and 21

## Moths

**The Mallow (1745 *Larentia clavaria*):** First report of this species from the Newhaven area on Sep 20

**Barred Red (1962 *Hylaea fasciaria*):** First taken at Friston near Eastbourne on Sep 25

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth (1972 *Agrius convolvuli*):** Eighth report for the year (fifth from Portland) on Sep 21

**Shore Wainscot (2201 *Mythimna litoralis*):** Not the first for the year but when one was trapped on sand dunes at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Sep 20 Ivan Lang reminded us that the caterpillars of this species live on Marram Grass

**Blair's Shoulder-knot (2240 *Lithophane leautieri*):** First report is from Thanet on Sep 24

**Beaded Chestnut (2267 *Agrochola lychnidis*):** Another first at Friston on Sep 25

**Clancy's Rustic (2387a *Platyperigea kadenii*):** One at Friston near Eastbourne on Sep 22 was the first for the year

**Clifden Nonpareil (2451 *Catocala fraxini*)** This rare and beautiful immigrant was found in two different places on two consecutive nights (Sep 25 and 26) in the Beckley Woods (north of Hastings in the Rother district of East Sussex)

**Red Underwing (2452 *Catocala nupta*):** One seen near Rye on Sep 23 was the fifth report for the year but this one was flying into a group of Poplar and Willow trees which are the foodplant of its caterpillars

**Moth/Butterfly Larvae (9998):** A **Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillar** was found in a Winchester garden on Sep 19

## Other Insects

**Colletes hederæ (Ivy Bee):** The Rye Bay website (go to <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/category/hastings/> ) has an entry for Sep 26 which describes the mating behaviour of these bees which are recent invaders of Britain and have a thriving colony on sandy cliffs at Hastings. The website entry will allow you to play a video of the mating bees but the copy of Andy Phillips text (below) will give you the main facts ..

Ivy Bees at Castle Rocks, Hastings

Spent a fascinating hour or two yesterday watching Ivy Bees (*Colletes hederæ*) with entomologist Simon Saxton who is researching the bee at Castle Rocks, Hastings. The video below shows some mating behaviour which is quite unusual but a feature of this species mating strategy and other *Colletes* species that form large aggregations.

When a new female emerges or is dug out by a male she produces a scent that attracts the males that tirelessly patrol the burrows. This scent also seems to rub off onto the successful male and any other attendant males which attracts more males, which pick up the scent themselves attracting more males etc. producing these mating balls which can become quite large. You can see the successful male at the bottom of the mating ball with his legs tucked tightly into its body and antennae held tightly backwards over the head.

When the mating ball disperses the female flies away from the area with the successful but motionless male attached. This is an example of phoretic copulation where the female carries the male while mating. Quite a bizarre sight watching these mating pairs flying around the nesting aggregation.

It seems that it is not only the scent that attracts males as size also seems to be a cue as Simon has noticed smaller males trying to mate with particularly large males and even a large *Dysdera* woodlice spider. The variation in the size of males seems to be quite marked in the aggregation at Castle Rocks and Simon is collecting data on this to try and analyse the reasons and

whether it is associated with the autumn emergence, and resultant thermoregulation & reproductive strategies of this species.

**Orb Web Spider (*Araneus quadratus*):** A less commonly seen but more colourful relative of the Garden Cross spider whose webs block our paths every morning at this time of year was seen and photographed at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Sep 21. See Brian Fellows' diary entry for that day at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Crown Vetch:** Still flowering on Sep 22 in the Wakefords Way garden in West Leigh at Havant where it is now established as a 'weed'

**Apple blossom:** Not something you expect at this time of year but as I was cycling north up the Hayling Coastal Path on Sep 25 and about to go past the gate which prevents unauthorised vehicles going north of the Stoke Bay/Oysterbeds carpark I found myself admiring a **small Apple tree covered with fresh blossom** growing in the ditch between the shore carpark and the overflow carpark behind the Esso garage

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** Both fruits and flowers can still be seen in Juniper Square at Havant

**Green Field Speedwell:** I have found **Grey Field Speedwell** in many places around Havant but on Sep 24 I think I found **Green Field Speedwell** for the first time on a roadside near the Havant Health Centre

**Slender Speedwell:** It was good to see this flowering again in the churchyard of St Faith's in Havant on Sep 24

**Devils Bit Scabious:** I came across a new colony of this flowering by the Lavant stream alongside the Bartons Road playing fields in West Leigh (Havant) on Sep 22

**Chamomile:** This was still flowering on the grass of Purbrook Heath, where I have found it for many years, on Sep 23 (see my diary entry for more detail)

**Butcher's Broom:** This normally starts to flower in September and I found the first flower in Havant Park on Sep 23

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Common Seal:** 11 were seen off Longmere Point on Thorney Island on Sep 24 (14 seen there on Mar 30 and 13 reported on Aug 20). Another count of 11 at Rye Harbour on Sep 21 included a very young pup.

**Frog Tadpoles:** I was aware that some Tadpoles fail to become Frogs in the year in which they hatched but remain in the pond until the next year but I was not aware of what Brian Banks tells us in an entry for Sep 26 on the Rye Bay website. Brian says .. "The **delayed development of common frog tadpoles** can occasionally be due to metabolic disorders, such as a defective thyroid gland for instance, but usually the delayed growth is down to over-crowding, and an interesting mechanism that kicks in with a **micro-organism called *Anurotheca richardsii***.

**These curious cells lie somewhere on the divide between green algae and fungi. They are eaten by tadpoles in early spring, and proliferate in their guts, passing out in the faeces. Now tadpoles are keen on coprophagy, so they then eat the droppings and ingest the cells, and high loads can build up in ponds with a lot of tadpoles.** They interfere with the growth rates of the smaller tadpoles, affecting a wide range of species, and can cause their death, so as a result the first animals to spawn in a pond are usually at a competitive advantage. Thus common frogs can affect the growth rates of common toad tadpoles, and both species suppress the growth-rate of the rarer natterjack toad, that breeds rather later in the season.

Interestingly such micro-organisms can have impacts on other totally unrelated species. A recent paper has shown that such micro-organisms from Australian tadpoles can affect the development of mosquito larvae sharing the same pond. It really is a complicated world out there where some species can have quite subtle effects on others without our realising.

So, when common frogs are over-crowded the larger tadpoles suppress the growth-rates of their smaller siblings, and as a result you get a trickle of froglets emerging from the pond throughout the summer, until frosty weather kills those that are left. For some reason common toads do not seem to cope so well and if their growth rates are affected they die off and I have never seen the development of this species delayed to the same extent as in the common frog or natterjack toad.

**Slow-worm:** Another quote from the Rye Bay website this week comes from Chris Bentley who writes .. "I found this young Slow-worm attempting to eat a slug in the Lime Kiln Garden this morning, and making a meal of it as it were. The typically slow movements of the slug were matched by the sluggish gnawing of the lizard, and it all had the feel of some piece of slow-motion film. I watched this gruesome tableau for about ten minutes, by which time the slug appeared no closer to being dispatched". To see Chris's photo go to the RX website but for further info about Slow-worms Chris refers you to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow\\_worm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_worm) (As Chris's entry was for Sep 22 the quickest way to get to it is to use the link <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/author/chris/> )

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 22 - 28 (WEEK 38 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 26 Sep**

#### **Egret roost count at Langstone Pond**

With favourable tide and weather I was on the Langstone seawall between 18:10 and 19:15 watching the **Egrets** arrive to roost there. Eight were present as soon as I arrived but nothing happened for the next half hour until they began to arrive from 18:40. By the time it was almost dark at 19:15 I had counted **a total of 139 birds**, mostly coming from the direction of Langstone Harbour. Just one of these (not included in the 139) flew straight past the roost and presumably went on to **the roost in trees just north of the Little Deeps on Thorney Island**, and by chance Barry Collins was also counting the **Egrets** arriving there, getting **a total of 190** so we now know that both roosts are active in parallel. Interestingly a young **Marsh Harrier** went to roost in the reeds at the Little Deeps but did not disturb the **Egrets**

(on Sep 23 the presence of **two Marsh Harriers** in this area caused the **Egrets** to panic and head west towards Langstone)

While at the pond I could hear the **Cetti's Warbler** somewhere along the Lymbourne stream and saw a few **Stock Doves** and at least one **Thrush** flying high into the trees - all these were presumably newly arrived here for the winter as were **six Grey Herons** forming a 'siege' out on the saltings in addition to the expected **three Herons** in the pond trees.

### [Thu 25 Sep](#)

#### Apple Blossom at the Oysterbeds

A quick visit to the Hayling Oysterbeds today ended with the unexpected sight of a good show of **Apple blossom** on a small self-sown tree in the ditch between the shore carpark and the inland overflow carpark. I saw it on my right as I was about to go north past the vehicle gate across the main track.

There was little in the way of birds to be seen with the tide low late in the afternoon but I did see **a pair of adult Shelduck with two juveniles** in the main pool (west of the lagoon) and noted at least **16 Egrets** around the mouth of Stoke Lake.

On the way home I went via the old north pier of the rail bridge and saw **13 Brent** back around in the mouth of the Langbrook stream where I think there were **six Wigeon** among the gulls and **Oystercatchers**. A single **Sandwich Tern** was to be heard patrolling the Bridge Lake area between me and the Oysterbeds.

On and around the rail pier **Blue Fleabane** and both **Common Centaury** and **Yellow-wort** were still in flower with a few flowers of **Greater Sea Spurrey** in the creek east of the pier.

Earlier in the day I had heard **continuous quiet sub-song from an invisible bird** in thick bushes in the centre of Havant, and I had heard the same sub-song elsewhere yesterday but I cannot be sure what bird was making it. It could possibly have been **Blackcap** but these were odd place to find **Blackcap** at this time of year and I have the feeling that the sound came from **Dunnocks** that are just finding their voice again after summer silence (I have not yet heard one singing but last year the first to restart was heard on Sep 22 and another was heard on Sep 24)

### [Tue 23 Sep](#)

#### Chamomile lawn flowering at Purbrook

This afternoon I went to check on the **Chamomile** which grows at Purbrook Heath and found it flowering and flourishing in a soft, springy **Chamomile Lawn** as it was cultivated in the 16th Century. I doubt this site goes back that far but it has been here for the best part of 30 years to my knowledge. To see it for yourself go west along the Purbrook Heath Road and turn left just after passing the entrance to The Rowans hospice on your right. Park on the grass here beside the Tennis Courts and walk back towards the road you have just left and you should see occasional daisy like flowers (bigger than common **Daisies** but probably smaller than those of **Scentless Mayweed**) but if there are no flowers a close look at the turf will show that much of it is made of leaves a little like those of **Yarrow** (or **Milfoil**), and if you pick these you will find they have a pleasant aromatic scent when crushed.

Earlier in the day I found the first flower of the new season on **Butchers Broom** in Havant Park, and yesterday a ride up New Lane in West Leigh Park gave me the expected **Crown Vetch** and **Weasel's Snout** plus a bonus of a good show of **Devils Bit Scabious** flowering on the bank of the Lavant stream running along the

east side of the Bartons Road playing fields. Coming back over the Level Crossing I found the **Perennial Wall-Rocket** is still flowering beside the railtracks near the old signal box.

## **SUMMARY FOR SEP 15 - 21 (WEEK 37 OF 2008)**

### **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** A flock of at least 27 was in the corner of Langstone Harbour's Chalkdock Lake nearest the east entrance to Farlington Marshes when I was there on Sep 20 - my first large autumn flock

**Black-necked Grebe:** One arrived at Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset on Sep 18 and another was new at Pagham lagoon on Sep 19 (others can probably still be seen in the Rye Bay area, the Kent Stour valley and possibly elsewhere so we should be seeing new returns to Langstone Harbour before long)

**Cattle Egret:** One was being seen regularly in Poole Harbour up to Aug 25 but has not been mentioned since then until now (1 at Brownsea Island on Sep 19)

**Little Egret:** On the evening of Sep 20 a total of 130 were seen to go into the Thorney Island night roost in trees north of the Little Deep

**Grey Heron:** Some seven reports of migrants during the past week include 16 passing the Folkestone area on Sep 13 and 15 going southwest over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15

**Spoonbill:** Ten seen at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on both Sep 14 and 19 (with at least three more in the harbour). One has also been present at Titchfield Haven this week

**Mute Swan:** The family still on the Havant Budds Farm pools have been giving their five cygnets flight training - on Sep 19 one parent ('Dad') was seen to go to one end of the pools while the other ('Mum') took the youngsters to the other end, then told them to 'fly to Dad' which they did, just skimming the water after much paddling

**Black Swan:** On Sep 16 there were four adults and six very young cygnets (I think all one family) on the West Ashling pond west of Chichester and two adults can still be seen on the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood.

**Greylag Goose:** Around 400 were in the Kent Stour valley on Sep 15 and on Sep 18 Rye Harbour had 120 plus 350 **Canada Geese**

**Brent Goose:** These are now back in force. The first I know of were 4 which reached Kent on Sep 12. On Sep 13 at least 6 were in Chichester Harbour with 48 pausing off the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Sep 14 when there were also reports of around 25 in north Kent, 1 passing Folkestone, 1 in Rye Bay, 2 passing Selsey Bill, 1 off Titchfield Haven and 3 in Southampton Water. On Sep 15 I saw 50 in Langstone Harbour (off Saltmarsh Lane on Hayling) and more than 60 in

Chichester Harbour off Tournerbury and another 8 were seen in Pagham Harbour. On Sep 16 some were again seen in both Chichester and Langstone Harbours and on Sep 17 the first 10 reached Christchurch Harbour. By Sep 19 there were around 200 in Chichester Harbour off Tournerbury and I heard that the bigger than usual number of early arrivals was due to a failure of the breeding season - with no young to care for the adults can move faster.

**Ruddy Shelduck:** On Sep 17 two 'probables' were seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth) and on Sep 20 another 'probable' was reported to have been seen from Thorney Island in Chichester Harbour. There have been a number of reports of this species in each recent year but I see that the bird which was present in the south of Langstone Harbour for a couple of winters was there in 2003/4 and 2004/5

**Wigeon:** Plenty of these now back - around 350 at Pulborough on Sep 15 and the first three in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream west of Langstone village on Sep 18 with four there next day

**Teal:** The first I have seen on Budds Farm pools were there on Sep 20 (only half a dozen)

**Pintail:** The first 7 were seen in Pagham Harbour on Sep 5 and by Sep 19 numbers had noticeably increased. On Sep 18 eleven were seen at Hook (Warsash) and on Sep 16 some were seen at Thornham Marshes on Thorney Island

**Fudge Duck (Ferruginous x Pochard hybrid):** The bird first seen at Farlington Marshes as a juvenile in the autumn of 1999 has subsequently wintered on Budds Farm pools and is now back on the pools for the ninth year (first seen as a 'possible' on Sep 19 and definitely seen on Sep 20)

**Hooded Merganser:** The young male which has been in the Weymouth area since June is now acquiring adult plumage and made a brief trip to Abbotsbury on Sep 16 but has since returned to its favourite haunt at Radipole (still there Sep 19)

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A group of 5 flying in Christchurch Bay (west of the Solent) on Sep 13 were almost certainly new arrivals and not summering birds

**Honey Buzzard:** 35 new reports this week from sites extending as far west as Hardy's Monument (north of Portesham) in Dorset and including two birds over Thorney Island and two more over the Lymington area on Sep 20 (when 6 were logged at Portland)

**Marsh Harrier:** 25 new reports of this species with birds seen over Thorney Island on Sep 18 (3 birds) and Sep 19

**Buzzard:** There seems to have been an exceptional southward movement taking an estimated 100 birds over east Kent on Sep 20

**Osprey:** These have been seen everywhere including one low over the Langstone South Moors on Sep 18 and a peak count of 5 together on Thorney Island on Sep 17

**Red-footed Falcon:** A confident report on Sep 20 of a female seen from Allington Lane (which crosses the M27 north east of Southampton) heading towards Eastleigh.

**Spotted Crane:** One has been at Farlington Marshes from Sep 16 to at least Sep 18

**Corncrake:** Three new reports from Folkestone (Sep 13), Portland (Sep 16) and Christchurch Harbour (Sep 17)

**Avocet:** By Sep 19 the number at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour was up to 759

**Dotterel:** New reports come from Christchurch Harbour and Rye Bay on Sep 13, the Selsey west fields on Sep 15, White Nothe headland east of Weymouth on both Sep 16 and 17, Thanet in Kent on Sep 19 and another in the Selsey area (heard only) on Sep 20

**Little Stint:** 16 new reports from a variety of sites including Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) and Farlington Marshes (peak count of 6 on Sep 18)

**Temminck's Stint:** One at Sidlesham Ferry on Sep 20 was the first anywhere this autumn

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** Sep 20 brought singles to both Farlington Marshes and Pulborough Brooks

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Recent counts show more than 200 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 17 with around 250 in Chichester Harbour on Sep 19/20 (124 in Fishbourne Channel, 114 near Bosham, and 6 in Emsworth Harbour). There are also probably around 50 at Hook (Warsash) and 25 at Pulborough.

**Spotted Redshank:** This week at least one has been at Farlington Marshes and two on Thornham Marshes.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** The first definite sighting of the autumn was at Farlington Marshes on Sep 16 (in many years they are seen as early as June, well before the **Grey Phalaropes**)

**Grey Phalarope:** This week has seemingly brought the last two of the 71 reports of this species this autumn - the first was at Lymington on Aug 21 and the last in the Cuckmere Valley area on Sep 18

**Med Gull:** The combined count of two flocks roosting at Pagham Harbour on Sep 19 was **379 birds - thought to be a county record for Sussex.**

**Black-headed Gull:** On Sep 18 one at Hook (Warsash) was seen **re-gurgitating food for two juveniles**. This is unusual in two respects, one is the late date when I thought all the young would have fledged and left their parents, and secondly in that I recently passed on something which I had only just heard, namely that Med Gulls re-gurgitate whereas Black-headed carry food in their bills (making them more prone to losing food to skuas or other harrying gulls)

**Terns:** Most have now left and the highest counts I have seen this week have been of **27 Sandwich** (Rye Harbour), **21 Common** (Christchurch Harbour) with no more than **2 Arctic** (Sandy Point on Hayling) and **1 Little** (Pagham Harbour)

**Black Tern:** 18 new reports with 20 seen at Dungeness on Sep 14 when the two **White-winged** birds were last seen there

**Barn Owl:** One was seen hunting at dusk over the Thornham Marshes on both Sep 16 and 20

**Tawny Owl:** These are becoming vocal (probably as a result of youngsters dispersing from their parents and blundering into established territories where they are not wanted). On the night of Sep 13 one was heard in the Billy Line area from a house in Grove Road in Havant and on the same night at male and female were calling to each other in the Pulborough area, while on Sep 19 one was disturbed by day at Christchurch Harbour (perhaps because it had wandered into unfamiliar territory)

**Short-eared Owl:** Twelve new sightings including one hunting over fields on the west side of Thorney Island on Sep 14

**Nightjar:** Towards evening on Sep 14 one landed on a garden shed roof in the Eastney area of Portsmouth but took off and flew south as it became dark and on Sep 16 another bird in transit was found at dawn hunting moths in a garden at Patching (north of Brighton)

**Swift:** 15 new sightings with the last three on Sep 20 (in Kent, IoW and Dorset). The bird at Boughton Park in Kent was seen during an annual 'Big Sit' event when the birder whose patch this is sits in a chair overlooking the site from 5am to 6:45pm and records all the birds seen

**Kingfisher:** On Sep 19 I had a good view of one flying and then perched at Budds Farm Pools in Havant (I think the first time I have seen one there)

**Wyneck:** 25 new sightings seems to indicate a good autumn for sighting of this elusive species. Locally one was seen on a fence post by the Langstone South Moors seawall on Sep 18. Also that day four different birds were in the Thanet area of Kent

**Skylark:** Two flying west over the Titchfield area on Sep 14 were the first indication of this species' autumn movement

**Sand Martin:** Surprisingly few seen in this week when vast number of **House Martins** have been on the move. No site saw more than 100 of them.

**Swallow:** Peak count in a week when thousands were on the move was of 4800 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 16

**House Martin:** Among the many thousands on the move peak counts were from Christchurch Harbour with 12,000 on Sep 17 and 14,000 on Sep 18. Locally well over 100 passed east over Havant in mid-morning as I went out to bring in my Wheelie Bin after the weekly collection on Sep 17

**Tawny Pipit:** Singles seen in the West Bay area of Dorset on Sep 13 and in Thanet on Sep 17

**Meadow Pipit:** Highest count was 1960 over Sandwich Bay on Sep 19

**Yellow Wagtail:** On Sep 15 around 140 flew east in the evening (presumably to roost at Titchfield Haven) and on Sep 16 Lytchet Bay in Poole Harbour had a flock of 337. On Sep 19 at least 15 were seen in the Llama field at Thornham Farm (Prinsted) where 55+ had been seen on Sep 11

**Bluethroat:** One at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 17 was the first to be seen this autumn

**Black Redstart:** The first two reports of passage birds/winter visitors come from Newhaven and Folkestone, both on Sep 16

**Whinchat:** 60 were seen in Thanet on Sep 15 during the extraordinary fall of migrants there during this week (nearest to this count was a 10+ at Farlington Marshes on Sep 18)

**Wheatear:** These have not been numerous elsewhere this autumn but Thanet had 200 on Sep 15, 320+ on Sep 17 and 140+ on Sep 18

**Ring Ouzel:** Just five reports so far this autumn. First was seen on Sep 13 at Chanctonbury Ring on the Downs north of Worthing and three were on the Ventnor Downs (IoW) on Sep 15, Dorset then had one at Durlston on Sep 16 and one at Studland on Sep 17 before Hampshire had its first at the north end of the Titchfield Canal path on Sep 20

**Song Thrush:** Continental birds are now arriving for the winter. This week brought six reports starting on Sep 13 at Hastings and with a peak count of 16 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 17 - none so far in Hampshire

**Redwing:** An isolated single was reported at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 15

**Mistle Thrush:** A flock of more than 30 was seen at Cissbury Ring on the downs north of Worthing on Sep 17

**Zitting Cisticola** (Was **Fan-tailed Warbler** and is related to **Cetti's Warbler**): The following extract is taken from the Swalecliffe (north Kent) website entry for Sep 13

...

"I heard a short call, uttered twice, too weak for an acro or sylvia, which I did not immediately recognise. As I looked around, I saw a bird alight on the crown of an umbellifer about 50 metres away; through the scope it was an immediately recognisable **Fan-tailed Warbler** (old school) or **Zitting Cisticola** (new school)! It flew a short distance before dropping into the grass uttering its now obvious "zit zit" call. I phoned a few people and Birdline SE to get the news out widely and other observers down as soon as possible. I stayed put so as not to disturb the bird and in the 30 minutes before anyone else arrived it called reassuringly several times. As others arrived, I refound it in vegetation beside the brook and then it flew up and over the observers and dropped down again. Shortly afterwards it popped up on the top of a rose bush, where it stayed in full view for several minutes much to the

delight of the assembled birders. Over the next three hours it stayed faithful to a small area of grassland apart from one foray over towards the sewage works after which it was lost for about 45 minutes. Although mostly out of sight in the grass, it appeared on the top of bushes or umbellifers and in flight periodically. I'm guessing about 100 birders saw it but, at 12.35 p.m., it took off from the crown of an umbellifer gaining height steadily until lost to sight high over and beyond the sewage works. This is easily the rarest bird to be found here; only the sixth for Britain after one in the county two years ago, two in Dorset in 2000 and two, in Dorset and Norfolk, in the 1970's".

**Icterine Warbler:** One in Thanet on Sep 17

**Melodious Warbler:** One seems to have stayed at Portland from Sep 12 to 20 and another was at Sandwich Bay from Sep 16 to 19

**Barred Warbler:** A juvenile at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 and one in Thanet on Sep 18

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** Just one so far this autumn - in the garden of 49 Gladstone Road, Broadstairs, Kent on Sep 16

**Goldcrest:** 15 reports show that these are now arriving - highest counts have been 20 at Thanet on Sep 20 and 43 at Christchurch Harbour on that same day

**Firecrest:** Also starting to figure in reports with 8 sightings this week, all ones or twos in Dorset, Kent and East Sussex

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** One of these seen in Thanet on Sep 17 (still plenty of Spotted and Pied being widely seen)

**Red-backed Shrike:** One has been on Thorney Island from Sep 13 to 19 and one other was in the Thanet area on Sep 17 and 18

**Corvids:** An interesting report of more than 2000 seen in the vicinity of Wildhern village/hamlet not far north of Andover (west side of A343) on Sep 19 - perhaps we will hear more of these?

**Brambling:** The first single isolated report of the autumn from Thanet on Sep 17

**Goldfinch:** Autumn flocks are just starting to build up with counts of 150+ at Newhaven on Sep 14, 180 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 and 120+ at Hook (Warsash) on Sep 16.

**Siskin:** Many thousands of these are roaming southern England (though the majority seem to be moving north). Biggest count was estimated at 850 passing Folkestone on Sep 16

**Lapland Bunting:** First of the autumn was seen on the Dorset coast east of Weymouth on Sep 13 and 14

**Ortolan Bunting:** Singles seen at two sites on the Dorset coast on Sep 13, 14 and 20

**Reed Bunting:** This week has brought the first significant counts of this species with up to 54 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 (but so far they are not being reported elsewhere)

**Escapees:** A **Fulvous Whistling Duck** (probably on an outing from Titchfield Haven) was seen at Hook (Warsash) on Sep 19

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

In addition to the **Migrant Hawkers** and **Common Darters** that most people will have seen in the recent sunshine three other species were active at Rye Harbour on Sep 14 - **Ruddy Darter**, **Emerald Damsel (*Lestes sponsa*)** and **Common Blue damsel**

### Butterflies

**Small Skipper:** A late individual was seen on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Sep 10

**Clouded Yellow:** One was in the Gosport area on Sep 13 and another (said to be 'very pale' but only seen in flight) was in the Cuckmere Valley near Beachy Head on Sep 20. These bring the total number of reports for the year which I have seen to just 16

**Brimstone:** Five recent reports including 15 at Oxenbourne Down near Butset Hill in the Petersfield area on Sep 13

**Green-veined White:** I saw at least four in the Saltmarsh Lane area of Hayling on Sep 15, including a pair about to mate and a female egg-laying

**Brown Hairstreak:** One still flying at Cissbury Ring north or Worthing on Sep 12 and another near Horsham on Sep 19

**Small Copper:** Five new reports including a count of 25 at Cissbury Ring on Sep 13

**Brown Argus:** Last report is dated Sep 13

**Common Blue:** Ten reports including a count of 36 on Oxenbourne Down on Sep 13

**Chalkhill Blue:** Three reports but none of more than three insects

**Adonis Blue:** Also three reports but including more than 30 seen in Mill Hill at Shoreham on Sep 12

**Holly Blue:** Just three singles

**Red Admiral:** 17 reports with more than 20 seen at Longstock, upstream of Stockbridge in the Test valley, on Sep 13

**Painted Lady:** A late surge of five reports between Sep 13 and 16 (all of singles)

**Small Tortoiseshell:** A more welcome surge of 10 reports with a max of three being seen on Buddleia on Sep 15 (when six species including Meadow Brown were all nectaring in Buddleia in Brockenhurst village gardens). Two were seen on Portsdown on Sep 17

**Peacock:** Three reports but no sighting of more than 4

**Comma:** These normally become frequent at this time so 8 reports is not unexpected though a count of more than 60 around the Testwood Lakes in Totton (Southampton) on Sep 12 was exciting

**Speckled Wood:** The highest count was of around 100 in Friston Forest near Eastbourn on Sep 17 (new brood out)

**Wall Brown:** A single third brood insect on Mill Hill at Shoreham on Sep 12

**Grayling:** A late single seen in the New Forest on Sep 13

**Other species** seen but not mentioned above were **Large** and **Small White**, and **Small Heath**

## Moths

**Twenty-plumed moth (1288 *Alucita hexadactyla*):** First at Ringmer near Lewes on Sep 18

***Antigastra catalaunalis* (1400):** First of year at Portland on Sep 14

**Grey Pine Carpet (1768 *Thera obeliscata*):** First for some time at Ringmer on Sep 18

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth (1972 *Agrius convolvuli*):** The sixth for the year (that I know of) was at Portland on Sep 14 and two more were taken in Kent (Thanet) on Sep 19

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Three more reports, all from the Eastbourne area, on Sep 10, 16 and 19

**Deep-brown Dart (2231 *Aporophyla lutulenta*):** First on Sep 17 Thanet

**Black Rustic (2232 *Aporophyla nigra*):** First at Ringmer on Sep 18

**Clifden Nonpareil (2451 *Catocala fraxini*):** First seen on Sep 17 on a factory wall in the St Leonards area of Hastings

**Red Underwing (2452 *Catocala nupta*):** One at Ringmer on Sep 18 was the second seen there in ten days

**Caterpillars:** Another **Fox Moth 'Woolly Bear'** was seen at Bartley Heath in north Hampshire on Sep 13 and on Sep 15 I heard of the first accidental find of an **Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar**

## Other Insects

**Water Scorpion and Water Stick Insect:** Both found at Rye Harbour on Sep 15

**Volucella zonaria:** The fourth of these Hornet like Hoverflies to be seen in my Havant garden this summer was nectaring on Chinese Anemones on Sep 17

**Ivy Bee (Colletes hederæ):** This fairly recent invader of the south coast from the continent is flourishing at Hastings and the bees are enjoying the newly flowering Ivy.

**Dor Beetle (Geotrupes stercorarius):** This large black beetle, approaching the size of a female **Stag Beetle**, likes to burrow into its favourite food (a Cowpat or a pile of Horse manure, and it is probably through this habit that it gets infested with mites giving it an alternative name of **Lousey Watchman**). This gets a mention after one was seen flying at Bartley Heath in north Hampshire on Sep 13

**Long-winged Conehead:** Brian Fellows came on a female of this species close to the Slipper Millpond in Emsworth on Sep 15, reminding me that although this species is marked as rarer than the **Short-winged Conehead** in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects (published in 1986) the situation has changed since an explosion in the population and range (in Britain) of the **Long-winged species** during the 1990s - this change is described in the following snippet from the work of David Element which I found via Google..

"This insect is a relatively recent self-introduction to the UK (1931). Originally confined to the southernmost Counties in localised colonies for about sixty years, there was a very rapid population explosion during the early 1990s. The extramacropterous forms (with even longer wings than usual) are believed to develop during periods of population overcrowding. These longer-winged individuals can presumably cover greater distances when seeking out suitable locations for new colonies and they have almost certainly facilitated the very rapid spread of this species in the UK recently in response to the warming climate. This formerly rare and notable insect is now very common! However, the brown forms are comparatively unusual and most of these insects are green".

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** A female was seen on Portsdown on Sep 17

## PLANTS

**Corn Spurrey:** One flowering plant seen in the disturbed soil outside the new carpark at the south end of Southmoor Lane in Havant on Sep 20 was an addition to the **Corn Cockle**, **Corn Marigold** and **Cornflower** still flowering there

**Fig-leaved Goosefoot:** A bank of these plants approaching two metres high were seen on Sep 20 in disturbed ground by the new cycle way along Harts Farm Way in Havant just east of its junction with the approach road to the Broadmarsh Slipway

**Ivy:** I saw the first bank of this in full flower at Bedhampton on Sep 20

**Slender Hare's Ear:** Although I did find this flowering on the Thorney Island seawall at the west end of the Great Deeps on Aug 22 I have not seen it elsewhere this summer despite searching both the South Moors seawall and the waste ground between Saltmarsh Lane and the Hayling Coastal path where I found it last year. On Sep 15, forced by flooding of the normal track between the Coastal Path and the seawall west of Saltmarsh Lane onto the bank along the north side of the track, I found myself about to tread on a good cluster of the plants which I had missed on previous visits - they were now past flowering but will be searched for next summer!

**Lesser Centaury:** This is another plant which I failed to find flowering on Portsdown this summer so I was very pleased, again on Sep 15, to find a plant still flowering on the shingle east of the Sandy Point nature reserve on Hayling (see Diary entry for more detail)

**Morning Glory (*Ipomea purpurea*):** The biggest surprise of the week was to find several plants of this in full flower on Sep 20 in disturbed ground beside the new cycleway along Harts Farm Way passing Broadmarsh Coastal Park - look about 100 metres east of the Broadmarsh Slipway approach road.

**Bittersweet Nightshade (seaside form):** While on the shingle east of the Sandy Point nature reserve I came on a small cluster of small Bittersweet plants that were not prostrate but which had tough leaves and 'looked different' from the normal plants. They had woody bases to their stems but I see that that does not separate them from the normal species. I think they were examples of the seaside variety of the plant (***Solanum dulcamara var marinum***) and I have some support from the author of the 'Nature Notes from Skye' who photographed very similar plants when visiting Winchelsea in Sep 2005 (go to <http://www.nature-diary.co.uk/2005-09-19.htm> and scroll down the page)

**Bugloss (*Anchusa officinalis*):** I have regularly found this around the edge of the Hayling Island Sailing Club grounds (in 'flower beds' at the top of the ramp up from the causeway) but I found on Sep 15 that it is now flowering by the track leading past the Lifeboat Station into the new carpark extension.

**Garden Lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*):** I found the bright blue flowers of this in two unexpected places around Havant this week

**Elder:** Another surprise on Sep 20 was to find a tree of this in fresh flower almost opposite the Harts Farm Way Amenity Tip

**Flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*):** When at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Sep 18 Brian Fellows found that Portsmouth City have planted this species as part of their face lift to the area around the pond.

**Yellow Iris:** One plant was in fresh flower at the Langstone South Moors on Sep 19

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Humpback Whale:** The first ever to enter the English Channel (as far as the experts know) was seen from a ferry heading from Spain to Portsmouth as it passed Guernsey on Sunday Sep 14. This news comes from the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme staff on board the ferry and I saw it in the Portsmouth NEWS on Sep 16

**Common Seal:** One was seen near Chichester Harbour mouth (from Black Point) on Sep 13 and ten were seen during a walk around Thorney Island on Sep 20

**Serotine Bat?:** On Sep 14 one of the younger contributors to the Sussex Bird News, Sophie May Lewis, was on the beach at Climping (west of the mouth of the R Arun) when, in her words, .. **"a bat flew in off the sea and crash landed in the dune grass. Upon inspection its body appeared to be about 3 inches long with black ears and nose. It hid in the grass obviously exhausted"**. Sophie took photos and has sent them off to the Bat Conservation Trust for identification but I think the size and black ears and nose make it very likely this was a **Serotine**. This is the first time I have come across direct evidence of bats crossing the Channel though I was aware that they occasionally do so.

UK Bat species survive the winter by hibernating but in other parts of the world there are species which migrate 1000 km or more (like birds) to warmer climes when winter arrives, and our hibernating species are well equipped for lengthy flights so crossing the channel is not unknown.

While looking for information on this subject I came across a piece on the BBC website concerning Bats and Wind Turbines which told me ...

"Bats are at risk from wind turbines, researchers have found, because the rotating blades produce a change in air pressure that can kill the mammals. Canadian scientists examined bats found dead at a wind farm, and concluded that most had internal injuries consistent with sudden loss of air pressure. Bats use echo-location to avoid hitting the blades but cannot detect the sharp pressure changes around the turbine".

**Common Lizard:** Many of this year's young were seen on Bartley Heath near Fleet in north Hampshire on Sep 14 but the observer did not mention if they were identified as young just by their size or their colour - I know that when the young are newly born around mid-summer they can be almost black in colour but I do not know when they acquire adult colour (which itself can be variable!)

**Terrapin:** At least one of these long living carnivores was still to be seen at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Sep 18 - it probably was a household pet dumped in the pond when it began to eat its owners fingers.

**Common Necklace Shell (*Natica alderi*):** A photo on the Rye Bay website (Sep 20) shows the characteristic broad furrow made by the foot of this mollusc as it moves over wet sand 'feeling' for buried shellfish. When it finds one this carnivore drills a neat hole in the top of the prey shell and sucks out the contents. The website also has photos of several molluscs killed in this way.

**Netted Dogwhelk (*Nassarius reticulatus*):** Another carnivorous mollusc which Barry Yates says preys on Barnacles (my Reader's Digest book says it is also a carrion eater)

**Fungi:** On Sep 17 Brian Fellows found a cluster of **Shaggy Parasol (*Macrolepiota rhacodes*)** beside the approach road to the Broadmarsh slipway and distinguished them from the commoner, taller **Parasol Mushroom** by the scaly flakes on their

caps and by the reddening of the flesh when cut with a knife. There was no sign of them when I went to have a look (roadside grass mowers had been at work)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 15 - 21 (WEEK 37 OF 2008)**

**Sat 20 Sep**

### **Broadmarsh area with Morning Glory flowering beside Harts Farm Way**

This afternoon I cycled via Bedhampton Mill to the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes and back in glorious weather and had some worth while sightings.

First item of note came when I reached the Wayfarer's Way bridge over the Hermitage Stream in the Bedhampton Waterworks area - here was the first **bank of Ivy in full flower** that I have seen with at least **four Red Admirals** and many flies enjoying the nectar with the sound of a passing **Grey Wagtail** in the background. Where the overflow from the springs flows into the stream a mass of **Stream Water Crowfoot** was flower, the white flowers complemented by the blue of **Hybrid Water Speedwell**, and where there used to be a level crossing over the railway into Bidbury Lane and unseen **flock of Starlings were singing** in some trees.

Reaching Broadmarsh Slipway I rode up the approach road as far as Harts Farm Way looking for the **Shaggy Parasol Muchrooms** which Brian Fellows recently found here but the grass mowers had beaten me to it (either they or someone intending to eat the fungi had removed all trace of them).

Carrying on across Broadmarsh grassland (much of it newly cut for the winter) I listed a number of good plants in flower including **Lesser Hawkbit, Blue Fleabane, Common Figwort, Dark Mullein** and **Common Centaury** plus the bright orange berries of **Sea Buckthorn** and the dark purple ones of **Sloe**.

The tide was high and there were very few birds on the water but in Chalkdock corner I counted **27 Great Crested Grebes**.

Coming back I followed the cycleway alongside the road (outside Broadmarsh) and on nearing the new roundabout I passed a mass of **Cockspur Grass** at the roadside. Turning into the new section of cycleway which now takes you the full length of Harts Farm Way right to Southmoor Lane I began to see interesting weeds such as **Common Poppy** and **Black Bindweed** in the newly disturbed soil beside the cycleway. The best section came immediately after passing the Broadmarsh slipway road (going east) where I first stopped to check what I think to be a mass of **Fig-leaved Goosefoot** (though the plants were taller - more than 1.5 metres - than the books say and showed no mealiness) and just beyond them were some very striking plants which I think were **Morning Glory (*Ipomea purpurea*)** - climbers with long trumpet shaped startling deep purple/Royal Blue flowers.

Further along Harts Farm Way (almost opposite the Amenity Tip) **an Elder tree had several fresh flowers**. Nothing more as I went down the Brockhampton Stream path and along the shore, then up for another look at Budds Farm Pools. This time I convinced myself that the **Fudge Duck** was back (sleeping close to the

westmost island and showing its white undertail and 'Ferruginous' flanks and breast). Near it **two white-faced female Tufted Duck** were diving and I tried to turn them into **Scaup** but could not convince myself (though they may be worth a second look if still there).

Coming up Southmoor Lane the soil outside the new (unused) carpark still has **Corn Cockle, Cornflower** and **Corn Marigold** in flower and today's bonus items were **Corn Spurrey** and **Musk Mallow**. Further up the lane the **Hedgerow Cranesbill** is still flowering but the **Small Melilot** plant which I saw most recently has vanished in the digging of a further deep trench to take underground power lines from the foot of the poles carrying the old overhead cables

## [Fri 19 Sep](#)

### **Langstone South Moors**

Yesterday Martin Hampton found a **Wryneck** at the extreme south east corner of the South Moors, seeing it clearly on a fence post before it plunged into nearby Blackthorn, as well as several other good birds including **Whinchat, Yellow Wagtail** and **Garden Warbler** with a bonus of a low flying **Osprey** right overhead, so I used my time today to see if any of the goodies were still around. I had not expected the **Wryneck** and did not see it but I had hoped for **Yellow Wagtails** but was again disappointed (near the cattle two people were very noisily strimming areas of the 'orchid field'). The best thing I did see was a group of **four Wigeon** in the stream mouth and I thought I might have been the first to see them as Martin had not mentioned them in his message to me (but subsequently, in his message to Hoslist, I saw that he had seen three of them).

On the positive side I passed a flock of around **70 Redshank** newly back on the banks of the Langstone Mill stream outfall, and on reaching the end of Mill Lane the first thing I saw on the South Moors were the fresh yellow flowers of the **Yellow Flag** which I had seen in bud a few days ago.

At Budds Farm pools a **Kingfisher** perched on vegetation on the westmost island and I was told that the **cygnets of the Swan family had been undergoing flight training just before I arrived** - it seems one parent took them to one end of the pools and the other parent went to the opposite end, then all five cygnets took off and flew low over the water to the waiting parent. I did not have time to stop there but I though I saw the **Fudge Duck** in the distance - returning here for the ninth consecutive year since it was a juvenile in 1999.

## [Mon 15 Sep](#)

### **Brent are back in force**

The first report of **Brent** back in Hampshire waters which I am aware of came from Steve Mansfield who visited Hayling on Sep 13 and saw 6 on the water of Chichester Harbour off Tournerbury and then saw 3 entering the Harbour passing Black Point. On Sep 14 three were seen in Southampton Water, one was in the Solent off Brownwich near Titchfield Haven, and 48 were in the Chichester Harbour entrance. **Today I went to the west Hayling shore by Saltmarsh Lane at high tide and saw 52 distantly to the west of that point.** I then went to have a look around the Sandy Point area and as I was approaching the Lifeboat station from Bracklesham Road I chanced to see **a flock of around 60 Brent flying in and landing on the water off Tournerbury.** These birds are almost certainly still on

the move and will not stay where I saw them but it does seem that they are arriving early and in bigger numbers than usual for September - maybe a portent of a bad breeding season?

While in the Saltmarsh Lane area I saw a soaring **Sparrowhawk** and several **Green-veined Whites** as well as both **Large** and **Small Whites**, and on the seawall **Lucerne** was still in flower. The high tide had flooded the area behind the seawall and I only just reached the wall dryshod after following the low bank beside the normal track - thanks to being forced onto the bank I found a large clump of **Slender Hare's Ear** (now past flowering).

In the Sandy Point area I went onto the shingle east of the nature reserve to look at the rare **Sea Knotgrass** which is flourishing there and in so doing I made another good chance discovery of **Lesser Centaury**. I had just seen **Common Centaury** flowering in the old Hospital grounds and the plant I found on the shingle immediately caught my eye with its much deeper red flowers but as it was the remnant of a plant that must have been between 10 and 15 cm high I took a specimen flower and checked with my lens that it had the required length of flower stem exposed above the calyx (**Lesser Centaury** is often no more than a single ground hugging flower with barely any stem to the plant but Stace gives a maximum height of 20 cm)

An unexpected find at the Lifeboat Station carpark was **Bugloss** (not **Vipers Bugloss!**) and nearby both **Sea Rocket** and **Sea Holly** could still be found in flower. Going south from here I had nearly reached the southern end of the additional fencing outside the reserve east of the footpath when I noticed a very small plant of **Bittersweet Nightshade** growing from the shingle. The plant was less than 8cm tall and had a woody base to the stem, thicker than usual leaves and flowers which looked different from normal (deeper in their 'purple' and with a longer yellow 'nose' than usual) - I am pretty sure this must be the **maritima subspecies** which Brian Fellows made me aware of when he found some near the Hayling Oysterbeds this summer.

Other items seen here included **Red Admiral** and **Small Copper** butterflies and back at home a **Chiffchaff** was singing for the third consecutive morning (there had been a first burst of song on Sep 8)

### **SUMMARY FOR SEP 8 - 14 (WEEK 36 OF 2008)**

**First Brent** seen in Kent, **first Red-throated Diver** at Portland and **first Red-breasted Merganser** at Christchurch.

At least **128 Little Egrets** in the Langstone Pond night roost.

More **Dotterel** and **Grey Phalaropes** this week with a good show of **Sabine's Gull** sightings on the River Itchen in Southampton.

Another unusual bird is an **Alpine Swift**, plus both **Icterine** and **Melodious Warblers**, **Red-backed** and **Woodchat Shrikes**.

One observer suggests that **Hawfinch** have been breeding to the north of Chichester.

Very little Insect News though a huge **Indian Moon Moth** was a surprise find at a Sussex Moth Trap

Plant news has the **start of Common Gorse flowering after the summer break** (also the first autumn **Cow Parsley** flowers). More unusual was **Pencilled Cranesbill** at Havant Bus Station and more **Small Melilot** near Langstone. On south Hayling I saw **Pale Toadflax** for the first time this year

Other Wildlife news is nearly all of **fungi**, including the first **Parasol Mushrooms** and more **Waxcaps**

## **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver**: First of the autumn seen off Portland on Sep 12

**Sooty Shearwater**: After having 29 of these on Sep 5 the count at Dungeness was down to 16 on Sep 6 (there had been 34 off Portland on Aug 18). Among eight new reports this week there is one from Sandy Point on Hayling on Sep 10 (when the count at Portland was up again to 19)

**Storm Petrel**: A late report of one going east off St Catherine's Point (IoW) on Sep 5

**Shag**: Still none reported in Langstone Harbour but one was in Shoreham Harbour on Sep 9 and one was off Sandy Point (Hayling) on Sep 10. I see that an exhausted juvenile was on the beach near the South Foreland in Kent on Sep 6.

**Little Egret**: At least 128 went into the Langstone Pond night roost on the evening of Sep 13 (another dozen or more could have arrived after I stopped counting at dusk). As most of the birds arrived from the Langstone Harbour direction my guess is that this roost is in addition to the one on Thorney Island (where Barry Collins had 151 birds on Aug 27) with Langstone taking the Langstone Harbour birds and Thorney taking those from Chichester Harbour. There may be additional night roosts for Chichester Harbour in Tournerbury Wood on Hayling, at Oldpark Wood east of Bosham, and possibly in the Thorney Island village churchyard trees.

**Great White Egret**: This returned to the Blashford Lakes on Aug 16 and stayed there until Aug 24 but then vanished until it was back at Blashford on Sep 8 and was still there on Sep 12

**Spoonbill**: Four were new at Titchfield Haven on Sep 11 and at least one was there next day. (No reports of the six in Poole Harbour since Sep 6 though three juveniles flew west over Dungeness on Sep 9 and one was new to the Moonfleet area near Weymouth on Sep 10)

**Mute Swan**: The five juveniles with their parents on the Havant Budds Farm Pools were exercising their wings on Sep 12 and looked as if they should now be able to fly.

**Brent Goose**: Four newly arrived birds were seen in Pegwell Bay (near the North Foreland in Kent) on Sep 12 and this matches the first arrivals last year (four at Dungeness on Sep 12) so maybe some are already in Langstone Harbour (last year 24 birds were first seen there on Sep 13)

**Shelduck:** Four juveniles seen on the Farlington Marshes Deeps by Kevin Stouse's walk party on Sep 7 are (so far as I know) the only ones in Langstone Harbour at the moment.

**Wigeon:** Further reports of returning birds come from the Lymington Marshes (29 birds on Sep 7) and Christchurch Harbour (12 birds on Sep 3 and still only 12 on Sep 9). As the return speeds up a count of 20 at Pulborough Brooks on Sep 10 became 65 on Sep 12 when there were over 90 in Pegwell Bay (East Kent), another 65 on the north Kent coast at Swalecliffe with 86 in Christchurch Harbour

**Gadwall:** There were at least 10 on Budds Farm Pools on Sep 7

**Teal:** At least 31 could be seen in the Lymington area on Sep 7 and 27 were back at Hook (Warsash) on Sep 9. At Pulborough Brooks a count of 82 on Sep 1 had doubled to around 180 on Sep 10

**Pintail:** No big counts yet but 3 were back at Hook (Warsash) on Sep 9. By Sep 10 four had reached Christchurch, on Sep 11 five flew west past Folkestone and on Sep 12 another three flew west off the north Kent coast.

**Garganey:** A late bird was on the stream at Farlington Marshes on Sep 8 and a single drake was at the Brading Marshes (IoW) on Sep 7. On Sep 10 Christchurch Harbour recorded 5 and one was still in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 12

**Shoveler:** Around 10 were at Budds Farm pools in Havant on Sep 7 when 4 were seen at Hook (Warsash) and 3 in the Titchfield Haven area. The birds at Budds Farm seem to have moved on but on Sep 10 Pulborough Brooks had around 20

**Pochard:** Two birds at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 8 is the only report for September that I have seen so far

**Eider:** The number on the sea off Lymington had risen marginally to 23 on Sep 7

**Red-breasted Merganser:** The first of the autumn to reach Christchurch Harbour was there on Sep 10 (no more news of the three seen flying up Southampton Water on Aug 30)

**Honey Buzzard:** Sep 1 saw one fly past St Catherine's Point (IoW), on Sep 8 four were seen going over Brighton with maybe a different single bird over the Adur at Shoreham, and Sep 9 one perversely flew north at Dungeness.

**Marsh Harrier:** On Sep 7 one was over the Brading Marshes (IoW), on Sep 8 a total of 12 flew over Dungeness, and on Sep 9 singles were seen at Hook (Warsash), Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) and the Selsey West Fields

**Sparrowhawk:** Following the extraordinary passage of 52 Sparrowhawks over Dungeness on Aug 23 a count of 11 there on Sep 8 was nothing special (six more were seen on Sep 10). Locally I had a brief glimpse of one vainly trying to catch a Swallow over Fort Widley on Portsdown - by its small size I guess it was a juvenile male which had not yet learnt not to waste its energy.

**Osprey:** 25 new reports of passing birds between Sep 7 and 12. On Sep 7 one was seen at Titchfield Haven, another on the RSPB Islands in Langstone Harbour and another at the head of Southampton Water. On Sep 8 two were seen in Langstone Harbour and on Sep 11 two were again seen at Thorney Island and maybe a third flew low over Itchenor. One flew over Sandy Point on Hayling on Sep 10 when there was evidence of a bird commuting back and forth between Titchfield Haven and Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight

**Hobby:** Dragonflies and hirundines continue to attract several of these to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood where a family group has a youngster still occasionally heard begging for food

**Quail:** We don't often hear of these at this time of year but on Sep 11 one was surprised on Round Hill at Steyning (north of Worthing) and gave a short 'quip' note in place of the normal 'wet-my-lips' song

**Spotted Crake:** The only one getting a mention this week is at the north Kent Oared Marshes - seen on Sep 11

**Coot:** At this time of year a large number of Coot leave inland waters and move to the coast (presumably as an insurance against the possible freezing up of the inland waters) and I have often seen the Thorney Little Deeps crowded with them but until this week (Sep 7) I had not seen a mass of around 100 on the Budds Farm Pools (by Sep 12 the number here had thinned out to around 40)

**Dotterel:** Last week I passed on Lee Evans news of juveniles having been seen at Slimbridge and on the Scillies (on or before Sep 1) and now we have another juvenile in our south coast area (on the downs above Rottingdean near Brighton on Sep 8). Since then one has been seen in Dorset on Sep 11 at the White Nothe headland between Weymouth and Lulworth Cove followed on Sep 13 by one roosting with 41 Golden Plover at Rye Harbour

**Golden Plover:** Flocks of up to 400 birds have been regularly seen in Kent and East Sussex since the beginning of August (and Christchurch Harbour has had two singles on Aug 8 and 18) but there have been no reports from Hampshire or West Sussex until now - on Sep 7 singles were seen at Farlington Marshes and at Pagham Harbour and on Sep 8 there was one at Cuckmere Haven (west of Beachy Head)

**Knot:** I think a couple of these have been in Pagham Harbour since Aug 5 (at least) but it was not until Sep 9 that I saw the first report of a flock of 30 back there, increasing to 40 on Sep 12. At least 10 were at the Lymington Marshes by Sep 10

**Ruff:** On Sep 7 two were at Titchfield Haven and four were in fields west of Pagham Harbour (the Oare Marshes in north Kent had 23 on Sep 7 and 27 on Sep 12).

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A substantial winter flock can normally be found in the north west corner of Portsmouth Harbour including Fareham Creek and on Sep 7 a flock of 55 was in the middle section of the Creek (first report for this winter). The only reports I have seen from Titchfield Haven this autumn have been 12 birds on Aug 26 increasing to 78 on Sep 7

**Grey Phalarope:** This autumn has brought an unusually high number of these to the south coast and they have been seen at 17 different sites in the period Sep 7 to 12. The majority of sightings were of single birds but Christchurch Harbour, Church Norton, Lodmoor, Bournemouth (Branksome Chine) and Hook (Warsash) all had two while Chesil Cove on Portland had four and the new Bracklesham RSPB reserve (west of Selsey Bill) had five.

**Pomarine Skua:** On Sep 7 Marc Moody and others on the Lymington shore had a very unusual sighting of a flock of 10 of these birds heading west out of the Solent (where they had presumably been sheltering from stormy weather) along with 7 **Arctic Skuas**.

**Long-tailed Skua:** Following three sightings of singles at Portland and Dungeness on Sep 5 and 6 another juvenile was seen at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Sep 6

**Med Gull:** The first big autumn assembly was of 140 birds at the Selsey West Fields on Sep 9

**Sabine's Gull:** I think we have had a very unusual surge of sightings of this species recently. I have recorded 15 separate reports this autumn, 9 of them (6 different birds) in the period Sep 6 to 9. On Sep 7 two birds flew west out of the Solent (seen by Marc Moody and others with the 11 Pomarine Skuas) but perhaps more exciting was the juvenile which turned up in Southampton Water off the mouth of the River Itchen on Sep 7 and was still nearby (at Riverside Park beside the Itchen in the Bitterne area of Southampton) on Sep 12

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** Their autumn passage is now under way - on Aug 31 a flock of 60 was seen roosting in the Cuckmere Haven area near Beachy Head, on Sep 7 a group of 16 went southwest over the Brading Marshes (IoW), and on Sep 8 a group of 20 flew high west over Ventnor Downs (IoW)

**Little Tern:** Although the majority of these have left us there were still 17 at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Sep 12

**Black Tern:** Reports from nine sites in the past few days with a peak count of 67 at Dungeness on Sep 11 and locally counts of up to 14 at Chichester Ivy Lake, also on Sep 11

**White-winged Black Tern:** The juvenile which has been at the Dungeness RSPB reserve since Aug 31 was still there on Sep 12 after being joined by a second bird on Sep 11

**Guillemot:** One was lingering off the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Sep 10 and on Sep 12 one ventured into Christchurch Harbour

**Turtle Dove:** Twenty could still be seen together at Oare Marshes (north Kent) on Sep 7 and on Sep 12 one flew west at Barton on sea (west of Lymington) and another was logged at Portland (late birds can still be expected in October and a very few may winter here)

**Short-eared Owl:** Latest sightings are of singles at Rye Harbour on Sep 10 and at Portland on Sep 12

**Nightjar:** One was seen hawking moths around street lights in Seaford on Sep 10

**Swift:** Six sites have had September sightings so far - the peak count was 3 birds in the Sussex Ouse Valley upstream of Lewes on Sep 8 (other reports on that day were of singles at the Balshford Lakes, on the Isle of Wight, and at Cuckmere Haven). Only one later sighting so far - two birds at Portland on Sep 12

**Alpine Swift:** One was seen for an hour flying around the village of Fittleworth (west of Pulborough) on Sep 7. The only other bird seen this year was the one that was around County Hall in Lewes from May 28 to 30.

**Wryneck:** Sightings this week were at Brighton (Sheepcote Valley) on Sep 7, Cuckmere Haven on Sep 8 and Pagham Harbour on Sep 9. The Pagham bird was seen again on Sep 11 and the latest sighting is of one at Portland on Sep 12

**Tawny Pipit:** After a five day gap in sightings at Portland one was again seen there on Sep 10

**Tree Pipit:** A mass exodus on Sep 8 brought reports of 43 at Durlston, 29 at Portland, 15 at Christchurch Harbour, 11 at Dungeness and 10+ at Luccombe Down (IoW). Christchurch Harbour had another surge with 28 there on Sep 12

**Meadow Pipit:** There is no doubt that these are now on the move with counts of 120+ at Hastings on Sep 7 and 225 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 8 plus smaller numbers at four other sites (including Portland which commented on their first autumn movement 'of several hundred birds' on Sep 8). Sep 12 brought the highest counts so far - around 400 on the Selsey West Fields, 370 at Christchurch Harbour and 120 at Dungeness

**Rock Pipit:** The first winter bird had returned to the Rye Bay shore (where they do not breed) on Sep 10

**Yellow Wagtail:** Reports from 12 sites with peak counts of 200 coming to roost on the north shore of Pagham Harbour on Sep 10, 108+ at Cuckmere Haven and 127 at Christchurch Harbour, both on Sep 8 (when I saw and heard one fly over me on Hayling). On Sep 11 a flock of more than 55 (many of them juveniles) was in the Llama field at Thornham Farm just west of Prinsted village in Chichester Harbour.

**Grey Wagtail:** Plenty of these on the move with a peak count of 23 at Portland on Sep 8

**White Wagtail:** 11 were at Portland on Sep 7 when at least 1 was seen at St Catherine's Point (IoW)

**Common Redstart:** Peak count of 12 at Cissbury Ring (north of Worthing) on Sep 8

**Whinchat:** Peak count of 30 at Portland on Sep 12

**Stonechat:** Portland claimed a single bird of the **Caspian 'maura' race** (with less orange and more white on the breast and belly) on Sep 9

**Wheatear:** These have been trickling through everywhere but on Sep 7 there were 120 at Portland (the first count to exceed the 70 that were at Portland on Aug 23 - the peak spring count there was 150+ on Apr 26)

**Icterine Warbler:** One at Portland on Sep 12

**Melodious Warbler:** One at Portland on Sep 11 staying over until Sep 12

**Lesser Whitethroat:** One was singing at Seaford on Sep 8

**Blackcap:** 200 were recorded at Beachy Head on Sep 8 with 300 there on Sep 12

**Wood Warbler:** On Sep 10 one was at Ditchling (north of Brighton), on Sep 12 one was in the Church Norton area of Pagham Harbour with another at Durlston on Sep 12 bringing the total of autumn passage sightings this year to 15

**Chiffchaff:** One sang briefly as it passed my Havant garden on Sep 8 and another was heard on Sep 13. The first big count of birds at the coast was 250 at Beachy Head on Sep 12

**Goldcrest:** These are just beginning to figure in reports of migrants - Portland announced their 'first of the autumn' on Sep 8 and four were seen at Hope Gap near Beachy Head on Sep 9. Since then a flock of 30 has been seen at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 10

**Firecrest:** One was on the Sussex Downs above the River Arun on Sep 7 and two more singles were at Durlston and Beachy Head on Sep 8

**Red-backed Shrike:** A juvenile was seen near Honer's Farm (north of Pagham Harbour) on Sep 10 and was still there on Sep 11

**Woodchat Shrike:** One was at Portland on Sep 11 and 12

**Starling:** As autumn numbers start to build a flock of 2000 seen at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Sep 10 included **one albino bird**

**Chaffinch:** A flock of around 30 were bathing/drinking at a puddle in the Hayling Coastal Path when I disturbed them on Sep 8

**Siskin:** These are now starting to arrive with us for the winter. I have 21 reports for Sep 7 to 12 over an area stretching from north Kent to Dorset with peak counts of 197 at Sandwich Bay and 188 at Christchurch Harbour (both on Sep 12), and smaller flocks of 50+ on the IoW on Sep 8 and 52 at Dungeness on Sep 11

**Linnet:** Rye Harbour had a flock of 150 on Sep 13

**Hawfinch:** 10 were seen somewhere south of the Chichester West Dean Woods on Sep 12 - the report suggest that this was an early date for migrants and the birds might have been local breeders.

**Ortolan Bunting:** After several reports from Portland and one from Brighton there are further reports from Portland of up to two birds there on Sep 8 and 9 plus one at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 10

**Corn Bunting:** A count of 20 in the Steyning Round Hill area north of Worthing on Sep 11 was encouraging

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

No reports this week

### Butterflies

Only 14 species mentioned this week and the only one which caught my attention was of **41 Adonis Blues** seen on Malling Down near Lewes on Sep 8

### Moths

**Agriphila latistria (1307):** a Pyralid which I have not encountered before was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 11

**The Vestal (1716 Rhodometra sacraria):** Another first in the Thanet area on Sep 11

**Channel Islands Pug (1855a Eupithecia ultimaria):** A good record from Dungeness on Sep 10 (I have only seen one other record - from Pagham Harbour on July 12)

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth (1972 Agrius convolvuli):** Another good record from Portland on Sep 10 - fifth record for the year since the first on Aug 21

**Setaceous Hebrew Character (2126 Xestia c-nigrum):** I seem to have missed recording any this spring so the first to go into my database was a report of autumn insects (38 of them) trapped in Sussex on Sep 8

**Cosmopolitan (2208 Mythimna loreyi):** First report is from the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Sep 9

**Centre-barred Sallow (2269 Atethmia centrago):** The first I know of was trapped at Ringmer near Lewes on Sep 7

**Lunar Underwing (2270 Omphaloscelis lunosa):** Another first at Ringmer on Sept 7

**Orange Sallow (2271 Xanthia citrigo):** First of year in Thanet on Sep 11

**Marsh Mallow Moth (2363 Hydraecia osseola):** A less common first trapped at Rye on Sep 8

**Frosted Orange (2364 Gortyna flavago):** First in Thanet on Sep 11

**Red Underwing (2452 Catocala nupta):** This has already been seen at Rye Harbour on Aug 14 and 30 but another report from Ringmer on Sep 7 is newsworthy

**Plumed Fanfoot (2488a Pechipogo plumigeralis):** This species had been reported in Thanet back on July 17 but the current report from Dungeness on Sep 10 was the second ever to be seen at that site

**Fox Moth caterpillar:** These 'woolly bears' are not uncommon at this time of year as they show themselves in the open while searching for a place to pupate - on Sep 8 I almost ran over one with my bicycle on south Hayling

**Exotic Moths** - a huge **Indian Moon Moth** was a surprise visitor to a moth trap at Friston near Eastbourne on Sep 8

## PLANTS

**Yellow Horned Poppy:** Most of these are well over but I still found two in fresh flower on Hayling on Sep 8

**Corn Cackle:** The 'wildflower seed' plants sown on soil lining Southmoor Lane in Havant outside the new carpark at the southern end of the road were still flowering on Sep 7 (along with **Corn Marigold** and **Cornflower** plants)

**Nottingham Catchfly:** I missed seeing these in flower on south Hayling this summer but on Sep 8 I saw several dead plants with seed cases.

**Green Amaranth:** One plant still flowering in Juniper Square at Havant on Sep 11

**Pencilled Cranesbill:** After coming across this for the first time in roadside grass at Pook Lane in July I was pleased to find two more plants covered with flowers on waste ground at Havant Bus Station on Sep 9 (see Diary entry)

**Common Gorse:** I found the first flowers I have seen since May 12 when cycling down the Hayling Coastal Path on Sep 8 - before long all the gorse bushes will be turning yellow again.

**White Melilot:** I found some flowering by the entrance to Langstone Harbour on Sep 8 and was reminded that I have only seen it once before this year (at the Hayling Oysterbeds in June)

**Small Melilot:** After finding this on waste ground at the junction of Southmoor Lane and Penner Road on July 28 I found a different plant freshly flowering nearby on Sep 7

**Lucerne:** Still flowering on the Hayling seawall in the Saltmarsh Lane area on Sep 8

**Cow Parsley:** First 'second flowering' for this year was found by Brian Fellows at Nore Barn west of Emsworth on Sep 10

**Cocks Eggs:** The Sinah Common colony was flourishing and covered with flowers on Sep 8

**Duke of Argyll's Teapant:** Flowers on a bush at the Langstone South Moors were the first I have seen since July 20

**Moth Mullein:** Flowers were still open on Sep 10 on plants at Prinsted where I had first come across the species on July 4

**Pale Toadflax:** Two plants had fresh flowers at their only Hayling Island site on Sep 8

**Apple Mint:** Lots of this flowering on the earth banks around the Fort Nelson carpark at the west end of Portsdown on Sep 12

**Spearmint:** Flowering at the southern end of Southmoor Lane in Havant on Sep 7

**Tufted Forget-me-not:** A second outburst of flowering on the Langstone South Moors on Sep 12

**Common Comfrey:** Lots of fresh flowers around the Fort Nelson carpark (Portsdown) on Sep 12

**Sheep's Bit:** Several plants of this were still flowering at south Hayling on Sep 8

**Blue Fleabane:** Still flowering on the old north pier of the Hayling Island rail line on Sep 12

**Tansy:** I had my first sight of this in flower on south Hayling on Sep 8 when the flowers were nearly over

**Yellow Flag:** New flowers opening on one plant at the Langstone South Moors on Sep 12

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Stoat:** A message from a Sussex birder reporting birds seen at Cuckmere Haven (just west of Beachy Head) on Sep 9 includes an observation of a **Stoat killing a Rabbit**.

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** One seen off Portland Bill on Sep 7 was the first I have seen reported since June 16

**Fungi:** In addition to the **three species of Waxcap** which I have mentioned before (**Meadow, Butter** and **Slimy**) my lawn currently has a small show of the tiny but very colourful species now called **Orange Mosscap (Rickenella fibula)** which is shown by Roger Phillips under the name Mycena fibula. Stephan Buczacki lists it as Mycena fibula but gives four synonyms for the genus (Rickenella, Omphalina, Omphalia and Gerronema). Also in the lawn by Sep 13 were **Parrot Waxcaps** and a second round of **Blackening Waxcaps**. On Sep 12 the first **Parasol Mushrooms** were found in the Rye area and can almost certainly be found locally around the Havant area.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 8 - 14 (WEEK 36 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 13 Sep**

#### **Egret roost count at Langstone**

The conditions for counting the **night roost of Egrets** at Langstone Mill Pond were ideal this evening - the tide was low, meaning that the birds would continue feeding until the last moment, thus bunching their arrival at the roost around the time of sunset, and the weather was pleasant with a clear sky for seeing them arrive. I reached the pond an hour before sunset to find 7 birds already in the trees (there could have been more already hidden by the foliage but I do not think so) and when I left, a few minutes after sunset, I had counted the arrival of **128 birds** including a couple of large groups of 15+ birds which made an impressive sight as they 'whiffled' down, crossing and re-crossing as they searched the trees for a vacant space to land on. It is likely that another dozen (maybe 20) birds arrived after I left but I re-assured myself that the roost is still in use, and the fact that most birds

came from the direction of Langstone Harbour suggested that this roost serves the Langstone Harbour area while the roost close to the Thorney Little Deeps (which had 151 birds on Aug 27) probably operates in parallel, serving the Chichester Harbour area.

Very few other birds seen but I twice heard **Cetti's Warbler song** from the pond, and out on the mud a **small roost of Lapwings** was in place (first time this autumn that I have seen them there).

### [Fri 12 Sep](#)

#### Langstone and Portsdown west

In the morning I cycled down the Billy Trail to the north end of the old rail bridge at Langstone where I was greeted by the piping of a **Common Sandpiper** and saw a **Small Copper butterfly** among the **Whites**. **Common Centaury**, **Viper's Bugloss** and **Blue Fleabane** were still in flower here, and when I went on to the South Moors I found fresh flowers on **Duke of Argyll's Teapant** plus **Tufted Forget-me-not** and a single stem of **Yellow Flag** with flowers about to open.

On the seawall I passed at least ten **Wheatears** and at Budds Farm Pools the **Coot** had diminished from around 100 to a more reasonable 40 while the **five cygnets** still here with their parents **were exercising their wings** and should pretty soon be able to fly over the fence onto the harbour waters. **9 Gadwall** and perhaps **40 Tufted Duck** were seen but I only saw **one Shoveler**. **Two Egrets** were unusual perched on the trees in the centre of the north side and **Little Grebes** were still trilling their 'song'.

Heading up Southmoor Lane I was pleased to see **Hedgerow Cranesbill** flowering (and **Small Melilot** across the road)

In the evening a short trip to the Fort Nelson carpark at the west end of Portsdown gave me a **Common Blue butterfly** settling for the night among **Wild Basil**, **Greater Knapweed**, **Eyebright** and other downland flowers while on the damp earth of the raised banks around the carpark I found masses of both **Apple Mint** and **Common Comfrey**.

### [Wed 10 Sep](#)

#### Moth Mullein at Prinsted

This evening I had a brief chance to look at the Prinsted market garden plot where a mass of **Shaggy Soldier** was in flower but there was nothing else more exciting than **Small Nettle** and **Black Nightshade**. Before reaching the plot, however, I was very pleased to find **Moth Mullein** still flowering where I had discovered it in July (among rough grass just outside the low wall of the ex-farmyard on your right immediately before coming to the gate into the field with the market garden plot)

### [Tue 9 Sep](#)

#### Pencilled Cranesbill at Havant Bus Station

A roundabout route to the Havant shops today gave me a good find of at least two plants of **Pencilled Cranesbill** in full flower on a tiny bit of waste ground (with no garden anywhere in sight). I had found this species for the very first time in July this year, growing in the roadside grass of Pook Lane (north of the A27) just outside a garden in which the parents of this 'escape' might have been planted, but today's find was definitely a proper 'casual'. If anyone wants to see the plants walk from the

Meridian Centre around the back of the Bus Station building and you will come to the plants in a narrow strip of soil behind kerb stones where any vehicles have to turn right.

Also seen today in Havant Park one plant of **Creeping Yellow-cress** has evaded the council gardeners and is once more coming into flower. Elsewhere in the Park a big clump of brutally trimmed **Butchers Broom** has a lot of fresh growth which I checked for first flowers (last year I found the first on plants at the Langstone South Moors on Aug 28) but could only find unopen flower buds.

## Mon 8 Sep

### Better weather last night and today

After completing my weekly summary yesterday I still had time in the evening for a ride to Budds Farm where the pools were once again crowded with returning wildfowl. Surprisingly **100 Coot** were present with more than **20 Tufted Duck** and around 10 each of **Shoveler** and **Gadwall** plus the usual **Mallard**, **Little Grebes** and **Moorhen**. Also on the water were the **Swan family with the five cygnets** that I had last seen in June - they will presumably have to stay here until the cygnets can fly as there is no easy way for them to get through the fencing and onto the sea. Over the water a small flock of **House** and **Sand Martins** were hawking for insects. On the way there down Southmoor Lane I stopped at the waste ground immediately north of Penner Road and was pleased to find **Small Melilot** still in flower, though in a different place from the plant which I discovered here on July 28 when it was a 'first' for me in Havant (I have only seen it at one other site - the Portsmouth IBM HQ - and I have not seen it there for a good many years) This morning the welcome sunshine brought brief **Chiffchaff song** from a bird passing down the Billy Trail behind my house and in the garden both **Large** and **Small White butterflies** (plus a **probable Green Veined** - not seen closely but seemingly egg laying on grass which the 'Cabbage' whites would not do) were on the wing.

After lunch I cycled to Gunner Point on Hayling, seeing a good selection of flowers but very few birds though I did score my first **Yellow Wagtail** of the autumn with a fly-over heard near the Oysterbeds where **Sandwich Tern** was the most exotic species and **Oystercatchers** and **Little Egrets** the only numerous ones (other than a flock of at least **100 Starlings**).

In the carpark for the Oysterbeds I found my **first Common Gorse of the autumn** in flower (later I saw flowers in just two other places) - the first flowers I have seen since May (although **Dwarf Gorse** has been flowering in the meanwhile). A little further south I passed several flowering plants of **Pepper Saxifrage** (my first for the year though Brian Fellows has had them out at Emsworth since the end of July). Another pleasant surprise on the shingle south of Stoke Bay was a single plant of **Yellow Horned Poppy** covered with fresh flowers. On the sea wall of the Saltmarsh Lane area **Lucerne** was still in flower and in the edge of the coastal path I passed both **Common Centaury** and **Field Scabious**. Just before reaching the Saltmarsh Lane area I disturbed a flock of at least **30 Chaffinches** from pools of water in the track.

On the Sinah Common shore **Sheep's Bit**, **Restharrow**, **Thrift** and **Sea Compion** were still in flower and a few **dead plants of Nottingham Catchfly** still had seed pods to show that they are still to be found there. Two firsts for the year as far as I am concerned were a couple of plants of **Pale Toadflax** in fresh flower and a

number of **Tansy** plants whose time was almost over - in between the sites for these I passed the flourishing colony of **Cock's Eggs** still in full flower (when looking at them I was reminded that last year I found **Dodder** on some of the gorse nearby but I have not seen any this year).

In the evening we drove to the top of Portsdown to enjoy the view and while there the **Swallows** hawking over Fort Widley suddenly burst into alarm calls, drawing our attention to a **Sparrowhawk** (probably a juvenile male) **making a vain attempt to catch a Swallow**

### **SUMMARY FOR SEP 1 - 7 (WEEK 35 OF 2008)**

As we get into autumn proper our winter wildfowl are starting to return - **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Pintail** are all newly back at some sites.

The **Black Swans** kept on West Ashling pond near Chichester have once again demonstrated that their biological clocks are still set to antipodean time by hatching **a brood of six cygnets** at this time of year.

Plenty of raptor news but I like the story of **the Peregrine using the rising tide to catch a Godwit**.

Sightings are claimed for both **Spotted** and **Little Crake** and there have been reports of **Dotterel** at two southern sites.

**Grey Phalarope** were commonplace this week but sightings of **Sabine's Gull** and **Forster's Tern** were definitely one-offs.

Autumn **Wrynecks** have included a relatively long stayer on Thorney Island

It has not been a good week for insects but it is good to see a few reports of **Small Tortoiseshell** (even if one was carried off by a **Hornet** to feed the latter's larvae). There has also been an interesting report of **a full grown Swallow-tail butterfly caterpillar** being found eating carrot tops in Kent but the most exciting insect news is of **three large Western Conifer Seed Bugs arriving on the south east coast on the same night** (only one had ever been recorded in Britain before their arrival)

Autumn rain has brought second flowering of many plants but **Ivy** is the only one to be new at this time of year. Local interest comes from a find of a rare alien grass (**Yellow Bristle-grass**) in the centre of Havant while the only **Sickle Medick** plants in Hampshire are now close to extinction

As might be expected news of **Fungi** is picking up and this week I have added two new species to my personal repertoire but the big animal story is of **a Wood Mouse eating the legs of a Chaffinch**.

### **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** A pair were seen with **3 very young juveniles** on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Sept 2. The number on the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood continues to increase - on July 6 Bob Chapman reported 45+ there, on Aug 16 he told us of 105 and on Sep 6 he saw at least 114

**Black-necked Grebe:** On Sep 1 two turned up at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex, probably only stopping briefly in transit. At the RSPB Dungeness reserve there were said to be four present on Aug 28 and a further report on Aug 31 spoke of 'several' there. The four that were at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 17 have not been mentioned again so I do not know of any currently in Hampshire though the one present in Langstone Harbour at the start of August may still be there.

**Sooty Shearwater:** Singles were seen at Dungeness on Aug 29, 30 and Sep 1 (when one was also seen off Portland) and on Sep 5 there were 29 there. Keith Betton's monthly round-up of Hampshire bird news for August includes a report which I had not seen before of one in Hayling Bay on Aug 13 (first Hampshire report for the year?). Latest reports are of 1 passing Durlston and 2 off Portland on Sep 5, with one going west past Selsey on Sep 6

**Balearic Shearwater:** The day total of these recorded at Portland on Sep 1 was 66, beating the previous high day counts of around 50 on Jan 13 and 60 on July 4

**Storm Petrel:** One was off Portland Bill on Sep 6 - the first seen anywhere since Aug 18

**Gannet:** More than 330 flew east past Milford at the west end of the Solent on Sep 5 when Dungeness recorded 316

**Shag:** Two were close in at Selsey Bill on Sep 5 and on Sep 6 Christchurch Harbour had one inside the harbour while ten flew west off Ventnor (IoW) - maybe we will soon see one back in the Langstone Harbour entrance

**Grey Heron:** Dungeness reported a high count of 13 birds passing through on Aug 31 but I am not sure if they were coming or going (probably the latter?)

**Spoonbill:** The group of six young birds was still in Poole Harbour on Sep 6 but it would seem that more are arriving in the south of England as Poole Harbour had 8 of them on Aug 31 and Pagham Harbour had 3 feeding in the water off Church Norton that day but they flew off when the water rose. Interesting news from Scotland (via Lee Evans) is of a family group of 5 birds on the River Dee at Kirkcudbright on Aug 30 - **the begging behaviour of the young seemed to indicate that the parents had bred locally in Scotland.**

**Black Swan:** Brian Fellows has heard that one pair of the birds kept on West Ashling pond ( west of Chichester) now have **six young cygnets** (these birds still work to their antipodean biological clocks and breed in our autumn)

**Greylag Goose:** An impressive count of 319 came to roost at Pulborough Brooks on the evening of Sep 1

**Canada Goose:** An even more impressive (and highly undesirable) count of 814 arriving at Pulborough Brooks to roost on Sep 1

**Shelduck:** Adults do not normally return from their distant moult grounds until near the end of September so I am not sure why 2 adults arrived at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 31 - they must have come from somewhere nearby

**Wigeon:** The first are just starting to return from breeding in other countries. 3 were seen at Dungeness on Aug 31 and on Sep 1 the 2 birds that have been at Pulborough Brooks through the summer suddenly become 6 and then increased to 7 on Sep 2. On Sep 3 Christchurch Harbour acquired 12 new birds and on Sep 6 there were 13 in the Eling Great Marsh area at the head of Southampton Water

**Teal:** These too are returning to Pulborough - at the end of July there were 15 there with no higher counts until Aug 16 when the total jumped to around 40 (and then to 160 on Aug 18). I think most of those travelled on and now a second wave has brought counts of 59 on Aug 30 and 82 on Sep 1 with Dungeness reporting 20 passing on Aug 30 and 30 there on Aug 31

**Pintail:** The first of these are also arriving - Christchurch Harbour reported 3 flying in from the sea and going north on Sep 1 (remarking that these were the first of the autumn there), and on that same day Pulborough Brooks had 3 which I have not seen reported there during the summer. On Sep 3 a single bird flew west past Dungeness and on Sep 5 there were 7 in Pagham Harbour (described as the first of the autumn there).

**Garganey:** These will not be with us much longer but on Sep 1 there was still one at Rye Harbour

**Honey Buzzard:** Of the 38 reports of this species that I have logged since the first flew over East Sussex on Apr 24 the first 16 were of spring passage (up to June 4), then there were 7 reports in June or July that may have been breeding birds (interestingly we were told by Lee Evans that he knew of 63 occupied territories in the UK), and the last 15 have been of autumn passage starting on Aug 16 and 13 of these 15 have been reported between Aug 29 and Sep 1. The first of these was of a bird flying north west over Sandy Point (Hayling) on Aug 29 which sounds as if it were going in the wrong direction but I suspect it had reached the coast and found the conditions were not ideal for crossing the Channel and so decided to go inland again to take a break from its journey.

**Marsh Harrier:** Keith Betton's summary for August includes a report of one at Farlington Marshes on Aug 23 and this has been followed by several local sightings, three of them on Aug 31 when one was over the Thorney Island Deepes and two over Titchfield Haven (what was probably one of these was seen over the Stubbington area south of Fareham). Interestingly there seems to have been a peak in their passage that day with 5 seen over Dungeness.

**Montagu's Harrier:** Also on Aug 31 Christchurch Harbour had a probable sighting on a Montagu's. Another probable was flushed from long grass in Eridge Park near Crowborough on Sep 6 - the report said the bird was seen .. "Gliding on well raised wings, its upper plumage was very dark, but perhaps made darker by recent heavy rain" - but I am not sure that raptor experts would think this sufficient to distinguish Montagu's from Hen Harrier. My understanding is that all Harriers raise their wings high in flight and the illustrations contrasting ringtail Hen and Montagu's in Keith Vinicombe's 'Bird Identification' show very little difference in the dark colour of the upper plumage and rely on the longer, slimmer wings with three prominent primary 'fingers' to pick out Montagu's from a Hen Harrier whose broader wings show four 'fingers'.

**Goshawk:** Butterfly hunters on Round Hill at Steyning (north of Worthing) on Aug 30 had good views of a passing female Goshawk

**Sparrowhawk:** Five migrants were over Dungeness on Aug 30 and six were reported there on Aug 31

**Osprey:** I think there were three over Thorney on Sep 1 (one seen on the Thornham Marshes landing lights and two seen over the north west of the island near the sea wall) and on Aug 31 singles were over Farlington Marshes and Titchfield Haven. Latest local reports are of one seen from Farlington Marshes on Sep 3 and over the Thorney Deeps on Sep 5 with one reported at Titchfield Haven on Sep 6

**Merlin:** Keith Betton's August Summary shows that the bird which has returned to Farlington Marshes was a regular sight there from Aug 26 on while the sighting of one on Aug 17 may have been of a transient bird.

**Hobby:** Increasing numbers seen at the coast probably indicate that some of these birds are already departing (though it may be that they are only at the coast to prey on the passerine migrants which are now there in large numbers). On Aug 30 **four Hobbies** were at the Lymington Marshes and on Aug 31 there were four at Dungeness. The latest report I have seen is of one over the Thorney Deeps on Sep 5

**Peregrine:** Martin Gillingham describes how, when he was at Farlington Marshes on Sep 3, he saw a **Black-tailed Godwit** narrowly escape being taken by one of two **Peregrines**. The **Godwit** took refuge under the hull of a boat resting on the mud but the **Peregrine** seems to have known that the tide was rising and so perched on the boat until the rising water forced the **Godwit** out from under the boat to become 'easy pickings' for the **Peregrine**.

**Spotted Crake:** These are usually seen at Farlington Marshes each autumn and the presence of one in north Kent from Aug 16 to 26 made it likely that one was seen at Farlington on Aug 28 but no one other than the unknown finder on that day has been able to re-find the bird there.

**Little Crake:** On Aug 31 Kris Gillam had a distant view of one at the Hersey nature reserve (north east coast of the Isle of Wight) but that also has not been seen again

**Dotterel:** No local sightings but on Sep 1 single juveniles were at two southern sites (Slimbridge and Scilly) according to Lee Evans

**Lapwing:** No large flocks have yet reached the Solent Harbours but on Sep 2 a flock of around 200 was seen in the Twyford area just south of Winchester by a passing motorist

**Knot:** These have now reached Kent in large numbers - 114 were reported at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Sep 1 after a count of 87 there on Aug 31. On Sep 5 a flock of 10 were seen in Pagham Harbour but elsewhere (e.g. Lymington and Christchurch) only ones or twos are being reported

**Sanderling:** There were reports of 30 at Dungeness on Aug 16 and 30 at Ryde sands on Aug 18 but otherwise no double figure counts this autumn until Sep 6 when there were around 40 at Christchurch Harbour

**Little Stint:** One was seen on Thorney Island on Aug 31, another was at Farlington Marshes on Sep 3 and one was at Keyhaven (Lymington) on Sep 6.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One was at Coward's Marsh (just north of Christchurch) on Sep 4 and moved to Christchurch Harbour after being flushed by a Hobby - latest report at the Harbour is dated Sep 6

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Recent local sightings have been three at Farlington Marshes on Sep 3 and two at Church Norton (Pagham Harbour) on Sep 6

**Grey Phalarope:** There seem to be more than usual passing through this autumn. Since the first was seen at Lymington on Aug 21 I have noted 30 reports with 20 of them since Sep 3. One showed well at Sidlesham Ferry from Sep 3 to 6, two or more were at Keyhaven on Sep 6 when another two were at Titchfield Haven and yet another two were seen at Church Norton.

**Pomarine Skua:** In addition to sightings at Dungeness and Portland this week one was seen inside Pagham Harbour on Sep 5

**Arctic Skua:** Plenty of these about with a peak count of 66 at Dungeness on Sep 5

**Long-tailed Skua:** Singles seen in the Portland area on Sep 1, 5 and 6

**Little Gull:** Peak count was 11 at Dungeness on Sep 5 when a first winter bird was seen in Southampton Water

**Sabine's Gull:** A juvenile flew east at Selsey Bill on Sep 6

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** We haven't heard much about their autumn passage so far but some 60 were seen roosting in the Cuckmere Haven area near Beachy Head on Aug 31

**Forster's Tern:** Occasional vagrants of this north American species reach Britain at a rate of around one a year and until now I have never heard of one on the south coast but on Aug 31 there was a confident report of one flying east past Hill Head (Titchfield Haven area). It was seen by Mark Palmer who commented on its 'classic face mask and very pale wingtips'. No one else seems to have picked it up yet.

**Little Tern:** On Sep 5 the Portsmouth NEWS carried RSPB Warden Chris Cockburn's report on this summer's breeding success on the Langstone Harbour islands. This showed that Little Terns built only 11 nests on the Islands (compared to 29 at the Oysterbeds) but no chicks fledged at either site. In addition to the normal depredation from Foxes and high tides a major cause of the Terns lack of success was the lack of room for their nests after **4886 pairs of Black-headed Gulls** (plus the **Mediterranean Gulls and other terns**) had taken up virtually all the available space on South Binness island. The RSPB had done their best by clearing vegetation to make more nesting space, and had put up an electric fence to deter foxes, but in the end the number of gulls was the chief obstacle to **Little Tern** breeding success.

**Black Tern:** These are now reaching the peak of their autumn passage bringing counts of 7 seen at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Aug 29 and 13 at Ibsley Water (Ringwood) on Aug 31 (in Kent they probably consider the peak to have occurred on Aug 6 and 7 when there were up to 141 Black Terns off Reculver on the north coast while counts at Dungeness have been 58 on Aug 16 and 35 on Aug 24). There have been 31 reports of Black Terns in this week's news - most reports were of three or less birds but on Sep 5 the count at Dungeness was 27

**White-winged Black Tern:** A first winter bird has been at the Dungeness RSPB reserve from Aug 31 to Sep 6 at least

**Turtle Dove:** I think most of these have now left but one was still at Portland on Sep 4

**Cuckoo:** A young bird was in the Gilkicker area near Gosport on Aug 31

**Short-eared Owl:** Portland has now had three returning birds (on Aug 23, 28 and 31) and others were at Pagham Harbour on Aug 23 and at Seaford near Beachy Head on Aug 31

**Swift:** 10 were recorded at Dungeness on Aug 31 and Durlston has had the only September bird so far (a single on Sep 1)

**Wryneck:** Twenty reports so far this autumn with the first at Farlington Marshes on Aug 28. On Aug 30 there were singles at Portland, Durlston and two separate ones in the Brighton area (one of them seen eating ants on the patio of a suburban garden the Hangleton area of Hove). On Aug 31 one appeared on the 'NRA track' joining the Thorney Island Main Road to the seawall near the Little Deeps and remained until Sep 5. Another was in the Stubbington area south of Fareham on Aug 31. Since then there have been sightings at Pulborough Brooks, Cuckmere Haven near Beachy Head and Reculver in north Kent

**Tawny Pipit:** One arrived on Portland on Sep 1 and was still there on Sep 5

**Tree Pipit:** 20 were on Portland on Aug 31

**Yellow Wagtail:** The biggest flock of passage birds so far was 300+ at Rye Harbour on Sep 1. Hampshire had a reasonable share in this with a count of 72 at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Aug 31 when there were around 50 on the Isle of Wight (West High Down) and 125 at Dungeness

**White Wagtail:** Portland recorded 11 on Sep 1, presumably birds that have crossed the channel in the wrong direction and will have to make the return journey south in a few days

**Whinchat:** Three were seen by a group of birders walking around Thorney Island on Aug 31 when there were four in the fields south of Fareham and north of Stubbington (and a peak of 8 in the Seaford area)

**Pied Flycatcher:** Other than the spring bird which spent a day on the Pook Lane shore east of Langstone on Apr 6/7 I have seen no reports of Hampshire sightings until now when Keith Betton's August Summary lists singles at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Aug 23 and 31

**Long-tailed Tit:** An interesting report of more than 75 at Rooksbury Mill (Andover) on Aug 31 - not sure if there was a typing error here.

**Rook:** A report of around 250 in the fields between Fareham and Stubbington on Aug 31 may well mark the start of the large winter corvid roost which has occurred in each of many recent winters with the birds spending the night somewhere in the Elson Wood area on the north west shore of Portsmouth Harbour and commuting west each morning to feed in sites as far away as the New Forest and then trooping back each evening.

**Rose-coloured Starling:** One has been seen regularly at Portland from Aug 31 to Sep 2.

**House Sparrow:** A good show of what I call 'Corn Sparrows' with 135 **House Sparrows** seen in open fields between Fareham and Stubbington on Aug 31

**Chaffinch:** See the entry for **Wood Mouse** in Other Wildlife for an unusual observation of the mouse eating a **dead Chaffinch**.

**Ortolan Bunting:** Two of these have been at Portland from Aug 29 to Sep 2

**Escapes:** At Pulborough Brooks on Sep 2 the wildfowl were said to include both a juvenile female **Australian Shelduck** and an adult male **Cape Shelduck** (presumably both had flown up river from the Arundel Wildfowl reserve)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Red-veined Darter:** The only report in this week of atrocious weather is of a Red-veined Darter seen on the Lymington Marshes on Sep3

### Butterflies

**27 species reported this week**, including the following ...

**Silver Spotted Skipper:** A very good count of 75 at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on Aug 30 (though I see there were 78 here in early Sep last year and 107 in August)

**Clouded Yellow:** One seen in the Pevensey Levels area near Eastbourne on Aug 30 was only the 14th report for the year (and the third for August)

**Brimstone:** Another good count of 60 at Old Winchester Hill on Aug 30

**Painted Lady:** Four reports this week - 1 in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 31, one at Shoreham on Sep 1 and another at Durlston that day, plus one on Stockbridge Down on Sep 3

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Seen at eight sites this week with the highest count for the year (12 in the Ramsgate area of Kent) on Aug 31. Sadly I see that one specimen seen at Steyning in West Sussex was taken by a Hornet as food for Hornet larvae and thus will not be seen again next spring

**Marbled White:** Having said in last week's summary that these were not being reported from anywhere other than Durlston since mid-August I am glad to see that one was seen at the mouth of the Beaulieu River on Aug 30

## Moths

**Olive Tree Pearl (1408 *Palpita vitrealis*):** First report for the year from the Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Aug 29 - this micro is given its new English name in recognition of its liking for Olive Trees around the Mediterranean - not common in Britain

***Ancylosis oblitella* (1467):** First record for the year from Portland on Aug 30

**Small Dusty Wave (1707 *Idea seriata*):** First record from Ringmer near Lewes on Aug 30

**Large Thorn (1911 *Ennomos autumnaria*):** First for the year in an Edburton village garden (north of Brighton) on Aug 31

**Buff Ermine (2061 *Spilosoma luteum*):** This moth does not normally have a second generation but a very fresh specimen trapped at Brighton on Aug 31 suggested that at least one had not waited until May of next year to emerge

**Hedge Rustic (2177 *Tholera cespitis*):** First for the year in an Edburton village garden (north of Brighton) on Aug 31

**Flounced Rustic (2353 *Luperina testacea*):** First of year seen in Brighton on or just before Sep 5

## Caterpillars

**Swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio machaon*):** A caterpillar which had eaten several carrot tops in a Margate (Kent) allotment was identified as a mature larva of the Swallowtail butterfly - its parent had presumably flown over from the continent as a migrant

**Vapourer moth (*Orgyia antiqua*):** The small caterpillars of this moth have a fascinating display of colourful skin and hairs which can be seen in a photo on the Rye Bay website at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/category/all-latest-news/insects/moths/> (click the 'Read the rest of this entry' link to see a close up photo). The photos show why this is one of a group called Tussock Moths (with a row of toothbrush like tufts or tussocks of hair on the caterpillars)

## Other Insects

**Hornet:** One gets into the news by taking a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly at Steyning in West Sussex on Aug 30 and another was seen killing Bumblebees on Aug 31

**Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*):** Yet another insect starting to invade Britain. Three of these very large Squash-bugs arrived on the night of Aug 31 (two found at Dungeness and the third in a

moth trap at Hastings) to become the second, third and fourth records for the species in Britain. A search of the internet for more info came up with the following from an Italian website (Entinfo) ...

"In North America the nearctic Leaf-footed conifer seed bug *Leptoglossus occidentalis* is considered a severe pest of conifer seed orchards, and it sometimes causes serious alarm when large numbers of adults suddenly invade houses looking for overwintering sites.

"This insect was never recorded for the European fauna, but in 1999 it was first collected near Vicenza (northern Italy). Up to now several specimens were observed in different localities of northern Italy.

"Adults are 9 to 18 mm long, females being larger than males."

For a picture of the specimen which Andy Phillips found in his Hastings moth trap go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wildhastings/2813195575/> Andy says that the species is now spreading through Europe and that the first for Britain was found at Weymouth in 2007

## PLANTS

**Saltwort** and **Frosted Orache**: Both these shore plants can normally be found at Sandy Point on Hayling but I could not find either of them this year. Both were recorded in the Thanet area of Kent on Sep 1

**Shining Cranesbill**: The plants in the Pook Lane area of east Havant were having a substantial second flowering on Sep 5

**Pencilled Cranesbill**: The plant on the grass verge of Pook Lane (north of A27) in east Havant was also having an abundant late flowering on Sep 5

**Sickle medick (*Medicago sativa* ssp. *falcata*)**: This uncommon plant occurs as a native in East Anglia and is occasionally found elsewhere in south east England. In 2003 a single cluster of plants was found on Portsdown to be the only Hampshire example but the cluster has diminished and this year just one small plant was flowering on Sep 1

**Ivy**: Although one bush had flowers in Havant on Aug 19 it was not until Sep 5 that I was able to find several flowering plants on the same day

**Stone Parsley**: I have not seen this in flower since the end of July so a freshly flowering plant on Sep 5 was a surprise

**Hogweed**: I have not seen this in flower since the end of July so a freshly flowering plant on Sep 5 was a surprise

**Weasel's Snout (or Lesser Snapdragon)**: 20 or more plants were flowering well in the New Lane allotments on Sep 3

**Harebell**: Still a good show on Portsdown on Sep 1

**Perennial Sunflower (*Helianthus x laetiflorus*):** This garden escape has established itself on the east side of the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth and was flowering there on Sep 4

**Yellow Bristle-grass:** A single plant of this was flowering in the centre of Havant on Sep 1 not far from my only other find of the species in 2004 - see Diary entry for Sep 1 for more detail

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Wood Mouse:** A photo in the Hampshire Bird News for Sep 5 showed a **dead Chaffinch** lying on the ground with a **Wood Mouse** gnawing at its wing. The message describing the scene said that the **Chaffinch** had flown into a house window and broken its neck when fleeing from a **Sparrowhawk** and that the mouse had then appeared in broad daylight and started to gnaw at one of the bird's legs (the sound of the gnawing being audible several feet away by the observer who was then able to take the photo without apparently frightening the mouse). My guess is that the mouse had been poisoned and was desperately seeking an antidote and I base this on having read in the past of sheep on some Scottish Island, where the food available to them is deficient in some essential minerals, eating the legs off life tern chicks for the same reason that cattle lick salt blocks. The poison might well have dulled the senses of the mouse, accounting for its lack of fear of the photographer's close approach, and the gnawing of the bird's leg and wing bone, rather than any attempt to get at its flesh, matches the action of the Scottish sheep.

The photo can be seen at

<http://ph.groups.yahoo.com/group/hoslist/photos/view/d8b2?b=1> and if you click 'Large' against the VIEW option above the picture you can clearly see the damage the mouse has done to the bird's right leg. The orangey tinge to the mouse's upper fur, and the contrast between the colour of that upper fur and the white fur under its body, show that this is a **Wood Mouse** (a **House Mouse** would be grey all over). Had it been a **Yellow-necked Mouse** I think you would see, at the top of the mouse's right leg, the start of the yellow bar running across its breast.

**Fungi:** On Aug 31 Nik Knight found a cluster of **White Spidles (*Clavaria fragilis* - was *C. vermicularis*)** on his lawn at Langstone and when I was on my way to see him on Sep 2 I found a new addition to the many fungi on the new wood chip piles beside the Billy Trail in the Langstone area - clearly a **Peziza species**, I eventually decided it was **P. ampliata** which is not listed in my older Fungus books but is pictured in Michael Jordan's more recent book and which was the closest match for colour, size, shape and other characteristics as well as being listed as occurring on wood chippings. As I had not heard of this species before I checked the list of records of it that is available on the internet through the British Mycological Society's Fungus Recording Database in which I found several recent finds of it had been in Hampshire.

Sep 5 started well with two new fungi in my lawn - one that I have seen in previous years (**Meadow Waxcap**) and one that I have never seen before which I am pretty sure had the unattractive new English Name of **Slimy Waxcap** and which has at least two scientific names - Roger Phillips and Stephan Buczacki list it as

**Hygrocybe unguinosa** but Michael Jordan has it as **Hygrocybe irrigata**. Later that morning I found a fresh and exuberant growth of **Giant Polypore** in the 'twitchel' path running east from Lymbourne Road to Wade Court Road

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 1 - 7 (WEEK 35 OF 2008)

### Fri 5 Sep

#### A walk in the wind and rain

This morning provided further proof of my long held view that there is always something to excite your interest in wildlife if you get out and look about you with an unprejudiced eye at whatever you may come across.

The day started well with two new fungi in my lawn - one that I have seen in previous years (**Meadow Waxcap**) and one that I have never seen before which I am pretty sure had the unattractive new English Name of **Slimy Waxcap** and which has at least two scientific name - Roger Phillips and Stephan Buczacki list it as **Hygrocybe unguinosa** but Michael Jordan has it as **Hygrocybe irrigata**. Later I walked to Warblington, passing the last remnants of **Danewort** and **Corn Marigold** flowers between the Billy Trail and Lymbourne Road and finding a magnificent new growth of **Giant Polypore** in the 'twitchel' path leading to Wade Court Road. Across Wade Court Road I came on the first of several **flowering Ivy plants** (I saw one open flower on Aug 19 but found no others until Sep 3 - today showed that they are at last starting to flower generally) and in the next section of the twitchel I noted **Pellitory of the Wall** and found a cluster of **Shining Cranesbill** plants covered with their tiny flowers.

My return by a different route found both **Stone Parsley** and **Hogweed** in flower (neither seen by me for a long while) and gave me another view of the **Pencilled Cranesbill** plant in grass on the west side of Pook Lane just north of its junction with Pembury Road - the plant is thriving and was covered with flowers.

Finally, to prove that however hard we look we never see everything, I found **Black Bindweed** in flower as I retraced my way through the twitchel path.

Another thing noted today was **the number of conkers brought down by the gales** - the leaves of the **Horse Chestnut** trees may look as if the trees were dying but luckily the depredations of the **Cameraria ohridella** moth larvae occur after the leaves have provided the trees with the energy they need to grow and develop seed so the moths do not seem to be too serious a problem for survival of the trees.

### Mon 1 Sep

#### Yellow Bristle-grass, Sickle Medick and Bullace Fruit

This morning I walked around Havant to see what was flowering in the new month. My route took me towards Solent Road so I thought I would see if any of the **Bastard Cabbage** still remained on the bank of the Langbrook Stream just north of Solent Road. When I got there I found a team of well meaning volunteers collecting litter and tidying up the banks of the stream so there was not a trace of the **Cabbage** plants (though nothing is all bad and the clearance could well have provided a good seed bed for any seeds that happen to have fallen).

Walking on up Park Road South I was again beside the stream north of West Street and here, quite unexpectedly, I came on a plant that I thought was **Green Bristle-grass** but which looked slightly unusual so I took a specimen home and on checking it out found it was **Yellow Bristle-grass (Setaria pumila)** which is less

common than the Green variety and a species that I have only seen twice before (both finds were in 2004 on Idsworth Down and in Havant near the multistorey carpark not far from the present discovery). I feel confident that this was not **Green Bristle-grass** as that has no more than three bristles on the stem of each flower spikelet and my find clearly had up to ten bristles, giving a choice of only two species (**S. pumila** or **S. parviflora** which has smaller flowers as the name suggests).

In the afternoon I paid a quick visit to Portsdown to look for **Autumn Ladies Tresses**. I did not find these (the grass in the area around the London Road has probably choked them out this year) but I did find a number of other downland plants such as **Harebells** and **Dwarf Thistles** plus **Autumn Gentians** and **Small Scabious**. To make up for the absence of the orchids I was pleased to find a small plant of **Sickle Medick** in flower. This plant is normally restricted to East Anglia but somehow arrived at this site in Hampshire to be discovered in Sept 2003 when the patch of flowering plants was a metre across (so they had probably been there un-noticed in previous years). Since then the plants have diminished and I was not expecting to see any this year but I did find what was probably a single plant in the grass. As this is the only site for the plant in Hampshire I expect the species to be extinct in the county very soon.

The rough grass which had perhaps choked the **Autumn Ladies Tresses** was ideal for the **Wasp Spiders (Argiope bruennichi)** and there were probably dozens of them. I also disturbed a couple of **Meadow Brown butterflies** and came on a single **Six-spot Burnet moth** clinging to a plant stem and hoping for less windy weather.

I made my way back to the car by going round the south side of the Collyer's Pit area and along this southern side of this area of dense scrub and trees there was an extensive mass of small whitish-mauve plums which looked ripe but disproved this when I tasted one! I think these were what would be called **Bullace** fruit.

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### **SUMMARY FOR AUG 25 - 31 (WEEK 34 OF 2008)**

**151 Little Egrets** went to roost on Thorney this week as their numbers reach an autumn peak.

Three **Red-breasted Mergansers** appeared 'out of the blue' in Southampton Water near where the **Carrion Crow** flock now numbers 250 birds.

**Honey Buzzards** are now starting to move south and a second **Hen Harrier** has returned to southern England. Near Romsey the harrowing of a large field has brought **32 Buzzards** to search for worms in the exposed soil.

The week has brought two reports of **Corncrake** and a possible **Pacific Golden Plover** as the first **Short Eared Owls** return for the winter.

A **Nightjar** flying across a floodlit cricket pitch at Brighton livened up the game and the first three **Wryneck** have arrived on the coast to be seen by day.

Autumn rarities include **Tawny Pipit**, **Melodious Warbler**, **Red-backed Shrike** and **Ortolan Bunting**. **Robins** have suddenly become extremely common this week as continental birds arrive. **Tree Sparrows** are breeding in increasing numbers at Dungeness and a substantial flock of **Crossbills** has been in Havant Thicket

Not a specially good week for dragonflies or butterflies but a **Camberwell Beauty** is of interest and a small emergence of **Small Tortoiseshells** gives hope that they will still be seen next year.

Moth interest includes both **Convolvulus Hawk** and **Red Underwing** plus an **Elephant Hawk** which 'overslept'. Other insects include a reminder of **Snail Killing Flies** and why they are so called

Very little in the way of new flowers though I did see my first **Devil's Bit Scabious** but my personal best find was a plant of **Blue Pimpernel**

A **Leopard Slug** was a lifetime first for me as was a fungus called **Thelephora penicillata** (**Spiky Earthfan?**)

## **BIRDS**

**Black-necked Grebe:** The first that I have seen reported on the north Kent coast this autumn was at Cliffe Pools on Aug 29. At the Dungeness RSPB reserve, where two returned as early as July 29, the number had increased to four by Aug 28

**Sooty Shearwater:** Singles have been seen at St Catherine's Point (IoW) on Aug 24 (when 5 were seen at Portland), and at Dungeness on Aug 29

**Storm Petrel:** One was seen off Fort Victoria (IoW - across the Solent from Lymington) on Aug 13 - the reason for the lateness of this news is that Kris Gillam has been offline for a few weeks but now has a new website - you can get the address from my Links page

**Shag:** These re-appeared off Christchurch Harbour at the end of their breeding season as early as July 8 but maybe there is a further movement now occurring as 5 flew north over Dungeness on Aug 24 and a first winter bird was on the sea there on Aug 26

**Little Egret:** Barry Collins saw 151 birds enter the night roost in trees just north of the Thorney Little Deeps on the evening of Aug 27

**Mute Swan:** The Langstone Pond pair still have all six of their cygnets with them and on Aug 29 I saw them at Langstone and found another pair with two cygnets across the water in the Northney marina. In the past (more than five years ago) a pair nested each year on the saltings in the marina area but I don't think this pair had nested here this year.

**Greylag** and **Canada Goose:** The flock of **Greylag** at Pulborough Brooks was estimated to have 260 birds on Aug 18 but by Aug 24 that had gone up to 300+ (along with 324 **Canada Geese**). In Hampshire on Aug 20 around 150 **Greylags** were on Tundry Pond (west of Fleet) with around 440 **Canadas**. Another big flock of around 380 **Canadas** was seen in the Chilling area (between Warsash and

Titchfield) on Aug 29 and 114 of them were roosting at Christchurch Harbour on the night of Aug 27/28. A smaller flock of 90 birds was seen near the village of Kingsley, east of Alton, on Aug 27

**Shoveler:** These are gradually returning to the sites where they will spend the winter - the figures for the Isle of Wight Brading Marshes reserve are probably typical with just 2 there on Aug 10. 6 on Aug 16 and 11 on Aug 24

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Three were seen flying north up Southampton Water off Hythe on Aug 30 - I assume these have been summering here unobserved until now - in recent years the first to arrive for the winter are not seen until after mid-September and the first flocks do not appear until late in October

**Pochard:** Not many of these back yet but one was an unexpected sighting on the Lymington marshes on Aug 26 and another single at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 24 seems to have been a newcomer there

**Ruddy Duck:** A report of a male displaying to a female at the Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) on Aug 24 was the first mention of the species there since January (when at least 10 were present) but I don't know if this is because the birds were not worthy of mention in the intervening months or whether the current news is of newly returned birds

**Honey Buzzard:** A cluster of five reports between Aug 27 and 30 seems to show that autumn passage has started for this species - as three of these reports are from Kent the birds concerned there probably came from Scandinavia. Four reports were of singles (one on Aug 29 was over Ventnor Downs on the IoW) but on Aug 30 three different birds were over Beachy Head

**Marsh Harrier:** Of seven new reports this week the Isle of Wight had two birds at Brading Marshes on Aug 24 and Titchfield Haven had one on Aug 30

**Hen Harrier:** An immature male was over the Elmley Marshes in north Kent on Aug 27 following the ringtail seen at Dungeness on Aug 17

**Buzzard:** An intriguing observation at North Baddesley (east of Romsey) on Aug 25 was of 28 or more Buzzards together on the ground in a single field. A return visit to the field on Aug 26 could only see 8 but 32 or more were there on Aug 27. I know that Buzzards often resort to catching earthworms on the ground and maybe the large number were attracted there because a good supply of worms or other invertebrates was to be had there (e.g. after spraying slurry on the field) and I have now heard that this field has been cleared and harrowed and is thus the only extensive area of bare soil for miles around

**Osprey:** Twenty new reports in the latest news show that these are now streaming south though some are pausing on the coast. The bird which arrived at Titchfield Haven on Aug 16 was still being seen on Aug 29 and the one which reached the Lower Test Marshes on Aug 16 was still there on Aug 27. On Aug 25 there were two in Poole Harbour - increasing to three on Aug 26. Some time around Aug 21 one landed briefly in an old Sweet Chestnut tree in the Stansted Forest East Park (from where it would have its first good view of Chichester Harbour and the distant open sea as it came south)

**Kestrel:** One which flew south over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 25 was probably intending to cross the Channel.

**Merlin:** One was at Farlington Marshes on Aug 30, maybe the bird which arrived there on Aug 18, and others were at the Lymington Marshes on Aug 25, at Selsey West Fields on Aug 28 and at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 28. Portland has had sightings on Aug 26, 27, 28 and 29.

**Hobby:** On Aug 24 at the Seven Sisters Country Park near Beachy Head a **Hobby** was seen to catch a **Swallow** and then disappear with its prey into long grass from which it did not emerge for at least five minutes so presumably it was eating the **Swallow** on the ground - the observer thought this was unusual and expected the **Hobby** to take its prey to a plucking post (but if the **Hobby** was on passage it would not be familiar with the local environment and not know where to find a suitable perch). On Aug 23 a family party of two adult and one juvenile **Hobbies** were seen near Storrington (south of Pulborough) with one of the adults carrying a **Collared Dove** it had just caught (quite a large catch compared to the usual dragonfly prey!) A third recent observation was of a **Hobby** chasing but failing to catch a **Swift** over the shore at Climping (mouth of R Arun)

**Corncrake:** One was reported on the Dorset news to have been seen at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 23 and one was heard at Portland on Aug 30

**Common Crane:** The two birds which arrived at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Aug 23 were still there on Aug 29 - on Aug 25 they were seen 'dancing' on more than one occasion.

**American Golden Plover:** The summer plumaged bird which arrived on the Kent coast at Pegwell Bay on June 1 and subsequently moved to the Elmley Marshes was still there on Aug 23.

**Pacific Golden Plover:** One is claimed to have been at Newtown Nature Reserve on the Isle of Wight on the evenings of both Aug 26 and 27 but I have no further details.

**Grey Plover:** Although the first local returnee was off Thorney Island on Aug 15 and two were in Emsworth Harbour on Aug 22 the first summer plumage birds to be reported in Langstone Harbour only got a mention on Aug 30 when a flock of 24 were on mud off Farlington Marshes

**Ruff:** A female (**Reeve**) was seen from the Titchfield Haven Canal Path on Aug 26 and another was at Brading Marshes on the IoW on Aug 24 but here in Hampshire we are unlikely to see these birds in numbers to compete with the estimated 30 that were at the North Kent Oare Marshes on Aug 21. Having said that I see that **Ruff** are very unpredictable in their movements and Birds of Hants records several large congregations of them - in Sep 1980 there were 47 at Keyhaven and in Feb 1976 an influx brought 350 of them to Hampshire with 225 of them in the Lymington area.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The flock at the north Kent Elmley Marshes reached a count of 960 birds on Aug 26

**Spotted Redshank:** These are currently being reported from several south coast sites and one was at Farlington Marshes on Aug 27 while Aug 25 brought news of one at Sidlesham Ferry already in winter plumage

**Grey Phalarope:** The juvenile which turned up in the Lymington area on Aug 21 appears to have moved on during Aug 25 after being seen there that morning. Luckily it only flew to Titchfield Haven where it was seen Aug 27 and 29. A 'possible only' sighting came from the Weymouth area on Aug 27

**Arctic Skua:** Dungeness recorded 25 on Aug 24 and 35 on Aug 29

**Long-tailed Skua:** A 'probable' was seen off Ventnor on Aug 25 by Kris Gillam (whose old website of Isle of Wight bird news has been out of action for some time but he now has a new site which you can reach via my Links page). If the id was correct this would be the fourth reported on the south coast this year - the first was off Dungeness on May 2

**Common Gull:** On Aug 27 Steve Mansfield found a total of 39 on the Warblington Shore east of Langstone showing they are now back in force

**Caspian Gull:** A probable was seen by the Itchen in Southampton on Aug 26 but this has since been discounted

**Roseate Tern:** As usual at this time of year the movements of all tern species can cause confusion - in the mornings a lot of them are seen moving west as if leaving us, at midday they can be seen loitering or fishing as if resident at various places in the Solent, but in the evening they head back east to roost for the night just inside the entrances to Portsmouth and Langstone Harbours. This probably accounts for reports of **2 Roseate Terns** at Titchfield Haven on Aug 27 and in Langstone Harbour entrance that same evening (among at least **700 Common Terns** also roosting there)

**Black Tern:** Numbers of all tern species are starting to diminish but there was still a count of **35 Black Terns** off Dungeness on Aug 24. Locally one was at Titchfield Haven on Aug 26 (with a juvenile off Lymington that day) and one was over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Aug 28 with three over Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Aug 30

**Wood Pigeon:** Following reports of large flocks enjoying the unharvestable rain-flattened grain in Kent fields last week I am pleased to see that a flock of 1000+ in the Chilling area (west of Titchfield) were on stubble (so hopefully the farmer got his share of the valuable crop)

**Turtle Dove:** No local news but as these are leaving us there were reports of 14 on wires at the Oare Marshes near Faversham on both Aug 23 and 26 with 5 still there on Aug 28 (three were at Portland on Aug 29)

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** I am still very dubious about **Parakeets** invading Hampshire in any strength but another single bird was reported at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 24 to bring the number of reports from Hampshire sites to seven for this year. The first three were isolated reports in March, April and July but three of the last four were all on Aug 16 (at Lymington, Botley Woods and Bere Farm near

Portsdown) and these could have been sightings of the same bird as could the Blashford Lakes one.

**Cuckoo:** A juvenile was seen at Pagham Harbour on Aug 23 and this has been followed by singles at Sandwich Bay in Kent, Seaford in East Sussex and at Portland, all on Aug 28

**Barn Owl:** Two were seen by day in the Titchfield Haven area on Aug 26 (and since then I have heard of newly fledged young in Kent on Aug 23 - last year I was surprised to hear of juvenile Barn Owls still being fed by their parents at the end of November)

**Short-eared Owl:** The first report since May 10 came from Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on Aug 23 when a second new arrival was at Portland. Since then another has been at Portland on Aug 28

**Nightjar:** Several people watching floodlit 20/20 Cricket at Hove on the evening of Aug 25 saw a **Nightjar** fly across the pitch (some initially thought it was a large bat)

**Swift:** Still being seen daily with a major movement on Aug 28 bringing a count of 150 over the Seaford area with 24 there on Aug 29 when three flew over Langstone village in the evening. Three more were over Southampton Water on the morning of Aug 30 with one over Christchurch Harbour.

**Hoopoe:** One has been at a farm near Dungeness from Aug 20 to 27 at least

**Wryneck:** Aug 30 saw the first of the autumn reaching the south coast - one at Portland, one at Durlston and one in the Sheepcote Valley behind Brighton

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** A presumed migrant was found clinging to a groyne (probably a wooden one!) on the beach at Pett near Hastings on Aug 23. On Aug 29 one was at Portland and four flew high south over Christchurch Harbour

**Sand Martin:** A flock of around 1000 birds was feeding in the Dungeness area on Aug 25 along with **300 Swallows**

**Swallow:** These are now being seen on the move along the whole of the south coast - on Aug 29 there were some 2000 over Dungeness

**House Martin:** Although the bulk of these leave us much later at least 100 flew south from Christchurch Harbour on Aug 29

**Tawny Pipit:** The first autumn bird was heard flying east over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 30

**Tree Pipit:** Fourteen reports in the week's news show a marked increase in departing birds

**Meadow Pipit:** A group of six near the shore at Climping (mouth of R Arun) on Aug 26 may have been a first sign of their autumn passage. On Aug 28 an influx of 35 birds was noted at Sandwich Bay and on Aug 29 the number were said to be noticeably increasing in the Hastings area

**Yellow Wagtail:** 22 or more were at Farlington Marshes on the morning of Aug 27 when another single flew over the Warblington shore east of Langstone. Bigger flocks were 100+ at Climping on Aug 24 and 200+ at Rye Harbour on Aug 25. More recently there was a count of 200+ at Climping on Aug 30 with 50+ in Pagham Harbour, 50 on the Lymington shore and 40 at Portland. Locally Aug 30 brought a sighting of one in the Warblington fields with cattle and an unspecified number at Farlington Marshes

**Grey Wagtail:** Of local interest one flew over my Havant garden on Aug 27 to be the first 'winter bird' back here and on Aug 30 there were 10 migrants at Portland.

**Wren:** One re-started singing near my Havant garden on Aug 22 and is now heard daily

**Robin:** I have heard occasional autumn song since July 22 but since Aug 22 (when 50 migrants were reported at Beachy Head, presumably arriving to winter here) the frequency of song has increased and on the morning of Aug 28 (Thursday) three birds were singing at different points around my back garden and another was in my neighbour's front garden. Next day I cycled to north Hayling and heard at least one **Robin** in every 100 metres of suitable habitat - they have since thinned out but by Aug 30 I noticed that at last one **Robin** in my garden has ceased skulking and sits openly on various perches around the lawn, flying down when it sees some insect in the grass.

**Whinchat:** These are now widespread along the coast and on Aug 27 two were seen at Farlington Marshes where the first was reported on Aug 18. Portland had 8 on Aug 28 and there were 10 on the Lymington marshes on Aug 30

**Wheatear:** Portland recorded 55 on Aug 28

**Mistle Thrush:** A family group of 5 seen in the Chilling area (west of Titchfield) on Aug 29 is worth noting nowadays

**Melodious Warbler:** One at Portland on Aug 30 was only the third I have heard of this year.

**Wood Warbler:** One at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 29

**Firecrest:** These are not a common sight in autumn but one was seen at the Ringwood Blashford Lakes on Aug 24 following sightings at Climping on Aug 22 and Ballard Down on Aug 17. Since then there has been one at Portland on Aug 29

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Michael Prior tells us that two pairs nested around Stansted House this year but they have now left. British Wildlife magazine this week told me that monitoring of Flycatcher nests with cameras in an RSPB study has shown that birds (principally Jays) and domestic Cats are the main predators of Flycatcher nests - Squirrels, which have often been blamed for the decline of the Flycatchers, are not a major predator.

**Coal Tit:** I suspect that these have been singing in woodland for some time and I was reminded of this by hearing one in a neighbour's garden on Aug 26

**Blue Tit:** One of these also sang briefly in my garden on Aug 30

**Red-backed Shrike:** A juvenile was in the Sheepcote Valley at Brighton on Aug 30

**Carrion Crow:** A flock is present at Weston Shore on Southampton Water throughout the year but it reached a peak count (for this year) of around 250 birds on Aug 29. Last year the number of birds was up to 500 on Sept 16

**Starling:** A flock of around 250 was in the Bushes area of Farlington Marshes on Aug 30 - I expect to see much larger flocks in many places before long

**House Sparrow:** Mark Rolfe found a total of 102 in Oxley's Copse on the south west fringe of the Fareham built up area on Aug 26 - maybe a first indication of what I call '**Corn Sparrows**' - **House Sparrows** which leave their urban environment at this time of year and join together in large flocks to feed on harvest grain.

**Tree Sparrow:** Good news from Dungeness - nest boxes put up a couple of years ago attracted 7 pairs to nest in 2006, 12 pairs in 2007 and 25 pairs have bred there this year

**Siskin:** A flock of 9 was seen at Sherford Bridge (just north of Wareham in Dorset) on Aug 26 - maybe the first arrivals coming here for the winter as I have not seen a mention of the species since June 15.

**Linnet:** A flock of 40 on the Climping shore on Aug 24 with 60+ at Rye Harbour on Aug 25

**Crossbill:** 17 reports from many different sites in the latest news but the only two which are of more than 11 birds are of 56+ in Havant Thicket on Aug 27 (with some still there on Aug 30 at least) and around 50 passing over the Ventnor Downs (IoW) on Aug 29

**Ortolan Bunting:** On Aug 29 one was seen at Portland and on Aug 30 there were two at Portland and one in the Sheepcote Valley at Brighton

**Escapes:** On Aug 27 a **Demoiselle Crane** was seen at Kingsley village in east Hampshire but this is an escape which has been regularly seen in Surrey (near Godalming) since mid-May

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern** and **Migrant Hawkets**, **Ruddy** and **Common Darters** were all on the wing

### Butterflies

**Down to just 27 species seen this week**, including ...

**Small Blue:** The first brood tailed off in the third week of June as normal and there is then normally a gap in sightings until a short burst of second brood sightings around the third week of August but this year second brood sightings started on July 4 and have continued until now - the latest report being of one seen on Portsdown on Aug 24 where there were also sightings on July 16 and 22.

**Painted Lady:** Just three new sightings, two singles on Aug 21 at Brockenhurst (New Forest) and near Rye, plus one at Titchfield on Aug 24

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Five reports between Aug 21 and 24 covered a total of 12 insects including a record sighting of 5 at Rye Harbour on Aug 22

**Camberwell Beauty:** Belated news of one at Newhaven on Aug 18 - third report for the year after one on the Isle of Wight in February(!) and another at Crawley on July 21

**Marbled White:** Still being seen at Durlston on Aug 30 at least two weeks after all other sites have ceased to report the species

## Moths

**Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner (0366a *Cameraria ohridella*):** The damage which the larvae of this recent invader does to the leaves of Horse Chestnut can be seen everywhere but I was interested to see that hundreds of the moths could be seen when driving along the A303 near Thruxton (Andover) on Aug 21

**Chequered Fruit-tree Tortrix (0969 *Pandemis corylana*):** First report of this from Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Aug 24

**Peach Blossom (1652 *Thyatira batis*):** First of second brood out at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Aug 24

**The Gem (1720 *Orhthonama obstipata*):** First for the year at Portland on Aug 23

**Sharp-angled Peacock (1890 *Semiothisa alternaria*):** First of second brood out at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Aug 24

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth (1972 *Agrilus convolvuli*):** Two at Reculver on the north Kent coast on Aug 24 were the fourth report for the year. The first was also in Kent on Aug 21 followed by reports from Portland on Aug 21 and 22

**Elephant Hawkmoth (1991 *Deilephila elpenor*):** A pristine specimen was trapped at Mill Hill on Aug 24 where the normal flight period for the species ended on July 16. Although this moth does not have two generations per year some of the caterpillars which pupated last year, and which normally emerge in the next June, take longer (like this one) to emerge.

**Jersey Tiger (2067 *Euplagia quadripunctaria*):** The first to be reported was seen in the Thanet area of Kent on July 27 but one seen by the Titchfield Canal path on Aug 26 was still in super condition.

**Beautiful Gothic (2226 *Leucochlaena oditis*):** First for the year trapped at Portland on July 25

**Feathered Brindle (2230 *Aporophyla australis*):** First for the year trapped at Portland on July 25

**Feathered Ranunculus (2255 Eumichtis lichenea):** First for the year trapped at Portland on July 25

**Red Underwing (2452 Catocala nupta):** A pristine example at Rye Harbour on Aug 30 was the second report of the year (first also at Rye Harbour on Aug 14)

## Other Insects

**Picture Winged Fly (Campiglossa plantaginis):** This is one of many similar species and is restricted to seaside sites where the larva can feed in the flowerheads of **Sea Aster** plants. A photo of one appeared on the Rye Bay website when it was seen there on Aug 26

**Snail-killing Fly (Coremacera marginata):** One of these found in the Rother valley north of Hastings on Aug 23. **Snail Killing Flies** are so called because their larvae parasitise snail species.

**Green Tiger Beetle:** This brightly coloured hunter of heathland gets a first mention on Aug 23 when one was seen in Sandgate Park at Storrington (south of Pulborough)

## PLANTS

**Imperforate St John's Wort:** Several plants flowering in Havant Thicket on Aug 30 were the first I have seen this year

**Many Seeded Goosefoot:** Seen for the first time this year in Havant on Aug 28

**Blue Pimpernel:** Although this is only a colour form of **Scarlet Pimpernel**, not a separate species, I was delighted to find a plant in flower at North Common in Hayling on Aug 29. I cannot remember coming across this form ever before but on July 10 this year I was told that it regularly appears in an east Havant garden

**Apple of Peru (Nicandra physalodes):** First reports of flowering for this year come from two sites in the Hastings/Rye area on Aug 26

**Borage:** Several plants have re-appeared and are flowering beside Park Road South in Havant outside Dolphin Court in a patch that had been cleared of its botanic interest not long ago

**Blue Fleabane:** I came across this in flower for the first time this summer on Aug 29 though I am sure it has been out elsewhere, unseen by me, for a long time.

**Devil's Bit Scabious:** Well out in Havant Thicket by Aug 30 where I saw it for the first time this year.

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Common Dolphin:** Only two sightings of which I have seen reports so far this year - a single **Dolphin** was off Selsey Bill on May 22 and I see two were off Ventnor (IoW) on Aug 10

**Common Seal:** On Aug 27 two were seen together in Langstone Harbour just off 'the Point'

**Grey Seal:** One was in Rye Bay on Aug 29

**Hedgehog:** Droppings in my garden on Aug 30 strongly indicated the presence of a **Hedgehog**. Earlier this summer I heard that one had been seen in a neighbour's garden and the presence of many large slugs (mainly **Arion ater** with the orange fringe to its sole) would make this an excellent **Hedgehog** restaurant

**Slow-worm:** The Rye Bay website reported the first appearance of young Slow-worms for this year on Aug 27

**Leopard Slug (*Limax maximus*):** This is, I think, Britain's largest Slug and is certainly very distinctive with its large size (up to 10cm long). I had never seen this species until I came on one in Havant Thicket on Aug 30. See my diary entry for Aug 30 for more detail and an account of their unusual sex life.

**Fungi:** A good selection this week including one that I had not come across before, **Thelephora penicillata**, which I found in Havant Thicket on Aug 30. Again see Diary entry for that day for more detail. Two other firsts for the year found that day were **False Death Cap (*Amanita citrina*)** and **Common Earthball (*Scleroderma citrinum*)**. At the same site were several **Blackish-purple Russula**, and on the Hayling Billy Trail in Langstone on Aug 29 there were still many **Agrocybe rivulosa** on the piles of wood chips, Rather past their best by now were **Giant Polypores** in Havant Park and in Wade Court Road

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## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 25 - 31 (WEEK 34 OF 2008)

### Sat 30 Aug

#### Crossbills, a Leopard and an Earth Fan

This morning I walked around Havant Thicket in relatively glorious weather. My aim was to seek out the **Crossbills** which had been seen here earlier in the week and I did see two small parties in flight (my first for the year) but the excitement came from chance finds of two species I had never seen before.

The first was found on the side of a track where I was checking the colony of wild **Lily of the Valley** plants (at least two had red seed capsules) and it was a **very large Slug with a very distinctive look**. It was nearly 10cm long and of a pale whitish grey colour liberally marked with spots and splashes of jet black. Back at home I soon found its name (***Limax maximus*** or the **Leopard Slug**) and that enabled me to find this interesting information about its love life from Wikipedia ...

"The mating habits of ***Limax maximus*** are considered unusual among slugs: the hermaphrodite slugs court, usually for hours, by circling and licking each other. After this, the slugs will climb into a tree or other high area and then, entwined together, lower themselves on a thick string of mucus, evert their white translucent mating organs (penises) from their gonopores (openings on the right side of the head), entwine these organs, and exchange sperm. Both participants will later lay hundreds of eggs.

"A commonly seen practice among many slugs is apophallation, when one or both of the slugs chews off the other's penis. The penis of these species is curled like a cork-screw and often becomes entangled in their mate's genitalia in the process of exchanging sperm. When all else fails, apophallation allows the slugs to separate themselves. Once its penis has been removed, a slug is still able to participate in mating subsequently, but only using the female parts of its reproductive system.

"The tiny slugs which emerge from the eggs need at least two years to reach sexual maturity".

A good picture of the species can be seen at

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/gallery/showimage.php?i=48037&c=29>

The other new species was **a fungus that I came on in leaf litter under oak trees**. It was not of the toadstool type but was a circular patch about 10 cm across with a fuzzy white perimeter and all I knew at the time was that I had not come across it before so I took a sample home and came to the conclusion that it must be **Thelephora penicillata**. You can see numerous images of this fungus at

<http://www.picsearch.com/pictures/food%20!!%20drink/mushrooms/s-ti/thelephora%20penicillata.html>

(the nearest to what I found was the second image)

Going back to the more normal things I saw **Devil's Bit Scabious** was now in flower as were **Goldenrod**, **Ling Heather** and **Dwarf Gorse**. Two other plants which caught my interest were a big patch of **Wild Angelica** and a single late flowering **Common Centaury**.

A **fresh male Brimstone sunning itself on Bracken** was the prettiest butterfly, unlike the many tatty **Meadow Browns** and single **Gatekeeper**, while quite a few of the many **Speckled Wood** were fairly fresh. One **Common Blue** female was fairly well worn. Dragonflies comprised many **Common Darter**, several **Migrant Hawkers**, one **Southern Hawker** and a single possible **Emperor**. Someone that I met told me he had seen a **Hornet's nest** but when I went to that area later there was neither sight nor sound of them

Fungi seen were my first **Amanita citrina** and **Earthball** plus a couple of clusters of the **Blackish-Purple Russula (R. atropurpurea)**

**Fri 29 Aug**

**Robins and Blue Pimpernel**

Free at last of dog sitting duty I was able to get out my bike and ride to North Common on Hayling this morning. I chose this destination as it was at this time last year that I found the **strange Mullein plants** there which expert opinion told me were of a species (**Verbascum macrocarpum**) known in the Middle East but not listed in any European Flora.

Sad to say there was no sign of these plants but I did find another plant that I had never seen before - **Blue Pimpernel** - though this is only a colour variant of **Scarlet Pimpernel**, not a separate species. Among the 82 other plants seen in flower perhaps the most exciting was **Blue Fleabane**.

North Common also had a few butterflies including a single **Small Heath**, quite a few **Common Blue**, a couple of **Speckled Wood** and a **Red Admiral** as well as **Large** and **Small Whites**. One **Migrant Hawker** dragonfly was on the wing there.

The tide was high and around **200 Redshank** were roosting on the sea wall where the sea long ago broke into what had been the holiday camp boating lake. With them were a few **Lapwing**, a couple of **Whimbrel** and a lone **Black-tailed Godwit**. In the marina area a pair of **Swans** had a couple of **cygnets** with them - I wonder if they did nest there this year as they used to do?

The **Langstone Pond Swans**, still escorting all six of their **cygnets** were in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream when I visited the north pier of the old rail bridge where there was a single **Common Sandpiper** on the beach. Over the water nine **Turnstone** and some fifty **Oystercatchers** flew over as did a dozen **Swallows** (and maybe three **Sand Martins**). At Langstone Pond on my way home around a **dozen Egrets** were in the trees waiting for the tide to fall.

**Bird of the day was undoubtedly Robin** with at least one every 100 metres wherever I went - there must have been a massive influx of continental birds starting on Wednesday evening, bringing four birds to sing around my garden on Thursday morning and today they were everywhere - most of them singing.

Despite the absence of recent rain there was still a great display of **Agrocybe rivulosa fungi** on the wood chip piles beside the Billy Trail, especially as I neared the main road at Langstone on the way out. Across the main road, at the entrance to Mill Lane, I saw my first **Russulas** of the autumn but I could not identify them as they were of a nondescript grey-green colour but very dried up and probably not nearly as large as they would normally be. Near them a couple of **Viola tricolor** plants were still in flower.

The warm, still air today had caused **many ants to take wing** - a big cloud of gulls was catching many over the Langstone area - and at one point I passed **an ant heap covered with winged ants** which had not yet taken to the air.

### **SUMMARY FOR AUG 18 - 24 (WEEK 33 OF 2008)**

This week the first **Red-necked Grebe**, **Spotted Crake**, **Grey Phalarope**, **Merlin** and **Hen Harrier** of the autumn have been seen on the south coast and an astonishing total of **34 Sooty Shearwaters** were recorded at Portland. **Two young Goosanders** were thought to be the result of local breeding and Dorset seems to have had its first **Ruddy Ducks** of the year.

**An unusually large passage of raptors** over Dungeness included **52 Sparrowhawks** and **41 Kestrels** and in a different report I learnt of **Hobbies mugging Barn Owls** for their prey (and also of a **Sparrowhawk** refusing to accept the carcass of a **Green Woodpecker** which broke its neck by flying into a fence instead of allowing the **Sparrowhawk** to catch it).

Other good birds this week have been a **Sabines Gull** and **two Cranes** arriving in Kent. A sad story for farmers comes from Kent where **hundreds of Woodpigeons and Collared Doves are gobbling up flattened grain crops**

A second example of a **Beautiful Demoiselle wandering well outside its normal area** come from Portland the week's new moths include both **Convolvulus Hawk** and an even rarer migrant - **Rosy Underwing**. Other insect news has introduced me to **new species of Robberfly** and of **Ichneumon** while the much commoner **Oak Bush Cricket** and **Harvestman 'spider'** are new on the scene

The week has also introduced me to a new umbellifer called **Longleaf** (not found in Hampshire) while I have at last found **Slender Hare's Ear** in flower. Among the

normal events I have recorded the **first flowering of Ivy** and the appearance of **Green Amaranth** while a remark on a Kent website leads me to believe that we will in future find **Ivy Broomrape** in new sites

Among the Other Wildlife is credible news of **Water Voles climbing trees** and less credible news of a **Red Squirrel** in the Portsmouth area. My own finds include **Pointed Snails** still living on Thorney Island and several new fungi while others have seen the first **Stinkhorn** and a good specimen of '**Chicken of the Woods**'.

## **BIRDS**

**Red-necked Grebe:** The first to be reported on the south coast since May 2 was at Dungeness on Aug 17

**Black-necked Grebe:** A party of four (thought to be three adults and one juvenile) appeared on the Blashford Lakes on Aug 17 but the birds were not there next day so had presumably flown on. Two which have been in the Kent Stour valley since at least Aug 10 were still there on Aug 23

**Sooty Shearwater:** I had seen just 8 reports of this species, all sightings of singles, prior to Aug 18 when an astonishing total of 34 were seen off Portland with 18 there on Aug 19 but only one was seen on both Aug 20 and 21

**Manx Shearwater:** Whatever was responsible for bring the Sooty Shearwaters to Portland on Aug 18 also brought 137 Manx and 37 Balearic

**Storm Petrel:** One of these was also blown to Portland on Aug 18

**Cormorant:** Now that the breeding season is over these are back in winter mode and on Aug 19 the roost trees at Titchfield Haven held at least 24 birds at dusk while on Aug 22 there were 23 at Brading RSPB reserve on the IoW (presumably roosting)

**Cattle Egret:** These too are back from breeding to give a count of 13 at Radipole Lake (Weymouth) on Aug 16 but they have not been reported there since. On Aug 17 one was seen at Dungeness and another on the Dorset coast near Swanage (this one may have gone on to Poole Harbour where one was seen on Aug 19). Latest news is of one at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Aug 21

**Little Egret:** I see that Sandwich Bay had a site record count of 79 there on Aug 17 when 19 were well inland at Paxton Pits by the A1 road north of Bedford. On Aug 23 the number leaving the roost at dawn (which had been 74 on Aug 15) had risen to 91

**Great White Egret:** The regular bird which returned to the Blashford Lakes on Aug 16 was seen there again on Aug 17, 19 and 20

**Grey Heron:** One was seen swallowing a Grass Snake which it had just caught at Pagham Harbour on Aug 22

**White Stork:** Two of these were in West Sussex over the R Ouse near Lewes from Aug 18 to 20 at least (and another was at Dungeness on Aug 20)

**Spoonbill:** A juvenile flew west over Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on Aug 17 and on Aug 22 the group of 6 were still in Poole Harbour. The two which arrived at the Lymington marshes on Aug 11 were still there on Aug 23

**Shelduck:** These seem to have better breeding success inland than on the coast - I was reminded of this by a report on Aug 18 of 5 juveniles with one adult on Alresford Pond near the source of the R Itchen

**Wigeon:** It is sometimes difficult to separate newly returned birds from the few that have stayed here for the summer but on Aug 18 one was said to be a new arrival at Christchurch Harbour

**Gadwall:** On Apr 25 only one was seen at Hook (Warsash) near the mouth of Southampton Water and on July 26 there were 18 there so a count of 50 on Aug 22 represents a big increase

**Teal:** Around 160 were back at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 18 and more than 50 were at Sidlesham Ferry Pool on Aug 17

**Common Scoter:** A big movement west through the straits of Dover took place on Aug 16 and 17 with 525 passing Dungeness on Aug 16 and 378 seen there on Aug 17 while the counts at Folkestone were 200 and 240 for those two days.

**Goosander:** Two juveniles seen at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 20 were thought to be the result of nearby breeding (Avon valley?)

**Ruddy Duck:** Six seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Aug 17 were the first to be reported in Dorset this year according to my record of reports

**Marsh Harrier:** A total of 12 flew south over Dungeness on Aug 23 (an exceptional passage of raptors was reported there that day - the Dungeness observatory website entry for that day reported "The main feature of the day was an excellent passage of raptors during the morning and early afternoon. The best of the birds were a Buzzard and 12 Marsh Harriers but the most remarkable feature was the total of 52 Sparrowhawks followed by 41 Kestrels, a Hobby and four Peregrine Falcons". Locally one Marsh Harrier was seen at Titchfield Haven on Aug 19, a single juvenile was hunting over the Thorney Deeps on Aug 20 and three of these birds were over the Selsey West Fields on Aug 22.

**Hen Harrier:** A single juvenile male stayed on the south coast until June 15 but none have been reported since until a ringtail was seen at Dungeness on Aug 17

**Sparrowhawk:** See the report of 52 migrants over Dungeness in the Marsh Harrier entry above. Locally the loud screams for food which are made by juvenile Sparrowhawks which still expect 'room service' from their parents could be heard on Aug 11 from trees where Mill Lane at Langstone reaches the South Moors - they had come from a nest in one of the Mill Lane gardens

**Buzzard:** As family groups join together in the autumn counts increase and on Aug 22 more than 20 were over Pagham Harbour and on Aug 23 14 were seen over Luccombe Down on the loW

**Osprey:** One had settled at Titchfield Haven from Aug 16 to 23 at least and another was at the Southampton Lower Test marshes from Aug 16 to 21 but radio tracking shows that some birds don't dawdle on their journey south. A report on the SOS website tells us .. "The Scottish Osprey 'Beatrice' recorded by satellite at Rackham (near Pulborough) at 12 noon yesterday crossed the channel two hours later and last night was on the north French coast. The Osprey 'Logie' left her site (in Scotland) last night to begin her migration. This is the bird which stopped over at Ardingly Reservoir on her return to Scotland last year". In Chichester Harbour one was over the Emsworth channel on Aug 20 and maybe the same bird was seen over Thorney Island on Aug 22

**Kestrel:** See the report of 41 migrants over Dungeness in the Marsh Harrier entry above

**Merlin:** What is probably the first to return to Langstone Harbour after the breeding season was at Farlington Marshes on Aug 18. Another was at Portland on Aug 22 and two more females were seen on Aug 23 in the Hastings and Seaford areas

**Hobby:** Plenty of these are still with us and among them was one seen by Michael Prior twice on Aug 12 in the Forestside area north of Stansted Forest. A very unusual report of one came from the Horsham area on Aug 17 - **it was seen to 'mug' a Barn Owl carrying prey back to its young and to carry off the prey to feed its own young.** This form of piracy is known to be practiced occasionally by **Kestrels** against **Barn Owls** (I once saw it for myself at Amberley Wild Brooks) but it seems to be unknown (until now) for **Hobbies** to do it. In response to that report from Horsham Phil Jones, warden of the Pannel Valley nature reserve near Rye Bay, told us that he too had seen both **Hobby** and **Kestrel** steal prey from **Barn Owls** in the past couple of years. He went on to say that both **Falcons** flew towards the **Owl**, turned upside down and used their talons to wrest the prey out of the **Owl's talons** as they passed underneath it. (My personal observation of a **Kestrel** going for a **Barn Owl** at the Amberley Wild Brooks was of a much more aggressive mugging with the **Kestrel** flying straight at the **Owl** and crashing into at top speed with feathers flying from both birds - in that case the **Kestrel** was not very succesful, coming away with no more than a piece of the skin of the vole)

**Quail:** Two were reported on Aug 22 at Tarrant Rushton in Dorset

**Spotted Crake:** The first report of the species for this autumn comes from the Oare Marshes on the north Kent coast where one was first seen on Aug 16 and was still there on Aug 23

**Common Crane:** Two flew over Dungeness on Aug 23 and appeared to land nearby

**Ringed Plover:** On the morning of Aug 18 Owen Mitchell sat seawatching on a stone wall by the shore at Climping (between Bognor and Littlehampton) for about an hour but when he decided to move on he noticed a 'dead bird' on the ground inches from his feet. He picked it up for a closer look and in doing so realised that it was warm, alive, and watching him - it was a fledged juvenile Ringed Plover obeying its instinct to 'freeze' when danger threatens. After Owen had taken its photo and returned it to the spot where he found it he started to back away

whereupon, in Owen's words .. "it suddenly flapped and fluttered weakly, scrambling over my feet and leaving a large deposit on my boot as a memento, before taking flight and heading for the beach".

**Kentish Plover:** A 'probable' was reported at the north Kent Cliffe Pools on Aug 20 (no more has been heard of the juvenile that was at the Lymington Marshes on Aug 10)

**Golden Plover:** Between Aug 16 and 21 several reports from the Oare Marshes in north Kent tell of between 300 and 400 Golden Plover there but the count was down to 82 on Aug 23.

**American Golden Plover:** One seen at the Oare Marshes on Aug 16 may have been the individual which has been in that area since July 30

**Grey Plover:** Brian Fellows saw his first summer plumage bird back in Emsworth Harbour on Aug 21 (the very first local report of a returning bird came from Langstone Harbour on July 27)

**Lapwing:** Around 220 were at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 18 (the only recent report from there was of around 50 present on July 23). At Rye Harbour there were 300 on July 31 and at Sidlesham Ferry there were 140 on Aug 6

**Sanderling:** A flock of 30 were on the Ryde sands on Aug 18, the highest count I have seen this autumn other than the large number which moved west on July 24 to give a count of 125 on the Hayling Bay shore

**Ruff:** 30 or more were at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Aug 21

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A few juveniles were back in Hampshire (at the Blashford Lakes) as early as Aug 3 and by Aug 13 the majority of 49 birds at Pulborough Brooks were juveniles but it was not until Aug 18 that Martin Gillingham reported that a few juveniles has started to return to Langstone Harbour (being seen at Farlington Marshes) - a couple of juveniles had been seen by Southampton Water on Aug 17 and 16 juveniles were seen at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 22

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** These should start to reach us in Hampshire during September and so far I have only seen three reports of substantial flocks, all in Kent. On Aug 6 Seasalter (on the north Kent coast) had 141 with 180 there on Aug 18, while Folkestone had 120 flying west on Aug 16. Last year the first local report (other than an isolated sighting of 50 near the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 24) was of 90 near West Wittering in Chichester Harbour on Sep 3 and it was not until Sep 20 that a flock of 120 were on the Pilsey Sands (Thorney Island) with 341 there on Sep 30. In 2006 there was a similar pattern with an isolated flock of 70 off north Hayling on Aug 12 but the main arrival occurring on Sep 14 and 16

**Greenshank:** A first wave of returning birds brought 39 Greenshank to north Kent on July 29 and 36 to Sandwich in east Kent on Aug 3. Now a second larger movement has brought 67 to the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Aug 17 with 25 at the Pett Pools on Rye Bay that day and 14 to Farlington Marshes on Aug 18 (there will have been a smaller number of birds at all these sites since July, and maybe more at some favoured sites such as Thorney Island, but I suspect everyone will be

seeing increased numbers from now on). Latest news is of 27 at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Aug 23

**Grey Phalarope:** The first of the autumn on the south coast was at the Lymington marshes from Aug 21 to 23 and the 'second equal' was on the east shore of Thorney Island (Thornham Marshes area just south of Prinsted), also on Aug 21

**Sabines Gull:** One had been seen at Dungeness on Jan 4 this year and the second was off Bournemouth on Aug 12. Now we have a third report of an adult in the Thames Estuary (Sheppey area) on Aug 22

**Common Tern:** A major movement took 1185 west past Dungeness on Aug 16, along with **256 Sandwich, 58 Black and 38 Little Terns**

**Roseate Tern:** Singles were in the Titchfield Haven area on Aug 17 and 23

**Little Tern:** On both Aug 16 and 19 the north Kent coast had counts of around **50 Little Terns**

**Black Tern:** These too are now passing through in good numbers - on Aug 16 Dungeness recorded 58 and on Aug 17 the Oare Marshes in north Kent had 25 while Bewl Water in north east Sussex had more than 40. In Hampshire one was at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 19 and 20, and on Aug 23 one was at Titchfield Haven

**Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove:** Farmers are likely to suffer significant financial loss this summer after wind and rain have flattened their crops - even if the grain can be picked up by combine harvester there will be a large fuel bill for drying it out to reach the acceptable moisture limit for milling grain. Many birds however are rejoicing in the easy pickings they can take from flattened grain (which they could not 'harvest' had it remained standing). On Aug 21 two entries on the Planet Thanet website highlight this - one writes of some **400 Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves** descending on flattened crops in that part of Kent, the other gives a count of **220+ Collared Doves** on such grain (I think these are two different flocks)

**Turtle Dove:** A report of **14 Turtle Doves** seen together at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Aug 23 probably indicates that the birds were gathering together prior to departure though I cannot be sure of this

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** On Aug 16 Trevor Carpenter had a probable sighting of one in the Botley Woods north of Fareham and on Aug 23 he definitely saw one at Bere Farm in the valley of the Wallington River west of Portsdown but I do not share his view that this marks the start of an invasion of Hampshire by these birds - for years the **Parakeets** have existed in thousands in the London area but have never shown a real interest in spreading out into Hampshire though one or two birds venture into the county briefly in most years.

**Little Owl:** These birds like to lead a very settled life and hardly move when they have found a site offering tree cavities for nests and roosts, plus a good dung heap around which they can feed on beetles and worms, but each autumn some youngsters have to leave home and find their own territories and at this time the Owls can turn up in odd places. In the past I have more than once heard of them in open grassland by the sea (at Farlington Marshes and Thorney Island) and this

year someone has seen a couple in a similar situation in the Seven Sisters Country Park near Beachy Head. I think the birds just roam around looking for a new home but are reluctant to fly across water when they reach it.

**Nightjar:** Most of these arrive and leave without ever being seen at the coast but one **Nightjar** was seen on Aug 17 in a wood on Ballard Down near Swanage on the Dorset coast

**Swift:** Maybe bad weather has prolonged the time which **baby Swifts** had to spend in the nest this year (developing more slowly than usual on account of having to wait longer than usual for their parents to return to the nest with food) - at any rate there have been several reports of young still in their nests well into August this year whereas I believe they have all left nests in the south of England by the end of July in normal years. In Cosham (Portsmouth) the nest boxes on Graham Roberts' house produced 6 young from 3 nests but the last youngster did not leave until Aug 13. **Swifts** were still around nests in Horsham on Aug 14 and on Aug 15 babies were still in south Dorset nests near Swanage. Fledged birds are still being widely seen - on Aug 17 there were sightings at seven sites including counts of 121 at Sandwich and 250 at Folkestone. Reports on Aug 19 were of 28 on the north Kent coast, 4 over Titchfield Haven, 4 over Runcton Lake at Chichester and 3 over the Bembridge area of the Isle of Wight. On Aug 23 there were 20 at Dungeness, 10 at Portland, 3 at Christchurch Harbour and one over Luccombe Down on the IoW

**Green Woodpecker:** On Aug 23 one broke its neck flying into a fence when trying to outfly a **Sparrowhawk** that was chasing it - the **Sparrowhawk** did not take advantage of a corpse that it had not killed!

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** There have been several indications of long distance movement recently including 5 at Dungeness on Aug 23

**Sand Martin:** Around 200 were over Runcton Lake at Chichester on Aug 19 and 200 went over Dungeness on Aug 23

**Swallow:** Christchurch Harbour birders detected the start of **Swallow** passage on Aug 22 when 100 flew over that site and on Aug 23 Dungeness had 500 passing over.

**House Martin:** A movement of 100 over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 22 (increasing to 200 there on Aug 23) was also taken as the start of passage.

**Passerine departure:** This has stepped up a gear this week with the following birds being reported at coastal sites (with the peak count of each given in brackets).

**Tree Pipit (25), Yellow Wagtail (66), Grey Wagtail (8), White Wagtail (2), Nightingale (1), Common Redstart (3), Whinchat (8), Stonechat (5), Wheatear (70), Grasshopper Warbler (3), Sedge Warbler (14), Reed Warbler (30), Lesser Whitethroat (10), Common Whitethroat (200), Garden Warbler (3), Blackcap (8), Wood Warbler (1), Chiffchaff (11), Willow Warbler (100), Firecrest (1), Spotted Flycatcher (25), Pied Flycatcher (1)**

**Yellow Wagtail:** 66 reported with cattle in the Hook (Warsash) area on Aug 23 when an uncounted flock was also with cattle at Titchfield at around 60 were at Rye Harbour

**Whinchat:** One bird seen on Culver Down at Bembridge (IoW) as early as July 4 was thought to be already leaving us and a string of reports from coastal sites where they do not breed started on July 13 with a male at Pulborough Brooks. They are now being seen all along the coast and on Aug 18 one was seen at Farlington Marshes.

**Stonechat:** One of these was also at Farlington on Aug 18 but as a good number of these breed along the south coast it is difficult to pick out the migrants.

**Mistle Thrush:** A flock of more than 15 was in the North Mundham area south of Chichester on Aug 21

**Common Whitethroat:** More than 100 were at Beachy Head (Whitbread Hollow) on Aug 17

**Willow Warbler:** One was heard singing as it passed through the Horsham area on Aug 17 but I see it was not the first to do so on autumn passage as birds had been heard at Christchurch Harbour on July 21 and 23

**Pied Flycatcher:** The big movement of migrants on Aug 17 brought both a **Pied** and a **Spotted Flycatcher** to Pagham Harbour

**Hawfinch:** The first to get mentioned in reports since June 9 was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 17

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** Following the recent unexpected appearance of one at Brook Meadow in Emsworth (outside the area in which the species is normally found) I see that on Aug 23 a similar 'wanderer' turned up on Portland Island where they have never been recorded before

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** A major emergence on Aug 15 brought a count of more than 40 nectaring on Wild Basil at Shipton Bellinger near Andover

**Brown Hairstreak:** Just the odd few seen at sites such as Noar Hill recently but Shipton Bellinger had around 25 on the wing on Aug 15

**Common Blue:** Emergence of the summer brood gave a good count of 38 at Noar Hill on Aug 17 with 31 seen at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley that day while Horsea Island (close to the latest proposed site for Portsmouth football ground) had more than 20 on Aug 16

**Chalkhill Blue:** Around 500 were seen on Old Winchester Hill in the Meon valley on Aug 17

**Adonis Blue:** More than 30 were seen on Bonchurch Down near Ventnor (IoW) on Aug 16

**Painted Lady:** Two more isolated reports of singles, both on Aug 22 - one at Crawley and the other at Pagham Harbour

**Peacock:** 22 were counted on Stockbridge Down on Aug 15

**Comma:** Of six caterpillars in a Peacehaven garden near Brighton two pupated on Aug 23

**Dark Green Fritillary:** Two of these were still flying at Stockbridge Down on Aug 15 and one was seen at Noar Hill as late as Aug 20

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** Singles were seen on Aug 17 at Noar Hill near Petersfield and in the Beckley Woods near Hastings

**Wall Brown:** 17 were out on the Steyning Rifle Ranges near the Adur valley on Aug 15

**Marbled White:** One could still be seen at Durlston on Aug 21

## Moths

**Ash Bud Moth (0449 *Prays fraxinella*):** First reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 16

***Cochylis dubitana* (0964):** First reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 17

***Zeiraphera isertana* (1165):** First reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 16

**Dusky Peacock (1891 *Semiothisa signaria*):** One was recorded earlier this summer in the Rother Woods near Rye Bay. The UK Moths website says of it .. "A species that until recently has been regarded as an occasional immigrant, there is now known to be an established breeding population in Kent".

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth:** The first two reports for this year came from Portland and Thanet (Kent) both on Aug 21 with another reported at Portland on Aug 22

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984):** One seen in the Portsmouth area in the week preceding Aug 11 when one was also seen at Rye Harbour

**Scarce Bordered Straw (2400 *Helicoverpa armigera*):** First for the year at Thanet in Kent on Aug 21

**Rosy Underwing (2453 *Catocala electa*):** A very good record for the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Aug 21 - this is only the 8th to be found in Britain

## Other Insects

**Brown Heath Robberfly (*Machimus cingulatus*):** This species is new to me but is apparently not a great rarity in southern England. A photo of one with a **Hoverfly** it had just caught was on the Rye Bay website on Aug 17 - it

was said to have taken the prey to a feeding post and turned it so that the sun shone full on its belly (cooking its food?)

**Volucella inanis Hoverfly:** One clearly seen resting on a leaf in my garden on Aug 21 - slightly smaller, yellower and with less broad black bands than the **V. zonaria** I have had in the garden earlier this summer.

**Diolcogaster alvearia:** This insect also features on the Rye Bay website with a photo of what is described as a 'cocoon mass' of its larvae. The insect concerned is a **Braconid Wasp (type of Ichneumon)** and the parent had chosen a moth caterpillar (thought to be a **Willow Beauty**) to be the food supply for its young. I am not sure of the details of the parasitisation process but the picture shows a mass of cells (looking a bit like honeycomb or the artificial 'nests' you can buy to encourage the breeding of other wasp species) packed tightly together in a mass of a semicircular shape. I understand that the perimeter of the semi-circle was formed by the arched body of the caterpillar, and that such masses are not uncommon in privet hedges. You can see the object for yourself by going to <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/?cat=20> and scrolling down to the entry for Aug 18 headed 'Mystery Cocoon'.

**Oak Bush Cricket (Meconema thalassinum):** The first report of this small insect which is often attracted to the lit windows of houses came from Durlston on Aug 17

**Harvestman species:** The first of these spider like insects was also found at Durlston on Aug 17. **These are not true Spiders but come under the Order Opiliones.** There are around 27 species found in north west Europe and one of the commonest is **Leiobunum rotundum** which can be found almost anywhere at this time of year.

## PLANTS

**Early Dog Violet:** I was surprised to find three flowers out on the plants in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Aug 23

**Green Amaranth:** Several small plants were flowering at the roadside in Juniper Square (Havant) where I found them last year - I noted then that they grow where the council grass mowers park their vehicle and assume the original seeds came on one such vehicle

**Shining Cranesbill:** A single flower seen on Aug 19 shows that the plants in east Havant which were sprayed with weedkiller in the spring have recovered enough to think of an unseasonal second flowering

**Ivy:** The very first flowers of the year seen in Havant on Aug 19

**Longleaf (Falcaria vulgaris):** An entry for Aug 16 on the Planet Thanet website mentioned that '**Longleaf is still flowering**' and this was the very first time I had ever come across the name of this plant so I checked it out and found that it is an umbellifer which has been introduced to eastern England and can be found on

grassland in Kent and East Anglia. We are not likely to find it in Hampshire in the near future.

**Slender Hare's Ear:** I have at last found this tiny umbellifer in flower this year on the north west Thorney seawall on Aug 22

**Ivy Broomrape:** A yellow form of this appeared a few years ago on the slopes of Portsdown above Portchester in woodchip mulch around newly planted shrubs at a newish housing estate and this year the normal form was found in similar circumstances at the Tesco store site in Havant so I was interested to read (again on the Planet Thanet website) that '**Ivy Broomrape is continuing to spread**' in that part of Kent. I wonder if the woodchips used in these places contained chipped Ivy wood?

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Stoat:** Most of us will have seen families of young Stoats indulging in exuberant play on film but very few get the opportunity to do so in real life - on Aug 20 one such youngster was seen at Rye Harbour and Barry Yates managed to attract its attention and draw it to within a few feet of him by 'squeaking' (sucking the back of his hand to make a sound like a rabbit in pain) so that he could get a still photograph of it which can be seen on the Rye Harbour website.

**Common Seal:** On Aug 20 a total of 13 were hauled out on the shore of Thorney Island in Chichester Harbour (the only previous report of that colony for this year was of 14 there on Mar 30) and on Aug 23 there were 21 seen at the Oare Marshes in north Kent

**Water Vole:** On Aug 22 Brian Fellows was asked **if Water Voles ever climbed trees** by someone who had just seen an animal which he thought was a Water Vole in one of the trees overhanging the R Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - a check on **an authoritative text book on these Voles showed that they do occasionally climb as high as 2.5 metres to get at the leaves.**

**Red Squirrel:** Young **Grey Squirrels** often have quite a reddish tone to their coat, leading to claims of **Red Squirrel** sightings in places where the **Red Squirrels** are now extinct. This may or may not have been the reason for a motorist driving along the Havant Road past the Forty Acres farm fields just west of the A3M to claim that on Aug 22 he and his wife had both seen a **Red Squirrel** dash out into the road ahead of them (but luckily to turn back and vanish into the roadside grass). I think further proof is needed - the real test of **Red Squirrel** is not so much the colour of the fur or the smaller size but the presence of ear tufts which the **Grey** never have.

**Hare:** There seem to be fewer of these in the Havant area each year but Michael Prior saw two in the Stansted East Park on Aug 16

**Grass Snake:** On Aug 22 one was seen vanishing down the throat of a **Grey Heron** the Pagham Harbour area

**Pointed Snail (Cochicella acuta):** On Aug 22 I proved that the colony of these which has existed on the Thorney Island seawall opposite the west end of the Great Deeps is still going (though I only saw three live specimens in a very brief search)

**Fungi:** As anticipated the recent rain has brought out more fungi including the first **Stinkhorn** of the season, seen in the grounds of the Rowans Hospice at Purbrook (Waterlooville) on Aug 19. On Aug 20 a crop of tiny bright orange, greasy, toadstools suddenly appeared in the grass of my garden lawn and I think these are **Hygrocybe ceracea (Butter Waxcap)** while on Aug 18 I found both **Fairy Ring Champignon** and **Brown Rollrim** while walking round Havant and on Aug 19 came on **Horse Mushrooms** in roadside grass at Warblington. Since writing that for my mid-week summary both **Blackening Waxcap** and what is probably **Snowy Waxcap** have appeared on my lawn. This week also brought a photo on one of the Kent birding websites (for Boughton Park south of Maidstone) of a fresh **Chicken of the Woods** (or **Sulphur Polypore**) though it was tentatively named as **Blushing Bracket** (which it certainly was not!)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 18 - 24 (WEEK 33 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 22 Aug**

#### **Slender Hare's Ear at last**

This morning **both Robin and Wren were singing** when the dog which is currently inflicted on us got me out in the garden soon after 6am - the only other songs heard today were **Wood Pigeon** and **Collared Dove** (even the **Dunnocks** are currently silent)

This afternoon I took the dog by car to Thorney Island and walked from the Thornham Lane junction down to the Great Deeps where I was able to tick off both **Slender Hare's Ear** and **Pointed Snail**.

I found the **Bupleurum** at twelve different places between the Little and Great Deeps and for anyone unfamiliar with this tiniest of umbellifers I suggest you walk about 50 metres south of the Little Deeps until you reach a large bramble bush on your left with a clump of **Mugwort** alongside it in the middle of the gravel track. If you now look at the foot of the sea wall on your right you must see, at the very edge of the gravel, a cluster of very thin, wiry stems zig-zagging up to a height of around 10 to 15 centimetres with a hint of yellow at a few points. A close look will show that the wiry stems do in fact have both leaves and flowers - the flowers being minute, yellow in colour and in umbels of two or three flowers and the leaves being thin enough to look like small grey-green extensions of dark brown stems, branching off the stem where it makes each of its zig-zag bends. To see more of these plants keep walking south with your eyes fixed on the foot of the sea wall where it meets the level track - single plants are not easy to spot but they do occur at well spaced intervals with another cluster as you near the Great Deeps.

The only other plant of interest to me was a cluster of **Vervain** which can be seen if you branch off the seawall track at its north end and take the track leading east to the Main Road and Thornham Lane. The **Vervain** occurs about 40 metres along this track just before it makes a bend to the left.

Back at the Great Deeps there had been a good show of **Spiny Restharrow** when I was last there but now only the spines and dead leaves are left (I saw just one flower!).

On the seawall bank opposite the guard rails above the Great Deeps intake pipes I had a brief look for the **Pointed Snails (Cochlicella acuta)** and satisfied myself that the colony is not extinct by seeing three specimens clinging to plant stems in addition to the empty shells of previous generations which litter the ground - hopefully a proper search would find a lot more of this year's snails.

Also noted were at least half a dozen each of **Common Blue** and **Meadow Brown** butterflies and two dragonflies - one definitely a **Migrant Hawker**, the other seen as a fairly distant silhouette with the tip of its abdomen curved down suggesting it was an Emperor.

**Ants were flying** and many gulls were hawking them when I arrived, and on the way back a dozen or so **Swallows** were maybe getting the last of them with other insects. On the Little Deeps I had the impression (without bins) of twenty or so **Coot** and could hear **Moorhens** but the only notable birds seen were in a tight flock of 20+ small waders flying high eastward - I could hear the calls of **Ringed Plover** and think they were all of this species.

Yesterday (Aug 21) did not merit a diary entry but **Robin** was again singing and the garden had a notable first for this summer - the large hoverfly **Volucella inanis** (smaller, yellow, and with less broad bands of black than **V. zonaria** which has twice visited Buddleia here). On the way to the shops I noted a fresh show of flowers on **Grey Field Speedwell** and walking the dog around Warblington cemetery I ticked off flowers on **Round-leaved Fluellen** but saw nothing else of note.

## [Tue 19 Aug](#)

### Ivy opens its flowers

A combination of the weather and domestic circumstances (chief among them being having to 'dog sit' during my daughter's holiday!) has limited my excursions this month, but dog walking this afternoon brought one good find - the **first flowers open on Ivy**.

A couple of other surprise finds around east Havant today were a single flower on the mass of **Shining Cranesbill** plants which have recovered from weed killer sprayed on them in the spring and a cluster of **Horse Mushrooms** in roadside grass at Warblington where a single **Red Hot Poker** flower spike was an unexpected second flowering.

Also noted today were many flowers on **Least Yellow Sorrel** in Wade Court Road and **Red Dead-nettle** flowering in five places (I was on the look-out for this as I have hardly seen any for a couple of months and I saw that Brian Fellows had found it flowering recently in Emsworth)

Yesterday's dog walk took me past the New Lane allotments where a good show of **Weasel's Snout** (or **Lesser Snapdragon**) plants were in flower and past gardens in which two very attractive 'new to me' garden plants were flowering but as yet I cannot name them. I also added the poisonous **Brown Roll-rim** and **Fairy Ring Champignon** fungi to my autumn list.

## SUMMARY FOR AUG 11 - 17 (WEEK 32 OF 2008)

This week brought news that both **Black-necked Grebe** and **Red-breasted Merganser** have been summering in Langstone Harbour but perhaps more exciting was news of the return to the Blashford Lakes of the **Great White Egret** which has spent its autumns and winters there since 2003.

A more surprising item was the news that **Cackling Canada Geese** have a breeding colony at Southampton but more genuine surprise items were reports of a **Red-necked Phalarope** at Portland and a **Sabine's Gull** flying past Bournemouth.

**Marsh** and **Barred Warbler** are also in the news and the subject of '**white winged Crows**' is again up for discussion

The only real news of insects in the weather this week is of a **Monarch butterfly visiting a Burger van in Kent**, though one of my favourite moths (**Red Underwing**) also made its debut for the year

**Small Teasel** and **Slender Hare's Ear** were welcome additions to the year's flowering list but **Japanese Knotweed** was not so welcome

Perhaps the most surprising find this week was of a **toadstool that was new to science in 2003 and has spread rapidly across the whole of Britain**, even to the Billy Trail in Havant.

Also in Other Wildlife are comments on the **strange lifestyle of a snail that insists on maintaining its habit of breathing through gills submerged in water but chooses to live in very dry land habitat**

### BIRDS

**Great Crested Grebe**: 105 of these could be seen at the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on Aug 16

**Black-necked Grebe**: John Goodspeed has been told that one was present on Aug 11 near the Broadmarsh slipway where the Hermitage Stream enters the north of Langstone Harbour east of Farlington Marshes. The bird was said to have been in summer plumage and present both morning and afternoon and since then Chris Cockburn (Langstone RSPB warden) has told me it has been around for some time and was still to be seen in the Chalkdock Channel on Aug 15. Two other recent sightings have been at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on July 29 (where I think more than one was seen) and in the Kent Stour valley east of Canterbury on Aug 10 where 2 (possibly 3) were seen.

**Fulmar**: More than 100 flew west past Portland on Aug 13

**Cory's Shearwater**: One or two were reported off Portland on Aug 13 but I am slightly dubious about the id as Martin Cade (observatory warden) commented that the sightings were by visitors and that regular observers there have not seen them

**Sooty Shearwater:** Since the 'possible' sighting at Portland on July 6 three more have been seen. One was at Dungeness on July 25, one off Folkestone on Aug 1 and now one off Portland on Aug 10 and another there on Aug 13

**Storm Petrel:** A single was seen from Portland on Aug 13, a month after the last previous sighting anywhere in the Channel (off Durlston on July 14)

**Cattle Egret:** One reported in Poole Harbour on Aug 10 was the first in Dorset (where sightings were more or less daily up to June 1) since July 18 when one was at Radipole (Weymouth). The only other recent sightings have been at Pagham Harbour on July 19 and at the north Kent Oare Marshes on July 24

**Little Egret:** Numbers have increased at most south coast sites in the past week as birds and their young come back from breeding. Rye Harbour reported a roost count of 74 on Aug 15 (double the 36 that were there on July 31 and the highest count there this year after 48 in February). Also on Aug 15 Chris Cockburn told me he had seen at least 50 on the Langstone RSPB Islands that day.

**Great White Egret:** One arrived at the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on Aug 16, probably the bird which has regularly spent the autumn and winter months at Blashford since 2003

**Storks:** A possible sighting of a **Black Stork** came from a motorist on the M3 near Basingstoke on Aug 13 but on Aug 14 there were two more reliable reports of a **White Stork**, firstly south of Salisbury and then in the New Forest

**'Polish Swans':** A pair of Mute Swans has raised 8 cygnets at Lymington this year, four of them having the white down and pink feet of the genetic variant known as Polish Swans. This variant is uncommon but widespread and this year two cygnets hatched in Emsworth marina in July were of this form, as was an adult bird seen in Emsworth on Apr 28 and identified by the pink colour of its feet. A Polish cygnet was hatched at the Emsworth Peter Pond nest in 2005 but subsequently disappeared while a different Polish type cygnet was hatched on Budds Farm pools that year.

From the Hoslist discussion about the Lymington family I learnt that "Polish swans were given their name when they were imported from the Polish coast on the Baltic sea, into London around about 1800. Mistakenly thought to be a new species they were given the name *Cydnium immutabilis* (Changeless Swan)" as, unlike normal Mutes, they have white down as cygnets and hence do not change colour from brown to white as they reach maturity. The quote continued .. "The polish mute swan is a pure white version of a mute swan. The legs and feet are a pinkish-grey colour instead of the usual black colour. A pigment deficiency of a gene in the sex chromosomes is what causes the whiteness. When a female Mute swan inherits only one melanin-deficient chromosome she will be a polish swan, whereas the male of the same parents will be normal. If the next generation is produced by two of their offspring, the brood will contain numbers of both polish and normal cygnets of either sex".

**Cackling Canada Goose:** Following the report on Aug 1 that a small flock of these 'half-sized' relatives of Canada Geese are based and are breeding at the Royal

Victoria Country Park at Southampton we now have news of a more normal sighting of a single bird among a flock of normal Canada Geese at Pagham Harbour (North Walls) on Aug 16

**Shelduck:** A single juvenile was with a single adult at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream immediately west of Langstone village on Aug 16. From 1 to 3 pairs of adults had been seen at this site between Apr 15 and June 30, and may have nested on the South Moors or over at the Oysterbeds, but the current birds are not necessarily of local origin as there have been no reported sightings there since June 30

**Teal:** Numbers are now increasing at Pulborough Brooks where around 40 were present on Aug 16

**Pintail:** These too are now returning with reports of three at Rye Harbour on Aug 14 and 4 there on Aug 17

**Red-breasted Merganser:** On Aug 15 Chris Cockburn told me that a female has been summering in Langstone Harbour (as in several recent years) and has been seen off west Hayling

**Honey Buzzard:** One flew east over the Blashford Lakes on Aug 15 if I have rightly interpreted the reference to it by the initials 'HB' (I find the random use of home-made abbreviations for the names of species can be confusing and do wish people would use the standard BTO codes - that for Honey Buzzard is 'HZ')

**Montagu's Harrier:** A lucky observer at Hengistbury Head (Christchurch Harbour) who continued to watch the sea on Aug 16, after other watchers had become bored with the lack of sightings, was rewarded with the sight of a ringtail Montagu's Harrier being mobbed by three Arctic Skuas

**Sparrowhawk:** A group of six flew west high over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 15 as their autumn dispersal gets under way

**Osprey:** Single Ospreys were seen at three sites (Dungeness, Titchfield Haven and the Southampton Lower Test Marshes) on Aug 16 as their rate of departure speeds up

**Hobby:** The first to be seen at Portland since June 8 (last arrival there) was seen (presumably departing) on Aug 16

**Kentish Plover:** A juvenile was seen at the Lymington marshes on Aug 10

**Golden Plover:** Although no more than ones and twos have been seen in central southern England so far there has been a sizeable flock at the Oare Marshes on the north Kent coast since 156 were there on Aug 6 and the flock had increased to 226 birds by Aug 11. On Aug 14 the flock at Oare was up to around 400 and the number at Rye Harbour had increased from 44 on Aug 9 to 268 on Aug 14

**American Golden Plover:** The summer plumage bird which was reported to be at the north Kent Elmley Marshes on July 30 was apparently still there on Aug 13 (though I have seen no reports for the intervening period)

**Grey Plover:** Around 20 were seen in Pagham Harbour on Aug 14 -these might have been non-breeding birds that have been there through the summer but on Aug 16 a flock of around 40 birds in summer plumage was seen near Selsey Bill flying along the shore towards Pagham so it is well worth keeping an eye open for these 'Silver Plovers' in our harbours before their plumage degenerates.

**Purple Sandpiper:** The single bird seen at the Oare Marshes on Aug 5 was regarded as very early but there was no surprise expressed in a report of three in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 12

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The flock at the north Kent Oare Marshes which was estimated at 900 birds as early as July 17 has varied in number but was estimated to have reached 1000 on Aug 7 and was around 800 on Aug 14. A report from Pulborough Brooks on Aug 13 gave a count of 49 birds and said they were 'mainly juveniles' - the first mention of the arrival of juveniles was of just two youngsters with their parents at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 3 and the only other mention of juveniles back in Hampshire is of another two on the shores of Southampton Water on Aug 17. Over on the Isle of Wight the biggest flock, which had been of 42 at Yarmouth on Aug 2, increased to 104 at Yarmouth on Aug 16

**Green Sandpiper:** These currently seem to outnumber Common Sandpiper all along the coast - 17 were at Sandwich Bay on Aug 15 and at least 15 were at Pulborough Brooks (with 4 Wood Sandpiper but only 2 Common) on Aug 16 with 10 at the Southampton Lower Test that day.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** A Phalarope seen at Portland on Aug 12 was not seen closely but was almost certainly Red-necked rather than Grey. This seems to be the first autumn Phalarope seen anywhere on the south coast so far this autumn.

**Pomarine Skua:** Two were seen from Portland on Aug 15, the first reported in the Channel since 3 at Dungeness on Aug 9

**Med Gull:** A flock seems to have settled on the east Dorset coast with reports of around 100 in Studland Bay on Aug 11 followed by more than 40 on Ballard Down near Swanage on Aug 16. On Aug 15 there were 60 on the Selsey West Fields.

**Sabine's Gull:** One was reported flying east past Branksome Chine in Bournemouth on Aug 12 (the only other report of the species I have seen this year was at Dungeness on Jan 4)

**Stock Dove:** A flock of up to 80 was seen on Thorney Island on Aug 15 while a report from Thanet in Kent speaks of '**hundreds of Wood Pigeons**' dropping into fields with flattened cereal crops - it would seem that the pigeons are on their autumn journeys already

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** What may have been the same bird flew over the Botley Woods north of Fareham on Aug 16 before distracting the attention of an umpire at a game of cricket at Pennington near Lymington that day.

**Cuckoo:** A juvenile was on the West Sussex shore at Climping on Aug 15

**Swift:** Still being seen daily up to Aug 16 at least when 36 flew over Weymouth and 24 went over the Lower Test Marshes near Southampton. On Aug 14 four Swifts

were still being seen around a nesting area while on Aug 15 one nest in Dorset still had unfledged young in it

**Kingfisher:** I am told that one was back at the regular winter site by the Brockhampton Stream (adjacent to Budds Farm) at Havant on Aug 15

**House Martin:** On Aug 17 I was puzzled to see four House Martins repeatedly flying up to a possible nest site under the apex of a gable on new flats at the southern end of Beechworth Road in Havant as if visiting a nest. As I pass this building daily and have never seen House Martins anywhere near it before my best guess is that a couple of pairs have had their nest knocked down elsewhere and are desperately seeking a replacement site. It would not be at all unusual for them to build a new nest at this time of year as they regularly have several broods between May and October.

**Departing passerines:** The following species have all been reported at coastal sites where they do not breed during the past week (a peak count, if any, is given in brackets after the species). **Swift (31), Sand Martin (200+), Tree Pipit (20), Meadow Pipit (12), Yellow Wagtail (56), Nightingale (1), Common Redstart (1), Whinchat (5), Wheatear (25), Grasshopper Warbler (2), Sedge Warbler (25), Reed Warbler (20+), Lesser Whitethroat (14), Whitethroat (132), Garden Warbler (6), Blackcap (23), Wood Warbler (1), Chiffchaff (3), Willow Warbler (210), Spotted Flycatcher (2), Pied Flycatcher (1)**

**Marsh Warbler:** One reported at Sandwich Bay on Aug 15 - not known if it was departing from Britain or a vagrant from the continent

**Barred Warbler:** A possible sighting on the Isle of Wight near Totland on Aug 16

**Lesser Grey Shrike:** The bird that arrived at Hartland Moor (west of Poole Harbour) on Aug 2 was still there on Aug 15

**Carrion Crow:** In addition to the very occasional bird with white patches randomly distributed on its plumage many Crows are regularly seen showing what appears to be a white stripe longitudinally along the wing and only visible in flight. A birder unfamiliar with this phenomenon raised the question of its cause on the SOS website this week and several people responded with the fact that the aberration is quite common and has been growing in frequency over the past 20 or 30 years.

Two other responses included one from myself saying that I had once found the corpse of a bird with this aberration and could see that (in that case, but maybe not every case) that there was no white pigment involved. What had happened was that when the bird had last moulted the new feathers (which are always - in all birds - enclosed in a 'cellophane wrapping' as they emerge from the bird's flesh) had failed to lose the cellophane wrapping around a mid-section (about 1 cm long) of each primary and secondary feather. This meant that the black barbs of the feather could not 'unfurl' in this section, leaving a line along the length of the extended wing where you could see through the wing, and this (with the reflection of light from the 'cellophane') gave an impression of a white band. It also meant that the bird did not get as much lift from its wing as it normally would, so birds with this aberration flapped their wings faster and flew slower than their normal companions.

One of the other Sussex birders who commented on this phenomenon appears to think that my account may be true as he agreed that the aberration is more commonly seen immediately after the birds have undergone their autumn moult - which is why the subject has come up at this time of year. In most cases the unwanted cellophane will disappear in time due to abrasion and preening.

**Linnet:** Autumn flocks are now forming - 40+ were seen at Rye Harbour on Aug 14 and more than 100 birds in several flocks were seen feeding in harvested Rape fields near Lewes on Aug 16

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Migrant Hawker:** A mention of many seen in the Pegwell Bay area of east Kent on Aug 10 probably indicates the arrival of migrants from the continent to supplement our home bred insects and maybe one of these migrants reached my Havant garden in a brief spell of sunshine on Aug 12 and has been seen several times since.

**Golden Ringed Dragonfly:** What was only the fourth report of this species for the year (the first was on June 30) came from an unexpected site near Facombe in the hills north east of Andover on Aug 12

### Butterflies

Despite the weather 33 species were seen in the past week, among them ...

**Clouded Yellow:** Still no invasion of migrants but the species has established a few resident colonies on the south coast in recent years, one of them must be at Durlston where the species has been reported regularly from Apr 16 to Aug 15. Another colony is on the Bournemouth coast but I have not seen any reports from there this year though I suspect the butterflies are surviving.

**Brown Hairstreak:** A few continue to be seen at Noar Hill and Pulborough Brooks but the good news this week was that they had been seen flying at a new site near Steyning in West Sussex on Aug 6

**Small Blue:** At least 10 were seen at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Aug 11. No more than 3 of the first brood were reported there this year and the appearance of 10 second brood insects pays tribute to the work of conservation volunteers in removing scrub and restoring downland habitat over recent years.

**Painted Lady:** A sighting of two different individuals at Pagham Harbour on Aug 10 drew a comment from the editor of the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website - he said .. "These are only the third and fourth Painted Ladies of August in what is a poor year for them so far". These may have been part of a small surge of migrants that caused a report of 10 in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 7

**Dark Green Fritillary:** One was still flying at Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Aug 13

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** Still reported from three sites this week with 10 counted in woodland near Facombe (north east of Andover) on Aug 12

**Marbled White:** These are near the end of their season but at least one could still be seen in Dorset on Aug 15

**Ringlet:** One was still flying at Stockbridge Down on Aug 11

**Monarch:** The first of these massive migrants was seen on a Buddliea bush 'behind the Burger Van' at Pegwell Bay in Kent on Aug 14

## Moths

**Orthotelia sparganella (0470):** The first was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 10

**Cyclamen Tortrix (0993 Clepsia spectrana):** The first was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 8

**Dichrorampha alpinana (1274):** The first was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 10

**Endotricha flammealis (1424):** First trapped at Ringmer near Lewes on Aug 11

**Barred Rivulet (1804 Perizoma bifaciata):** The first was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 8

**Plain Pug (1842 Eupithecia simpliciata):** The first was trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 11

**Great Dart (2094 Agrotis crassa):** Not the first by a long way but a good find in the Portland trap on Aug 15

**Langmaid's Yellow Underwing (2110a Noctua janthina):** Although one had been trapped in Thanet back on July 17 one trapped at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6 was a first for that reserve

**Red Underwing (2452 Catocala nupta):** An exciting first in the Rye Harbour trap on Aug 14

## PLANTS

**Hairy Vetchling:** Still flowering at its only Hampshire site (top of the Broadmarsh 'ex-rubbish-tip' mountain at Havant on Aug 15 with plenty of seed for next year's plants

**Slender Hare's Ear:** Seen and photographed in flower at Rye Harbour on Aug 14 but not found on the South Moors at Havant this week (the Thorney Island site not yet visited)

**Japanese Knotweed:** Starting to flower by the Brockhampton Stream in Havant on Aug 15

**Small Teasel:** Flowering on Aug 11 at Racton in the Ems valley - the only site I know for it in the Havant area

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Snails:** Two species of local interest in the Havant area have been reported recently in the Durlston news.

One is **Pomatias elegans** which I have previously known as the **Round-mouthed Snail** and which is one of only two British land snail species that still retain the gills of a marine mollusc and get their oxygen from water. All other land snails have evolved to be air breathing and are classified as **Pulmonata** (meaning that they have lungs) while **Pomatias** is classified with the marine molluscs in **Prosobranchia** (having gills which must be submerged in water). As **Pomatias elegans** is perverse enough to choose to live in dry friable soil (in the Stansted Forest site where I have found it this is chalk which has been broken down into very small fragments) it has to go to great lengths to preserve the water supply which it keeps within the mantle cavity in its shell and it does this by burrowing into the loose soil and only coming out at night or on wet days. As the soil in which it burrows is itself dry the snail has to seal its shell to prevent water loss and it does this by having the equivalent of a 'bath plug' in the 'sole of its foot' - when it retracts its body into the shell this plug is the last thing to be drawn in and it exactly fits the opening in the shell to make a perfect seal. From this habit some people have named it the '**Trapdoor Snail**' but this is confusing as there is another snail given that same English name - it is a mollusc originally from Japan but now widely available in Britain and world wide to people who keep fish as 'pets' - the snail is a very effective cleaner of algae from their fish tanks, so if you put **Trapdoor Snail** into Google you will be presented with many opportunities to buy this Japanese snail but will not find any mention of **Pomatias elegans**.

The other uncommon species currently found at Durlston, but which I could not find on my most recent visit to the only local site where I have regularly found it in recent years (on the seawall bank at the west end of the Thorney Island Deeps), is **Cochlicella acuta** which I know as the **Pointed Snail**. This is a land snail but is generally found in dry situations close to the sea (thousands could be found on the land reclaimed from Portsmouth Harbour to build the M27 around 1970 but as the land lost its salinity the species seems to have died out there) and unlike the **Round-mouthed Snail** which burrows out of site during hot days this **Pointed Snail** is most easily found on hot dry summer days when it has to climb anything it can find to get off the ground (where it would fry!) into slightly cooler area just a few inches off the ground.

**Fungi:** Evolution is still and at work and its workings are still a mystery - this message was brought home to me on Aug 15 when I came on a massive display of fungi growing on piles of wood chips where trees have been cut down along the Billy Trail in the Langstone area. At first I could not name them but after taking a few samples home and checking on the internet I am pretty certain that the fungus is

**Agrocybe rivulosa**, a species that seems to have appeared from nowhere as recently as 2003 on piles of wood chips throughout the length and breadth of Britain. The only argument I can think of to account for the widespread appearance of this new species 'out of the blue' is a combination of the relatively new practice of machine chipping of tree and garden waste, generating large piles of chippings, and climate change factors which make those piles 'hotbeds' for fungal growth. All you need then is for one or more existing species of fungus to land on a few of these piles and to respond to the new and favourable habitat in way that generates a 'new species', followed by windborne dispersal of the spores giving the new species a foothold in the new piles. (That is purely my guess at what has happened).

The species has been named **Agrocybe rivulosa** and it grows in dense clusters. The caps are at first conical and white (with a tendency to have radial grooves near the rim of the cap) but they soon acquire a faint orangey tinge to the colour and become flat with a diameter of around 10 cm. The stems are white throughout and grow to a height of around 10 cm with a thin floppy ring. The mushroom like gills soon become dark brown and have lots of spores that are almost black. These gills are remote (they do not join onto the stem so there is a small gap all round the top of the stem before the gills start). The new species is said to be related to *Agrocybe cylindracea*. Pictures of the new species can be seen on the internet at:

<http://www.pbase.com/02purser/image/77854753>

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/pictures/showphoto.php/photo/46754/cat/500/ppuser/2073>

[http://homepages.tesco.net/~brent.pearson/bolbitiaceae/agrocybe\\_rivulosa.htm](http://homepages.tesco.net/~brent.pearson/bolbitiaceae/agrocybe_rivulosa.htm)

Just two other new species so far this week - a small troop of **Collybia dryophila** (**Russet Toughshank**) has appeared under trees at the end of my garden and one **Red-cracking Bolete** appeared in the Billy Trail area behind my house

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 11 - 17 (WEEK 32 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 15 Aug**

#### **An improvement in the weather**

Yesterday the sun came out and the wind abated but I was unable to get out so I was delighted when the good weather persisted today and allowed me to enjoy a cycle ride to Broadmarsh and Southmoor.

Before describing what I saw today I must record a couple of observations from earlier in the week. The first dates back to Monday (Aug 11) when I paid a brief visit to Racton in the Ems valley and found **Small Teazel** in flower at its only local site in the south east quadrant of the road junction where the road to Funtington and Chichester goes east from the road going north to South Harting. These plants are not easily seen as you drive by as they are in the shade of tall trees and surrounded by head high nettles but if you force your way through the nettles you will find **Teazel plants** reaching up at least 2 metres, topped by **small round white Teazel**

**flowers** - when I was there at dusk one of the flowers had attracted a **Green-veined White butterfly** to spend the night on it.

A second omission relates to yesterday (Aug 14) when both **Comma** butterfly and **Migrant Hawker** dragonfly were in my garden, and while walking the dog which I have foolishly promised to look after while my daughter is on holiday (the dog is a **Chinese Crested Powder Puff** for those who are into strange dog breeds) I found more **Cockspur grass** and noted that **Elderberries are now ripe**.

Today, before going out, I had a fresh **Holly Blue butterfly** in the garden where I was able to confirm that the dragonfly I have seen several times recently really is a **Migrant Hawker** as it kindly hung motionless for a few moments on a shaded branch.

My cycle ride brought me face to face with Chris Cockburn at Broadmarsh so I asked him if the **Black-necked Grebe** that had been seen off the slipway on Aug 11 was still around to which he replied that it could still be seen off North Binness if you were lucky, and that it had been around for some time (as had been a female **Merganser** off west Hayling). Chris also told me there had been a **significant increase in the number of Little Egrets** in the harbour this week - he had seen at least 50 today when out on the islands.

Up on the Broadmarsh mountain I found **Hairy Vetchling** still in flower with lots of seed pods to perpetuate it there for next year, and alongside the gravel quay at the edge of the Hermitage stream I saw a **Common Sandpiper**.

Heading homeward I went down the Brockhampton stream path and looked for the **Kingfisher** from the second bridge, hoping it was already back for the winter. No sign of it for me (the tide had fallen too low for profitable fishing) but when I reached the Budds Farm shore I met someone who had seen it there earlier today when the tide was up. Before reaching the shore I saw my first flowers on the dreaded **Japanese Knotweed** which grows opposite the gravel quay (**Vervain** was also flowering nearby and a **Robin was singing** from the bushes).

Continuing along the South Moors shore I stopped twice to look for **Slender Hare's Ear** but without success (a photo of it on the Rye Bay website shows that it has just begun to flower there). My search did find several **Wasp Spiders** in the long grass from which I disturbed two **Common Blue** butterflies. Before leaving the area I did spot a **couple of Shelduck** at the mouth of the Langbrook stream - **one adult and one juvenile**.

Back at home I took the dog for a short walk on the Billy Line behind my house, finding **Field Scabious** and **Common Toadflax** newly in flower there - these appear annually here but today there was a newcomer - **Black Bindweed**. I also passed a young **Boletus chrysenteron (Red-cracking Bolete)** fungus which I could identify, unlike the **mass of fungi (all one species) which has suddenly sprung up on several of the large piles of wood chippings** left by the team that have been felling trees that threaten the power lines coming up the Billy Line from the main road at Langstone to the point south of the A27 where the power lines turn east across the fields - I have brought some specimens home and will try to identify them later.

**SUMMARY FOR AUG 4 - 10 (WEEK 31 OF 2008)**

**Great Shearwater** became a new species for my database this week (seen at Dungeness) while **Lesser Grey Shrike** in Dorset, **Collared Pratincole** at Farlington Marshes, **Long-tailed Skua** at Selsey, **Dotterel** at Portland and **Bee-eater** on Hayling are exciting new reports.

**Swifts** are now becoming a rare sight but **Black Terns** have been seen in huge numbers (at least in north Kent). Also this week I have learnt something about **Heron nests** and **Barbary Partridges** while we have news of a very early **Purple Sandpiper** and a late singing **Song Thrush**

The identity of a **Damselfly** seen at Emsworth last week remains a mystery but there are no surprises among the butterflies. Best moth was a **Bedstraw Hawk** at Portland and it is left to a **Bog Bush Cricket** in Sussex and a **Lesser Marsh Grasshopper** on the Emsworth foreshore to add some spice to the week's news.

**Perennial Wall-rocket** was added to my Havant area plant species list this week and **Narrow-leaved Water Plantain** has re-appeared in Emsworth where it was first discovered in 2006. This week's first flowerings include **Creeping Yellow Cress** and **Tansy** and an interesting **hybrid between Marsh and Hedge Woundwort** has been found near Petersfield

Other Wildlife news has a **sad coda to the story of last week's Northern Bottle-nosed Whale** but also news of the **first Common Seal pup** and the **start of the autumn fungus season**. Best of all is the story of how **quiet observation of wildlife brought an Otter within five feet of the observer without the Otter detecting a human presence**.

## BIRDS

**Fulmar**: 4 flew west past Selsey on Aug 5 and 1 was seen at Portland on Aug 8 but the interesting news came from Rye Bay that day when a pair were seen with two chicks (presumably now away from their nest) at Cliff End east of Hastings

**Great Shearwater (Puffinus gravis)**: One was seen close in at Dungeness, heading south, on Aug 2. I have not previously come across a report of this species in the area I cover but I see it is not uncommon in the east of the Atlantic in autumn months as it heads south to breed (during our winter) in the south Atlantic. After breeding it heads north up the west side of the Atlantic then turns round to come down the east side where several of them are currently being seen off Cornwall - Lee Evans' latest bulletin of national bird news says .. "A handful of **CORY'S** and **GREAT SHEARWATERS** were noted off Cornwall and Scilly at the weekend (Aug 2/3), with a **WILSON'S PETREL** identified amongst **250 Storm Petrels** from a short pelagic (3rd)".

**Gannet**: Plenty of these in the channel on Aug 3 when Christchurch Harbour reported 400+, Portland had 143 and Selsey had around 100 (with 87 off Worthing)

**Cormorant**: An unusual sight of two flying high south over my Havant garden late in the day on Aug 7, maybe just returning to the sea from fishing local inland waters but maybe on a long journey

**Grey Heron**: I was aware that Herons will nest on the ground if there are no trees as on some Scottish islands but I was surprised to hear from Derek Hale that

Heron nest on the ground among reeds in two places on the Isle of Wight. Derek seemed to imply that ground nesting is a habit of continental Herons whereas British birds use the trees but my old books on bird nests say that they will nest on the ground, in low bushes or in trees without reference to their 'country of origin'. Another piece of information given in one of these books is that established Heronries are built high in the tree canopy whereas single nests are built at a lower height.

**White Stork:** One was back in the Avon valley near Ringwood on Aug 6 and 7

**Canada Goose:** Two reports show that flocks of these geese are now on the move (suppressed autumn migration?). On Aug 6 a small flock of 23, with a **pair of Barnacles** among them, was on the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth and a bigger flock of 306 was on the Arlington Reservoir in the Cuckmere Valley near Beachy Head

**Mallard:** These non-stop breeders had **three families** on show at Langstone Mill Pond on Aug 8. The oldest ducklings were as large as they get before acquiring feathers (seven of them including one in pure black down suggesting **Tufted Duck** parentage), the middle family were not seen clearly but the youngest family was of nine tiny ducklings.

**Pintail:** The bird which was reported as a very early arrival at the Blashford lakes (Ringwood) on July 27 has subsequently been found to have a plastic tag indicating that it came from a wildfowl collection

**Eider:** 16 were in the west Solent off Lymington on Aug 6, the highest count I have seen from there since mid June when 19 were present

**Marsh Harrier:** Single juveniles were seen at Pulborough on Aug 4 and on the Lymington marshes on Aug 8.

**Montagu's Harrier:** A ringtail was seen at Reculver (north Kent coast) on Aug 3

**Golden Eagle:** What was probably a long-term escapee in the Hastings area was seen at Ashburnham Place near Battle on Aug 5 before it flew off north west.

**Osprey:** In addition to the bird seen fishing in Langstone Harbour on July 30 I see that Keith Betton's summary for July of birding in Hampshire has three sightings of an **Osprey** in Chichester Harbour, seen from Hayling, on July 4, 10 and 15 (presumably a non-breeding bird that went no further north), The most recent sighting was of one heading south over the Lower Test marshes near Southampton on Aug 3

**Barbary Partridge:** At least 5 **Red-leg Partridge** were seen in the Seaford area of East Sussex on Aug 8 and with them were more than 40 **Barbary Partridge** (some still in a cage, the others seemingly having escaped from it). **Barbary** is one of **three look-alike species** which may be encountered as game birds in Britain - the main feature to look for when identifying them is the dark collar which separates the white throat from the breast plumage. **Red-leg** has a high collar with a solid black band running high across the throat and the solid black becomes a streaked black 'neck shawl' running down over the breast. **Chukar** has the solid black collar only

with no dark streaking below it. **Barbary** also has a neat black neck collar (not running down onto the breast) but this is stippled with white dots in the lower half of the black collar

**Avocet:** The only news of breeding at Titchfield Haven that has managed to leak out into the public domain was a report of four chicks seen there on May 24 so a report of up to 18 birds seen there sometime in July (in Keith Betton's July summary) may just reflect early autumn passage. North Kent could boast a few more last week when 755 were reported on Aug 1 at the Cliffe Pools (north of Rochester on the Isle of Grain) but these had diminished to 450+ on Aug 4. An indication of birds on the move was the appearance of a flock of 34 at Dungeness on Aug 9

**Collared Pratincole?:** Two, maybe three, Pratincoles were reported to have been seen at Farlington Marshes on the evening of July 31 (two together at the Deeps and one seen later over the main lake). These would be the first in Hampshire since one was definitely at Farlington Marshes (also seen around the Deeps) on 1 May 2005 (that was the third Hampshire record)

**Kentish Plover:** The bird seen briefly at Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on Aug 1 may have flown west to give a possible sighting at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Aug 3

**Dotterel:** The first autumn passage bird was seen at Portland on Aug 8 more than a week earlier than the previous earliest autumn bird there

**Golden Plover:** The first flocks of the autumn were seen at The Midrips (Rye Bay area) on Aug 2 (45 birds) and at Sandwich Bay on Aug 3 (35 birds mostly in summer plumage). Since writing that for my mid-week summary a count of 156 has been reported at Kent Oare Marshes (north of Faversham) on Aug 6 and Rye Harbour had 44 on Aug 9

**Curlew Sandpiper:** On Aug 2 the Sidlesham Ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) had 3 birds as did Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour while another single was at The Midrips (Rye Bay)

**Purple Sandpiper:** A bird still in summer plumage was a surprise sight at the north Kent Oare Marshes on Aug 5

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Adult birds in summer plumage have been back from Iceland since around June 28, and flocks of up to an estimated 900 birds were back at the Oare Marshes (near Faversham in Kent) on July 17 (with 710 reported at Northward Hill, also in north west Kent, on July 22) but the first explicit mention of **juvenile birds** having arrived from Iceland had not caught my eye until Aug 3 when a group of seven birds at the Blashford Lakes were reported on Birdguides as having two juveniles among them. Maybe a new wave of returning birds had just arrived as a flock of 300 was reported at the Elmley Marshes (on Sheppey) that day - further evidence for new arrivals came on Aug 4 when the number of birds in Emsworth Harbour shot up from around 20 birds to 66 (though these may have come from Langstone Harbour where there were 170 birds at Farlington Marshes on Aug 1). Among recent reports is one of an estimated 1000 birds at the Oare

Marshes on Aug 7. Locally the flock in the Hook/Warsash area was up from around 50 on Aug 2 to 121 on Aug 6

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** A flock of 141 at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Aug 6 was the first report of more than 100 since May 2 when the last flock of 600 on spring passage was at Dungeness

**Turnstone:** A report of more than 50 seen briefly on the beach near Selsey Bill on Aug 3 may presage an increase in local numbers (though they may just pass through). On Aug 5 I saw the first autumn three figure count with 130 at Seasalter on the north Kent coast.

**Pomarine Skua:** Selsey Bill had its second of the autumn on Aug 5 (the first was an immature which went by on July 20). Dungeness has had four sightings this autumn and Portland had had two more.

**Long-tailed Skua:** Selsey also had its second autumn record of this species on Aug 5 after the first on July 27 - Selsey is the only site to report this species so far this autumn.

**Med Gull:** When I saw that there had been a flock of 86 on the Ryde sands on Aug 5 I thought this might have been the first large flock away from the breeding sites but a quick check showed that a flock of 56 had been seen at a pig farm near Hambledon near the Meon Valley on July 14 and more than 174 had been seen at a favoured gravel pit site at Badminton (near Fawley in the New Forest) on July 2

**Black-headed Gull:** The relatively large number of these (together with **Common Terns**) breeding at the Hayling Oysterbeds this summer has been a prime cause of the failure of the **Little Tern** nests there but now, long after the **Little Terns** have left, something caused the majority of the gulls and **Common Terns** to suddenly desert the nest islands on the night of Aug 4/5 - at the moment the cause remains a mystery.

**Common Gull:** Very few Common Gulls are in our area at the moment since the majority of them nest at sites north of the Scottish border - a few have been back since July 6 but these first returnees are usually all adult birds so I have been surprised to see **two reports of juveniles already with us**. The first was at Christchurch Harbour on July 22 and the second at the Hayling Oysterbeds (where it was photographed by Brian Fellows) on Aug 5. These reports raised the possibility of breeding on the south coast so I have looked back to what I wrote in response to a report of a pair seen mating at Rye Harbour on June 9. That entry read ....

"A photo on the Rye Bay website showing a **pair of Common Gulls mating** at Rye Harbour on June 9 led me to check how many pairs of this species nest in southern Britain and I find that my previous impression that virtually none nest in England south of the counties adjacent to the Scottish border is more or less correct. The latest seabird survey in the years 1998 to 2002 discovered 6 pairs in north Norfolk, 20 pairs in Suffolk and 11 at Dungeness in Kent. Older sources speak of breeding at Anglesey in Wales from 1963 onwards and a survey in 1969-70 found one pair in East Sussex. The Rye Harbour pair in the current photo may have mated but have

not yet built a nest so I think that my impression that you have to go to Scotland to see **Common Gull nests** is still more or less correct".

**Black Tern:** All species of tern have been on the move westward in the past few days but the reports that have impressed me most have been counts of Black Tern from the Reculver area of north Kent where 139 were seen on Aug 3 increasing by two to 141 on Aug 4 - I cannot recall ever having heard of such large numbers of this species in southern England before. Sadly the number close to where I live has been less impressive - just singles at Selsey Bill, Southampton Water and the Blashford Lakes.

**Long-eared Owl:** On Aug 5 one turned up at Dungeness where it was seen by day and on Aug 7 one gave a great display of hunting well before dusk at St Helens near Bembridge on the Isle of Wight

**Swifts:** A flock of 60 moved south over Havant on Aug 6 (with others seen over Portsdown that day) - these were the only Swifts seen around Havant since July 30 but plenty are still in southern England. On Aug 3 Reculver reported more than 500, Folkestone had 45 and Christchurch Harbour had 38. On Aug 4 Dungeness reported 350 and one flew down the River Test at Southampton. Twelve more sightings have been reported from other places in the south from Aug 5 to 8

**Bee Eater:** Keith Betton's summary of July birding in Hampshire reported one seen/heard on the Hayling Coastal Path on July 14 though there have been no other sightings in southern England since June 13. On June 6 I met Alistair Martin by chance in the Havant Waitrose store and asked if he knew about the sighting - his response was that it was his observation though he had not been over-confident of it at the time ....

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** This species is well known for its tendency to migrate over large distances so it is not surprising that one was seen at Dungeness on Aug 4 and we should not be surprised that Brian Fellows found one in his Emsworth garden on Aug 3 (new to his garden list)

**Woodlark:** A flock of 14 was seen in the area of Black Down north of Midhurst on Aug 3

**Passerines on the move:** Birds seen on the move during the past week (with a peak count for each species) have been **Sand Martin (280+), Swallow (400), Tree Pipit (1), Meadow Pipit (20), Yellow Wagtail (18), Grey Wagtail (1), Nightingale (1), Common Redstart (2), Whinchat (few), Wheatear (12), Grasshopper Warbler (3), Sedge Warbler (43), Reed Warbler (8), Lesser Whitethroat (8), Common Whitethroat (50), Garden Warbler (5 on Old Winchester Hill in the Meon valley), Blackcap (4), Wood Warbler (1), Chiffchaff (7), Willow Warbler (163 at Christchurch Harbour), Firecrest (1 on Old Winchester Hill on Aug 4), Spotted Flycatcher (few), Pied Flycatcher (1)**

**Song Thrush:** Still singing at dawn and dusk in Crowborough on Aug 5 but none reported anywhere else

**Mistle Thrush:** Not too many years ago it was not uncommon to come across flocks of 20 or more roaming the countryside at this time of year but nowadays I

was quite surprised to see a report of 12 in Boughton Park (south of Maidstone in Kent) on Aug 1

**Lesser Grey Shrike:** One has been on Hartland Moor (west of Poole Harbour in Dorset) from Aug 2 to 9 at least. A first for this year. Last year one was in Dorset on Apr 11 and another was reported in the Eastbourne area on Aug 26. Unlike the **Great Grey Shrikes** which come from the north to visit us in winter this will have come from the south (probably around the Mediterranean).

**Starling:** A flock of around 2000 was roosting in reeds at the Oare Marshes (north Kent) on Aug 7 and no doubt similar flocks will soon be seen elsewhere

**Linnet:** First autumn flock of around 50 was reported at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Aug 6

**Crossbill:** Still being seen widely with reports from 9 sites between Aug 2 and 9. Biggest flock was of 30+ at Patcham (north of Brighton) on Aug 6

**Yellowhammer:** One had been seen carrying nest material for a second brood at Boughton Park (Maidstone) on July 26 and now another has been seen doing the same at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on Aug 3. One was still singing on Portsdown on Aug 6

**Corn Bunting:** A flock of more than 30 was in the Seaford area near Beachy Head on July 30

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker:** Surprisingly few reports this summer - I have only recorded 8 sightings since the first on June 13

**Emperor:** Similarly few reports this summer

**Banded Demoiselle:** Still being seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth up to Aug 7

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** The jury is still out on the identity of a damselfly seen and photographed by the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Aug 3. Prior to that date there have been regular sightings of Banded Demoiselle at this site but none of Beautiful Demoiselle and that is backed up by distribution maps which show that Banded can be found anywhere in southern England whereas Beautiful can be found in Sussex east of the Arun valley and in Hampshire west of Fareham but not in the gap between these two boundaries. The mystery damsel looks exactly right for a male Beautiful (neither the colour nor the pattern is right for either sex of Banded) but the mystery deepens as when it was photographed it was perched on a leaf just above the water with its abdomen curved down into the water as if egg-laying, and from this it was assumed to be a female though the position of the tail may have been accidental (no substantial proof of egg laying has reached me).

The photographs I have seen show distinct 'anal claspers' at the tip of the abdomen and these are male only attributes used for grasping the female during mating - females may have two small points protruding from the end of the abdomen but do not have the curved 'claspers' of the male

As the flight period for Beautiful ends in late August (and for Banded in September) it may be assumed that the real business of mating and egg-laying is now over, and this completion of procreation duties may have left a Beautiful free to fly off from its normal haunts to end up in Brook Meadow.

One other factor concerns a difference in the habitat preferred by the two species for their egg-laying - Banded are said to go for "unpolluted slow-moving muddy bottomed rivers or canals" while Beautiful are said to prefer "clean, moderate to fast flowing stream with gravel or silt bottoms" but I have no information as to what the river was like where the mystery insect was seen, nor if it was in an area normally favoured by Banded Demoiselle.

A final aspect of the reported egg-laying is that it would normally occur immediately after copulation with the male remaining nearby to ensure that another male does not interfere with his female until she has laid the eggs (some dragonfly species remain in tandem throughout egg-laying but not so with these two species). The egg-laying process lasts for up to 30 minutes for Beautiful (and females of this species rarely submerge) while Banded can take up to 45 minutes and the females often submerge completely during the process.

## Butterflies

**33 species reported in the past week's news** which shows the end of season for the **Fritillaries** and **Marbled Whites** is imminent while **Chalkhill** and **Adonis Blues**, **Wall Browns**, **Graylings** and **Silver Spotted Skippers** are now flourishing. There were three reports of **Silver Washed Fritillary** and even one of a female **Purple Emperor** but I doubt either species will be in next week's news. Still no arrival of **Clouded Yellows** but **10 Painted Ladies** were seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 7 and the only report of a **Small Tortoiseshell** also came from Kent

## Moths

**Orange Swift (0015 *Hepialus sylvina*)**: First trapped at Pagham Harbour on Aug 5

**Eucalybites auroguttella (0297)**: First seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 7 by day

**Ypsolopha scabrella (0455 *Ypsolopha scabrella*)**: First trapped at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6

**Pied Smudge (0462 *Ypsolopha sequella*)**: First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Vine Moth (0955 *Eupoecilia ambiguella*):** First trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 4

**Calamotropha paludella (1292):** First trapped at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6

**Pediasia contaminella (1323):** First trapped at Portland on Aug 8

**Pediasia aridella (1324):** First trapped at Rye Harbour on Aug 5

**Chequered Pearl (1358 *Evergestis pallidata*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Pale Straw Pearl (1388 *Udea lutealis*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Palpita vitrealis (1408):** First trapped at Portland on Aug 6

**Synaphe punctalis (1414):** First trapped at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6

**Trachycera suavella (1438):** First trapped at Dungeness on Aug 8

**The Mocha (1676 *Cyclophora annulata*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Small Scallop (1712 *Idea emarginata*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**The Chevron (1755 *Eulithis testata*):** First trapped at Dungeness on Aug 5

**Wormwood Pug (1830 *Eupithecia absinthiata*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Bordered Pug (1839 *Eupithecia succenturiata*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Two more singles seen on Aug 6 at Portland and Dungeness

**Bedstraw Hawkmoth (1987 *Hyles Gallii*):** The first of these uncommon migrants had been seen at Rye Harbour on July 16 but it was not until July 31 that the second turned up at Portland

**Gypsy Moth (2034 *Lymantria dispar*):** First trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 6

**Archer's Dart (2085 *Agrotis vestigialis*):** First report of this coastal (sandhill) species comes from Dungeness on Aug 1

**Turnip Moth (2087 *Agrotis segetum*):** First report from Ringmer near Lewes on Aug 4

**Dog's Tooth (2159 *Lacanobia suasa*):** First trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 4

**Marbled Beauty (2293 *Cryphia domestica*):** First trapped at Shoreham on Aug 5

**Straw Underwing (2303 *Thalpophila matura*):** First trapped in the Horsham area and at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6

**Double Kidney (2311 *Ipimorpha retusa*):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Aug 6

**Lesser Common Rustic (2343a *Mesapamea didyma*):** The id of this, trapped at Ringmer on Aug 4, was 'possible only'

**Rosy Rustic (2361 *Hydraecia micacea*):** First trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on Aug 4

**Bulrush Wainscot (2369 *Nonagria typhae*):** First trapped in the Horsham area and at Pagham Harbour on Aug 6

**Brown-veined Wainscot (2371 *Archanara dissoluta*):** First trapped at Portland on Aug 8

**Webb's Wainscot (2373 *Archanara sparganii*):** First of year at Dungeness on Aug 1

## Other Insects

**Volucella zonaria:** This Hornet sized Hoverfly was back on my garden Buddliea here in Havant on Aug 6 where I also saw it on July 30 (first sighting was at Rye Harbour on July 26). On Aug 7 two were seen at Durlston

**Lesser Marsh Grasshopper:** These are known to frequent sea shore vegetation but Brian Fellows was surprised to find them on Aug 2 around the edge of Emsworth Harbour on shingle and driftwood away from any vegetation

**Bog Bush Cricket:** This uncommon insect was found on damp heathland on Aug 3 near Black Down in West Sussex between Midhurst and Haslemere

## PLANTS

**Perennial Wall Rocket:** In my Diary entry for Aug 4 I said that I was fairly certain that a plant growing on the edge of the railway track just west of the Havant Signal Box, and seen from the railway carpark south of the track, was Perennial Wall Rocket rather than the common annual species and I have since been back and confirmed the id on the basis of the shape, colour and position of the leaves as well as the large flowers and the angle between the stem and the flower/seed pedicels.

**Creeping Yellow Cress:** My first sight of this in flower for the year was in Havant Park flowerbeds on Aug 4 (alongside the path connecting the railstation forecourt to the park)

**Pencilled Cranesbill:** Still flowering in roadside grass by Pook Lane in east Havant on Aug 9 where I first found in on July 10

**Wild Angelica:** There have always been some plants in Brook Meadow at Emsworth but this year the number has increased to around 200

**Autumn Gentian (or Felwort):** I had recorded the first flowering of this on July 28 at Durlston but I now hear it was out on Portsdown on July 23

**Lesser Centaury:** First report of this comes from Stockbridge Down on Aug 4 though no doubt it has been out, unreported, on Portsdown before now

**Marsh Woundwort hybrid with Hedge Woundwort:** These two species are known to hybridise but I had not come across an example until Martin Hampton sent me a photo of one of several plants he had found growing by the River Rother east of Petersfield on Aug 7 - I hope Martin will send his photo to Martin Rand for confirmation (or otherwise!) of my guess at the plant's identity

**Tansy:** This was found flowering at Emsworth by Brian Fellows on Aug 9 - it has probably been out at other sites before this but this is the first report I have seen for this year.

**Chicory:** This was still flowering in the new cemetery extension at Warblington (where I had seen it on July 10) when Brian Fellows was there on Aug 8

**Narrow-leaved Water Plantain:** This had started flowering in the Westbrook stream at Emsworth by July 20 but at that time it could not be found in the original site alongside the Bridge Road carpark where it has now been re-found on Aug 2.

**Autumn Ladies Tresses:** These had first been reported in Emsworth on Aug 1 and are now flowering on Portsdown (seen Aug 6) and at Durlston (Aug 7)

**Cockpur Grass:** Found in Havant on Aug 4 flowering in the gutter of Homewell Street (west end of St Faith's churchyard) where bird seed has fallen by accident.

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Otter:** On the evening Aug 7 Colin Bates went to a quiet stretch of the River Itchen near Eastleigh in the hope of seeing a **Barn Owl** (which did not show) but as he sat quietly on a low branch of a riverside tree a **Robin** bathed in the water, then sat to dry its feathers on the same branch on which Colin was sitting. A little later an **Otter** clambered out of the water and onto the same branch, coming within five feet of Colin without detecting his presence - the first wild Otter Colin had ever seen and almost certainly the closest he will ever come to one

**Northern Bottlenose Whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*):** Just to complete the story given in my last Weekly Summary. A couple of emails and the Monday edition of the Portsmouth NEWS told me that the Whale left the Langstone village area under its own power, then headed under Langstone Bridge and out through the mouth of Langstone Harbour on the ebb tide. It did not get far as it then beached on the Winner sands, and it was here that the lethal injection was given (to avoid further suffering to an animal with liver failure proved by earlier blood tests), after which the whale was towed back to the Langstone Harbour entrance and brought ashore on the Hayling Island public carpark south of the Ferry Inn. Somehow it was manouvered into a waste disposal lorry and taken to places unknown for further analysis and disposal.

**Field Vole:** These must be scurrying around unseen in rough grassland wherever you go but few are ever seen so a daytime sighting of one at Brook Meadow on Aug 7 is worth a note. **Field Voles** are not as common as **Bank Voles** from which they can be distinguished by having greyer fur (**Bank Voles** are reddish) and shorter ears than **Bank Voles**. **Field Voles** also prefer damp tussocky grass while **Bank Voles** like drier places and are good climbers.

**Common Seal:** At Pegwell Bay in Kent on Aug 6 a **Common Seal pup** hauled itself out of the sea onto the beach - I wonder if any have been born in Chichester Harbour this year?

**Hare:** Very few are left in our area but on Aug 2 one was seen in the Wallington River valley in the Boarhunt area upstream from Fareham.

**Fungi:** With the current wet ground and warm air there should be a good show of fungi in the coming week but the only reports this week are of a big **Giant Polypore** at the base of a Beech tree in Wade Court Road (east Havant) and a troop of **Mycena type 'bell caps'** on wood chips in Palmers Road copse alongside Brook Meadow at Emsworth

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## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 4 - 10 (WEEK 31 OF 2008)

### Mon 4 Aug

#### Around Havant

I did well for butterflies in my garden today with 6 species including a **male Common Blue** which I have never seen here before - luckily it settled on the lawn and gave me a clear view of its underside. I also saw a **fresh male Brimstone** which also settled for a time. The others were a very tatty **Red Admiral** plus three **Gatekeepers** and several of both **Large** and **Small Whites**.

Out and about I found flowering **Creeping Yellow-Cress** in Havant Park, **Small Nettle** in the station flower beds with the small subspecies of **Fool's Parsley**, and beside the rail track were the large flowers and narrow leaves of what I am pretty sure is **Perennial Wall Rocket** (though newly established here, so a young specimen). On my way home I saw my first **Cockspur grass** flowering in the gutter of the Homewell street running down the west side of St Faith's Churchyard (someone from the cottages by the Robin Hood pub here regularly comes out to scatter birdseed in the churchyard and some of it falls back into the gutter of the street)

## SUMMARY FOR JULY 28 - AUG 3 (WEEK 30 OF 2008)

**Little Egret** numbers are now increasing as breeding colonies disperse - the Thorney Deeps night roost is back in business with 98 birds but the Langstone pond roost has not been abandoned.

The Slipper Mill pond at Emsworth has a new species on its check list (**Barnacle Goose**) but more interestingly I hear that there is a **breeding flock of the 'half-size' Canada Geese (Cackling Canada Goose)** at Southampton.

Although **Ospreys** have been moving south for some time this week brought the first report of one in Langstone Harbour.

Both **Kentish** and **American Golden Plover** are in this week's news as is the **first summer plumage Grey Plover** back in Langstone Harbour.

The second **Long-tailed Skua** of the year has been seen off Selsey and **large flocks of Terns** can now be seen all round our coasts (including **Black Terns** and a surprise appearance of **13 juvenile Little Terns** close to the Oysterbeds where breeding failed this year).

Our breeding **Swifts** have now left and both **Nightingale** and **Pied Flycatcher** have joined the list of departing summer visitors now being seen at the coast. Also new this week are the **first Goldfinch flocks** on thistle seed and the **first 'winter' corvid roost**.

Downland butterflies now include peak numbers of **Chalkhill Blues**, **Silver Spotted Skippers**, **Grayling** and even **Wall Browns** with second brood **Adonis Blues** and **Dingy Skippers**. For moth enthusiasts there are reports of **Gymnancyla canella** (whose larvae eat prickly **Saltwort** on sandy beaches), **Dusky Hook-tip**, **Least Carpet**, **Oblique Carpet** and **Brown Scallop** plus a speciality of the North Downs called **Straw Belle** and another species restricted to extreme south east oak woods - **Clay Fan-foot**. Another rare migrant is the **Scarce Chocolate-tip**. Among other insects are **two large Hoverflies** and a **Hornet** in my Havant garden with **two more Bush-cricket species** first appearances.

Two uncommon plants went onto my Havant area list for the first time this week (**Small Melilot** and **Hieracium trichocaulon**) and Brian Fellows discovered a **seaside variant of Bittersweet Nightshade**.

Both **Autumn Gentian** and **Autumn Ladies Tresses** are now out but it looks as if **Buttonweed** (which has been growing at Bedhampton for about ten years) will be extinct in Hampshire next year. Finally I read that **Oxford Ragwort** is 'the only really poisonous Ragwort species'

Other Wildlife has something to report this week with the **sad fate of the Northern Bottlenosed Whale** which came from the depths of the Atlantic to **die of kidney failure a few yards off Langstone Mill Pond**

## **BIRDS**

**Black-necked Grebe:** More than one seems to have been on the Dungeness RSPB reserve on July 29 but the only info I have seen is that '**Black-necked Grebes**' in the plural were included in a list of birds present at the reserve alongside **Common Sandpipers**. This seems to be the second report of birds returning from the north (the first having been one that was at the Blashford Lakes for one day only on July 5)

**Cory's Shearwater:** Three were reported at the Portland end of the Chesil bank on July 29 (two had been seen at Selsey on July 20), and singles were seen off Dorset on July 31 and Aug 1

**Sooty Shearwater:** One was off Folkestone on Aug 1. Only two earlier sightings this autumn - a possible off Portland on July 6 and a definite off Dungeness on July 25

**Balearic Shearwater:** Seen daily this week along the channel from Portland to Dungeness with a peak count of 10 at Dungeness on July 27

**Cormorant:** With the breeding season over three birds were back on rafts in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth on July 27

**Cattle Egret:** The bird that was at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool on July 19 has not been seen there again and the only current report is of one turning up at the Oare Marshes near Faversham in Kent on July 24

**Little Egret:** Numbers everywhere seem to be increasing. On the evening of July 30 the roost at the Thorney Great Deeps held 98 birds and this suggested to me that the Langstone Pond trees might have been abandoned as a night roost but a quick check on the evening of Aug 2 showed that at least 20 birds were present (probably more than 50) and at least two were seen to fly in from the east (i.e. the Thorney direction). A group of 8 sitting out the morning high tide at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 29 were probably birds that would, for the past couple of months, have been tied to the nests at Langstone Mill Pond but which are now free to hang out where they like - this post breeding dispersion is the main cause of the increases everywhere though many of the birds are dispersing from nests on the continent and thus genuinely increasing numbers in southern Britain. At Rye Harbour the night roost, which had been down to 20 birds in May and June, was up to 36 birds on July 31

**Great White Egret:** One is reported to have flown past St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight on July 27 and another flew south over Reculver on the north Kent coast on Aug 1

**Black Swan:** On July 31 one of a group of three which had been present with the huge flock of **Mute Swans** in Christchurch Harbour was found dead but no cause of death was given.

**Canada Goose:** These are now flying again after their summer moult - evidence for this comes from a flock of 80 seen from Farlington Marshes on Aug 1

**Cackling Canada Goose:** There are several different species/races of **small sized Canada Goose** of which the occasional single individual is seen among a flock of the larger birds but it was news to me that **a whole flock of the smaller birds can be seen on the 'duck pond' at the Royal Victoria Country Park on the shore of Southampton Water**. Ian Watts referred to these birds in a HOSLIST message on Aug 1 saying that **the flock has two juveniles among it**.

**Barnacle Goose:** Two of these made a brief visit to the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth on Aug 1 - a new species for that pond!

**Shelduck:** These ducks seem to have had a poor breeding season locally this year - the only juveniles I have heard of in Langstone Harbour were two seen on July 10 flying east over the Hayling Oysterbeds in a flock of adults and now four juveniles

seen on Aug 1 on the Farlington Marshes Deeps. The usual two pairs of adults were seen on the Budds Farm pools in April but after April 22 no more than one pair was seen there and they have had no young that I am aware of. I think the same lack of success has been true in Chichester Harbour as on July 27 Ed Rowsell went searching for youngsters but could only find one group of 8 which I think contained some adults,

**Mandarin:** It would seem that these are spreading and increasing in numbers in our area - one item of recent news is the sighting on Aug 1 of an adult with two juveniles at a site where they have not been seen before in the Rooyal Victoria country park at Southampton

**Pintail:** Bird of the day at the Blashford Lakes on July 27 was a single **Pintail** - the first I have seen mentioned anywhere since Apr 20

**Garganey:** One was seen at Farlington Marshes on July 30

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A summering female was seen off the Lymington shore on July 30

**Speckled Teal:** The number of these 'escapees' in the Lymington area has gone up by five after one of the pairs resident there brought off a brood of young this year (**Great Crested Grebe** also bred for the first time in the Lymington area this year)

**Buzzard:** A second hand report from the Southampton area tells of one bird of a nesting pair being set on and killed by a gang of **Magpies**

**Booted Eagle:** One is rumoured to have been seen in the Christchurch area on July 28

**Osprey:** One was seen to catch a fish in the Broom Channel of Langstone Harbour (between Farlington Marshes and the Eastern Road) on July 30 and **two Ospreys** were together in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight on July 31

**Kestrel:** Three seen hunting together at Rye Harbour on July 27 were thought to be a family party with one youngster learning the trade from its parents - something we may see almost anywhere in the near future.

**Avocet:** These are presumably now leaving their breeding sites and moving to winter quarters bringing a report of more than 60 at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on July 29 and over 100 there on July 31. The number at the Cliffe Pools in the Thames estuary peaked at 680 birds on July 29

**Kentish Plover:** One paid a very brief visit to the Sidlesham Ferry Pool at Pagham Harbour on Aug 1. The only previous report of this species this year was of a female at Church Norton (also in Pagham Harbour) on Apr 28

**Golden Plover:** A few reports this week - five were in the Thanet area of Kent on July 24, four were at Rye Harbour on July 31 and a single juvenile re-appeared at Christchurch Harbour on July 28 (four days after it was first seen there)

**American Golden Plover:** A confident report of one in summer plumage at Elmley Marshes on Sheppey (north Kent) on July 30

**Grey Plover:** The first to return to Langstone Harbour in summer plumage was seen by Jason Crook at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 27 in a flock of 32 birds

**Little Stint:** First autumn bird in southern England seems to have been one at the Oare Marshes near Faversham on the north Kent coast on July 24 with another at the nearby Cliffe Pools on July 26. On July 27 one had reached Rye Harbour and another was nearby at the 'Midrips' near Lydd. Locally a juvenile was at Farlington Marshes (by the stream) on July 29 when another arrived at the Dungeness RSPB reserve and four could then be seen at the Cliffe pools

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One was at Sandwich Bay on July 29

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Latest sightings are of 2 or 3 at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on July 24, three reports on July 27 (1 at Keyhaven, 2 at Brownsea Island and 8 at the 'Midrips'), with two more reports on July 28 (1 in the Kent Stour valley) and July 29 (2 at the Sidlesham Ferry pool). By July 30 the count at the Elmley Marshes on Sheppey was 20 and on July 31 there were 4 at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The only large flocks in the latest news are of 100 birds in the Lymington area on July 29 (when 32 were at the Sidlesham Ferry pool) and of 170 at the Farlington Marshes lake on Aug 1

**Wood Sandpiper:** The period from July 27 to Aug 1 has brought sightings from eight sites including one bird at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool on July 29

**Turnstone:** There have been a few around through the summer but numbers are now increasing - locally five were seen at Broadmarsh on July 25 and seven were at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 31 (one was in Emsworth Harbour on July 28)

**Long-tailed Skua:** One flew west past Selsey on July 27 - only the second report of this species for the year after one at Dungeness on May 2

**Yellow-legged Gull:** A flock normally builds up at the head of Southampton Water at this time of year and an estimated 40 birds were there on July 27 (the only previous report from there is of 7 seen on July 9)

**Kittiwake:** A count of 164 at Dungeness on Aug 1 was the highest anywhere since April

**Sandwich Tern:** Very large flocks of terns can be seen close offshore at many coastal sites at this time of year and I noted the details of one such observation at Sandwich Bay on July 31 when **1060 Sandwich** were with **474 Common, 4 Roseate, 12 Little, 6 Arctic and 1 Black Tern**. A dusk count on the north Kent coast on July 29 recorded around **1500 mixed Terns** including at least **11 Black Terns**

**Common Tern:** These are the most numerous species currently in our area. On July 30 there were more than 1200 off Titchfield Haven and on July 31 an evening count of birds in Langstone Harbour seen from The Kench gave an estimate of 1500. On Aug 1 Dungeness had 1400 birds

**Little Tern:** Despite the failure of the Hayling Oysterbeds site to rear any young this year 13 juveniles were seen there on July 31 among a flock of 60 Little Terns.

**Black Tern:** Autumn passage just starting - there had been an isolated report of two birds at the Blashford Lakes on July 25 and now we know of two at Dungeness on July 27 and two more on the north Kent coast (Reculver) on July 29 when the number at Dungeness was up to 6. By Aug 1 there were around 20 off Reculver (north Kent), 7 at Sandwich Bay, and 1 at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour

**Swift:** On July 30 one pair of **Swifts** still seemed to have some attachment to my part of Havant but it seems pretty certain that the other three pairs have severed their ties with us and have joined the great throng of **Swifts** in the sky. On July 31 a stream of **350 Swifts** flew over south Hayling and on Aug 1 just one was seen over Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight but by Aug 3 there had been no more sightings here in Havant and the saga of the **Swifts** is over for another year.

Later in the autumn we will express no surprise when we see an apparently endless stream of **Swallows** moving east or west along the coast, feeding up and waiting the right time to cross the channel, nor do we express surprise when we see signs that large shoals of fish have turned up off our shores, attracting **Gannets** and others to feed on them, but some birders still seem to have difficulty in imagining the lifestyle of a **Swift** (which, to my mind, has very much in common with a fish - the only difference being that the **Swift** operates in the unbounded air while the fish roams the unbounded water).

Two observations of **Swifts** this week seem to fit in with my idea of the **Swift** lifestyle, which is based on the ability and freedom to roam the skies, usually high up and out of our sight, but which involves a lot of social interaction.

The first observation was of a flock of around **100 Swifts** 'milling around' in the sky above Alton on July 28 - these birds may have been there to feed on a hatch of insects, but at this time of year I can imagine they were occupied in a variation on the screaming parties of birds around nest sites earlier in the season when (so the theory goes) young birds come down to interact with the older breeding birds on their nests in order to learn the ropes of the nesting procedure before they have to practise them in the next year. At this time the interaction between the free-flying 'shoals' which have come down from the upper air and the breeding birds could be imagined as being a form of 'passenger pick up' giving any birds that have been breeding, plus their young, the chance to join a 'shoal' which will operate as a unit through the coming months of migration and winter.

The second observation came from the Lee on the Solent area near Gosport on July 27 when several flocks, each of around 50 birds, were seen diving low over pools of water to skim the surface and drink water as **Swallows** do. As **Swifts** seem to avoid flying through cloud they presumably have to acquire their water intake from such pools, and I am surprised that we do not hear of this activity more often - it just goes to show how little we know of their lifestyle!

**Kingfisher:** I have noticed a few people recently expressing surprise (and delight) at seeing **Kingfishers** and I guess the surprise comes from seeing the birds in new places. That would tie in with the expected movement of this year's first brood of young, and perhaps some adults which have failed to breed, back to the coast so it is probably worth keeping an eye and an ear open for them from now on at the places where we expect to see them in the winter.

**Yellow Wagtail:** The first was heading south at Dungeness on July 11 and since then very small numbers have been reaching our south coast but on Aug 2 Rye Harbour reported the first sign of a major departure as the birds began to gather in large numbers on shingle banks close to the shore

**Robin:** On July 28 I was passing Wade Court at Langstone when I heard my second burst of autumn song from a **Robin** - the first was heard nearby (but almost certainly from a different bird) at dusk on July 24 - this one was heard at midday. I am still hearing the occasional 'ticking' from birds around my garden area, but so far not as frequently as daily and the birds are still keeping well out of sight.

**Departing passerines:** The following species have been reported as migrants from coastal sites in the week starting July 28 (some peak counts given in brackets after the species). **Nightingale, Common Redstart, Wheatear, Grasshopper Warbler (20), Sedge Warbler (23), Reed Warbler (9), Lesser Whitethroat (7), Common Whitethroat (16), Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Wood Warbler** (singles at three sites - heard singing at two of them), **Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler (29), Pied Flycatcher** (singles at two sites)

**Bearded Tit:** A **pure white bird** was seen amongst others at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on July 29

**Corvid roost:** The first report of a post breeding corvid roost comes from the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough where around **500 Jackdaws** spent the night with **smaller numbers of Crows and Rooks** on July 28. This reminds me of an impressive sight which I watched a few years ago in the section of the Fishbourne Channel between Dell Quay and the Chichester Yacht Basin - while watching Egrets coming to roost at dusk in Oldpark Wood at around this time of year I was impressed on several evenings by vast flocks of Corvids assembling around the water channel prior to flying into some night roost nearby.

**Goldfinch:** The first two reports of large flocks on thistle seed came on July 30 from the Crowborough area (70+ birds) and on Aug 1 from Christchurch Harbour (80+ birds)

**Crossbill:** Reports from 8 different sites this week including a flock of 32 on the west side of Poole Harbour on July 29

**Ortolan Bunting:** A 'possible' sighting on July 27 at Chapmans Pool in the Dorset coast close to St Albans Head

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies**

**36 species mentioned in new reports for the past week, including ....**

**Silver Spotted Skipper:** By July 28 these were out in good numbers

**Dingy Skipper:** A second brood had started to emerge at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on July 26

**Brimstone:** A count of 15 at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on July 25 shows that next year's butterflies are now emerging - in the past I used to imagine that these insects would fly around until late autumn chill drove them into hibernation but I now understand that they will find a hideaway and enter the 'long sleep' within a few days of emerging despite the current sunshine and availability of food. This is clearly a good strategy to limit any damage that they could incur before hibernation, keeping them fresh and fit for breeding next spring.

**Brown Hairstreak:** The first had been seen on July 22 and three more were reported from somewhere in Sussex on July 27. One was out at Noar Hill on July 31 and two were seen at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 1

**Chalkhill Blue:** Now at the peak of their numbers - on July 25 Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester had 243 while a site close to Friston Forest (Eastbourne area) had over 1000.

**Adonis Blue:** The first of the summer brood was seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on July 26 and three more were seen at Newtimber Hill (also in the Brighton area) on July 28

**Painted Lady:** Ones or twos seen at six sites in the past few days (the only Clouded Yellow was one at Durlston). On July 31 six were found in the Thanet area of Kent and four were seen at Dungeness.

**Large Tortoiseshell:** Two more sightings of singles in Sussex - on July 23 one flew north up the Adur valley and on July 28 one was seen at Newtimber Hill (maybe following the A23 north?). We now have five reports in July to add to the seven between the Jan 27 and Mar 14.

**Wall Brown:** July 26 brought reports of 6 from the Lymington marshes and 12 from Mill Hill at Shoreham with another 3 seen at Cissbury Ring (Worthing) on July 27

**Grayling:** 22 were found on Windover Hill north of Eastbourne on July 26

## Moths

**Monochroa palustrella (0737):** Trapped at Rye Harbour on July 29 - first there for ten years

**Acleris aspersana (1043):** First trapped in the Thanet area of Kent on July 31

**Mint Moth (1361 Pyrausta aurata):** Several can now be seen daily around flowering herbs in my Havant garden since July 27

**Sitochroa palealis (1370):** First at Dungeness on July 27

**Trachycera advenella (1439):** First at Dungeness on July 29 (reported as *Numonia advenella*)

**Oncocera semirubella (1441):** First at Dungeness on July 27

**Gymnancyla canella (1464):** First at Dungeness on July 29. A local species of sandy beaches where the larvae feed on Saltwort or Atriplex species

**Merrifieldia baliodactylus (1512):** First found in the Thanet area on July 31 (a white Plume moth)

**Barred Hook-tip (1647 Drepana cultraria):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24

**Dusky Hook-tip (1649 Drepana curvatula):** First at Dungeness on July 26 (only found in Britain as a rare migrant)

**Least carpet (1699 Idaea vulpinaria atrosignaria):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24 (also at Dungeness on July 27)

**Oblique Carpet (1719 Orthonama vittata):** First at Dungeness on July 25 (only fourth record for the site)

**Brown Scallop (1791 Philereme vetulata):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 27 (very rare in that area)

**Haworth's Pug (1813 Eupithecia haworthiata):** First in the Thanet area on July 30

**Tawny Speckled Pug (1838 Eupithecia icterata):** First at Dungeness on July 31

**Dusky Thorn (1914 Ennomos fuscantaria):** First in the Rother Woods near Rye Bay on July 29

**Straw Belle (1967 Aspitates gilvaria):** First in the Thanet area on July 31. In Britain this is only found on the North Downs of Kent and Surrey

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 Macroglossum stellatarum):** Singles at Dungeness on July 27, at Longstock by R Test on July 28 and three seen at Newtimber Hill (By A23 north of Brighton) on July 28

**Scarce Chocolate-tip (2018 Clostera anachoreta):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 28 (rare migrant - Red Data Book resident in Britain at Dungeness only)

**Black Arches (2033 Lymantria monarcha):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24

**Round-winged Muslin (2035 Thumatha senex):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 27

**Jersey Tiger (2067 Euplagia quadripunctaria):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 27

**Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing (2111 Noctua janthina):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24

**Copper Underwing (2297 Amphipyra pyramidea):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24

**Old Lady (2300 *Mormo maura*):** First in Pamber Forest (Basingstoke) on July 22 but seen by night nectaring on Buddleia in Chandlers Ford area (Eastleigh) on July 23

**Lesser-spotted Pinion (2316 *Cosmia affinis*):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 28

**Slender Brindle (2335 *Apamea scolopacina*):** First in the Friston area near Eastbourne on July 24

**Ear Moth (2360 *Amphipoea oculea*):** First somewhere in Sussex on July 27

**Clay Fan-foot (2494 *Paracolax tristalis*):** First trapped in the Rother woods near Rye Bay - a species restricted to oak woods in south east England

## Other Insects

**Scaeva pyrastris Hoverfly:** First seen on Portsdown on July 30. This large hoverfly has white chevron markings on a black abdomen.

**Volucella zonaria Hoverfly:** This large and boldly marked Hoverfly (**Hornet** size and colour) was first reported at Rye Harbour on July 26 and on July 30 I had a close view of one on Buddleia in my Havant garden

**Hornet:** One of these also in my garden on July 28 working around flowers on a **Snowberry bush** that were attracting other small insects.

**Speckled Bush-Cricket (*Leptophyes punctatissima*):** First reported at Durlston on July 30

**Great Green Bush Cricket (*Tettigonia viridissima*):** This has been full size since the beginning of July and on July 30 seven were found on Portsdown by conservation volunteers

**Grey Bush-cricket (*Platycleis albopunctata*):** First reported at Rye Harbour on July 26

**Wasp spider (*Argiope bruennichi*):** A full grown female was found and photographed by Brian Fellows at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 29

## PLANTS

**Californian Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*):** For the past couple of summers some of these have brightened the edges of an alleyway opening off The Pallant street alongside Waitrose store in Havant and on July 28 I came on a new clump in the roadside grass of Southmoor Lane

**Dittander:** This is a close relative of **Hoary Cress** which is abundant in the Portsmouth area but **Dittander** cannot be found anywhere in Hampshire and I have to cross the border into Sussex to see it as I did on July 29. It grows in profusion alongside the Fishbourne Channel but was mostly over when I went though I did see a few fresh specimens

**Indian Balsam:** Lots of this flowering by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1

**Corn Cockle:** Within the past few weeks a 'crop' of this has grown up in recently disturbed soil alongside Southmoor Lane bordering the newly created carpark at the extreme south end. I am puzzled by the origin of these plants but maybe they are something to do with Havant Borough Council whose offices are adjacent (I doubt they were planted by the travellers whose vehicles were parked by the roadside here a little while ago!)

**Knotted pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*):** A photo of these plants (see the Rye Bay website) recently found on the sandy margin of a gravel pit at Rye Harbour shows how large and prominent are the flowers of this species, making identification easy should I ever come across it here in south east Hampshire (which is unlikely!)

**Marsh Mallow:** I am reliably told that these flowers are now out along shore margins of the small oakwood to the west of Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour

**Least Yellow Sorrel:** I found masses of this flowering in the Southbrook Road area of 'new' Langstone on July 28 and at the same time allayed my worries that some of the plants beside the footpath there do not have the pure green leaves of the species - there were quite a few coppery leaved plants but these definitely came from an admixture of the larger and commoner Yellow Oxalis or **Procumbent Yellow-sorrel**. On that same day I found two new small colonies of the plant in flower at other sites, so it is perhaps not as uncommon as I thought.

**Small melilot (*Melilotus indicus*):** A surprise find on July 28 of one small bush of this plant growing in rough ground alongside Southmoor Lane at the west end of Penner Road (north side). I had previously only seen this plant at one site (the IBM North Harbour site) where it flourished for a few years in the 1980s, then vanished.

**Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil:** Flowering at Farlington Marshes on Aug 1 (first report though it will have been out for months)

**Hawthorn:** Berries already turning red ....

**Yellow Flowered Strawberry:** Still flowering in Juniper Square where it now also has a lot of bright red fruit - a week or so ago I found one of the fruits was 'hard as a bullet' but on July 28 **the fruit was edible but almost tasteless**.

**Purple Loosestrife:** In full flower by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1

**Corn Parsley:** Now in flower and seen alongside Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on July 29

**Pepper Saxifrage:** I gather from Brian Fellows' comments that this was in flower at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on July 28

**Fennel:** First flowering seen in Farm Lane at Nutbourne on July 29

**Water Dock:** The prominent flowers on the huge plants at the north end of Langstone Mill Pond were first noticed by me on July 28

**Water Pepper:** Flowering by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1

**Amphibious Bistort:** Flowering at the Fishbourne Channel meadows on July 29

**Autumn Gentian (or Felwort):** Flowering at Durlston on July 28

**Bittersweet:** I learnt from Brian Fellows that **this common Nightshade has an uncommon variant form** (not a subspecies as stated in Fitter, Fitter and Blamey) **which grows on the seashore** and which he is fairly certain he has found on the shingle of Stoke Bay (immediately south of the Hayling Oysterbeds). He took a photo of it on July 29 showing that the plants have one of the required features of this variant in that they are prostrate on the ground and is checking if they have the other required feature of having succulent leaves.

**Blue water speedwell (Veronica anagallis-aquatica):** This pure species has been all but eliminated from south east Hampshire by an aggressive hybrid between it and **Pink Water Speedwell** but Brian Fellows has found some of the true species at Farlington Marshes on Aug 1

**Brooklime:** This was flowering in May and June with some still to be seen on July 10 but on Aug 1 it had started a second flowering in the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton

**Gipsywort:** Flowering by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1

**Oxford Ragwort:** I was interested to read on the Durlston website that **Oxford Ragwort is 'the only really poisonous Ragwort species'** - so far I have no further information to back this up.

**Buttonweed (Cotula coronopifolia):** See my diary entry for Aug 1 - it seems likely that this species will be extinct (as a wild plant) in Hampshire by next year but one or two plants were still flowering by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1. According to Stace it was first recorded in the county in 1991

**Mugwort:** I saw flowers on this common plant for the first time on July 28. The plants have been in bud for several weeks but as soon as the flowers open the plants lose the glistening white silkiness of the buds and look as if they were at the end of their flowering - this is an effect of the flower petals being small and unexpectedly brown in colour.

**Creeping Thistle:** I noticed a 'field full' of thistle seed (which should soon be attracting flocks of **Goldfinches**) for the first time on July 28

**Hieracium trichocaulon:** This is the probable name of a 'new to me' microspecies of Hawkweed which I discovered by chance among brambles on rough ground alongside Southmoor Lane (north side of Penner Road) on July 28. The plants stood over a metre high and had multiple long branches coming off the main stem at 45 degree angles, giving the overall look of a many branched candelabra, all the stems and branches being thickly covered with short white bristle hairs. I know there are at least 260 microspecies of Hieracia but **my plant agreed very closely with the description and illustration of H. trichocaulon (in the Tridenta section) given by Stace**

**Common Water-plantain:** Plenty of this flowering by the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton on Aug 1

**Violet Helleborine:** Shortly after my visit to Stansted Forest on July 25 to look for this plant at two known sites, and my total failure to see any at either site, John Goodspeed has acquired photos of plants in flower under the prominent oak in compartment 22B, which is where I looked!

**Autumn Ladies Tresses:** These had appeared in a north Emsworth garden by Aug 1 - not sure if they were actually in flower but they should be very soon

**Blunt-fruited Water-starwort (*Callitriche obtusangula*):** I have long been familiar with what I believe to be the **Common water starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*)** which fills many wet ruts in the rides of Stansted Forest and similar places (though I have never given it much attention!) but I had not come across the **Blunt-fruited species** until it was mentioned this week by Brian Fellows as growing in the shallows of the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth.

**Green Bristle-grass (*Setaria viridis*):** Another first for the year for Brian Fellows who found this growing from 'pavement cracks' or the like in St James Road at Emsworth on July 31

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Northern Bottlenosed Whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*):** Late in the day on July 31 one of these whales entered the mouth of Chichester Harbour and would be rescuers succeeded in turning it round and sending it back out to sea but overnight (high tide at midnight) it returned to the harbour and on the morning of Aug 1 it was re-discovered grounded on mud just off Langstone Mill Pond. At some stage an intrepid vet managed to get a sample of the whale's blood and this showed that the whale had kidney failure and would die within a few days so the decision was taken to give it a lethal injection and this was done late on Aug 1 after which the whale's carcass was towed out of the harbour (not sure where it ended up).

This species lives in the deep water of the north Atlantic, feeding on squid in the ocean deeps, and is not normally found nearer land than the 1000 metre contour line but they have beached on the coasts of most countries around the British Isles and the North Sea (even occasionally in the Baltic) but not in the warmer waters of the Mediterranean.

Unlike the huge, flat-headed, whale species which filter krill from the water with baleen plates this is one of the toothed whales which typically have domed heads and chew large fish and squid with their teeth, **Northern Bottlenosed Whales** can grow to 9.5 metres long and are found in small schools of 4 to 10 animals. They are said to be able to dive to 4,000 feet and to stay underwater for up to 2 hours but a normal deep dive takes no more than 20 minutes. When at the surface they breathe once or twice a minute, sending up a 3 foot high spout and making a noise that can be heard a long way off.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 28 - AUG 3 (WEEK 30 OF 2008)**

[Fri 1 Aug](#)

### Downstream at Bedhampton

News of **98 Egrets** back at the Thorney Deeps roost on Wednesday evening suggested that I should go down to Langstone this evening to see if any Egrets were still using the Millpond trees as a night roost but today's news of the **stranding of the great Whale** close to the pond made me fear that I would get caught up in the crowd of commentators and spectators 'enjoying' the poor animal's death, so I headed for the Hermitage stream at Bedhampton instead.

This was my first attempt to check out the plants growing in and by the stream this year, and my main objective was to see if the **Buttonweed (Cotula coronopifolia)** could still be found there. As far as I know this is still its only Hampshire site, but the number of plants has been declining in the past few years and this year I could only find two or three so I do not expect to see it next year.

I think this plant is grown as an ornament to garden 'water features' but it seems that in the wild it will only flourish on fairly bare shingle which is occasionally submerged by a mixture of salt and fresh water. As this stretch of the stream is tidal all that the plant needs for survival here is the bare shingle, which in the recent past occurred at a couple of places where there are bends in the stream causing the current to gouge out the outside of the bend while leaving the inside to build up a shingle bank.

That build up might have continued indefinitely were it not for the tremendous spates of flood water coming down stream in the last few years, carrying with them silt, seeds and sh\*t (one word for all the miscellaneous rubbish which gets into our streams, especially when they flow through deprived built-up areas....

So the bare shingle has vanished but the silt has created a marvellous substrate for other water plants and my venture this evening took me through massive beds of **Stream Water-Crowfoot, Hybrid Water Speedwell, Himalayan Balsam, Purple Loosestrife, Water Plantain, Gipsywort, Brooklime, Water Forget-me-not and Water Mint** with the occasional plant of **Wild Celery, Marsh Ragwort, Marsh Bedstraw and Water Figwort**.

Also seen and heard was a **Grey Wagtail**, and away from the water I noted that some of the **Mulberry fruit** was already ripe on the tree which over-arches the Wayfarer's Way path while elsewhere noticeable **flowerbuds were already forming on Ivy**

[Mon 28 July](#)

### Two new plants for my Havant area list

This evening I cycled down Southmoor Lane to Budds Farm to look for the **Corn Cockle** plants which were found there last week and as well as finding them I **added two new plants to my 'repertoire'** - one which I had only seen previously at the IBM HQ site in Portsmouth and the other one which I had never knowingly seen before.

Not knowing where the **Corn Cockle** plants might be (other than on what was described as a 'building site') I kept my eyes open all the way down Southmoor Lane and very soon noticed a clump of **Eschscholzia (Californian Poppies)** in the roadside grass on the west side just south of the lorry park. I had not seen these here before but they were not my target so I continued south until just before the junction with Penner Road on the east side.

Here there is a substantial bit of waste land between Southmoor Lane and the Penner Road industrial buildings, and it currently looks a bit like a building site as a trench has been dug across it for cable laying and the trench is surrounded by metal safety fencing, so I got off my bike for a look round.

The first thing I saw was a **tremendous crop of ripe 'giant' Blackberries** and before I left I had half-filled a plastic bag with delicious fruit, but while pushing my way into the blackberry bushes I made my best discovery - **a mass of tall, candelabra-branched, Hawkweed plants** with short stiff bristle hairs all up their stems and long thin leaves from the axils of which the 'candelabra branches' originated (each branch went up at a 45 degree angle with a small cluster of flowers at the tip). I took home a complete specimen and checked it out with Stace's Flora which left no doubt that **these would fall into the Tridentata section of the Hawkweeds** (one of 15 sections covering at least 260 microspecies), and **my specimen looks very like Stace's illustration of *H. trichocaulon***. Further, I see that ***H. trichocaulon*** is described as locally common in the Hants Flora which says that it has been found on Hayling (Sinah Common roadside).

Looking further into this site I found a bush of **Vervain** from which I disturbed a **Common Blue butterfly** that was settling down in it for the coming night, and near it I made my second discovery of the evening - a single small bush of yellow flowered Melilot which I felt sure was the **Small Melilot (*M. indicus*)**, a plant that I was familiar with for a few years at the IBM North Harbour site in the 1980s but which disappeared from that site and I have not seen it anywhere else though it is described in the Hants Flora as 'rare but increasing on disturbed ground around Portsmouth'.

Continuing south down Southmoor Lane through the 'anti-traveller' barrier across the road I came to the entrance to a newly constructed large carpark which as yet has no apparent use. Before the work on the carpark this year the east side of Southmoor Lane here had a low earth bank whose origins I cannot recall but I am pretty sure the bank was created from earth moved within the past ten years or so though it may go back to the creation of the IBM Club Tennis Courts which were created behind it in the 1980s. In the past few years an immense colony of the uncommon **Slender Thistle** (normally found on seaside shingle) has grown up here but most of the plants were removed earlier this year during work on the new carpark and it is on the semi-bare earth of this roadside bank that the crop of **Corn Cockles** has appeared (most likely from seed sown by the building contractors as 'mitigation' for the damage their work has done to the local habitat - and most likely to be removed next year by other contractors brought in when the carpark comes into use to plant shrubs around it so that this carpark cannot be distinguished from a Tesco's (or other) carpark. Among the **Corn Cockles** was one flower of ***Nigella damascena* (Love in the mist)**

A quick look at the Budds Farm pools showed me that the **Swan family have left**, the water level is low and covered with blankets of algae, and a host of water fowl have moved in (mostly ducks in almost uniform moult plumage). Most were **Mallard** but I could pick out a few **Shoveler** and at least one **Gadwall** and one **Pochard** as well as the **Coot, Moorhen, and Little Grebes**.

Earlier in the day I had taken a walk to Langstone and back, partly to confirm that the **Least Yellow Sorrel (*O. exilis*)** growing beside the footpath from South Street in Havant to the Royal Oak at Langstone, just north of where it crosses Southbrook Road, really did have green leaves. My worries about having possibly wrongly

identified this plant were allayed when I found masses of it with all the right attributes but also found plants of the commoner **Spreading Yellow Sorrel** mixed in with the smaller species. The larger plants do have the coppery coloured leaves that had been worrying me! While on this subject I also found two new clusters of the **Least Yellow Sorrel** in different places - clearly it is not all that uncommon when you know what to look for!

Also on this round I heard my second burst of **autumn Robin song** (at midday) from the Wade Court area, and earlier I **tasted a fruit of the Yellow Flowered Strawberries** in Juniper Square and found they were edible but almost tasteless. Before I set out a **Hornet** was working round flowering shrubs in my garden, probably intending to grab some other hapless insect to provide a meal for **Hornet larvae** (I believe **adult Hornets** only eat pollen but feed their young insect 'meat'), and en route I found **Comma, Speckled Wood** and **Red Admiral butterflies** as well as **Large** and **Small Whites**. I also found at least one **female Green-veined White** which bore out what my book says about the underwing 'green veins' being very faint in summer brood females though the black on the upper wings is bolder in the summer - if you see the upper side of a 'small' white you can separate **Green-veined** from **Small** by looking at the tips of the forewings - the **Small White** has a neat semi-circle of black at the tip with a straight line across the bottom to separate it from the white of the rest of the wing whereas the **Green-veined** is more 'sloppily' marked with splodges of black continuing down the outer edge of the wing.

My final observations for the day were of **Egrets** and **Swifts**. At Langstone Pond the mass of juvenile **Egrets** has gone but there may still be one or two left in the trees in which half a dozen birds were resting. As to the **Swifts** I think the majority of these have gone but there were still two birds overhead in the late evening light.

### **SUMMARY FOR JULY 21 - 27 (WEEK 29 OF 2008)**

**Cattle Egret** have bred in Britain this year (according to the BBC) and both **Little** and **Great White Egrets** are currently coming north to Britain (while **Grey Herons** fly south!).

More national news is of at least **63 pairs of Honey Buzzard breeding in the UK** and latest **Godwit news comes from Iceland**.

Many wader and duck species are now reaching us for the winter and many passerine summer visitors are already starting to leave.

A minor high point this week was the **resumption of Robin song** as large **Tit flocks start to roam the countryside**.

One new dragonfly is the **Emerald Damsel** but new butterflies are **Silver Spotted Skipper** and **Brown Hairstreak** with an isolated **Camberwell Beauty** for rarity.

A long list of new moths includes the large **Old Lady** and the **Oak Eggar** while among the new **Grasshoppers** and **Bush Crickets** the Other Insects section includes a **giant Ichneumon** and the first of the dramatic **Wasp Spiders**

A surprise among new flowers was a good show of **Early Dog Violet** - more seasonal newcomers were **Upright Hedge Parsley, Ling Heather, Wild Basil** and **Marjoram** with **Sea Aster** on the shore and **Dwarf Thistle** on the downs. Both **Broad-leaved** and **Violet Helleborine** are starting to flower

## BIRDS

**Great Crested Grebe:** Now returning to the sea from inland breeding sites where they were last seen in numbers in early March. 10 were in the Langstone Channel off the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 22, a week earlier than last year when 12 appeared off the Oysterbeds on July 28

**Cory's Shearwater:** Two flew past Selsey Bill on July 20, the first to be seen anywhere other than a 'possible' sighting of a single bird off Portland on July 6 and 7.

**Sooty Shearwater:** One was off Dungeness on July 25. This year's only previous sightings were singles off Dungeness on Jan 1 and 2 and off the Isle of Wight on Feb 3 plus a 'possible' off Portland on July 6

**Balearic Shearwater:** I think the day total for Selsey Bill on July 20 was as high as 23

**Cattle Egret:** I heard on Radio 4 that breeding has been confirmed in Somerset (not Cornwall) this year bringing the species a step closer to being declared a British resident

**Little Egret:** On July 20 three Egrets flew in from the south to Portland Bill and on July 21 the number reported at Christchurch Harbour shot up to 58 from zero (none reported there earlier in the year and no count of more than 5 anywhere in Dorset since Feb 6 when 55 were roosting at Radipole - I'm pretty sure that I have omitted a number of counts, but also sure that I have not omitted any large or significant numbers). These figures tell me that the usual autumn surge in Egret numbers is now starting and that at least some of the increased numbers come from abroad.

**Great White Egret:** Two of these arrived at Portland from the south on July 23

**Grey Heron:** A group of seven flew south out to sea at Christchurch Harbour on July 26

**White Stork:** It seems that the bird seen in the Avon valley on July 19 has been on the move ever since - on July 20 it flew over Christchurch Harbour, on July 23 it went over Southampton and on July 24 it was back in Dorset in meadows at Wool in the Frome valley west of Wareham

**Black Swan:** A pair flew in to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on July 20 and were still there on July 25. Discussion of them on Hoslist revealed that quite a few birders are not aware how widespread feral pairs of this species are - I have reports of them at 13 different sites this year, not including two sites where I am pretty sure they can still be found (a breeding pair on Benbow Pond east of Midhurst and a single female on the Test at Romsey)

**Greylag Goose:** On June 30 a pair were at Pulborough Brooks with 4 tiny goslings and on July 21 a flock of 83 geese were at Pulborough - presumably intending to settle in there for their summer moult. (This reminds me that no one has yet mentioned being annoyed by the presence of large flocks of **Canada Geese** littering the ground with their feathers and droppings while tearing the grass out by the roots so that coarse weeds can grow instead). Since writing the above in

mid-week I see that I was wrong in assuming the **Greylags** would settle at Pulborough - on July 25 there was a further report of 115 at Pulborough with the comment that these geese gather at Pulborough but then fly south to roost (or graze?) at some unspecified site. As we are now near the end of July I guess it is possible that the geese have completed their summer moult and these reports are a reflection of their re-gained power of flight? In Hampshire a flock of more than 120 were at Tundry Pond (west of Fleet) on July 26

**Shoveler:** Reports of various duck species are increasing from a number of sites but it is difficult to tell which of these birds are newly back and which have been there through the breeding season. Of 9 new reports of Shoveler this week one (of 15 birds offshore from Sandy Point on Hayling on July 24) must be of birds on the move back to winter quarters.

**Pochard:** A report of 8 'new in' at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on July 23 also indicates the arrival of winter visitors.

**Goldeneye:** Another returning bird was a juvenile (?) Goldeneye which arrived at Ibsley Water near Ringwood on July 24

**Muscovy Duck:** I see that one of these oversize ugly ducklings turned up (of its own volition or was it dumped by human hand?) at the Town Millpond in Emsworth on July 21 and was still there on July 26

**Honey Buzzard:** Having mentioned in last week's summary that a pair had been breeding within thirty miles of Havant this summer I see that Lee Evans has just told the Hoslist e-group that at least 63 pairs of Honey Buzzard held territories in Britain this summer with pairs that could be seen from public viewpoints in Norfolk and in Yorkshire (the latter viewpoint also gave views of up to seven Goshawks, some of them juveniles)

**Sparrowhawk:** On July 23 Brian Fellows went to see what he was told by the 'Friends of Nore Barn Wood' was a Kestrel nest in the wood with at least one of three juveniles still in the nest (two were thought to have fledged earlier). When he got there Brian found that the nest was in fact that of a Sparrowhawk showing that these birds are continuing to nest in these trees as they have done in past years

**Red-footed Falcon:** On the lovely sunny evening of July 22 Christian Melgar was walking on Steep Down north of Lancing when a male Red-footed Falcon flew towards him and banked to let the evening sun highlights its diagnostic features. Christian adds .. "A superb bird and totally unexpected especially considering the large spring influx into the UK which seemed to result in Sussex being left out!"

**Quail:** One was accidentally flushed from long grass beside Pagham Harbour on July 24

**Avocet:** The four young which hatched in the Selsey West Fields on June 24 left the nest area on July 14 and temporarily disappeared.. On July 18 one of the parents turned up at the Sidlesham Ferry pool and stayed there July 23 when the four youngsters joined it and on July 26 all six birds were at the Ferry Pool

**Golden Plover:** After several reports of small groups back in Kent and East Sussex a single juvenile turned up at Christchurch Harbour on July 24

**Sanderling:** Fair sized flocks are now back on the south coast with around 125 seen on the Hayling Bay shore (chased by a **Peregrine**) on July 24 and another group of 60 on the Climping shore east of Bognor on July 25

**Curlew Sandpiper:** A summer plumage bird at 'The Midrips' pits near Lydd in Kent on July 20 was the first to be reported since a couple were at the Cliffe Pools on the Thames estuary on June 18 and 19 - I guess they marked the end of the spring passage and the current report marks the start of autumn passage. Since writing that in mid-week there have been sightings at Farlington Marshes (July 23 and 26), Sandy Point on Hayling (July 24), Lymington marshes (July 26) with three seen together at the Pett Pools on Rye Bay on July 25

**Dunlin:** A count of 215 at 'The Midrips' (near Lydd airport on the Romney Marshes) on July 20 takes us from the first few returnees into the mainstream of autumn passage. The Sidlesham Ferry pool also had just over 100 birds on July 23 and 24

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Pete Potts has just reported on his most recent trip to study these birds on their Icelandic breeding grounds and his main message seems to be that global warming is having its effect. Pete says .. " In summary it seems to have been another early season and further advanced by a week to ten days on last year following good weather since I think middle of May. Consequently we struggled to ring many godwit chicks, however we did manage to ring 54, this is our lowest total since 2004". He goes on to say .. "The weather was incredible, much sunshine and temperatures up to 19 and frequently 15-16 in NW Fjords which felt hot and is warm by Iceland standards. We had rain on just 2-3 days. In some parts of Iceland they had not had rain for 10 weeks and many of the rivers were very low and some almost dried up. The Snaefellsnes glacier looks smaller than ever and will I am sure be gone in 10-20 years perhaps if global warming continues at this rate". Back in southern England the **Godwits** seem to be at their highest concentration in the Thames estuary area with a count of 710 on July 22 at Northward Hill (north of Rochester) in Kent. Locally there were more than 120 to be seen from the Farlington Marshes seawall on July 25 when the Hook area at Warsash had 41 and the Sidlesham Ferry pool had 31 with around 20 in Emsworth Harbour and 13 in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester.

**Curlew:** Substantial flocks are now to be seen locally - 45 at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 22 and 54 in the Fishbourne Channel on July 26 with smaller number anywhere you go.

**Redshank:** No shortage of these but a count of 200 at the Farlington Marshes lake on July 25 was the first count of over 100 this month

**Greenshank:** A substantial group of 21 returning birds were on the isolated grassland/saltmarsh between Oldpark Wood and the Fishbourne Channel almost opposite the Chichester Yacht Basin at high tide on July 22 - incidentally I learnt from Ed Rowsell's report of these birds that that distinctive grassland is called Bowling Green saltmarsh. Not all the birds are on the coast - there were 16 at the

watermeadows of the Nation Trust property called The Vyne near Basingstoke on July 25

**Wood Sandpiper:** We have already had one of these at Lymington on July 18 and 19 but this week brought two of them to the Sidlesham Ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) on July 25 and 26 while another was in The Fleet area of Dorset on those two days

**Common Sandpiper:** No shortage of these now but a local sighting of 5 in Fareham Creek on July 21 is worth noting.

**Pomarine Skua:** The first to be seen from Selsey Bill since May 21 was an immature bird flying by on July 20 - this seems to be the third autumn bird after one at Dungeness on July 6 and two off Portland on July 13.

**Med Gull:** One was among the gulls 'anting' over my garden on July 20 but a more interesting report on that day came from Nutbourne Bay where five adults and nine juveniles were together on the water. At a guess these will have come from nests in Langstone Harbour and it bears out something which I did not know until Chris Cockburn (Langstone RSPB warden) told me last week - unlike **Black-headed Gulls** which take no interest in their offspring after they have fledged the **Med Gulls** are more caring parents and stay with their young for some time.

**Common Gull:** I have now seen seven reports of these back on the south coast since the first at Sandown on the Isle of Wight on July 6 but I did not expect my first sight of one to be in the air over my garden on July 20, among a flock of 'anting' **Black-headed** and **Med Gulls**.

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** Experience shows that this species is much more likely to be seen on inland fields than at the coast in the Solent area and a report of 26 at the Anton Lakes at Andover on July 20 confirms this.

**Tern roosts:** An autumn speciality which attracts some birders is the monitoring of the large number of terns which fish in the Channel (or Solent) by day and spend their nights at a few preferred night roosts just inside the mouths of the Solent Harbours and at other points on their autumn passage route. I was reminded of this by a count of 315 Sandwich and 107 Common Terns in Christchurch Harbour on July 21. I also see that there were more than 1000 Sandwich Terns in the Rye Harbour roost on July 26

**Black Tern:** The first mention of this species since June 28 comes from Ibsley Water at Ringwood where two were present on July 25

**Guillemot:** Two birds that were on the sea off Selsey Bill on July 22 may have split up as on July 23 one was in Chichester Harbour (off Cobnor Point) and the 'other' was seen off Titchfield Haven. The two were back off Selsey on July 24.

**Razorbill:** On July 20 a **pair of Razorbills** were seen off Selsey Bill accompanied by a **small juvenile** indicating local breeding at an unknown site (possibly the Isle of Wight?)

**Cuckoo:** None heard since July 15 but this week brought reports of one in the Rowlands Castle area on July 21 (sitting on the Woodberry Lane field gate taking

the public path south to Havant beside the railway) and another flying along the shore between Bognor and Littlehampton on July 26

**Swift:** 8 birds (4 breeding pairs) were still to be seen over east Havant at dusk on July 23 and on July 20 they were attracted down from the heights (where they are assumed to spend their days) in mid-afternoon to join a flock of gulls catching insects in the air above the houses. Maybe on other days they spend their days roaming widely in company with many other breeding and non-breeding Swifts to generate the regular reports of large numbers seen at various widely separated sites - on July 19 Dungeness reported 1000; on July 20 430 were over the Andover area, 250+ over Shoreham, and 500 over Dungeness; on July 21 Dungeness reported 3000+ and 100 were over Ferrybridge (Weymouth). Latest news is that at least seven birds were still over east Havant on the evening of July 26

**Woodlark:** More than six were still in the Stansted East Park area on July 22

**Sand Martin:** I assume that the reports of birds passing over coastal sites are (unlike the **Swifts** which just seem to be circulating over a wide area) of birds leaving us and heading south. These reports started with 27 birds over Dungeness on June 24 and rose to 800+ over Sandwich Bay on June 29 with 2600 there on July 14 - by July 22, when 3000 flew over Dungeness, a total of around 11,000 birds had left us.

**Swallow:** The first indication of these birds leaving us came on July 22 with a count of 200 over Portland and 45 were flying east along the shore at Sandy Point on Hayling on July 24 when another 32 were reported on the Sussex coast (Hope Gap near Beachy Head)

**Robin:** These were to be seen and heard everywhere up to June 24 when they suddenly vanished with neither sight nor sound of even one bird until July 22 when I heard the familiar 'ticking' from my neighbour's garden and later saw an adult bird briefly on my lawn. The single bird re-appeared equally briefly on the lawn on July 23 and 24, and as I predicted in my mid-week Summary the **first song** was heard on the evening of July 24. I am pretty sure this annual disappearing act marks the birds summer moult when the pressure from their hormones to attract a mate, defend a territory and feed young suddenly ceases, but once the need to grow new feathers becomes less important the need for food during the winter causes them to re-assert themselves and to claim and defend a winter feeding territory.

**Blackbird:** Another sign of approaching autumn is the gathering of **Blackbirds** to feed on both **Rowan berries** and **fallen apples** in my garden - up to half a dozen birds come and go in the **Rowan** with no apparent territorial disputes and three or four juveniles spend their day on the lawn.

**Departing summer passerines:** The first two reports of departing **Tree Pipits** came on July 24 (at Durlston) and 26 (Hope Gap near Beachy Head). **Yellow Wagtails** are now being reported daily at coastal sites with a count of 11 at Dungeness on July 25. Among other species now starting to be seen along the coast in areas where they have not been breeding are **Common Redstarts**, **Whinchats**, **Wheatears**, **Grasshopper** and **Garden Warblers**, **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers**, **Common** and **Lesser Whitethroats**, **Blackcaps**, **Willow Warblers**

and **Chiffchaffs**, **Grey Wagtails** and **Spotted Flycatchers**. All these species are starting to appear on the coast, though the majority are not yet moving and some are just starting new broods. One sign of autumn that I noted was **Willow Warbler song** heard at Christchurch Harbour on July 21 and **Wood Warblers** have been seen 'on the Hayling Billy line' (I guess this means on Hayling) on July 21, at Sandwich Bay on July 22 with song heard at Andover on July 23 and at Petworth on July 26

**Tit flocks**: Bob Chapman at the Blashford Lakes on July 20 noted the first autumn movement of small birds in a loose flock containing **Goldfinches**, **Chiffchaffs**, **Blackcaps**, **Spotted Flycatchers** and **Tree Creepers** as well as the **Tit species** after which we name such feeding flocks

**Crossbills**: The six days from July 20 to 25 brought twenty four new reports of **Crossbills** on the move over an area from Rye Bay to Poole Harbour (including a couple of birds in the Botley Woods on July 22). July 23 brought the first news of a **flock of around 100** in Alice Holt Forest near Farnham but no other reports were of more than 12 birds.

**Yellowhammer**: One Kent birding website had a photo of a male **Yellowhammer** carrying a beakful of nest material on July 26 as they start their second broods

**Corn Bunting**: A report from Steep Down (north of Lancing and Worthing) on July 22 speaks of many birds including juveniles seen there.

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker**: One was briefly in my Havant garden on July 26

**Migrant Hawker**: Many have now emerged from local ponds - not sure if any migrants have arrived

**Common Darter**: Many of these have also emerged by now

**Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)**: First report for the year from Dungeness on July 24

### Butterflies

#### 38 species seen this week including ...

**Silver Spotted Skipper**: First for the year at Beachy Head on July 24 with others at Newtimber Hill north of Brighton on July 26

**Wood White**: A few of these were reported from the usual sites on the Surrey border near Horsham between May 21 and June 1 but a report of 3 seen in the Plaistow area on July 21 indicates the emergence of a second brood - I think this is quite common on the continent but only occurs occasionally in Britain in warm summers

**Clouded Yellow:** Still no invasion - I saw seven reports during April and May and now we have a report of 2 at Portland on July 12 followed by 1 at Hastings on July 16 and one at Durlston on July 24

**Large White:** These have become more numerous in the recent hot weather

**Brown Hairstreak:** First report from the Eastbourne area on July 22

**Purple Hairstreak:** More than 123 were seen in public open spaces in Totton (Southampton) on July 22

**Brown Argus:** Plenty of these were seen in May but the last of the first brood was seen at Stockbridge Down on June 30. Now we have the first report of the second brood - four seen on Malling Down near Lewes on July 21 with reports from three other sites on the following three days

**Chalkhill Blue:** More than 100 seen on Old Winchester Hill (Meon valley) on July 22 and 200+ at Stockbridge Down on July 23

**Holly Blue:** No great numbers yet but second brood fresh insects seen at eight sites this week including Emsworth and Havant

**Purple Emperor:** Their season is coming to an end but on July 21 two females at the Southwater woods (Horsham) decided to drown their troubles by drinking too much sweet tree sap and became incapable of steady flight - they were last seen clinging to leaves with which they had collided as they tried to fly off

**Painted Lady:** Unlike the **Clouded Yellows** this species is becoming more common with 12 reports during July, five of them on July 21 and 22.

**Large Tortoiseshell:** In July these are proving to be as common migrants as Clouded Yellows! After one was seen near Eastbourne on July 14 two more turned up on July 21 at Crawley and Durlston (where I think it was seen from July 19).

**Camberwell Beauty:** A tatty specimen spent several hours at a site near Crawley on July 21 but could not be refound later

## Moths

**Ectoedemia decentella (0020):** First on July 25 in Thanet

**The Triangle (0174 Heterogenea asella):** First on July 23 in Thanet

**Bucculatrix thoracella (0273):** First on July 25 in Thanet

**Horse Chestnut leaf miner (0366a Cameraria ohridella):** Looking at local **Horse Chestnut trees** on July 20 I could not find one whose leaves were not affected by the mining of this moth's larvae but their efforts do not seem to have affected the trees or the size of the Conkers that can now be seen in good numbers. **The moths are now on the wing** with a report of 65 in one trap on Thanet on July 25

**Willow Ermine (0428 *Yponomeuta rorrella*):** First at Portland on July 25

***Cochylis atricapitana* (0966):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

***Orthotaenia undulana* (1087):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

***Bactra furfurana* (1110):** First at Portland on July 24

***Eudemis profundana* (1113):** First at Portland on July 25

***Cydia splendana* (1260):** First at Portland on July 24 (more than 78 in one trap)

**Codling Moth (1261 *Cydia pomonella*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

***Cydia amplana* (1262):** First at Portland on July 25

**Marbled Yellow Pearl (1357 *Evergestis extimalis*):** First reported at Rye Harbour on July 21

**Starry Pearl (1359 *Cynaeda dentalis*):** First reported at Rye Harbour on July 22

***Anania verbascalis* (1382):** First at Portland on July 25

***Conobathra tumidana* (1435):** First at Portland on July 24

***Dioryctria sylvestrella* (1454b):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 21 (rare migrant first found in Britain in 2001)

***Phycitodes binaevella* (1483):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Oak Eggar (1637 *Lasiocampa quercus*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 24

**Small Fan-footed Wave (1702 *Idea biselata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Dark Spinach (1749 *Pelurga comitata*):** First at both Portland and Pagham on July 24

**Small Rivulet (1803 *Perizoma alchemillata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 24

**Maple Pug (1812 *Eupithecia inturbata*):** First at Horsham on July 25

**Cypress Pug (1855 *Eupithecia phoeniceata*):** First at Dungeness on July 22

**August Thorn (1912 *Ennomos quercinaria*):** First at Horsham on July 25

**Canary-shouldered Thorn (1913 *Ennomos alniaria*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Lunar Thorn (1918 *Selenia lunularia*):** First at Portland on July 24

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Number of immigrants is now increasing with 16 reports in July, ten of them between July 19 and 24 including one seen on the Hayling Coastal Path on July 20

**Hoary Footman (2045 *Eilema caniol*):** First at Horsham on July 25

**Pigmy Footman (2046 *Eilema pygmaeola*):** The first report came from Rye Harbour on July 21 (though this moth was said to have been seen 'recently' before that date)

**Four-spotted Footman (2051 *Lithosia quadra*):** First trapped in the St Leonard's area of Hastings on July 20

**White-line Dart (2081 *Euxoa tritici*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 24

**Beautiful Yellow Underwing (2142 *Anarta myrtilli*):** First in Pamber Forest (north of Basingstoke) on July 22

**Southern Wainscot (2197 *Mythimna straminea*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Star-wort (2217 *Cucullia asteris*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Reed Dagger (2290 *Simyra albovenosa*):** First at Portland on July 25

**Old Lady (2300 *Mormo maura*):** First in Pamber Forest (north of Basingstoke) on July 22

**The Olive (2312 *Ipimorpha subtusa*):** First at Horsham on July 25

**Cloaked Minor (2341 *Mesoligia furuncula*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 24

**Large Wainscot (2375 *Rhizedra lutosa*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Fen Wainscot (2377 *Arenostola phragmitidis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Small Rufous (2379 *Coenobia rufa*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 22

**Dewick's Plusia (2436 *Macdunnoughia confusa*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 23 (also at Portland on July 25)

## Other Insects

**Rhyssa persuasoria:** Females of this large **Ichneumon Fly** have a long needle-like ovipositor with which it bores deep into wood to lay its eggs on the skin of a **Horntail (aka Wood Wasp)** grub. Unlike those parasitic insects which lay their eggs within the host, and whose larva eat the insides of the host, **Rhyssa** is described as an ecto-parasite implying that its eggs and larvae remain outside the host but which (like a blood sucking tick on your skin) still cause harm to the host.

**Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa violacea*):** The first of these large brightly coloured migrant bees with brightly coloured (violet) wings was seen at Dungeness on July 22

**Stag Beetle:** Although the first surge of reports of these came between May 26 and June 19 there has been another sighting of a female on July 19 at the Testwood Lakes (Southampton) - these beetles can survive until autumn frosts kill them off though they are normally predated by Crows, Magpies or cars well before then.

**Glow-worm:** 30 of these were seen on Portsdown in the Fort Purbrook area on the night of July 26

**Grasshoppers:** Search of the grass at Durlston on July 26 found three grasshopper species (**Common Field, Common Green and Stripe-winged**)

**Short-winged Conehead (*Conocephalus dorsalis*):** An adult female, complete with the long rapier like ovipositor (with which she cuts a slit into a plant stem before allowing one or more of her eggs to slide down the tube within the ovipositor to a safe place within the plant stem), was found in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on July 20 (first report I have seen this year)

**Long Winged Conehead (*Conocephalus discolor*):** Found at Durlston on July 26 - I believe it is this species rather than the Short-winged Conehead which has greatly extended its range in recent years and can now be found far inland away from coastal marshes

**Grey Bush-cricket (*Platycleis albopunctata*):** First reported find at Durlston on July 26

**Roesel's Bush Cricket (*Metriopectera roeselii*):** First report for the year comes from Dungeness on July 20

**Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*):** First report came from the Isle of Wight (Newtown Harbour) on July 24 and on July 25 I found seven of them in a cluster on the north side of the main avenue at Stansted Forest

## PLANTS

**Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*):** Flowering at Black Point on Hayling on July 22 - surprisingly this is the first entry for the year in my database though this plant is normally flowering in June (and I seem to recall seeing that Brian Fellows had already found it this year)

**Hairy St John's Wort:** Looking very similar to the Square Stalked St John's Wort of marshy places found earlier this species of dry woodland was flowering in Stansted Forest on July 25

**Trailing St John's Wort:** I only saw this for the first time in Stansted Forest on July 25 though it has probably been flowering for some time

**Early Dog Violet:** I was very surprised on July 20 to find a good number of flowers open on the plants in the Havant Eastern road cemetery where they were flowering from Jan 31 to Apr 11

**Corn Cockle:** Some of these are reported to be flowering on disturbed soil alongside Southmoor Lane in the Brockhampton area of Havant - I am pretty sure they will have been introduced (either accidentally or by sowing wildflower seed) as I do not think this area has ever been cultivated as arable fields.

**Upright Hedge Parsley (*Torilis japonica*):** My first sight of this flowering was in Stansted Forest on July 25

**Burnet Saxifrage:** The first flowers had been reported at Durlston on July 14 and I found quite a few plants flowering in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on July 20

**Rock Samphire:** This has certainly been in flower for some time but I did not record it until July 22 on the Hayling shore

**Sea Holly:** This had only recently started to flower when I was at the Sandy/Black Point shore of Hayling on July 22

**Sea Knotgrass:** This was already flowering at Sandy Point on Hayling when I was there on May 22 and the plants were still covered with fresh flowers on July 22.

**Ray's Knotgrass:** I have always been uncertain about the identification of this plant but am pretty certain I found some flowering on the shore outside Sandy Point on July 22

**Russian Vine:** This was in full flower locally by July 20

**Ling heather:** Just starting to flower in the old Hospital Grounds at Sandy Point on Hayling when I was there on July 22

**Rottingdean Sea-lavender (*Limonium hyblaenum*):** This was flowering at Rye Harbour, where it has only recently become established, on July 22. It is also long established at Rottingdean but is apparently only native to the Scilly Isles in Britain.

**Dark Mullein:** This must have been flowering for some time but my first find of it was at Stansted Forest on July 25

**Common Hemp Nettle:** Also first flowers seen in Stansted Forest on July 25

**Wild Basil:** Flowering in Stansted on July 25

**Marjoram:** Masses in flower at Stansted on July 25

**Hoary Ragwort:** This was starting to flower at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on July 23

**Sea Aster:** First flowers seen by the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on July 26

**Hemp Agrimony:** Flowering at Langstone Mill Pond on July 24

**Dwarf Thistle:** Flowering at Durlston on July 25

**Narrow-leaved Water Plantain:** This can still be found in the Westbrook Stream at Emsworth and one plant had started to flower on July 20

**Broad-leaved Helleborine:** 130 plants counted along Sheepwash Lane at Hazelton Common (north of Waterlooville) on July 23 - presumably some of them in flower

**Violet Helleborine:** Flowers in bud on plants at one Stansted Forest site (but no plants to be found at two other sites on the estate where they have been seen in recent years)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

Nothing of significance this week

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 21 - 27 (WEEK 29 OF 2008)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

### **Sun 27 July**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Summary of past week's news**

My latest weekly summary of reports is now available by clicking [Weekly Summary](#) here

### **Fri 25 July**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Stansted Forest west**

The first report of a flock of **100 Crossbills** (in Alice Holt Forest near Farnham) was on the internet yesterday and spurred me to visit Stansted today - no luck with these birds but I did have an enjoyable outing in respect of both flowers and insects.

Eleven butterfly species went on my list, including singles of **Holly Blue**, a **Fritillary** (assumed to be **Silver Washed**), a **Green-veined White** and **Marbled White** with tatty late specimens of **Ringlet** and both **Small** and **Large Skippers** - one cluster of thistles had at least half a dozen **pristine Peacocks** feeding in close company, presumably new hatched nearby today.

Both **Silver Y** and **Six-spot Burnet moths** were flying, but the best tick was awarded to my first **Wasp Spiders (Argiope bruennichi)** of which I found seven on webs in one small section of the north side of the main avenue.

I only saw the first of these spiders because I had stopped to record my first **Wild Basil** flowers (and the other six spiders were only found by deliberately checking the depressions in the tall grass where they like to build their webs in order to catch small grasshoppers and the like which are forced to commit to a flying leap across the gap in the otherwise close packed grass stems).

Next new flower for my year list was **Common Hemp-nettle**, soon followed by a very late first sight of **Trailing St John's Wort** when searching in vain for **Violet Helleborine** plants where I have seen them in recent years at this time of year (in 2006 flower buds were about to open on July 21 and the last flowers were nearly over on Aug 8).

The show of flowers was magnificent all the way north up the Broad Avenue from the Main Avenue but was at its best at the extreme west end of the Rough (or Shooting) Avenue which crosses the north end of the Broad Avenue. At this west end of the Rough Avenue (map ref roughly SU 745116) the show of **Marjoram** and **Hemp Agrimony** (with lots of other species) is currently breath-taking but it was not until I was following the westernmost track south to join the Ornamental Drive at the Rowlands Castle end that I added my last three new flowers - **Hedge Parsley** (*Torilis japonica*), **Hairy St John's Wort** and **Dark Mullein** (though this latter must have been flowering for several weeks)

### [Thu 24 July](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### First Robin song of the autumn

Summer heat brought several **Large White butterflies** and singles of **Speckled Wood**, **Comma**, **Gatekeeper** and **Peacock** into the garden with **six Swifts** overhead both morning and evening (maybe one pair have now left with any young they have fledged?)

Slightly out of the ordinary were a **male Sparrowhawk** soaring high overhead in the afternoon heat, and definitely newsworthy was a **single Robin singing the first autumn song** I have heard as I came up Wade Lane at dusk.

I had been down to Langstone for a quick check on the **Egrets** though all I found was that at least a dozen are still present, mostly seen in the air, but the congregation of juveniles around the water's edge was not seen - maybe because they had already flown up into the trees to roost for the night (rather than left the site), and this impression was enhanced by the sight of several **Egrets** (assumed to be adults) setting out on what I assumed to be fishing trips under pressure to provide supper for their young - the tide had only just fallen enough to allow fishing and my experience suggests that if the birds were all adults they would not have thought it worth the effort of going fishing in the brief period between the tide falling and the light failing, but domestic pressures had over-ruled adult laziness.

While at the pond I found **Hemp Agrimony** was newly in flower and enjoyed the whistling calls of **Whimbrel** out on the mud.

### [Wed 23 July](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## Mid-week Summary

**Autumn passage increases day by day** - recent items include the arrival of a small flock of **Great Crested Grebes** in Langstone Harbour and an apparent large influx of **Little Egrets** from the south. More **Crossbills** are arriving and **autumn tit flocks are starting to be seen**. A flock of **Greylag Geese** seems to have settled at Pulborough for its **summer moult** and no doubt **Canada Geese** are doing so at several sites while **Common Gulls** are returning to our shores and **Swallows** have joined the many species already starting to head south (a **Wood Warbler** is said to have been seen on Hayling). Unexpected news includes a **Red-footed Falcon** on the Sussex Downs and a report of **63 pairs of Honey Buzzard in Britain this summer** (though not all breeding). BBC Radio announced that **Cattle Egrets have bred in Somerset** this year. I also learnt that **Med Gulls are better parents than Black-Headed** and have a note on the **Robins annual disappearing trick**.

**Summer broods of Brown Argus and Wood White** have emerged and **Large Tortoiseshells** are seemingly more common migrants than **Clouded Yellows** so far this year - there has also been a single **Camberwell Beauty**. **Binge drinking among females seems to have spread to Purple Emperors**. There has been a slight increase in the number of **Painted Lady** and **Hummingbird Hawkmoth migrant arrivals** and a large and colourful **Carpenter Bee** has come ashore at Dungeness

**Sea Holly** and **Ling Heather** have started to flower on Hayling while **Narrow-leaved Water Plaintain** has just started to flower in an Emsworth stream. A surprise local find was of **Early Dog Violets** already flowering again alongside the first local **Burnet Saxifrage**.

## **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**Great Crested Grebe**: Now returning to the sea from inland breeding sites where they were last seen in numbers in early March. 10 were in the Langstone Channel off the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 22, a week earlier than last year when 12 appeared off the Oysterbeds on July 28

**Cory's Shearwater**: Two flew past Selsey Bill on July 20, the first to be seen anywhere other than a 'possible' sighting of a single bird off Portland on July 6 and 7. Sixteen **Balearic Shearwaters** were also seen from Selsey on July 20

**Little Egret**: On July 20 three **Egrets** flew in from the south to Portland Bill and on July 21 the number reported at Christchurch Harbour shot up to 58 from zero (none reported there earlier in the year and no count of more than 5 anywhere in Dorset since Feb 6 when 55 were roosting at Radipole - I'm pretty sure that I have omitted a number of counts, but also sure that I have not omitted any large or significant numbers). These figures tell me that the usual autumn surge in Egret numbers is now starting and that at least some of the increased numbers come from abroad.

**Cattle Egret**: I heard on Radio 4 that breeding has been confirmed in Somerset (not Cornwall) this year bringing the species a step closer to being declared a British resident

**White Stork**: The bird seen in the lower Avon Valley on July 19 seems to have flown off over Christchurch Harbour on July 20

**Black Swan**: A pair flew in to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on July 20 and discussion of them on Hoslist revealed that quite a few birders are not aware how widespread feral pairs of this species are - I have reports of them at 13 different

sites this year, not including two sites where I am pretty sure they can still be found (a breeding pair on Benbow Pond east of Midhurst and a single female on the Test at Romsey)

**Greylag Goose:** On June 30 a pair were at Pulborough Brooks with 4 tiny goslings and on July 21 a flock of 83 geese were at Pulborough - presumably intending to settle in there for their summer moult. (This reminds me that no one has yet mentioned being annoyed by the presence of large flocks of **Canada Geese** littering the ground with their feathers and droppings while tearing the grass out by the roots so that coarse weeds can grow instead)

**Muscovy Duck:** While on the subject of unwanted wildfowl I see that one of these oversized ugly ducklings has turned up (of its own volition or was it dumped by human hand?) at the Town Millpond in Emsworth

**Honey Buzzard:** Having mentioned in last week's summary that a pair had been breeding within thirty miles of Havant this summer I see that Lee Evans has just told the Hoslist e-group that 63 pairs of **Honey Buzzard** held territories in Britain this summer with pairs that could be seen from public viewpoints in Norfolk and in Yorkshire (the latter viewpoint also gave views of up to seven **Goshawks**, some of them juveniles)

**Red-footed Falcon:** On the lovely sunny evening of July 22 Christian Melgar was walking on Steep Down north of Lancing when a **male Red-footed Falcon** flew towards him and banked to let the evening sun highlight its diagnostic features. Christian adds .. "A superb bird and totally unexpected especially considering the large spring influx into the UK which seemed to result in Sussex being left out!"

**Curlew Sandpiper:** A summer plumage bird at 'The Midrips' pits near Lydd in Kent on July 20 was the first to be reported since a couple were at the Cliffe Pools on the Thames estuary on June 18 and 19 - I guess they marked the end of the spring passage and the current report marks the start of autumn passage

**Dunlin:** A count of 215 at 'The Midrips' on July 20 takes us from the first few returnees into the mainstream of autumn passage

**Greenshank:** A substantial group of 21 returning birds were on the isolated grassland/saltmarsh between Oldpark Wood and the Fishbourne Channel almost opposite the Chichester Yacht Basin at high tide on July 22 - incidentally I learnt from Ed Rowsell's report of these birds that that distinctive grassland is called Bowling Green saltmarsh.

**Common Sandpiper:** No shortage of these now but a local sighting of 5 in Fareham Creek on July 21 is worth noting.

**Pomarine Skua:** The first to be seen from Selsey Bill since May 21 was an immature bird flying by on July 20 - this seems to be the third autumn bird after one at Dungeness on July 6 and two off Portland on July 13.

**Med Gull:** One was among the gulls 'anting' over my garden on July 20 but a more interesting report on that day came from Nutbourne Bay where five adults and nine juveniles were together on the water. At a guess these will have come from nests in Langstone Harbour and it bears out something which I did not know until Chris Cockburn (Langstone RSPB warden) told me last week - unlike Black-headed Gulls which take no interest in their offspring after they have fledged the **Med Gulls are more caring parents** and stay with their young for some time.

**Common Gull:** I have now seen seven reports of these back on the south coast since the first at Sandown on the Isle of Wight on July 6 but I did not expect my first

sight of one to be in the air over my garden on July 20, among a flock of 'anting' Black-headed and Med Gulls.

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** Experience shows that this species is much more likely to be seen on inland fields than at the coast in the Solent area and a report of 26 at the Anton Lakes at Andover on July 20 confirms this.

**Tern roosts:** An autumn speciality which attracts some birders is the monitoring of the large number of terns which fish in the Channel (or Solent) by day and spend their nights at a few preferred night roosts just inside the mouths of the Solent Harbours and at other points on their autumn passage route. I was reminded of this by a count of **315 Sandwich and 107 Common Terns** in Christchurch Harbour on July 21.

**Razorbill:** On July 20 a pair of **Razorbills** were seen off Selsey Bill accompanied by a small juvenile indicating local breeding at an unknown site (possibly the Isle of Wight?)

**Guillemot:** Two were off Selsey Bill on July 22 (and two **Puffins** were still to be seen off Portland on July 21)

**Swift:** 8 birds (4 breeding pairs) were still to be seen over east Havant at dusk on July 23 and on July 20 they were attracted down from the heights (where they are assumed to spend their days) in mid-afternoon to join a flock of gulls catching insects in the air above the houses. Maybe on other days they spend their days roaming widely in company with many other breeding and non-breeding Swifts to generate the regular reports of large numbers seen at various widely separated sites - on July 19 Dungeness reported 1000; on July 20 430 were over the Andover area, 250+ over Shoreham, and 500 over Dungeness; on July 21 Dungeness reported 3000+ and 100 were over Ferrybridge (Weymouth).

**Sand Martin:** I assume that the reports of birds passing over coastal sites are (unlike the Swifts which just seem to be circulating over a wide area) of birds leaving us and heading south. These reports started with 27 birds over Dungeness on June 24 and rose to 800+ over Sandwich Bay on June 29 with 2600 there on July 14 - by July 22, when 3000 flew over Dungeness, a total of around 11,000 birds had left us.

**Swallow:** The first indication of these birds leaving us came on July 22 with a count of 200 over Portland

**Robin:** These were to be seen and heard everywhere up to June 24 when they suddenly vanished with neither sight nor sound of even one bird until July 22 when I heard the familiar 'ticking' from my neighbour's garden and later saw an adult bird briefly on my lawn. The single bird re-appeared equally briefly on the lawn on July 23 and 24, and no doubt we will soon be hearing the first autumn song - last year this song was heard briefly but daily from July 4. I am pretty sure this annual disappearing act marks the birds summer moult when the pressure from their hormones to attract a mate, defend a territory and feed young suddenly ceases, but once the need to grow new feathers becomes less important the need for food during the winter causes them to re-assert themselves and to claim and defend a winter feeding territory.

**Blackbird:** Another sign of approaching autumn is the **gathering of Blackbirds to feed on both Rowan berries and fallen apples** in my garden - up to half a dozen birds come and go in the Rowan with no apparent territorial disputes and three or four juveniles spend their day on the lawn.

**Departing summer passerines:** Among the species now starting to be seen along the coast in areas where they have not been breeding are **Common Redstarts, Whinchats, Wheatears, Grasshopper Warblers, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Blackcaps and Willow Warblers** (but not **Chiffchaffs**), and **Spotted Flycatchers**. All these species are starting to appear on the coast, though the majority are not yet moving and some are just starting new broods. One sign of autumn that I noted was **Willow Warbler song** heard at Christchurch Harbour on July 21 and I read that a **Wood Warbler** has been seen 'on the Hayling Billy line' (I guess this means on Hayling).

**Tit flocks:** Bob Chapman at the Blashford Lakes on July 20 noted the first autumn movement of small birds in a loose flock containing **Goldfinches, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Spotted Flycatchers** and **Tree Creepers** as well as the **Tit species** after which we name such feeding flocks

**Crossbills:** The three days from July 20 to 22 brought eleven new reports of **Crossbills** on the move over an area from Rye Bay to Poole Harbour (including a couple of birds in the Botley Woods on July 22. No report was of more than 8 birds so it seems that they are travelling in family parties but at any time now I am expecting to hear of flocks numbering 100 or more birds in conifer or larch woods such as Stansted Forest.

**Corn Bunting:** A report from Steep Down (north of Lancing and Worthing) on July 22 speaks of many birds including juveniles seen there.

## **INSECTS**

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### **Butterflies**

**Wood White:** A few of these were reported from the usual sites on the Surrey border near Horsham between May 21 and June 1 but a report of 3 seen in the Plaistow area on July 21 indicates the emergence of a second brood - I think this is quite common on the continent but only occurs occasionally in Britain in warm summers

**Clouded Yellow:** Still no invasion - I saw seven reports during April and May and now we have a report of 2 at Portland on July 12 followed by 1 at Hastings on July 16

**Brown Argus:** Plenty of these were seen in May but the last of the first brood was seen at Stockbridge Down on June 30. Now we have the first report of the second brood - four seen on Malling Down near Lewes on July 21

**Purple Emperor:** Their season is coming to an end but on July 21 two females at the Southwater woods (Horsham) decided to drown their troubles by drinking too much sweet tree sap and became incapable of steady flight - they were last seen clinging to leaves with which they had collided as they tried to fly off

**Painted Lady:** Unlike the **Clouded Yellows** this species is becoming more common with 12 reports during July, five of them on July 21 and 22.

**Large Tortoiseshell:** In July these are proving to be as common migrants as **Clouded Yellows!** After one was seen near Eastbourne on July 14 two more turned up on July 21 at Crawley and Durlston (where I think it was seen from July 19).

**Camberwell Beauty:** A tatty specimen spent several hours at a site near Crawley on July 21 but could not be refound later

## Moths

**Horse Chestnut leaf miner (0366a *Cameraria ohridella*):** Looking at local Horse Chestnut trees on July 20 I could not find one whose leaves were not affected by the mining of this moth's larvae but their efforts do not seem to have affected the trees or the size of the Conkers that can now be seen in good numbers

**Marbled Yellow Pearl (1357 *Evergestis extimalis*):** First reported at Rye Harbour on July 21

**Starry Pearl (1359 *Cynaeda dentalis*):** First reported at Rye Harbour on July 22

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Number of immigrants is now increasing with 14 reports in July, eight of them between July 19 and 22 including one seen on the Hayling Coastal Path on July 20

**Pigmy Footman (2046 *Eilema pygmaeola*):** The first report came from Rye Harbour on July 21 (though this moth was said to have been seen 'recently' before that date)

**Four-spotted Footman (2051 *Lithosia quadra*):** First trapped in the St Leonard's area of Hastings on July 20

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**Roesel's Bush Cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*):** First report for the year comes from Dungeness on July 20

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

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**Narrow-leaved Water Plantain:** This can still be found in the Westbrook Stream at Emsworth and one plant had started to flower on July 20

## OTHER WILDLIFE

Nothing of significance to report at this time

### [Tue 22 July](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### Black and Sandy Points on Hayling

In excessive heat this afternoon I walked a circuit of the Chichester Harbour mouth on the Hayling side, finding **Sea Holly** and **Common Heather (Ling)** newly flowering but failing to see a **Grayling** though I did find fresh **Common Blues** and **Small Coppers** with **Small Skippers** on the **Bell Heather** and **Dwarf Gorse** in the now very overgrown old hospital grounds.

Other items of some note were a **Ringed Plover with a young chick** on the seaward side of the Black Point causeway and a good show of **Lax Sea Lavender** in the creek on the other side of the causeway. **Hounds Tongue** was still flowering in Sandy Point reserve (where just one **Marbled White** was seen), and there was a good show of the rare **Sea Knotgrass** on the shingle east of the reserve.

Back at home butterflies were responding to the heat, bringing a **Peacock**, a pair of **Large Whites** and single **Gatekeeper** and **Speckled Wood** into the garden but the most significant item today was the **re-appearance of one of the local Robins** which has been 'invisible' (though almost certainly present) for 27 days (since June 24). Early in the morning I heard a **Robin 'ticking'** in the next door garden and later in the day **an adult showed briefly on my lawn**, not looking very smart so presumably still moulting.

### [Mon 21 July](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### Around Havant

Today at least three **Blackbirds** started eating the **Rowan berries** on a tree in my neighbour's garden and one of them was also seen eating windfall apples while the **Squirrels** have for several days now been **eating unripe Hazel nuts** (of which there seems to be an excess crop this year).

**Bird song** is now rarely heard, though **Wood Pigeons** and **Collared Doves** can be heard daily with the occasional contribution from **Dunnock**. The only other bird I heard today was **Goldfinch**. **House Martins** are overhead almost all day with their first brood of young and all eight **Swifts** are currently seen at dusk when they return

to feed their young - I assume all four pairs have young and that both parents stay away all day, leaving the young to fend for themselves.

Walking round Havant to start my weekly flower list brought nothing new until I reached the Eastern road cemetery, where I was surprised to find quite a substantial **second flowering of Early Dog Violets** and new flowering of **Burnet Saxifrage** and **Sticky Groundsel** with a plant of **Field Scabious** that I do not recall seeing in the cemetery before. Another new find for the area as **Marsh Ragwort** by the Billy Line where **Holly Blue**, **Green-veined White**, **Speckled Wood** and **Small White** were seen with **Gatekeepers** and **Meadow Browns** in the cemetery.

### SUMMARY FOR JULY 14 - 20 (WEEK 28 OF 2008)

Waders have now been moving for some time but this week we begin to see our **summer passerines starting to leave us** with **Wheatear** and **Willow Warbler** newly back at coastal sites and **Redstart**, **Whinchat**, **Yellow Wagtail** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker** also on the move. Bird news also includes some **thoughts on the life of a Swift** (and **the death of a Sparrowhawk**). Going back to the shore birds **Snipe** are now appearing on the shore, as are small groups of **Golden Plover**, and Hampshire has its first autumn **Wood Sandpiper**. Oddities include an unseasonal **Great Northern Diver** and a **'blonde' baby Cormorant** in a nest at the Blashford Lakes

The first **Migrant Hawker** and **Ruddy Darter dragonflies** are now airborne and a rare **Lesser Emperor** has been seen in Kent. A total of 35 butterfly species were reported in the week including an unexpected new **Grizzled Skipper** among the summer broods of **Green Veined White**, **Holly Blue**, **Small Copper**, **Wall Brown** and **Common Blue**. A **Large Tortoiseshell** and a **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth** were surprises in Sussex where **Grayling** are now on the wing.

Best moth was probably a **Bedstraw Hawk** at Rye Harbour but Kent has news of a **Yellow V Moth** previously only found in the Scilly Isles and of **Small Ranunculus** (until recently extinct in Britain). An unusual observation in the New Forest was of **Brown China-Mark moths 'walking on water'**

At Havant Thicket **Dwarf Gorse** was flowering earlier than expected, as was **Black Nightshade** in Havant. Other new summer flowers include **Clustered Bellflower** and **Common Valerian**, **Ploughman's Spikenard** and **Carline Thistle**, **Sneezewort** and **Water Mint**. Also reported was **Violet Helleborine** but it was not clear if it was yet in flower.

**Other Wildlife** has the first sighting of a **Basking Shark** in our central part of the Channel plus a find of a rare **Devil's Fingers fungus** near Midhurst

### BIRDS

**Great Northern Diver**: One was seen off Christchurch Harbour on July 16, a very unusual date for the species (I think it was flying east). Another unusual recent report was of a **Red-throated Diver** off north Kent on July 1.

**White-billed Diver:** For twitchers looking for a summer holiday a **summer plumaged adult White-billed Diver** was on offer in the Orkneys (South Ronaldsay) on July 14

**Storm Petrel:** The recent spate of sightings seems to have dried up with just one new report of **three Petrels** off Christchurch Harbour on July 14

**Gannet:** On July 15 more than 300 were off Selsey Bill as they had been on July 11. On July 19 the number off Selsey was thought to exceed 500 and another estimated 500 were fishing off Christchurch Harbour that same day. Perhaps more unusual was the sight of 140 off the north Kent coast at Seasalter on July 18, when around 250 off the west Solent

**Cormorant:** Bob Chapman has a real 'ugly duckling' on offer at the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood - in a **Cormorant's nest there the only youngster is a pale leucistic specimen**, not the standard black

**Cattle Egret:** In early April there are said to have been 33 of these in Britain (19 together in Cornwall and possibly breeding) but nothing has been heard of any of them since June 1 (other than an unconfirmed report of one at Farlington Marshes on June 23) but now we have a report of one flying south over the Dorset coast at Swyre Head (another name for Durdle Dor, just west of Lulworth). Since that report in mid-week I have heard of one being seen at Radipole (Weymouth) on July 18 and another being seen flying away from the Sidlesham Ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) on July 19

**Little Egret:** While checking details of the Northward Hill reserve on the RSPB website I noticed that the site is supposed to have the **largest breeding colony of Little Egrets in Britain** (50+ pairs nesting with 150+ prs of Grey Heron). Not sure of which year that claim refers to but I see that a flock of **77 Egrets** was on the shore of the Swale estuary at Oare Marshes north of Faversham, a long way east of Northward Hill on the Isle of Grain near Rochester. Here in Hampshire I gather that there are three Egret breeding sites (Elson Wood at Gosport, Langstone pond, and another un-named site). Locally 37 birds were at Langstone pond sometime during July 16 and I counted **28 juveniles** (and no adults) at Langstone Mill Pond during low tide on the evening of July 17 (presumably all the adults were away fishing, as they normally would be, but the youngsters have not yet plucked up the courage to leave) - this number of young helps to validate my guess of up to a dozen pairs having bred there this year.

**Grey Heron:** Latest report of a **Heron** forcing an oversize meal down its throat come from Pulborough Brooks on July 16 when **one caught and (eventually) swallowed a near full grown Mallard duckling** (whose legs were seen to be still desperately paddling away as they vanished from sight)

**White Stork:** One was seen in the Sopley area north of Christchurch and just south of the Avon Causeway on July 19 by a taxi driver taking a fare to Bournemouth airport - the driver could not stop for a better look but others have since reported the bird to be staying in the area

**Spoonbill:** On July 14 Lee Evans reported a total of 18 birds currently in Britain (including 7 in Poole Harbour and 6 at Cley in Norfolk with singles elsewhere). One of the singles was on the Lymington shore on July 19 carrying colour rings showing that is the same bird that was there from Mar 11 to May 10, but it is a different bird to that which was at Lymington on July 5. On July 19 all seven birds were still in Poole Harbour and another juvenile was at Brading Marshes on the IoW having arrived on the Island on July 18

**Pochard:** Quite a few of these remain to breed in southern counties but a report of three pairs arriving at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex on July 15 and of two birds flying west along the north Kent coast on July 18 seems to show that birds that bred abroad are already returning.

**Honey Buzzard:** A sighting of two passing over a garden in the Thanet area of Kent on July 18 suggests that autumn passage may now be underway. I also hear this week that a pair have bred this year to the north of the Sussex Downs not too far from the Hampshire border

**Sparrowhawk:** I have just been sent a really **gruesome picture of a juvenile Sparrowhawk** which had come to a very nasty end in a local Havant garden. The sender suggested the hawk had flown into something and broken its neck, fallen to the ground, and then had its heart neatly removed though a hole drilled into the back of the hawk - possibly the work of a **Magpie**. The pictures show the hawk on the ground, wings outstretched and neck twisted back so that the beak rested on its back just in front of the gaping bloody hole through which part of its innards had been removed. I could not come up with a better suggestion but I did add a quote from a recent contribution to the Hoslist internet newsgroup (not, I think, applicable to a suburban garden in Havant but nevertheless interesting) which emphasised the fact that all raptors are in the business of killing other birds. The quote came from Lee Evans, and read ..

"Some raptors do a lot more damage to bird populations than some people realise and perhaps none more damaging than **Montagu's Harriers**. Once a **male Montagu's** finds a nest (perhaps of **Corn Bunting, Yellow Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Grey Partridge** or **Woodlark**) and is feeding young, he returns time and time again until he has taken each and every nestling. I have observed this behaviour on many occasions, particularly of the pairs that nest near me in the Home Counties. **Yellow Wagtails** have been virtually wiped out from my area.

**Northern Goshawks** are even more dangerous and totally obliterate bird populations in a radius of a nest site. Not only do they take many fledglings, they also kill many adult birds that stray into their territory (not for food, but for territorial reasons) and do not tolerate **Eurasian Sparrowhawks**. Last year, I witnessed a **Goshawk** blind and scramble a female **Honey Buzzard** to the ground in the New Forest, the buzzard never seen again and presumed killed".

**Peregrine:** I think the pair which breed on Chichester Cathedral normally adjourn to Pagham Harbour after the young have fledged but a reported sighting at Pagham on July 19 seems to show that the family has split up by now (and maybe reveal the cause of the spilt). At the start of June there were four young close to fledging in the cathedral nest and I have heard no more of them until this report of a

**family of two adults and two juveniles seen together at a kill on the shore of Pagham Harbour on July 19** - the report claimed that a dominant juvenile drove the adult male off the kill, and this may suggest that the observer was mistaken and that the four birds were all juveniles which may have stayed together while the adults have left them to enjoy a well earned rest from family squabbles.

**Avocet:** A pair has bred this year at the Selsey West Fields RSPB reserve in West Sussex - the pair hatched four chicks on June 24 and the young left the nest area on July 14. The first pair to breed in the county in recent years did so in the West Wittering area in 1996 and a second pair nest at Sidlesham Ferry in 2003 - this year's pair are only the third to do so

**Golden Plover:** A returning adult was seen in the Thanet area of Kent on July 15 but the first flocks are not expected on the south coast until mid-August - having written that in mid-week I see that a flock of 12 arrived in the Thanet area of Kent on July 17, and on that same day there were three at the Pett Pools and another four at Rye Harbour

**Lapwing:** A sudden influx brought 750 to Sandwich Bay on July 16 and 30 were at Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on July 19

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** Lee Evans latest bulletin of rarity news lists one as being at Minsmere in Norfolk for its third day on July 13

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One at Elmley Marshes (Sheppey) on July 13, another at Swineham Point in Poole Harbour on July 17 to 19 and a third report from Dungeness RSPB reserve on July 20

**Common Snipe:** The last report of the 'winter' came from Christchurch Harbour on May 1 and the first to arrive back on the south coast was seen at Christchurch on July 17 with 'first back' reports from the Lymington area and Pulborough Brooks both on July 19

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Another Thames estuary reserve at which Blackwit numbers have been building up recently is Northward Hill on the Isle of Grain north of Rochester. Counts there have been 352 birds on July 10 and 430 on July 13 with a count of 425 on July 15 at the Oare Marshes north of Faversham. Since writing that in mid-week Oare Marshes has reported a dramatic sighting of **900 birds all put up by a Peregrine on July 17**. In Hampshire a flock of 120 was back at the Lymington Marshes on July 16 while a flock building up at Sidlesham Ferry had grown to 36 birds on July 19 - also seen on that day were 14 birds at Pulborough, four of those flying on south to show that they regard Pulborough as a staging post and not a destination.

**Redshank:** By July 17 a flock of 80 were back in Emsworth Harbour with another 72 at Sidlesham Ferry

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** Lee Evans current rarity list shows one of these in Suffolk on July 13 plus a **Terek Sandpiper** in Cumbria that same day.

**Wood Sandpiper:** The first autumn bird in Hampshire was at Lymington on July 18 and 19

**Mediterranean Gull:** These are well known for preferring to feed inland rather than at the water's edge on the coast, and so now they are free of domestic duties at coastal nests many can be found inland by day - John Shillitoe found a flock of 56 feeding at a piggery in the Hoe Cross area near Hambledon (Meon Valley) on July 14

**Common Gull:** Four were back at Fishbourne on the Isle of Wight by July 18

**Roseate Tern:** One has been at Rye Harbour from July 13 to 15 while others have been seen at Titchfield Haven on July 13 and Selsey Bill on July 15. By July 16 three birds were at Brownsea Island in Pooles Harbour and by July 19 there were two (maybe three) at Titchfield Haven.

**Little Tern:** It would seem that these have now abandoned attempts at breeding and are heading back south. All tern species use the entrances to our Solent harbours as good places to spend their nights when on passage and by July 13 up to 140 Little Terns had been recorded at Black Point on Hayling (with a bonus of **a single juvenile being seen passing Hayling Bay on July 17** - where did that one come from?)

**White-winged Black Tern:** One has been at Rye Harbour on July 14 and still there on July 19 (it may have been there since July 12)

**Puffin:** Just one was seen from Portland on July 15, the first to get a mention on the south coast since one was off the Purbeck coast on June 14 though a very few do breed there and 5 were seen from a boat trip round Durlston Head on May 30. Thereafter Portland reported singles on July 16 and 17 with 2 seen there on July 19

**Cuckoo:** Two birds were still to be heard calling on the north Kent coast as late as July 17

**Swift:** Looking back through my records since 2000 to try to measure the apparent decline in the number of local breeding **Swifts** I realised how difficult it is to get an overall measure of their breeding success. Unlike most bird species where the parent birds stay around the nest area and can with luck be seen going towards the nest carrying material or food, and whose offspring will usually be seen in the nest area for a few days after fledging if they have not already been seen or heard in the nest, **Swifts** leave very few clues as to exactly how many nests they have in an area, and very few people ever see a **juvenile Swift** well enough to distinguish it from an adult.

There was an exception to this this week when one youngster failed to get airborne at the first attempt and ended up on the ground - once there the short legs and long wings make it impossible to get airborne but this one was lucky enough to be rescued and spent a night in a cardboard box before being thrown up into the air next morning - that was all that was needed.

The first difficulty in **evaluating Swift breeding success** is that, while we may see and hear **Swifts** dashing around our houses, their **speed of entry to their nest** is such that you are very unlikely to see one actually enter a nest, and even if they are carrying food for young it is not easy to see the swollen throat which is the only clue. Another confusing factor is the **ability of the young and eggs of this species to**

**survive the absence of the parent birds for two or more days** during periods of bad weather (giving the impression to a regular watcher that the nest has been deserted) - and when the young do emerge from the nest you have at most a couple of seconds from the time they appear at the entrance to the nest to the moment when they have flown out of sight (never to touch the ground again for perhaps their first two years during which they feed, sleep and eventually mate on the wing).

Their skill, speed and stamina at flying allow them to think nothing of crossing the channel to collect food to bring back to any young, and this same habit of wide-ranging flight introduces other complications in assessing breeding numbers. It is my understanding that, during the summer months when the **Swifts** are in northern latitudes, the great majority of the birds are at all times somewhere in the air above us, only coming down to the heights at which we can see and hear them in special circumstances. I suspect that non-breeding birds can normally find enough insect food above 3,000 metres, and will only come down when they are aware of a particular feast available in e.g. a wetland where flies are just emerging en masse, though inquisitive youngsters in their pre-breeding year will also come down to find out what their elders are up to down at their nests, giving rise to the screaming parties we see on some evenings (doubling or trebling the number of apparently breeding birds that we see on more normal evenings).

Two of the new reports I have seen this week were of (i) a screaming party of at least 16 birds high over my garden on the evening of July 15, matching (ii) a report of 18 birds over Emsworth that same evening, apparently increasing the number of 'local birds' at each site from a maximum of 8 seen so far this year to a new figure of 18. One interpretation of this was that the increase was due to the fledging of local young, another was that the additional birds had just 'dropped in' from above to interact briefly with one group of breeding birds in Havant and then with another group in Emsworth (the interaction being in the 'screaming').

Other reports during the week show the large numbers of birds circulating above us - on July 17 a stream of 730 flew southwest over Thanet and 120 went over Dungeness; on July 18 Sandwich Bay estimated 2000 birds over there with 200+ over Reculver (north Kent) and 870 over Dungeness. In the past I recall reading how one Hampshire birder happened to be gazing skyward with his binoculars at this time of year and suddenly realised that the whole sky from horizon to horizon held a broad line of **Swifts** all moving in the same direction but so high up that he would never have been able to see them with his naked eye. I suspect the reason that most of the reports of large numbers on the move come from coastal bird observatories is because the birders there are continually scanning the skies for migrants whereas the majority of other birders don't spend their time scanning empty skies.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** The appearance this week of 'out of place' birds at Portland, Dungeness and Reculver on the north Kent coast shows that post breeding dispersal is under way.

**Yellow Wagtail:** Dungeness started to report these passing over on July 11 and by July 18 they had been seen moving on five days with a peak day count of 10 so far

**Robin:** When did you last see a Robin? Their song ceased locally on June 24 and I do not have any record of seeing one (or even hearing it 'ticking') since then. I am pretty sure there are plenty of them still around but keeping a very low profile during their moult. Last year their song ceased locally on June 19 but I heard one singing briefly at dusk from July 4 onwards with several singing their autumn song by the end of the month so it may be worth a stroll around at dusk when the strong winds die down next week.

**Common Redstart:** A juvenile had been seen moving south in the Avon valley on July 12 and July 19 brought two separate sightings of birds on the Sussex Downs, already moving south

**Whinchat:** Just two birds have been seen on the coast since the beginning of June - one turned up on the Isle of Wight on July 4 and now a second has been seen at Amberley Wild Brooks (south of Pulborough) on July 13. Since writing that in mid-week passage birds have been seen at three more sites on July 16 and 18

**Wheatear:** What seems to have been the first migrant to be spotted on the south coast this autumn was a bird at Durlston on July 18

**Willow Warbler:** Portland reported the first bird back at the coast there on July 15 with three present by July 18 when both Durlston and Dungeness had their first passage birds. On July 19 a group of 8 were seen on the Sussex Downs.

**Willow Tit:** These are effectively extinct in most of Hampshire though there are (probably) a few pairs still breeding in the north of the county. Last year at least three pairs were breeding at Hurstbourne Common near Andover and there were also reports from the Hannington and Overton areas west of Basingstoke. This year we heard of one bird singing in the Test Valley near Mottisfont on Apr 11 and now (July 14) an experienced birder has been surprised to come across two family groups within a couple of miles of each other, also near Basingstoke but in unlikely territory just east of the M3 Popham interchange (though not far from the Candover valley)

**Crossbill:** Numbers seem to be increasing with a report this week of a flock of 40 or more seen on July 14 going over the village of Ashurst (on the edge of the New Forest as you head from Totton to Lyndhurst). In Sussex two smaller flocks were seen on July 13 - 17 near the coast at Seaford and 9 over the Downs south of Pulborough. Ten more reports have been made from July 16 to 19 with numbers ranging from 1 at Portland to 11 at Folkestone, 16 at Arne and 18 over Thanet.

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker:** Early reports were of one emerging locally on June 13 and of two seen on the Isle of Wight on June 24 but July is the month in which they become more commonly seen and we now have reports from the Hastings area on July 1, from Sandwich Bay on July 8 and from Langstone on July 11

**Migrant Hawker:** Although some of this species do reach us as migrants I think the majority nowadays emerge from English ponds but we may have started their season with a mixture of these modes - the first report came from Sandwich Bay (migrants?) on July 13 but on July 14 a fresh exuvia (discarded larval skin) found at Rye Harbour showed that the species had started to emerge there.

**Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*):** A report from Sandwich Bay on July 12 was the first for the year (and a new species for that site). Both my recent Dragonfly Books (Steve Brooks, published 1997, and Dan Powell, published 1999) say that there are only three British records for this normally southern European species (all found in 1996 and 97 in Gloucestershire, Cornwall and Cambridgeshire). Since then a search of the internet shows that one was found in Ireland in 2000 and that the British National Biodiversity Network now has reports of the species from nearly 100 Ten Km squares scattered across Britain (north to the Lake District and with at least one in south Wales). It is known to have bred in Cornwall but other reports are treated as vagrants.

**Ruddy Darter:** First for the year at Sandwich Bay on July 10

## Butterflies

### 35 species reported in this week's news

**Grizzled Skipper:** These are normally over by the end of June so the sighting of a fresh individual at Durlston on July 12 was of special interest

**Green-veined White:** A very fresh specimen in my garden on July 16 was a reminder that the summer brood are now due out though reports seem to show that they have been emerging since the start of July. Since writing that in mid-week I see that this species appeared at four other sites in July 16 including a count of 10 in the Boarhunt woods north west of Portsdown

**Purple Hairstreak:** A count of more than 30 in public open spaces within Totton (Southampton) shows how important such urban spaces are for wildlife - only one rural site could match this count during this summer and none have exceeded it

**Small Copper:** Although fresh specimens have been reported sporadically since June 13 the real start of the summer brood seems to have been on July 16 with reports from four different sites including a count of 10 at Stockbridge Down

**Common Blue:** The first two of the second brood appeared at Roydon Woods (Lymington) on July 16

**Chalkhill Blue:** July 16 also brought out many of these with more than 50 being seen on Stockbridge Down

**Holly Blue:** One in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden on July 14 must have been a fresh summer brood insect and these may have started to emerge as early as June 20 (when one was seen after a three week gap in reports). July

15 saw several fresh specimens at Shoreham and more were reported from four sites on July 16

**Painted Lady:** A small run of recent reports started with a sighting on July 8 (Thorney Island) and continued with one at Durlston on July 12, Pulborough Brooks on July 13, and then with three reports on July 14 (two seen in Havant Thicket, one nearby in Cosham, and one at Testwood Lakes at Southampton) but none since ...

**Large Tortoiseshell:** One clearly seen and photographed at Windover Hill (north of Eastbourne) on July 14 but not seen again since - presumably a migrant.

**Comma:** Most people will have seen these recently but a mass emergence of more than 33 at the Southampton Testwood Lakes on July 10 is worthy of note.

**Dark Green Fritillary:** A report of more than 50 seen at Martin Down on July 14 shows that there are plenty currently on the wing, and on that same day I almost certainly saw one flying over the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket - several Silver Washed Fritillaries were seen in woodland glades but their relatively slow, floating flight is unlike the high speed dashing 'tiger like' flight of the similar looking butterfly seen racing over the grassland.

**Heath Fritillary:** There may be a difference of opinion between butterfly enthusiasts in Hampshire and those in east Kent where one was so keen to see a single rare and elusive **White Admiral** that he complained about "**having to wade through swarms of tatty Heath Fritillaries**" in the Blean Woods near Canterbury before seeing just one **White Admiral**.

**Wall Brown:** One seen at Durlston on July 16 was the first I have seen mentioned anywhere since June 4, and as such probably the start of the summer brood. Since that report there have been two more sightings at Durlston and at Edburton Hill on the Sussex Downs

**Grayling:** The first report for the year came from Durlston on July 4 with no others until July 11 when 8 were seen on the Browndown shore (west of Gosport) followed by a report from Portland on July 12 and from New Forest heathland on July 14 - it should now be worth looking for them on south Hayling when the sun shines. July 16 brought reports from two New Forest sites and from Windover Hill near Eastbourne (where Sussex people celebrate an annual Grayling festival that seems to have got mixed up with rites associated with the Holy Grail).

**Gatekeeper:** These have been slow to get going this summer but the sunshine on July 14 at last brought them out in good numbers (I even had the first in my garden!)

## Moths

**Yellow V Moth (0277 *Oinophila v-flava*):** This moth is at its northern limit in southern Britain and while it can be found outdoors in the Scillies it is

normally only found indoors (after hitching a lift) elsewhere here so one found in Thanet (Kent) on July 16 was exciting

**Caloptilia hauderi (0295)** : Also found in Thanet on July 16 - this and all following moths are firsts for the year unless otherwise stated

**Acrocercops brongniardella (0313)** : Also found in Thanet on July 17

**Argyresthia goedartella (0411)** : Also found in Thanet on July 16

**Yponomeuta sedella (0431)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Aethes rubigana (0946)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Cochylis flaviciliana (0963)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 15

**Cochylis molliculana (0964a)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 16

**Cnephasia conspersana (1019)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 15

**Epiblema foenella (1183)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 14

**Pammene fasciana (1236)** : Found at Thanet shortly before July 15

**Agriphila straminella (1304)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 16

**Agriphila geniculata (1309)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 16

**Eudonia mercurella (1344)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Brown China-mark (1345 *Nymphula nymphaeta*)**: Not a first (that was seen on June 7) but an interesting report of these moths deliberately choosing to rest on the surface of a small New Forest stream. Andy Barker, who saw them, wrote on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website .. "A particularly interesting aspect of their behaviour was that on several occasions they were seen to land on the surface of the water, out of choice. They would rest "pond skater style" for periods of up to at least a minute, before taking off again. Usually when moths get in water they're in trouble, but for this attractive pyralid it is clearly light enough that it doesn't break the meniscus of the water and has wings that don't easy get water-logged".

**Ebulea crocealis (1385)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 14

**Yellow Pearl (1396 *Mecyna flavalis*)**: Found in hundreds on July 16 at Windover Hill north of Eastbourne though a great rarity elsewhere

**Gold Triangle (1413 *Hypsopygia costalis*)**: Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Trachycera marmorea (1440)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Pempelia genistella (1443)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 15

**Euzophera pinguis (1470)** : Trapped at Pagham on July 13

**Sussex Emerald (1672 *Thalera fimbrialis*)**: Four more examples of this coastal rarity were seen on the Dungeness shingle on July 13

**Small Blood-vein (1690 *Scopula imitaria*):** Trapped at Pagham on July 15

**Chalk Carpet (1731 *Scotopteryx bipunctaria cretata*):** Seen at Windowver Hill by day on July 16

**The Fern (1782 *Horisme tersata*):** Trapped at Dungeness on July 15

**Channel Islands Pug (1855a *Eupithecia ultimaria*):** Trapped at Pagham on July 12

**Tawny-barred Angle (1893 *Semiothisa liturata*):** Trapped at Portland on July 16

**September Thorn (1915 *Ennomos erosaria*):** Trapped at Pulborough Brooks on July 15

**Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (1982 *Hemaris tityus*):** Seen in a Brighton garden on July 18 (98% certain!)

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** As with the Painted Lady butterflies there has at last been a slight indication of a migrant influx with reports from points scattered along the south coast from Eastbourne to Durlston on July 12, 13 and 15

**Bedstraw Hawkmoth (1987 *Hyles Gallii*):** One at Rye Harbour on July 16

**Buff Footman (2049 *Eilema deplana*):** Trapped at Pulborough Brooks on July 15

**Langmaid's Yellow Underwing (2110a *Noctua janthina*):** Trapped in Thanet on July 17

**Small Ranunculus (2165 *Hecatera dysodea*):** Trapped at Thanet on July 14 - this was extinct in Britain until recently but is now being found where its larval foodplant (lettuce) is grown in Kent

**The Clay (2193 *Mythimna ferrago*):** First for the year reported at Durlston on July 16

**Tree-lichen Beauty (2292 *Cryphia algae*):** Trapped at Thanet on July 16

**Marbled Green (2295 *Cryphia muralis*):** Trapped at Pagham on July 15

**Svensson's Copper Underwing (2298 *Amphipyra berbera*):** Trapped at Pulborough Brooks on July 15

**Scarce Silver-lines (2421 *Bena prasinana*):** Trapped at Pulborough Brooks on July 15

**Plumed Fanfoot (2488a *Pechipogo plumigeralis*):** Found at Thanet on July 17

## Other Insects

**Glow-worm:** At least 20 were seen in Havant Thicket on the evening of July 16

## PLANTS

**Traveller's Joy (Old Man's Beard):** First flowers open in Havant on July 15

**Annual Wall Rocket:** First flowers open in Havant on July 15

**Halberd-leaved Orache (*Atriplex hastata*):** This common species described under this name by Francis Rose has now been re-named **Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostrata*)** and the original is declared to be illegal. Whatever its name it is now starting to flower in so far as any Goosefoot does 'flower'.

**Dwarf Gorse:** I do not expect to find this in flower until August but several plants were in flower on July 14 when I visited the Havant Thicket area.

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** The plants in the roadside grass of Juniper Square in Havant had several bright red (but rock hard) fruits as well as a few yellow flowers on July 15

**Stone Parsley:** Several plants had their first tiny white flowers open in Havant on July 15

**Burnet Saxifrage:** First flowers reported by Durlston on July 14

**Pepper Saxifrage:** Also flowering at Durlston on July 14

**Lesser Water Parsnip:** Plants in the Lymbourne stream where it passed Wade Court at Langstone were in full flower on July 19

**Black Nightshade:** One plant flowering in Havant St Faith's churchyard on July 15 was the first for the year (ignoring the oddity at Warblington flowering in the winter)

**Water Mint:** First flowers at Emsworth on July 18

**Clustered Bellflower:** First report comes from John Goodspeed who found it on the Sussex Downs at Kingley Vale on July 11

**Common Valerian:** First flowers also seen at Kingley Vale on July 11

**Canadian Goldenrod:** First flowers of plants long established in the wild at Emsworth seen on July 15

**Ploughman's Spikenard:** First report of flowering from Durlston on July 17

**Canadian Fleabane:** Unlike the Guernsey Fleabane which never seems to stop flowering I noticed fresh flowers on Canadian Fleabane for the first time on July 15

**Sneezewort:** Several plants flowering on the Gipsies Plain at Rowlands Castle on July 14 - probably had been out for at least a week.

**Woolly thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*):** One of these huge plants was in flower at Durlston on July 17

**Carline Thistle:** Another first from Durlston on July 17

**Hawkweed (*Hieracium* ) species:** Two apparently different types, both with many leaves up the stem but with varying degrees of hairiness, in the Havant Thicket area on July 14

**Orange Hawkweed (aka Fox and Cubs):** Fine examples flowering by the gateposts of the entrance gate to the Havant Thicket carpark on July 14

**Violet Helleborine:** First report of (presumably) flowering plants comes from the Ebernoe Common church site north of Midhurst on July 12

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Basking Shark:** The first to be reported at Portland this year was seen there on July 15

**Fungus:** A superb fresh example of **Devil's Fingers (*Clathrus archeri*)** 'stinkhorn type' was photographed in the Midhurst area on July 13 (Photo can be seen on Brian Fellows' website at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-101-devils-fingers-midhurst-TW-13.07.08.jpg> ). This is a different species from the similar **Red Cage (*Clathrus ruber*)** - *C. archeri* opens into a 'red starfish' whereas *C. ruber* forms a lattice cage. In the USA *C. archeri* is given the name **Octopus fungus** but in Britain, where it is thought to have arrived in 1914 from New Zealand in a cargo of military supplies for the First World War, it is called **Devil's Fingers** (use this name to see pictures of it in Google Images - that set of pictures includes one of a human hand making an unusual two finger gesture which seemingly goes by the same name!). I think this is the first time ***Clathrus archeri*** has been found in our area but ***Clathrus ruber*** has been found in the past on the Isle of Wight and several good specimens came up in a Cosham garden in Nov 2006 (and one opened at Durlston in May 2007)

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 14 - 20 (WEEK 28 OF 2008)

### Sat 19 July

#### North Common on Hayling

Cycling down the Billy Trail on a warm afternoon I put up half a dozen fresh **Red Admirals** which were sunning themselves on the hot track surface, and when I reached North Common I added both **Comma** and **Peacock** to my list.

My aim was to look for any sign of last summer's **exotic Mullein plants** but I found no sign of them - I did find a good show of **Shasta Daisies** and white **Goat's Rue**

with plenty of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** still flowering as well as the **Fragrant Agrimony** now at its best.

No **Barn Owl** seen in the 'nest box', and the white splashes on the roof did not look fresh but I expect the bird is still around. The only bird in any significant number was **Starling** - a swirling flock of around 200 in the bushes - and the only real interest lay in half a dozen summer plumage **Dunlin** back on the mud with ten **Grey Plover** - not in summer plumage but strangely keeping together in a loose flock (normally these birds keep well apart when feeding but perhaps these had just flown in as a group and had not yet settled in).

Coming back up the Billy Trail I found **Lesser Water Parsnip** was flowering for the first time, and I added **Speckled Wood** to the butterfly list.

Back at home just two **Swifts** showed briefly at dusk.

### [Thu 17 July](#)

#### **Around Langstone**

A quick ride to Langstone this evening when the tide was low gave me my best idea so far of the **breeding success of the Egrets**. The edges of the pond were crowded with them and a few more were in the trees and in the pony field to the north, but there was little movement so I was able to get a pretty good overall count by summing the numbers seen from several viewpoints. **The total was 28 birds seen** (with almost certainly a few more unseen), but the significant thing was that **every bird had the pale yellowy-green legs of a juvenile** rather than the black of an adult (I assume all the adults were away fishing, as they normally would be with the tide low, but the juveniles have not yet plucked up the courage to fly from home).

I read that **Egrets** lay 3 to 6 eggs, so 28 or 30 fledged juveniles would tie in with my previous guesses at the number of nests here (which ranged from a minimum of six to a dozen or more).

While at Langstone I saw the **Swan family** still had all six of their cygnets but the only other shorebird (other than the gulls) was a single **Lapwing** - that will soon change!

### [Tue 15 July](#)

#### **Around Havant**

A walk to the shops in Havant this morning took me along a circuituous route which netted four new 'first flowering' plant species. First to be found was **Stone Parsley** and near it I found **Traveller's Joy** (which will become **Old Man's Beard** when it goes to seed). Perhaps the most surprising new flower was **Black Nightshade** (one plant in St Faith's churchyard) which I do not expect to see until August, and the fourth species was **Annual Wall-Rocket**.

Another surprise find was **bright red fruit on the Yellow-flowered Strawberries** in Juniper Square, but an attempt to pick one found that the fruits were as hard as bullets so I did not taste!

### [Mon 14 July](#)

#### **Havant Thicket and the Gipsies Plain**

This morning I walked around part of the area that is to become a huge new reservoir in which Portsmouth Water Company can store the large amounts of fresh water which flow from the chalk of Portsdown Hill in excess of what is currently needed to supply local demand. I had been invited to join Tracey Viney who is in charge of the wildlife aspects of this massive undertaking, and before we set off she showed me the latest plans defining the area that will be affected and showing that the north east edge of the reservoir (along the current southern edge of Havant Thicket east of the Long Avenue of trees coming north from Leigh Park Gardens) will be a swampy wetland fringed by a long line of small islands. She also told me that the impact of the construction activity on the land which falls outside the perimeter of the reservoir will be limited by routing all construction traffic via the northern fringe of Havant Thicket - vehicles will leave the Horndean road at the northern edge of the woodland, then go along the existing northern perimeter track and down the existing track which follows the Havant Borough/East Hants boundary to enter the reservoir area at a point north of the existing Long Avenue (though the trees of the Avenue will be among the first to go).

In this morning's glorious sunshine we enjoyed a great show of both butterflies and flowers, though few birds were seen - **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Blackcap** and **Chiffchaff** were all singing but no **Lapwings**, no raptors and not even a flock of corvids!

We saw 12 species of butterfly, including two **Painted Ladies**, **White Admirals**, **Silver Washed** and **Dark Green Fritillaries** plus numerous **Gatekeepers** which have at last emerged in force. **Peacock**, **Ringlet** and **Brimstone** were all present and one **Marbled White** flew over the grassland that was alive with **Small Skippers** and **Meadow Browns**.

Two new plants for my yearlist were **Sneezewort** and **Dwarf Gorse**, with **two Hawkweed 'species'** newly in flower, both with leafy stems but one having a much more hairy stem than the other - I will have to go back and have a much closer look before I can attempt to name them. Also a personal first was **Wild Angelica**. Everywhere we went vast tracts of **Bird's Foot Trefoil** (with **Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil** in the damper area) provided a bright yellow backcloth which was spattered with significant pink patches of **Centaury**, and in a few places **Betony** provided the dominant colour. Right at the end, as I was driving out through the Havant Thicket carpark exit, I added another very colourful new flower for the year in the **Orange Hawkweed** which is commonly called **Fox and Cubs**

### **SUMMARY FOR JULY 7 - 13 (WEEK 27 OF 2008)**

High winds have increased the sightings of **Storm Petrels** and **Shearwaters** (including possible **Cory's** and **Sooty**) along the Channel coast as winter birds start to show there (e.g. **Wigeon**, **Common Gulls** and **Shags**).

The winds also seem to have scattered **Black-tailed Godwits** returning from Iceland but large flocks are now starting to assemble in our harbours.

New passage birds include **Black-necked Grebe** and **Wood Sandpiper**, and departing migrants include **Golden Oriole**. Something I learnt from this week's news is that **some juvenile Shelduck appear to accompany the adults to their moult area** on the north German coast.

Recent news includes some interesting comments on the **contrasting breeding success of Little Terns and Mediterranean Gulls**. There is also some good news of **Corn Buntings**, at least in Sussex.

**Moth news** includes the emergence of the dreaded **Brown-tail** and good news of **Scarlet Tigers** doing well in Eastbourne gardens when they were thought to be extinct in the county's countryside.

Local **butterfly news** has the first **Painted Lady** of the year to be seen on Thorney Island (though others have been seen sporadically elsewhere) while two **Clouded Yellows** have been seen at Portland and a minor influx of **Silver Y moths** has been noted in Kent. The Hastings area continues to boast of its success with providing habitat for insects that are uncommon elsewhere in Britain. Among other insects we have news of the appearance of **adult Grasshoppers** and **Bush Crickets** (including the **Great Green** which may be found on Portsdown)

**Plant news** includes a find of **Least Yellow Sorrel** growing through tarmac in a tiny Emsworth urban garden and **Pencilled Cranesbill** in Havant roadside grass near where **Blue Pimpernel** is said to be a common garden weed. A mass of flowering **Chicory** and a plant of **Phacelia tanacetifolia** were good finds in Warblington cemetery extension with **Dropwort** flowering in the uncultivated Warblington farmhouse garden The first **Autumn Hawkbit** is a sign of the passing season.

**Other Wildlife** includes a **Thresher Shark** and a **Sunfish** off Portland and a **couple of Hares successfully 'crossing the road' during the Silverstone Grand Prix**

## **BIRDS**

**Black-necked Grebe:** A summer plumaged bird was seen on Ibsley Water at Ringwood on July 5 but could not be found there next day so presumably it had just stopped off for a rest on its autumn passage journey to an unknown destination - the last report of one at this site was on Mar 21.

**Cory's Shearwater:** There were unconfirmed reports of one off Portland on both July 6 and 7. On July 6 there was also a report of two 'possible' Cory's off Worthing

**Sooty Shearwater:** One of these was also reported off Portland on July 6 but not confirmed

**Manx Shearwater:** Plenty of these around all week with a peak of 330 seen from Portland on July 7 and 20 as far east as Dungeness

**Balearic Shearwater:** Also seen daily with a peak count of 30 at Portland on July 7  
**Storm Petrel:** Watchers at Christchurch Harbour logged 75 or more passing on July 8 when at least two were seen from Sandy Point on Hayling - that was just the high point of continuing daily sightings of these Petrels and of Balearic and Manx Shearwaters

**Gannet:** Peak count of 680 off Dungeness on July 12 but more than 300 off Selsey Bill on July 11

**Shag:** Several were newly back from breeding to be seen at Christchurch Harbour on July 8 and singles were reported at Selsey and Dungeness during the week

**Little Egret:** Numbers in coastal roosts increase at this time of year as adults and juveniles leave their nest sites. Rye Harbour commented on this but the numbers leaving that roost on July 10 were only 27 against a minimal count of 20 there on May 24. Also on July 10 the high tide count at Langstone Pond was at least 28, including at least 5 juveniles - I guess these were all birds that have bred there but now none are around nests in the trees - they were either around the pond edge or on the adjacent pony field.

**Grey Heron:** Some minor post-breeding dispersion with reports of singles going south across the Channel from both Christchurch and Portland on July 12.

**Spoonbill:** The last report of a group of five in Poole Harbour was on June 28 after five or six had been regularly seen there from May 5 to June 15. It seemed they had dispersed but on July 12 a group of 7 were reported there - the bird which showed up on the Lymington shore on July 5 was probably one of this group which have now re-united.

**Shelduck:** The majority of these have probably now left for their summer moult on the north east German coast. Reports of 544 at the Cliffe Pools (southwest of Sheppey in the Thames estuary) and 400+ there on July 7 probably indicate that this RSPB reserve acts as a staging post where some birds assemble before crossing the North Sea. I suspect that our South Coast birds have a different route but nevertheless feel the call to move at the same time - in Langstone Harbour Jason Crook noted parties of Shelduck flying purposefully east over the Hayling Oysterbeds on both July 8 (12 birds) and July 10 (27 birds including 2 juveniles). I had previously assumed that only adults made this journey, the young remaining here in groups made up of the young of several different pairs with just one or two adults left as 'supervisors' - this does happen but I suppose that Jason's evidence shows that it depends on when the young were hatched with only those too young to make the journey staying here.

**Wigeon:** July 6 brought the first two reports of Wigeon returning from breeding - one was at Pett Level on Rye Bay and the other in the Kent Stour Valley

**Hooded Merganser:** The first summer male bird which unexpectedly appeared in the Weymouth area on June 6 was still there on July 12 and can be seen in the Radipole area of the town.

**Grey Partridge:** Two pairs on the Sussex Downs south of Amberley have had a good breeding season - they had 21 young birds between them on July 7

**Quail:** Two birds first heard by the River Arun in the Pulborough area on July 7 were still there on July 11

**Avocet:** On July 5 a total of 305 birds were present at the RSPB Cliffe Pools reserve on Sheppey in the Thames estuary and on July 8 there were 140 at Elmley Marshes (also on Sheppey) - not sure if these were part of the flock from Cliffe.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Many Iceland birds are now back (around 250 summer plumaged birds on the Lymington shore on July 7, and I guess the flock of 330+ at the Oare Marshes near Faversham in north Kent on July 4 were of the same origin), but it seems that the high winds of the past few days have scattered some of the birds which are turning up in small groups at unexpected places. On July 5 two arrived at Dungeness and one at Ibsley Water at Ringwood, On July 6 two summer plumaged birds were 'new' in the Kent Stour valley, one was at Rye Harbour and twelve were at Pulborough Brooks. July 7 saw one at Worthing and four struggling west against the wind over the Adur at Shoreham with three more turning up in Christchurch Harbour. On July 8 three were seen at Pulborough Brooks and on July 9 a birder sheltering from the wind in his car at Pett Level near Hastings watched two parties of six and four birds fly in to join a party of six already there. Since the above was written for my mid-week summary the first birds have arrived back in the Emsworth area (24 on July 11) and around 50 were seen at Slimbridge on July 10. As usual with these birds they remain flighty and will move unpredictably between sites - the 250 that were at Lymington on July 7 had disappeared by July 11 (increasing depth of water in the pools there may have made it difficult for them to feed) - 11 of these 250 may have formed a small group flying east over the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 11.

**Whimbrel:** Passage now increasing with 16 new reports this week

**Redshank:** The presence of 20 birds in Emsworth Harbour on July 11 indicates a return to the sort of number seen there in winter months

**Wood Sandpiper:** Although a single bird was in the Kent Stour Valley from June 5 to 13 autumn passage seems to have started in earnest with birds at both Dungeness and Radipole (Weymouth) on July 5.

**Common Sandpiper:** These are now widespread along the coast with a peak count of 11 at Christchurch Harbour on July 8

**Pomarine Skua:** The first to be reported since June 5 was off Dungeness on July 6

**Great Skua:** After only four Bonxie sightings on scattered dates in June we now have four sightings in the three days July 6 to 8 at sites ranging from Portland and Christchurch to Ventnor (IoW) and Dungeness

**Mediterranean Gull:** One of the gulls breeding at Rye Harbour has a colour ring (Red 47K) showing it was hatched in Hungary in 2002 and has been at Hayling Island for some time in 2004 and was back there in March 2007 before heading for Pett Level (Rye Bay) in April 2007. This year it has settled to nest at Rye Harbour and now has one fledged chick. Barry Yates comments that it is unusual for any bird to nest at a site hundreds of miles from where it was hatched (this is one of the

features allowing the great extension in range of the species in recent years). Barry also commented on another significant feature of Med Gull behaviour adding to their breeding success - unlike other gulls and terns which carry food to their young held in their bills (from which they can easily lose it to Skuas or other gulls) the Med Gulls swallow the food and their young then have to extract it from their throats.

**Black-headed Gull:** A leucistic bird with pure white plumage all over other than red bill and legs was photographed in the centre of Portsmouth on July 10 and has been in that area for some time

**Common Gull:** Single adult birds were back at Sandown (IoW) on July 6, at Durlston on July 9 and at both Weymouth and Christchurch Harbour on July 10 - the forerunners of many we will soon see all along the south coast

**Yellow-legged Gull:** The first juveniles were seen at Dungeness on July 9, maybe the progeny of the few birds that new breed in Britain

**Sandwich Tern:** Some 300 pairs have raised 450 chicks at Rye Harbour despite the parent birds losing much of the food intended for their young to Med Gulls which have learnt that waiting among the Tern nests is easier than flying to find their own fish.

**Roseate Tern:** Passage is picking up with singles in Poole Harbour on July 8, at Christchurch Harbour on July 11 and 3 at Dungeness on July 12

**Little Tern:** Last week the Hayling Oysterbeds still had one Little Tern chick on the brink of flying but when Brian Fellows returned to the Oysterbeds for his turn at wardening on July 8 there was not a Little Tern in sight and he learnt that as soon as he left on July 1 the one chick vanished - its parents returned with fish for it but could not find it and themselves left the area. Unlike the Med Gulls (see above) which have developed survival strategies resulting in a significant expansion of their numbers and range the Little Tern species is unable to cope with the problems that confront them when breeding and in my view human efforts to protect their nests, eggs and young do nothing to solve the problem that is in their genes and behaviour - Lee Evans tells us that wardens at the Yarmouth Little Tern colony have even tried putting wire cages over the chicks to save them from Kestrel predation while allowing the parents to feed them through the bars of the cage, but to no avail (I do not know the details of this scheme but I can see many problems with it including the inability of the parents to shelter their chicks from rain or cold nights).

**Cuckoo:** A juvenile at Rye Harbour was close to fledging on July 10 so we may expect to see young birds almost anywhere in the next month or so

**Swift:** Widespread reports of birds heading south, apparently leaving a wet and windy Britain, included counts of 1500+ heading south on July 6 but that was matched with a report of 500 coming in off the sea at Worthing that day. Locally no birds were seen over Havant between July 7 and 11 but one or two have been seen on July 12 and 13.

**Sand Martin:** Daily reports of these leaving Britain since June 29 with a count of 500 at Dungeness on July 11 - I think these are genuine departures.

**House Martin:** The few local breeding birds had the first of their young airborne over my garden on July 12 - previously two or three adults were seen on most days but July 12 brought 5 birds over and twice I saw what I assumed to be a youngster being fed in mid-air.

**Yellow Wagtail:** A report of more than 50 at the Elmley Marshes on Sheppey (north west Kent) indicates that some still breed in southern England. Another report from Dungeness on July 11 indicated that at least one bird was already leaving us.

**Common Redstart:** A juvenile seen at the Blashford Lakes on July 12 was presumably already leaving us

**Golden Oriole:** The last reports of arriving migrants were on June 8 and now, on July 1, the Dungeness RSPB reserve reports the first female heading south

**Corn Bunting:** A winter flock of up to 52 birds was seen at Cheesfoot Head near Winchester from January 9 to 12 and this was followed by two more reports (from the Fareham and Andover areas) in March but since then the only report of Corn Bunting in Hampshire that I have seen was of one heard singing at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon valley on May 23. Unlike their apparent demise in Hampshire it seems that reports from Sussex have actually increased this summer - I have 16 reports of them since April 1, including reports from Chidham and the Funtington area both close to the Hampshire border. Latest encouraging news is of an estimated 10 territories in a small area of the Downs south of Amberley on July 7

**American Robin:** A second hand report of one in a garden close to the Southampton Docks on July 8 could possibly be of a ship-borne arrival (but could equally be a case of mistaken identity caused by the reddish tinge of a juvenile **Blackbird's** plumage)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Brown Hawker:** The first to emerge were reported at Rye Harbour on June 23 but the first to be seen in Hampshire (at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood) was not reported until July 6

**Golden Ringed dragonfly:** One found near Rye Bay on July 5 was at first thought to be unusual (far from the nearest known site for the species in the Ashdown Forest) but a look at the recent book on The Dragonflies of Sussex shows that there are several established colonies in the Rother Valley/Hastings area (and during the period immediately following their emergence most dragonflies range widely and far from water before returning to breeding sites)

**Red-veined Darter:** Proof that some larvae had survived the winter at Rye Harbour came on June 30 when one exuvia (empty larval case) was found there. Four insects seen at Sandwich Bay on June 26 may have been cross-Channel vagrants but could also have emerged at a British site

## Butterflies

**30 species named in recent reports** including a hint of migrants with **Clouded Yellow** and **Painted Lady** (plus **several migrant moths**)

**Clouded Yellow:** Two at Portland on July 12 were the first seen anywhere since May 22

**Purple Hairstreak:** No reports of these forming clouds round the tops of oaks so far but there were sightings at five sites including one on a Gorse Bush on the west side of Pagham Harbour on July 5

**White-letter Hairstreak:** Brighton still has a few Elms that have not succumbed to the beetle-borne fungus that has killed these trees elsewhere and so (with the help of the local Fire Brigade's 'cherry picker' high lift platform) 24 of these butterflies were found there on July 5

**Purple Emperor:** The Vyne National Trust property north of Basingstoke is not, so far as I know, a regular Purple Emperor site but on July 8 a lady called Anne Brewerton had one in view there for 30 minutes during which time it even landed on her shoe!

**Painted Lady:** One was seen on Thorney Island on July 8 by Barry Collins, the first of the year for our local Havant area but the sixteenth report since April 27 when two of these butterflies were seen at Portland. July 12 brought another sighting at Durlston.

**Marbled White:** One was seen on July 8 in a Langstone garden near Wade Court where there is no established colony but this is not unusual for these strong flying butterflies (especially taking recent strong winds into consideration) but it did remind me that this species are well adapted to extending their range since the females, unlike those of many other species which carefully select the plant on which to lay eggs, just fly over an area of grassland and scatter their eggs in much the same way that a damaged bomber plane might jettison its bombs without any thought of a particular target. Another was seen on the same day away from a regular site - it was on the western fringes of Chichester beside Clay Lane.

**Grayling:** The first has already been reported at Durlston on July 4 but so far there has only been one other report (from Portland on July 12)

## Moths

**Six-belted Clearwing (0382 *Bembecia scopigera*):** Not new (first seen in Thanet area on June 26) but on July 5 reported to be flourishing along the coast around Hastings despite being rare nationally

**Syndemis musculana (0986):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Grey Tortrix (1020 *Cnephasa stephensiana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Light Grey Tortrix (1024 *Cnephasia incertana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 4

**White-triangle Button (1037 *Acleris holmiana*):** First somewhere in Sussex on July 8

***Acleris forsskaleana* (1036):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Strawberry Tortrix (1039 *Acleris comariana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Rhomboid tortrix (1042 *Acleris rhombana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 4

***Crambus perlella* (1302):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

***Catoptria falsella* (1316 *Catoptria falsella*):** First in Thanet area of Kent on July 7

**Water Veneer (1331 *Acentria ephemerella*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Ringed China-mark (1348 *Parapoynx stratiotat*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Dark Bordered Pearl (1356a = *Evergestis limbata*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 10

**Dark Marbled Tabby (1403a = *Duponchelia fovealis*):** First somewhere in Sussex on July 8

***Orthopygia glaucinalis* (1415 *Orthopygia glaucinalis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Large emerald (1666 *Geometra papilionaria*):** First at Shoreham on July 10

**Shaded Broad-bar (1732 *Scotopteryx chenopodiata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 8

**Phoenix The (1754 *Eulithis prunata*):** First at Shoreham on July 10

**July Highflyer (1777 *Hydriomena furcata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Dark Umber (1792 *Philereme transversata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 9

**Lead-coloured Pug (1814 *Eupithecia plumbeolata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 8

**Yarrow Pug (1841 *Eupithecia millefoliata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 10

**Clouded Magpie (1885 *Abraxas sylvata*):** First somewhere in Sussex on or before July 8

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** One in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on July 5 was only the eleventh of the year (since Feb 10) and has been followed by one other at Edburton (north of Brighton) on July 12 but no sign of a mass invasion so far

**Brown-tail (2029 *Euproctis chrysorrhoea*):** Our unwelcome but irrepressible friend first took wing at Pagham Harbour on Jul 1

**Scarce Footman (2047 *Eilema complana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Scarlet Tiger (2068 *Callimorpha dominula*):** When three were found flying in Friston Forest on June 28 they were hailed as a new addition to the Sussex county moth list but publication of this news in the local Eastbourne newspaper has brought numerous reports of this moth having been seen in various places within the town of Eastbourne (the reports are substantiated

and seem to indicate that this species has abandoned the Sussex countryside for its urban gardens)

**Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing (2110 *Noctua fimbriata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Least Yellow Underwing (2112 *Noctua interjecta*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Double Square-spot (2128 *Xestia triangulum*):** First somewhere in Sussex on or before July 10

**Orache Moth (2304 *Trachea atriplicis*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 10 (uncommon migrant)

**Lunar-spotted Pinion (2319 *Cosmia pyralina*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Reddish Light Arches (2323 *Apamea sublustris*):** First at Edburton (north of Brighton) before July 12

**Crescent Striped (2325 *Apamea oblonga*):** First at Rye Harbour on July 12

**Double Lobed (2336 *Apamea ophiogramma*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 4

**Rosy Minor (2342 *Mesoligia literosa*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on July 8

**Common Rustic (2343 *Mesapamea secalis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on July 1

**Small Dotted Buff (2345 *Photedes minima*):** First somewhere in Sussex on or before July 8

**Dusky Sallow (2352 *Eremobia ochroleuca*):** First somewhere in Sussex on or before July 10

**Silver Y (2441 *Autographa gamma*):** A small influx reported in the Thanet area of Kent on July 9

## Other Insects

**Myathropa florea hoverfly:** One seen on the umbel of a Danewort flower in Havant on July 10

**Andrena thoracica solitary bee:** Thriving at coastal sites around Hastings though lost from most inland heat sites

**Soldier Beetle (*Cantharis livida*):** First report from Brook Meadow in Emsworth where several were seen on July 8

**Harlequin Ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis conspicua*):** One found in Brook Meadow on July 10 - this form of Harlequin beetle is mainly black with two big red spots plus the 'white cheeks' which are a feature of most Harlequins

**Meadow Grasshopper:** Adults found at Durlston on July 10

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** First report of adults from the Lydden area of Kent on July 4, then heard singing at Durlston on July 10

**Dark Bush Cricket:** Adults found on July 10 both at Durlston and Brook Meadow in Emsworth

## PLANTS

**Square-stalked St John's Wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*):** This was flowering in the marshy SSSI at Warblington on July 10 and at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on July 12 - my thanks to Brian for unknowingly correcting my wrong identification of

the Warblington plants which I put down as **Hairy St John's Wort** without checking (**Hairy** grows in dry places, **Square-stalked** in damp meadows)

**Corn Cockle:** The 'wildflower garden' at the south end of Lymbourne Road in Havant now has a great show of these

**Ragged Robin:** Plants still flowering at Warblington on July 10 included one with pure white flowers

**Red Goosefoot:** Starting to 'flower' on July 10 along with **Common Orache** and **Sea Purslane**

**Marsh Mallow:** Flowering at Rye Harbour on July 12 and so probably to be found on the west side of the Cobnor peninsula in Chichester Harbour under the oak wood close to Cobnor Point.

**Pencilled cranesbill (*Geranium versicolor*):** I found a plant of this flowering in the roadside grass of Pook Lane (north of the A27) on July 10, the first time I have come across this species. No doubt originally of garden origin this had established itself in the roadside grass where it is regularly mown, so not as large a plant as it would be in a garden - luckily I came on it when there had been sufficient time since the last mowing for it to put up flowers

**Least Yellow Sorrel:** A very good find on July 5 by Brian Fellows of plants growing up through tarmac in the 'garden' of a house on a busy Emsworth road. Brian Fellows took a photo contrasting this species with the common species

**Procumbent Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*)** side by side, bringing out the three significant points of difference used by botanists to separate the species (1 Overall size of plants, 2 Flowers of Least are borne singly - in the common species they are usually in twos, 3 Leaves of Least are plain light green in colour, those of the common species are often brown or bronze) Looking at these photos has made me want to revisit the two sites where I have found what I believe to be the Least species - at both the plants satisfy the first two criteria but do not have the pure green leaves (maybe they are a garden cultivar?)

**Alsike Clover:** I came on this for the first time this year flowering in the Warblington area on July 10

**Hairy Vetchling (*Lathyrus hirsutus*):** Plenty of this flowering on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' (its only Hampshire site) on July 11 after it started to flower there on June 7 this year.

**Rowan:** Berries now ripening on all tree - the first to be bright red were seen on July 11

**Blackberry:** The first fruit were edible by July 10 on what I believe is known as the Himalayan Giant species which flourishes by the Hayling Billy trail in Havant

**Dropwort:** This plant has probably been flowering at various downland sites (including Catherington Down in our area) since mid-May but the first mention of it comes from Durlston on July 9. On July 10 I came on a cluster of plants flowering in the uncultivated 'garden' of the Warblington Farmhouse in Church Lane.

**Horse Chestnut:** By July 10 the conker cases on trees in the Havant area appeared to be full size but the leaves on nearly every tree are very badly damaged by the larvae of the moth **Cameraria ohridella** which has spread through Europe in recent years and reached Britain as recently as 2002 but is now to be found everywhere.

**Wild Angelica:** Flowering in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on July 10

**Amphibious Bistort:** A pink raft of these flowers on a pool in the Brede High Wood area (Rother Valley near Rye) on July 6 is the first mention of this species in flower this year

**Blue Pimpernel:** I have not yet personally come across this plant growing in the wild but on July 10 I was told of a garden in the Warblington area of Havant where it is prolific and has come up there for many years

**Phacelia tanacetifolia:** On July 10 I came on a couple of plants in flower in the Warblington cemetery extension where it was presumably introduced with last year's sowing of Wildflower seed.

**Teazel:** Although reported to be in flower at Durlston on June 24 there have been no other reports of it until the first local sighting at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 8

**Corn Marigold:** Single flowers were seen on July 10 at two places where wildflower seen was sown last year - the Lymbourne Road 'triangle' and the Warblington cemetery extension

**Chicory:** A large mass of plants is now flowering at the east end of the Warblington cemetery extension, presumably after being successfully introduced there last year

**Autumn Hawkbit:** First flowers found in Havant on July 10

**Lesser Hawkbit:** This had started to flower at Durlston on July 4 and I found the first local examples at Warblington on July 10

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Common (Harbour) Porpoise:** Two seen off Ventnor on July 6 were only the second report of the year after a single was seen off Portland on May 6

**Long-tailed Thresher Shark (*Alopias vulpinus*):** First report for year is of one off Portland on July 12. Used to be called **Common Thresher** and is still sometimes called **Fox Shark** this one was probably after **Mackerel**. One caught by a trawler off Cornwall in Nov 2007 was 5 metres long and weighed 568 Kg to set a British record

**Roe Deer:** These usually have a single kid but one seen at Durlston on July 12 had **twins** with her

**Sunfish (*Mola mola*):** These large fish with the shape of a round dinner-plate swimming on its edge are not uncommon nowadays in the western end of the Channel and the first I have heard of this year was seen from Portland on July 9

**Cuttlefish:** Plenty of **Cuttlefish 'bones'** washed up on the Warblington shore on July 10 but the earliest report this year came from the north Kent coast on May 29 when 160 were counted in a 200 metre stretch of beach.

**Hare:** Any Formula One enthusiast watching last week-end's Silverstone Grand Prix on July 6 will have seen **two different Hares out-running the racing cars** which left the track in the rain and disturbed the Hares from their trackside vantage points

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 7 - 13 (WEEK 27 OF 2008)**

[Thu 10 July](#)

### **A walk to Warblington**

Serendipity accompanied me on this walk during which unforeseen circumstances yielded rich pickings in the way of unexpected plants.

I set off through the Arts Centre carpark on the Billy Trail where my first chance find was of two fresh **Sweetbriar rose flowers** (so much prettier than **Dog** or **Field Roses**) peeping out from the huge bank of these plants on which all the other flowers are long gone. Then, just around the corner in the Lymbourne triangle wildflower garden, the first **Corn Marigold** had come out among this year's excessive show of **Corn Cockles**. Pausing to admire these flowers my eye was caught by a large hoverfly resting on a now fully open flower of **Danewort** - noting its bold pattern of black lines on a bright yellow abdomen and the absence of striping on its thorax I am pretty sure that it was **Myathropa florea** when I checked it out after returning home.

The walk down the twitchel path to Pook Lane was pretty dull, with many reminders of Council weedkilling, but the **Pellitory of the Wall** plants which have escaped death were in full flower (though requiring close examination even to see that flowers exist hidden under the leaves!), and the sad remnants of the once great display of **Shining Cranesbill** were doing their best to recover with hundreds of tiny pink flowers on the withered plants.

Reaching Pook Lane I found the footbridge over the A27, which leads directly into the Warblington Farm area, was closed for repairs, and signs pointed me to a long detour up Pook Lane and the A27 underpass. Suppressing my annoyance I set out up the road but before I had gone a hundred yards I came on two new plants for my year list in the roadside grass - **Autumn Hawkbit** and what I could only describe as **Dove's Foot Cranesbill with flowers the size of Greater Stitchwort** and similarly white in colour. These baffled me until I got home and checked my books to find the plant was **Pencilled Cranesbill** which I don't recall coming across (in or out of gardens) before so I had assumed the plant would be of similar dimensions to the large plants of **Meadow** or **French Cranesbill** which are not uncommon hereabouts. That may well be true, but this specimen had chosen to grow in a place where it is regularly close mown and its attempts to flower between mowings are naturally on a stunted plant. Nearby was another **Cranesbill with minute flowers**, seemingly **Small-flowered Cranesbill**, but a look at its flower pedicels showed

long hairs, not the pure close-cropped 'down' which distinguishes **Small-flowered**, so this was another stunted plant of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill**.

A little further up the road I was accosted by another walker with a similar interest in wild flowers, and in the course of conversation he told me that his garden in a nearby cul-de-sac regularly had lots of **Blue Pimpernel** (the sub-species of **Scarlet Pimpernel** which is listed as 'very rare' in the Hants Flora and which I personally have never seen) as well as a growing population of **Common Spotted Orchids** which now number over 200. My diverted route gave me one more new flower on the eastern side of the A27 underpass, **Alsike Clover** looking like large flowered **White Clover** but having the lower two thirds of each floret coloured a dark red.

No more finds resulted from my diversion but when I got to the Warblington Farmhouse I found several very unexpected plants of **Dropwort** flowering in the long-uncultivated wild garden (just inside the gateway so easily seen from the roadside). Continuing down Church Lane I found both **Round-leaved Fluellen** and **Least Yellow Sorrel** (recently introduced in soil supporting a garden rose bush?) flowering in the main cemetery before heading east past the new cemetery extension where three fresh **Comma butterflies** caused me to pause, and while there I looked over the gate to the east end of the extension where much wild-flower seed was sown last year. I had thought none of the flowers had come up this year but a distant blue haze seen from the gateway called for investigation so I went in to have a look and was well rewarded. The blue colour came from a great mass of **Chicory** in full flower and among it were a few **Common Poppies** and at least one plant of **Viper's Bugloss** drowned in a sea of **Wild Carrot**. Towards the southern end of this wall of weeds and **Chicory** I discovered a vehicle track through the weeds leading to what seems to be a hidden part of the cemetery with half a dozen graves that have no markings (possibly they were dug as trials to test the success of the drainage of this area which used to be waterlogged with the run off slurry from the adjacent farmyard requiring a lot of drainage work before the burial ground was fit for use!). If anyone goes to have a look at the flowers here they should go into this hidden area for in it I found a couple of plants of the lovely **Phacelia tanacetifolia** which is planted by some farmers to attract bees to come and pollinate their commercial crops.

Only now did I reach my intended destination, the marshy SSSI east of the old cemetery where I wanted to look for flowers on the many leaves previously seen there which seemed to be of **Creeping Jenny**, and today (for the very first time in years as I normally only came here in the Bird Census season which ends with June) I found those yellow flowers along with the **Bog Pimpernel** that I found on my last visit. Today's surprise among the rushes was a **white flowered plant of Ragged Robin**, and near the shore I found **Lesser Hawkbit** in flower for the first time this year.

I came home along the shore passing a cluster of **Golden Sapphire** plants which all had half-open flowers, and among the debris on the shore were quite a few **Cuttlefish 'bones'**. The mass of **Sea Purslane** was also showing yellow anthers to indicate flowering, reminding me that earlier in the outing I had added 'flowering' **Red Goosefoot** and **Common Orache** to my year list

Reaching the Langstone seawall I found the local **Swan pair with all six cygnets** on the water with the tide nearly high. Around the pond and in the pony field to the north at least **28 Egrets** were present, **at least five of them showing the pale legs of juveniles**. Four of these youngsters were in the little 'private section' at the north end of the pond where the water disappears behind the reeds (the four were visible around the entrance but others may have been behind the reeds).

Afternoon was turning to evening as I neared home and both **Blackbird** and **Song Thrush** were heard singing to add to the **Goldfinch** and **Reed Warblers** heard earlier in the walk and those heard earlier in the day (**Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Wren** and **Dunnock**).

To end this satisfactory outing I was **able to eat a good half-dozen of the large 'cultivated' Blackberries** growing by the Billy Trail - within a few days I will be able to gather enough to make a Blackberry and Apple pudding.

### **SUMMARY FOR JUNE 30 - JULY 6 (WEEK 26 OF 2008)**

Increasing numbers of **Balearic Shearwaters** led me to refresh my memory on the recent history of this species. The only rarities this week have been **Black-winged Stilt** at Beaulieu and **Melodious Warbler** at Portland but most of the week's news is taken up with the beginnings of autumn passage.

**Golden Ringed dragonflies** are new this week, as are **Lulworth Skipper, Chalkhill Blue** and **Grayling butterflies**. New moths include the **Yellow-tail** (close relative of the dreaded **Brown-tail**) and a very rare **Sussex Emerald** which is not to be found in Sussex

Three very colourful new flowers this week are **Marsh Woundwort, Betony** and **Round-headed Rampion**. Another very colourful plant, **Red Hemp-nettle**, is only likely to be seen at Rye Harbour (or on the Rye Bay website), but the local high spot of the week was a find of **Moth Mullein** at Prinsted (also locally noteworthy was **Crown Vetch** at its only Havant site). Common plants that everyone can enjoy from now on include **Great Willowherb, Fleabane, Vervain** and **Golden Samphire** on the harbour shores

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** One seen off the north Kent coast on July 1 was very unexpected so far south at this time of year - it was not in breeding plumage so presumably one of last year's young

**Black-necked Grebe:** The last report of winter birds in Langstone Harbour which got into any news that I see was of 9 birds seen from the Oysterbeds on Feb 24 but a couple of these birds were reported at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood up to Mar 21 and a single bird was in the Pagham Harbour lagoon until Mar 31. That seemed to be the end of the winter birds but a few occasionally stay on in southern England and they have bred in Hampshire but an isolated report of one at Rye Harbour on May 19, and now in this week's news a report of one in Langstone Harbour on June 6, are more likely to be of vagrants rather than breeders.

**Balearic Shearwater:** On July 3 Portland reported 40 of these offshore and on July 4 that number increased to 60, beating an estimated count of 50 seen passing

Portland on Jan 13. As these birds are said to be a rare and endangered species, while at the same time apparently increasing in number in the English Channel each year, I have had a look into the available info on the species.

It seems that until about 30 years ago the Shearwaters found in the Mediterranean were regarded as variants of the Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*), but they were then separated off as Mediterranean Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*), and when *Birds of Hampshire* was published in 1993 these two are the only ones which are listed, the Mediterranean Shearwater having only four Hampshire records to its name. The situation was similar in Sussex with a single bird seen in 1992 and then none until 1996 when 6 were seen, and in 1997 another 5 appeared while 1998 saw the start of the more frequent sightings nowadays with more than 25 seen.

The 1999 Sussex Bird Report is the last to list Mediterranean Shearwater as *P. yelkouan*, sightings in the 2000 report are under the same English name but with *P. mauretanicus* as the scientific name, reflecting the designation of these western Mediterranean based birds as a separate species (*P. yelkouan* is still the name for the birds found in the eastern Mediterranean but they do not come into the English Channel - and never did!)

Coming back to the increasing numbers seen off our south coast I have no firm information - global warming? lack of food in the Mediterranean? more and better observer coverage here?

**Storm Petrel:** Still being seen in the Channel - on June 29 one was seen from Sandy Point on Hayling and on July 2 one flew west past Christchurch Harbour

**Mute Swan:** The saga of the six cygnets continues. I think we can be sure that the Langstone Pond pair do have six surviving cygnets and that they do wander away from the Langbrook stream mouth at times but the pair seen with six young on a couple of occasions in Emsworth Harbour do not necessarily come from Langstone as on July 4 I saw a family of this description on the Thorney Little Deeps and I doubt the Langstone family would climb the high Thorney seawall to get to the Little Deeps - so maybe a pair did breed on the Little Deeps in some new hidden nest site and it is this family that has twice visited Emsworth Harbour.

A second 'surprise' Swan family was 'discovered' on July 2 by Brian Fellows in Emsworth marina where they must have nested late as their four cygnets are still tiny compared to the family of six. Two of these four have the pale white down of 'Polish' birds.

**Brent Goose:** Fewer than usual seem to have stayed in Langstone Harbour this summer. A group of 13 seen at the mouth of the Langbrook stream on Apr 22 were thought likely to be staying but the only reports since then have been of a group of three birds seen in the harbour on June 6 and 14,

**Tufted Duck:** These are late breeders and the first brood of ducklings was seen at Rye Harbour on June 26 with a second brood of five tiny ducklings on the Thorney Little Deeps on July 4

**Goosander:** One or two pairs have bred in the Avon valley in recent years and so reports of a single female at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on June 2 and 22 are not unexpected - hopefully they do not reflect failed breeding.

**Red Kite:** On June 15 one flew low over a conservation work party at Brook Meadow in Emsworth and wagged its tail in approval of their efforts.

**Eagle species:** On June 28 a non-birding couple were driving from South Harting over Harting Down towards Chichester and had to slow down and swerve to avoid an Eagle hungrily devouring prey and not going to let anyone else muscle in on its meal. The bird was almost certainly an escape (maybe one recently lost in France) and perhaps its familiarity with humans accounted for its lack of fear when the car came close to it. A similar sighting on June 29 of an Eagle eating carrion on the road near Kirdford (headwaters of the R Arun some 25 km north east of Harting Down) may have been the same bird

**Osprey:** I have now seen eight reports of Ospreys heading south since the first was seen near Canterbury on June 11. On June 29 one reached Langstone Harbour and was still there next day, seen fishing from the Hayling Oysterbeds. Latest reports are of one in Poole Harbour and another heading for the coast at Worthing, both on July 1. Late news of a bird staying in Chichester Harbour during June comes in Keith Betton's monthly summary of Hampshire birding for June - he reports sightings from the Black Point area of Hayling on five dates between June 7 and 28.

**Kestrel:** A family of four young in a nest on Christchurch Priory were said to be near leaving their nest on July 4 and I assume other broods are currently fledging which means that we may soon enjoy the sight of the parents teaching their young to catch prey by hovering - during this process lines of up to half a dozen Kestrels can be seen hovering, spaced out up to 100 metres apart, over open country such as Sinah Common on Hayling

**Peregrine:** The people of Paulsgrove, an area of dense housing by the M27 at the foot of Portsdown, are currently able to watch a pair of adult Peregrines perching on electricity pylons as a base from which to catch local pigeons and take them to two young still in their nest high on the chalk cliff of the big Chalk Pit that is visible from anywhere in the Portsmouth Harbour area.

**Quail:** Two heard in crops at Over Wallop near Andover on July 1- the fourteenth site where they have been reported this year

**Oystercatcher:** Recent correspondence on HOSLIST has shown that it is not uncommon for Oystercatchers and other wader species that would breed on shingle beaches to nest on flat rooves of buildings, especially if the rooves are covered with pea gravel (intended, I think, to prolong the life of the tarred felt roofing material, not to simulate a beach environment). Oystercatchers have nested on a Fareham roof for several years and now Geoff Farwell tells us of a pair doing so on a Portsmouth office roof

**Black-winged Stilt:** Two birds seen and photographed by a good many birders in the Beaulieu River/Pond at Beaulieu village on June 30 were initially reported as

female with a juvenile (suggesting local breeding) but later thought by more experienced observers to be a male and female pair, very likely the pair which had just flown south from a failed attempt at breeding in Cheshire. It seems that this was a one day stand, the birds stopping to feed up before heading south-east across the channel.

**Little Ringed Plover:** An increase in the number of adults at The Vyne (National Trust estate at Basingstoke) is said to be a sign that these birds are already moving south on their autumn passage

**Ruff:** One was back at Rye Harbour on July 4, the first seen there since Apr 6 and so presumably on autumn passage

**Lapwing:** Many birds have now left their breeding sites and returned to the coast so I was surprised to find 6 birds still present on the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket on July 1 (there may have been more as I did not look at the areas where most birds have been seen on previous visits)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The arrival of 5 summer plumaged birds at Christchurch Harbour on June 28 seems to mark the start of the return of the Iceland birds. On June 29 Pulborough Brooks reported some back there and 3 were back at Ferrybridge (Weymouth). On July 2 some 20 were seen at Farlington Marshes, probably returning birds but the report did not say if they were summer plumaged to confirm this. Looking at reports from the Oare Marshes (near Faversham in north Kent) I see that the flock there has been increasing since mid-June (when just one bird was present) to a total of 330+ on July 4 but I am not sure if these are returning Icelandic birds, non-breeders with no settled abode, or even birds of the main race (not the Icelandic sub-species). Looking further back I see that the Oare Marshes attracted around 200 birds in mid-April but then presumably left to breed and are now returning.

**Whimbrel:** The first autumn passage bird flew over Sway (New Milton) on June 28, another went over Wareham Forest (west of Poole Harbour) on June 29, a third was heard over Durlston on June 30 and the first passed over Portland on July 3. One or two summering birds have remained in Chichester Harbour (two seen on June 3), Langstone Harbour (3 on June 6) and Southampton Water (1 on June 9)

**Spotted Redshank:** The first arrived back in Kent on June 9 but it was not until June 30 that the first returning bird was reported elsewhere on the south coast (one summer plumaged bird at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour)

**Greenshank:** Two at Christchurch Harbour on July 3 were said to be the first there for some time and both Brian Fellows (on July 2) and myself (on July 4) heard their calls at the Thorney Deeps. On July 5 two more were heard on the shore of Southampton Water indicating a general movement of passage birds

**Green Sandpiper:** These two are starting to move through in good numbers - on July 2 5 were at Pulborough Brooks and by July 4 the count at Rye Harbour was up to 7 - on July 5 the first was seen at The Vyne near Basingstoke

**Common Sandpiper:** These are now numerous and widespread along the south coast

**Med Gull:** Juvenile **Black-headed Gulls** are now being seen at several coastal sites and no doubt we will soon be seeing the duller plumaged juvenile **Med Gulls** locally as 34 juveniles were already fledged at Rye Harbour by June 28 when 3 juveniles were visible at Newtown Harbour on the IoW. Another sign of the times, following the end of the breeding season, is the gathering of gulls at their 'summer holiday resorts' where they can feel safe during their moult to replace all their worn feathers with a new set to carry them through the coming winter. One such place for **Med Gulls** is the Badminton Common gravel pits in the south east of the New Forest area near Fawley, and on July 2 **more than 174 Med Gulls** were already there.

**Black-headed Gull:** On June 30 ginger plumaged juveniles were seen locally at Budds Farm pools and in Langstone Harbour at the mouth of the Langbrook stream and on July 4 a gathering of more than 100 Black-headed Gulls on the Thorney Little Deeps was a reminder that they too are coming to the end of their breeding season and moving to moult areas (the water of the Little Deeps is not one of these but there are big areas of open grassland around the Great Deeps which will suit them)

**Yellow-legged Gull:** This species breeds in the Mediterranean (a few now breed on the south coast of England, sometimes pairing with local Herring Gulls) but many arrive here post-breeding and a sizeable flock builds up at the head of Southampton Water (Eling Great Marsh area) from July onwards. On July 2 the first seven of these gulls could be seen looking across the water from Redbridge on the Southampton side and by August the flock may increase to the peak of 174 seen there in 2004. Other sites they favour are Poole Harbour (177 there on 31 July 2007) and Pagham Harbour (108 present on 2 Aug 2007).

As an aside here some Hampshire birders will recollect that the leucistic Herring Gull which has been seen in Southampton Water for five years or more was originally found (I think) by Richard Bonser when he was a student at Southampton University and the bird became unofficially known as *Larus argentatus bonserii*. When making a Google search for Yellow-legged gull for this summary I mis-spelt *Larus michahellis* as *Larus micahellis* and Google gave me a link to Richard Bonser's current website (as he had made the same spelling error) so if anyone who has lost touch with him wants to know of his recent birding they should go to <http://www.freewebs.com/richbonser/>

**Little Tern:** Just one of the thirty chicks hatched at the Hayling Oysterbeds was still alive on July 1 but it has already been seen airborne (just lifting briefly off the ground as it exercises its wings) and it seems to know where to take cover from aggressive gulls when its parents are away fishing so there is a good chance that it will survive

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** These remain rarities in Hampshire so a sighting of one eating apples in a garden five miles from Alresford on July 3 is of interest.

**Tawny Owl:** On July 2 I was told that hesitant hooting coming from the trees lining the Hayling Billy Trail just north of the A27, where the track runs parallel to Lower Grove Road, suggested that a recently fledged young owl had recently moved in

there. I suspect that the night-long noise from the A27 may not be to the liking of the owl's sensitive hearing and the bird may well seek a more peaceful site elsewhere.

**Swift:** Increased numbers are being seen at many sites, presumably reflecting the increased need for parents to bring food to nests which now contain hungry young. This was reflected locally by the presence of 8 birds over my part of Havant on the evening of July 1.

**Sand Martin:** More than 800 flew south at Sandwich Bay on June 29 - failed breeders leaving already? By July 4 there had been reports of birds moving south at six other sites and a report of 9 juveniles at Cuckmere Haven near Beachy Head indicates that this is a normal end of breeding movement, not just the departure of failed breeders.

**Whinchat:** A male at Culver Down (near Bembridge, IoW) on July 4 is the first indication of the autumn departure of this species

**Melodious Warbler:** One was trapped at Portland on July 4 (another had been seen at Beachy Head on May 29)

**Long-tailed Tit:** On July 3 a combined flock of **38 Long-tailed Tits**, accompanied by **Blue** and **Great Tits**, moved past the Sandwich Bay Observatory

**Corvid flocks:** On July 4 the Sandwich Bay Observatory reported a mixed flock of **560 Crows and Jackdaws** in a field near the Observatory and on July 5 a flock of **100 Crows** were on the shore of Southampton Water at Weston

**Crossbill:** Latest reports are of 7 at Wareham Forest on June 29, 11 over Christchurch Harbour and 3 over Durlston on June 30. Since then July 3 brought 13 to Portland and 7 to Stedham Common near Midhurst

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Golden-ringed Dragonfly:** First of the year in Pamber Forest, north of Basingstoke, on June 30 and another was seen at Iping Common near Midhurst on July 3

**Common Darter:** Several were seen in the Peasmarsh area near Rye on July 1

### Butterflies

**Small Skipper:** After early isolated reports on June 17, 22 and 24 they began to emerge in strength from June 28 when they were seen in Havant Thicket, and on June 30 more than 200 were seen in the Friston Forest area near Eastbourne. I saw my first around the Havant Thicket area on July 1 when more were seen at Farley Mount near Winchester

**Lulworth Skipper:** First seen at Durlston on June 29

**Green-veined White:** Regular sightings of the first brood ceased at the end of May and a report of 2 at Gosport on June 19 was probably the early start of

the summer brood. Another two were seen in woods at the west end of Portsdown on June 24 and one was seen in the New Forest on July 2, then on July 4 they started to emerge in force with sightings of four in the Kingley Vale area north of Chichester, two on the Langstone South Moors and one in Pamber Forest north of Basingstoke.

**Small Copper:** A very fresh specimen at Stockbridge Down on June 30 was probably the second of the summer brood following one near Newhaven on June 28 (none seen previously since May 31). On July 4 two were at Kingley Vale in the Chichester area

**Chalkhill Blue:** 5 seen on July 1 on the Downs behind Brighton were the first reported this year and they were out on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on July 4

**Painted Lady:** One seen near the shore in the Worthing area on July 1 may have been a newly arrived migrant but it has not yet been followed up by others

**Grayling:** First of the year seen at Durlston on July 4

**Gatekeeper:** In 2007 the first was out in Hampshire on June 3 but this year we had to wait until June 23 for a single to appear at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester. The next were 2 on Thorney Island on June 27 followed by 1 at Stockbridge Down on June 30 but maybe they have now got going with 6 seen near Brighton (and 1 in Havant Thicket) on July 1 - since then there have been reports from four other areas.

## Moths

**Orange Pine Twist (1001 *Lozotaeniodes formosanus*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

***Eucosma obumbratana* (1202):** First at Portland on July 2

**The Lackey (1634 *Malacosoma neustria*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

**The Drinker (1640 *Philudoria potato*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

**The Lappet (1642 *Gastropacha quercifolia*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

**Sussex Emerald (1672 *Thalera fimbrialis*):** First at Dungeness on June 30 - this is a very rare species in England, found only on shingle sites (although the foodplant is the universally found Yarrow) and no longer found anywhere in Sussex.

**Bordered Beauty (1907 *Epione repandaria*):** First at Portland on July 2

**Early Thorn (1917 *Selenia dentaria*):** First in Sussex on July 2 (early for a moth normally appearing in August)

**Brussels Lace (1945 Cleorodes lichenaria):** First in Sussex on July 2

**The Vapourer (2026 Orgyia antiqua):** First of year at Horsham on June 28

**Yellow-tail (2030 Euproctis similis):** First in Sussex on July 2

**Dingy Footman (2044 Eilema griseola):** First at Dungeness on July 2

**Silvery Arches (2149 Polia hepatica):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

**Grey Arches (2150 Polia nebulosa):** First at Portland on June 30 - only the fifth record there in recent years

**Brown-line Bright-eye (2192 Mythimna conigera):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on July 4

## Other Insects

**Volucella pellucens:** At least three of these large hoverflies (black with a distinctive white band around the 'mid-riff') were seen in Havant Thicket area on July 1, typically hovering more than 2 metres off the ground.

**Four-jawed Spider (Tetragnatha extensa):** First mention of this common wetland spider comes from Brian Fellows who saw and Photographed on Thorney Island on July 2. This is sometimes called a **Long-jawed Spider**

## PLANTS

**White Water Lily:** I don't know how long these have been flowering but they first went onto my list on July 1 when I visited the Leigh Park Gardens Lake

**Slender St John's Wort:** Plenty of these colourful plants newly flowering in Havant Thicket on July 1

**Fat Hen:** This very mundane plant had started to flower by July 4

**Glasswort species:** On July 2 the Rye Bay website carried a piece by Cliff Dean outlining some of the history behind the use of these species in the glass making process. The use of **Glasswort** as a source of soda ash required as a flux in the glass making process was seemingly first recognized by Venetian glassmakers recently arrived in England but use of the plants ceased in the late 18th century when the necessary soda ash began to be produced on an industrial scale after one Nicholas Leblanc patented a process using salt, sulphuric acid, limestone and coal. This process caused so much pollution that it led to the first modern air pollution legislation, when the British Parliament passed the first of several Alkali Acts in 1863.

**Spanish Broom:** This must have been in flower for some time but I first noticed it at Emsworth Marina on July 4

**Crown Vetch:** The plants which have survived the mowing of the council flats 'garden' in Wakefords Way here in Leigh Park were in full flower on July 1

**Great Willowherb:** First reported from Emsworth on June 25 this was flowering abundantly by June 30

**Hoary Willowherb:** First flowers seen in the Havant Thicket area on July 1

**Small Nettle:** First sighting of this in flower was at Prinsted market garden plot on July 4

**Hop:** First flowers seen on a male plant here in Havant on June 30

**Fool's Parsley:** Started to flower in the Havant area on June 30

**Knot-grass:** First flowers seen in Havant on June 30

**Pale Persicaria:** First found in flower in Stansted East Park on July 3

**Black Bindweed:** First flowers seen in Havant on June 30 in new soil introduced after road works

**Rhododendron ponticum:** The wild 'pest' species had started flowering in the Havant Thicket area on July 1

**Yellow Loosestrife:** The native species (not Dotted Loosestrife) was in flower at two places in the Havant Thicket area on July 1

**Vervain:** First found flowering on Thorney Island on June 30

**Moth Mullein:** This is a plant that I have not come across before so I had a 'lifetime tick' when I found a plant at Prinsted on July 4 - see my diary page entry for that day for more detail

**Red Hemp-nettle:** Unlikely to be found in Hampshire nowadays but if you want to know what you are missing see recent pictures on the Rye Bay website (it is now flowering on shingle at Rye Harbour)

**Marsh Woundwort:** First flower found at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 29 and a good show seen in the Havant Thicket area on July 1

**Betony:** First found on July 1 on the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket.

**Round-headed Rampion:** Flowering on Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on June 28

**Fleabane:** Very nearly out on July 1 in more than one place - fully out in several places by July 4

**Golden Samphire:** Starting to flower on the Thorney seawall on July 2

**Michaelmas Daisies:** Flowers on garden escape plants in Havant on June 30

**Shaggy Soldier:** Plenty of this flowering in the Prinsted market garden plot by July 4

**Scented Mayweed:** Also found at Prinsted on July 4

**Lesser Burdock:** Flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 1

**Lesser Hawkbit:** First report of flowering from Durlston on July 4

**Stinking Hawksbeard:** Protecting plants at Rye Harbour from rabbit grazing with wire net fences has resulted in a good show of this rarity despite drought conditions - well in flower by July 3

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Slow-worm:** A photo of one swimming at Rye Harbour proves that they can do so (as if anyone thought they could not!)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 30 - JULY 6 (WEEK 26 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 4 July**

#### **Moth Mullein - this summer's discovery**

This afternoon I cycled east to Thorney Island and on to Prinsted with two or three objectives in mind - the first being to check for **Slender Hare's Ear** and **Pointed Snails** at the Thorney Great Deeps. No luck with either of these but my surprise here was to very nearly run over a **Shrew** behaving in a very un-Shrewlike manner on the broad track below the Thorney seawall between the Little and Great Deeps. Swerving at the last moment around this tiny creature I noted that its nose and whiskers were still twitching - in all other respects it was moribund - but I did not stop to find out more.

On the Little Deeps a hundred or more **Black-headed Gulls** was present, a sign of the transition from breeding to moulting. Also on the water was a **family of five tiny Tufted Ducklings** and, more surprisingly, **a pair of Swans with six well grown cygnets**. I guess this is the family which has been seen occasionally in Emsworth Harbour and their presence here suggests that they did nest somewhere out of sight on the Little Deeps this year, and that the birds seen in the harbour were not those from Langstone (which might have sailed along to Emsworth but would be unlikely to climb over the Thorney seawall to reach the Deeps). Before seeing them I had seen the **new Swan family with four very small cygnets** (two pale) that have presumably nested in Emsworth Marina - that theory being supported by the fact that I saw them on the quay just inside the marina after entering from Slipper Mill road - they had probably settled there after being fed by people in the first office/workshop on the left beyond the narrow footpath entrance (near which **Spanish Broom** is providing a bold splash of colour). Further into the marina area a new notice tells cyclists to dismount as they pass in front of the row of 'stilt houses', and by obeying this I found my first 'bush' of **Knot-grass** in flower, unlike the single first flower seen in Havant on June 30.

**Greenshank** calls could be heard near the Great Deeps and a single **Common Sandpiper** flew south over the sea, round the military fence to the Wickor Point area. On the seawall bank here I searched for young **Pointed Snails (Cochlicella acuta)**, finding many old, empty adult shells but no live youngsters - they will be more easily found on a really hot day when the ground temperature forces them to climb the nearest stem into cooler air rather than fry in their shells. I also found a good display of **Spiny Restharrow** and freshly flowering **Hawkweed Ox-tongue**.

Cycling east to Prinsted I made a detour to Thornham Point where plenty of **Dyers Greenweed** is in flower and, in a garden near the Boaters Diner, **Yellow Loosestrife** was flowering.

My final target area was the 'market garden plot' by the footpath leading west from Prinsted village towards Emsworth. Here I found lots of **Shaggy Soldier** plus **Scented Mayweed** and also added **Fat Hen** starting to flower, **Pale Persicaria** and **Redshank**, as well as **Small Nettle**.

Returning to the road I had just closed the single bar gate at the entrance to the field path when **a tall plant caught my eye among rank weeds by the entrance to an abandoned farmyard**. This plant was **well over a metre high and in the form of a three branched candlestick**. At the base of the plant the stem was clothed with a **dense cluster of hairless leaves, running up the stem in several ranks, each of a narrow triangular shape some 7cm long by 3 cm wide at the base which clasped the stem with cordate lobes either side**.

The three branches of the candlestick had each had many single flowers now replaced by round tough seed cases. Just one or two flowers remained at the top of each stem and I collected one stem tip for examination at home. **The flowers**, like the leaves, are arranged in three ranks up the stem, occurring alternately at intervals of 5mm with a narrow pointed bract having a single 1cm long pedicel in its axil. The pedicel has a single flower with a five pointed calyx (narrow segments about 6mm long) and a **five petalled white, pale rose tinted, flower 25mm across and of similar height** though the lowest petal is distinctly larger and flatter than the upper four which curve around to form a 'bonnet'. **The stem, pedicel and calyx are densely covered with patent glandular white hairs with no other hairs seen** (though I was only able to check the stem tip which I brought home).

Now for the interesting part of a Mullein - its flowers. **Each had five stamens, the lower two being longer and curving upwards to the bright orange anthers mounted so that they were decurrent down the filament. The top three were shorter and also had orange anthers which were mounted forming the top of a T shape across the filament**. In both the flowers I have examined one of the three upper stamens is smaller than the others and is fused with another, giving the impression that there are only two upper stamens. **All stamens are densely clothed in violet/purple hairs at the base but the two lower ones are almost free of hairs near the top while the upper ones have white hairs at the top of the filament**.

These features lead directly to **Moth Mullein (Verbascum blattaria)** in Stace's key, but Stace says that this species only grows to 1 metre (this plant was distinctly

higher) and that the corolla is usually yellow (this plant having pale white tinged rose pink petals).

The Hampshire Flora says that **Moth Mullein is a rare casual or garden escape**, and here in the village of Prinsted with its pretty thatched cottages and well stocked gardens I am pretty sure this plant has a garden origin though it was definitely never planted in its present site.

### Thu 3 July

#### Domestic disputes

A **pair of Magpies brought three fledged young into our garden** on June 9 and they have been present daily since then, acting out a 'growing up' process very similar to that of many human families and giving me much amusement as they do so.

For the first few days both parents were in constant attendance and there was much **wing flapping and begging for food by the young** which did not give the parents a moment's peace. One adult, presumably the male, soon got fed up with this and opted out of the baby care job, leaving it all to the presumed female though he did remain in the vicinity and would not do have joined in their defence against a predator (as when a local **Fox** once appeared on the lawn, putting all five birds into a frenzy until the **Fox** left 'their garden')

After a few days **the 'mother' began to get fed up with the constant pestering and began to drive off the youngsters**, though she did share any food she found with them (she seemed to favour the smallest of the three young and to feed it while driving off the largest of the three).

This **forced the youngsters to search for their own food** and I noticed one of them jumping into the air to pull a rose off a rosebush, then pull off the petals on the ground in a vain search for something tasty inside. These adventurous searches for food inevitably led them into patches of long grass where there might be hidden danger, and here a quick stab at a potential food item would be immediately followed by a leap into the air to avoid imagined retaliation.

Each morning I put out breadcrumbs and bird seed on the lawn when I top up the bird's water supply, and this brings in a small flock of **Woodpigeons** as well as smaller garden birds, and the arrival of bulky **Woodpigeons** from the air at first scattered the young **Magpies** which kept well clear of them. Within the past week I have noticed **the young Magpies getting bolder and 'testing their strength' by trying to chase off the bigger birds with varying success** - any sign of retaliation would send them running but there was a clear learning process with the **Magpies quickly learning their place in the pecking order** (keeping well clear of big aggressive pigeons but bullying any smaller birds) and learning 'sneak thief' tactics to take food when the 'pigeons backs were turned'.

My reason for writing about this today was a small drama illustrating the universal nature of this 'growing up process'. It is easy to see **parallels between the behaviour of the Magpie family and many human families** but this morning I was shown how such parallels extend right through the bird world. The action began with a big **Carrion Crow** flying in to perch in the apple tree over the lawn, causing immediate panic among the **Magpies**. This **Crow** is one of a local pair that has been involved in a different recent drama on the rooves of houses across my street when **Jackdaws** have a chimney nest with young and on several recent

mornings I have watched the pair of **Jackdaws** 'dive bombing' the **Crows** if they dare to land on nearby rooves - the Jackdaws are just as aggressive in this as the **Bonxies** we see attacking humans on TV.

This morning, before the **Crow** could do more than threaten the **Magpie** family, the pair of **Jackdaws** arrived on the scene, began their dive bombing, and succeeded in driving off the **Crow**

Just one more chapter to come in this story when the adult pair of **Magpies** decide to expel the three youngsters from their territory, but that may not be until next breeding season. The adventurous nature of **Magpies** may well pre-empt any parental expulsion - very likely the youngsters will soon be off on their own adventures without parental pressure

[Mon 30 June](#)

### Around Havant

Taking a long way round to get to the shops I checked out the plants flowering around the town on this last day of June finding five new flowering species for my year list - **Fool's Parsley**, **Hop** (males flowers), **Michaelmas Daisies**, **Knot-grass** and **Black Bindweed** (a bonus in new soil brought in to tidy up the edge of the A27 slip road after recent roadworks). Also a first for me, though a full five days since it started to flower in Brook Meadow at Emsworth, was **Great Willowherb**.

The only birding surprise was to find **a newly fledged Jackdaw on the ground** in St Faith's churchyard - it seemed unable to fly so I don't know how long it will survive but it's parents were doing what they could to protect it by shouting abuse at me in very hoarse Crow-like language. Recently I have seen parent **Jackdaws** **dive-bombing Crows** that have landed on the roof of a house across the road from ours near a chimney in which they have young - their attacks would not shame a **Great Skua** and they manage to drive off the larger **Crows**.

### Budds Farm pools

A short cycle ride to Budds Farm and back along the South Moors shore this evening showed me that many **juvenile Black-headed Gulls** are now away from their nests and independent of their parents - several were on the pools and more on the sea at the mouth of the Langbrook stream.

Also on the pools were the **Mute Swan** pair with all five of their well grown youngsters which probably cannot leave their birthplace until they are able to fly. Two **Shelduck** without young were on the water here and two more were at the mouth of the stream.

My only other notes were of **Meadow Pipit still singing** over the South Moors (where several pairs seem to have bred but seemingly no **Skylarks** this year). **Blackbird**, **Song Thrush** and **Dunnock** were singing on my way home and at least three **Swifts** were overhead when I got back

### **SUMMARY FOR JUNE 23 - 29 (WEEK 25 OF 2008)**

I hear that there was a **Cattle Egret** at Farlington Marshes this week, a **Hoopoe** was seen near New Milton and the first brood of **Tufted Ducklings** has hatched at

Rye Harbour. Of more significance it seems that **Black-tailed Godwit** have **started to return from Iceland**. Among the many birds now starting to move south through our region are **Osprey, Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper** and **Black Tern**. Juvenile **Avocet** and **Black-headed Gull** have started to move from their nest sites. **Local observation of non-breeding Swifts regularly night-roosting in an artificial House Martin nest has shattered my long held belief that Swifts always sleep on the wing unless they have an active nest**. The **Crossbill** irruption continues in low key and the week's rarity was an **Eastern Race Subalpine Warbler** at Portland **Brown Hawker, Red-veined Darter** and **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** have all made their first appearances this week and the second **Common Darter** that I know of turned up in my Havant garden. 31 butterfly species were seen during the week including the first **Purple Emperor, Essex Skipper** and **Gatekeeper** while it seems that **second broods of Green-veined White, Small Copper** and **Holly Blue** are now flying. **White Admirals** and **Silver Washed Fritillaries** are now common in several woods. (**Do check out the web reference to the 'Purple Empire' website** to see how some people can get carried away by the sight of a **Purple Emperor**). 37 new moths were added to the year list including **Garden Tiger** and **Chimney Sweeper** (beauty and the beast) while Sussex seems to have acquired a new species with **Scarlet Tiger** in Friston Forest. Plant news includes the first **Basil Thyme** (a personal favourite) and the sight of **Bell Heather** in profusion on the Hayling Golf Course plus a reminder that there may still be hidden treasure near Black Point on Hayling in the shape of **Sea Heath (*Frankenia laevis*)** - see the photo on the Rye Bay website and then go and find it on Hayling if you can!. Common summer flowers making their first appearance include **Rosebay** and **Great Willowherb** plus **Marjoram**.

## **BIRDS**

**Balearic Shearwater:** A count of 22 off Portland on June 28

**Storm Petrel:** After a gap in sightings from June 7 to 22 there has been another run of reports from Christchurch Harbour with counts of 1 on June 25, 4 on June 27 and at least 8 on June 28 (when singles were also seen at Portland, Selsey and Worthing)

**Cattle Egret:** After almost daily reports from Dorset and Sussex during May (with rumours of a small breeding colony having established itself in Cornwall) I have only seen two June reports - June 1 brought the last report from Poole Harbour and now I am told that one was seen at Farlington Marshes on June 23 (though I have seen no confirmation of this)

**Little Egret:** By June 24 it seemed that all the young had left their nests at Langstone but at least two pale legged juveniles were still to be seen standing at the edge of the pond with seven more birds of uncertain age perched in the trees. My next visit there was on June 27 at high tide when I saw at least 22 birds including one definite juvenile.

**Spoonbill:** It looks as if the group of six birds in Poole Harbour may be starting to break up as on June 28 only 5 were seen in the harbour with 1 at Lodmoor.

**Shelduck:** A count of 495 Shelduck at the RSPB Cliff Pools reserve on the Thames estuary just east of Gravesend on June 21 caught my eye - I don't know if this is a normal number to be there at this time of year but it did make me wonder if this site is a regular gathering point for birds about to fly east to moult off the north east German coast, or even if some birds stay at this site to moult.

**Tufted Duck:** These are late breeders compared to some duck species and June 26 brought the first report of a brood seen on the water at Rye Harbour

**Hooded Merganser:** The bird of obscure origin which turned up at Weymouth on June 6 was still there on June 24 and has since been reported near the Gurkha restaurant in Weymouth - I hope it does not end up on the menu! It is now being identified as a first summer male

**Osprey:** A sighting of one over the Elmley Marshes on Sheppey in northwest Kent on June 14 probably marks the start of southward movement by non-breeding birds. The next sighting was on June 26 in the Thanet area of Kent with a further sighting over the Pevensey Levels on June 27

**Avocet:** The first juvenile has been seen away from its nest site - on June 28 one seen at the Oare Marshes north of Faversham in Kent was said to have flown across the wide Medway estuary from a nest on Sheppey

**Ringed Plover:** A total of five pairs are nesting at the Hayling Oysterbeds - one has already lost its young, a second nest is yet to hatch and three more nests have yet to be found

**Golden Plover:** One at Portland on June 23 was the first to be reported on the south coast since May 1 and presumably marks the start of autumn passage

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Five birds in full summer plumage seen at Christchurch Harbour on June 28 are probably the **first returning Iceland birds** (In 2006 the first arrived at Pulborough Brooks on June 27 but in 2007 the first major return was of 170 at Titchfield Haven on July 11 with 70 at Farlington and 19 at Lymington both on July 13) A report of 200 at Elmley Marshes on Sheppey on June 18 (presumably non-breeding birds) may also be of interest to our Godwit devotees.

**Whimbrel:** The first returning bird flew over Sway (near New Milton) on June 28, disrupting a village cricket game while Steve Keen (one of the players) took time out from concentrating on the game to search the skies.

**Spotted Redshank:** First back at Elmley Marshes in north west Kent on June 9

**Redshank:** 28 were back at Christchurch Harbour on June 24

**Common Sandpiper:** Single birds were back at Lodmoor on June 16 and on the northwest Kent coast on June 20 but a group of 5 new in at Christchurch Harbour on June 25 was a definite indication of return passage

**Black-headed Gull:** Christchurch Harbour is the first to report the arrival of a **juvenile Black-headed Gull away from its nest site** on June 22 and another was seen at Highcliffe on June 23 (probably having flown from the Lymington area)

**Iceland Gull:** One seen at Portland on June 22 was unexpected and the first anywhere on the south coast since May 6

**Common Tern:** By June 24 there were 30 pairs nesting at the Hayling Oysterbeds, quite a few of them displaced from South Binness island out in the harbour by high tides or Fox predation

**Little Tern:** On June 24 only 3 chicks remained alive at the Hayling Oysterbeds out of the 30 present a week before - cause of death in each case is either assassination by a few rogue **Black-headed Gulls** or more justifiable predation by **Kestrel** (so far the precautions against the rats which ate most of the eggs last year seem to have worked). No information so far about breeding on the Langstone Harbour RSPB Islands but we are told that the breeding colony in the Lymington area has 43 pairs this year compared to around 57 last year. In Sussex the Rye Harbour site has no birds nesting there for the second time since the reserve was set up in 1970 (no breeding in 2000 or in 2008) and I have little hope of hearing of successful breeding at Pagham Harbour where around 8 birds were seen on June 3.

**Black Tern:** Since the unexpected report of two at Paxton Pits near Bedford on June 16 (with another back at Dungeness that day) there have been three further reports of returning birds at Selsey, Dungeness and the Oare Marshes (Medway estuary)

**Swifts:** The presence of two or three birds flying over my home area, usually just before sunset, on most recent evenings seems to show that they are breeding somewhere in or near to the Manor Close houses. To add to the interest there were five birds concurrently in the sky at dusk on June 24, **three of them giving the impression of being a family group**. This led me to check the time it takes for young to leave their nest, and I see this varies from 8 to 11 weeks (3 weeks incubation followed by a variable time in the nest depending on the food supply which is mainly determined by the weather) - egg-laying by Apr 29 is possible and would permit young to be flying now if we take the minimum time of 8 weeks and the first reports of of Swifts in Hampshire this year were on Apr 15 and 16, just allowing a 10 week period.

While looking up the details of the breeding cycle I noticed that my reference book mentions that **Swifts will occasionally nest in House Martin nests** (and Sand Martin burrows), giving added interest to the **recent report of Swifts 'night roosting' in an artificial House Martin nest** on a house here in Havant - maybe they were checking it out as a potential nest site for next year?

Further news of the **'night roosting'** birds confirms that **they have been entering the House Martin nest box at dusk each evening for at least 10 days, and I am told that a mirror has been used to look into the nest to confirm that there is no sign of nest material or eggs**. This destroys my **long held belief that Swifts always sleep on the wing** except when they are forced to spend the night in a nest with eggs or young but it also sheds new light on the behaviour of the **Swifts** which I see over local houses each evening towards dusk. In past years I have occasionally seen the **Swifts** gather in the sky as dusk approaches and I have then seen them form a loose ball which gradually rises into the sky until lost to view - I

assume they remain in this loose ball through the night, sleeping as best they can - but on the majority of evenings the birds which have been flying low suddenly disappear, which would tie in with them entering roost places in or on houses. I use the word 'on' with reference to the **Alpine Swift** which was seen to 'cling to the County Hall' building in Lewes during the nights of May 28 and 29 this year, something that **House Martins** regularly do overnight when on passage (and probably every night).

**Hoopoe:** One was reported to be in the Sway area near New Milton on June 27

**Wood Lark:** A report of two birds singing at an atypical site in Sussex led me to look at the photo of the site - certainly not the sandy heathland woodedge with pine trees but also not atypical of habitat used by the birds in the local Forestside area. The picture showed the edge of a broad leaved woodland abutting on abandoned arable fields now growing a thin (not dense) crop of tall weeds

**Sand Martin:** A report from Dungeness of **27 Sand Martins** flying over on June 24 presumably marks the start of their autumn departure

**Cetti's Warbler:** On July 4 in 2005 I heard harsh 'tucc, tucc' calls from reeds around Langstone Pond and at first thought a family of **Blackcaps** had got into this atypical habitat but I was later assured that the calls came from a brood of **young Cetti's Warblers just out of their nest**. I mention this as on June 26 the Dungeness website reported that the first juveniles were out of their nest there, and as **Cetti's Warblers** have probably been breeding at several local sites these calls made by the young may soon be heard here.

**Subalpine Warbler:** One was at Portland on June 26 (photos on their website) but was not of the western subspecies that we normally see - this was an **Eastern (albistriata) subspecies bird** from the region around Turkey (not usually getting nearer to us than southern Italy).

**Red-backed Shrike:** A new report of a female seen in Morden Bog (just west of Poole Harbour) on June 23 - possibly a failed breeder on the move

**Jay:** Two adult birds appeared in my garden (where I cannot recall seeing them ever before) at dusk on June 24, pecked at some unripe Rowan berries and apples, and moved on.

**Crossbill:** This year's irruption continues with reports now received from 23 sites across southern England since mid-May though no large flocks have been reported (one of 40+ and one of 50+ might have been local birds near Lymington and Midhurst).

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Common Darter:** The first appeared in my Havant garden on June 29, long after the first of the year was reported on June 9 but surprisingly it is the first I have seen mentioned since then (they normally fly from mid-June)

**Southern Hawker:** There has also been a substantial gap between the first (seen on Portsdown on June 13) and the second to be reported from the Isle of Wight on June 24

**Brown Hawker:** First of the year reported from Rye Harbour on June 23 - one of ten species currently on the wing there

**Red-veined Darter:** First to be seen flying was at Sandwich Bay on June 26 so possibly a cross Channel migrant although there are now several breeding colonies in Britain.

**Small Red-eyed Damselfly:** First of year at Rye Harbour on June 23. This species invaded Britain in 1999 when it was found in Essex. It has now spread widely and can be found locally at Farlington Marshes and the Sinah gravel pit lake on Hayling.

**Butterflies** (31 species mentioned in this week's reports - one person saw 16 species in an day in Sussex)

**Essex Skipper:** First report comes from Dungeness on June 23 - also found on Thorney Island on June 27 and in Havant Thicket on June 28

**Green-veined White:** A gap in reports from May 31 to June 19 suggests that we are now seeing summer brood insects (at Gosport on June 19 and in woods near Boarhunt (below Portsdown) on June 24

**Purple Hairstreak:** Since the first was seen at Gosport on June 18 I have seen five more reports including one of 30+ in the Southwater Woods at Horsham on June 24

**White-letter Hairstreak:** After the first of the year on the Portsmouth IBM site on June 13 I have seen five more reports including a find of 8 on the Gosport Defence Munitions MoD site on June 26

**Small Copper:** A sighting on June 28 on the downs above Newhaven is the first since May 31 and suggests the emergence of the second brood.

**Holly Blue:** A sighting in Kent on June 20 after a gap since the previous sighting on June 1 suggests that the summer brood has started to emerge with one other sighting so far in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on June 23

**White Admiral:** Ignoring the abnormal sighting in the Emsworth Hollybank Woods on May 11 the first regular appearance was on June 10 and the season began to peak with reports of 18 in the Boarhunt woods northwest of Portsdown and 26 in the Horsham Southwater woods, both on June 24. 'Many' were seen in Havant Thicket on June 28

**Purple Emperor:** The first three were reported in the Horsham Southwater area (Madgelands, Dogbarking and Marlpost Woods) on June 24 and 9 were seen there on June 26 (including one that was aggressive enough to chase a Great Spotted Woodpecker). They have also been seen in Alice Holt Forest near Farnham and Bentley Wood west of Stockbridge. If you have any

interest in this superb butterfly you must visit

<http://www.thepurpleempire.com/whatsnew.html> and see how this butterfly can derange the mind of an otherwise sane person (not just in modern times - scan down the pictures on this webpage to the black and white photo of the 'the great I R P Heslop: holding his 30 foot (?) long butterfly net and then go on to read the text at the bottom of the page). When you have got over this webpage pick up the latest edition of British Wildlife mag and read what Matthew Oates has to say about 'Master Trees'.

**Comma:** Three were out in the Hollybank Woods on June 23 and another three in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on June 24 as their summer brood gets off to a good start - plenty seen elsewhere too

**Dark Green Fritillary:** These are also doing well with sightings at seven sites since the first was seen on Beachy Head on June 17. Best count was of 11 seen in the Meon Valley on June 22. I had a 'probable' (brief glimpse in flight) on Portsdown on June 23 and one was almost certainly seen on west Hayling on June 24.

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** Now well established with a count of 13 seen in the Boarhunt woods northwest of Portsdown on June 24 and some seen in Havant Thicket on June 28 (I suspect that these were in Hammonds Land Coppice in Staunton Country Park south of Havant Thicket proper but cannot be sure)

**Gatekeeper:** The first was seen on June 23 at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester and the only other report so far is of two on Thorney Island on June 27.

**Ringlet:** Now well established with 14 seen in the Boarhunt Woods on June 24 and 'many' in Havant Thicket on June 28

## Moths

**Leopard moth (0161 *Zeuzera pyrina*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Burnet Moths:** A second report of **Six-spots** comes from Martin Down on June 22. I am now convinced that I wrongly reported the specimen that I saw at the Langstone South Moors on June 16 as a **Six-spot** when it was in fact a **Narrow-bordered Five-spot**, and this conviction was re-inforced when I had a second close view of a newly emerged **Narrow-bordered Five-spot** on June 23 (at Portchester Common on Portsdown)

**Red-Belted Clearwing (0379 *Synanthedon myopaeformis*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 26

**Six-belted Clearwing (0382 *Bembecia scopigera*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 26

***Coleophora follicularis* (0555):** A specimen bred from Fleabane emerged in the Thanet area of Kent on June 23

***Agapeta hamana* (0937):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Barred Fruit-tree Tortrix (0970 *Pandemis cerasana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Large fruit-tree Tortrix (0977 *Archips podana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Bramble-shoot Moth (1175 *Epiblema uddmanniana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Eucosma metzneriana* (1196):** First in the Thanet area of Kent (where it is now resident and breeding) on June 24

***Chilo phragmitella* (1290):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Chrysoteuchia culmella* (1293):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Agriphila tristella* (1305):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Schoenobius gigantella* (1328):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Eudonia pallida* (1336):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**European Corn-borer (1375 *Ostrinia nubilalis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

***Perinephela lancealis* (1377):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24

**Rosy Wave (1691 *Scopula emutaria*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24

**Bright Wave (1696 *Idea ochrata*):** This only occurs as a resident at a small number of colonies in Kent though it can occasionally be seen as a migrant elsewhere. One of the genuine residents was seen in the Thanet area of Kent on June 21 (first for year)

**Single-dotted Wave (1708 *Idea dimidiata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Ruddy Carpet (1735 *Catarhoe rubidata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24

**Royal Mantle (1736 *Catarhoe cuculata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Wood Carpet (1739 *Epirrhoe rivata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24

**Barred Straw (1758 *Eulithis pyraliata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Blue-bordered Carpet (1766 *Plemyria rubiginata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Chimney Sweeper (1870 *Odezia atrata*):** This relatively common daytime flyer was first seen at Martin Down on June 22

**Scalloped Oak (1921 *Crocallis elinguaris*):** First at Rye Harbour on June 23

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** One at Dungeness on June 22 was only the tenth to be reported this year - very slow going so far!

**Common Footman (2050 *Eilema lurideola*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Garden Tiger (2057 *Arctia caja*):** First at Rye Harbour on June 23

**Scarlet Tiger (2068 *Callimorpha dominula*):** Has been seen in Hampshire since June 19 but three seen in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on June 28 were claimed as the first ever found in Sussex

**Kent Black Arches (2076 *Meganola albula*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24 followed by a find at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on June 25

**Short-cloaked Moth (2077 *Nola cucullatella*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Square-spot Rustic (2134 *Xestia xanthographa*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Dot Moth (2155 *Melanchra persicariae*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Smoky Wainscot (2198 *Mythimna impura*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

**Dingy Shears (2314 *Enargia ypsilon*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 24

**The Blackneck (2466 *Lygephila pastinum*):** First at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on June 25

**Beautiful Snout (2476 *Hypena crassalis*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 23 - possibly new to the Thanet area

**The Fan-foot (2489 *Herminia tarsipennalis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 24

## Other Insects

**Longhorn Beetle species (*Rutpela maculata* - was *Strangalia maculata*):** First of these relatively common black and yellow beetles seen at Rye Harbour on June 23

## PLANTS

**Rough-headed Poppy:** First seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Sea heath (*Frankenia laevis*):** This could still be found at Black Point on Hayling Island up to 1995 but is I fear now extinct in Hampshire but on June 28 it was

flowering at Rye Harbour 'better than I have seen before' according to Barry Yates who has put a photo on the Rye Bay website.

**Rose Campion:** This was flowering profusely on Sinah Common at Gunner Point on June 26

**Sea Beet:** This started to show the yellow anthers of its flowers on June 24

**Little Robin:** I could only find one plant on the shingle at Gunner Point on Hayling on June 26 - admittedly I did not make much of a search but it has been fighting a losing battle for some years against grass and Restharrow advancing over the open shingle

**Spiny Restharrow:** I pricked my fingers on some this when on Sinah Common on June 26 to be sure of its identity among masses of common Restharrow.

**Strawberry Clover:** First flowers seen on Hayling on June 26

**Hare's Foot Clover:** I first saw this on Hayling on June 26

**Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Tall Melilot:** It is always difficult to separate Tall and Ribbed Melilot until the seed appear but I judged by the equal length of all parts of the flowers that I found the first Tall Melilot on Portsdown on June 23. Brian Fellows had found the first Ribbed Melilot at Eastney Beach on May 29

**White Melilot:** Flowering at several places on Hayling on June 26

**Bladder Senna:** The 'wild' bush on the east side of the Kench (south Hayling) was in flower on June 26

**Wild Strawberry:** Fruits were seen in Hollybank Woods on June 23 by Brian Fellows (John Goodspeed had also found fruit on Chalton Down on May 28)

**Lax Sea Lavender:** I wrongly reported this in flower on June 24 (early stages of flowering of **common Sea Lavender** can be mistaken for **Lax**) but by June 26 flowers were starting to open on a distinctive plant just below the seawall path passing Langstone Mill Pond (look immediately opposite the 'dog fouling' red bin by the 'duck feeding point')

**Great Willowherb:** Flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 25 but not seen elsewhere yet.

**Rosebay Willowherb:** One plant flowering on June 26 on the seawall of the Hayling Coastal Path passing Stoke Bay but not elsewhere so far

**Large flowered Evening Primrose:** Plenty out on Hayling on June 26

**Sweet Chestnut:** This last tree of the year to flower revealed that it was now doing so in a photo of two **White Admirals** taken in the Emsworth Hollybank Woods on June 26 (it has probably been flowering for some time)

**Bell Heather:** I used to think of this as an autumn flower coming out after other Heathers but it is in fact the earliest and a mass could be seen on the Hayling Golf Course opposite the Kench on June 26

**Sea Bindweed:** Flowers were out on south Hayling on June 26

**Round-leaved Fluellen:** This had started to flower in Warblington cemetery on June 27

**Hybrid Water Speedwell:** Flowering in the River Ems at Emsworth on June 28

**Red Bartsia:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Basil Thyme:** A better than usual showing of this lovely plant at five locations on Portchester Common (Portsdown) on June 23

**Marjoram:** First flowers on Portsdown on June 23

**Black Horehound:** Flowering profusely in many places by June 28

**Wood Sage:** Flowering in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on June 23 and on south Hayling on June 26

**Harebell:** Surprisingly the first of the year was seen on Brook Meadow at Emsworth on June 22

**Danewort:** The first open flowers seen by the Billy Trail in Havant on June 27

**Teazel:** Reported as in flower at Durlston on June 24

**Small Scabious:** First seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Sticky Groundsel:** Flowering on south Hayling on June 26

**Sea Mayweed:** First noted on the shore at Emsworth on June 22

**Perennial Sowthistle:** The tall golden flowers of this started to open at Langstone on June 24

**Marsh Helleborine:** First report of flowers from East Kent on June 21

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Marsh Frog:** A small colony of these is established in the Shatterford area of the New Forest near Beaulieu Road station and it was most likely these that attracted the attention of a birder who saw them on June 28 and asked for help in identifying them. They were seen here on June 2 in 2007 and in May of 2005. No one has commented on the noise they make though they are said to be very noisy at this time of year in the Rye Bay area. How long they will survive may depend on the spread of a disease called **Chytridiomycosis** brought in on **American Bullfrogs** and **Alpine Newts**

**Slow-worm:** I found one **Slow-worm road casualty** on Wade Court Road this week

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 23 - 29 (WEEK 25 OF 2008)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

## [Sun 29 June](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Summary of past week's news**

My latest weekly summary of reports is now available by clicking [Weekly Summary](#) here

## [Fri 27 June](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Warblington and Langstone**

A walk to Warblington cemetery and back via Langstone Pond added two new flowering plants to my year list with **Round-leaved Fluellen** in the cemetery and **Danewort** by the Billy Trail when back in Havant but I also noticed a new surge of **Black Horehound** flowering and spent some time cutting my way through brambles and tree growth to traverse the drainage ditch alongside the A27/A259 east side off-slip road to discover that **16 Bee Orchids** and **12 Pyramidal** were still managing to flower despite the choking scrub growth.

At Langstone Pond with the tide high I saw at least **22 Egrets (including one definite juvenile)**, the majority now choosing to perch close to the water level at the back of the pond instead of high in the trees. **20 Lapwing** were roosting on the saltings and under the sea wall opposite the dog fouling bin the plant of **Lax Sea Lavender** (which I commented on last year as being a good specimen for checking the difference between this species - here growing on its own in a clearly located site -and the **Common Sea Lavender** which grows nearby) is nearly in flower and is a bigger and better specimen than last year.

## [Thu 26 June](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Flowers on south west Hayling**

A cycle ride from Havant to Sinah Common this afternoon added **twelve new flowering plants to my year list**, starting with **Strawberry Clover** as soon as I came off Langstone Bridge onto the island. **White Melilot** was the next find followed by a single plant of **Rosebay Willowherb** on the seawall as I was passing Stoke Bay.

No more new flowers until I reached Sinah Common but the ride down the coastal path gave me one **Marbled White** and several fresh **Red Admirals** plus probable sightings of **Meadow Brown** and **Speckled Wood**. Passing the pond in the 'Hoopoe Field' between Stoke Bay and the path to West Lane I enjoyed a **vivid display of yellow Dyer's Greenweed flowers** and also heard **Yellowhammer song** there for the third time this summer.

Reaching the Kench I cycled out to see the **Bladder Senna** bush in flower and when I rejoined the Ferry Road I found the expected display of **Bell Heather** on the Golf Course. In the Gunner Point area I found **Large Flowered Evening Primrose, Sea Bindweed, Spiny Restharrow, Rose Campion** and just one plant

of **Little Robin** (a species that looks as if it will soon be extinct here as tough grasses and **Restharrow** advance over the bare shingle).

While still on Sinah Common I looked for the **Proliferous Pinks** (once described as **Childing Pinks**) but could find no sign of them today (nor on the earlier occasions that I have searched diligently for them this year). Two 'firsts of the season' after flowering in the winter were **Sticky Groundsel** and **Wood Sage** (the latter also seen by Brian Fellows in Hollybank Woods earlier this week). Before heading home I checked the **Tansy** plants near the Royal Shades hotel (not in flower) and the **Cock's Eggs** which are flourishing on the open grass despite being exterminated from the fence line of the adjacent garden.

One other noteworthy observation in my garden early today was of the two local **Swifts** feeding in the air over head then attracting my attention with a couple of screams to announce the arrival of a soaring male **Sparrowhawk** - **within seconds the two Swifts became eight as others arrived 'from nowhere' to mob the hawk** as it drifted east in the strong breeze.

This is a good point to insert some interesting information I have just received from Tony Tupper in Leigh Park. I have already passed on his news of **Swifts apparently night roosting in an artificial House Martin nest box** on his house alongside other boxes in active use by House Martin broods. My first reaction was to tell Tony that it was my understanding that **Swifts always slept on the wing unless they were nesting**. Looking further into this I found a book which told me that **Swifts will occasionally nest in House Martin nests** (or Sand Martin burrows) and I asked Tony to see if he could get a look inside the 'nest'. He has managed to do this with a small mirror and now tells me that (a) **there is no sign of a nest** but (b) **two Swifts regularly turn up and enter the 'nest' at dusk, leaving it at dawn**. Hopefully this is part of a learning process by young **Swifts** which will come back and use the nest properly next year.

[Wed 25 June](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Mid-week Summary

New entries on the autumn passage list this week include **Osprey, Golden Plover, Spotted Redshank** and **Sand Martin**. **Little Terns** are again in the news, their chicks at the Hayling Oysterbeds having been reduced from 30 to just 3 in the past week, mainly by aggressive **Black-headed Gulls** which do not require them for food (and by **Kestrels** for whom they are necessary prey). **Swifts** are also in the news with new information on the possibility of them nesting in **House Martin nests**, and **Little Egrets** remain newsworthy as the juveniles continue to leave their nests. **Storm Petrel, Hooded Merganser** and **Red-backed Shrike** supply a necessary pinch of rarity to the news.

New insects include **Brown Hawker dragonfly** and **Essex Skipper butterfly** plus four new moths (**Garden Tiger, Scalloped Oak, Chimney Sweeper** and the rare **Bright Wave** seen in Kent)

**Harebell** and **Basil Thyme** are two exciting new additions to the year's flowering list (as is **Marsh Helleborine** in Kent) but there are also welcome new additions of more run of the mill flowers such as **Perennial Sowthistle**, **Marjoram** and **Red Bartsia** plus the very attractive **Rough-headed Poppy**

## **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**Storm Petrel:** One seen off Portland on June 22 was the first reported since June 7 (but also a month to the day since summer sightings started on May 22 and is 20th report in that series)

**Little Egret:** By June 24 it seemed that all the young had left their nests at Langstone but **at least two pale legged juveniles** were still to be seen standing at the edge of the pond with seven more birds of uncertain age perched in the trees.

**Hooded Merganser:** The bird of obscure origin which turned up at Weymouth on June 6 was still there on June 24

**Osprey:** A sighting of one over the Elmley Marshes on Sheppey in northwest Kent on June 14 probably marks the start of southward movement by non-breeding birds

**Ringed Plover:** A total of five pairs are nesting at the Hayling Oysterbeds - one has already lost its young, a second nest is yet to hatch and three more nests have yet to be found

**Golden Plover:** One at Portland on June 23 was the first to be reported on the south coast since May 1 and presumably marks the start of autumn passage

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A report of 200 at Elmley Marshes on Sheppey on June 18 may be of interest to our Godwit devotees. This RSPB reserve also reports the return of the **first Green Sandpiper on June 7** and the **first Spotted Redshank on June 9**

**Redshank:** 28 were back at Christchurch Harbour on June 24

**Black-headed Gull:** Christchurch Harbour is the first to report the arrival of a **juvenile Black-headed Gull away from its nest site** on June 22

**Iceland Gull:** One seen at Portland on June 22 was unexpected and the first anywhere on the south coast since May 6

**Common Tern:** By June 24 there were 30 pairs nesting at the Hayling Oysterbeds, quite a few of them displaced from South Binniss island out in the harbour by high tides or Fox predation

**Little Tern:** On June 24 only 3 chicks remained alive out of the 30 present a week before - cause of death in each case is either assassination by a few rogue

**Black-headed Gulls** or more justifiable predation by **Kestrel** (so far the precautions against the rats which ate most of the eggs last year seem to have worked)

**Swifts:** The presence of two or three birds flying over my home area, usually just before sunset, on most recent evenings seems to show that they are breeding somewhere in or near to the Manor Close houses. To add to the interest there were five birds concurrently in the sky at dusk on June 24, **three of them giving the impression of being a family group**. This led me to check the time it takes for young to leave their nest, and I see this varies from 8 to 11 weeks (3 weeks incubation followed by a variable time in the nest depending on the food supply which is mainly determined by the weather) - egg-laying by Apr 29 is possible and would permit young to be flying now if we take the minimum time of 8 weeks and

the first reports of Swifts in Hampshire this year were on Apr 15 and 16, just allowing a 10 week period.

While looking up the details of the breeding cycle I noticed that my reference book mentions that **Swifts will occasionally nest in House Martin nests** (and Sand Martin burrows), giving added interest to the recent report of Swifts 'night roosting' in an artificial House Martin nest on a house here in Havant - maybe they were checking it out as a potential nest site for next year?

**Wood Lark:** A report of two birds singing at an atypical site in Sussex led me to look at the photo of the site - certainly not the sandy heathland woodedge with pine trees but also not atypical of habitat used by the birds in the local Forestside area. The picture showed the edge of a broad leaved woodland abutting on abandoned arable fields now growing a thin (not dense) crop of tall weeds

**Sand Martin:** A report from Dungeness of 27 Sand Martins flying over on June 24 presumably marks the start of their autumn departure

**Red-backed Shrike:** A new report of a female seen in Morden Bog (just west of Poole Harbour) on June 23 - possibly a failed breeder on the move

**Jay:** Two adult birds appeared in my garden (where I cannot recall seeing them ever before) at dusk on June 24, pecked at some unripe Rowan berries and apples, and moved on.

## INSECTS

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### Dragonflies

**Brown Hawker:** First of the year reported from Rye Harbour on June 23 - one of ten species currently on the wing there

**Butterflies** (24 species mentioned in current reports)

**Essex Skipper:** First report comes from Dungeness on June 23

**Holly Blue:** What was probably the first summer brood insect was reported from Kent on June 20 after a gap of three weeks in sightings and a sighting of another in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on June 23 was also presumably newly out.

**Comma:** Three were out in the Hollybank Woods on June 23 and another three in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on June 24 as their summer brood gets off to a good start

**Dark Green Fritillary:** These are also doing well with sightings at seven sites since the first was seen on Beachy Head on June 17. Best count was of 11 seen in the Meon Valley on June 22. I had a 'probable' (brief glimpse in flight) on Portsdown on June 23.

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** I was surprised to see that one was reported to have been seen near the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 24 as I have not heard of them being seen on the Island before and they are not listed in Pete Durnell's "Wildlife of Hayling" but it does list **Dark Green Fritillary** as a 'rare wanderer from the mainland' and I suspect this was another such vagrant from Portsdown.

### Moths

**Burnet Moths:** A second report of **Six-spots** comes from Martin Down on June 22. I am now convinced that I wrongly reported the specimen that I saw at the Langstone South Moors on June 16 as a **Six-spot** when it was in fact a **Narrow-bordered Five-spot**, and this conviction was re-inforced when I had

a second close view of a newly emerged **Narrow-bordered Five-spot** on June 23 (at Portchester Common on Portsdown)

**Bright Wave (1696 *Idaea ochrata*)**: This only occurs as a resident at a small number of colonies in Kent though it can occasionally be seen as a migrant elsewhere. One of the genuine residents was seen in the Thanet area of Kent on June 21 (first for year)

**Chimney Sweeper (1870 *Odezia atrata*)**: This relatively common daytime flyer was first seen at Martin Down on June 22

**Scalloped Oak (1921 *Crocallis elinguaris*)**: First at Rye Harbour on June 23

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth**: One at Dungeness on June 22 was only the tenth to be reported this year - very slow going so far!

**Garden Tiger (2057 *Arctia caja*)**: First at Rye Harbour on June 23

## Other Insects

**Longhorn Beetle species (*Rutpela maculata* - was *Strangalia maculata*)**: First of these relatively common black and yellow beetles seen at Rye Harbour on June 23

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Rough-headed Poppy**: First seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Sea Beet**: This started to show the yellow anthers of its flowers on June 24

**Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea**: First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Tall Melilot**: It is always difficult to separate Tall and Ribbed Melilot until the seed appear but I judged by the equal length of all parts of the flowers that I found the first **Tall Melilot** on Portsdown on June 23. Brian Fellows had found the first **Ribbed Melilot** at Eastney Beach on May 29

**Wild Strawberry**: Fruits were seen in Hollybank Woods on June 23 by Brian Fellows (John Goodspeed had also found fruit on Chalton Down on May 28)

**Lax Sea Lavender**: Flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 24 a few days after the common **Sea Lavender** appeared at Northney

**Red Bartsia**: First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Basil Thyme**: A better than usual showing of this lovely plant at five locations on Portchester Common (Portsdown) on June 23

**Marjoram**: First flowers on Portsdown on June 23

**Harebell**: Surprisingly the first of the year was seen on Brook Meadow at Emsworth on June 22

**Teazel**: Reported as in flower at Durlston on June 24

**Small Scabious**: First seen on Portsdown on June 23

**Sea Mayweed**: First noted on the shore at Emsworth on June 22

**Perennial Sowthistle:** The tall golden flowers of this started to open at Langstone on June 24

**Marsh Helleborine:** First report of flowers from East Kent on June 21

## OTHER WILDLIFE

Nothing to report other than one **Slow-worm road casualty** on Wade Court Road

### Tue 24 June

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### Langstone area

With a short time available before lunch I cycled down the Billy Trail to the north pier of the old rail bridge, then back via Langstone pond and Wade Lane.

First item of interest was the re-flowering of **Wild Pansies** which had been cut in recent mowing of the 'unadopted' section of Billy Trail west of the main road at Langstone - interestingly the new flowers were about half the size of the originals. From the railbridge I could see the Langstone **Swan Pair with their six cygnets** and **two pairs of Shelduck with no young** while the pier itself was well decked with flowers including my first **Sea Beet** and **Perennial Sowthistle** plus lots of **Bird's Foot Trefoil, Common Centaury** and **Vipers Bugloss** with a single **Marbled White butterfly** flying over.

At the Mill Pond **the original Egret nests were now deserted** but at least nine birds could still be seen (two down by the water's edge showed they were juveniles by their leg colour). Continuing up Wade Lane I passed the **squashed corpse of a Slow-worm** and at the Lymbourne Triangle wildflower meadow the first half dozen **Corn Cockle flowers** were out.

Back at home in the evening we had a surprise visit from two **Jays** (I can't recall seeing them here before) which had a peck at some Rowan berries and unripe apples before passing on. After they had gone I went to look for **Swifts** and not only saw the three which have been pretty regular evening visitors and are presumably visiting local nests but also saw a new group of three flying relatively slowly close together which might have been a pair with a youngster taking its first flight.

With this thought in mind I checked my book of Bird Nesting and found that **Swifts take from 8 to 11 weeks to complete the egg to flying period in the nest**. I suppose the eggs could have been laid by Apr 29 to give the minimum 8 weeks but doubt they could have been laid as early as Apr 8 to give the maximum (the **first reports of Swifts in Hampshire** this year came on Apr 16 and 17 though the very first report was of three seen on the Isle of Wight on Mar 17 with regular arrivals being reported from Apr 2).

My book also told me that **Swifts occasionally nest in House Martin nests**, making the recent report of Swifts using an artificial House Martin nest on a house in Leigh Park at Havant as 'a night roost' the more interesting - maybe these birds were checking the suitability of the nest for use next year?

### Mon 23 June

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### Portsdown west for Basil Thyme

This afternoon I drove to the unofficial parking place immediately west of Fort Southwick and walked west to the Skew Road entrance to Portchester Common and back recording 79 flowering plant species, my first **Marbled White** butterflies

and an unexpected **Buzzard**. I also enjoyed magnificent views from Selsey Bill in the east to Hurst Castle in the west.

My primary target was to find **Basil Thyme**, which I did in five places, and I also added **Rough Poppy**, **Small Scabious**, **Tall Melilot**, **Marjoram** and **Red Bartsia** (or **Red Rattle**) to my year list, but these ticks are nothing compared to the magnificently rich carpet of flowers found in two places. Portchester Common was rich in the downland flowers of short grassland (even carpets of **Self Heal** were attractive here!) and the lower slopes of the hill west of the Paulsgrove chalk pit (which have only had the thick scrub removed in recent years) were densely covered with **Vipers Bugloss**, **Musk Thistle** and **Ox-eye Daisies**.

In addition to the dozen or more **Marbled Whites** I also saw **Common Blues**, **Meadow Browns**, **Speckled Wood**, **Red Admiral** and a fast flying butterfly which never gave me a chance to see it properly but gave me a strong impression that it was a **Dark Green Fritillary**. One insect that I did get a very close look at was a newly emerged **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet** clinging to a flowerhead of **Greater Knapweed**

### **SUMMARY FOR JUNE 16 - 22 (WEEK 24 OF 2008)**

**Local bird news** this week includes the story of a **Barn Owl** living in a **Council Flat** (or at least a nest box provided by Havant Borough) and an observation of **adult Little Egrets teaching their young to fly** (or at least hop out of their nests onto nearby branches), plus an observation of **Swifts apparently night roosting in artificial nest boxes designed for House Martins**. News for more serious birders is of a **White-rumped Sandpiper** and a **breeding Spotted Crake**, both in Kent, and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** on Portland with **numerous indications of the start of autumn passage**

**24 butterfly species** have been seen during the week including the first **Small Skipper**, **Purple Hairstreak** and **Dark Green Fritillary** while summer broods of **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Comma** (probably plus **Holly Blue** and **Green-veined White**) have started to emerge.

**Fourteen new moth species** are reported, including **Scarlet Tiger**, the nationally rare **Olive Crescent** and two species of **Burnet Moth** (I now think that the **Burnet Moth** which I saw on the Langstone South Moors on June 16 was a **Narrow-bordered Five-spot** and **not a Six-spot** hiding its sixth spot under the fifth!). A second migrant **Spurge Hawkmoth** for the year has been found - in a bedroom of a house at Winchester.

**New flowers** include **Musk Mallow**, **Sea Lavender**, **Marsh Ragwort** and **Ladies Bedstraw** with the jury still out on a **Broomrape** found by John Goodspeed in the carpark shrubbery around the Havant Tesco store carpark - **it seems to be Ivy Broomrape** but may be a new species or form specialising in the nourishment to be found in wood chippings and being spread around the country by landscape gardeners.

A garden in my road at Havant still has the blessing of hosting a **Hedgehog** and further afield the first report of a **Smooth Snake** comes from birders listening for **Nightjars** on Ambersham Common near Midhurst

## BIRDS

**Manx Shearwater:** An estimated 25,000 were seen from Portland on May 1 as the majority of these birds arrived in British waters at the start of their breeding season. Since mid-May there have been no three figure counts along the south coast until Portland recorded 100 on June 18 and then 300 on June 21, presumably marking the start of dispersal of failed breeders

**Balearic Shearwater:** Counts at Portland of 11 seen on June 19 and 14 on June 21 are the highest along the south coast since January and may also reflect the arrival of failed breeders

**Bittern:** A group of Kent birders spent the whole night from June 13 to 14 observing the nightlife of the Stour Valley marshes with regular reminders to keep awake from **a booming Bittern**

**Little Egret:** As I was passing Langstone Mill Pond on June 16 I was left in no doubt that at least two of the Egret nests had young in them. In both cases I saw an adult bird flapping its wings, then making a short jump/flight to a nearby branch, followed by a juvenile imitating its action - after this short flying lesson the adult soon flew off, no doubt to collect food with which to reward the youngster and give it strength for longer flights. In one of the two cases where this occurred three birds were involved and I could see that one was an adult when it flew off but I could not be sure that both the other birds were juveniles though I think they were (at least one was seen to be a juvenile). By June 20 more juveniles had left their nests and had moved to more exposed branches with several down around the edge of the pond allowing me to count a total of 15 birds (mostly adults)

**Storks:** On June 16 one hard working office worker in Brighton (naturally equipped with binoculars on his desk) clearly saw a **Black Stork** fly past the office window and maybe the same bird was seen that day from Mount Caburn near Lewes (and reported as a **White Stork**). Another **White Stork** on June 15 flew north over Junction 5 of the M27 and on over Eastleigh to be missed by all the local birders (all of whom, unlike the Brighton office worker, were usefully employed at the time). June 19 brought another **White Stork** sighting from a motorist on the A2 in Kent

**Mute Swan:** A total of 284 birds were counted in Christchurch Harbour on June 20 reminding me of the days not too many years back when summer flocks of around 100 regularly congregated at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream in Langstone Harbour and in at least one year there were 200 in Emsworth Harbour. I rather suspect that the reason the birds do not come here nowadays is related to their food supply during the moult period when they cannot easily move elsewhere if the weed runs out - could this be connected with the cessation of the raw sewage supply from Budds Farm and elsewhere? I would be interested to see a correlation between the size of the summer flock in the Fishbourne Channel (off the Apuldram sewage works) with measures taken to clean up the water there - more than 100 were present there in Aug 2005 and 154 in July 2006

**Pochard:** A count of 116 birds (mostly adult males) on June 18 at the RSPB Cliffe reserve on the Thames estuary north of Rochester in Kent seems unusual but I have seen no explanation of it.

**Eider:** 19 first year birds were on the Solent off the Lymington marshes on June 15

**Red-breasted Merganser:** The very last departing birds that I am aware of were a group of three passing Beachy Head on May 22. Since then we have had a report of a pair in the west Solent on June 7 and now a single female has been seen on June 20 in Sweare Deep where the Langstone Wadeway crosses to Hayling Island. It is not unusual for one or two to remain in Langstone Harbour through the summer but this is the first report for this summer that I am aware of.

**Hen Harrier:** The bird that is being reported as a **juvenile male Hen Harrier** and which has been seen sporadically around Washington village (north of Worthing) since Apr 13 was seen again on June 15

**Sparrowhawk:** There is nothing very unusual about seeing a **Sparrowhawk** take a young passerine at this time of year but I had an exceptionally good view of one on June 16 as I was walking down Langstone High Street towards the sea and was passing the Towers Gardens turning. My attention was drawn by a few squeaks from the victim followed by a plop as it fell out of a bush onto the roadside grass with a **male Sparrowhawk** on top of it - I was only the roadwidth away and had my binoculars to give a real close up of the **Sparrowhawk** during the minute or so before the prey gave up the ghost and was carried off by the silent predator. When a **Sparrowhawk** takes a bird in flight and brings it to the ground the hawk usually mantles its prey - no need for that in this case which was almost a case of taking a joint of meat off the slab of the local butcher's shop with no effort required in making the kill.

**Kestrel:** These mainly feed by hovering and then dropping on small mammals, beetles or worms and they have been known to use the same technique to catch ground feeding birds (or to drop on them as they go to roost in bushes). Much less frequently do they use their flying abilities as falcons to pursue and catch other birds in flight but on June 20 one was seen to catch a **juvenile Sand Martin** in flight at Reculver on the north Kent coast.

**Peregrine:** On June 21 a **newly fledged juvenile** at Portland was found on the ground by 'a member of the public' after its feathers became water-logged in heavy rain. It was taken to the bird observatory, allowed to dry out and then released in better weather when it happily flew back to a cliff re-union with one of its parents.

**Quail:** A bird which was first heard on June 7 in the area between St Catherine's Point and Niton village on the IoW was still there on June 15 and two more birds were heard 'somewhere in west Hamsphire' on June 17

**Spotted Crake:** I think of this species as an early autumn passage migrant through Hampshire but I see it has bred in the county at least once (at Titchfield Haven sometime around 1990) and while I do not know its status in Kent I was surprised to see that one had been heard 'singing' in the Stour vallley marshes by the birders who stayed in the Stodmarsh area throughout the night of June 13 to 14

**Lapwing:** These are now flooding back to the coast with Rye Harbour reporting 500 there on June 21. Locally the first seven were back on the Langstone shore on

June 13 and by June 20 I found 15 on the Northney shore. Christchurch Harbour had 52 on June 20

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** One was found in the Kent Stour valley on June 19 and was still there on June 20 - the identity of this bird was confirmed by several birders whereas a claimed **Temminck's Sandpiper** on June 19 was only seen by one

**Curlew Sandpiper:** A moulting adult was seen with Dunlin on the Lymington marshes shore on June 15 (just one of half a dozen reports in the past few days showing that autumn passage is already under way). Two more of these birds were seen at Cliffe (north of Rochester on the Thames estuary) on June 18

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A sudden increase from 5 to 120 birds on the Lymington marshes on June 15 was queried as a possible indication that birds were returning from breeding but expert opinion is that birds returning from Iceland will be in full breeding plumage which these were not so they are assumed to be first year birds which will have been roaming the south coast throughout the summer and have arrived at Lymington more or less by chance.

**Curlew:** One of the signs of autumn passage is reported by Kris Gillam from the Brading Marshes (IoW) where a couple of **Curlew** which had been seen to arrive there on June 13 flew on south at dusk. By June 21 five **Curlew** had arrived back at Christchurch Harbour and another four were seen there but flew on west.

**Green Sandpiper:** One seen at Brading Marshes on June 13 was the first I have seen reported there since Apr 18 and was probably on passage. The last report of a spring bird seems to have been on May 10 at the Pevensy Levels with a gap of nearly a month until one turned up at Rye Harbour on June 5 (followed by a second there on June 8). Folkestone then had one on June 12 before the IoW bird was seen on June 13

**Common Sandpiper:** One at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on June 16 is listed on the Dorset Bird Club website as probably the first autumn passage bird of this species.

**Great Skua:** The first Bonxie to be reported from the south coast for three weeks was seen at Portland on June 19

**Great Blackback Gull:** Sightings of around 30 in Langstone Harbour (mouth of Langbrook stream on June 16) and 34 off Ryde Esplanade on June 21 seem large counts for the date.

**Common Tern:** On June 21 both Dungeness and Rye Harbour both reported their first young birds of the year as 'first summer birds' so presumably fully fledged and away from their nests and parents

**Black Tern:** This species was reported more or less daily up to May 28 as spring passage tailed off. There was then a gap of nearly three weeks before the next reports on June 16 from Dungeness (one bird) and from Paxton Pits in Bedfordshire where two birds appeared 'out of the blue' - another suggestion of autumn passage.

**Barn Owl:** Havant Borough have installed at least two large nest boxes of the sort which I believe are intended for **Kestrels** to nest in, placing one on a tree

overlooking the new Warblington cemetery extension and the other on a telegraph pole in the North Common open space at Northney on Hayling. Both boxes are in very exposed situations with no cover for birds approaching them, and with no shade to prevent them becoming hot on sunny days, though both have openings facing east so that the midday sun does not shine in. Similar even more exposed boxes, looking like dovecots mounted on tall poles, can be seen on the fairways of the Hayling Island golf course, and I did not expect any of these to be occupied by any nesting predator though I hear this year that a **Barn Owl** was regularly seen hunting over Sinah Common near the golf course in the early months of this year.

Nevertheless this week John Goodspeed has received a photo (from Rob Hill who is, I think, in charge of wildlife matters such as the Oysterbeds nature reserve and involved in Brook Meadow local nature reserve at Emsworth) of **a Barn Owl peering out of the North Common box and subsequent sightings by a number of people on several days, plus white streaking on the roof of the box, show that it is being regularly used by a Barn Owl**. As the box does not have the dimensions of a Barn Owl breeding box (there is barely room for the one owl to stand up in it, and no room for it to hide away and avoid showing itself through the opening) I guess this owl is either an unpaired youngster or perhaps the male partner of a pair with a nest somewhere in the vicinity but required by the female, when not bringing food to the nest, to keep out of her way while she gets on with the work of raising a family. To see this bird go to the North Common carpark and walk through the kissing gate, then immediately look to your left through one of the few gaps in the bushes which permit a view of the box on the telegraph pole sited behind the first of the houses west of the carpark.

**Long-eared Owl:** These replace Tawny Owls on the Isle of Wight but elsewhere in southern England they are rarely seen even in winter, and certainly not in summer though a few do breed. One of the surprises (at least to me) in the list of observations in the Kent Stour valley marshes during the night of June 13 to 14 was the hooting of an adult and the squeaks of a juvenile (said to sound like someone riding an unvoiled bicycle through the night sky!)

**Swift: Young have already hatched in an artificial nest box** at Cuckfield near Haywards Heath and faint squeaks could be heard from the young as they were being fed on June 16. Interestingly **this nest box was not occupied until the year after tape recordings of Swift calls had been broadcast from within the nest box and heard by Swifts flying by on one of their 'screaming parties'**, apparently showing that Swifts need re-assurance from a previous occupant that a nest site is suitable and then have to remember the site and the message through a year of travelling before coming back to use the nest.

Here in Havant it seems that one or two pairs probably do have nests this year as I have had three recent sightings in the past week of a group of three adults flying silently low over the area where they have nested in the past - two of the sightings were in the late evening. The most interesting news of Swifts this week comes from the Leigh Park area of Havant where **Swifts seem to have started to use an artificial House Martin nest box alongside other boxes actively in use by House Martins** - the person who built and put up these boxes tells me the Swifts have been seen entering the nest late in the evening 'to roost' but my

understanding is that Swifts only touch down when forced to do so by the need for something on which to lay their eggs - otherwise they feed, sleep and mate on the wing (often high out of our sight), managing to remain airborne for years on end (no more remarkable than a fish remaining waterborne through most of its life)

Another item of Swift news this week comes from Dungeness where **180 birds were reported to have been seen flying south out to sea on June 18**, followed by another 110 going the same way on June 19 - of course these birds are not necessarily leaving us as Swifts would think nothing of going over to the continent to feed during a period of bad weather in Britain, then returning with full crops a day or more later, but it could mean that a substantial number of Swifts are finding Britain uncongenial....

**Bee Eater:** Three flew over Sandwich Bay on June 13 bringing the total of birds in the 24 reports I have seen this year to 51 (obviously there may be some duplication but this species is becoming frequently seen in England!)

**Woodlark:** Birds were still singing at Ambersham Common near Midhurst and in Ashdown Forest, both heard on June 18. Tree Pipits were also singing at Ambersham that day

**Yellow Wagtail:** More surprising to me was news that a male was still to be heard signing at the Pevensey Levels on June 21 - is it intending to have a second brood? or is there such a scarcity of females here on the Sussex coast that he has not yet attracted a mate?

**Black Redstart:** A lone juvenile seen at Portland on June 20 was pretty good evidence of local breeding in that area this year.

**Stonechat:** On June 16 a pair was seen with two juveniles on the Nutbourne Marshes east of Emsworth showing that they have bred there

**Ring Ouzel:** One at Dungeness on June 17 could well be another sign of autumn passage under way...

**Song Thrush:** This spring I have heard more song from these birds than I remember in recent years, and I have recently seen several juveniles (including the one taken by a Sparrowhawk in Langstone High Street on June 16). By mid-summer day I would expected song to be greatly diminished but at 4am on June 21 one was singing at full volume from the roof of my neighbour's house (and has continued to do so in this vicinity)

**Cetti's Warbler:** Juveniles have fledged from some nests (see photo of a juvenile taken on June 20 by ringers at Reculver on the north Kent coast by visiting <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/June2008.htm> ) and young may well be heard at local sites now. A few years ago I was puzzled by Blackcap like 'tucc' calls coming from the reeds around Langstone Pond but luckily Barry Collins passed the pond and assured me these were the calls of a family of Cetti's Warblers.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** As these are in short supply nowadays I was grateful to be told that one can currently be seen in the grounds of Stansted House from the road leading to the house and on to Lumley Seat and Broadreed farm - look in the

section between the entrance to the house and the track leading off across the East Park by the Irongate Cottages

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** One was at Portland for most of June 16 - only the second for the year after one at Dungeness on May 25

**Long-tailed Tit:** A flock of 26 birds (at least two families) moved through David Parker's garden at Forestside (north of Stansted Forest) on June 20

**Marsh Tit:** Another rather unexpected sign of 'autumn passage' was the appearance of one in the Christchurch Harbour area on June 15 (there are only five records of the species at that site since 1992) - it was seen there again on June 18

**Crossbill:** More indications of an irruption come from Sandwich Bay (17 birds on June 14), and (all on June 15) from Pett Level on Rye Bay (9 birds), the Lake area on the IoW (10) and Ambersham Common near Midhurst (50+ birds). On June 18 small groups were seen at Ambersham Common and at Pulborough Brooks and on June 20 six flew west along the north Kent coast and 14 were seen in the Thanet area of Kent

**Bullfinch:** Four reports between June 18 and 20 probably show that birds are now dispersing after breeding. Locally I heard one or two in the Warblington area on June 13 and I see David Parker had one in his Forestside garden on June 20. Of more general interest is news of a pair seen more than once in a Coldwaltham garden near Pulborough feeding on Thistle seeds (some years ago I heard of a pair regularly visiting an Emsworth garden to feed on Violet seeds)

**Corn Bunting:** On June 16 one was heard singing in the Chidham village area in fields beside Steel's Lane (around SU 792 043)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Scarce Chaser:** After recent good news of this species in Sussex (particularly the Ouse valley) one was seen in the New Forest near Lymington on June 15 but excitement about this find of a rarity was somewhat dampened by further news that this species is now spreading as rapidly as Little Egrets have done and can be seen in Christchurch Harbour and all along the Hampshire Avon valley with an outlier being seen recently in a Christchurch garden

### Butterflies

**Small Skipper:** First and so far only sighting for the year comes from the Eastbourne area on June 17

**Green-veined White:** These were being seen fairly regularly up to May 31 but the only report for this month is of two seen in the Gosport area on June 19 - maybe the first of the summer brood?

**Purple Hairstreak:** First for the year seen in Gosport on June 18 with two being seen there on June 20

**White-letter Hairstreak:** First of the year seen on elms at the IBM Portsmouth HQ site on June 13, followed by sightings in the Gosport area on June 14, along Priors Leaze Lane at Hambrook (west of Chichester) on June 16 and of six in Brighton on June 19

**Silver Studded Blue:** Around 70 were seen on Silchester Common (north of Basingstoke) on June 15 and 85 were counted at Iping Common (west of Midhurst) on June 17

**Holly Blue:** The first to be reported since June 1 was seen in north Kent on June 20 (first of summer brood?)

**White Admiral:** The one seen at Henfield on June 11 (and reported by me as the first for the year barring the odd sighting on May 11 in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth) has now been ousted by one at Gosport on June 10. We now have 14 reports of the species including a count of 11 in the Horsham area on June 17 when two were seen in Havant Thicket

**Small Tortoiseshell:** The first summer brood insects started to emerge on June 18 in the Brighton area (one seen). Another was seen in north Kent on June 20 and June 21 brought reports of two at Beachy Head and four at the Pevensey Levels

**Comma:** These two are starting to appear. I remarked on a fresh specimen seen at Warblington on June 13 after one had been seen by the River Ems on June 9 and on June 20 a fresh specimen of the *Hutchinsonii* form was seen in Gosport

**Dark Green Fritillary:** First of the year seen on Beachy Head on June 17 followed by one in the Adur valley and two on Pitt Down near Winchester, both on June 19

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** The first had been seen at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 12 and two were seen there on June 17

## Moths

**Six-spot Burnet (0169 *Zygaena filipendulae*):** One seen closely by myself on the Langstone South Moors on June 16 seems to have been the first of the year. Had I not known that Five-spot Burnet is a rarity now only to be seen at Martin Down in Hampshire or on the Isle of Wight I would have said this was one as I could only make out one spot at the wingtip (not two spots closely overlapping). Seeing reports of **Narrow Bordered Five Spot Burnet** (see below) I am now thinking that it was this species that I saw but there is **one other report of two Six-spots** seen at the Testwood Lakes near Southampton on June 19 (along with 12 empty cocoons)

**Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet (0171 *Zygaena lonicerae*):** First seen at Edburton (north of Brighton) on June 19 and two were seen in the Gosport area on June 20. This was probably the species I saw on the Langstone South Moors on June 16 (see above)

**Large Tabby (1421 *Aglossa pinguinalis*):** One was seen and photographed on the wall of a building in a Portsmouth street on June 12 - as this was a new species for my database I looked it up in UK Moths and read that **it inhabits old dilapidated rural buildings with chaff and sheep droppings on the floor** so I will not bring shame on the street concerned by repeating its name!

**Blotched Emerald (1667 *Comibaena bajularia*):** First seen in the Blean woods at Canterbury on June 18

**Common Emerald (1669 *Hemithea aestivaria*):** First seen at Edburton (north of Brighton) on June 19 or just before that date

**Swallow-tailed Moth (1922 *Ourapteryx sambucaria*):** First seen at Edburton (north of Brighton) on June 19 or just before that date

**Common White Wave (1955 *Cabera pusaria*):** First seen in the Blean woods at Canterbury on June 18

**Spurge Hawkmoth (1986 *Hyles euphorbiae*):** First report was from Shoreham on June 9 but there has now been a second report from the Winchester area on June 17 when one was found in a bedroom

**Rosy Footman (2037 *Miltochrista miniata*):** First seen in the Blean woods at Canterbury on June 18

**Red-necked Footman (2039 *Atolmis rubricollis*):** The first for the year has already been reported from Abbot's Wood near Hailsham on June 11 and the species was said to be close to extinction as an East Sussex resident (though currently recovering in numbers). On June 16 a further report from Newhaven queries this status and points out that the Red-neck shown in the photo of the first report is not obligatory - **the same species can come with a Yellow-neck**. As to the status it is thought that occurrences at Newhaven may well be of migrants - the near extinction status referred to residents breeding in the county.

**Scarlet Tiger (2068 *Callimorpha dominula*):** A pristine insect was found at the Southampton Testwood Lakes on June 19 though I have seen a reference to two seen mating at Kingcombe in Devon on June 7

**True Lover's Knot (2118 *Lycophotia porphyrea*):** First at Friston near Eastbourne on June 18

**Green Arches (2138 *Anaplectoides prasina*):** First taken in the Rother Woods near Rye on June 21

**White-line Snout (2482 *Schrankia taenialis*):** First seen in the Blean woods at Canterbury on June 18

**Olive Crescent (2495 *Trisateles emortualis*):** This rarity was found at Friston near Eastbourne on June 18

## Caterpillars

Back in mid-April an unusual number of **Small Tortoiseshell** butterflies were reported to be in the Ferring Rife wetland area at Worthing and at a time when you were lucky to see one or two **Small Tortoiseshells** anywhere else 16 were seen here during one visit on Apr 16. Currently this same site has **more than 40 Peacock caterpillars** and a nearby garden had **three Large White caterpillars** (not many years ago every garden that grew cabbages had these in profusion!)

## Other Insects

**Helophilus trivittatus hoverfly:** First report of this species from Rye Harbour on June 15

**Robins Pincushion gall wasp (Diplolepis rosae):** My first sight of the work of this tiny wasp came on June 16 when I found two fresh red 'Pin Cushions' on Dog Roses at Langstone South Moors

**Honey Bees?:** A visitor to the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 15 reported 'a swarm of bees' in bramble bushes - no further details and no confirmation from others but I have to assume these were Honey Bees

**Stag Beetle:** A female Stag Beetle was crawling through the grass of my front lawn here in Havant on the evening of June 17 shortly after I had passed the crushed body of another female on a nearby road

## PLANTS

**Narrow-leaved Pepperwort:** A few plants were flowering on the pavement edge at the northwest 'corner' of the A27 Langstone roundabout on June 16

**Musk Mallow:** First flowers found by Wade Lane at Langstone on June 20

**Sea Pea:** This is a great rarity in Hampshire which has only been found on one or two occasions between 1953 and 1993 on shingle around Hurst Castle in the west Solent but it flourishes in shingle at Rye Harbour and has done particularly well this year thanks to rain after drought. Pictures of it there can be seen on the Rye Bay website in an entry for June 20 ( <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/?cat=39> )

**Crown Vetch:** The plants which had been growing in profusion in the 'front garden' of council flats on Wakefords Way in Leigh Park at Havant were recently mown down but luckily some had grown in among a clump of 'lilies' and these have survived though they were not in flower on June 20

**Fragrant Agrimony:** The plants at North Common on Hayling had started to flower on June 20 and their leaves had a detectable fragrance at this early date as did those I found on the Hayling Coastal Path on June 12

**Slender Hare's Ear:** Not likely to flower for another month but I did find a well grown plant on the Langstone South Moors seawall on June 16

**Redshank:** The first flower seen in a Havant street on June 16

**Sea Lavender:** The first I have seen was flowering on June 20 on the Hayling Northney shore where the Wadeway from Langstone reaches the island

**Ivy Broomrape?:** On June 17 John Goodspeed found a sizeable show of Broomrape plants growing in wood chippings under planted shrubs at the edge of the carpark of the Havant Tesco store (on the Tesco side of the path running south beside the Langbrook stream at the east end of the Tesco site) but he was uncertain of their id. I collected and examined a fresh specimen on June 18 and came to the conclusion **they were probably Ivy Broomrape though I could not be certain**. The best identification feature was the stigma on which the two 'balls' were fused together (**Common Broomrape** has them held apart), and as the plants were growing with Ivy (but no clover or wild flowers of any sort growing in the woodchippings covering the ground around the planted shrubs) and as they had various other features not usual for **Common Broomrape** I guess they are **either Ivy Broomrape or some non-British species** imported (as are most Supermarket flowers) from distant lands. Interestingly the **wood chippings and shrubs with some Ivy is the same mix that produces the yellow form Ivy Broomrape found in the Red Barn estate on the slopes of Portsdown above Porchester**.

**Greater Plantain:** Each year these plants creep into flower almost un-noticed - this year some spikes were already going over when I first noticed them on June 16

**Danewort:** Flower buds are already developing on the plants by the Billy trail in Havant

**Ladies Bedstraw:** This has been looking yellow for some time but the first with open flowers was found on June 19 in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery

**Marsh Ragwort:** Newly flowering on the Langstone South Moors on June 16

**Lizard Orchid:** 14 flowering spikes were found in the Rye area on June 20

**Glaucous Bulrush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*):** Flowering on the Langstone South Moors on June 16

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hedgehog:** I hardly ever come across these nowadays, even as corpses on the roads, so I was very pleased to hear from a neighbour in my road here in Havant that he has seen a large **Hedgehog** visiting their garden recently

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** On June 15 a pod of five were seen off Durlston where they were said to be the first seen there for several weeks - with the exception of a couple seen from Selsey Bill on May 22 they are the first I have seen reported since the end of March.

**Noctule Bat:** Other than one seen on the Isle of Wight on May 11 one reported from the Kent Stour Valley on June 13 is the first of the year

**Smooth Snake:** Three birders visiting Ambersham and Heyshott Common near Midhurst on the evening of June 18 for **Nightjars** also came on a **Smooth Snake**

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## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 16 - 22 (WEEK 24 OF 2008)

### Fri 20 June

#### Langstone and Northney

A cycle ride to North Common on Hayling this afternoon gave me unexpected views of a **Merganser** and a **Barn Owl**, plus more evidence of **Little Egrets leaving their nests**, as well as my first sight of **Sea Lavender** and **Musk Mallow** in flower.

Starting off down Wade Lane I found my first **Musk Mallow** in flower and at Langstone Pond I counted **15 Egrets** in full view in various places that were different from the nests in which the birds have been very difficult to see over the past month. At least two of the birds were juveniles, now well away from their nests. After crossing Langstone Bridge I turned east along Northney Road but stopped at the car layby where the ancient Wadeway reaches Hayling Island. Here I counted **15 Lapwings** back on the shore and then walked out onto the saltings where much of the **Sea Lavender** has started to flower - the nearer I got to the water's edge the more **Greater Sea Spurrey** I found.

**A single duck was out on the water** but not easy to identify as when it was not underwater it was frantically washing and preening as if it was carrying a swarm of fleas or was perhaps partially oiled and desperately trying to clean itself. I never answered this question but I was able to determine that the bird was a **female Merganser** (not an unusual summer stayer).

Continuing to the North Common open space I found a magnificent show of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** at the carpark entrance and then, shortly after negotiating the kissing gate and before reaching the point where the ground opens out, I took a look to my left at the '**Owl box**' mounted on a telegraph post just behind the nearest house - a contributor to John Goodspeed's website had recently seen and photographed a **Barn Owl** in this box but nevertheless I was very surprised to find a **Barn Owl** looking out of it at me!

The box is only just deep enough (from front to back) for the **Owl** to stand in it. I understand that for nesting purposes **Barn Owls** like a deep box the size of a Tea Chest on its side and with 'front porch' area outside the front of the closed in area which itself should be a couple of feet deep or more. This box is only about one foot deep and has no external porch platform but nevertheless seems to have caught the fancy of its single inhabitant as it has not only been using it for several days but the white streaks on the roof show that it has been frequently perching on top - presumably at night. This could be a '**bachelor pad**' belonging to a young **unpaired male** but it could also belong to a male which has a mate and family elsewhere in the immediate vicinity but is not encouraged by his mate to clutter up the nest itself except when bringing food.

While here I cycled to the far east end and also explored the west end behind the houses but found nothing more exciting than the expected **Fragrant Agrimony** newly in flower (and also having a fragrance to its leaves!).

In recent years I have the impression that a formal conservation group has been at work clearing paths through the dense blackthorn jungle behind the 'west end' houses but today I found the paths very overgrown and then came on a bold notice asking anyone seeing unofficial scrub clearance taking place to report the fact to Havant Borough Council.

## Thu 19 June

### A quick ride to West Leigh Park

While waiting for lunch time I got some fresh air by riding north up New Lane to the Barton's Road playing fields and back, adding **Ladies Bedstraw** to my year list of flowering plants.

When I drove up this route last week I noticed that the small garden of the council flats on Wakeford's Way, which has had a great show of **Crown Vetch** for several years, had been drastically mown but today I saw that not all was lost as quite a lot of the plant had escaped by growing among some substantial Lily plants - no flowers yet but hopefully there soon will be.

The streamside path along the east side of the Barton's Road playing fields had nothing new but it was good to see **Meadow Sweet, Marsh Ragwort, Dyer's Greenweed** and commoner plants such as **Meadow Vetchling**.

On the way home I enjoyed a good show of **Weasel's Snout** (or **Lesser Snapdragon**) in the New Lane allotments, doing especially well among planted Potatoes which are unlikely to be weeded until the Potatoes are harvested. As I had a little time in hand I made a circuit of the Eastern Road cemetery where I came across **Ladies Bedstraw** in full flower at last as well as seeing blossom on the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant** and **White Stonecrop** growing on some graves.

## Mon 16 June

### Around Langstone

The highlights of a walk this afternoon down the Langbrook stream to the South Moors and back via Langstone Mill Pond were the **first Burnet Moth of the season**, a **male Sparrowhawk killing a young bird in the middle of Langstone High Street** and the sight of **two parent Egrets encouraging their young to leave their nests**.

Before leaving Havant I saw my first **Narrow-leaved Pepperwort** in flower beside the Langstone Roundabout, with **Greater Plantain** and possibly **Alsike Clover** flowering nearby, and on the South Moors **Marsh Ragwort** and **Meadow Sweet** were out with a first plant (no sign of flowers yet) of **Slender Hare's Ear** found on the seawall where **Sea Wormwood** and **Rock Samphire** are showing flower heads though no flowers. While on the subject of flowers I found flowerheads developing on **Musk Mallow** in Wade Lane (where a **Stag Beetle** was crushed on the roadway) and on the **Danewort plants** by the Billy Trail at the end of Grove road.

Bird news started with **Lesser Whitethroat song** as I entered the South Moors by the Langbrook stream path, followed by the sight and sounds of a **Blackcap family group** moving through Alder trees, and on the open southern part of the Moors **at least three Meadow Pipits were singing** (but no sign of a **Skylark**). On the shore at the mouth of the Langbrook stream the **Swan family definitely had six (not seven) cygnets**, and near them were **six Shelduck** (I think all adults though one might have been a very advanced juvenile), **a pair of adult Med Gulls** and a total of **around 30 Great Blackback Gulls** in various stages of maturity. Scattered along the shore were several **Egrets** but virtually no waders (just one **Oystercatcher**).

While walking around the 'orchid field' (perhaps 500 **Southern Marsh** in bloom but that is a pure guess) I came on my first **Marsh Ragwort** plants in flower and my first 'frothy' **Meadow Sweet** near a **Dog Rose** bush adorned with the first two

**Robin's Pincushion galls** I have seen this year. Also in the orchid field I saw **Meadow Brown** and **Large Skipper** butterflies to add to the **Speckled Wood** seen by the stream, and as I was leaving I came on a pristine **Burnet Moth** allowing me very close looks as it remained motionless on a **Marsh Thistle** flowerhead. I had a careful look at the diagnostic wing tip area and could see just one spot which would make it a **Five-spot**, but my understanding is that the only place where **Five-spot** can now be seen in Hampshire is Martin Down with others surviving on the Isle of Wight, so I had to persuade myself that the two spots that overlap on the wing-tip of the **Six-spot** had in this case fully overlapped to generate the impression of a single spot so I recorded it as **Six-spot Burnet**.

Heading for Langstone Pond I was walking down the village High Street and passing Towers Gardens when there was a **brief burst of squealing from a young bird followed by a plop as it landed in the grass across the road from me with a male Sparrowhawk holding it firmly down**. I suppose it took less than a minute to give up the ghost and during that minute I had a close up view of the **Sparrowhawk** through my binoculars at the distance of little more than the road width. When the young bird ceased struggling and the hawk flew off I had the impression that the victim was a young **Song Thrush**.

At the pond a **new Coot nest** was being built on the metal pontoon and **both Reed and Cetti's Warbler were singing** but my main interest was in the **Egrets**.

Focussing on wing flapping in the trees I found I was looking at a **group of three Egrets flopping and flapping from branch to branch - at least one was an adult and it eventually flew off leaving what I took to be two juveniles in the trees**. After they settled down I had a better view of what was going on from another family - in this case I could clearly see **an adult bird demonstrating how to use its wings and then using them to fly/jump to an adjacent branch - the juvenile got the message and imitated the actions to get to the same branch**.

The adult then took off leaving the juvenile on its new perch away from the nest. Just one more bird item to add - **three Swifts** were over my house this morning, presumably the same three that I saw in the area at dusk last night and a couple of evenings ago. No screaming in any of these cases but pretty good proof that one or two pairs are still interested in the Manor Close houses here as nest sites (one house in Manor Close has Swift nest boxes but several pairs have nested thereabouts in past years before any boxes were put up)

### **SUMMARY FOR JUNE 9 - 15 (WEEK 23 OF 2008)**

Interesting to learn that Tape Lures can be used to bring **Storm Petrels** close to the observer playing a tape of their calls and that a nosy **Buzzard** seems to have been killed by a **Peregrine** for coming too close to the latter's nest.

**Oystercatchers** are nesting on building rooves in Fareham and Southampton while **Lapwing** have already started to return to coastal sites.

The TV Springwatch programme has cast a new light on the **breeding habits of Dotterel and Red-necked Phalarope** and the internet has revealed a few **breeding colonies of Common Gull** in southern England. Latest news gives evidence for the start of a **Crossbill irruption** and the week's rarities include

**Black-headed Bunting, Thrush Nightingale, Pectoral Sandpiper** and an out of season **Redwing**.

New dragonflies are **Southern Hawker** and **Keeled Skimmer** and new butterflies are **Silver Studded Blue, Silver Washed** and **Heath Fritillaries** and **White Admiral** as well as **Marbled White** and Ringlet.

50 new moths for the year list include an unexpected **Spurge Hawkmoth**, a tiny micromoth **Donacaula forficella** whose larvae construct boats to get from one foodplant to another, and an uncommon migrant (the **Rannoch Looper**) flying south from Scotland to Kent. The beautiful **Scarce Merville du Jour** has been seen in Sussex and the dreaded **Brown-tail moth caterpillars** at Hurst Castle in the Solent. The first **Glow-worms** have been found glowing in Havant Thicket Plant news includes the first colour of **Dyers Greenweed** and **Goat's Rue** plus the tiny white stars of **Bastard Toadflax** found with a new mass of **Squinancywort**.

Two personal favourites found this week were **Bog Pimpernel** and **Skullcap** while **Fragrant Agrimony** let me identify it by scent for the first time ever! An easily overlooked newcomer this week is **Rough Chervil** looking very like the **Cow Parsley** it supersedes

## **BIRDS**

**Storm Petrel:** I was interested to see that a tape lure was used successfully to attract one of these birds in to St Catherine's Point on the IoW on June 7 - apparently this technique has worked there before

**Little Egret:** On June 13 one juvenile was seemingly wing-flapping in its nest at Langstone and another nest seemed to have two well grown young in it leaving no room in it for the parents that were both perched nearby. No young seem to have left their nests yet but it cannot be long before they do. At Portland three Little Egrets flew in from the sea on June 8

**Great White Egret:** On June 10 a **Great White** flew in at Dungeness and may have been responsible for three other sightings this week - on June 11 there was a possible sighting at Rodmell near Lewes, on June 12 one was in the Stour Valley near Canterbury and on the morning of June 13 one left the Rye Harbour roost with **22 Little Egrets**

**Mute Swan:** The pair which nested at Langstone Pond were reported to have had seven cygnets with them when they moved to the safety of the sea immediately after hatching on May 1 or 2, and a clear view of them at the mouth of the Langbrook stream on May 7 showed that all seven have survived the critical first month. This number of cygnets is unlikely to have been raised by any other local pair so the mysterious appearance of a pair with seven cygnets in Emsworth harbour on May 25 is pretty good proof that this family group ranges between Langstone and Emsworth. To add to the mystery surrounding the Langstone pair I saw what I assume was them back in the outfall of the Lymbourne stream on June 13 with apparently only 6 cygnets

**Brent:** Three summering birds were seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 14

**Teal:** A few do stay and breed in Hampshire and Sussex but a total of 18 seen together at the Sidlesham ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) on June 11 was unusual

**Buzzard:** Of local interest I hear that **four Buzzards** have been seen circling over Warblington farm on more than one occasion recently and what may have been a fifth bird (with a damaged wing) has been seen on the ground there - this suggests that we now have two pairs breeding locally. From further afield on the Hants/Wilts border I see that one seems to have paid the penalty for intruding too close to a **Peregrine nest** - the **Buzzard was found dead on the ground with injuries to the back of its neck that were consistent with a Peregrine strike**

**Peregrine:** I have in the past heard suggestions that a pair may have nested on high rise buildings near the Portsmouth docks and this year there are rumours of a pair nesting on Portsdown (possibly on one of the old forts or perhaps high on the Paulsgrove chalk pit), recently seen feeding two chicks in the nest.

**Quail:** Five new reports over the three days June 8 to 10 may indicate the start of an influx. Three of the birds involved seem to have settled on the Isle of Wight and another somewhere in Sussex while the fifth bird was heard at Portland and was presumably not yet at its destination

**Common Crane:** Latest sighting is of three seen together over the village of Crossbush a little east of Arundel

**Oystercatcher:** A pair are once again nesting on the roof of a Shopping Centre building in Fareham and are said to have two chicks at least a week old while from Southampton comes a report of three more pairs nesting on rooves close to the River Itchen

**Lapwing:** On June 8 half a dozen **Lapwing** on a sandbar at Christchurch Harbour suggested that failed breeders are already heading back to the coast. On June 9 the first returnees were back at the coast at Folkestone and on June 13 seven birds were back on the shore at Langstone village. A less positive report came from Sandwich Bay on June 12 saying the the number there had increased to 82.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** An unusual report for June was a of a **Pectoral Sandpiper** in the Kent Stour Valley on June 12

**Dotterel:** I was already aware that females of both **Dotterel** and **Red-necked Phalarope** leave their males to do all the incubation of their eggs and to care for their young, and I had assumed these females were either lazy or clever at avoiding chores, so I was interested to hear Simon King on the Springwatch TV programme suggesting that they are not lazy but that their behaviour is part of a strategy to ensure the maximum productivity of young for their species. Because the species chooses to nest in sites that are prone to unpredictable cold weather (snow in summer making it impossible to raise young in some years) the females make themselves available to males at more than one site. Simon suggested that after a female has mated with a male and laid eggs in a nest in the Scottish Cairngorms she is free to fly across the North Sea and mate with a different male in northern Scandinavia - thus if bad weather in Scotland kills her young there there is at least a chance that her eggs laid in Norway will survive

**Ruff:** A female was seen at Ibsley Water near Ringwood on June 7.

**Common Gull:** A photo on the Rye Bay website showing a **pair of Common Gulls mating at Rye Harbour** on June 9 led me to check how many pairs of this species nest in southern Britain and I find that my previous impression that virtually none nest in England south of the counties adjacent to the Scottish border is more or less correct. The latest seabird survey in the years 1998 to 2002 discovered 6 pairs in north Norfolk, 20 pairs in Suffolk and 11 at Dungeness in Kent. Older sources speak of breeding at Anglesey in Wales from 1963 onwards and a survey in 1969-70 found one pair in East Sussex. The Rye Harbour pair in the current photo may have mated but have not yet built a nest so I think that my impression that you have to go to Scotland to see Common Gull nests is still more or less correct.

**Herring Gulls:** Chicks had just started to hatch in rooftop nests in Bexhill on June 8, initiating a prolonged period of noise pollution (and other forms of pollution) for the human inhabitants of that town and the many other towns and cities where Herring Gulls increasingly nest.

**Roseate Tern:** Single birds have been seen this week at Dungeness on June 9, Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on June 13 and at Christchurch Harbour on June 14

**Little Tern:** By June 11 the eggs in 9 of the 27 nests at the Hayling Oysterbeds had hatched and so far there have been no observed losses of chicks. Elsewhere news is not so good - at Rye Harbour Little Terns have nested in every year since 1970 other than 2000 and now 2008 - none there this year. No positive news so far from Pagham Harbour but I have the impression that there are no more than 4 pairs there, and no definite news of any nests.

**Guillemot:** On June 9 the cliff ledges at Durlston held at least **70 Guillemot chicks**. **Puffins** and **Kittiwakes** have also been seen around nests on the Purbeck cliffs from bird-watching boat trips this week.

**Turtle Dove:** On June 9 the bird which had first appeared at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 1 was still there though no one has yet seen a mate for it.

**Owls:** In the last few days I have seen reports of **Tawny**, **Little** and **Long-eared owlets** being seen out of the nest (the **Long-eared** were heard 'squeaking' on the Ventnor Downs on the IoW). Another sign of the end of the breeding season is a sighting of an adult **Little Owl** perched boldly on a telegraph pole beside the Chichester to South Harting road in the section from Racton to Walderton. An odder report comes from Portland where a **Long-eared adult** was photographed hunting by day on June 8, presumably hungry after flying in from a long sea crossing, and to make it even odder another apparent migrant from the continent was seen flying west along the north Kent coast on June 9 (the first to be seen in that area at any time for several years)

**Nightjar:** The number of reports of these is now increasing. The first reports were on May 11 from both Parkhurst Forest (IoW) and the Basingstoke area but I only saw four other reports during May whereas I have seen eleven reports for the period June 4 to 13, coming from Havant Thicket (max 2 birds), the Chilgrove/Hooksway area north of Chichester (5 birds on June 10), and from Coates Common near Pulborough, Ashdown Forest, Darwell Wood near Battle

(Hastings), Parkhurst Forest on the IoW (3 birds), Christchurch Harbour, Firestone Copse at Newport (IoW) and St Leonard's Forest near Horsham (2 birds on June 13)

**Swallow:** I recently reported the apparent absence of local breeding birds around Warblington Farm but on June 9 I found two pairs back at the farm and am told by Tony Gutteridge that there are also two pairs at the Pook Lane stables - a decline in numbers but not extinction yet! Many people will have seen on the Springwatch TV programme film of **a male Swallow killing the new hatched chicks** in what seemed to be its own nest (though the killer was probably a different male to that which had fertilised the eggs) and on June 12 the SOS website had a report of similar behaviour by a male somewhere in Sussex.

**Pied Wagtail:** I have not seen any at Warblington Farm since Apr 5 this year but Tony Gutteridge assures me that a pair have been seen feeding young at the farm since then

**Thush Nightingale:** One has already been reported at Portland on May 18 and now I see that one was heard and seen at Folkestone on June 9

**Redwing:** One at Portland on June 11 was the first ever June record for Portland

**Pied Flycatcher:** A female at Portland on June 12 was another unusual record

**Golden Oriole:** In most years I am lucky to hear of more than half a dozen birds arriving on the south coast during April and May but this year I have already seen 19 reports and they are still coming in with seven since the beginning of June, all in Kent or East Sussex (almost certainly too late to breed here this year)

**Crossbill:** A run of 11 reports between June 7 and 14 shows that an irruption of continental birds is underway. Some reports may be of birds which have bred here (e.g. a flock of more than 40 seen in Roydon Woods near Lymington on June 7) but others from Portland, Folkestone and the Thanet area of Kent must have been new arrivals though the largest count among these coastal sightings has so far been of only 15 birds

**Hawfinch:** A female was an unexpected find in the ringing nets at Portland on June 9 and made an impressive photo while still in the hand before being released, the large size of the bird and its bill can both be judged by comparison with the size of the ringers hand

**Black-headed Bunting:** What was either a **Black-headed** or a **Red-headed Bunting** was seen at Portland on June 13 - this species is a rare visitor to Britain though common in the Middle East (breeding) or India (wintering)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Southern Hawker:** First report for the year comes from Portsdown (John Goodspeed's garden pond) on June 13 when John saw a female emerge. Although this is an early date I see one was out on June 10 last year and the first for 2006 was seen on June 2

**Keeled Skimmer:** The first of these was seen at Durlston on June 11

**Common Darter:** First of the year seen on June 9 in the Brede valley near Rye and on June 10 they were emerging at Rye Harbour

## Butterflies

**Silver Studded Blue:** First of the year seen near Lymington (at Shirley Holmes, south of Setley Plain) on June 7 followed by sightings on June 8 of 23 at Silchester north of Basingstoke and at least one on Iping Common near Midhurst

**White Admiral:** Leaving aside the unusual early appearance of one in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on May 11 the more normal first of the year was seen at Woods Mill at Henfield in the Adur valley on June 11 and the next was seen in Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 14

**Red Admiral:** Although the first fresh resident butterfly emerged in the Newhaven area on May 3 and I had a pristine specimen in my Havant garden on May 24 sightings of fresh specimens in Emsworth on June 11 and Hayling Island on June 12 probably reflect the start of a more general emergence

**Painted Lady:** Two more sightings at Beachy Head on June 7 and on the Hampshire coast west of Lymington on June 8

**Comma:** These are getting a bit thin on the ground now until this year's new generation appear in July so Brian Fellows did well to see one in the lower Ems valley on June 9 (only two others have been reported so far in June). Since then I have seen a very fresh specimen at Warblington on June 13 and others on Hayling so maybe the new generation is already emerging.

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** First and only report so far is from Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 12

**Heath Fritillary:** A few were already flying in the Blean woods near Canterbury on June 10 - we are not likely to see these in Hampshire or Sussex but they are of sentimental value to me as the woods where they still occur in Kent are very close to my old school.

**Marbled White:** First of the year seen on the downs behind Brighton on June 8 with Portsdown not far behind with its first on June 9

**Ringlet:** These were out at two Sussex sites on June 11 and at a third site on June 12. On June 13 the first were seen at Portland

## Moths

**Ghost Moth (0014 *Hepialus humuli*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 (National Moth night)

**The Festoon (0173 *Apoda limacodes*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 and another on Thorney Island on June 8

**Monopis obviella (0229):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11

**Red-tipped Clearwing (0380 *Synanthedon formicaeformis*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 8

**Cocksfoot Moth (0391 *Glyphipterix simplicella*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 10 - this is a common day flying tiny moth found on flowers in grassland - it is the caterpillars which rely on Cocksfoot grass

***Bryotropha domestica* (0789):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11

**Hollyhock Seed Moth (0809 *Pexicopia malvella*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11 - this is a pest species for gardeners of Hollyhocks and similar plants

***Cochylis hybridella* (0965):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11 (normally out in July)

**Dark Fruit-tree Tortrix (0972 *Pandemis heparana*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11

**Cherry Bark Moth (1216 *Enarmonia formosana*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 7

***Pammene regiana* (1234):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11 (Larvae feed on Sycamore seeds)

***Donacaula forcicella* (1329):** First report came unexpectedly from Portland on June 9 - presumably a vagrant from reed beds at Weymouth as the entry in UK Moths reads .. "Inhabiting marshy areas, ditches and similar habitats, the larva of this species has a peculiar habit of cutting part of a leaf to act as a raft, using this to float on the water to a new foodplant when necessary".

**Meadow Grey (1333 *Scoparia pyralella*):** First in the Newhaven area on June 14

**Brown China-mark (1345 *Nymphula nymphaeta*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on June 7 (National Moth night)

**Mother of Pearl (1405 *Pleuroptya ruralis*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 (National Moth night)

***Dioryctria abietella* (1454):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 9

**Buff Arches (1653 *Habrosyne pyritoides*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 (National Moth night)

**Birch Mocha (1677 *Cyclophora albipunctata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 (National Moth night)

**Flame Carpet (1722 *Xanthorhoe designata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 7 (National Moth night)

**The Spinach (1757 *Eulithis mellinata*):** First on Thorney Island on June 7

**Barred Yellow (1765 *Cidaria fulvata*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on June 7

**Pine Carpet (1767 *Thera firmata*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Scallop Shell (1789 *Rheumaptera undulata*):** First in the Rother Valley woods near Rye on June 7

**Sharp-angled Carpet (1794 *Euphyia unangulata*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Slender Pug (1811 *Eupithecia tenuiata*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Lime-speck Pug (1825 *Eupithecia centaureata*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on June 7

**Ochreous Pug (1844 *Eupithecia indigata*):** First at Dungeness on June 11

**Small Yellow Wave (1876 *Hydrelia flammeolaria*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Small Seraphim (1882 *Pterapherapteryx sexalata*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on June 7

**Latticed Heath (1894 *Semiothisa clathrata*):** First report from Silchester Common by day on June 8

**Rannoch Looper (1896 *Itame brunneata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11 - a rare migrant from Scotland where it is a common day flying, butterfly like, species

**Lilac Beauty (1910 *Apeira syringaria*):** First at Shoreham on June 12

**Mottled Beauty (1941 *Alcis repandata*):** First in the Hastings area on June 9

**Bordered White (1954 *Bupalus piniaria*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Pine Hawkmoth (1978 *Hyloicus pinastri*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Four of these were seen in February and three more in April but only one report in May (29th) and now one in June (7th) at Beachy Head area

**Spurge Hawkmoth (1986 *Hyles euphorbiae*):** The first of these rare and impressive migrants trapped at Shoreham on June 9

**Poplar Kitten (1998 *Furcula bifida*):** First at Portland on June 9

**Red-necked Footman (2039 *Atolmis rubricollis*):** First in Abbot's Wood near Hailsham on June 11 (until recently classed as extinct in East Sussex)

**Four-dotted Footman (2040 *Cybosia mesomella*):** First also in Abbot's Wood on June 11

**Broom Moth (2163 *Ceramica pisi*):** First at Park Corner Heath on June 7

**Shore Wainscot (2201 *Mythimna litoralis*):** First at Rye Harbour on June 10

**Sword-grass (2242 *Xylena exsoleta*):** First in the Hastings area on June 9 - a rare species in southern England

**Scarce Merveille du Jour (2277 *Moma alpium*):** First in Rother Valley woods near Rye on June 7

**Small Clouded Brindle (2331 *Apamea unanimitis*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 11

**Middle-barred Minor (2340 *Oligia fasciuncula*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 9

**Bordered Sallow (2399 *Pyrrhia umbra*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 9

**Cream-bordered Green Pea (2418 *Earias chlorana*):** First at Rye Harbour on June 10

**Beautiful Golden Y (2442 *Autographa pulchrina*):** First at Abbot's Wood (Hailsham) on June 11

**Beautiful Hook-tip (2473 *Laspeyria flexula*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on June 7

## Caterpillars

**Brown-tail moth:** First mention of this annual menace to life (!) comes from Hurst Castle near Lymington on June 8

## Other Insects

**Bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum*:** A recent invader of Britain gets a mention as it has appeared in a new area near Rye but perhaps of more interest here in Hampshire is that it was first found in Britain in 2001 by Ben Darvill in the New Forest area when he was still at student at Southampton University (he is now a kingpin of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust)

**Stag Beetle:** The first of the year that I know of was in my Havant garden on May 26 and since then we have had a couple more reports but my find of a female on the road between Havant and Emsworth on June 9 is the first female I have heard of (since then I have found another female on a road in Havant - sadly this one was squashed)

**Glow-worm:** John Goodspeed is the first to report these 'glowing' - he saw a couple in Havant Thicket on June 8

**Bush Crickets:** None yet mature but instars of both **Great Green** and **Dark** were reported from Durlston on June 13

## PLANTS

**Pale Flax:** This had been reported at Durlston on May 22 and seen recently by Alistair Martin at the Denhill Close open space off Saltmarsh Lane on Hayling where I saw it on June 12

**Thyme leaved sandwort:** First reported by John Goodspeed who saw it on Portsdown on June 10

**Greater Sea Spurrey:** The bright mauvish flowers of **Lesser Sea Spurrey** have been out since Apr 25 this year but I did not find the larger, whiter flowers of **Greater Sea Spurrey** until June 9 in the muddy harbour shore at Langstone (which reminds me that in recent years **Lesser Sea Spurrey**, like **Danish Scurvygrass**, has widely spread inland on roadsides where salt spread on the roads in winter has got washed to the roadsides to form an equivalent muddy, salty 'shoreline')

**Bastard Toadflax:** This was reported to be in flower at Durlston on June 8, then found at two regular sites on Portsdown on June 10

**Dyer's Greenweed:** Flowering on west Hayling on June 12

**Restharrow:** This was widely in flower on Portsdown by June 10

**Yellow vetchling (Lathyrus aphaca):** Reported as in flower at Durlston on June 8 and hopefully still to be found at Milton Common in Southsea, one of the very few sites where it can still be found locally

**Goat's Rue:** First flowers seen in the carpark for the Hayling Oysterbeds area on June 12

**Agrimony:** First of the year seen on Portsdown on June 10

**Fragrant Agrimony:** Just starting to flower by the Hayling Coastal Path on June 12 - identification confirmed by a strong scent from the fresh leaves

**White Stonecrop:** Newly flowering in Warblington cemetery on June 13

**Enchanter's Nightshade:** This delicate Willowherb (not sure where the Nightshade part of the name comes from) was flowering as a weed in a neighbour's garden on June 7 though you are probably more likely to see it in woodland

**Common Lime:** Flowers fully open on roadside trees in Havant on June 13

**Rough Chervil:** Several flowering plants flowering in the Warblington area on June 13 and must have been out for some time as the first umbel to open on each of several plants had gone to seed

**Fool's Water Cress:** Flowering in a wet ditch at Warblington on June 13

**Bog Pimpernel:** A good show of these flowers found in the Warblington SSSI on June 13

**Great Mullein:** A cluster of a dozen plants had started to flower by the Hayling Coastal Path on June 12

**Common Toadflax:** First of the year on Portsdown on June 10

**Eyebright:** Reported at Durlston on May 22 but not seen locally until found on Portsdown on June 10

**Skullcap:** The lovely blue flowers of this were out beside the Lumley Mill stream in Emsworth on June 9

**Carrot Broomrape:** Not a species we are likely to find locally around Havant but this was flowering at Durlston on June 10 - their website tells us that it is the only one of the Broomrapes that is totally dependent on the Wild Carrot which it parasitises for all its sustenance

**Buddleia davidii:** The common Butterfly Bush started to flower in Havant on June 12

**Squinancywort:** Lots of this in flower on Portsdown by June 10

**Field Scabious:** First flowers found on Hayling on June 12

**Pineappleweed:** This has probably been flowering un-noticed for some time - I first recorded it on June 13

**Wall Lettuce:** Flowering in Havant on June 14

**Wild Onion (Crow Garlic):** Plants with well developed bulbils seen at Warblington on June 13

**Man Orchid:** Flowering on Wolstonbury Hill near the A23 just north of Brighton on June 8

**Fragrant Orchid:** Flowering on Wolstonbury Hill near the A23 just north of Brighton on June 8

**Heath Spotted Orchid:** Flowering in the Hookheath nature reserve at the north foot of Portsdown on June 8

**Common Cord Grass (Spartina):** First flowering seen at Langstone on June 9

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fox:** One seen on June 12 in the Kent Stour valley carrying a **Mole** as prey

**Squirrels:** Young **Grey Squirrels** have been on our lawn for some time now and on June 10 I see that young **Red Squirrels** could be seen at Binstead on the Isle of Wight

**Lesser Horseshoe Bat:** At least one seen on June 11 at Christchurch Harbour with the usual **Pipistrelles**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 9 - 15 (WEEK 23 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 13 June**

#### **A walk around Warblington**

Walking along the Emsworth Road in Havant I found **Lucerne** as a new roadside species flowering outside the One Stop shop and nearby **Lime Trees** were in full flower. Around the A27 underpass my first **Rough Chervil** was found and one or two **Bullfinches** were heard but not seen.

In Church Lane at Warblington **Fool's Water Cress** was newly flowering as was **White Stonecrop** in the cemetery. Back in the lane I enjoyed the lovely orange colour of a **fresh Comma butterfly** and the much less beautiful sight of **Wild Onions with well developed bulbils**.

In the marshy SSSI a lot of **Bog Pimpernel** was out where a gap in the treeline allowed more sun to reach the wet streamside and around it the count of **Southern Marsh orchids was marginally up to 83**. **Meadow Brown, Large Skipper** and **Speckled Wood** were all on the wing here.

Coming back along the shore to Langstone I found the **first seven Lapwing back on the shore** and in the trees behind the pond I seemed to see **one large juvenile Egret exercising its wings** while another nest seemed fully occupied by **two juveniles**, leaving their parents to perch on nearby branches.

In the outflow of the Lymbourne stream **a family of Swans had six cygnets** - was this the local family that had lost one cygnet?

### **Thu 12 June**

#### **New flowers on Hayling Island**

I soon saw the flowers of **Agrimony** and **Common Toadflax** (which Brian Fellows had been the first to see on Portsdown on June 10) as I crossed Langstone Bridge and started down the Hayling Coastal Path. My first personal find came in the overflow carpark for the Oysterbeds where **Goat's Rue** was just starting to flower but I had to go much further south to the Denhill Close open space (off Saltmarsh Lane) before I added the next - a lovely large specimen of **Pale Flax**.

The **Pale Flax** was one of the main reasons for this trip as it had been spotted a few days ago by Alistair Martin and he had emailed me yesterday to ask to be reminded of this plant's name, so it has clearly been in flower for a few days though I do not have a precise first date (last year I first saw it on June 7 and I doubt it has been out for more than a week this year).

While in the Saltmarsh Lane area I went down to the sea wall to have a look at the mass of **Bastard Cabbage** now flowering and in seed there, and while there I noted my first **Lucerne** flowers (the first had been found on Eastney beach by Brian Fellows on May 29)

Cycling back up the coastal path I kept a count of the **Bee Orchids** seen between Saltmarsh Lane and the Oysterbeds, reaching a total of 19 seen without stopping my bike or searching. I also found one **Pyramidal Orchid** in a new site (under the wooden barrier separating the tracks as you pass the northernmost of the open West Lane fields).

Quite a bit south of this I did stop my bike when I spotted **an extra large plant of Agrimony** in an area where I have identified **Fragrant Agrimony** in past years. It was too early to check the curl of the spikes on the seed capsules so I picked a large lower leaf and sniffed - for the first time ever I encountered the distinct 'fragrance' gives the plant its name and that was enough to allow me to tick it off as **Fragrant Agrimony** though I did also sniff at the equivalent leaves of smaller, normal **Agrimony** plants and could detect no scent from them.

Having stopped here I was rewarded with something I would otherwise have missed - two plants of **Field Scabious** newly in flower - and further up the track I added another tick when I passed a dozen tall spikes of **Great Mullein** with their first flowers open

Just after passing the pillbox guarding the path to the West Lane bends I heard **Yellowhammer song** from the field inland of the track where I had heard it on May 22 - it seems at least one bird has returned to breed here this year.

That same field also provided my final new flower for the yearlist - a mass of **Dyer's Greenweed** but I was also impressed by the large display of flowering **Sea Kale** on the shingle where the shingle bar sheltering the Stoke Bay saltings diverges from the line of the old rail track - it seems only five years or so since **Sea Kale** started to appear here.

Nearing home I found the **Langstone Swan family** in the outflow of the Lymbourne stream and this time **I could not see more than six cygnets!**

Behind the Mill Pond **Egrets** flew in to mark the rough locations of at least four unseen nests and at the most visible (but still screened) nest I seemed to see two

adults close to the nest in which there was seemingly one large and well feathered juvenile - I guess none of the young have yet left their nests but that it is now only a matter of days before they do.

## Tue 10 June

### Bastard Toadflax and Squinancywort flowering on Portsdown

News that **Marbled Whites** and **Silver Studded Blues** are now on the wing in Sussex suggested a trip to sunny Portsdown this afternoon in the hope of **Marbled Whites** but I did not have time to make a lengthy visit so I changed my target to that of seeing **Bastard Toadflax** (reported as flowering at Durlston on June 8) and I was successful in this objective, finding one plant in the uncut grass just below the carpark with the wooden gateposts just east of the London Road.

While in that area I also found masses of **Squinancywort** and **Restharrow**, both new to my flowering list among many other delights that included **Bee**, **Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted orchids** (one of them white) and masses of 'very nearly out' **Ladies Bedstraw** which I could not yet add to the year list plus the flowering **Spotted Hawkweed** which I found here on May 23.

Two expected plants were missing - the **Rosy Garlic** has suffered a really determined onslaught from a mechanical digger (probably stolen by youths as the digging seems to have been in aid of creating a really dangerous hump for motorcycling over - if doing so in the downhill direction the rider would have a really good chance of breaking his neck when his bike came down from its airborne trajectory). The **Rosy Garlic** will not be seriously missed but the other missing plant is the **Sickle Medick** that has appeared for about five years beside the sliproad connecting the west bound Hill Road to the northbound London Road. My first record of the **Sickle Medick** was in 2003 with a report of it in September. In 2004 the first flower was seen on June 4 and it was still going on Sep 5. In 2005 the first and last dates were June 19 and Oct 15 and in 2006 they were June 20 and Oct 10. In 2007 the plants seemed to be dying back and my only record is of Aug 15 so there is still hope that something will be seen later in the summer but it does seem that this casual and unexplained introduction to the hillside flora is reaching the end of its term.

While here this afternoon I did see my first **Large Timothy grass**, though not yet in flower.

Back at home we had a new addition to the garden birds yesterday when the **local Magpie pair brought three youngsters** on to the lawn for the first time and they were still much in evidence again today.

## Mon 9 June

### Langstone Swan family reveal 7 cygnets

From the north pier of the old Langstone rail bridge this morning I could see the **Langstone Swan pair** in the expected place at low tide on the muddy bank of the outflowing Langbrook stream. In the warm sunshine and with the growing independence of the cygnets there was no need for any to shelter in the plumage of their parents and **I was really surprised to count seven of them** all looking fit and healthy.

I first saw them on May 2 within a day of hatching and before the parents had taken them from the pond to the safer and weedier waters of the harbour. At that first view I counted **six cygnets but I heard later that someone claimed to have seen**

**seven** which I was happy to accept as my view of them was very restricted, but on the subsequent sightings around the harbour (never ideal views) I thought they were down to three surviving cygnets until June 2 when they seemed to have four. Today they showed me that all seven have survived.

While on the old rail pier I enjoyed a good show of flowers including my first **Viper's Bugloss** and **Hop Trefoil** (both seen earlier by others), and in the muddy saltings between the rail track and the main road I found the first flowering of both **Spartina Grass** and **Greater Sea Spurrey**.

Passing Langstone Pond **the most clearly visible of the Egret nests seemed to have a large but dully plumaged bird in it** (I thought I could see the 'spines' of some of its primaries as if the barbs of the feathers had not yet fully opened) and this could have been a view of a juvenile close to leaving the nest. That ties in with my calculation that if the eggs were laid on May 1, had the stated 21 days incubation followed by 30 days in the nest after hatching, **then the juvenile should leave the nest on June 14** (this week). Of course we do not know when the eggs were laid but the adults were at the site throughout most of April so some eggs may have been laid before May 1.

A look into the Warblington farmyard gave me more good news in that at least **one pair of Swallows has a nest** and I saw at least three adults so there should be more than one nest. Even better was the sight of a **House Martin** circling the farmyard as if it might have a nest somewhere close - and **House Martins** have not nested here previously. Balancing bad news was that there is still no sign of any **Pied Wagtails**.

Stopping on my way home to check on the rare **Clustered Clover** I increasingly have the impression that it never shows the sort of flowerhead that you see on **Red** or **White Clover** - just a globular flowerhead of mainly empty calyces with a few pale pink flower buds poking out of some of them. On the old tarmac of the road where they are found I nearly ran over a **female Stag Beetle** wandering aimlessly.

### **SUMMARY FOR JUNE 2 - 8 (WEEK 22 OF 2008)**

A **Common Crane** has turned up near Arundel, an unseasonal **Bittern** was seen near Lewes, a **White Stork** was 'following the plough' on the Isle of Wight, a **Trumpeter Finch** was on the cliffs at Newhaven and an **American Golden Plover** was at Pegwell Bay in Kent. Oddest bird of the week was a **Hooded Merganser** at Portland.

A single **Black-tailed Godwit of the nominate race** (not the Islandic subspecies) has been seen on the River Adur at Shoreham. Both **Terek Sandpiper** and **Whiskered Tern** are again in the news and a 'genuine' **Common Rosefinch** has turned up at Dungeness to be first for the year.

**White-legged** and **Small Red Damselflies**, and **Banded Demoiselle** feature in reports for the first time and early **Meadow Brown** butterflies were seen on Thorney Island, Portsdown and later at Emsworth.

A long list of 62 moths (including **Broad Bordered Bee Hawkmoth** and **Privet Hawkmoth**) feature as firsts, partly because an exhaustive list was published of those trapped on the night before the Open Day at the Sussex Butterfly reserve at

Park Corner Heath near Uckfield - also listed but from the Kent coast is a **Plume Moth** whose larvae feed on **Sea Lavender** and which may thus be found in our harbours. Eye catching **Mullein Moth caterpillars** have been seen at Rye Harbour and both **Peacock butterfly** and a probable **Knot Grass moth caterpillar** at Brook Meadow in Emsworth, while among other insects are the first **Scorpion Flies** (and a **Stag Beetle** brought down in flight by a **House Sparrow** but saved from pecking to death by human intervention - the first observation of **emerging Stag Beetles** comes from Portsmouth).

Best new flowers this week have been **Hairy Vetchling** at Broadmarsh and **Bastard Cabbage** at a new site in Havant, with a good list of summer favourites now flowering (including **Meadowsweet, Meadow Vetchling, Greater Knapweed, Common Centaury** and **Yellow-wort**)

## **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** One was on the sea close in off East Wittering on May 30

**Storm Petrel:** Sightings from Portland, Durlston and Selsey during the week with the biggest count of around 10 from Selsey on June 5

**Bittern:** One was seen to fly out of reeds on the Lewes Brooks on May 31 - very unexpected for anywhere in Sussex at this time of year though the booming of **Bitterns** can be heard nightly in the Kent Stour valley

**Cattle Egret:** Just a single report of one bird in Poole Harbour on June 1 but from further afield I hear rumours that the first breeding of this species in this country has been recorded this year

**Great White Egret:** One was at Abbotsbury in Dorset on June 2 and another was new in the Kent Stour Valley on June 6

**Black Stork:** One flew low over East Grinstead in Sussex on June 5 and another 'Stork species' was in the Wareham area of Dorset on June 7

**White Stork:** What was presumably the bird seen in the Luccombe Down area on May 31 was still on the IoW on June 1 when it was found in the Samber Hill area south of Shorwell not far from the Shepherd's Trail going to Shepherds Chine on the coast west of Atherfield and St Catherine's Point. Photographs show it 'following the plough' with gulls. Since then there have been sightings of one flying east over Christchurch Harbour on June 4 and and two reports of one in East Kent on June 5

**Mute Swan:** The pair which hatched at least six cygnets on Langstone Pond quickly moved their family to the mouth of the Langbrook stream on the west side of Langstone village and when I last saw them there they seemed to be down to 3 cygnets. On June 2 what I think was the same Swan family had moved east to the stream flowing out from Warblington reedbed and was seen to have four cygnets - further investigation is called for! On June 7 I found the pair on the Budds Farm Pools had 5 healthy cygnets

**Black Swan:** A single Black Swan joined the massive summer flock in Christchurch Harbour on June 6

**Hooded Merganser:** At dusk on June 6 a tame, unringed and full winged female appeared in a pool by the Chesil Bank near Portland and it was still there next day - no one knows where it came from.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Single birds are regularly seen each year at a few south coast sites during the summer but a sighting of a pair together off the Lymington shore on June 7 was interesting - if **Goosanders** regularly breed in the Avon valley nowadays why not **Mergansers**?

**Hen Harriers:** Two birds, both described as **ring-tail Hen Harriers** were seen in Sussex on June 1. One was in the south west of the county at Washington Common north of Worthing, the other in Ashdown Forest. Then on June 5 a ringtail was seen at Newhaven and a **male Harrier of uncertain species** was seen from a train heading towards Chichester in the Nutbourne area.

**Montagu's Harrier:** Whether or not either of the above two **Hen Harriers** were in fact Monties there was a genuine first summer male **Montagu's** in the Kent Stour valley on May 31 as well as the one already reported at Portland that day

**Red-footed Falcon:** The first summer male which has been in the Beaulieu Road station area of the New Forest since at least May 13 (probably May 10) was still there on June 1 and an adult female was in the Kent Stour valley on both May 31 and June 1 (and may be the bird seen on Sheppey prior to May 9 when it was at Oare Marshes near Faversham)

**Peregrine:** The four young in the Chichester Cathedral nest were close to fledging when Brian Fellows saw them (via video cam) on June 1

**Quail:** One was reported from St Catherine's Hill area (Isle of Wight) On June 7. Before that one was in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5 and another was 'singing' in the Northward Hill area of Kent (near the Thames estuary north of Rochester) on June 2

**Crane:** Another new sighting on June 3 of one feeding in flooded fields south of the A27 a few miles east of Arundel (between Poling and Angmering) and it was seen again over Angmering on June 4. On June 5 another flew west over The Fleet area near Weymouth.

**American Golden Plover:** A bird in full summer plumage turned up in Pegwell Bay (south of Ramsgate) on June 1 and was still there up to June 5. After the fiasco of the mis-identified Grey Plover at Lymington recently you may wish to check the photos of this bird which can be seen at [http://www.planetthanet.org/american\\_golden\\_plover.htm](http://www.planetthanet.org/american_golden_plover.htm) (most angles are covered but no view of the critical underwing area!)

**Grey Plover:** High counts in Newtown Harbour on the IoW (44 birds on June 1) and Pagham Harbour (40 birds on June 3) suggest that there should be a lot remaining in Langstone Harbour.

**Lapwing:** At least two pairs each had one fledged youngster on the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket on June 5 and another 9 adult birds were seen in the air together there giving a minimum of 15 birds but my guess would be that there were at least 25 present including several more young

**Temminck's Stint:** One arrived in Pegwell Bay on June 1 with the **American Golden Plover**

**Woodcock:** At least one was roding in Havant Thicket on the evening of June 4 and more than 5 were flying in Parkhurst Forest (loW) on June 7

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Some of the Icelandic birds that have stayed with us seem to have been on the move - on June 1 a flock of 30 flew east over Christchurch Harbour, stopping only for a quick lunch break, and on the same day 18 went over Newtown Harbour on the loW. Perhaps more interestingly June 3 brought a report of **a bird of the nominate race (not the Islandica subspecies)** seen on the banks of the R Adur opposite Shoreham airport. This was seen by an experienced observer, Richard Fairbank, who writes .. "A summer-plumaged limosa

**Black-tailed Godwit** on the River Adur opposite the airport at low tide (6pm). This race has a longer bill and paler, less extensive, red underparts than islandica".

**Terek Sandpiper:** The great rarity which appeared at Rye Harbour on May 31 was refound later that day at a pit called the Midrips between Camber and Lydd in the Dungeness area and was seen there again on June 1

**Black-headed Gull:** On June 7 some of the chicks at Rye Harbour were very close to fledging so there is a chance that we will start to see ginger juveniles locally during the coming week

**Little Tern:** Latest news from the Hayling Oysterbeds comes from Brian Fellows, who was wardening there on June 3, and who tells us that there are probably **27 Little Tern nests** and that those birds that started to lay eggs on or soon after May 13 are coming to the end of their three week incubation so **some chicks should hatch before the end of this week**. Within the first day of hatching the chicks can be expected to leave their nests though they cannot go far on the small island as it will be another four weeks before they 'fledge' (i.e. grow feathers and become able to fly). I would imagine that they will be exposed to even more danger during that month than they have been during the incubation period - the only advantage of being mobile is that they can retreat from high tides. Brian describes one of the problems that will occur when both Tern and Gull chicks are mobile and wander into each others 'territories' - he says .. "The big change was the **presence of about 30 Black-headed Gull chicks on the two islands**, with lots more to come. There appeared to be some tension between the Terns and Gulls with lots of dive-bombing from the former. Jason is a bit concerned about this". Add to that the threats posed by **Kestrels**, other **large hungry gulls** whether or not they have young of their own, and potential waterborne forays by **Foxes, Rats**, and possibly **'pet' dogs**, the outlook for the young Terns is fraught with danger (including the weather - young chicks can quickly die of cold brought on by rain or cold nights)

**Whiskered Tern:** One, probably two, of these have already been reported in the Weymouth and Lymington area between May 5 and 8 and now we have another

report of one at Stodmarsh in the Kent Stour Valley from May 31 to June 3 at least - for a couple of pictures of this bird in flight go to

<http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/junesightings2008.htm>

**Turtle Dove:** One was purring in Brook Meadow on June 1 to become a new species for that nature reserve, and it was still around on June 4. At a guess this was probably a newly arrived young migrant that will not breed this year - those that will breed will have arrived some time ago (they started to come in from Apr 15) and will have settled down in the first half of May, but others continue to arrive - two came in at Dungeness on June 1, two reached Portland on May 30, and 8 others have arrived there since May 20. Singles arrived at both Portland and Dungeness on June 7

**Barn Owl:** One was seen distantly in Havant Thicket on the evening of June 4 along with both **Nightjar**, **Woodcock** and **Tawny Owls**

**Nightjar:** On the evening of June 4 at least two were churring in Havant Thicket, on June 5 one was heard on Coates Common near Pulborough and on June 7 at least three were active in Parkhurst Forest (IoW).

**Swift:** As with Turtle Doves many of these are still arriving and are unlikely to breed this year - on June 3 Dungeness logged 210 Swifts arriving . Here in Havant four birds (two pairs) were seen briefly over Havant on each of June 5, 6 and 7 but it seems unlikely that any will breed here this year. While on the subject of **Swifts**, and with their demise as breeding birds here in Havant in my mind, it is appropriate to quote an entry which has recently appeared on the Dorset Bird Club website (I am not sure if this applies to counties other than Dorset) ...

**"The UK breeding population of Common Swifts is in big trouble** (down by 42% in the South West and more in some areas) and if action is not taken soon it is likely to reach an unrecoverable level. The most obvious reason for the decline is human interference in the Swifts' traditional nesting habitat, ie. in our homes and other buildings. An important part of attempting to protect breeding colonies is locating them. Most people will be familiar with the low level, high speed "screaming party" displays with which Swifts announce the presence of a breeding colony. **Geoff Beale has established a Google Group (**<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/uk-swifts>**) to enable people to send in details of past and future sightings."**

**Bee Eater:** Reports of singles at Folkestone, Selsey and Dungeness this week brings my total of reports for the year so far up to 23

**Hoopoe:** One was seen on a bungalow roof at Horsted Keynes (near Haywards Heath) on June 4 making 27 reports of the species so far this year.

**Willow Warbler:** A single bird seen to be **singing both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff song** in the Lewes area on June 7 was the third heard doing so this year - the first was at Martin Down on May 14 and the second was in the Adur valley on May 18

**Golden Oriole:** Five more birds have just arrived in Britain. On June 1 one was heard singing at the Park Corner Heath butterfly reserve close to the A22 south of

Uckfield before it flew north and on both June 2 and 3 birds were heard at Dungeness, then on June 6 one was in the Thanet area of Kent and on June 7 another was heard at Dungeness.

**Red-backed Shrike:** The bird at Shopham Bridge in the Pulborough area was still there on June 7 (first seen May 24) and on June 1 there were sightings of a female at Brading Marshes (IoW) and another vague report of one 1 kilometre south of Beaulieu Road station in the New Forest

**Rose-coloured Starling:** An adult was seen at Beachy Head on May 30 and another at Portland on June 4 (when yet another was at Dungeness)

**Trumpeter Finch:** A first summer male was heard and seen well in the Newhaven area from June 2 (first seen in a private garden) up to June 6

**Common Rosefinch:** One was singing at Dungeness on June 3

**Hawfinch:** A party of three flew over Beachy Head on May 30

**Reed Bunting:** Of local interest on June 2 I saw a female perched on reeds at the Warblington reedbed with what seemed to be a faecal sac in her bill before she flew off with it - they are almost certainly breeding there but I am not so sure if they are doing so at Langstone Mill Pond this year - I only have one record of a male singing there on May 15 (he may have moved to the Langstone South Moors where I heard and saw one on May 30)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Downy Emerald:** Although these had been seen in the Rye area on May 13 they only started to emerge at Rye Harbour on June 5, showing their green eyes as they hover over the water

**Black-tailed Skimmer:** First seen at Rye Harbour on May 27 they only started to emerge at Dungeness on June 7 (and at Christchurch Harbour on June 6)

**Scarce Chaser:** Last week we heard of these being found on the Sussex Ouse north of Lewes and then of one being found on the Isle of Wight (where they have not been recorded previously). Now, on June 1, comes a report of them at Broadbridge Heath near Horsham

**Banded Demoiselle:** These have almost certainly been on the wing for some time but the first mention that I have seen of them only comes on June 1 when 'hundreds' were said to be flying at Broadbridge Heath. Locally the first was seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 6

**White-legged Damselfly:** Another first for Broadbridge Heath on June 1

**Small Red Damselfly:** The **Large Red** is traditionally the first dragonfly to be seen each year but the first **Small Red** was not seen until June 6 (at Christchurch Harbour)

## Butterflies

**Large Skipper:** After the first of the year on the Isle of Wight on May 21 there were more sightings on May 31 at Thorney Island, Farley Mount (Winchester), and Bonchurch (IoW). I saw several in the Havant Thicket area on June 5

**Painted Lady:** The twelfth report of the year since the first at Portland on Apr 27 came from Park Corner Heath near Eastbourne on June 4 - the nearest we have to an invasion so far is four sightings on two successive days (Martin Down and the M3 at Eastleigh on May 29 and Thanet in Kent plus the Hurst sighting on May 30)

**Glanville Fritillary:** The count of 30 at Hurst Castle on May 25 has now been beaten by a total of 54 in the Ventnor area on May 31

**Speckled Wood:** A count of 17 fresh specimens in the Cuckmere valley area near Eastbourne on June 3 suggested a new emergence of these butterflies

**Meadow Brown:** First of the year has already been attributed to the Downs behind Brighton on May 31 but further reports now show that they were also flying on Thorney Island and on Portsdown on that same day. Locally the first was seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 7

## Moths

**Currant Clearwing (0373 *Synanthedon tipuliformis*):** First reported from a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden on June 7

***Argyresthia trifasciata* (409a):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

***Argyresthia cupressella* (409b):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

**Timothy Tortrix (0989 *Aphelia paleana*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

***Lozotaenia forsterana* (1002):** First reported from a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden on June 6

**Green Oak Tortrix (1033 *Tortrix viridana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

***Crambus lathoniellus* (1301):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**Bee Moth (1428 *Aphomia sociella*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 4

***Ephestia parisitella* (1474):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

***Agdistis bennetii* (1488):** This large plume moth with a very distinctive 'three bladed propeller' shape when at rest was found at Pegwell Bay in Kent on May 30. The larval food plant is **Sea Lavender** and the moth is a south coast speciality that should be found locally.

**Oak Hook-tip (1646 *Drepana binaria*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Satin Lutestring (1656 *Tetheella fluctuosa*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Small Emerald (1673 *Hemistola chrysoprasaria*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Dwarf Cream Wave (1705 *Idea fuscovenosa*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Riband Wave (1713 *Idea aversata*):** First at Newhaven on June 6

**July Belle (1734 *Scotopteryx luridata*):** First at Dungeness on June 5

**Galium Carpet (1740 *Epirrhoe galiata*):** First at Newhaven on June 5

**Cypress Carpet (1771 *Thera cypressata*):** First at Cosham (Portsmouth) on June 6

**Broken-barred Carpet (1773 *Electrophaes corylata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Foxglove Pug (1817 *Eupithecia pulchellata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Netted Pug (1823 *Eupithecia venosata*):** First at Newhaven on June 5

**Freyers Pug (1827 *Eupithecia intricata*):** First taken somewhere in Sussex on May 31

**Green Pug (1860 *Pasiphila rectangulata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**The Magpie (1884 *Abraxas grossulariata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 4

**Peacock Moth (1889 *Semiothisa notata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Scorched Wing (1904 *Plagodis dolabraria*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Orange Moth (1924 *Angerona prunaria*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Pale Oak Beauty (1944 *Serraca punctinalis*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Clouded Silver (1958 *Lomographa temerata*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Privet Hawkmoth (1976 *Sphinx ligustri*):** First found on Portsdown by day on June 4 then trapped at Newhaven on June 5

**Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (1983 *Hamaris fuciformis*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield on June 4

**Dew moth (2036 *Setina irrorella*):** First taken at Hurst Castle near Lymington on May 30

**Wood Tiger (2056 *Parasemia plantaginis*):** First was a female in Old Burghlere lime quarry near Basingstoke on June 2

**Clouded Buff (2059 *Diacrisia sannio*):** First at Newhaven on June 7

**Water Ermine (2062 *Spilosoma urticae*):** First at Rye Harbour on June 7

**Heart and Club (2088 *Agrotis clavis*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Lesser Yellow Underwing (2109 *Noctua comes*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

**Ingrailed Clay (2120 *Diarsia mendica*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Cabbage Moth (2154 *Mamestra brassicae*):** First at Newhaven on June 6

**Tawny Shears (2167 *Hadena perplexa*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

**Marbled Coronet (2171 *Hadena confusa*):** First at Newhaven on June 5

**The Lychnis (2173 *Hadena bicruris*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**L-album Wainscot (2202 *Mythimna l-album*):** First at Cosham (Portsmouth) on June 6

**Shoulder-striped Wainscot (2205 *Mythimna comma*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**The Shark (2216 *Cucullia umbratica*):** First taken somewhere in Sussex on May 31

**Toadflax Brocade (2223 *Calophasia lunula*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 5

**The Sycamore (2279 *Acronicta aceris*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**The Coronet (2291 *Craniophora ligustri*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Bird's Wing (2301 *Dypterygia scabriuscula*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Small Angle Shades (2305 *Euplexia lucipara*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Dark Arches (2321 *Apamea monoglypha*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 4

**Light Arches (2322 *Apamea lithoxylaea*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 4

**Clouded Brindle (2327 *Apamea epomidion*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**Dusky Brocade (2330 *Apamea remissa*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**The Uncertain (2381 *Hoplodrina alsines*):** First taken somewhere in Sussex on May 31

**The Rustic (2382 *Hoplodrina blanda*):** First at Pagham Harbour on June 5

**Rosy Marbled (2396 *Elaphria venustula*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Marbled White-spot (2410 *Lithacodia pygarga*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**Green Silver-lines (2422 *Pseudoips fagana*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

**The Snout (2477 *Hypena proboscidalis*):** First taken somewhere in Sussex on May 31

**Buttoned Snout (2480 *Hypena rostralis*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on June 4

**Pinion-streaked Snout (2484 *Schrankia costaestrigalis*):** First at Park Corner Heath near Uckfield during their Open Day on May 31

## Caterpillars

**Mullein Moth:** Full grown specimens seen at Rye Harbour on June 3

**Knot Grass Moth:** Probable only at Emsworth on June 4

**Peacock butterfly:** Nest of caterpillars at Emsworth on June 5

## Other Insects

**Scorpion Fly (*Panorpa communis*):** First report from Bartley Heath near Hook in north Hampshire on May 31

**Horntail (*Urocerus gigas*):** A possible identity for a large yellow insect seen in Denny Wood (New Forest) on June 7 - not confirmed

**Red Mason Bee (*Osmia rufa*):** These bees filled 100 tubes in artificial nest boxes put up for them in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden by June 7

**Stag Beetle:** On June 3 somewhere in Sussex one was intercepted in flight by a House Sparrow which brought it to the ground and was belabouring it

with its beak when a human intervened to save the beetle. On the evening of June 6 there was **an emergence of at least six** in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden

**14 Spot Ladybird:** One of these small yellow and black beetles seen at Brook Meadow (Emsworth) on June 4

**Raft spider (*Dolomedes fimbriatus*):** Several of these large spiders were seen in Holmsley Inclosure (south west New Forest) on May 31

## PLANTS

**Brackish Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*):** First flowers on the plants in the Homewell spring at Havant on June 5

**Black Mustard:** First of this years new flowers at Emsworth Marina on June 4

**Bastard Cabbage:** When I saw yellow flowers on June 5 by the Langbrook stream where it goes under Solent Road in Havant I expected them to be **Black Mustard** but found they already had some of the '**chianti flask**' **shaped seeds** showing they were my first **Bastard Cabbage** of the year in a new site.

**Perforate St John's Wort:** First flowers on the north west Thorney seawall on June 4

**Smooth Tare:** **Hairy Tare** has been in flower since May 1 and the first report of **Smooth Tare** came from Rye Harbour on June 3 - not only are the flowers generally blue where **Hairy** are white (and the seed pods hairless on **Smooth**) but the report by Barry Yates points out that the flowers on **Smooth Tare** generally come in pairs (two to a flower stem) - although I did not see this feature on the plants I saw at Havant Thicket I did notice it on plants at Broadmarsh.

**Meadow Vetchling:** A good show of fresh flowers on Broadmarsh on June 7 - first of the year

**Hairy Vetchling:** First flowers found on Broadmarsh on June 7

**Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil:** First seen at Broadmarsh on June 7

**Field Rose:** First flowers seen in the Havant Thicket area on June 5

**Meadowsweet:** First flowers found at Emsworth on June 7

**Square-stalked Willowherb:** Starting to flower on June 2

**Wild Celery:** First flowers found in the Warblington marsh SSSI on June 2

**Brookweed:** First flowers seen in the Warblington marsh SSSI on June 2

**Creeping Jenny:** First flowers seen among ivy at the foot of Bulbeck's Wall in Havant on June 5

**Common Centaury:** Although this was reported to be flowering at Durlston last month I saw my first at Broadmarsh on June 7

**Yellow-wort:** As for Centaury above

**Self-heal:** First flowers found on Thorney Island on June 4

**Common Marsh Bedstraw:** Flowering at Havant Thicket on June 5

**Greater Knapweed:** A single first flower seen on Portsdown on June 6

**Bristly Ox-tongue:** Flowering in Havant on June 5

**Southern Marsh Orchid:** A rough count of flowering spikes in the Warblington marsh SSSI on June 2 found 81 and on June 6 a total of 279 were found in the Fishbourne church meadows (probably with more to come - last year's max count here was 439). In Emsworth's Brook Meadow the two plants planted there last year have become three already this year (all flowering) - considering that some orchid species can take five years or more to start to flower after first germination this is fast growth.

## OTHER WILDLIFE

Nothing to report though my lawn currently has a small crop of **Panaeolus foenisecii** toadstools and I have seen **Fox** and **Roe Deer** during the week

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 2 - JUNE 8 (WEEK 22 OF 2008)

### Sat 7 June

#### Broadmarsh mountain becomes a French Impressionist painting

Today's search for **Hairy Vetchling** on the Broadmarsh mountain was successful but provided only one of the many delicate component dots of colour, set in a pristine sea of tall waving grass, that made me think that I was exploring within a living painting by Monet. Chief component, after the grass, was **Grass Vetchling** which provided a stippling of blood-red dots wherever you looked, though it was probably numerically outweighed by the even smaller and more subtle mauve of **Smooth Tare**. **Common Vetch** was starting to go over and was giving way to the much bolder blobs of colour supplied by **Tufted Vetch** and my first **Meadow Vetchling**. Had I been earlier in the day **Salsify** would have provided the boldest colour but all its flowers were closed in the late afternoon.

Before reaching Broadmarsh I had been down Southmoor Lane to see the dusty inconspicuity of the **Knotted Hedge Parsley** flowers and to look in vain for the **Neapolitan Garlic** which Brian Fellows discovered on this roadside last year (that part of the verge had been mown this year). I don't recommend anyone to follow me down this lane and up onto Budds Mound for the next month or so as summer has brought the 'travellers' here on their summer holiday - sadly they have no portable toilets in their very expensive caravans as you will discover as you go up the slope onto the mound... My visit here did discover a very healthy looking **family of five cygnets with their parent Swans** on the pools, but neither **Shelduck** nor **Canada Geese** were seen.

After climbing the mountain I headed along the cycle way as far as the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes, finding my first **Greater Birds Foot Trefoil**,

**Perforate St John's Wort, Self-heal, Yellow-wort and Common Centaury** and a couple of **Bee Orchids** among a profusion of **Pyramidal Orchids**.

The new cycleway joining Havant to Portsmouth is very nearly complete, making cycling along Harts Farm Way safe and almost pleasant, and where this route approaches the Langstone Technology Park and I met a real 'traveller' after my own heart - he was an Australian riding a bike loaded with everything needed by a long distance nomad but wanting advice as to his best route through Havant on his present journey from Belfast to London with Emsworth as his next immediate target. One thing which especially impressed me about his equipment was a rear view mirror only slightly larger than a dentist's mirror but clipped to his sunglasses so that he could see whatever was behind him at all times.

## Thu 5 June

### New flowers in Havant

While waiting for a prescription to be made up at Boots I spent 20 minutes looking for and finding new flowers close to the town centre.

First up was **Creeping Jenny** among the Ivy and Bindweed on Bulbeck's Wall which you pass driving round the multi-storey carpark. Then came **Ranunculus baudotii (Brackish Water Crowfoot)** in the Homewell spring. From there I managed to cross two busy roads to find myself on the north side of Solent Road at the east end of the new retail park (the building of which eliminated a regular site for both **Marsh Woundwort** and **Black Mustard**). Here, by the Lavant/Langbrook stream was a mass of yellow crucifer flowers suggesting that the **Black Mustard** had survived but a look at the '**Chianti flask**' shaped seeds showed that we had 'a new kid on the block' named (you may think appropriately) **Bastard Cabbage**. Following the streamside path north and over the pedestrian bridge I came on my first **Bristly Ox-tongue** in flower, and back across Park Road South, where the Texaco Garage has now been reduced to a pile of concrete rubble, **Common Ragwort** was in full flower (not new!) and the leaves of **Amphibious Bistort** were suggesting that it may be time to check its other sites for the occasional flower spike

### Havant Thicket and the Gipsies Plain

A walk around the southern part of the Thicket and across the open grassland to the south gave me several welcome sights - principally of **fledged juvenile Lapwings** and my first **Large Skipper butterflies**.

Both **Willow Warbler** and **Chiffchaff** were among the birds singing as I walked west along the 'yellow brick road' and **Brimstone, Speckled Wood** and a single male **Orange Tip** flew past me along the flower rich damp ditches either side of this main vehicle access road. The only new flower to attract my attention here was **Marsh Bedstraw** and I failed to see any sign of the **Bitter Vetch** which I first found here on May 3 last year (but there is still plenty of time for it to appear at its shaded site here and I did not go on to check for it on Blendworth Common where in the past I have seen it carpeting large swathes with its pink flowers).

At the track which crosses the east/west vehicle road along the line which divides East Hampshire from Havant Borough I turned south across the open grassland on a line taking me west of the Long Avenue of trees coming up from Leigh Park Gardens and it was here that I came on at least four fresh **Large Skippers** (and had a brief encounter with a **Fox**).

Reaching the line of the path that runs across the middle of the Gipsies Plain to Rowlands Castle I turned east, leaving Deerslaughter Plain and crossing the tree Avenue to come out in the Gipsies Plain area. Here, in the relatively small triangular 'field' east of the avenue, south of the path I was on and having a tree lined stream as its southern edge, I noted a good show of **Common Spotted Orchids** that I have not seen in previous years. Also in this field was the male **Stonechat** (plus one other female or young bird) that I have seen here earlier this year, and both **Skylark** and **Meadow Pipit** were singing overhead.

From the field north of the track I put up a group of nine **Lapwing** (all apparently adults) which flew south together, and later, further east, I saw at least two **fully fledged juvenile Lapwings** (looking brown and tatty rather than green and smart) on the ground in the northern field. Each of these two had a pair of adults nearby guarding their young and this group of two families (six birds) must have been in addition to the nine seen flying earlier, giving fifteen Lapwing definitely present. My guess would be that there were at least four other family groups spread over the area as a whole, and even if each pair had only one young, **there may well have been 25+ Lapwings using the site.**

I did not see the other pair of **Stonechat** that had been based on the 'orchid ditch' last time I was here but I did count over 50 **Common Spotted orchids** in the ditch area. Other things noted were a **Sparrowhawk** flying north over the grassland (harried by one of the **Lapwings**), and what may have been a family party of four **Linnets**. One **Roe doe** bounded over the plain and flowers noted were **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort**, **Heath Speedwell**, and the first **Field Roses** that I have seen in flower.

## [Mon 2 June](#)

### **Southern Marsh Orchids now appearing at Warblington**

The rain held off this afternoon long enough for me to walk to Warblington and back, enabling me to count **81 Southern Marsh Orchids** in the SSSI field east of the cemetery.

On the way there, going down Pook Lane, I saw one **Buzzard** perched at the top of the tree in which they are nesting, and in another tree overhanging the lane the continual 'tucc tucc' calls of a **Blackcap** gave me a glimpse of a female bird surrounded by several other birds which I assumed were her young flitting between the branches. Further up the lane a cacophany of bird alarm calls suggested the presence of an owl but I saw nothing of it, nor did I see any **Swallows** around the nearby stables, nor at the farm when I reached it.

In the cemetery I found my first plant of **Square-stalked Willowherb** in bud near a large patch of **Heath Speedwell**. Elsewhere both **Biting** and **White Stonecrop** were starting to flower on several graves and there were fresh leaves of **Round-leaved Fluellen** along the path edges. In the carpark area a couple of **Prickly Lettuce** plants had almost finished flowering (nowhere else have I seen them near to starting to flower) and the equally out of season **Black Nightshade** still has flowers.

In the marsh **Brookweed** is now in full flower and among the other things I noted there were fresh blood-red flowers on **Water Figwort**, the yellow of the toadstool **Bolbitius vitellinus** which we used to call '**Yellow Cowpat toadstool**' but are now asked to call **Yellow Fieldcap**, and one **Small White butterfly** hanging from the tip of a grass stem and oblivious of all around it in the chill damp weather.

Near the public path a **Cetti's Warbler** shouted at me but at the reed bed there was silence. I think this was another effect of the weather as I did hear a couple of 'churrs' to prove that at least one **Reed Warbler** was present and in any case I enjoyed the best proof so far that **Reed Buntings** are nesting there - the sight of a female perched on the tip of a reed with something small and white in her bill that I am pretty sure was a faecal sac before she flew off with it still in her bill.

As well as the count of 81 healthy flowering **Marsh Orchids** I added one newly flowering plant here - **Wild Celery** - before I reached the shore and found a **Swan family** on the banks of the outflowing stream. I guess these were the Langstone Pond family and if so they still have **four cygnets** (all my recent sightings of them indicated that they were down to three).

Coming home along the shore and then up the eastern path I noted two more **Swallows**, one flying in over the seawall was probably a late arrival and the other patrolling the extreme eastern field edge near the pony stables across the main road from the Brookfield Hotel - **Swallows** are probably still nesting in those stables but I fear that both they and **Pied Wagtails** have ceased to nest on the Warblington farm.

### **SUMMARY FOR MAY 26 - JUNE 1 (WEEK 21 OF 2008)**

**Storm Petrels** have re-appeared in the English Channel 'out of season' as they did last year and a **Brent Goose** has been seen heading north up the A1 north of Bedford. A **Black-winged Stilt** was briefly at Dungeness this week as was an even rarer **Terek Sandpiper** at Rye and 'rare' **Black-tailed Godwits are nesting in East Anglia** (see my notes on the different sub-species involved). Also see Barry Yates notes on the perils of mixed species gull breeding sites. Dorset has had a **White-winged Black Tern** and East Sussex has had an **Alpine Swift** clinging to its County Hall. **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Tawny Pipit** sightings pale beside the week's run of **River Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Melodious Warbler** and **Red-breasted Flycatcher**.

**Emperor dragonflies** and **Black-tailed Skimmers** are now flying and the Isle of Wight has had its first **Scarce Chaser** (the latter record unconfirmed). 25 butterfly species seen during the week include the first **Meadow Brown, Large Skipper** and **Wood White**. A good list of 13 new moths includes **Burnished Brass** and the **first of the year's Clearwings (found by Peter Pond at Farlington Marshes)**. Also this week we have had the first, and so far the only, **Stag Beetle** of the year.

**Poppies, Thistles** and **Bindweeds** have started to flower but perhaps more interesting has been finds of **Vipers Bugloss, Lucerne, Deadly Nightshade** and **Weasel's Snout** with **Crown Vetch** and **Meadowsweet about to flower**. Already in flower are most orchid species with good news of the **Southern Marsh Orchids** on Langstone South Moors

Other Wildlife includes **white coated Fallow Deer**, flourishing **Water Voles**, and **Cuttlefish bones starting to wash up on our shores**. This week's 'special' is also marine - the **Long-spined Sea Scorpion**

### **BIRDS**

**Great Northern Diver:** One was still present off Selsey Bill on May 29

**Black-necked Grebe:** These have been known to breed in southern England so a report of one on inland water in the Rye area on May 19 is of interest - the previous last report of the species was of one on Pagham Lagoon on Mar 31

**Balearic Shearwater:** Last year these began to appear regularly in the English Channel from May 29 on (ignoring sightings in Jan and Feb) . This year they seem to be slightly earlier with sightings of singles off Christchurch Harbour on May 21, 23 and 26 plus at least three seen off Worthing on May 25

**Storm Petrel:** These are again appearing (as they did last year) in the Channel 'out of season'. This year the first was seen from Selsey on May 22 (more than 9) with further sightings on May 23 and 24. New sightings are from Portland and Durlston (4) on May 26 and from Portland (11) and Christchurch Harbour (3) on May 27. On May 28 Christchurch Harbour had the highest count so far with 15 seen and one was even seen that day going west off Sandy Point on Hayling and they may be seen there again as on May 30 ten were back off Selsey Bill

**Little Egret:** Looking from the public path along the seawall passing Langstone Mill Pond on May 26 I thought I could glimpse a downy youngster in one of the four nests that can be seen (with difficulty) from a point just south of the bridge over the sluice through which the pond could be drained into the sea. The comings and goings of birds from different places in the mass of trees suggested that there are several other nests which cannot be seen.

**Black Stork:** Ten days after the first was reported in the Cuckmere valley on May 18 one flew low over the A22 on the outskirts of Eastbourne on May 28 provoking the thought that one may have taken up residence in the Eastbourne area (or could it be an escapee?)

**White Stork:** One was in the Hampshire Avon Valley near Ringwood on May 30 and maybe it went on to give further sightings in the New Forest and over the Isle of Wight on May 31 (though the latter could well have been a new arrival as it seems to have been over the Island in the Shanklin/Newchurch area from 10:45 to 13:30 at least while the sighting in the Beaulieu Road Station area was at 14:52)

**Brent Goose:** One migrant that is unlikely to get to its destination in Siberia was seen on May 25 heading north up the A1 some 50 miles north of London and 19 miles west of Cambridge. It paused briefly at the Paxton Gravel Pits nature reserve close to St Neots before flying on north - of course it may have been a Pale-bellied bird heading for Greenland but I still think it unlikely to get there.

**Eider:** I have always been puzzled by the erratic appearance of these birds along the south coast. Many years ago I learnt that they are not just winter visitors to the English Channel when a flock of up to 110 or so spent the summer of 1989 in Chichester and Pagham Harbour (in July that year there were 70 in Chichester and 40 in Pagham). More recently I have learnt to expect from 80 to 120 to be in the Solent from December through to April but also to hear of 30 or 40 remaining right through the summer. I assume the summer birds are mainly young non-breeders which have learnt that the Solent is a good place for a summer holiday with

sheltered water and plenty of crabs to eat. Reports from Christchurch Harbour indicate that these summer visitors are arriving slowly in small parties - counts of birds heading east past the harbour have been Apr 26 (2), Apr 28 (1), May 5 (2), May 17 (1), May 26 (2), May 31 (5) - several of the more recent sightings seem to have been of adults (e.g. a drake on May 17, a pair on May 26)

**Honey Buzzard:** One was over Dungeness on May 30 heading south - maybe it didn't like the look of England and thought it would be better off in France

**Black Kite:** A 'probable' was in the Crawley area on May 25 but one at Icklesham (close to Rye) on May 26 was clearly seen for 20 minutes. Since then there have been reports from the Lewes area on May 29 and Eastbourne on May 30

**Montagu's Harrier:** One flew in over Portland on May 31

**Red-footed Falcon:** The Shatterford area bird was still being seen in the New Forest on May 30 when a different bird was reported from the Dorchester area

**Quail:** One at Portland on May 25 was the fifth potential migrant to be reported this year and on May 30 two more turned up at Beachy Head and the nearby Cuckmere Valley

**Black-winged Stilt:** One was at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on May 28

**Stone Curlew:** The eighth to be reported this year was on Ballard Down near Swanage on May 30

**Temminck's Stint:** Two were at Rye Harbour on May 26. There had been a string of ten reports between May 3 and 18 probably marking the main passage of these birds with this one on May 26 probably indicating late stragglers.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Three seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on May 25 were also the first to be reported anywhere since May 18

**Black-tailed Godwit:** I chanced on a web page (for the Wetlands and Wildfowl Trust Welney reserve in the East Anglian Ouse Washes) which described **Black-tailed Godwits** as being rarities which winter in Africa with a few (well under 100 pairs) coming to Britain to breed - the majority of these doing so in the Ouse Washes with another cluster nesting at Derwent Ings in Yorkshire. If anyone else out there is under the impression that **Black-tailed Godwits** are common birds that can be seen around our coasts all year round (though with much reduced numbers in the breeding season since none breed in Britain and any wishing to breed fly to Iceland to do so) then they have to realise that this species comes in three different subspecies. The mainstream birds are known as **Limosa limosa** and these do winter in Africa and breed in a broad east-west band across Europe with a very small minority doing so in Britain (where they ceased to breed in the 19th Cent - the name Godwit is said to be a contraction of 'Good to eat' - and only resumed breeding here from 1952 onward). The great majority of the birds we see are of the subspecies **Limosa limosa islandica** which are slightly larger in size, breed in Iceland and winter here in Britain and northwest Europe. Brian Fellows tells me that a third subspecies **Limosa limosa melanuroides** breeds in eastern Siberia and migrates down the Pacific coast of Asia to winter in Australasia. Yet another related

species is the **Hudsonian Godwit** *Limosa haemastica* which breeds from Alaska across the north of Canada to Hudsons Bay - these spend the winter in South America

**Terek Sandpiper:** One turned up at Rye Harbour on May 31 - their web entry sums up the visit by saying .. "A **Terek Sandpiper** was present at Rye Harbour at 9am, fairly mobile and moving between saltmarsh and the new pits close to Lime Kiln Cottage. It was last seen at about 2.30pm, having been seen by hundreds of birdwatchers". I can imagine the congestion on the local roads as these hundreds of birders got the message on their pagers - those who didn't get there in time will probably have to wait at least another year before one turns up again in this country.

**Black-headed Gull:** More than 100 pairs are now nesting at Rye Harbour among **300 pairs of Sandwich** and **150 pairs of Common Tern** plus a few **Med Gulls**. Not unexpectedly in these conditions the Rye Harbour warden (Barry Yates) wrote on May 28 .. "Poor weather often sees an increase in gull chick mortality and today I saw a **Black-headed Gull eating a small Mediterranean Gull chick** and a **Lesser Black-backed Gull eating a large Black-headed Gull chick**".

**Roseate Tern:** A few singles are still going up channel and on May 27 one which was not in a hurry to get to the Farne Islands landed on a sand bar off Chichester Harbour and then flew into the harbour but I doubt it will nest on Pilsey Sands.

**Little Tern:** Brian Fellows was at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 27 and gives the latest estimate of **26 Little Tern nests**, a big increase on the 11 nests he could see last week. He also found **8 Common Tern nests**, **2 Ringed Plover nests** and **1 Oystercatcher nest** all struggling to co-exist with some **85 nesting pairs of Black-headed Gull**. It seems that the Langstone Harbour Little Terns are doing well compared to Rye Harbour where no more than a **8 Little Terns** have been seen so far, none of them attempting to nest. Hopefully those on the beach at Pagham Harbour are doing better than that but I have no news from there.

**Black Tern:** These are still passing through with a peak count of 11 seen at Dungeness on May 27

**White-winged Black Tern:** The first to be seen this year was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on May 27. A couple of good photos can be seen on the Dorset Bird Club website at <http://www.dorsetbirdclub.org.uk/Sightings.htm>

**Puffin:** A boat trip to look at the cliff nesting birds at Durlston Head on May 30 saw **5 Puffins** there.

**Swifts:** In the past Swifts would arrive in Havant on May 1 and be seen daily until they left on July 31. In recent years numbers have decreased and dates become more erratic but until this year some have always arrived in early May and settled down to nest. This year none appeared until May 15 when two flew silently over my garden. Three birds did the same thing on May 16 then nothing until May 25 when two birds were seen low over trees in the Hayling Billy trail, almost certainly feeding on insects rising from the trees. Not until the evening of May 27 did a few birds (max 4) start diving and screaming over old nest sites in Manor Close houses and the

same 4 were back again on the morning of May 28 but they have not been seen since. I am pretty sure these birds are not intending to nest this year but they are probably birds that were hatched in Havant and have come back to check out the nest sites in preparation for their first attempt at breeding next summer. More regular sightings of birds around breeding sites have come from Leigh Park and Emsworth this year, hopefully birds are still breeding at both places.

**Alpine Swift:** One appeared in Lewes, flying around the County Hall building, on May 28. It was still there, clinging to the wall of the building on May 29 and was still there on May 30 but not since

**Bee Eater:** The 18th report for this year was of a single in the Rye Harbour area on May 25 followed by one flying east over Fontwell (near Arundel) on May 29 and another at Portland on May 31

**Hoopoe:** The Canford Heath (Poole) bird was seen again on May 25 and on May 31 a new bird entered the country at Dungeness

**Red-rumped Swallow:** May 31 brought singles to Beachy Head and to Portland to bring the total of reports for this year to 9

**House Martin:** Good news from Leigh Park is that Martins are now nesting in all six home made nest boxes on a house near the Hermitage Stream

**Tawny Pipit:** One was seen and photographed at Rye Harbour on May 25 and 26 and on June 1 one was seen at Hurst spit near Lymington

**Wheatear:** Mention of a newly fledged bird at Rye Harbour on May 26 is a reminder that the species does still breed in Sussex.

**Ring Ouzel:** A female was at Beachy Head on May 30 and a female has been seen in the Folkestone area from May 18 to 29 (with two of them present on May 24)

**River Warbler:** One seen by several birders at Beachy Head on May 30 was a new species for Sussex

**Marsh Warbler:** One is said to have been identified by its song at Durlston Country Park on May 27 and the same or another was heard and seen at Christchurch Harbour on May 28

**Icterine Warbler:** One was at Dungeness on May 25 and one was at Sandwich Bay on May 30

**Melodious Warbler:** One was reported at Beachy Head on May 29

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** One was at Dungeness on May 25 - the photo shows no red breast but the large white patches on the base of the outer tail feathers pick it out.

**Golden Oriole:** One was at Durlston on May 29 - the twelfth report for the year

**Red-backed Shrike:** On May 24 one was seen briefly perched on barbed wire at Byworth (a small village just south east of Petworth) and it has remained in the area near Shopham Bridge up to May 31 at least. Different birds have been seen at Christchurch Harbour on May 28 and in the Thanet area of Kent on May 30

**Rose-coloured Starling:** An adult was reported at Beachy Head on May 30

**House Sparrow:** Fledged juveniles have been mentioned in several recent reports and on May 26 two juveniles were being fed by their parents on the lawn of my house in Havant

**Common Rosefinch:** A 'possible' sighting in the New Forest near Rhinefield House on May 30

**Serim:** One was singing at Portland on May 27 - this is the 24th report for the year since the first was seen at Bognor on Apr 3

**Corn Bunting:** Good to hear of at least three singing from hedges and telegraph poles along Ham Road which runs across the open fields of the Manhood peninsula from Sidlesham to Earnley on May 29

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Emperor:** Only now starting to emerge - first report from Rye Harbour on May 27 - almost a month after the similar looking **Hairy Dragonfly** appeared on May 2

**Black-tailed Skimmer:** Also first seen at Rye Harbour on May 27

**Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*):** Some 30 of these rarities were found on the River Ouse upstream of Lewes in an organised search on May 25. A sighting of just one at the Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on the Isle of Wight on May 30 is thought to have been a first for the Island

### Butterflies

**25 species reported this week**, including ...

**Large Skipper:** Seen at Gosport on May 23 a couple of days after the first had been seen on the Isle of Wight

**Wood White:** First seen in the Plaistow area near Horsham on May 21 (just one out) and another single seen nearby in Ashpark Wood on May 24

**Common Blue:** Numbers slowly increasing - peak count so far is 23 on Chalton Down north of Rowlands Castle on May 25

**Adonis Blue:** The first were seen on the Isle of Wight on May 18, Old Winchester Hill had two out on May 23 and on May 24 Malling Down near Lewes had 101 on show

**Painted Lady:** Sightings of singles at Martin Down on May 29 and in the Thanet area of Kent on May 30 bring the total of reports for the year since the first at Portland on Apr 27 to just eight so no invasion yet

**Glanville Fritillary:** An estimated 30 were seen at Hurst Castle on May 25

**Meadow Brown:** First of the year in the Brighton area on May 31

## Moths

**The Forester (0163 *Adscita statices*):** The first report was of a male and female on Odiham Common on May 24

**Yellow-legged Clearwing (0374 *Synanthedon vespiformis*):** First of the year at Farlington Marshes (Peter Pond area) on May 23

**Fox Moth (1638 *Macrothylacia rubi*):** First two flying near Barton on sea on May 25

**Blood-vein (1682 *Timandra griseata*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 30

**Pretty Chalk Carpet (1784 *Melanthia procellata*):** First seen on May 24 on the Downs north of Brighton near Edburton

**Argent & Sable (1787 *Rheumaptera hastata*):** First seen in Bentley Wood (west of Stockbridge) on May 29

**Grey Pug (1837 *Eupithecia subfuscata*):** First for the year taken by a visitor to Hampshire in the Alton area on May 29

**Shaded Pug (1840 *Eupithecia subumbrata*):** First in the Thanet area on May 30

**Ash Pug (1849 *Eupithecia fraxinata*):** First in the Alton area on May 29

**Common Wainscot (2199 *Mythimna pallens*):** First in the Thanet area on May 30

**Porter's Rustic (2392a *Proxenus hospes*):** First at Portland on May 28

**Burnished Brass (2434 *Diachrysia chrysitis*):** First at Pannel Valley near Rye on May 28

**Straw Dot (2474 *Rivula sericealis*):** First at Pannel Valley near Rye on May 28

## Other Insects

**Stag Beetle:** One male which appeared on my garden lawn on May 26 is the only one I have heard of so far this year

***Oedemera nobilis* (commonly called **Thigh Beetle**):** On May 29 this species first appeared in Stansted Forest and on the Portsmouth shore at Eastney

## PLANTS

**Common Poppy:** First seen on May 27 on waste land which was previously Broadmarsh playing fields in Havant

**Opium Poppy:** First also seen on May 27 at the old Broadmarsh playing fields

**Clustered Clover:** At least one cluster of plants had flowers showing pink buds when I checked the site (in the middle of the old south coast trunk road immediately east of the new A27 at Havant) on May 26

**Ribbed Melilot:** First flowering at Eastney in Portsmouth on May 29

**Lucerne:** First flowering at Eastney in Portsmouth on May 29

**Crown Vetch:** On May 31 I found the plants growing wild in the 'garden' of council flats on Wakefords Way in Leigh Park, Havant, have once again survived a garden clean up and are close to giving another great display of flowers (not yet out)

**Creeping Cinquefoil:** First flowering on May 26

**Biting Stonecrop:** Bright yellow flowers were starting to appear on top of the wall of Church House in The Pallant here in Havant on May 30

**Field Bindweed:** First flowers seen in Havant on May 27

**Large Bindweed:** First flowers seen in Havant on May 26

**Deadly Nightshade:** First flowers seen in Chalton Down north of Rowlands Castle on May 28

**Lesser Snapdragon or Weasel's Snout (*Misopates orontium*):** One plant flowering in the New Lane allotments in Havant on May 26. Several others have appeared since then.

**Heath Speedwell:** First flowers seen in Stansted Forest main avenue on May 29

**Hedge Woundwort:** First flowers seen in Havant on May 27

**Tufted Forget-me-not:** First flowers on Langstone South Moors on May 30

**Vipers Bugloss:** First flowers on Eastney beach in Portsmouth on May 29

**Clove-scented Broomrape (*Orobanche caryophyllacea*):** Noted for interest only this was flowering on the golf course at Sandwich Bay in Kent on May 30

**Creeping Thistle:** First flowers on this seen in Havant on May 27 (Spear, Marsh, Welled and Slender Thistle all out prior to this)

**Slender Thistle:** Flowering since Apr 15 but discovered at a new site on May 27 on the waste ground which was once the Havant Broadmarsh Playing Fields

**Milk Thistle:** First flowers seen on May 27 at the Hayling Oysterbeds site

**Nipplewort:** First flowers in Havant on May 30

**Rosy Garlic:** I have now had confirmation that the plant which I found on May 23 flowering on Portsdown was this species, and a reminder that a colony of around 50 plants of it were discovered flowering on Milton Common in Southsea in May last year, and they are flowering again this year and can be seen in Brian Fellows' photo at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-133-rosy-garlic-flowers-milton-cm-cu-28.05.08.jpg>

**Stinking Iris:** First flower reported at Durlston on May 29

**Bee Orchid:** First local flowering that I know of was on Portsdown on May 22. Since then others have been spotted on May 27 in the grass triangle dividing the two carriageways of the Havant Road immediately west of the Forty Acres roundabout under the A3M at Bedhampton. Others have appeared on the Crookhorn Golf Course (on Portsdown) and half way down the coastal path (old railway) on Hayling Island

**Fly Orchid:** These had started to flower in Kent on May 20 and were found locally on Portsdown on May 29

**Common Spotted Orchid:** Plenty of these can now be seen in many places but a good site with more than 500 spikes (including two white flowered) is easily accessed alongside the Hulbert Road close to its junction with the A3M on the east (Havant) side of the motorway. If coming from the A3M there is a lay by opposite the site as you come down from the roundabout and if coming from Havant there is a layby as you emerge from the trees just before you reach the site

**Southern Marsh Orchid:** A visit to the Langstone South Moors on May 30 found 70 fresh healthy flowering spikes so fears that salt water had damaged the plants seem to have been un-necessary

**Early Marsh Orchids:** John Goodspeed has seen a site somewhere north west of Southwick Village (north of Portsdown) where these can be seen among many **Southern Marsh** and **Common Spotted orchids**. I believe this species can also be found locally in the 'Hay Field' at Farlington Marshes and in the Lye Heath area

**Fern Grass:** Although I do not normally cover grasses here I was pleased to see the **rigid fan shapes of Fern Grass blades** on May 30 in a place where others should be able to spot them - right between the 'legs' of the first pair of twin power line poles as you enter the South Moors area from Mill Lane at Langstone heading for Southmoor Lane

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fallow Deer:** There has long been a 'rogue gene' in the Fallow population of the wider Chichester area of West Sussex giving rise to white coated animals. Like the 'white' Grey Squirrels of the Portsmouth area these are not true albinos but from a distance they appear pure white. On May 30 Brian Fellows took a photo of a bunch of 8 Fallow in a cereal crop somewhere between Up Marden and Uppark House which captures two of the white ones - I think this is a group of last year's young with some already well on the way to growing their first set of antlers though the white ones show no sign of antlers - maybe they are does, maybe they are late developers? Have a look for yourself at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-131-deer-up-marden-30.05.08.jpg>

**Roe Deer:** The population of these continues to increase and on May 24 a doe was seen in the pony field north of Langstone Mill Pond where I am not aware of any previous sightings. There is now an established group of at least 12 on the north Hayling fields a mile to the south and another similar sized group in the fields between Havant and Emsworth immediately north of the new A27 but I cannot recall finding them in the Warblington/Langstone fields south of the A27

**Water Voles:** These are flourishing in the River Ems at Emsworth - the current year to date total of sightings stands at 76 compared to the highest previous total of just 50 for the whole year of 2005. This increase is probably due more to increased observer coverage than to the number of voles but the figure still shows a flourishing Vole population.

**Scorpion Fish:** These are a group of species of small fish found world wide which rely on perfect camouflage to remain motionless on the bottom of rock pools and other shallow water until they can grab their prey. The Scorpion name results from the sharp upward pointing, poison filled, spines on their backs - humans suffer intense pain if they walk barefoot in shallow water and tread on one of these fish (I think they are not life threatening and the recommended treatment is to immerse the affected foot in hot water - as hot as you can stand - to ease the pain). It seems this potential hazard did not spoil the enjoyment of a group of children doing a bit of supervised rook pooling at Rye Harbour as part of their recent Wildlife Festival - the group netted eight of these small monsters (**Long-spined Sea Scorpions** or **Taurulus bubalis**) and you can see a couple of them pictured at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/?p=5697#more-5697> To learn more about them visit <http://www.glaucus.org.uk/bullhead.htm> which is run by Andy Horton based in Shoreham and is an excellent website for all matters concerning marine wildlife. Note that while there are marine creatures in British waters which can cause the pain mentioned at the start I am not sure if the creature found at Rye (**Taurulus bubalis**) is one of them.

**Cuttlefish:** At this time of year **Cuttlefish** come inshore to breed and die after which the remains of their bodies wash ashore to leave **cuttlefish bones** for cage birds. This has now started in north Kent where a birder found 160 of them in one 200 metre stretch of beach.

**Fungus:** This is also the season for **Dryads Saddle** fungus to appear - on May 30 Brian Fellows found one unusual high on a tree near Up Marden and on the same day came on one more usually sited low on a log pile though this was also unusually in being considerably damaged despite being young and fresh - I usually find them intact even when old and I suspect the damage may have been inflicted by humans rather than super **Slugs**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 26 - JUNE 1 (WEEK 21 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 30 May**

#### **Southern Marsh Orchids now appearing at Langstone South Moors**

Walking via the Langbrook Stream to the South Moors today I started with my first **Nipplewort** flowers out in Havant, and I was greatly cheered when I reached the 'Water Wheel' in the stream immediately north of the A27 to see that a grass mower who had, I think, been clearing the edges of the streamside path had sufficient respect for the plants he was mowing down to leave several clumps of **Ox-eye Daisies** and the single plant of **Dame's Violet** unharmed.

When south of the Langstone Technology Park approach road, where the path looks across the stream to the gardens of house whose owners have extended their property across the stream, I found one bonus arising from their pathside gardening. In several places this has led to the creation of small logpiles by the path and today one of these had several large examples of **Dryads Saddle fungus** on show, although the fungus had been well nibbled and pecked at by persons or animals unknown.

Emerging onto the South Moors proper the top end of the small central stream which flows into the Tamarisk Pool had a new flower on show - the **Tufted Forget-me-not** which grows in water like **Water Forget-me-not** but has smaller flower. With it was a small white flowered crucifer of which I have been uncertain in the past - today I took a specimen and convinced myself that (despite the paucity and small size of its leaves) it definitely is a young plant of **Water Cress**.

On the 'orchid field' **Ragged Robin** was flowering in abundance but there was other good news in that a quick circuit of the area gave me seventy flowering plants of **Southern Marsh Orchid**, all in fine condition, so I think we can be re-assured that submersion of the area under the high tide in March has merely delayed the start of this year's flowering, and the plants have not suffered from the salt.

**Cetti's Warbler** and **Lesser Whitethroat** were both singing here, and beside the stream I had already heard **Blackcap**, **Whitethroat**, **Reed Warbler** and **Goldcrest song**, while before I left my attention was drawn to a male **Reed Bunting** singing from a bramble bush in the southern part of the Moors. Both **Common Blue** and **Small Heath butterflies** were seen among the orchids and a pool of water under the twin wooden posts of the power line nearest the Mill Lane kissing gates drew my eye to the rigid fan shape of the first **Fern Grass** I have seen this year - the grass was half submerged in excess water.

Crossing the main road to enter Langstone High Street I was reminded that I may not have mentioned the flowers of **Holm Oak** when I first noticed them some time ago - the tassles were still fresh on this tree.

Nothing much new on the way home but passing the **Lymbourne triangle Wildflower Meadow** I saw that some of the seed put in the sown area is now causing plants to arise at last through the soil so another colourful display is not too far off.

## [Thu 29 May](#)

### Standsted Forest west end

This afternoon I walked around the west end of Stansted Forest, climbing the 'wall style' from Woodberry Lane into the Lavant stream floodplain meadow before climbing up through the trees and making my way east along the Main Avenue to the first major junction. Here I turned north up the Broad Avenue but branched off left about halfway up to follow one of my favourite woodland paths which brought me to the main public path coming down from Forestside towards Rowlands Castle, and this took me back to my start just seconds before very heavy rain started.

Had I been here in the morning I would have expected to see a few butterflies in the meadow where I started (last year the first **Meadow Brown** was flying at Ropley on May 29, the first **Marbled White** was seen on Portsdown on June 1 and the first **Silver Washed Fritillary** was out on June 9 on the Isle of Wight). As it was I was lucky on this increasingly gloomy afternoon to disturb just one **Common Blue** and one **Speckled Yellow moth**, though I did have the slight bonus of two first insects for my year - **Green Lacewing** and the brilliant metallic green flower beetle called **Oedermera nobilis**, known to many as the Thigh Beetle because of this enlarged 'thighs'.

The weather could not drive the flowers into hiding and I made four new ticks on my personal year list plus some **very vigorous hybrid orchids**, both of whose parents have been seen earlier. These orchids were in a site that was new to me, in the

Main Avenue at its extreme west end but on the southern side away from the well used main track. My guess is that these were the progeny of **Common Spotted** and **Southern Marsh Orchids**, and hopefully they will soon be seen and named more authoritatively by local orchid experts.

Next find was on the north side of the Main Avenue and was of **Heath Speedwell** which is probably to be found in the Hollybank Woods by now. After turning up the Broad Avenue I made a short detour to look at the recently felled compartment immediately west of the Avenue and south of the Ornamental Drive, and here I found some plants whose flowers were not open (though buds were present) which I am currently convinced are **Wood Stitchwort (Stellaria nemorum)** but I am slightly concerned as (although this find was in Sussex) the species does not appear in the Hampshire Flora. I am hoping that the two samples I brought home will be more helpful when they flower but I may have to return to the site to see if the plants have stolons and stems to their lower leaves which I did not collect.

Two other newish plants which I came on here have already been found by Brian Fellows were **Yellow Pimpernel** and **Tormentil**.

## [Tue 27 May](#)

### **Poppies, Thistles and Bindweed**

A cycle ride this evening to Broadmarsh gave me evidence that all three of these groups are now coming into summer mode.

Both **Common** and **Opium Poppies** were flowering on the waste ground which was once the Broadmarsh Playing Fields, and with them I found two examples of **Slender Thistle** which is abundant down Southmoor Lane but which I have not seen at this site before.

On my way out **Spear Thistles** were flowering by the Langbrook Stream 'Water Wheel' and my first **Creeping Thistles** were out at the west end of the Langstone Technology Park (as were the **Milk Thistles** at the Oysterbeds seen by Brian Fellows today). In the grounds of the Technology Park I passed the first lovely pink and white flowers of **Field Bindweed** to add to the **Large Bindweed** first seen yesterday.

Up on the top of the Broadmarsh mountain a lot more **Grass Vetchling** was to be found among the grass (but no sign of the **Hairy Vetchling** so far).

Making a detour on my way home I checked the large plot of **Least Yellow Sorrel** which flourishes beside the footpath where it crosses Southbrook Road in Langstone, and the Lymbourne Triangle wild flower garden had the first **Hedge Woundwort** which I have seen in flower

Returning home at dusk I watched a couple of **Swifts** screaming around the Manor Close houses for the first time this year - if these had been intending to breed they would have been here at the start of the month and I guess these were young birds that have not bred so far but are checking out possible nest sites in case their hormones get to work next spring - they are probably birds that were hatched here a year or two ago and are hoping they can find nest sites here without searching for new sites.

## [Mon 26 May](#)

### **First Stag Beetle**

While doing a bit of gardening a neighbour looked in and among other things mentioned that he had seen no **Stag Beetles** so far this year - as soon as he had

left a **male appeared on the lawn** but flew off before I could show it to anyone. Also on the lawn today there were **at least two juvenile House Sparrows** among the half dozen adults which come daily for food.

The **Stag Beetle** came with an improvement in the weather so I went for a short cycle ride to Langstone where I am pretty certain that I could see a youngster in one of the four **Egret nests** that can be seen from the seawall (watching **Egrets** flying in to land in other trees I am pretty sure there are at least half a dozen nests). I then went up Pook Lane to the A27 underpass to check on the **Clustered Clover** which I found there on this Bank Holiday last year. I found one small cluster of plants showing pink but unopen flowers.

Next stop was the Eastern Road cemetery where I found my first **Creeping Cinquefoil** flowers of the year, and after that to the New Lane allotments where two flowers were opening on **Large Bindweed** and (much more welcome) one plant of **Weasel's Snout (or Lesser Snapdragon)** had an open flower and several buds

### **SUMMARY FOR MAY 19 - 25 (WEEK 20 OF 2008)**

**Bird news** includes the start of **Storm Petrel sightings** in the English Channel and the first **Black Stork** sighting of the year. A webcam in the New Forest is now showing **young in a Goshawk nest** and nearby there has been a possible sighting of a **Booted Eagle**. The first **Avocet chicks** have hatched at Titchfield Haven and the first **juvenile Tawny Owl** has been seen out of its nest. **Bee Eaters** continue to invade England and rarities at Portland have been **Thrush Nightingale** and **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**. At least one **Firecrest** has shown it can sing **both its own and Goldcrest song equally well**. A **Crossbill** irruption may have started.

**Variable Damsel flies** have started to emerge and up to **700 Four-spotted Chasers** have been seen at Dungeness while **one Broad-bodied Chaser** was **seen to catch and then free a Hornet**. New butterflies are **Large Skipper** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** while an exceptionally early **White Admiral** has been seen flying at Emsworth. **33 new moth species** seen this week include both **Elephant** and **Small Elephant Hawkmoths** and a **very rare migrant Great Dart** has been trapped near Newhaven

**Newly flowering orchids** include **Bee, Fly, Pyramidal, Bird's-nest** and **White Helleborine**. Two Hayling rarities (**Cock's Eggs** and **Sea Knotgrass**) are out and both **Rosy Garlic** and **Spotted Hawkweed** were flowering on Portsdown

### **BIRDS**

**Balearic Shearwater:** Singles were seen from Christchurch Harbour on May 21 and 23, the first seen anywhere since Apr 29 (and before the Mar 30)

**Storm Petrel:** More than 9 were seen passing Selsey Bill on May 22 with at least one there on May 23 and an estimated 5 on May 24. In the past Storm Petrels were only seen after autumn gales but last year more than 100 were off Dorset and the Isle of Wight from May 7 until July 17 (peak counts were 160+ on May 10 and 12 with numbers dropping off after June 1)

**Little Bittern:** The female which arrived at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on May 17 was still there on May 20

**Cattle Egret:** At least one remained in Poole Harbour until May 23 while another appeared in the Marsh Farm area (north of Pagham Harbour north wall) on May 21 and 22

**Great White Egret:** One was in the Pevensey Levels area on May 21 and 22

**Black Stork:** One was at Arlington in the Cuckmere valley on May 18 (first for the year). Uncommon in western Europe

**White Stork:** One over the New Forest on May 20 was the third in southern England this spring (first at Portland on Apr 15, then one near Basingstoke on May 10). The New Forest bird may have flown east to appear in the Kent Stour valley/Thanet areas on May 22 and 23

**Spoonbill:** Six still together in the west of Poole Harbour on May 24

**Barnacle Goose:** In the spring of 1999 there were **42 Barnacle Geese** regularly present at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth (and one or two pairs bred there successfully) but in the summer, when the pond was hit by disease, 17 were found dead and the rest dispersed to Titchfield Haven and other unknown locations. In 2000 no more than **12 Barnacles** were seen at Baffins and by 2007 the peak count at the pond was just 6 birds dropping to 4 or 5 this year, but on May 22 Ian Julian visited the pond and gave us news that two of the remaining birds had paired up and raised a family of **5 young goslings**.

**Brent Goose:** On May 23 sea watchers at Spalsh Point (Seaford) were surprised to see 3 apparently migrant Brent flying east.

**Gadwall:** These have now become widespread but I was surprised on May 22 to see a male (apparently paired with a female Mallard) on the tiny pond alongside the Hayling coastal path in a field just south of the Stoke Bay area (known to older birders as the '**Hoopoe Field**' having hosted both **Hoopoe** and **Sub-Alpine Warbler** in past years but perhaps nowadays more associated the shipping container apparently dumped on the coastal path by Hertfordshire County Council when they had no further need for it)

**Garganey:** May 24 brought sightings of a pair together at Titchfield Haven and two drakes in the Arne area of Poole Harbour plus a single male associating with a female Mallard in the 'Breech Pool' by the Pagham Harbour north walls - this bird had been seen there on May 21 and 22 and shows no concern about showing itself to birders and others so at least one person has suggested that it is the same bird which was at Pagham lagoon from Mar 15 to Apr 8 showing no sign of being a wild bird.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Three late birds flew east past Splash Point at Seaford on May 22

**Honey Buzzard:** On May 18 one was seen over Battle Great Wood north of Hastings and on May 20 one flew in off the sea at Portland with another two seen over West Bexington further west along the Dorset Coast - another arrived at

Portland on May 21 These make a total of 14 sightings along the south coast since the first was seen in the Hastings area on Apr 24 - I suspect that most of these birds are just passing through Britain on their way to Scandinavia.

**Black Kite:** On May 18 one was reported going east over Came Wood (east of the A354 half way between Weymouth and Dorchester) and on May 20 there was a definite sighting in the Pevensy Levels area - the bird not only flew over low but landed in a field. On May 24 one flew west low over Worthing. I have seen 16 reports of this species so far this year but several are dubious (probably sightings of **Red Kites**) and I think that the four which escaped from London Zoo this year have not been recaptured yet!

**Montagu's Harrier:** A first summer male has been regularly seen in the Hartland Moor and adjacent Arne RSPB reserve areas west of Poole Harbour from May 14 to May 20 at least and on May 22 a female was in the Thanet area of Kent.

**Goshawk:** A webcam is once again showing life in a New Forest **Goshawk nest** to visitors to the Reptiliary (just west of Lyndhurst). By May 23 the nest had **three 10 day old chicks**

**Booted Eagle??:** Wayne Percy, a very experienced raptor enthusiast, feels sure that a bird which he saw flying north in the north west sector of the New Forest on May 24 was a **Booted Eagle** and was definitely not a very pale **Buzzard** (so white it has been mistaken for a seagull when perched) nor a pale **Honey Buzzard**.

**Red-footed Falcon:** A first summer male has been seen by many birders in the Shatterford area of the New Forest from May 10 to 23 at least, and on May 22 an adult male was also seen in the same area

**Merlin:** A late returning bird flew in off the sea at Birling Gap (Beachy Head) on May 23

**Hobby:** Kent holds the record this year for the greatest number of Hobbies hunting at one site with a count of 36 in the Stour Valley in May 5. Dorset had 5 together in the Wareham Forest area on May 23 and Hampshire has had 7 in the Bishops Dyke (Beaulieu Road station) area on May 22 while Sussex peaked at 12+ over the Pevensy Levels on May 22

**Quail:** Two different birds were heard on Steep Down behind Lancing (Worthing area) on May 20 but there is no sign of a 'Quail year' developing so far. The only previous reports have been on Apr 30 (one on Beaminster Down in Dorset), Apr 17 (two flushed at Durlston on the Dorset coast), Mar 26 (a possible early migrant flushed on the north Kent coast), and Jan 15 (at the foot of the Downs south of Pulborough - probably an escaped 'cage bird')

**Common Crane:** The three birds which were at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 18 (two of them staying there until Apr 4 when they were seen mating) were all back at Pulborough on May 18. The group of three may have arrived together on Feb 21 when three flew north over Horsham, and more recently the same three may have been the birds seen over the Medway estuary in Kent on May 6 while at other times the two that were seen mating may have succeeded in ridding themselves of the

unwanted third bird which was seen in the Alton (Woolmer Pond) area three times during April and on May 15 was over East Dean near Beachy Head.

**Avocet:** By May 24 the first **four chicks** could be seen at Titchfield Haven.

**Stone Curlew:** Yet another late arrival (after the bird at Dungeness on May 13) was photographed crouching in the shingle at Rye Harbour beach on May 18

**Ringed Plover:** One or two pairs normally nest in the Hayling Oysterbeds area but this year they seemed to be absent until this week when three birds were seen there on May 20

**Little Stint:** Two were seen on the Lymington marshes on May 18 and 19, the first reported in Hampshire since one was at Farlington Marshes up to Mar 9

**Temminck's Stint:** This has been a good spring for sightings of this species on passage - I have reports of 11 sightings since Apr 25 (including 3 together at Pulborough Brooks from May 6 to 8). Latest report is of one well inland at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on May 18

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Ignoring the 'winter bird' seen in the Thames estuary on Mar 10 there have been three reports of birds on spring passage. On Apr 27 one was in Poole Harbour, on May 4 one was in the Lymington area and now one has been seen at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on May 18

**Purple Sandpiper:** A group of more than 20 birds seen at Barton on Sea (west of Lymington) on Apr 9 seemed to mark the normal end of spring passage but one was at Portland on May 6 to start a second phase of passage which has so far generated another seven reports, the latest being of two at Southsea Castle on May 19 (after three were at Newhaven on May 18)

**Wood Sandpiper:** Two more sightings of single birds, both on May 18, at the Blashford Lakes in west Hampshire and Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex.

**Black-headed Gull:** On May 23 there were more than 100 active nests at Rye Harbour, many of them having newly hatched young but a few having young already half grown. The Wildlife Discovery Day at Rye on May 25 featured an unusual Black-headed Gull being paraded through the streets of Rye which can be seen at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/?p=5673#more-5673> (the other pictures in the series are worth a look)

The number of active nests at the Hayling Oysterbeds had increased to 75 by May 20. I don't know how many more pairs are nesting on the RSPB Islands this year but the official count in 2004 was 4587 pairs and in 2006 it was up to 4923. No doubt it also increased in 2007, so no wonder that these gulls are grateful for any suitable habitat on which to nest.

**Little Tern:** By May 20 the number of nests at the Hayling Oysterbeds was thought to have increased to 11 but I have seen nothing to say that the total number in Langstone Harbour has increased above the 100 estimated last week (60 or 70 of these 100 birds will probably attempt to nest on the RSPB Islands in Langstone Harbour)

**Tawny Owl:** The first report of a **juvenile out of the nest** comes from Nyman's Gardens near Haywards Heath on May 24

**Bee Eater:** These continue to arrive in Britain - latest sightings have been of one arriving at Portland on May 18, one flying north in the Shatterford area of the New Forest on May 23 and another going northwest over the Chichester West Dean woods on May 24

**Hoopoe:** One photographed flying over Canford Heath on the western fringe of the Poole built up area on May 24

**Thrush Nightingale:** One turned up at Portland on May 18 and sang for a couple hours before vanishing. This species replaces our Nightingale in countries east of Poland and looks very like our bird but has a less attractive song (recording can be heard on the Portland website). As far as I know this species has never been recorded in Hampshire but I see that there had been 41 records of it in Britain prior to 1983 when my Shell Guide to Birds was published

**Common Redstart:** First report of a pair with a fledged youngster out of the nest comes from Ashdown Forest on May 24

**Cetti's Warbler:** These could almost be described as 'abundant' in Hampshire nearly 50 years after the first reached Britain at Titchfield Haven in 1961 but they are only now becoming frequent in east Sussex and Kent and I was interested to read on the Rye Bay website that they have not achieved the same westward spread on the continent and are still rare in Belgium

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler:** The bird which arrived at Portland on May 17 (see last week's summary) was still there on May 18 but has not been reported since.

**Firecrest:** John Eyre had a clear view of a Firecrest somewhere in Hampshire on May 24 and saw that it was **singing not only its own distinctive song but alternating that with the song of a Goldcrest**. John saw the bird on a bare branch and says .. "I could clearly see it singing both regular Firecrest - an accelerating, rising Zu Zi Zi Zizzzzz - and the Goldcrest-like cyclical, rising and falling song".

**Golden Oriole:** These were reported from Dungeness, Portland, the Kent Stour valley and Lodmoor (Weymouth) during the period May 16 to 18 and I have just seen that there was also one heard singing somewhere in the New Forest during that wave of arrivals. Latest report is of one on the golf course behind Climping beach (between Bognor and the mouth of the R Arun) on May 21

**Woodchat Shrike:** First sighting of the year was of one at East Holme near Wareham in Dorset on May 18.

**Starling:** First report of young out of the nest and being fed on the ground by their parents comes from Brian Fellows in Emsworth on May 20

**Crossbill:** A couple of recent reports of one or two **Crossbills** flying west across Kent were probably of birds arriving from the continent but it was not until May 23 when **a flock of 18 was seen in Ashdown Forest** that there was a mention of this

marking the start of an irruption - worth keeping eyes and ears open in Stansted Forest

**Corn Bunting:** One was seen at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon valley on May 23 (last report of any **Corn Buntings** in Hampshire was on Mar 27 in the Andover area).

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Broad-bodied Chaser:** Brian Fellows made a very unusual observation at Stansted House on May 21 when he saw a **Chaser dragonfly in the air over a small pond carrying a Hornet, seemingly in its jaws**. After a short time the **Hornet** managed to free itself and fly off so my guess is that while the dragonfly was patrolling its territory the **Hornet** happened to cross its path and the dragonfly instinctively scooped it up in its legs which have spines to prevent prey from escaping. Whether the dragonfly realised 'it had bitten off more than it could chew' or whether the **Hornet** broke the grip of the leg spines cannot be determined but neither insect showed any observable damage.

**Four-spotted Chaser:** The unusual sight on May 16 of 600+ of these clinging to reeds at Dungeness as a result of dull and damp weather (after emerging from the water they climbed the reeds to pump-up and dry out their wings but the absence of sun meant that their wings did not dry and so the dragonflies could not fly) was repeated on May 17 (when 650 were counted on the reeds) and May 19 brought another count of 110 there. The saga continued with a count of 700 on May 22. No news of Hobbies visiting the site!

**Variable Damselfly:** Two seen at Rye Harbour on May 18 were the first for the year.

### Butterflies

**26 species seen in the past week** with first appearances of **White Admiral**, **Large Skipper** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary**

**Large Skipper:** First of the year seen on the Isle of Wight on May 21

**Clouded Yellow:** Still no major invasion but on May 22 a fast flying **Clouded Yellow** was seen heading north at Durlston on the Dorset coast where others had been seen on Apr 16 and 23. The current sighting is the seventh for the year.

**Brown Argus:** May 18 saw a mass emergence of these with more than 60 seen together at one site on Bonchurch Down (IoW) and on May 20 more than 20 were seen on the Sussex Downs above the Cuckmere Valley

**Common Blue:** These are now being seen at all the expected sites with counts of 16 together on Chalton Down (Rowlands Castle) and 19 at Southwater Country Park (Horsham)

**Adonis Blue:** Also seen at Bonchurch Down on May 18 were more than 60 of these beauties. On May 24 Mill Hill at Shoreham had 30 but Martin Down only had 12 on May 21

**Duke of Burgundy:** I had thought that these were only seen on open downland but it seems that when they were more numerous in the past they could also be **found in woodland glades**. A sighting of three in woodland near West Meon shows that they can still occur there.

**White Admiral:** One was reliably reported to have been seen in Hollybank Wood at Emsworth on the **exceptionally early date of May 11** - the first ever recorded before June 1 in Britain as far as I know. I certainly could not find a May emergence reported in any of the Hampshire Butterfly reports from 2007 back to 1989 when the first was seen on what was then regarded as the remarkably early date of June 11, and the report goes on to say that June 11 was the earliest county record since 1943 while the earliest ever Hampshire record was 2 June 1918. That report also talks of a major population crash in 1988.

The RSNC Guide to Butterflies written by Jeremy Thomas shows the flight period for White Admiral as being limited to July with a few sightings in late June and with late sighting up to the third week of August. In 2006 the flight period seemed to end on Aug 7 but an abnormal second generation started to fly on Sept 3, lasting until Oct 15. This was not unprecedented but did not recur in 2007 (last sighting was on Aug 7) though the 2007 emergence did start on the early date of June 3. I wonder if the conditions which effectively brought forward (for some individuals) the spring emergence of 2007 to the autumn of 2006 has been at work again, bringing the spring emergence in 2008 forward by a month for at least one individual?

**Red Admiral:** The appearance of a very fresh individual to sun itself on my garden path on May 24 may well reflect the local emergence of insects from caterpillars which fed here through the winter. On May 3 one **Red Admiral** is known to have emerged from the pupa of an overwintering caterpillar in the Sussex Ouse valley and local emergence is supported by the absence of reports of migrant arrivals.

**Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** The first of the year was seen in Bentley Wood (west of Stockbridge) on May 19 with 15 males flying there by May 21

**Glanville Fritillary:** Around 20 of these were seen on the undercliff at Wheeler's Bay, Ventnor, on May 18

**Grayling:** Not yet on the wing as butterflies but on May 17 a **nocturnal search for caterpillars of this species** (normally as elusive and cryptic as the adult butterflies) was organised somewhere in East Sussex and succeeded in finding 11 caterpillars in downland grass.

## Moths

**33 new species this week**

**Alabonia geoffrella (0652):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 20

**Pancalia leuwenhoekella (0899):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 20

**Arched Marble (1080 *Olethreutes arcuella*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 24

**Marbled Orchard Tortrix (1083 *Hedya nubiferana*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Small Magpie (1376 *Eurrhynx hortulata*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**White-spotted Sable (1381 *Anania Funebris*):** First of these distinctive day flying moths in the Thanet area of Kent on May 20

**Udea olivalis (1392):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Thistle Ermine (1458 *Myelois circumvoluta*):** First at Durlston on May 22

**Silver-ground Carpet (1727 *Xanthorhoe montanata*):** First in Pannel valley (Rye) on May 22

**Yellow Shell (1742 *Camptogramma bilineata*):** First in the Adur valley on May 20

**Grass Rivulet (1807 *Perizoma albulata*):** First at Durlston on May 22

**Light Emerald (1961 *Campaea margaritata*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Elephant Hawkmoth (1991 *Deilephila elpenor*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Small Elephant Hawkmoth (1992 *Deilephila porcellus*):** First at Denton (Newhaven) on May 21

**Buff-tip (1994 *Phalera bucephala*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Alder Kitten (1996 *Furcula bicuspis*):** First at Catsfield near Hastings on May 23

**Cream-spot Tiger (2058 *Arctia villica*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 21

**Great Dart (2094 *Agrotis crassa*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23. Described on UK Moths as .. "A very rare migrant to Britain, with less than 20 records in the last 100 years".

**Purple Clay (2122 *Diarsia brunnea*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**The Shears (2147 *Hada nana*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 21

**White Colon (2152 *Sideridis albicolon*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 21

**Light Brocade (2157 *Lacanobia w-latinum*):** First at Denton (Newhaven) on May 21

**The Champion (2166 *Hadena rivularis*):** Two taken somewhere in Sussex on May 23

**Obscure Wainscot (2204 *Mythimna obsoleta*):** First at Pannel Valley (Rye) on May 22

**The Miller (2280 *Acronicta leporina*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) and at Catsfield near Hastings on May 23

**Alder Moth (2281 *Acronicta alni*):** First at Catsfield near Hastings on May 23

**Dark Dagger (2283 *Acronicta tridens*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Clouded-bordered Brindle (2326 *Apamea crenata*):** First at Pannel Valley (Rye) on May 22

**Treble Lines (2380 *Charanyca trigrammica*):** First at Ringmer (Lewes) on May 23

**Gold Spot (2439 *Plusia festucae*):** First at Pannel Valley (Rye) on May 21

**The Four-spotted (2465 *Tyta luctuosa*):** First at Portland on May 21

**Small Purple-barred (2470 *Phytometra viridaria*):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 20

**Caterpillars: Lackey Moth caterpillars** found at Durlston on May 22

## Other Insects

**Hornet:** One seen on Portsdown on May 23 and one at Stansted on May 21 (see Dragonflies above)

**Bloodsucker Soldier Beetle (*Rhagonycha fulva*):** Seen on umbellifers at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on May 18

**Eyed Ladybird:** First report from Dungeness on May 21

## PLANTS

**Rock Rose:** First of year flowering at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown on May 20

**Pale Flax:** First flowers reported at Durlston on May 22

**Procumbent and Annual Pearlwort:** Both noticed flowering this week

**Spanish Gorse:** Flowering at Black Point on Hayling on May 22

**Tree Lupin:** In full flower at Black Point on May 22 - probably out for some time

**Hop Trefoil:** First flowers at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown on May 20 (one day earlier than 2007)

**Tufted Vetch:** Flowering on Portsdown from May 19

**Tormentil:** First report of the year from the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on May 24

**English Stonecrop:** Starting to flower on south Hayling on May 22

**White Bryony:** First flowers on Portsdown on May 19

**Ground Elder:** First flowers seen in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on May 24

**Wild Parsnip:** Although this had been reported in flower at Durlston on Apr 29 the first local report was from Portsdown on May 19

**Wild Carrot:** Late flowering plants seen in Feb and Mar but the first fresh flowering not seen until May 23

**Wood Dock:** Found flowering in the Hollybank Woods on May 24

**Sea Knotgrass (*Polygonum maritimum*):** This very rare plant is still to be found on the shingle east of Sandy Point reserve on Hayling and was in flower on May 22

**Wild Privet:** Just starting to flower on Portsdown on May 20

**Cock's Eggs (*Salpichroa origanifolia*):** This still flourishes on Sinah Common (south Hayling) and first flowers were seen on May 22

**Purple Toadflax:** This started to flower on May 23

**Eyebright:** Flowering at Durlston on May 22

**Alkanet (*Anchusa officinalis*):** Flowering at Hayling Island Sailing Club (Black Point) on May 22 - not to be confused with Green Alkanet

**Common Broomrape:** Found freshly flowering at two local sites on May 19

**Hoary Plantain:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on May 20

**Sheep's Bit:** This lovely blue flower was out on south Hayling on May 22

**Guelder Rose:** First seen flowering on Portsdown on May 23

**Honeysuckle:** Wild hedgerow plants had started to flower on Hayling on May 22

**Hedge Bedstraw:** Just starting to flower on Portsdown on May 23

**Silver Ragwort:** Just starting to flower in Hayling beach gardens (hardly separable from the beach environment) on May 22

**Seaside Daisy:** Just starting to flower in Hayling beach gardens (hardly separable from the beach environment) on May 22

**Wetted Thistle:** One first plant flowering on Portsdown on May 23

**Black Knapweed:** Flowering well on Portsdown by May 23

**Hawkweed Oxtongue:** One first flowering plant on Portsdown on May 19

**Spotted Hawkweed (*Hieracium maculatum*):** One plant unexpectedly in flower on Portsdown on May 23

**Red-hot Poker:** A bank of plants well out at Black Point on Hayling were my first on May 22

**Rosy Garlic (*Allium roseum*):** A very pretty plant that I have never seen before was in flower (with bulbils) on Portsdown on May 23 - presumably a garden chuck out which had established itself on the downland in long grass

**White Helleborine:** Flowering in Kent on May 20

**Bird's nest Orchid:** Flowering in Kent on May 20

**Pyramidal Orchid:** Several had started to flower on Portsdown by May 23

**Bee Orchid:** First flower seen at Durlston on May 21

**Fly Orchid:** Flowering in Kent on May 20

**Sea Club-rush:** Flowering at Emsworth on May 22

**Quaking Grass:** Abundant on Portsdown on May 23

**Hare's Tail Grass:** A great show in two area of the Sandy/Black Point area on Hayling on May 22

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fox:** As I was cycling down the Billy Trail in the Langstone area on May 22 a **small Fox** popped out in front of me but quickly vanished again - my first impression was that it was one of this year's cubs but the animal's **tail seemed to have no fur on it** so it was probably a small mangy adult.

While thinking of animal fur coming out I was very puzzled to go out onto my front lawn this morning (May 25) and to see **a large amount of ginger fur covering a small area of grass around a central flattened hairless area**. There was no indication of any struggle and my best guess was that a local old ginger tom had been sleeping on the lawn (during the overnight rain!!) while some unknown and unskilled cat barber had been all round the cat cutting off chunks of ginger fur and scattering them around the sleeping cat's body. Not a very likely story but can you make a better suggestion?

**Dolphins:** Bird watchers at Selsey Bill on May 22 saw two **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** and one **Common Dolphin** (first report of this species for the year)

**Rabbits:** **Baby Rabbits** are now being seen everywhere

**Fungus:** Just two reports this week. On May 24 Brian Fellows found a fresh specimen of **Chicken of the Woods** aka **Sulphur Polypore (*Laetiporus sulphureus*)** on a large tree stump in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth. On May 23 I was on Portsdown Hill and noticed that a lot of the short grass had tight white 'collars' some 1 to 2 cm high around the middle part of the grass stems - I think this was a fungus called ***Epichloe typhina*** or '**Grass Choke**'

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 19 - 25 (WEEK 20 OF 2008)

### Fri 23 May

#### Rosy Garlic and Pyramidal Orchids flowering on Portsdown

A walk around the Portsdown grassland on either side of the A3 London Road this afternoon added five new flowers to my yearlist, one of them a species I had not seen before, and before leaving the hill I found two more newcomers to the yearlist at the Fort Purbrook site.

I started my walkabout from the carpark just east of the London Road, going south to where the **Sainfoin** is now abundant but the only new find here was what I think is a fungus called **Grass Choke** which forms tight white collars (1 or 2 cm high) around grass stems - as far as I know this does the grass no permanent damage.

Moving west towards the trees which surround the Collyer's Pit area I decided to have a look at the long grass left uncut around the periphery of this area and I headed for the north west corner of the uncut grass where my eye was caught by a **cluster of rosy pink flowers** on a thin stemmed plant growing up through a mass of old dead ivy stems that had fallen (or been cut) from some tree top. It was clear that the plant was an **Allium**, but one that I had never seen before. On getting home it was pretty clear that this must be **Rosy Garlic (*Allium roseum*)** giving me a second new Allium species seen by me in flower this year (the first being the **Hairy Garlic** at Emsworth Nore Barn). Near the **Rosy Garlic** both **Hedgerow Cranesbill** and **Green Alkanet** were in flower.

From here I crossed the slip road connecting the west side of the London Road to the Hill Top Road and walked on through the flower rich uncut grass toward the bridge over the London Road, finding lots of **Hoary Plantain** en route. At the east end of the bridge (where a tarmac footpath comes north to meet the main road pavement) one plant of **Hieracium maculatum** was in full flower (an interesting flower head with all the flowers closely grouped at the top of the stem but all facing in different directions)

Here and on the west side of the London Road both **Hedge Bedstraw** and **Black Knapweed** were newly in flower, and when I headed back east towards the car I came on my first **Wetted Thistle** in flower. The last surprise in this area was to get a glimpse of a fast flying **Hornet**.

Driving homeward I made another stop in the Fort Purbrook area where many **Common Spotted Orchids** were in flower (already reported) with several flowering **Pyramidal Orchids** to add to the year list, along with one flowering bush of **Guelder Rose**.

Both **Holly** and **Common Blue** butterflies were on the wing on Portsdown, and I also saw **Speckled Wood** and a **Burnet Companion**

### Thu 22 May

#### Sheep's Bit and Sea Knotgrass flowering on Hayling

Cycling to south Hayling this afternoon I had not reached the main road at Langstone when a young **Fox Cub** appeared ahead of me in the middle of the busy Billy Trail - needless to say the Cub did not stay in full view for long. Over on Hayling quite a few **baby Rabbits** were seen as I cycled down the old rail track, and as I passed the pond just inland of the track a little south of Stoke Bay I saw it had a **family of Mallard ducklings** on it. Also seen on the shingle south of the bay was a good show of **Sea Kale** which has only started to appear here in very recent years.

Reaching Sinah Common opposite Staunton Avenue I found that a lot of the **Cocks Eggs plants (already in flower)** had been cut back from the garden fence but it had not been eliminated in the garden hedge line and lots more was growing freely in the grass of the Common.

I could find no sign of the **Childing/Proliferous Pink plants** - in 2005 I found the first plants with unopen flowers by May 6 and by May 26 that year 42 plants were flowering. It is too early to say that the plants have become extinct here but I do not expect them to flourish in the future.

In the area where I was searching for the Pinks I found **Sheep's Bit** in flower along with the white flowered **English Stonecrop** and the startling red foliage of the tiny **Mossy Stonecrop**

In the sandy grass seaward of the beach huts the **leaves (but no flowers) of Sea Bindweed** were seen, as was much **Sand Sedge**.

Cycling east along the seafront all the way to Sandy Point I passed a few **Yellow Horned Poppies** and saw several semi-wild flowers in various gardens which are effectively extensions of the beach habitat - **Hoary Stock, Silver Ragwort, Seaside Daisy (Erigeron glaucous)** were all seen in flower.

In the Sandy Point reserve several freshly flowering plants of **Hounds Tongue** were to be seen with a singing **Meadow Pipit** making its parachute drops nearby, and emerging onto the shingle east of the last fenceline I was pleased to find the very rare **Sea Knotgrass** in flower and to see a small display of **Hare's Tail grass**.

Around the Sailing Club at the end of the causeway **Spanish Gorse** and **Tree Lupins** were boldly flowering along with a bank of **Red Hot Pokers**. Less easy to see, but plentiful along the top of the bank on top of which are the Sailing Club grounds, was **Bugloss** in flower. Also seen here. on the inland bank of the causeway near its southern end, was a single flowering plant of a small **garden escape Gladiolus** with dark red flowers.

Cycling home I passed **wild Honeysuckle** in flower and back on the Billy Track coastal path I was delighted to hear **Yellowhammer song** from the trees of the 'green lane' which runs north from the start of the West Lane bends. **Lesser Whitethroat** was also heard and on the pond near the **Yellowhammer** the family of **Mallard ducklings** had been joined by a **male Gadwall** associating with another **female Mallard**

[Mon 19 May](#)

## Portchester Common on Portsdown

This afternoon I walked around Portchester Common on the shoulder of Portsdown just above the M27 where it climbs west from Portsmouth.

In a little over a month from now this site should have **Basil Thyme** on show but today the only new plants were **Hawkweed Oxtongue** (growing in the kissing gate by which you enter the site from Skew Road), **White Bryony**, **Tufted Vetch** (two flower heads seen though neither had any fully open flowers), and **Wild Parsnip** (my first, though reported in flower at Durlston back on the early date of Apr 29). I also found a couple of spikes of **Sainfoin** in flower and a little more of the **Hairy Rockcress (Arabis hirsuta)** which seems to be having a very good year.

One other new plant for the year was **Common Broomrape** which I first saw here today but then found a much better specimen in my own garden when I arrived back home.

Before coming home I drove further down Skew Road to the parking place just above the bridge over the M27. Walking around here there was no sign of the **Common Spotted** or **Bee Orchids** that normally flourish here (not even a leaf of either) but there was a lot more of the **Arabis hirsuta** under the metal crash barriers on the east side of the road just above the bridge. Near the point where Monument Lane vanishes into the trees the lower part of the steep bank on the north side of the road has had some good clearance, giving the **Small Yellow Foxgloves (Digitalis lutea, also called Straw Foxgloves)** which are established here less competition and a good many of these plants are already visible (only one had a hint of a flowerhead but they are always later than the normal **Foxgloves**).

### **SUMMARY FOR MAY 12 - 18 (WEEK 19 OF 2008)**

**Bird highlights** include **Bittern** and **Long-eared Owl** heard through the night in the Kent Stour Valley; **Little Bittern**, **Purple Heron** and **Great White Egret** in the Weymouth area; **Glossy Ibis** at Weymouth before stopping at Lymington; Raptor sightings include **Red-footed Falcon**, **Honey Buzzard**, **Hen** and **Montagu's Harrier** and lots of **Red Kites** plus a **wandering Eagle of disputed identity**; a **reported American Golden Plover** proved to be a **Grey** after drawing in the twitchers to Lymington; **Purple** and **Wood Sandpipers** still being seen; lots of **Bee Eater** sightings and many **Wood Warblers** (one managing to eat a caterpillar and sing at the same time); bird of the week was an **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**

**Insect news** includes **600+ Four Spotted Chasers** got caught out by the weather to give a good photo opportunity; **Small Blues** are out and Butser Hill has a very good showing of **Duke of Burgundy**; 41 new moths include a **Dorset Cream Wave** and **Eyed + Poplar Hawkmoths**

Plants: **Yellow Horned Poppies** are out with **Sea Pea** at Rye Harbour; **Grass Vetchling** can be seen at Broadmarsh and I had an exciting 'lifer' first when I found **Manna Ash in flower** on Portsdown; **Foxgloves**, **Wild Thyme** and **Common Mallow** are common firsts for the year while **Wild Clary**, **Hounds Tongue**, **Ivy Broomrape** and **Herb Paris** were much more exciting finds; **Man** and **Common**

**Spotted Orchids** are now out as are **Southern Marsh** but there are fears that flooding with sea water has had a dire effect on the Langstone South Moors colony

The first **Roe Deer kid** has been dropped and I have been introduced to the subject of **Squid Eggs**

## **BIRDS**

**Bittern:** A group of birders in the Kent Stour Valley undertook an all night vigil at Grove Ferry from May 16 to 17 and enjoyed the night long booming of Bittern

**Little Bittern:** One turned up at Lodmoor in Dorset late on May 17

**Cattle Egret:** At least two remain in Dorset (seen in Poole Harbour on May 16 and at Radipole on May 17) but there have also been reports of one in the Sussex Ouse valley on May 14 and 16

**Great White Egret:** A photo of one at Radipole on May 17 (see Dorset Bird Club) shows the black bill and yellow legs they have at this time of year.

**Purple Heron:** One flying over water at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on May 17

**Glossy Ibis:** One seen briefly at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on May 17 before flying on to be seen at Keyhaven (Lymington) on the May 17 and 18

**Spoonbill:** One was seen in Langstone Harbour on May 15 by the Little Tern warden at the Oysterbeds who only got a distant view of it in the Broadmarsh area. As many as six were still in the Poole Harbour area on May 13

**Brent Goose:** The first week with no reports!

**Bar-headed Goose:** Of local interest I see that one was with Canada Geese in the flooded field by the Main Road onto Thorney Island on May 12

**Shoveler:** A pair made a surprise appearance in Emsworth Harbour on May 13 and a single drake also popped up at Christchurch Harbour that day

**Pochard:** Another late traveller was a male Pochard seen flying past Spalsh point at Seaford on May 11

**Honey Buzzard:** On May 11 one flew in over Christchurch Harbour and was said to be heading 'straight for the New Forest'. Several others have arrived this week - at Folkestone singles flew in off the sea on My 9 and 11, in north Sussex one was seen near Ashdown Forest on May 12, and on May 15 two probable sightings in the Brighton area (at Southwick and Falmer) may have been of the same bird.

**Black Kite:** Two 'probable only' sightings this week - one over Brighton, the other over Pilsdon Pen in west Dorset. These may well have been more Red Kites (see below)

**Red Kite:** I have seen 23 reports of Red Kite sightings along the south coast during the four day period from May 10 to 13, one of them relating to at least 6 seen in the Kent Stour valley on May 10, another report of 9 Kites seen together over the Rother Valley north of Hastings on May 11 and another of 2 or 3 over West Grinstead near Pulborough on May 12. Local sightings have been over Chichester city centre and north Emsworth on May 11, and over Langstone village on May 13. Latest report is of one going low over Bishopstoke (Eastliegh area) on May 17.

While there is no common direction in which these birds were heading the majority were seen within a mile or so of the coast and at least four of them were said to be heading north so I think it is not unreasonable to guess that we have seen a wave of non-breeding birds drifting over from the continent (it is equally plausible to imagine these are young birds hatched in Britain in the last couple of years and with nothing better to do than to take a day trip to the seaside). We know there are lots of Red

Kites in Britain nowadays but I was surprised to see John Clark illustrating the numbers in Hampshire by saying that he knows of at least one winter roost in the county which held more than 50 birds, and with these numbers around it is very likely that one or more pairs are breeding 'somewhere near where you live'.

**Hen Harrier:** We normally only see these in winter month but this week has brought two more sightings - one on May 13 over Hartland Moor (just west of Poole Harbour), and the other was a male over Dungeness on May 16.

**Montagu's Harrier:** Kent has had three recent sightings - one over Folkestone on May 9, one in the Stour valley near Canterbury on May 12 and one at Reculver on the north coast on May 15. Dorset has also had three sightings on May 14, 15 and 17, all in the area west of Poole Harbour.

**White-tailed Sea Eagle?** Around a dozen sightings of unidentified Eagles have been reported this month, mostly in the New Forest but with at least one report from the Christchurch area of Dorset and a couple from south east Hampshire (Bedhampton and Fareham). Several of the earlier reports specifically denied that the bird was the **White-tailed Sea Eagle** which spent much of last winter in the Andover area (coming from a nest in Finland where it was hatched and ringed last spring) but the consensus (not unanimous) now seems to be that it is that same bird that is wandering round Hampshire. The question now is will it stay? (and if so where?)

**Osprey:** One was over Thorney Island as recently as May 12 followed by two sightings in Dorset on May 12 and 14 and one at Cuckmere Haven near Eastbourne on May 16

**Red-footed Falcon:** A male was seen at Christchurch Harbour on May 11 and one was reported in the Bishop's Dyke area of the New Forest (near Beaulieu Road station) on May 13

**Hobby:** Plenty of recent sightings but the Stour Valley in Kent continues to be a good place to see them with a total of 25 there on May 12 (they had reported 36 there on May 5)

**Common Crane:** On May 15 one was seen flying over East Dean in Sussex but unfortunately the reporter did not say which East Dean he meant - it could be a local sighting near Goodwood north of Chichester but is more likely to have been at the East Dean which is just inland of Beachy Head.

**Oystercatcher:** I have heard in the past that this species is subject to 'phantom pregnancies' and will occasionally sit on what seems to be nest with no eggs in it. Brian Fellows now tells us that one at the Hayling Oysterbeds has gone one better and is sitting on a nest with eggs, but not of her own - it seems she has taken over a Ringed Plovers nest and eggs.

**Stone Curlew:** These birds normally arrive in this country before the end of March so one seen at Dungeness on May 13 was either very late in arriving or had already decided to quit this season's attempt at breeding (more likely this was a young bird not intending to breed this year).

**American Golden Plover:** What looked very like an American Golden Plover arrived at Pennington Marshes (Lymington) early on May 13, attracting a fair number of twitchers who duly arrived and ticked it on their lists without checking the only two sure identification features which separate the American bird from our

Grey Plover (one is the colour of the axillary feathers which are hidden by the closed wing, the other is the call). Even Britain's leading twitcher (Lee Evans) had to admit to being misled by appearances when the bird lifted its wings to show it had black axillaries and was thus a Grey Plover

**Temminck's Stint:** These have already been seen this month at Lymington and Pulborough Brooks as well as the Kent Stour Valley before one appeared at Farlington Marshes (at the Deeps) on the evening of May 13. Since then two were seen together at Sandwich Bay in Kent on May 16 and one was at the Lymington Marshes on that same day (probably not the same bird seen there on May 6 and 8)

**Purple Sandpiper:** The single bird which turned up at Portland on May 6 seemed to be a lone straggler but now May 11 saw the appearance of a group of 8 at Southsea Castle and on May 13 there were two at Portland - another or the same two were at Portland on May 15 and yet another (this time a group of 4) was on the Dorset coast near Lyme Regis on May 17

**Woodcock:** These were seen roding on May 11 the The Vyne near Basingstoke and at Parkhurst Forest on the IoW.

**Wood Sandpiper:** These are uncommon on spring passage but there have been at least 10 reports this spring - the latest are of one at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on May 11, five in the Kent Stour Valley on May 12, and two at Sandwich Bay on May 14

**Common Tern:** Approximately 10 birds (5 pairs?) were seen around the nest island at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 13 and are in the middle of the pecking order there - the big bullies are around 50 pairs of nesting Black-headed Gulls which harry both Common and Little Terns, the latter being also harried by the Common Terns.

**Little Tern:** By May 13 one pair had already laid eggs at the Hayling Oysterbeds (earliest recorded date of laying at this site) and up to 30 birds (another 14 pairs) may be intending to nest at the site with another 70 birds basing themselves on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour. At the Oysterbeds the Little Terns have to compete for nest sites on the islands in the lagoon with some 50 pairs of Black-headed Gull that have already settled down to nesting, and with around 10 Common Terns and two pairs of Oystercatchers. One pair of Oystercatchers had already seemingly driven off a pair of Ringed Plover that tried to nest on the island.

**Black Tern:** On May 15 two were seen fishing in the Langstone Channel off the Hayling Oysterbeds

**Cuckoo:** On May 13 one was regularly calling in the scrub area around the Hayling Oysterbeds and another had been heard in the Milton area of Portsmouth (I suspect that one was just passing through). On May 16 one was heard repeatedly calling on the Warblington Farm fields so that site has not been abandoned.

**Long-eared Owl:** As Tawny Owls are absent from the Isle of Wight and are replaced there by Long-eared I was not surprised to see that a Long-eared was present in Parkhurst Forest on May 11 when the first Nightjar were churring there

but I was surprised to see that the birders undertaking an all-night vigil in the Kent Stour Valley heard one 'hooting through the night'.

**Nightjar:** By May 11 one was back and churring in the Vyne Park area near Basingstoke and another was in Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight. On May 13 another was seen flying in off the sea at Christchurch Harbour but sadly it was struck by a Peregrine before it reached the shore - whether the blow killed it is not known but it was seen to fall into the sea and, while the Peregrine made a couple of attempts to retrieve the body it was not successful and the Nightjar is now presumably crab food.

**Swifts:** Half a dozen birds have been regularly screaming around houses in Emsworth where they presumably have, or are searching for, nest sites in the older buildings. Here in Havant a couple were seen on May 9 and again on May 15 and 16. May 16 bought the first sighting of a pair copulating on the wing over Worthing. Many were still arriving at Portland on May 17 but I suspect that these late birds will not breed this year.

**Bee Eater:** I have now seen 14 reports of these (potentially totally 40 birds) since the first were seen in Dorset on Apr 27. The latest reports include three from the New Forest area - on May 11 some five birds were seen at Cadman's Pool near Stoney Cross and on May 13 two were seen at this same site, then on May 14 five were seen flying north in the Furze Hill area of South Gorley (north east of Ringwood). The other new sightings come from Kent - on May 14 there were sightings at Folkestone, Sandwich Bay and the Thanet area, and at Seasalter near Whitstable.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Of local interest one was seen or heard about half way along the Main Avenue of Stansted Forest in the week ending May 11

**Ring Ouzel:** Two seen at Dungeness on May 9 were late comers for this species

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais pallida elaeica*):** This rarity turned up at Portland on May 17 and was caught and ringed - maybe only the second at Portland after the first turned up in July 1999. Several very similar species occur and I think the bird can only be safely identified in the hand by close examination of the plumage (e.g. feather lengths). There is also a **Western Olivaceous Warbler (*Hippolais opaca*)** which, despite its name, is probably even rarer in this country. See many photos and details of today's bird on the Portland website.

**Wood Warbler:** This seems to be a good year for a species that has been in long term decline (it's many years since they could be heard at West Walk woodland in the Meon Valley though luckily they have persisted in the New Forest). On May 17 David Holland asked if others were also seeing more of them this year after he had just seen 7 together at one site in the New Forest (including **one singing with its mouth full - eating a large caterpillar without impeding the delicious flow of its shivery song**). I know that birds can breathe in and out at the same time in a continuous circle of moving air, unlike humans who can only sing as they expel air and who have to pause to breathe more air in, but I was surprised that singing seems to have a separate air passage from the throat used for swallowing food - I would like more info on this!

**Spotted Flycatcher:** A pair had returned to the buildings around Stansted House by May 11 and others are still arriving (ten were present on Portland on May 13). On May 15 Portland had a huge fall of an estimated 225 Spotted Flycatchers on or over the island, with 60 there on May 16 and 30 on May 17

**Bearded Tit:** First mention of juveniles out of the nest comes from the Kent Stour Valley on May 17

**Long-tailed Tit:** On May 16 I watched a family of at least eleven pass me heading along a hedgerow at Warblington Farm, the rattle of the adult birds almost drowned by the tiny Goldcrest-like contact notes of the young birds

**Red-backed Shrike:** A smart male bird was seen at Dungeness on May 11 (the only other report so far is of one on the Dorset coast on May 9)

**Golden Oriole:** Two more reports of singing birds - one at Dungeness on May 16 (when another bird was logged at Portland) and another singing in the Canterbury area of Kent on May 17

**Tree Sparrow:** It is clear that a few of these regularly cross the channel but I was surprised to see a run of them appearing at Portland - they report one present on May 13, two on each of May 14, 15, 16 and three on May 17

**Reed Bunting:** Of local interest one was back and singing at Langstone Mill Pond on May 15

**Escapes:** A **Red-tailed Hawk** flew over the centre of Winchester on May 13

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Hairy Dragonfly:** 15 of these were flying at Dungeness by May 12

**Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*):** The first two of the year were flying in the Rye area on May 13

**Broad-bodied Chaser:** First two reports for the year came on May 11 from the Hastings area and from Selborne Common in Hampshire

**Four-spotted Chaser:** These have been out since May 2 and by May 12 around 15 were flying at Dungeness. On May 14 I heard of one having been seen in a south Hayling garden and on May 16 the weather conditions gave rise to an extraordinary sight at Dungeness. An estimated 600+ of these dragonflies emerged from water there at first light and climbed the reeds to pump up and dry out their wings prior to flying but damp, misty air and the absence of the sun prevented them from doing this (at least for some time) allowing a mass of them to be photographed clinging to the reeds.

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** The first was reported on May 7 and by May 12 'many teneral' specimens could be seen near Lewes with around a dozen seen perching on brambles at the foot of the Downs north of Brighton on May 13

**Red-eyed Damselfly:** Several flying at Dungeness on May 12

**Common Blue Damselfly:** Seen at Rye Harbour again on May 13

## **Butterflies**

**25 species reported so far this week**, including ...

**Dingy Skipper:** Said to be having an exceptionally good year in Sussex

**Clouded Yellow:** The sixth sighting for the year was the first for the Isle of Wight, seen on Afton Down on May 11

**Green Veined White:** Unlike the Large and Small Whites which are far roaming migrants that can be seen anywhere Green-veined Whites are restricted to a colonial life in areas with grass that is to their liking. It seems that the grass on Milton Common in Southsea is very much to their liking as as a confetti-like cloud of them could be seen there on May 12, reported by Richard Jones (Portsmouth's Wildlife Warden in charge of Portsdown Hill wildlife)

**Small Blue:** The first reports for the year both came on May 11 when they were flying at Afton Down near Freshwater on the IoW and 11 were seen at Upper Beeding in the Adur valley. May 12 brought a further sighting at Cocking near Midhurst plus a dubious sighting of my own on Portsdown (a tiny speck of blue hurtled past me and disappeared) but their presence on Portsdown that day was confirmed by a report of 8 being seen in the Paulsgrove Chalkpit area

**Duke of Burgundy:** Although Noar Hill is probably the best known Hampshire site for these the highest count from there so far this year has been 16 insects whereas a total of 46 were seen on May 11 at 'Grandfather's Bottom' in a very steep ravine at the northern foot of Butser Hill. These were described in a report on a Hampshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation outing by Ashley Whitlock, who wrote about this 'bottom' .. "Here we stopped for lunch, and in such glorious sunshine and fantastic scenery who wants to be on a beach? On the flat grasses at the base of the hill we counted about (5) Duke of Burgundies, however when everybody was busy eating lunch, I slipped away up behind the Hawthorn and other scrub bushes, and about 30 minutes later came back with a tally of (41) here the Dukes really mark out their territories, being roughly 5-10 yards long, doing battle with other males and any Grizzled Skippers and Dingy Skippers as well".

**Painted Lady:** Sixth report for the year was of one at Ladle Hill near Basingstoke in north Hampshire on May 12

**Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** On May 10 at Rewell's Wood west of Arundel 26 were counted and on that same day there were 17 in Abbot's Wood near Hailsham.

**Small Heath:** Although this species is in decline Hampshire is doing fairly well with them - on May 11 some 20 were seen at Butser Hill and on May 12 Chalton Down (north of Rowlands Castle) had 6 while Magdalen Down near

Winchester had 4. At least one more has been seen at East Meon and in Sussex 8 were counted at Upper Beeding in the Adur Valley on May 11

## **Moths**

### **41 new species for the year list this week**

**Common Swift (0017 *Hepialus lupulinus*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 7

***Bucculatrix ulmella* (0274):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

***Aspilapteryx tringipennella* (0294):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

***Argyresthia trifasciata* (0409A):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

***Elachista argentella* (0610):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

***Tachystola acroxantha* (0656):** First at Portland (and new species for that site) on May 11

***Phtheochroa rugosana* (0925):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8

***Aethes smeathmanniana* (0947):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 10

**Plum Tortrix (1082 *Hedya pruniana*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 9

**Small China-mark (1354 *Cataclysta lemnata*):** First 'somewhere in Sussex' on May 14

**Garden Pebble (1356 *Evergestis forficalis*):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 10

**Meal Moth (1417 *Pyralis farinalis*):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

***Nephoterix angustella* (1465):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

**Figure of Eighty (1654 *Tethea ocularis*):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 11

**Maiden's Blush (1680 *Cyclophora punctaria*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8

**Mullein Wave (1689 *Scopula marignepunctata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 10

**Satin Wave (1709 *Idaea subsericeata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 10

**Garden Carpet (1728 *Xanthorhoe fluctuata*):** First of year in the Thanet area of Kent on May 10

**Small Phoenix (1759 *Ecliptopera silaceata*):** First in Rother Valley woodland north Hastings on May 9

**May Highflyer (1778 *Hydriomena impluviata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 10

**White-banded Carpet (1786 *Spargania luctuata*):** First in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on May 13. This is a rare species first discovered in Kent in 1924 and restricted to the extreme south-east. This has only been known in Sussex since 1950

**Sandy Carpet (1808 *Perizoma flavofasciata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 5

**Mottled Pug (1819 *Eupithecia exiguata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 7

**Pinion-spotted Pug (1820 *Eupithecia insigniata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 10 - new species for the site

**Treble-bar (1867 *Aplocera plagiata*):** What I think was this species was seen by myself on Portsdown on May 12 (disturbed by day). It should be flying in this sort of habitat (food plant is St John's Wort) by now but I can see no previous reports of the species so mine is a possible first

**Clouded Border (1887 *Lomaspilis marginata*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8

**Dorset Cream Wave (1888a *Stegania trimaculata*):** A very rare find at Portland on May 11. Despite its name this is a southern European species which very rarely visits this country (but gets its name from the fact that it was first found in Dorset as recently at 1978)

**Sharp-angled Peacock (1890 *Semiothisa alternaria*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**Peppered Moth (1931 *Biston betularia*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**Willow Beauty (1937 *Peribatodes rhomboidaria*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**Eyed Hawkmoth (1980 *Smerinthus ocellata*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**Poplar Hawkmoth (1981 *Laothoe populi*):** First of year at Pagham Harbour on May 7 (on May 12 one was found in Langstone village)

**Maple Prominent (2009 *Ptilodontella cucullina*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**Buff Ermine (2061 *Spilosoma luteum*):** First at Ringmer near Lewes on May 11

**The Flame (2098 *Axylia putris*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8

**Pearly Underwing (2119 *Peridroma saucia*):** First at Portland on May 14

**Small Square-spot (2123 *Diarsia rubi*):** First on May 10 in Thanet area of Kent

**Broad-barred White (2164 *Hecatera bicolorata*):** First on May 11 in Thanet area of Kent

**White Spot (2172 *Hadena albimacula*):** First at Portland on May 14

**The Delicate (2195 *Mythimna vitellina*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8

**Poplar Grey (2278 *Acronicta megacephala*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 5

**Marbled Minor (2337 *Oligia strigilis*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 8 - this may have been the look-alike Tawny Minor

**Vine's Rustic (2384 *Hoplodrina ambigua*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 5

**Mottled Rustic (2387 *Caradrina morpheus*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 7

**Oak Nycteoline (2423 *Nycteola revayana*):** First in Rother Valley woodland north of Hastings on May 9

**Dark Spectacle (2449 *Abrostola trigemina*):** First at Pagham Harbour on May 9

## Other Insects

**Froghopper:** The presence of these at Durlston on May 14 was obvious from the presence of Cuckoo-spit containing the young insects on plants

**Lily Beetle:** These pretty but highly destructive pests had arrived on lily plants in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden on May 12

## PLANTS

**Garden Aquilegia:** Several large and brightly coloured plants were incongruously flowering on the grassy slopes of Portsdown Hill on May 12

**Yellow Horned Poppy:** Flowering at Rye Harbour on May 15

**Hairy Rockcress (*Arabis hirsuta*):** This was more widespread and abundant than usual on Portsdown on May 12

**Lesser Swine-cress:** Growing abundantly and just starting to flower on disturbed earth forming banks around the carparking bays on Portsdown (Mill Lane site) on May 12

**Horse Radish:** This must have been out for some time but the first I saw was at Broadmarsh on May 17

**Wild Mignonette:** My first find of this in flower was on Portsdown on May 12

**Weld:** Probably seen on Portsdown on May 12 but definitely seen at Broadmarsh on May 17

**Field Pansy:** This continued to flower until the start of March and has now resumed with a find at Walderton on May 15

**Fairy Flax:** A few first flowers seen on Portsdown on May 12

**Bladder Campion:** Just starting to flower on Portsdown on May 12

**Lesser Stitchwort:** First flowers seen on Langstone South Moors on May 18

**Bog Stitchwort:** Out at Warblington Farm east stream on May 16

**Sea Sandwort:** Flowering on the shore at Langstone old rail bridge on May 15

**Common Mallow:** General start of flowering on May 16

**White Clover:** First flowers out on Portsdown on May 12

**Bush Vetch:** Although I often find this in April this year's first was on Portsdown on May 12

**Grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*):** First report of this lovely plant in flower came from Durlston on May 14 - locally I found the first on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' on May 17

**Sea Pea:** Something we are unlikely to see locally, this was flowering at Rye Harbour on May 16

**Broad-leaved Willowherb:** First plant in flower in my garden on May 12

**Pink flowered Horse Chestnut:** Brian Fellows reports an impressive tree now flowering in King St at Emsworth but I am not sure of the species or cultivar. I suspect it was the cross between the standard **Horse Chestnut** and **Red Buck-eye (*Aesculus pavia*)**

**Common Lime:** Although this has not yet started to drip sticky juices on parked cars it now has the flowers ready to do so soon

**Manna Ash (*Fraxinus ornus*):** A new plant for my 'life list' - seen in full flower on Portsdown on May 12 (**see diary entry for that day**)

**Knotted Hedge Parsley:** This had started to flower at the Southmoor Lane site on May 18

**Corky-fruited Water Dropwort:** One plant was in flower on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' on May 17

**Docks:** **Broad-leaved** and **Curled Dock** plus **Common Sorrel** are now in flower

**Brookweed:** Not quite in flower at Warblington on May 16 but one bud was seen to be opening and showing the white colour of the flower.

**Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*):** Fully out on many plants at Warblington on May 16

**Yellow Wort:** Reported to be in flower at Durlston on May 13 but not seen locally yet

**Bittersweet Nightshade:** First plant in flower seen on Portsdown on May 12

**Common Figwort:** Flowering at Broadmarsh on May 17

**Water Figwort:** Flowering at Langstone South Moors on May 18

**Foxglove:** The first wild flower opened in my garden on May 15

**Brooklime:** Flowering in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on May 12

**Yellow Rattle:** Several plants in flower on Portsdown on May 12

**Wild Thyme:** Just one plant flowering in Portsdown on May 12 (but soon followed by others)

**Wild Clary:** Flowering at Durlston on May 14

**Water Forget-me-not:** This ceased flowering at the end of January and resumed on May 16 at Warblington

**Hounds Tongue:** Close to flowering on Butser Hill on May 14 and definitely out at Durlston on May 17 (also likely to be out at Sandy Point on Hayling)

**Common Gromwell:** I had seen this in flower near Fort Purbrook on Portsdown at least a week before I saw it again further west on Portsdown on May 12 when it was more widespread and abundant than usual

**Ivy Broomrape:** The yellow flowered variant plants growing in the Red Barn estate at Portchester (near the Hill Road bridge over the M27) were flowering and flourishing on May 17

**Spear Thistle:** One bush had two flowers open on May 17 here in Havant

**Marsh Thistle:** Start of flowering at Warblington on May 16

**Musk Thistle:** Not properly in flower by May 12 but sufficiently colourful then to attract my attention from a distance on Portsdown

**Goat's Beard:** First flowers at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on May 14

**Salsify:** This had been reported flowering in Kent on May 6 but my first find was of a mass on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' on May 17 where they made a very pretty sight

**Rough Hawkbit:** Flowering on Portsdown on May 12

**Smooth Hawksbeard:** Several plants flowering on Portsdown on May 12

**Prickly Sowthistle:** Not seen in flower since Jan 7 until fresh flowering resumed on May 16

**Black Bryony:** One flowering plant seen at Broadmarsh on May 17

**Herb Paris:** Flowers found in the 'Grandfather's Bottom' valley on the northern slope of Butser Hill on May 14

**Solomon's Seal:** First report of this flowering 'in the wild' from Lowton's Copse on the southern slope of Butser Hill on May 10

**Wild Onion (Crow Garlic):** First unsheathed flower heads seen at Warblington on May 16

**Man Orchid:** Flowering in the Thanet area of Kent on May 12

**Common Spotted Orchid:** First flowers at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on or before May 14 (probably out on May 12). No reports from elsewhere until May 17 when they were reported at Durlston.

**Southern Marsh Orchid:** One plant at Brook Meadow in Emsworth was showing colour on May 16 (and I think others were in bud in a south Hayling garden on May 14). Durlston reported flowering on May 17 and **on May 18 I managed to find just one spike flowering at the Langstone South Moors site where I think the plants have been adversely affected by flooding with sea water in mid-March (see my diary entry for May 18)**

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Roe Deer:** The **first kid was dropped** at Durlston on May 12

**Hare:** A count of 14 in the area called The Burgh on the Sussex Down above the River Arun on May 15

**Noctule Bat:** While looking for **Nightjar** and **Woodcock** to perform in Parkestone Forest (IoW) on the evening of May 11 a **Noctule** repeatedly flew over a clearing in the trees.

**Sea Slater:** These seashore '**giant Woodlice**' can grow to 3 cm long but the biggest of a group of 4 found at Rye Harbour on May 14 was only 2 cm long

**Squid Eggs:** On May 13 a large mass (perhaps about 50cm across) of what look like small whitish worms was photographed on the beach at Rye Harbour and described as '**Squid Eggs**' with the comment that they would normally only be found well underwater firmly attached to a rock or similar solid substrate. Presumably these had been dragged from their 'moorings' by the trawl of a fishing boat - a disaster for them but a reminder to me that **Cuttlefish** are not the only members of the **Squid family** (which also includes **Octopi**) to be found in our coastal waters. We have all come across the '**cuttlefish bones**' that remain on the shore after the flesh of the **Cuttlefish** has vanished but I don't recall finding **Cuttlefish eggs** on the shore - they are illustrated in my Reader's Digest book of Water Life, which calls them '**Sea Raisins**' or '**Sea Grapes**', as a cluster of small dark 'globules' with one pointed end which makes them look a bit like some form of small **Winkle-like shellfish**, and are apparently to be found in shallow water attached to **Eel-grass** or **Seaweed**. These are nothing like the '**Squid Eggs**' in the photo and so I looked at other members of the Squid tribe which might have produced them, and while I cannot find information about their eggs I have found that at least four species of Squid occur in the Channel and that the most likely parent of these eggs is one of two species in the genus *Loligo* - either **L. vulgaris (Long-finned Squid)** or **L. forbesi (Common Squid)**, the two being very difficult to separate by their appearance. These two are both large creatures growing to 50 or 60cm long. The other two species are **Ptodarodes sagittatus** and **Alloteuthis subulata**

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 12 - 18 (WEEK 19 OF 2008)

### Sat 17 May

#### Grass Vetchling and Salsify on the Broadmarsh mountain

With a little over an hour between lunch and the start of the Cup Final I cycled to Broadmarsh to see if there was yet any sign of the **Lathyrus hirsutus (Hairy Vetchling)**, which there was not but the trip was still well worth making.

On top of the 'mountain' there has been no illegal grazing of horses this spring and the grass was fresh and unspoilt other than by masses of wild flowers, chief of which was **Common Vetch** (with much **Hairy Tare** when you walked among the grass) but the plant which added most to the attractiveness was **Salsify** - many isolated plants widely distributed and all fresh and open in the dull weather. Among these mauve delights I did find just one plant of **Goat's Beard** in yellow to match the **Meadow Buttercups**. Another tinge of red colour was added in places by newly flowering **Sorrel**.

This pattern was continued over most of the mountain top but a ride around the peripheral path eventually found me two more gems - the first (which I was hoping for) was just two examples of **Grass Vetchling**, and the second was a single unexpected first plant of **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort** with one umbel of open flowers.

After coming down from the mound to the slipway I still had time to head towards Farlington Marshes, finding my first plant of **Black Bryony** in flower and several of **Weld** which I listed as my first though I may have seen it on Portsdown earlier in the week.

Speeding back I stopped briefly at the 'water wheel' in the Langbrook stream near Tescos as a couple of flowers were open here on a bush of **Spear Thistle** and while stopped I noticed a new fresh plant of **Dame's Violet** (white flowered) had appeared in the grass beside the path leading to the main road pavement.

### Fri 16 May

#### Cuckoo back at Warblington where Sea Milkwort is flowering

The **Sweetbriar roses** which form a hedge along the southwest of the Billy Trail carpark below the Havant Arts Centre were in flower this morning, the apple scent given off by their crushed leaves confirming their identity, making a good start to my walk to Warblington.

Arriving in the Warblington farm area via the Pook Lane footbridge over the A27 I was encouraged to see a **Swallow** flying above the stables, and then to meet a **family of Greenfinches**, but at the farm itself there was no sign of any **Swallows**, nor of the **Pied Wagtails** that normally nest there. Scanning the rooves of the farm buildings for the **Wagtails** I was amused to see a **drake Mallard** incongruously perched on the ridge of the cowshed but later my worries about the absence of the expected birds was deepened by the sight of **13 Magpies in a single tree**.

Reaching the SSSI marsh things began to look up as I heard a **Cuckoo** hypnotising his chosen foster parents with his simple song while at my feet the variety and abundance of flowers had increased considerably since my previous visit and was dominated by **Brooklime** and **Ragged Robin** among the **Sedges** and **Spike Rushes**. Best new addition was **Sea Milkwort (Glaux maritima)**, along with

**Floating Foxtail grass** and the first hint of white in one opening bud on the mass of **Brookweed** plants (whose latin name of **Samolus valerandi** gives a proper tinge of class which the name **Brookweed** lacks!).

Along the shore **Tamarisk** blossom is now fully out but sadly there was **no Skylark song** from the fields which have recently been ploughed, harrowed, and sown with Sweetcorn well after the **Skylarks** will have made their first attempt at nesting (I eventually heard one **Skylark** singing in one of the northern fields). In contrast there was a relative abundance of **Song Thrush song** with at least four birds belting out song in different areas.

Reaching Nore Barn I was surprised to hear a **Reed Warbler** singing in some **Blackthorn** in the farm field fence abutting the west end of the wood (adding to the four birds already heard in the reedbed area), and at the kissing gate taking the main public path from Nore Barn into the Warblington fields I stood and watched with pleasure as **a family of at least 11 Long-tailed Tits** moved south along the line of the footpath going north.

Rather than using this path going north I made my way up the marshy east side of the eastern stream and in so doing not only found my immediate target of **Bog Stitchwort** in flower but also found **Marsh Thistle** and **Water Forget-me-not** out for the first time.

I went home via the main road from Emsworth, failing to see the **Clustered Clover** flowers east of the A27 underpass but finding several plants of **Common Mallow** out for the first time west of the road, plus developing flowers on **Lime trees**.

Back at home a group of **three Swifts** made one pass over the garden, so maybe all is not lost.

To complete the list of plants that I ticked as new or nearly new this morning there were **Crow Garlic** plants about to split the cellophane wrapping on their flowerheads, my first **Prickly Lettuce** in flower, more **Lesser Swine-cress** and both **Curled** and **Broad-leaved Docks**, plus **Prickly Sow-thistles**, **Silverweed**, **Cats Ear**, a single plant of **Broad-leaved Willowherb** and lots of **Smooth Hawksbeard**.

No butterflies seen on a cool and sunless morning but **Cuckoo-spit** was frequently seen showing that many **Froghoppers** had been at work.

## [Thu 15 May](#)

### Flowers, Mushrooms and a Reed Bunting at Langstone

After this morning's rain had pushed north I cycled to Langstone where a **Reed Bunting** was back singing his uninspiring song from an alder by the pond before I went on to the north pier of the old rail bridge.

From here I could see the **pair of Swans** which nested on Langstone pond but which (as usual) moved to the mouth of the Langbrook stream as soon as their cygnets hatched. Before they left the pond they had six cygnets - today I could only see three.

Out at the end of the pier there was a great show of **Ox-eye Daisies** and **Birds Foot Trefoil** with both **White** and **Bladder Champion** but when I climbed down on to the shore I added another plant to the year list with **Sea Sandwort** and back on the grass I found my first **Goat's Beard** - going to check this out I also found, hidden in some long grass, a **couple of large Mushrooms** with caps around 15cm across and relatively short stems with a thick pendulous ring. The stems were not tall enough for these to be **Horse Mushrooms** and I could not see any evidence of

yellow staining so these may have been **Agaricus macrosporus** but I think it more likely they were **Yellow Stainers**.

On the salting by the creek which runs up the east side of the pier there was a mass of **Sea Plantain** in full flower showing bright yellow anthers and on drier ground were more **Goat's Beard** plants and a big bush of **Bittersweet Nightshade** now flowering.

Back in my garden the first **Foxglove** flower had opened and **two Swifts** screamed across just once under the low cloud

## Mon 12 May

### Manna Ash and a Small Blue on Portsdown

This afternoon I drove to Portsdown and parked just west of Fort Widley for a walk along the south face of the hill to Fort Southwick and back.

The earth bank around the carpark area at the start of Mill Lane had a great show of **Common Fumitory**, **Lesser Swine Cress**, **Wild Mignonette**, **White Campion**, **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** and **Sun Spurge**, while the short grass beyond the bank had a good show of **Slender Speedwell**.

Having crossed the road to walk west along the 'wilder' hillside the first thing I was looking for was the **Hairy Rockcress (Arabis hirsuta)** of which I normally find just one or two plants in the area just west of the fenced compartment where motor-bikes play their part in wild life conservation by ensuring some disturbed bare chalk shows through the mat of grass. This year I found several plants before I reached the usual spot and I continued to see occasional plants all the way along the hillside (the plants are small, slender, and not easy to spot but I have never seen such a good show of them before).

Another plant found at the start of the walk which recurred throughout it and which seemed more prolific than usual was **Common Gromwell**, and at the western end of the area I found three large patches of **Horseshoe Vetch** which is also more than I expected.

Among the more expected plants now in flower were **Yellow Rattle**, **Salad Burnet**, **Kidney Vetch**, **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** and **Common Milkwort** in all its various colours (a pale lilac-mauve was the most frequently seen). Other plants of which I saw few but which will soon be abundant were **Fairy Flax** and **Wild Thyme** plus a single **Musk Thistle** which drew me to it from a distance by the size and colour of its flower though when I reached I saw it was not yet in flower, unlike various clumps of garden escape **Aquilegia** whose bright colours and height made them beacons visible far off. Another plant just starting to show was **Totter Grass (Briza media)** of which I saw just two examples just poking a few bead-like incipient flowers from a split in the side of an otherwise undistinguished grass stem. (I see that in the old Clapham, Tutin and Warburg 'Excursion Flora' the English Names are given as **Quaking Grass** or **Doddering Dillies**)

One plant that will soon be universally common was making its debut here - **Smooth Hawksbeard** with its long 'snake's tongue' leaves - and another debut plant was **Bittersweet**. Far from flowering, but of interest to me, were the leaves of a few plants of **Hieracium Maculatum** or **Spotted Hawkweed** (while checking that I had correctly remembered the English name for this plant I came across a garden cultivar with similar heavily spotted leaves advertised as **Hieracium lanatum** 'Leopard' or "Crime Scene Hawkweed" - A new, chi-chi, decorative foliage plant with the added bonus of cheery flowers). The basic plant used to have a small

colony here on Portsdown in an area where scrub clearance seems to have taken away the shade that it previously had, so it is good to see that it has managed to translocate itself to a new site about a hundred metres away.

Another plant feeling the effect of scrub clearance, and confusing me when I first saw it from a distance as I would expect to see it in shaded woodland, not as a dense mass covering a large area of chalk downland exposed to the sun, was

### **Sanicle.**

The **Sanicle** was near my turn round point where, after walking west across the open face of the down I turned to walk east in the lush vegetation of the roadside path outside the fence of the grazed compartments and it was on this return leg that I came across my two best plant finds.

The first find was startling and unmissable but nevertheless something I cannot remember ever seeing anywhere in my life before. I had been walking through a semi-tunnel of shrubs and suddenly found my head surrounded by a mass of large white frothy flowers covering a medium sized tree which had large pinnate leaves. I could not begin to name it on the spot but collected specimens of both flowers and leaves and eventually identified it at home as **Manna Ash (Fraxinus ornus)** and I suggest that if you want to see what I am talking about you can see a good photo of the species in flower on the BBC Gardening website at

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/plants/plant\\_finder/plant\\_pages/12224.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/plants/plant_finder/plant_pages/12224.shtml) This tree had probably been planted on Portsdown not too many years ago as photos of a very young specimen appear on the Portsdown Hill wildlife website and can be seen at [http://www.portsdown.org/asp/ecology/ec\\_sp\\_images.asp?spld=Frorn](http://www.portsdown.org/asp/ecology/ec_sp_images.asp?spld=Frorn) but these pictures give no hint of the impressive flowers that I saw.

Continuing east just south of the road I was near the east end of the fenced MoD (now privatised and run by the Quinetic organisation) site when I glanced across the road and saw a patch of purple among the long grass on the north side of the road. Crossing the road at my peril I gathered a specimen of the plant in question and found it was **Bush Vetch** - not a rarity but not something I would have expected to find here. If anyone is in the area and wants to look for it search the northern roadside edge around a roughly estimated 75 metres west of the eastern limit of the wire fencing around the site (but don't be surprised if roadside grass cutting has removed the plants before you get there).

Before ending this lengthy entry I must mention the butterflies - quite a few **Holly Blues** and few **Orange Tip, Small White, Brimstone** and **Speckled Wood** plus an almost subliminal glimpse of what I am pretty sure was a **Small Blue** (I see from other sources that they are now on the wing and so worth looking out for). I also saw several large moths disturbed by my presence and a fairly good look at one suggested that they were newly emerged **Treble Bar (Aplocera plagiata)** which has **St John's Wort** species as its larval foodplant.

Few birds were seen - one group of **Swifts**, a nice male **Kestrel** and two or three **Yellowhammers** (but no **Stonechats** this year) - and quite a few **Whitethroats** (including one **Lesser**) were heard. I also saw one **Swallow** and one **Song Thrush** (they must do well for snails up here!). Also heard were **Greenfinch, Chiffchaff** and **Blackbird** song.

## **SUMMARY FOR MAY 5 - 11 (WEEK 18 OF 2008)**

Bird highlights include an **Eagle** (species not identified), **Red-footed Falcon**,

**Black-winged Stilt**, the first **Long-tailed Skua** and many **Pomarinés**, two **Whiskered Terns** and a flock of **16 Bee-eaters**, two **Short-toed Larks**, a **Pallas's Warbler** on Hayling, **Golden Orioles** in East Sussex and Kent and a **Red-backed Shrike** in Dorset. Also in the news are **Great and Blue Tit families sharing a joint nest**

**Eight species of Dragonfly** are now flying (including **Beautiful Demoiselle**), as are **25 butterfly species** (including **Clouded Yellow** and **Painted Lady** migrants, **Brown Argus**, **Adonis Blue**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Glanville Fritillaries**. Many new moths include the first **Hawkmoth (Lime)** and three common day fliers (**Cinnabar**, **Mother Shipton** and **Burnet Companion**). **Hornets**, **Cockchafers** and **Yellow Dung Flies** have all appeared

New flowers include the **first Dog Roses**, **Sainfoin**, **Ragged Robin**, **Subterranean** and **Clustered Clover** plus the first of many **Willowherbs**. Surprise of the week was **Hairy Garlic** in flower at Emsworth.

## **BIRDS**

**Balearic Shearwater:** These were regularly seen through January with a couple of sightings at the beginning of February followed by four isolated reports between Mar 6 and 30. The only April sighting was of one off Ventnor on Apr 29 - a good spring record for the IoW

**Little Egret:** The growth of fresh leaves on the Alders around Langstone Pond makes it easier to pick out the dead wood used by **Little Egrets** to construct their nests and on May 5 I thought I could see half a dozen occupied nests (with no doubt more unseen)

**Great White Egret:** On May 5 one was reported flying high east over Ovingdean beach (east of Brighton) and on May 6 there was another sighting claimed at Seaford (the entry on the SOS website said .. "Two egrets east past Splash Point, Seaford at 17.45, the second bird being larger with long black legs and bill." .. and on checking the books I find that the black bill, which sounds wrong for **Great** but right for **Little**, is in fact a feature of the breeding plumage of **Great White** - strangely its normally all yellow bill becomes black in the breeding season)

**Purple Heron:** On May 6 one was at the Dungeness RSPB reserve

**White Stork:** One was seen briefly at the edge of a ploughed field near Tadley (east of Basingstoke) on May 10 before it flew north

**Spoonbill:** One remained in the Lymington area up to May 5 at least and one was seen at Farlington Marshes that day. One was seen again at Farlington on May 9 and the Keyhaven bird was still there on May 10

**Canada Goose:** One pair had at least four goslings in the flooded field beside the main road onto Thorney Island on May 10

**Brent Goose:** A late straggler flew past Selsey Bill on May 6 and two went past Splash Point at Seaford on both May 8 and 9. On May 10 a total of 16 flew past Hope Gap near Seaford and on May 11 a total of 11 were seen in Southampton Water

**Gadwall:** The first report of **Gadwall ducklings** comes from the Blashford lakes where one family was seen on May 8

**Garganey:** Reported from five coastal sites this week with five birds together at Rye Harbour on May 4 and a smart pair together in the Lymington area on May 10

**Eider:** Keith Betton's monthly summary of bird news from Hampshire gave a peak count of 86 Eider off Titchfield Haven in March and 66 there sometime in April

**Velvet Scoter:** A lot of these have been moving up channel recently and on May 4 watchers at Lymington Hurst area saw 14 and those at Selsey saw 13 (2 were seen from Sandy Point on Hayling). On May 5 one had time to stop off in the Lymington area to fish for crabs.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** On May 4 Selsey Bill recorded 11 flying east (and 5 were seen from Sandy Point on Hayling)

**Black Kite:** Recent reports of **Black Kites** have come from Dungeness (May 2 and 6), Overton at the head of the R Test (May 5), Shipley village by the R Adur near Horsham (May 5) and the Fareham area (May 5). The last of these was seen to have tags on both wings and was almost certainly a **Red Kite** while the others remain sub judice (after writing this I saw a note saying that quite a few **Black Kites** do have wing tags attached by continental ringers so the presence of tags is no proof of identity on its own)..

**Red Kite:** May 5 brought a local sighting of one over Aldsworth, north of Emsworth. During the week John Clark (Hampshire county bird recorder) made an interesting comment on the status of the species in Hampshire - he is aware of more than 50 birds coming together to share a communal roost in the county during winter months.

**Hen Harrier:** A late male flew in off the sea to the Isle of Wight on May 4 and on that day another **Hen Harrier** flew south from Portland against the normal flow

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** One flew low over Dungeness on My 7 going west

**Eagle Species:** An unidentified large eagle was reported soaring over Fareham on May 5 (it was said not to be the White-tailed Sea Eagle from Andover!). At least five reported sightings of an Eagle species (at widely spaced locations across Hampshire with one sighting at Bedhampton in Havant and another at Christchurch in Dorset) have been published during the past week and while no one has been able to make a positive identification there are several suggestions that these sightings are all of the Finnish **White-tailed Sea Eagle** which was regularly seen in the Andover area during the past winter.

**Red-footed Falcon:** An adult male was seen at Sandwich Bay in Kent on May 8 and a female flew over from Sheppey to be seen at the Oare Marshes near Faversham in Kent on May 9 while May 10 brought a sighting of a 'probable' in the New Forest

**Merlin:** Still passing north - 2 over Dungeness on May 2 and one over the Isle of Wight on May 4

**Hobby:** Last week we gave a peak count of 23 in the Kent Stour valley but May 5 brought a count of 36 from the same area.

**Peregrine:** The four young in the Chichester cathedral nest were said on May 8 to be matched by four more in the nestbox on the Sussex Heights Tower block in Brighton

**Black-winged Stilt:** Two were on the Isle of Sheppey on May 3 and these both flew across the Medway to be seen at the Oare Marshes near Faversham on May 4. On May 10 one turned up at Ibsley Water near Ringwood.

**Avocet:** I have no idea how many are currently at Titchfield Haven but Keith Betton tells us that the peak count for April was 23 and at Rye Harbour the count on May 5 was 25 (31 there on May 1)

**Grey Plover:** On May 4 a flock of around 200 was in the north of Pagham Harbour and on May 6 the count at Dungeness was 143 (both were presumably birds on passage)

**Lapwing:** A few can be seen at two or three sites around Havant and while I have not heard any local reports of chicks I note that one birder in another county wrote that there were so few interesting birds around that he was forced to count Lapwing chicks to maintain his interest.

**Temminck's Stint:** The four birds which arrived on May 6 (three at Pulborough Brooks and one at Lymington) were still at both sites on May 8

**Curlew Sandpiper:** After one in Poole Harbour on Apr 27 a second spring bird was on the Lymington shore on May 4

**Purple Sandpiper:** The last of the winter birds seemed to have gone after Apr 9 but on May 6 a single appeared at Portland

**Ruff:** Although 22 were seen together on the Oare Marshes (north west Kent) on Jan 16 and 29 were at Rye Harbour on Feb 19-21 the great majority of the 38 reports I know of for this year have been of single birds so a report of 12 seen together at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 4 is surprising. Latest sighting have been singles at Lymington on May 4 and 5 plus three at Pulborough Brooks on May 7

**Whimbrel:** To judge by the daily reports of the number roosting at Rye Harbour the peak of their spring passage occurred on May 1 when the roost held 287 birds. By May 4 the count had dropped to 210 and on May 7 it was down to 85

**Wood Sandpiper:** The fifth report of one this spring came from Rye Harbour on May 4. Subsequently six turned up in the Kent Stour valley on May 7 and one was at Sandwich on May 8 with another at Oare Marshes (north west Kent) on May 9

**Pomarine Skua:** May 4 saw the peak of their spring passage with an extraordinary day total of 75 passing Splash Point at Seaford, a peak which was not reflected at other coastal sites to the east or west of Seaford. I do not know what route these birds take but they must come north from far out in the channel when Beachy Head comes into view and then they probably climb high to pass overland to the Thames

estuary. There is no evidence that I know for this but it is the only logical conclusion when reports show that they were not seen following the coast past Dorset, Hampshire & IoW, and West Sussex (highest reported count from sites east of Seaford on May 4 was 9 birds passing Selsey) and only 46 went past Dungeness (and those were maybe birds that had continued east in mid-channel and had not veered north to be seen at Seaford). This pattern of seeing large numbers at Seaford which are not seen either east or west of Seaford applies to most seabirds moving up channel and is not peculiar to a few species or odd days. One factor which could be relevant is the dedication and co-ordination of sea watchers at Splash Point (they might see more because they watch for longer and are careful to add their sightings together accurately) but I know that contenders for the Pom King trophy at Selsey are not wanting in these matters!

After writing the above for my mid-week report I find that the picture is even more confused by news from Owen Mitchell (who normally watches at Selsey but on May 7 went to Seaford). Describing his experience at Seaford he wrote .. "My phone was red hot with calls and queries from Selsey (especially Chris Janman) who forewarned me of flocks of 6, 4 and 9 Pomarine Skuas on their way. Sure enough they passed us in due course (about an hour and a half to two hours later) - but then he told me of a magic flock of 20 close in at 13.15. In short, it wasn't until 16.20 that a flock of 19 passed, followed by the single straggler two minutes later". The count at Selsey was 29 on May 7 and the counts at Seaford were 66 on May 7, 40 on May 8 and 34 on May 9

**Long-tailed Skua:** First report for the year is of one bird off Dungeness on May 2

**Iceland Gull:** A first summer bird was seen off Ovingdean (Brighton) on May 6

**Little Tern:** By May 5 some had started prospecting for nest sites on the shingle spit at the mouth of Pagham Harbour and on May 4 there were at least 7 birds at the Hayling Oysterbeds with at least 14 there on May 7 (but having to compete for nest space with some 200 Black-headed Gulls and one or two Common Terns, Oystercatchers and Ringed Plover). Many birds are still passing up the chance of coming to nest in Langstone Harbour and heading on east - on May 4 Selsey recorded 133 flying east while Seaford had 28 and Dungeness 40. 66 seen at Selsey on May 6 may have been birds intending to nest at Pagham but 32 passing Seaford on May 7 were presumably going further east.

**Whiskered Tern:** A bird in perfect breeding plumage arrived at Radipole (Weymouth) on May 5 and was still there on May 6 before it (or another) turned up at the west end of the Solent to be seen by watchers on Hurst spit. The Dorset Bird Club website has a superb photo of this bird - see the May 6 entry at <http://www.dorsetbirdclub.org.uk/Sightings.htm> Subsequent news that the Radipole bird was still there on May 7 and was at the nearby Lodmoor site in May 8 (before leaving the area) so it seems that the Hurst bird was different

**Black Tern:** Seaford may have had the best showing of Poms on May 4 but Selsey got its own back with a record count of 74 Black Terns against Seaford's count of just 48. Hampshire birders had a fair share of these lovely birds on May 4 - counts were of 14 passing Hurst Spit, 13 off Titchfield Haven and 17 passing Stokes Bay at Gosport with 8 seen from Sandy Point on Hayling

**Turtle Dove:** The 31 reports of this species so far this year only account for at most 73 birds (of which 15+ were at Portland on May 3 and 11 at Portland on May 6) so there cannot be many of them in the country but luckily one or two have been heard in the east of the Stansted estate (one near Broadreed Farm on May 3 and one somewhere in the East Park on May 4).

**Short-eared Owl:** Some non breeding birds do remain in the south of England through the summer occasionally and one which has been in the Swineham area of Poole Harbour for some time may be intending to do so but birds turning up in the Rye area on May 9 and at Portland on May 10 were presumably passage birds

**Cuckoo:** Stansted Forest is also a good place to hear a **Cuckoo** if you have not yet done so - one was heard in the north west of the Forest on May 2 and another in the East Park on May 5 (Still no reports from Langstone or Warblington)

**Swift:** These are back around nest sites in many places but not in east Havant. May 4 saw 5 in Westbourne village on the R Ems and 6 in Emsworth itself, and on May 5 at least 100 flew in over Portland while a number were seen around the rooves of Chichester and one actually entered a nestbox at Cuckfield near Haywards Heath. Two did fly low over my house in Havant that day but they have not been seen again.

**Bee Eater:** On May 5 one was seen flying north up the Sussex Ouse towards Lewes and another was logged at Dungeness. On May 7 one was at Portland Bill and on May 8 another was in the Bere Regis area of Dorset while on May 9 a **flock of 16** were seen at Beachy Head

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** These are easily overlooked unless you hear them or know where they are likely to be seen - a new place in the latter category was reported on May 4 when one at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough was seen pecking at the stems of Reedmace (aka Bulrush) around the water's edge - not somewhere I would expected them but well suited to the size of this little bird.

**Short-toed Lark:** One flew in to Portland on May 8 and on May 10 another turned up at Newhaven

**Red-rumped Swallow:** One seen at Dungeness on May 4 and another at Radipole (Weymouth) on May 6. On May 7 a party of 5 arrived at Portland Bill

**House Martin:** I have heard that these birds readily use artificial nests and that it is well worth putting up a cluster of them - local proof of this comes from Tony Tupper who lives near the Hermitage Stream in Leigh Park here in Havant. Tony has built six artificial nests from cement and sawdust and the birds have already returned to them this year (fourth year in a row)

**Blackbird:** A **pure white bird** has been hatched somewhere in our area and has appeared on BBC South News - I hope it survives as I recall a similar bird (pure white) in a nest which could be seen from the glass walled corridor between buildings at the IBM Portsmouth site. There appeared to be nothing wrong with it but when the rest of the brood left the nest it stayed behind and was later found dead on the ground below the nest - it seemed that it was afraid to go out into the world

dressed in white, stayed in the nest where its parents ceased to feed it, and died of starvation

**Pallas's Warbler:** One spent a short time singing at Sandy Point (Hayling Island) on May 8 but has not been seen or heard again.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Excluding one reported on Apr 7 (which was probably a female Pied Flycatcher) the first was reported on Apr 27 followed by singles on May 1, 2 and 4. May 5 saw the arrival of 10 at Portland and 2 near Horsham in Sussex, and May 6 saw 12 at Portland and another near Horsham. Since then there has been an arrival of 15 more at Portland on May 9

**Great and Blue Tits sharing a nest:** A report on May 7 of both species laying, and sharing the brooding of, eggs in a single nest in a nest box was thought to be unique by the person making the report but expert opinion is that this is not unknown in places where breeding birds outnumber the available nest sites.

**Golden Oriole:** One had been reported on Mar 27 in East Sussex with no more until May 4 when one was heard singing at Dungeness. On May 5 two were seen at Dungeness bringing the year total up to 4 birds (hopefully a few more will have overflowed the south coast to reach East Anglia by now). On May 7 there was another report of song at Dungeness but no clear indication if this was an additional bird.

**Red-backed Shrike:** First report for the year is of one seen on the Dorset coast near Charmouth (west end of the Dorset coast)

**Raven:** John Clark has had reports of as many as 25 Ravens sharing a single winter roost somewhere in Hampshire

**Tree Sparrow:** One was a surprise arrival at Portland on May 8

**Serin:** On May 4 singles were at Selsey Bill and Dungeness, and on May 6 one flew in off the sea at Durlston

**Mealy Redpoll** (now called **Common Redpoll**): One turned up at Portland on May 5

**Escapee:** I hear that a huge **Eagle Owl** was sitting in the trees of a north Emsworth garden on May 8

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Hairy Dragonfly:** These started to emerge at Rye Harbour on May 2 and on May 5 they were also seen at Dungeness

**Four Spotted Chaser:** First seen at Dungeness on May 2

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** Seen at Filsham reedbed west of Hastings on May 7

**Red-eyed Damselfly:** First out at Dungeness on May 3

**Large Red Damselfly:** Flying since Apr 25

**Blue-tailed Damselfly:** First definite report from Dungeness on May 3

**Common Blue Damselfly:** First at Dungeness on May 4

**Azure Damselfly:** First reported in the Rye area on May 7

## Butterflies

**25 species seen in the past week-** the more significant were ...

**Clouded Yellow:** Another seen to fly in off the sea at Seaford on May 7 - first arrival at Portland on Apr 3

**Green Hairstreak:** These were out in force on the Sussex Downs by May 5 when 25 were seen north of Brighton. By May 7 they were to be seen locally on Portsdown

**Brown Argus:** First for the year on Afton Down (IoW) on May 4. Hampshire's first was at Magdalen Hill Down on May 7 and in Sussex 3 were seen on Levin Down on May 9

**Common Blue:** After the first (a single at Noar Hill on Apr 26) we had to wait until May 5 for the second (a single at Mill Hill, Shoreham) but that was followed by at least one at Durlston on May 7 when I saw two on the Thorney seawall south of Emsworth

**Adonis Blue:** A single at Durlston and two at Mill Hill at Shoreham (including an early female) on May 7 were firsts for the year

**Duke of Burgundy:** The number at Noar Hill had increased to 16 by May 7. On May 5 at least one was seen somewhere in Sussex (I think at a 'new site' for the species not far from Arundel)

**Red Admiral:** Migrants were arriving off the sea at Portland on May 4

**Painted Lady:** One at Dungeness on May 2 and more arriving off the sea at Portland on May 4 followed by one in the Sussex Ouse valley 'defending territory' on May 6 and one at Magdalen Hill Down in Hampshire on May 7

**Pearl Bordered Fritillary:** After the first 5 had emerged in Rewell Wood at Arundel on May 3 the count there was up to 12 on May 6 after 6 had been seen near Eastbourne on May 4. They started to be seen at Bentley Wood on the Hants/Wilts border on May 6 and by May 9 more than 25 were seen at a New Forest Inclosure

**Glanville Fritillary:** First seen at Ventnor (IoW) on May 3

**Wall Brown:** These have now been seen in Dorset, Hampshire and Sussex but with a peak count of only 3 at Mill Hill (Shoreham) so far

**Small Heath:** Hampshire had the first at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on Apr 28 and the Isle of Wight had the next at Afton Down on May 3 since when there have been sightings at two Sussex sites

## Moths

**Plain Gold (0005 *Micropterix calthella*):** First at Horsham on May 7 - normal date for this species to appear

**Common Oak Purple (0006 *Eriocrania subpurpurella*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normally appears in April

**Small Hazel Purple (0007 *Eriocrania chrysolepidella*):** First at Horsham on May 3 - a new species for my database - normally appears in April

**Longhorn moth (0150 *Adela reaumurella*):** First seen in the Thanet area of Kent on May 7 - normally out in May

**Saltern Bent-wing (0267 *Bucculatrix maritima*):** Another new species for me but not uncommon at coastal sites (the photo on the UK Moths website was taken by Ian Thirlwell in the Portsmouth area). A 'probable' taken in the Newhaven area on May 4. This species not normally seen until June.

**Azalea Leaf Miner (0285 *Caloptilia azaleella*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normally first seen in May

**Brown Apple Midget (0326 *Phyllonorycter blancardella*):** Another 'new to me' leaf miner seen at Horsham on May 4 - normally out in May

**Nettle Tap (0385 *Anthophila fabriciana*):** First at Newhaven on May 6 - normally out in May

**Sulphur Underwinged Tubic (0649 *Esperia sulphurella*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 7 - day flyer normally seen in May

**Viper's Bugloss Moth (0720 *Ethmia bipunctella*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 7 - normally emerges in May

***Epiblema cynosbatella* (1174):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 8 - flies from May to July

**Common Grey (1334 *Scoparia ambigualis*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - flies from May to July

***Phlyctaenia coronata* (1378):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 8 - not normally out until June

**Rush Veneer (1398 *Nomophila noctuella*):** One at Horsham on May 3 was the first I have seen mentioned since January. This is a common migrant normally arriving between May and September but can turn up at other times

**Pebble Hook-tip (1648 *Drepana falcataria*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on May 5 - a normal time of emergence

**Chinese Character (1651 *Cilix glaucata*):** First at Horsham on May 3 - normal time for emergence of this moth which looks like a bird dropping

**Peach Blossom (1652 *Thyatira batis*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - a much prettier moth that does not normally appear until June

**Oblique Striped (1718 Phibalapteryx virgata):** First at Rye Harbour on May 8 - normally appears in May

**Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet (1725 Xanthorhoe ferrugata):** First at Holmsley in the New Forest on May 3 - normal time of emergence

**Common Carpet (1738 Epirrhoe alternata):** First on the Sussex Downs (Devils Dyke) on May 5 - normal time of emergence (and often flushed by day)

**Common Marbled Carpet (1764 Chloroclysta truncata):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 8 - normally emerges in May

**Grey Pine Carpet (1768 Thera obeliscata):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal time of emergence

**Spruce Carpet (1769 Thera britannica):** First in the Thanet area of Kent on May 8 - normally flies from May to July

**Green Carpet (1776 Colostygia pectinataria):** First at Newhaven on May 4 - a pretty moth normally out in May

**The Rivulet (1802 Perizoma affinitata):** First on the Glynde levels near Lewes on May 7 - flies from May to July

**Currant Pug (1832 Eupithecia assimilata):** Newly emerging in the Hastings area on May 6 from bred caterpillars - normal time for emergence

**Common Pug (1834 Eupithecia vulgata):** First at Newhaven on May 4 - normal time for emergence

**White-spotted Pug (1835 Eupithecia tripunctaria):** First at Dungeness on May 3 - normal time for emergence

**Narrow-winged Pug (1846 Eupithecia nanata):** First at Pulborough Brooks on May 5 - a little late as this normally emerges in April

**Lesser Treble-bar (1868 Aplocera efformata):** Two seen at Cissbury Ring north of Worthing on May 6 - flies in May and June

**Small White Wave (1875 Asthena albulata):** First at Horsham on May 4 - this one does not normally appear until July

**Drab Looper (1878 Minoa murinata):** First in Rewell Wood at Arundel on May 6 - a day flying moth normally emerging in May

**Yellow-barred Brindle (1883 Acasis viretata):** First at Horsham on May 3 - normal time of emergence

**Scalloped Hazel (1920 Odontopera bidentata):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal time of emergence

**Ringed Carpet (1939 Cleora cinctaria):** First at Holmesley in the New Forest on May 3 - can emerge in April, this is I think an uncommon species

and UK Moths says .. "Occurring as two distinct races, the nominate race has its headquarters in the New Forest."

**Lime Hawkmoth (1979 *Mimas tiliae*):** First at Glynde levels near Lewes on May 7 - a normal first date

**Puss Moth (1995 *Cerura vinula*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 7 - normal date

**Lobster Moth (1999 *Stauropus fagi*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - UK Moths does not give flight times

**Iron Prominent (2000 *Notodonta dromedarius*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - first brood normally out in May

**Lesser Swallow Prominent (2006 *Pheosia gnoma*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal date

**Swallow Prominent (2007 *Pheosia tremula*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal date

**Chocolate-tip (2019 *Clostera curtula*):** First at Dungeness on May 3 - usually appears first in April

**Pale Tussock (2028 *Calliteara pudibunda*):** First on house window in Rye area on May 10 (male) - flies in May and June

**Orange Footman (2043 *Eilema sororcula*):** First at Horsham on May 3 - normal date

**White Ermine (2060 *Spilosoma lubricipeda*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal date

**Ruby Tiger (2064 *Phragmatobia fuliginosa*):** First out at both Brighton and Horsham on May 4 - can be seen first in April

**Cinnabar moth (2069 *Tyria jacobaeae*):** First at Rye Harbour on May 7 - common day flying species

**Dark Sword-grass (2091 *Agrotis ipsilon*):** First at Portland on May 8 - a common migrant appearing at any time from March to November

**Flame Shoulder (2102 *Ochropleura plecta*):** First at Horsham on May 4 - normal date

**Bright-line Brown-eye (2160 *Lacanobia oleracea*):** One had been seen somewhere in Sussex on Feb 23 but one on May 5 was at the right time for the first of the year

**Lead-coloured Drab (2185 *Orthosia populeti*):** One had been reported at Horsham on Mar 1 but this one on May 5 was a more normal first date

**Red Sword-grass (2241 *Xylena vetusta*):** First in the New Forest at Holmesley on May 3 - this would be an adult emerging from hibernation

**Angle Shades (2306 *Phlogophora meticulosa*):** One at Horsham on May 4 was the first of the year other than one reported on Jan 29 - May is the normal time of emergence but adults can be seen in all months

**The Spectacle (2450 *Abrostola tripartita*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on May 5 - normal date

**Mother Shipton (2462 *Callistege mi*):** First of these day flying moths seen in the Adur Valley on May 6

**Burnet Companion (2463 *Euclidia glyphica*):** First of these day flying moths seen in the Adur Valley on May 4

## Other Insects

**Cranefly:** The leatherjacket grubs which the Starlings have been taking to feed their young are now starting to emerge as adult Craneflies - I saw one of the smaller *Tipula* species at Warblington on May 5

**Yellow Dung Flies:** I also saw the first mass of these on cowpats at Warblington Farm on May 5

**Common Wasp:** These often make their nests underground and maybe the **Queen Wasp** which I saw crawling around in grass on a grave at Warblington cemetery (on May 5) was searching for an entrance to the cavities that often occur in old graves.

**Hornet:** First to get a mention this year were two in the Eastbourne area on May 7 shortly followed by one in the Southwick Woods north of Portsmouth on May 9

**Mason Bee (*Osmia bicolor*):** One of these was seen on May 6 in Rewell Wood west of Arundel constructing its nest. It uses an empty snail shell as the 'building' in which to house its nest but collects bits of grass to construct a 'wigwam' over the shell in order to conceal the nest.

**Cockchafer (aka May Bug):** First to get a mention this year is one seen on a north Emsworth house window on May 5

**Cardinal Beetle:** First report from Abbots Wood near Eastbourne on May 7

**Oil Beetle (*Meloe proscarabaeus*):** A large female of this species was seen at Durlston on May 4

**Bloody Nosed Beetle:** Not the first appearance of these but I was interested to read on the Durlston Web site (May 4) that both the standard and the **Lesser Bloody Nosed Beetles** could be seen there 'eating Goosegrass'.

**Great Silver Water Beetle (*Hydrophilus piceus*):** First to get a mention this year was one found in a moth trap in the Rye area on May 7

## PLANTS

**Total species in flower for the year to date is now 300** with 263 seen by myself. Totals for May to date are 172 and 156

**Small-flowered Buttercup:** This seaside species was flowering at Durlston on May 4

**Common Fumitory: Common Ramping Fumitory** has been seen flowering since Feb 20 but the smaller **Common Fumitory** was first seen by me at Warblington on May 5

**Dames Violet:** Having recently seen this at the Hayling Oysterbeds I made a second find on May 5 in the Wade Farm field west of Pook Lane - the plants can be seen on a dump just within the corner of the field when you climb onto the upper path used to get back to Langstone at high tide

**Ragged Robin:** Flowering in the Emsworth area by May 7

**Tree Mallow:** The plants along the east side of the Slipper Mill pond at Emsworth had started to flower by May 4

**Shining Cranesbill:** The plants lining the twitchel path from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane in east Havant were sprayed with weedkiller by the local Council just as they were starting to flower on Apr 18 but by May 5 a few had recovered from the poison and were flowering

**Small-flowered Cranesbill:** Found in Emsworth on May 10

**Subterranean Clover:** A great show of this in flower in the short grass just inside the seawall of the Warblington SSSI marsh on May 5

**Clustered Clover:** One flower bud found where I discovered this species in Havant last year indicates that it will soon be flowering properly there

**Sainfoin:** The very first flowers were opening on Portsdown when I was there on May 6

**Rose species:** The first rose flowers of the year were open on May 5 here in Havant - not sure of the species but they were council planted bushes of the **Burnet Rose type**

**Dog Rose:** First flowers of the year seen on Budds Mound in Havant on May 8

**Dewberry:** The first of these blackberry flowers was open in Havant on May 8

**Silverweed:** This had started to flower on the Langstone South Moors on May 8

**Wood Avens:** Although I had seen one flower in my garden as early as Apr 20 (and last year's flowers could still be seen in January) general flowering started this week from May 5

**American Willowherb:** Just one plant had a couple of flowers open here in Havant on May 7 - the club shaped stigma distinguishing it from the four lobed stigma of the lookalike Broad-leaved Willowherb.

**Common Nettle:** The first were flowering in Emsworth on May 2 and flowering become general this week

**Pellitory of the Wall:** Flowers were out on plants that were recovering from spraying with weedkiller - seen in Havant on May 5

**Tamarisk:** Spring flowering had started on May 8

**Dogwood:** This had also started flowering on May 8

**Cushion spurge (Euphorbia polychroma):** This colourful garden escape was brightening the shore of the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth on May 10

**Pignut:** Found flowering in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on May 6

**Yellow Pimpernel:** Another first in Hollybank on May 6

**Scarlet Pimpernel:** Suddenly in full flower at Warblington on May 5

**Tufted Centaury:** This is a small form of Common Centaury and I am surprised that it was flowering at Durlston as early as May 6

**Common Figwort:** Just coming into flower at Warblington on May 5

**Changing Forget-me-not:** My first find of this in flower was on May 8 at Langstone South Moors

**Hoary Plantain:** Flowering at Durlston by May 7

**Marsh Valerian:** Just one plant in flower by the east stream on Warblington farm on May 10

**Salsify:** Flowering in north Kent on May 6 so both it and its close relation Goatsbeard should now be out.

**Prickly Lettuce:** It may be some time before this flowers but complete flowerheads were in bud at Warblington on May 5

**Cats Ear:** One plant flowering in Havant on May 8

**Mouse-ear Hawkweed:** Flowering on Thorney Island on May 10

**Solomon's Seal:** Full size white flower buds (unopen) were hanging from garden escape plants in Havant on May 5

**Hairy Garlic:** The plant growing by the footpath along the north side of Nore Barn wood at Emsworth has never been known to flower and has never looked as if it had the energy to raise a flower stem but it had done so on May 10

**Early Purple Orchids:** Many years ago I recall counting around 800 flower spikes at the Hollybank Woods site north of Emsworth but since then counts have been much lower until this year when Brian Fellows found 745 there on May 6 (including one pure white flowered spike)

**Lady Orchid:** Orchid fanatics may like to know that Lady Orchids had just started to flower at Bonzai Bank in Denge Woods (Thanet area or east Kent) on May 8

**Marsh Arrowgrass:** Just starting to flower in the Warblington SSSI on May 5

**Hairy Sedge:** First flowers found in the Ems Valley south of Westbourne on May 4

**Wood Melick** and **Wood Millet:** Both flowering in woods near Walderton (north of Emsworth) on May 9

**Large Timothy:** This grass had started to flower on May 6

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fox:** The first **Fox cubs** are usually seen before the end of April but the first I have heard of this year came in a second hand report when I was on the Langstone South Moors on May 8 and met a dogwalker who had seen two cubs there recently - this in response to my saying that I had just seen an **adult fox** crossing the 'orchid field' on the west side of which a family of cubs is to be seen in most years.

**Harbour Porpoise:** First report of the year comes from Portland on May 6

**Hare:** At Peasmarsh north of Hastings on May 7 a Hare came to within two feet of a motionless watcher and passed on without detecting his presence. Here on May 9 there was a more normal sighting of one in the Lyecommon area north of Emsworth - all that was seen of it was the two black tipped ears showing in a field of young wheat.

**Adder:** One seen on Oxenbourne Down south of Petersfield on May 9 was busy swallowing a **mouse**

**Grass Snake:** On May 6 the Rye Bay website has a couple of photos of a **Grass Snake** gradually getting its body around that of a full grown Marsh Frog. I know that **Grass Snakes** are not venomous and I still wonder how the **Snake** persuades the **Frog** it has just caught (probably by one of its back legs) to go head first into the **Snake's mouth**. As I understand it the **Snake** has backward pointing teeth which are very good at holding anything it catches and wants to eat, and I know that **Snakes** have the ability to separate their upper and lower jaws to create a capacious entrance for their food, but it seems to me that getting the prey positioned so that it's head goes into the **Snake** first, and then gradually swallowing prey which is still alive requires the victim's co-operation. Do **Snakes** have hypnotic powers? A Google search gave no answer to this but did remind me when a **Grass Snake** gets seriously annoyed it will bite (causing pin-pricks but doing no serious harm) and will spray a nasty smelling fluid from its rear end. I guess the answer to my question is that the **Snake's prey** knows when it is beaten and accepts the inevitable.

**Fungi:** A cluster of **Common Inkcaps** was found on the mound south of Budds Farm here in Havant on May 8

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 5 - 11 (WEEK 18 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 10 May**

**Hairy Garlic in flower and two Common Blue butterflies**

Yesterday two **Swifts** flew over my house on two separate occasions but they have not been seen again, unlike the half dozen that are now regularly screaming over central Emsworth (as I saw and heard for myself this afternoon). If the **Swifts** have not returned one or two **House Martins** are back with one definitely over my garden today (and two seen tomorrow - Sunday!).

This afternoon I cycled along the road to Emsworth and found just one flower bud on the **Clustered Clover** which I discovered at the end of May last year just east of the A27 underpass. Turning off the road on the path towards Nore Barn I checked the small eastern Warblington stream which runs beside the path and found just one plant of **Marsh Valerian** in flower among several **Ragged Robin** (but no **Marsh Marigolds** this year and probably no **Marsh Orchids** to come).

Heading east along the north side of Nore Barn wood I used my boots to flatten the nettles around the **Hairy Garlic** site and was greatly surprised when I revealed a single head of blossom above the totally inconspicuous leaves of this plant - something I have never seen before.

This decided my next port of call at Brian Fellows' home in Emsworth to tell him the news, and this took me along Warblington Road beside which I found **Small-flowered Cranesbill** flowering at two sites known from previous years. Subsequently Brian cycled to Nore Barn and photographed both the **Garlic** and the **Cranesbill** (his photos can be seen by reading his diary entry for today and following his links - go to <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> )

Continuing east via Brook Meadow I heard **Lesser Whitethroat** singing and had an excellent view of a well marked **Green-veined White** before making a diversion to the Lumley Stream cottages where the leaves of two **Bur Marigold** plants are growing out of the water. Next stop was beside the Slipper Mill pond to admire the **Tree Mallow** plants in full flower - below them, almost hidden in long grass, were lovely flashes of vivid green and yellow from the **Spurge plants** which are now established here - I think they are called **Cushion Spurge (Euphorbia polychroma)** and obviously have a garden origin but are quite happy here without a gardeners care.

On the Emsworth Marina seawall the **Hedgerow Cranesbill** was in flower and near the Great Deeps two mats of **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** were out (also here I saw my first two **Common Blue butterflies**). Two **dragonflies**, joined in wheel shape, flew rapidly across my path and disappeared - by their size, flight and dark colour I guessed they might be **Four-spotted Chasers** but when I got home I read that **Chaser species** do not have the prolonged mating of some other dragonflies - the **Chaser males** let go of the females as soon as they have done their bit, leaving the female unguarded while she lays her eggs. Females of those species which take care where they lay their eggs need guarding during the time they are probing underwater with their tails but **female Chasers** apparently just fly over the water shaking their tails and letting the eggs drop off at random)

Near the Little Deeps I heard Britain's worst bird songster - **Reed Bunting** - as well as **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers**, and in the flooded field at the Main Road end of the Little Deeps were a **pair of Swans** with no cygnets that I could see though there were **four Canada Goose goslings** with their parents. **Two Lapwings** standing

idly around on the wet grass reminded me that the first **Lapwing chicks** have now hatched at some sites.

I went on the Prinsted and had a look at the market garden plot by the footpath just west of the village but the only plant of interest to be seen in the hard baked ground was a good show of **Hairy Buttercup** - there were sufficient of them for me to feel justified in pulling one up to see that its roots were joined to the base of the leaf/flower stems with no intermediary 'bulb'. I also measure the large flowers at 25mm across.

## Tue 6 May

### Sainfoin flowering on Portsdown

A very brief stop at the hilltop carpark immediately east of the A3 London Road where it crosses the ridge of Portsdown gave me look at the very first **Sainfoin** flowers on what promises to be an excellent show of this lovely plant growing in the uncut grass south of the carpark and east of Collyer's Pit. After walking around this pit I climbed back towards the Portsdown Hill Road over the A3 and down in the sides of the cutting many **Ox-eye Daisies** were in full flower (first I have seen all out). Walking back east to the carpark I was struck by several large patches of **Slender Speedwell** in flower - this species seems to have had a massive explosion this year and can be seen in quantity in many places where I have not noticed it before

Back in Havant the **first Willowherb of the year** was in flower at the foot of the wall of the Havant Arts Centre - a single specimen of what might have been **Broad-leaved Willowherb** but which proved to be **American Willowherb** when I looked into one of the flowers and found it have a club-shaped stigma (President Bush's aggressive club wielding against 'lesser people's not yet converted to democracy' makes it easy to remember that this is the **American Willowherb** (**Broad-leaved** has a four lobed stigma).

## Mon 5 May

### A walk to Warblington

Today I walked to the Warblington farm SSSI marsh and back on what turned out to be a very warm morning.

First surprise was to see the **leaves full out** on the **Beech tree** at the end of my garden - seemingly they have appeared overnight, and everywhere I looked it seemed that we have suddenly been thrown into summer with no gradual change of season. A second example of this sudden transition came when I reached the Hayling Billy line carpark below the Art Centre - here council planted **Roses of the Burnet Rose type were in full flower**. A third sudden change was the appearance of garden escape **Solomon's Seal plants** with a full sets of flowers (though not yet open).

My route was along the twitchel path from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane and last time I walked along it I was disheartened by the work of council workers who had sprayed the path edges with weed-killer. Today I was relieved to see that among the dead and dying remnants quite a few plants had more or less recovered from their un-necessary ordeal. In particular much of the **Ramsons** was back in flower (though it had lost most of its leaves), **Pellitory of the Wall** had its first flowers and the great show of **Shining Cranesbill** was not totally lost - one cluster of plants

was covered with fresh flowers. Reaching Pook Lane I watched a **Holly Blue** butterfly - the first of several seen during my outing which also found **Large White** and **Speckled Wood** plus (back at home) **Orange Tip** and **male Brimstone**. Other insects seen this morning were my first **Yellow Dung Flies**, **St Mark's Flies**, a small **Cranefly species** and several others that I cannot name

A single **Swallow** dived into the pony stables south of the A27 where they regularly nest, and when I got to the sea wall I had a distant view of one **Buzzard** flying east over the fields north of the Castle.

In the cemetery I found **Scarlet Pimpernel** and **Common Fumitory** flowering for the first time, and in the SSSI **Marsh Arrowgrass** was new as was a great display of **Subterranean Clover**. Back at the seaward end of Pook Lane I discovered a large clump of **Dames Violet** in flower (all of them white) on an earth dump right in the corner of the Wade Farm fields

Back at Langstone Pond the **Reed** and **Cetti's Warblers** were singing and the sudden new growth of leaves on the trees in which the **Egrets** are resident made it easier to separate the dead wood which forms the rough and ready **Egret nests** from the live wood of the trees - by this means I seemed able to pick out **half a dozen Egrets sitting on nests** but I suspect there may be more than twice that number at the site.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 28 - MAY 4 (WEEK 17 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 3 May**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **A cycle ride to the Green Winged Orchids at Gunner Point**

This afternoon I cycled down the Billy Track to south Hayling and had a look for new plants, finding **Lesser Trefoil**, **Sheep Sorrel**, **Smith's Pepperwort**, **Sea Campion**, **Shepherd's Cress**, **Sea Pink (=Thrift)**, **Spring Vetch**, **Wintercress (Barbarea vulgaris)** and **Spindle** plus one of the best displays of **Green Winged Orchids** that I can remember - thousands of plants all at their best and seemingly covering a larger area than in the past.

Other plants that were new to me (though others have seen them) were **Sea Kale** (only just starting with few plants showing flowers) and **White Campion** (plus a pale pink plant among them which I put down as a hybrid though I could not see any **Red Campion**). Also notable was my first find of **Bird's Foot Trefoil** in full flower. Lots of buds on the **Wild Lupins** but none yet in flower.

Nothing special in the way of birds other than my first **Lesser Whitethroat**, and back in my Havant garden I had the first **Holly Blue** of the year there as well as a male **Orange Tip**

### **Fri 2 May**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Little Terns back at the Hayling Oysterbeds**

A mid-morning high tide and sunny weather suggested a trip to the Oysterbeds to see if the **Little Terns** were back. When I got there I thought I would be disappointed as I could not hear any **Little Terns** but a search of the west side of the nest island showed me one pair snuggling up together on the shingle close to the water (almost certainly below the level of the next spring tide on May 8 when the water will be at least 70cm above this morning's high) with another single bird nearby. A single **Common Tern** was resting on top of the island among the gulls. Jason Crook was present and told me that the maximum count of **Little Terns** he has seen in Langstone Harbour so far this season was 15 birds around the RSPB Islands (viewed from Farlington Marshes) seen last night.

Before reaching the lagoon I had heard one **Whitethroat** near the Langstone Sailing Club (north end of Langstone Bridge) with four more in the Oysterbeds area. Three **Shelduck** were in the northern pools (from which four **Whimbrel** flew off to continue their journey) and a **Meadow Pipit** was singing over the field west of the Billy track.

After seeing the **Terns** I turned my attention to the land and climbed over the earth mound, which is currently covered with a great show of **Field Forget-me-not** and with both **Bugle** and **Ground Ivy** growing on the east side in two well separated clumps (allowing anyone who may be confused by their superficial similarities to compare them). My aim was to check on the clump of **Dame's Violets** that are established inland of the north end of the mound. These were doing well with both white and violet flowered plants standing tall. While in this area I spent some time in the scrub due east of the mound trying to see a bird which I am almost certain was a **Garden Warbler**. It was singing almost continuously (with a more rapid delivery and a smaller range of pitch than most Blackcaps) but I only got one glimpse of it flying between trees and showing a plump silhouette helping to confirm its identity as **Garden Warbler**, though not conclusively. Another reason for suspecting it to be a **Garden Warbler** was that one was resident here in the early summer of 2006. Also seen in the area were two clumps of rather old specimens of **St George's Mushrooms** and one other clump of blackened fungal remains too old to identify.

On the way home I went past Langstone Mill Pond where I found the **Swans off their nest and accompanied on the water by six healthy looking young cygnets**. Both **Reed** and **Cetti's Warblers** were singing and more than a dozen **Egrets** were still based in the trees behind the pond but still giving no positive clue as to why they have remained here in and around the trees when they would normally be far way, scattered around the harbour and fishing.

The sunny weather was good for butterflies but all I saw was a probable **Holly Blue** in Langstone, one **Peacock** at the Oysterbeds, and both **Orange Tip** and **Small White** back in my garden. Also in my garden my son was painting an external wall and drew my attention to a bee which he said had been visiting a hole in the brickwork until he painted that area, after which the bee kept coming back but seemed unable to locate the hole (although the hole was still there).

This will have been a **Mason Bee**, probably one of the **leaf cutting bees** that cut small circular disks from a leaf and use these to create multiple egg chambers in an existing an existing hole in a wall. The first leaf goes at the back of the hole and the

bee lays an egg in front of it then puts some food for the young before bringing another leaf disk to act as a partition wall in front of the first chamber. Multiple eggs are thus laid in separate chambers within the original hole from which (if all goes well) a number of young bees will eventually emerge. Sadly the mother bee takes no further interest in her offspring and if the entrance to the hole becomes blocked, or if one of the youngsters dies before it can emerge, the remaining offspring in chambers behind the blockage never see the light of day.

## [Thu 1 May](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Honeysuckle, Holly and other new flowers for a new month

A walk around Havant this morning gave me a good list of flowering plants to start this month's list, among them five new plants for the year.

First of the new plants was **Hairy Tare**, a mass of which has escaped the council weedkillers at the southwest corner of the East Street bridge over the old Billy line. Going down the slope from this find to the carpark on the old rail track I was pleased to see that some of the **Early Wintercress** plants which had been mown down about a week ago had regrown and were now in flower.

Next new flower was on a **Holly tree** in Grove Road, and after that came my first **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** seen in the Juniper Square roadside grass shortly after checking the **Yellow-flower Strawberries** and finding them still in flower. Just before leaving Juniper Square came the third new flower on **Honeysuckle** (maybe cheating a bit as this was an ornamental species but none the less welcome).

My final new plant could not be determined in the field as I did not have my hand lens with me, and without it I could not see if the **Parsley Piert** found in St Faith's churchyard acutally had flowers hidden in the 'marsupial pouches' in its leaf axils - when I got home I found it had.

## [Wed 30 Apr](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Mid-week Summary

**Highlights of Bird News** are the arrival of the first **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Montagu's Harrier** plus six irregular visitors (**Bee Eater, Kentish Plover, Curlew** and **Wood Sandpiper** and both **Purple** and **Night Herons**); a **record count of 16 Roseate Terns** passing through the Solent on the same morning; **hatching of 4 Peregrine chicks** at Chichester, **5 Pochard ducklings** on the Test and the first **Canada Goose goslings**; and finally news of some **House Martins completing their nests**.

**Insect news** includes the appearance of **Common Blue, Small Heath** and **Painted Lady** butterflies, and reports of **15 new moth species** including an early **Silver Y migrant**

**Thirteen newly flowering plants** include non-wild **Laburnum** and **Rowan trees** in bloom plus the discovery of a **Water Horsetail colony** near Chichester.

**Other wildlife** has the story of **hundreds of Carp dying in the IBM lake** at Portsmouth after a bloom of **Golden Alga** in the brackish ditches which run into the lake, and the **death of a single Little Egret in the jaws of a Fox** at Langstone

## **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**Manx Shearwater:** More than 500 were to be seen off Portland on Apr 27 and 29, with 400+ reported on Apr 28. On Apr 29 Dungeness reported that 5 had come far enough east to be seen there,

**Night Heron:** An adult or second summer bird was seen in the Pevensey Levels area on Apr 29 - no further news so far

**Little Egret:** On Apr 28 Brian Fellows visited Langstone and saw a good number of **Egrets** still in the trees behind the Mill Pond at a time of day and tide when they would normally have been out fishing. He then got a photo of a **Fox** carrying a dying **Egret** in its jaws in the adjacent Pony field, making me wonder if the dead bird might have been caught because it was an inexperienced juvenile just out of the nest but I stress that there is no evidence for this in the photo.

**Purple Heron:** An adult bird was seen on the afternoon of Apr 28 in a roadside pool beside the road from Berwick to Arlington in the Cuckmere Valley. On the morning of Apr 29 another birder, not knowing of the previous find, saw what must have been the same bird flying over Arlington reservoir and expended a lot of time and energy trying to track the bird down in what he describes as dense Mangrove swamps around the edge of the reservoir to no avail.

**Spoonbill:** On Apr 27 one flew over the Sidlesham Ferry Pool and on Apr 28 a group of four were seen in Pagham Harbour but did not, I think, stay.

**Mute Swan:** One bird of a pair seen by Brian Fellows at Emsworth on Apr 28 had **pink feet** instead of the normal black and Brian reminds us that this is a feature of those adult Swans which have the genetic error which causes juvenile birds to have white plumage when all their siblings are dressed in brown - such birds are known as '**Polish**' swans

**Canada Goose:** A pair at Weir Wood reservoir already had **five juveniles** on Apr 27 - they were described as 'already fledged' reminding me that I have in the past been greeted with a certain amount of derision when I asked what the true definition of 'fledged' - does it mean that the young birds have grown enough feathers to be able to fly from their nest, or does it (as in this case) just mean that the birds have 'fled' from their nest? My current belief is that most birders use this term to mean that the birds are able to fly, and for these **Canada Geese** that will probably not occur until July.

**Brent Goose:** As far as their passage back to breeding grounds is concerned we are now into the stage of only seeing a few stragglers but these can give some surprises as one did on Apr 27 when it flew in from the west to land on the water at Weir Wood reservoir (well inland and off the normal **Brent** flight path) before flying

on east. Latest report is of four birds flying east through the Solent seen from the Gosport shore on Apr 29

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Four flew past Portland on Apr 28

**Pochard:** David Thelwell saw **a family of 5 ducklings** on the River Test at Romsey on Apr 27 and says that these had hatched a month earlier than usual.

**Honey Buzzard:** After the first was seen over Darvell (north of Hastings) on Apr 24 a second has been seen on Apr 26 heading for Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough - I had assumed these were passage birds overflying south east England on their way to Scandinavia but this bird was flying south west when seen.

**Montagu's Harrier:** The first definite sighting for the year was on Apr 23 when one flew over Pagham Harbour - Apr 27 brought a second sighting of one heading north over Christchurch Harbour area.

**Osprey:** One came in over Selsey on Apr 27 and one was seen at Arlington reservoir on the previous day

**Kestrel:** A pair were feeding young in their Sussex nest on Apr 27

**Merlin:** One came in off the sea at Seaford on Apr 27

**Peregrine:** I recently expressed surprise that we have not heard more about the birds nesting on Chichester Cathedral and my only source for the information that **four chicks hatched** in their nest on the cathedral spire in the 24 hours from Apr 27 to 28 is the Portsmouth local paper (THE NEWS) on Apr 29. I suspect this information is correct but I am dubious about the date when they go on to say that "From June 21 the RSPB team will be at the cathedral between 10am and 5pm to show people close-up views of the Peregrine family through a nest cam" as these chicks should have flown from the nest by June 8.

**Golden Pheasant:** A male was seen near Arlington in East Sussex on Apr 25

**Kentish Plover:** First of the year was a female seen at Pagham Harbour on Apr 28

**Grey Plover:** Normally we only see these birds in their splendid black and silver breeding plumage as they start to return in July but both Christchurch Harbour (on Apr 28) and Rye Harbour (on Apr 29) report single birds already in breeding finery.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** These are not normally seen on spring passage (last year only five or six were reported with the first not arriving until May 10) so one in Poole Harbour on Apr 27 was a good find.

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** A count of 286 passing Dungeness on Apr 29 was the second highest count for this spring after 450 at Dungeness on Apr 20

**Whimbrel:** The daily dawn count of birds flying out of their night roost at Rye Harbour recorded 150+ on Apr 27, 212 on Apr 28, and 269 on Apr 29

**Wood Sandpiper:** The second bird for this spring was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Apr 27 after the first was seen on Apr 21 at Mortimer gravel pits on the Hants/Berks border.

**Pomarine Skua:** Anyone competing for this year's 'Pom King' crown at Selsey Bill this year may have a total of eight birds seen so far (1 on Apr 26 plus 7 on Apr 27) and must feel a slight resentment towards watchers at Dungeness who counted 45 there on Apr 27 (and who could well have a total of 53 seen since Apr 20). At Seaford the total for this spring is now 24 and even Hampshire has a total of 7 seen so far (2 passing Stokes Bay on Apr 27, 4 seen at Hurst on Apr 20 with another single there on Apr 25)

**Med Gull:** A pair were seen mating at Rye Harbour on Apr 27

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter bird was at Dungeness on Apr 27 and 28, and on Apr 29 an adult was at Portland

**Roseate Tern:** Watchers at Stokes Bay, Gosport, enjoyed the sight of 16 flying east on Apr 29 as reported by John Norton. I am surprised that there has not been further comment on this as (after briefly checking Birds of Hants, the Hampshire Bird Reports from 1992 to 2006, and Trevor Carpenter's website listing most Hampshire birding record counts) I have the impression that a total of 16 birds for the whole 1999 spring season (May 4 to June 3) exceeds the total of birds in any season (spring or autumn) up to date, and that the maximum number ever seen previously at one site on one day is six birds

**Little Tern:** Still no news of any in Langstone Harbour but on Apr 29 there were at least 56 in the Solent off Gosport and 74 were logged at Selsey Bill that day

**Black Tern:** Apr 29 also saw 14 of these passing Stokes Bay at Gosport with 11 seen at Selsey Bill and 19 at Dungeness that day

**Puffin:** On Apr 28 one was seen in the West Bay area of the Dorset coast near Bridport and on Apr 29 two were seen at Portland

**Turtle Dove:** So far I have seen reports of 12 birds since the first arrived on Apr 15. Latest sightings have been one at Dungeness on Apr 27, one at Woods Mill in the Adur valley on Apr 28, and two at Durlston on Apr 29

**Swift:** Large numbers started with 70+ over the Chichester Lakes, and 80+ at Blashford, both on Apr 27. Apr 28 brought 40 to Christchurch Harbour, 50 to the Amberley Wild Brooks area south of Pulborough, and 100 to Rye Harbour. So far reports for Apr 29 have been of 25 over Fleet Pond and 80 at Lodmoor (Weymouth)

**Bee Eater:** On Apr 27 a party of four were seen in the Wimborne Minster area of Dorset and on Apr 28 at least one was heard over Portland.

**Hoopoe:** Latest reports are of singles at Lodmoor on Apr 27 and at nearby Portland on Apr 29. These are probably of the same bird which has been alternately reported at Portland and Lodmoor on seven dates since Apr 13

**House Martin:** By Apr 27 five nests had been built and were ready for use in the Romsey area and at least two other reports tell of birds back at nests in Chichester and Ringmer (near Lewes). Here in Havant it might be worth seeing if any are back at the artificial nests on houses immediately south of the railway in Staunton Road which is close to Bedhampton rail station and (more importantly) to the canalised section of the Hermitage Stream.

**Nightingale:** At least two of the three or four birds which arrived back at the Marlpit Lane site near Funtington (west of Chichester) on Apr 25 were still singing there on Apr 28 when I had the bonus of a good visual sighting of one plus the accompaniment of both **Blackcap** and **Willow Warbler** song

**Wood Warbler:** An eighth report of this increasingly rare migrant for this year comes from the Isle of Wight on Apr 27 where it was the first of the year for the Island.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** What was probably the first of the year was on the Dorset coast at Ballard Down on Apr 27 (the bird said to have been seen in the Highclere area of north Hampshire on Apr 7 was more likely to have been a female Pied Flycatcher)

## INSECTS

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### Butterflies

Despite the absence of **Dingy Skipper** and even **Red Admiral** from the species reported in the past few days the number of species which were seen was a creditable 18

**Green Hairstreak:** Singles had been seen at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on Apr 14 and 22 without any sightings elsewhere but on Apr 26 three were seen at the Winchester site and another three on the Sussex Downs above the Cuckmere valley

**Common Blue:** First of the year was out at Noar Hill (between Petersfield and Alton) on Apr 26 (In 2003 the first was out on Apr 22 and in 2004 one was seen on Apr 23)

**Duke of Burgundy:** After the report of a single out at Noar Hill on Apr 22 four could be seen there on Apr 26

**Painted Lady:** Leaving aside a single reported in the Gosport area on Jan 25 the first of the year were two seen at Portland on Apr 27. The January insect was clearly seen in a garden where one had previously been seen on Dec 8 so presumably a 'last year's butterfly' trying to over winter - it has not been seen again!

**Wall Brown:** After a 'possible' sighting in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Apr 9 there were first sightings on Apr 26 in the Sussex Cuckmere Valley and at Durlston in Dorset followed by several seen in the Winspit area of the Dorset coast on Apr 27. So far no Hampshire sightings.

**Small Heath:** First of the year seen at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on Apr 27 (one was out in Hants on Apr 22 in 2003)

### Moths

**Mint Moth (1361 *Pyrausta aurata*):** An early first seen in a garden at Lower Froyle near Alton on Apr 26. This species is not normally seen before May

**Frosted Green (1660 *Polyploca ridens*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 with another taken at Ringmer near Lewes on Apr 26. April is the normal date for emergence

**Purple Bar (1752 *Cosmorhoe ocellata*):** First at Portland on Apr 26 - normally emerges in May

**The V-Pug (1858 *Chloroclystis v-ata*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - another May moth with a lovely pale green colour on which the black V mark is set

**Early tooth-striped (1881 *Trichopteryx carpinata*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - normally flying in April

**Scorched carpet (1888 *Ligdia adustata*):** First at Playden village near Rye on Apr 27 - another May species

**Brown Silver-line (1902 *Petrophora chlorosata*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - another May species with caterpillars that feed on Bracken

**Purple Thorn (1919 *Selenia tetralunaria*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - normally out in April

**Waved Umber (1936 *Menophra abruptaria*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - normally out in April

**Yellow Belle (1968 *Aspitates ochrearia*):** First at Portland on Apr 26 - normally not seen until May this moth sometimes flies by day as well as after dark

**Sallow Kitten (1997 *Furcula furcula*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - another May flyer.

**The Nutmeg (2145 *Discestra trifolii*):** First at Portland on Apr 26 - will be on the wing from May to September

**Knot Grass (2289 *Acronicta rumicis*):** First in the Rother valley near Rye on Apr 25 - normally emerges in May

**Rustic Shoulder-knot (2334 *Apamea sordens*):** First at Portland on Apr 26 - flies in May, caterpillars feed on grass through the winter

**Pale Mottled Willow (2389 *Caradrina clavipalpis*):** First at Portland on Apr 26 - this one has a variable time of emergence though the majority do not appear until July

**Silver Y (2441 *Autographa gamma*):** Portland had their first migrant on Apr 26 but the first had been recorded in Kent on Apr 10

**The Herald (2469 *Scoliopteryx libatrix*):** One at Portland on Apr 26 was the second for the year after one in the Ashdown Forest on Jan 29) - as this species overwinters as an adult it is surprising that more have not been seen before now

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**The number of species in flower for the year to date is 245** with 215 seen by me. Equivalent figures for April only are 186 and 161

**Water Horsetail:** Brian Fellows discovered a substantial colony of this growing in the wet Fishbourne Meadows near Chichester when he was there on Apr 29 - the species was new to him as it is to me though it is no rarity and is described in the Hants Flora as locally frequent "in still water, bogs and swamps, both acid and basic"

**Sea Radish:** Brian Fellows found the first example for the year of this flowering on Eastney beach in Southsea (Portsmouth) on Apr 27

**Sea Kale:** Brian also found this flowering at Eastney on Apr 27. I suspect it has been out for a little while in some places but this is the first report I have seen.

**Laburnum:** Hardly a wild flower but always a welcome sight when it first appears in spring - first seen by me on Apr 28

**Bird's Foot Trefoil:** First report of this in flower comes from Durlston on Apr 29 though the bud I saw on Portsdown on Apr 22 was almost certainly in flower before that date.

**Kidney Vetch:** First report of this in flower also comes from Durlston on Apr 29

**Rowan:** My first sight of this in flower was on a planted tree in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Apr 29

**Wild Parsnip:** Durlston also reported a single plant of this in flower on Apr 29

**Russian Comfrey:** Flowering near the Havant BUPA hospital on Apr 29. These were particularly attractive plants when I saw them and must have started to flower some time ago. Flower colours are variable in this species but these had open flowers with a corolla tube of pale sky blue terminating in 'petals' of pure white, the open flowers contrasting with the reddish colour of the unopen buds. To see them go west from the BUPA hospital on the north side of Bartons Road and you will find a mass of them by the fence of the abandoned field adjacent to the BUPA site.

**Sea Plantain:** Found by Brian Fellows flowering on the Eastney beach on Apr 27

**Grey Sedge:** This was showing spikelets about to flower in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Apr 29

**Common or Black Sedge:** Found flowering in the Fishbourne meadows near Chichester on Apr 29 by Brian Fellows

**Soft Brome (or Lop Grass):** First noted by Brian Fellows at Eastney on Apr 27

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fox:** On Apr 28 Brian Fellows got a photo of one with a dying **Little Egret** in its jaws when viewing the pony field south of Wade Court at Langstone. Having often seen

**Foxes** at this site looking at prey (usually **Rabbits** or **Ducks**) without attempting to catch it (they are probably too wise to waste energy on fruitless chases) I was intrigued by the thought that this bird might have been caught because it was a juvenile just out of the nest - but I still have no positive evidence that the **Egrets** in the trees behind the adjacent Mill Pond are actually nesting. The photo showed no clear evidence that the **Egret** was a juvenile.

**Fungi:** When mowing my lawn on Apr 26 the mower found and mangled a small white toadstool which appeared to have been a **St George's Mushroom** but I have found no others there so my first record of this species for the year comes from the find of a small cluster in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Apr 28

**Carp:** I think it was in the mid-1980s that a large number of **Carp** in the IBM Lake at Portsmouth contracted some disease and died, requiring large pits to be dug to bury hundreds of very large dead fish. A couple of years later the lake was re-stocked and the population subsequently built up again but the Apr 29 edition of the Portsmouth local paper (THE NEWS) tells me that **300 Carp** in the IBM lake have recently died as a result of having their gills choked by an alga (called **Prymnesium**) which is flourishing in part of the drainage system ditches which feed surplus water from this 'below sea level' site into the lake (from which it is pumped under the M27 into Tipner Lake). The paper suggests that some **Carp** which have remained in the lake and not swum into the ditches may have escaped the alga.

Google tells me that the alga is almost certainly one called **Golden Alga** or **Prymnesium parva** which is "A naturally occurring microscopic flagellated (i.e. self-propelled) alga that typically occurs in brackish waters. Under certain environmental stresses, this alga can produce toxins which can cause massive fish and bivalve (i.e. clams and mussels) kills. There is no evidence these toxins harm other wildlife, livestock or humans."

[Tue 29 Apr](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **St George's Mushrooms and Russian Comfrey**

A cycle ride to the northern edge of Leigh Park this morning started in light rain but that soon gave way to sunshine making for a pleasant trip.

First stop was at the Havant cemetery at the junction of Eastern Road and New Lane where a small cluster of **St George's Mushrooms** (easily identified by having white gills to match a white cap, as well as by the time of year) was an addition to my list of wildlife at that site. Nearly out (one flower was already unfurling its petals) were many **Ox-eye** (or **May**) **Daisies**, and a close look showed flowers on the trailing branches of the **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** which hang among the branches of a Holly tree. Another first flower for me was the blossom on a Rowan tree under which two empty **Wood Pigeon eggshells** lay on the grass among many **Bulbous Buttercups**. Another first, but far less eye-catching, was **Grey Sedge**.

At the north end of New Lane I continued north to make a circuit of the Barton's Road playing fields where there is usually some interest around the Lavant stream running down the east side of the site. Here a patch of **Broom** bushes were in full flower on the bank below the railway, and many **Cuckoo Flowers** were on the stream banks. Maybe not much in the way of flowers today but I did have both **Egret** and **Whimbrel** flying over while a **Song Thrush** sang volubly and **Rooks** at their nests in Barton's Copse made more raucous sounds.

Back on Bartons Road I climbed to the top of the hill and was passing the meadow (now apparently abandoned) on the north side of the road between Bartons Copse and the BUPA Hospital site when I spotted a mass of colour in the roadside edge of the field. This was a massive display of Comfrey having unusually coloured flowers which (when fully open) had pale sky blue corolla tubes ending in a fringe of white petal tips, contrasting with the red colour of the as yet unopen buds. After checking the features back at home I concluded the plants were **Russian Comfrey**

[Mon 28 Apr](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Nightingales at Marlpit Lane**

Evening sunshine after showers earlier in the day made it good to get out and as we drove through Emsworth we passed the first **Laburnum tree** that I have seen in full flower while most of the **Horse Chestnuts** we passed were also in full flower.

At Marlpit Lane one **Nightingale** could be heard as soon as we arrived, and as we walked closer to where it was singing a second **Nightingale** could be heard in the distance. Coming close to the first bird we found it was being accompanied by a **Blackcap**, and later the chorus was joined by the delicate song of a **Willow Warbler**. To round off the show we actually got a short view of the **Nightingale** perched openly on a branch of a low **Elder** bush no more than 20 metres from where we were standing. By way of applause a couple of **Swallows** flew low over the tree tops making the calls which always remind me of young children riding around on bicycles and ringing their bells for joy.

## **SUMMARY FOR APR 21 - 27 (WEEK 16 OF 2008)**

### **Highlights of bird news**

are an unexpected **White-billed Diver** and a singing **Little Bunting**, both at Dungeness, and first reports of **Honey Buzzard**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **Dotterel**, **Wood Sandpiper** and **Wood Warbler**. Also unexpected were a **Green-Winged Teal** at Hook and a **Temminck's Stint** at Pett Level.

**Swift**, **Nightingale**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Reed Warbler** became widespread during a week in which one Hampshire day-lister managed to tick 125 species

**Large Red Damselflies** emerged to start the Dragonfly season and **Duke of Burgundy** and **Wall Brown** both emerged to give 17 butterfly species on the wing.

Lots of new moths included a **Large Yellow Underwing** that is not normally seen until July. Other insects newly out were the big black **St Marks Flies**

Among new flowers were **Wild Pansy, White Campion, Common Comfrey, Lesser Sea Spurrey** and **Buck's Horn Plantain**

Other Wildlife includes the first sighting of a **Grass Snake**

## **BIRDS**

**Black-throated Diver:** Twelve reports of these during the week, including a count of 7 passing Durlston on Apr 21, make the species apparently more common than the Red-throats which have only six reports.

**White-billed Diver:** The first sighting of the year was a real surprise at Dungeness on Apr 26 when an adult in summer plumage flew past.

**Cattle Egret:** At least two (probably three) were still present on Apr 26 at a farm on the west side the of the River Adur not far north of the A27 while one was still in Poole Harbour on that day. Apr 24 brought a possible sighting from the Haywards Heath area but there have been no reports of the Hampshire birds (in the Bucklers Hard area east of Lymington) since Apr 22 while the last report from Abbotsbury was on Apr 21, and the bird seen in the Udimore area at the head of Rye Bay on Apr 20 has not been reported again.

**Little Egret:** Whenever I have been passing the roost trees at Langstone Pond during this month there have always been some Egrets in the trees, which is unusual during the day time except at high tide, and on Apr 14 I had an email telling me of "20 Egrets behind the Millpond at Langstone, mainly in pairs. One landed on the back of another briefly. It all looked as though they were intending to breed but couldn't quite work out how to do it". On Apr 25 at midday I could see 27 birds (there were probably more hidden in the dense cover) and the tide was well out, so it seems that once again these birds are demonstrating the unpredictability of their behaviour. All I know is that many of the birds have a good show of breeding plumes.

The roost trees are within the private property of the Mill with no possibility of closer access - even with permission to enter the land I know, from past experience when I have had access, that it would be impossible to see what is really going on without disturbing the birds with a high probability that they would desert the site altogether (as they have already deserted the Wade Court trees as a result of human activity there)

**Purple Heron:** On Apr 20 one was seen, looking exhausted, at Sandwich Bay. It seems to have recovered from its jet lag during the day and moved on.

**Brent Goose:** On Apr 23 Selsey Bill recorded 122 flying east and at Dungeness that day they logged 585. Another 75 were seen at Selsey on Apr 24 and on Apr 26 there were still 15 in Southampton Water with 5 flying east past Gosport. A group of 13 were at the mouth of the Langbrook stream west of Langstone village on Apr 22 and at least 5 were in Chichester Harbour on that day - these are likely to stay for the summer though probably hiding themselves from general view (only one bird could be seen at the Langbrook stream mouth on Apr 25). I am not aware of

summering birds staying at places east of Chichester in previous summers so do not know what to make of a group of 11 seen on the shore of Rye Bay on Apr 20

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The family group at Lymington was down to one bird on Apr 20 and that has not been seen since but on Apr 24 a total of 30 passed through the Portland area (maybe coming from somewhere on the continent).

**Shelduck:** On recent visits to the Budds farm pools two pairs of Shelduck were regularly seen on the water but when I visited on Apr 22 only one bird could be seen, probably an indication that the females of the two pairs were now on nests.

**Green-winged Teal:** One appeared on the scrape pool at Hook (Warsash) on Apr 22 and was still there on Apr 25.

**Garganey:** A pair was on the flood in the northern part of Titchfield Haven area on Apr 20 and were still there on Apr 24. On Apr 22 a single male was to be seen near Keyhaven and on Apr 26 a pair turned up at Radipole (Weymouth)

**Eider:** 21 were seen off Titchfield Haven on Apr 20.

**Long-tailed Duck:** A female turned up at Rye Harbour on Apr 22 and was still there on Apr 26. Apart from one bird seen at Dungeness on Apr 13 regular reports of these ceased on Mar 30

**Velvet Scoter:** This week has brought reports of 20 passing Selsey Bill on Apr 24 and another 10 flying east through the Solent on Apr 25

**Smew:** Another unseasonable bird was a **redhead Smew** which appeared at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Apr 21. The last previous report that I have seen was of four still at Dungeness RSPB on Mar 8

**Goosander:** Yet another straggler was a Goosander in the Fleet near Weymouth on Apr 21

**Honey Buzzard:** First report comes from the Hastings area on Apr 24

**Black Kite:** What is likely to have been a genuine wanderer from the continent (rather than an escapee from the London Zoo) flew north over Portland on Apr 20

**Marsh Harrier:** I am not sure where the many birds seen arriving on the south coast end up (i.e. how many stay in Britain and how many go on to Scandinavia) but, as with Buzzards and Red Kites, I am beginning to wonder how so many find food and habitat in our de-naturalised landscape. At least a dozen more have been reported between Apr 18 and 26 including three seen together over the Thorney Little Deeps on Apr 20 (when another two were seen to fly east past the entrance to Chichester Harbour).

**Hen Harrier:** Five separate reports of late birds passing north - on Apr 20 one came in over Portland, on Apr 21 one was over Rye Harbour, on Apr 22 another was seen at St Catherine's Point (IoW), and on Apr 26 one was recorded at Dungeness. A ring-tail seen hunting in the New Forest on Apr 23 was reported as **Hen Harrier** but might have been a **Montagu's**

**Montagu's Harrier:** A bird over Pagham Harbour on Apr 23 was reported as **Montagu's**

**Osprey:** The peak of their passage now seems to be past with only two new reports, both on Apr 20, in the Weymouth area and over the Arundel Wildfowl reserve

**Merlin:** A few are still arriving from the south - on Apr 20 one (maybe two) was in the Lymington area, on Apr 21 one came in at Portland, and on Apr 22 singles were at Dungeness and Ferrybridge (Weymouth). Since then one has been seen on the Dorset coast (Winspit) on Apr 24

**Hobby:** Although some of these will continue to arrive in late May there are plenty coming in now with reports of 19 seen between Apr 19 and 23 including one flying north over the west Hayling fields on Apr 20 when 4 arrived at Portland. By Apr 25 the rate of arrival was increasing, bringing reports of 5 together in the Test valley at Romsey and 10 in the Stour valley east of Canterbury.

**Peregrine:** A report of one circling the spire of Chichester Cathedral on Apr 21 reminded me that I have seen no news of them nesting there so far this year though the first egg was laid in the Sussex Heights (tower block) nest box in Brighton on Mar 18, and the pair that are presumably nesting on the Shoreham power station chimney were present at their nestbox on Mar 13

**Common Crane:** The bird seen at Woolmer Pond in east Hampshire on Apr 8 and 9 is unlikely to have stayed there so one seen flying north west over the area on Apr 24 was presumably different.

**Stone Curlew:** One dropped in on the beach at Rye Harbour on the morning of Apr 19, a month after the first of the year was seen at Dungeness. No doubt quite a few have arrived at their nest sites without being seen en route and no one is broadcasting news of them.

**Dotterel:** An unconfirmed report of one in the Hastings area on Apr 23

**Golden Plover:** Around 80 could still be seen at Rye Harbour on Apr 22

**Lapwing:** With their almost complete disappearance from southern farmland during the breeding season it was good to see 12 birds (probably representing 8 pairs) still present on the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket on Apr 21 (but their stay here is limited by the start of construction of the new reservoir - I doubt they will be here in five years time)

**Knot:** Reports of 60 at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Apr 20, 50 passing Splash Point at Seaford on the same day, and more than 100 in Pagham Harbour on Apr 24, show that many of these birds are on the move (though maybe not yet leaving us)

**Temminck's Stint:** Other than one seen at Slimbridge in February one seen at the Pett Level Pools near Hastings on Apr 25 was the first for the year. The bird was found by Keith Hackett but was reported on the Rye Bay website by Cliff Dean who added (for those not familiar with Temminck the man) .. "Temminck was the first director of the National Natural History Museum at Leiden from 1820 until his death. His Manuel d'ornithologie, ou Tableau systematique des oiseaux qui se trouvent en

Europe (1815) was the standard work on European birds for many years. He inherited a large collection of bird specimens from his father, who was treasurer of the Dutch East India Company".

**Ruff:** On Apr 20 two passage birds were seen on the Sidlesham Ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) and on Apr 21 a male was in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour. Since then there have been singles in the Titchfield Haven area on Apr 24 and on the Lymington shore on Apr 25.

**Woodcock:** When carrying out a bird survey in Ractonpark Wood on the east side of the Ems valley on Apr 26 soon after 6am Brian Fellows heard the unmistakable 'grunting' of a Woodcock. I had always thought that **Woodcock** were totally silent except when roding late in the evening (and except for the noise of their wings as they take off if you approach too close to the spot where they are hiding by day).

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Although a good number of young, non-breeding birds will remain with us during the summer we can expect a sharp decline in numbers in the next week or so as the breeding birds make their flight to Iceland. Pete Potts (one of the Hampshire County Council rangers) and his team that will be monitoring the breeding of the birds in Iceland are already there and you can learn about their project by visiting the BBC website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/worldonthemove/reports/postcard-from-iceland/>

At Christchurch Harbour the flock of **Godwits**, which had peaked at 120 birds on Apr 3, and still had 75 on Apr 20, was down to 30 on Apr 22, with none at all to be found there on Apr 26. In Chichester Harbour, where the birds have more chance to move around within the harbour, and where there is not the same daily coverage by birdwatchers that is possible in the more restricted area of Christchurch Harbour, the numbers I have seen for Fishbourne channel declined from 127 on Mar 25 to 95 on Apr 7, 68 on Apr 21 and 54 on Apr 23

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** These are now streaming up channel and on Apr 20 450 were logged passing Dungeness with many reports of smaller numbers (probably included in the 450) from other sites

**Whimbrel:** Their passage too is in full flood with reports from 14 sites on Apr 20 - the peak count among these was of 200+ from the Hurst area where birds enter the Solent but a count of 131 passing St Catherine's Point on the IoW that day was almost certainly of different birds. Interestingly only 56 were reported passing Dungeness and I think this is because **Whimbrel**, unlike the **Bar-tails**, do not follow the coast but head north overland when they reach places that they regard as turning points (on Apr 20 I heard and saw a small party going north high over my house in Havant). As **Whimbrel** tend to visit wet fields near the coast to feed up on passage their choice of where to turn north may be connected with memories of good places to feed inland en route north.

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** The bird which arrived at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool (Pagham Harbour) on Apr 18 was still there on Apr 22 but has not been reported since then.

**Wood Sandpiper:** This species is very uncommon in spring and, ignoring the report of a bird that turned up on the Isle of Wight on Mar 5, there is just one report

of a bird seen on Apr 21 on the Hampshire/Berkshire border at Mortimer West End (a tiny hamlet north of Silchester and Basingstoke).

**Common Sandpiper:** Passage birds are now being seen in many places (including two on Thorney Island on Apr 20) but the wintering bird at Christchurch Harbour is still there and so one which I saw near the Broadmarsh Gravel Quay on Apr 22 may or may not have been a migrant. On Apr 24 a surge of immigrants brought 27 birds to a lake in the Sherborne area of Dorset with 5 at the Longham Lakes just north of Poole that day and on Apr 26 a group of four were new arrivals at Christchurch Harbour

**Pomarine Skua:** After a dozen winter reports between Jan 1 and Feb 3 there have been no more sightings until spring passage began on Apr 20 with five reports of sightings from Portland to Dungeness including one of four birds going east through the Solent, seen off Lymington, and another of a single passing St Catherine's Point. By Apr 27 there were 12 reports of passage birds including 2 seen passing Stokes Bay at Gosport on Apr 27. Birders at Selsey got their first on Apr 26

**Arctic Skua:** There was also a surge of these on Apr 20 with around 40 seen in the Portland area and 37 at Dungeness but the movement has continued through the week with another 35 at Dungeness on Apr 26

**Great Skua:** The peak count during the week was 18 at Portland on Apr 24

**Little Gull:** These continue to be seen in good numbers with 73 at Dungeness on Apr 20. The three birds at Budds Farm pools which arrived on Apr 16 were still there on Apr 22 when there were four inland at the Blashford Lakes. Towards the end of the week there were counts of 87 passing Seaford on Apr 24 and 44 passing Dungeness on Apr 26

**Common Gull:** Although these seem to have left us some time ago others are still on the move east and north with 109 seen passing Splash Point at Seaford on Apr 20

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** These are also now passing us - 25 went east through the Solent (with 23 Great Blackbacks) on Apr 19 and on Apr 20 127 were recorded at Christchurch Harbour.

**Iceland Gull:** Two Iceland Gulls were seen on Apr 20 at Portland and Newhaven with another two sightings on Apr 22 at the same two sites. Latest sightings were on Apr 24 when one was seen at Newhaven and another near a posh hotel in the Sandbanks area of Poole.

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird was still there on Apr 23

**Roseate Tern:** After one 'possible' off Shoreham on Apr 16 there was a definite sighting of two in the Solent off Stokes Bay on Apr 20 and then another probable off Selsey on Apr 22

**Common Tern:** On Apr 23 the count of these reported by Dungeness was 2850

**Arctic Tern:** The first definite report came from Dungeness on Apr 13 and Apr 23 saw 85 at Dungeness and brought a count of 80 pausing briefly over Fleet Pond in north Hampshire (showing that a good number of these birds cut the corner by going overland to the North Sea without following the coast around Kent)

**Little Tern:** After an isolated sighting of three near Weymouth on Apr 5 these birds began to be seen daily in the Channel from Apr 16 but so far I have only seen one report of birds within the Solent Harbours - that was on Apr 20 when two birds were in Chichester Harbour seen from Thorney Island. The highest count so far was of 40+ off Selsey Bill on Apr 26

**Black Tern:** First of the year was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 16 and since then there have been 19 reports along the coast as far as Dungeness, with up to three birds seen on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Apr 17 and 19. Hampshire has had one off Gosport on Apr 27 and Sussex has had the highest count so far with 7 off Seaford on Apr 24

**Guillemot:** More than 250 were on the Durlston cliff ledges on Apr 24 with at least two eggs seen through the webcam

**Puffin:** Just one seen at Durlston on Apr 26

**Turtle Dove:** The first was seen at Thorney Island on Apr 15 and by Apr 26 there had been seven reports, the last being of one heard at the old HMS Mercury site on the hill ridge east of Old Winchester Hill (above the Meon valley)

**Short-eared Owl:** No reports since Apr 22 when what may have been the last birds were seen in Dorset, the Isle of Wight and at Rye Harbour

**Swift:** These began to be seen more or less daily from Apr 16 and on Apr 17 more than 3 were over the Blashford Lakes and another had reached the Thames estuary area near Sheppey. Apr 20 brought sightings at Portland, Lymington and Rye Harbour and on Apr 23 the Isle of Wight had two birds as did the Ouse valley near Lewes. Apr 25 brought news of 17 in the Test valley at Romsey

**Hoopoe:** On Apr 20 birds arrived at Portland and Selsey and on Apr 23 the Portland bird was seen again. What was probably the same bird was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Apr 26

**Wood Lark:** At least one was still in the Stansted Forest area on Apr 25

**Sand Martin:** Apr 24 brought news of some birds checking nest holes at a sand pit between Midhurst and Cocking and on Apr 26 some 10 pairs were doing the same in the Storrington area

**Red-rumped Swallow:** One at Portland on Apr 20

**House Martin:** Still relatively few but on Apr 21 at least one pair were checking old nests above shops in the centre of Chichester.

**Nightingale:** At least three birds were back and singing at the Marlpit Lane area near Funtington (west of Chichester) on Apr 25 and 6 were at Pulborough Brooks

on Apr 26 (when 16 were recorded at the RSPB reserve at Cliffe on the Kent Thames estuary shore)

**Reed Warbler:** After single birds had been heard at Peter Pond in Emsworth on Apr 4, 14 and 22, three were singing there on Apr 26 when birds were newly back at Langstone Pond (first heard on Apr 25) and at the Warblington Farm reed bed.

**Icterine Warbler:** One was photographed during a very brief visit to Portland Bill on Apr 24

**Lesser Whitethroat:** I have now seen 29 reports of these birds since the first was singing on Apr 17 in north Kent but the nearest to Havant so far was one singing at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 22. The only Hampshire report so far comes from the Lymington area on Apr 23

**Garden Warbler:** After an isolated arrival at Weir Wood reservoir on Apr 13 these began to be seen and heard more generally from Apr 20 but I have only seen nine reports so far with the only Hampshire record coming from the Blashford Lakes on Apr 24

**Wood Warbler:** Two arrived on the Isle of Wight on Apr 22 and three were at Portland on Apr 23 when singles were at Christchurch Harbour and at Arne (Poole Harbour). On Apr 25 the first Hampshire bird was at the Blashford Lakes and on Apr 26 one was heard in the New Forest during a day list 'bird race' which recorded 125 species.

**Willow Warbler:** Counts of birds arriving at Portland were 400 on Apr 20, 250 on Apr 21 and 600 on Apr 23.

**Great Grey Shrike:** A late bird was reported to be in the Ringwood area on Apr 21 but there has been no confirmation of this

**Tree Sparrow:** Maybe not quite extinct on the south coast - Apr 26 brought a report of a single pair at a farm near Rye Bay and another observer in that area heard a single bird flying over

**Serin:** After reports from Bognor on Apr 3 and Portland on Apr 9 a third bird reached the IoW on Apr 22, being seen at St Catherine's Point. Another flew over Christchurch Harbour on Apr 25 and one was at Portland on Apr 27

**Linnet:** Quite a few have been arriving from the south in the past week - On 22 Apr 68 were seen at St Catherine's Point (IoW), on 23 Apr 93 were recorded at Christchurch Harbour and on 25 Apr 50 were in the Hook (Warsash) area

**Common (=Mealy) Redpoll:** After reports of two at Christchurch Harbour in mid-Feb and one at Studland in Dorset on Apr 5 another has been trapped at Portland on Apr 20

**Little Bunting:** On Apr 23 a smart male was at Dungeness and was heard singing.

**Corn Bunting:** On Apr 26 one was singing from the fence of the MoD site at Funtington and a group of 6 were seen near Steyning (north of Worthing) while on Apr 24 one was at Westhampnett (just east of Chichester)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Large Red Damselfly:** This section of Insect news gets off the ground with a very vague report among Hampshire Butterfly news of the first **Damselfly**. The vagueness can be forgiven when we know that the observation was made by a soldier based at Aldershot while he was on a cross country run by the Basingstoke Canal on Apr 22 - he said .. "A run between Queen's Avenue and Ash Embankment produced the butterflies listed. **First Damselfly also seen (sp unknown).**" It is my guess that it was a **Large Red Damsel** as that is normally the first to get in the news each year but I see the **Blue-tailed Damsel** is the next. Dan Powell's Guide to Dragonflies agrees with this and shows that only one of three more species that come out before mid-May is common - that is the **Red-eyed Damselfly** which is I think becoming more common (the other two are the **Southern** and **Irish Damsels**, neither of which is really likely).

Following that uncertain first report there have been three definite reports of **Large Red Damsel** - two from the Hastings area on Ap 25 and 26 and the third from the Eastbourne area on Apr 26

### Butterflies

17 species on the wing in the past few days - highlights follow ...

**Dingy Skipper:** First seen at Windover Hill north of Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Apr 22 and then at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 25

**Grizzled Skipper:** This has been out since Apr 10 but Apr 22 brought the first local sighting on Chalton Down north of Rowlands Castle

**Clouded Yellow:** On Apr 17 the Durlston Ranger's log had an entry reading .. "Yesterdays survey saw a Clouded Yellow" .. and I passed this on their first of the year. On Apr 23 that same log had an entry saying .. "The first Clouded Yellow butterfly of the year seen this morning - a migrant or could it be a resident?". Luckily there is no need to resolve this internal argument among the Durlston Rangers as to who saw the first since one had been reported at Portland as early as Apr 3. Apr 26 brought another 'possible only' report of 3 seen in the Rother Valley near Rye Bay

**Green Hairstreak:** Magdalen Hill Down at Winchester reported this species on Apr 14 and on Apr 22 with a third sighting now coming from the Downs near Eastbourne where three were seen on Apr 26

**Small Copper:** Apr 22 gave Sussex its first at Windover Hill north of Eastbourne but Hampshire has had three sightings since Apr 8 and Portland had one on Apr 15.

**Holly Blue:** I have seen 21 reports since the first at Gosport on Feb 9 (earliest ever for Hampshire) but they are not yet common (no report of more than 2 together) so a sighting of one at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Apr 22 (following one there on Apr 10) is good local news

**Duke of Burgundy:** First of the year seen at Noar Hill near Petersfield on Apr 22

**Large Tortoiseshell:** We have already reported some very unusual sightings of this at Portland (four reports between Jan 27 and Feb 10), at Ventnor on the IoW on Feb 18, and at Lymington marshes on Mar 14. Now David Tinling of Gosport excitedly reports that when reviewing some photos taken earlier this year one taken at Gosport on Feb 10 (originally assumed to be of a Small Tortoiseshell) is now thought by him to be definitely of a Large Tortoiseshell. This tends to confirm that we have had a mini-invasion of migrant Large Tortoiseshells since five of the seven reports are in the period Feb 6 to 18 (three of them are on Feb 9 and 10) and this cluster of dates covers reports from Portland, Gosport and the Isle of Wight.

**Speckled Wood:** Although the first of these was seen on Mar 21 the first 20 reports up to Apr 15 were of ones and twos. Reports from Gosport of 10 seen on Apr 16 and 15 seen on Apr 20 seems to indicate the real start of their season.

**Wall Brown:** First seen on Apr 26 in the Cuckmere Valley near Eastbourne with another seen on the same day at Durlston in Dorset

## Moths

**Hawthorn Leaf Miner (0303 Parornix anglicella):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - A common species normally emerging in April

**Poplar Leaf miner (0368 Phyllocnistis unipunctella):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - Probably this had overwintered after emerging in the autumn

**Elachista cannapennella (0607):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - this name not known in UK Moths website

**Elachista rufocinerea (0608):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22

**Esperia sulphurella (0649):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 23 - normally does not appear until May

**Grapholita jungiella (1251):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - normally out in April

**Cydia succedana (1255):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - early - normally out in May

**Twenty-plumed moth (1288 Alucita hexadactyla):** First report comes from the Newhaven area on or just before Apr 21. This moth looks like a delicate black and white Japanese paper fan and can be found all round the year

**Pyrausta nigrata (1366):** This day flying moth of chalk downland is listed in the UK Moths website as flying in June and July with a second generation in

the autumn so one seen at Mill Hill, Shoreham on Apr 20 was unusually early. However the photo on the UK Moths website shows the moth on a fresh Germander Speedwell flower and this is already out this year.

**Red Twin-spot Carpet (1724 *Xanthorhoe spadicearia*):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 22 - another moth that normally emerges in May

**Water Carpet (1750 *Lampropteryx suffumata*):** The first had been recorded near Eastbourne on Mar 26 but one at Dungeness on Apr 23 was new for the site

**Brimstone Moth (1906 *Opisthograptis luteolata*):** First record from the Lewes area on Apr 25 with a second find at Durlston on Apr 26 - usually out in April

**Common Heath (1952 *Ematurga atomaria*):** This day flyer first seen in Ashdown Forest on Apr 26 - normally not out until May

**Pebble Prominent (2003 *Eligmodonta ziczac*):** First in the Rother woods on Apr 25 - also normally out in May

**Great Prominent (2005 *Peridea anceps*):** First in the Rother woods on Apr 25 - normally out in April

**Coxcomb Prominent (2008 *Ptilodon capucina*):** First in the Rother woods on Apr 25 - normally flies in May

**Scarce Prominent (2010 *Odontosia carmelita*):** First in the Rother woods on Apr 25 - does fly in April

**Pale Prominent (2011 *Pterostoma palpina*):** First in the Rother woods on Apr 25 - normally out in May

**Lunar Marbled Brown (2015 *Drymonia ruficornis*):** First at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 22 - normal in April

**Muslin Moth (2063 *Diaphora mendica*):** After an early first near Worthing on Mar 30 the second of the year has been seen on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Apr 22

**Least Black Arches (2078 *Nola confusalis*):** First report from the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 23 - another May species

**Heart and Dart (2089 *Agrotis exclamationis*):** First at Durlston on Apr 26 - normally not out until May

**Shuttle-shaped Dart (2092 *Agrotis puta*):** First at Ringmer near Lewes on Apr 22 with another in the Thanet area on Apr 23 - also normally out in May

**Large Yellow Underwing (2107 *Noctua pronuba*):** An early find near Lewes on Apr 25 - normally not seen until July

**Chamomile Shark (2214 *Cucullia chamomillae*):** First in the Thanet area on Apr 23 - an April species

**Nut-tree Tussock (2425 *Colocasia coryli*):** First report from the Newhaven area on or just before Apr 21 - a fairly normal first date

## Other Insects

**St Mark's Fly:** The first cluster of these large black flies was seen near sewage works at Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Apr 22 (St Mark's Day, when they traditionally emerge, is Apr 25)

## PLANTS

**Species seen in flower so far this year number 233 (211 seen by me)** and the equivalent figures for April are 174 (150)

**Celery-leaved Buttercup:** First flowers seen on Apr 26 at Warblington marsh

**Hairy Buttercup:** Flowering plants on the Langstone South Moors on Apr 22 were likely to be this rather than Bulbous Buttercup

**Lesser Spearwort:** First flower found in Warblington marsh on Apr 26

**Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*):** First flowers found on a section of the old Billy Line in the Langstone Mill Lane area on Apr 25

**White Campion:** First of the year flowering in the Stansted area on Apr 25

**Lesser Sea Spurrey:** A mass flowering on the sea wall at Langstone village on Apr 25 was my first for the year

**Dove's Foot Cranesbill:** Although I had seen an odd plant flowering at the end of March the main flowering only started this week

**Bird's Foot Trefoil:** One flower seen showing the 'eggs and bacon' colour on Portsdown on Apr 22 was very nearly open

**Wood Avens:** One plant had a flower in my garden on Apr 21 but so far no others have followed its lead

**Horse Chestnut:** Apr 23 brought the start of full flowering with whole 'candles' lit rather than single flowers

**Wall Speedwell:** The first date I have for this is Apr 22 but I had seen it earlier - by Apr 26 its flowering was widespread

**Field Forget-me-not:** The large flowered garden version (corresponding to Wood Forget-me-not) has been flowering since the end of March but it was not until Apr 26 that I found the smaller flowered wild Field Forget-me-not in Warblington cemetery

**Common Comfrey:** First flowers found in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Apr 24 by Brian Fellows

**Buck's Horn Plantain:** First flowers seen by the roadside in Langstone village on Apr 25

**Crosswort:** One very early plant was seen flowering on Mar 23 but I did not see another until Apr 22 when many were out on Portsdown (with more seen in Stansted Forest on Apr 25)

**Common Ragwort:** Late flowering plants were still out in February but the first fresh plants of this year did not appear until Apr 26 when they were found in Emsworth

**Beaked Hawksbeard:** One plant was flowering near Havant Bus Station on Apr 21 but I have not yet seen any more

**Lily of the Valley:** The wild colony which I first found in Havant Thicket in 2006 is now pushing up new flowers with white buds seen on Apr 21 - as the area where they grow has recently been mown to reduce Bracken growth I have informed the Forestry Biodiversity Manager of their presence and been assured they will be taken into account when for future management.

**Yellow Iris:** A second lot of plants was seen in flower on Apr 26 in the ponds of the newly restored Chinese Water Garden at Wade Court in Langstone

**Remote Sedge:** Flowering in Racton Park Wood near Funtington on Apr 26

**Lesser Pond Sedge:** Flowering in Emsworth on Apr 21

**Barren Brome:** First flowers on this seen at Emsworth on Apr 26

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Water Vole:** A couple more sightings at Brook Meadow in the northern section of the river indicate the presence of at least one pair in addition to those more frequently seen voles further downstream by the sluice gate.

**Grass Snake:** Although **Adders** have been seen out of hibernation since the end of January it was not until Apr 25 that the first **Grass Snake** has got a mention with a young one seen in the Northiam area north of Hastings

**Common Lizard:** The first report of these came from the New Forest on Mar 30 when 20 Lizards were seen sunning themselves in Pignal Inclosure near Brockenhurst - no more reports that I have seen until one was spotted in the Haslar area of Gosport on Apr 21

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 21 - 27 (WEEK 16 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 26 Apr**

#### **A walk to Warblington**

Walking down the Billy Trail to Langstone this morning I could hear **Sandwich Terns** high overhead but could not spot them but by the time I had reached

Langstone Pond I had noted twelve species singing, including the **Cetti's** and my first **Reed Warbler** at the pond where at least **20 Egrets** were busy in the trees despite the low tide which would normally have seen them all away from their roost and busily fishing.

Looking from the Langstone seawall towards Warblington I could see a couple of microlite aircraft coming low off the shore fields - last year part of the farm diversification was to host a gathering of these microlites but I think neither of these aircraft actually landed.

When I got to this area of the seawall the noisy planes had left and been replaced by four **Linnets**, and in the cemetery I added a new flower for the year with **Field Forget-me-not** (distinguished from what I call the '**Garden Forget-me-nots**' that have been common since February by noticeably smaller flowers on a small plant). Passing the churchyard along the public path I enjoyed a great show of **Cuckoo Flowers** under the **Yews** (with more in the SSSI marsh), and on reaching the marsh field I noted both **Large** and **Small White** butterflies (later I had one **Red Admiral**).

In the marsh both **Celery-leaved Buttercup** and **Lesser Spearwort** were newly flowering, and in the reedbed at least two **Reed Warblers** were singing.

Heading east along the shore past the two arable fields which have had a good show of flowers during the winter I saw them in the final stages of preparation for this year's crop (by the date I assume this will be Sweet Corn again) and heard **Med Gulls** among the **Black-headed** following the tractor.

Walking north up the footpath bordering the east of the farm, and late by the roadside heading back into Havant, I enjoyed a great show of flowers but had nothing new to report other than a bronze coloured **Shield Bug** which I have not been able to identify

## [Fri 25 Apr](#)

### **Around Langstone**

This morning I cycled to the north pier of the old Langstone rail bridge, stopping at the point where Mill Lane leaves the main road to check the flowers. Best find here was the small cluster of **Viola tricolor** that I had seen last year - the colour of these flowers is very variable and those out currently are mainly a dark blue overall.

Coming home via Langstone village I had two more new plants - at the junction of the High Street with the Main Road I had my first flowering **Buck's Horn Plantain** and on the seawall path south of where the High Street meets the shore was a mass of **Lesser Sea Spurrey**.

Although it was by now midday and it was more than three hours before high tide I counted **27 Little Egrets** (there were probably more unseen) in and around the trees behind the pond. I can only guess what was keeping them there when they would normally be fishing far from their roost trees but I did notice that several birds had a good show of breeding plumes.

## [Tue 22 Apr](#)

### **Little Gulls still at Budds Farm with many butterflies on the wing**

Today's sunshine made it feel like the first day of summer and brought out good numbers of butterflies - during a cycle ride to Budds Farm and back I saw several **Small Whites** and **Peacocks**, two male **Orange Tips**, both male and female **Brimstone** and one **Comma**.

I went via Mill Lane and along the South Moors shore, finding **13 Brent** (almost certainly staying for the summer) at the mouth of the Langbrook stream and a leftover male **Wigeon** in the Tamarisk Pool on the moors, over which **Meadow Pipit** and **Skylark** were singing. A single **Wheatear** was on the sea wall and the calls of **Med Gulls** came from the air above while the calm water had a dozen **Great Crested Grebe**.

On the Budds Pool all three of the **Little Gulls** which have been there since Mike Collins spotted them last Wednesday were still present - one a full adult, the second in adult plumage but with a couple of black primary tips, and the third a first year bird with the **juvenile Kittiwake** like wing markings.

At least one male **Gadwall** was still present with plenty of **Tufted Duck** but no **Shoveler** or **Teal** that I noticed. My quick scan also found only one **Shelduck** so I guess that there may be two nests in use somewhere around the site.

Coming home via the Brockhampton stream I saw what I assume was a newly arrived migrant **Common Sandpiper**.

[Mon 21 Apr](#)

### **Beaked Hawsbeard in flower and wild Lilly of the Valley in bud**

Yesterday's sunshine brought me sightings of **Comma** and **Small White** in my garden, together with my first sight of **Nursery Tent spiders (Pisaura mirabilis)** sun bathing on low vegetation. Much duller weather today did not augur well for new finds but as I drove past Havant bus station I had my first glimpse of flowers that will soon appear on roadsides and waste ground everywhere - **Beaked Hawksbeard**. Another first flower, **Wood Avens**, had appeared in my garden this morning.

I was on my way to Havant Thicket where I counted **at least 12 separate Lapwing** on their Gipsies Plain territories - at least two of them appeared to be sitting on nests, and if these were paired to two of the displaying males that leaves eight more males that could also have mates sitting unseen giving 10 breeding pairs. **Skylark** and **Meadow Pipits** were singing and I was told that at least **one pair of Stonechats** had been seen today. Elsewhere in the woodland the many singing birds included **Willow Warbler** and **Mistle Thrush** and **one Buzzard** and **two Jays** were seen.

On one waterfilled ditch fourteen **Pond Skaters** were the first I have seen and at one point I walked through **a cloud of black flies** hanging in the air in way that reminded me that we are close to St Mark's Day (Apr 25) though these were smaller than **St Mark's Flies**.

My reason for coming to Havant Thicket today was that **Lily of the Valley** have already started to flower in my garden and the colony which I had found growing

wild in the Thicket in 2006 were flowering by May 15 last year. In the past two years the site has been almost hidden under **Bracken** but as I approached the area today I found that a wide swathe on both sides the track alongside which they grown had been mown and this had allowed the frail shoots of **Lily of the Valley** to push up and several of them had exposed spikes of white flowers, though none yet had open flowers.

If anyone wants to see them they are on the west side of the peripheral track at SU 719108 - the easiest way to find them is to start from the Castle Road gate giving vehicle access to the Thicket and to walk north along the path which separates the broad-leaved trees by the main road from the conifers and heath. Go on past the first broad track branching off to your left and after about 100 metres look for an established **Beech tree** overhanging the left side of the track you are on - the lilies start under the **Beech** and can be found over the next 50 metres or so

### **SUMMARY FOR APR 14 - 20 (WEEK 15 OF 2008)**

**Highlights of bird news** are the arrival of **Turtle Dove, Whinchat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler** and **Black Tern** (plus a possible **Roseate**). **Whimbrel** and **Barwits** are now passing up channel in numbers and **Yellow Wagtails** are at last arriving in flocks (with two **Blue-headed**). A **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Sidlesham Ferry is a good local rarity as were a **White Stork** at Portland and a **Hooded Crow** at Dungeness while the Sussex Downs have had a possible migrant **Quail**

**Insect news** is of **15 Butterfly species on the wing** including the first **Green Hairstreak** and **Grizzled Skippers** plus a second migrant **Clouded Yellow**. The first **Queen Wasp** was in my garden and a **White Plume Moth** (should not be flying until June) was on the window of an Aldershot Fish and Chip shop.

**New flowers** include **Wood Avens** and **Salad Burnet**, plus **Bugle, Slender Thistle** and **Elder**. Also noted were **Bird Cherry** and **Least Yellow Sorrel**

**Other Wildlife news** includes the attempted murder of a **Slow-worm** by a **Magpie**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Plenty of these still moving east up channel with a few **Black-throated** and **Great Northern** but the behaviour of **one Red-throated** on Apr 18 was interesting when it flew north from the sea off Selsey Bill and kept going inland as if it knew a short-cut to the north.

**Black-throated Diver:** One seen from Sandy Point on Hayling on Apr 16 (when 5 **Great Northern** were still 'resident' on the sea off Selsey Bill)

**Red-necked Grebe:** The summer plumaged bird was still resident on the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on Apr 16 and another flew east past Hastings on Apr 17

**Slavonian Grebe:** None reported locally but five came from somewhere to fly past Dungeness on Apr 18

**Cattle Egret:** No reports from the Lavant at Chichester since Apr 4, nor from Abbotsbury in Dorset since Apr 15 but on Apr 19 one was still in Poole Harbour and the id of three birds still in fields north of Worthing (near Coombes Farm) was confirmed

**Purple Heron:** A possible only sighting of one in flight over Cuckfield near Haywards Heath on Apr 15

**White Stork:** A definite sighting of one flying in from the sea at Portland on Apr 15 - it went on north but may later have realised it had overshot its destination and returned to the continent.

**Spoonbill:** A young bird was still in the Keyhaven area near Lymington on Apr 19 but the birds which have been in Dorset seem to have left (last report was of two in Poole Harbour on Apr 17).

**Mute Swan:** By Apr 14 a pair had settled to nest at Aldsworth Pond north of Emsworth

**Snow Goose:** On Apr 16 a pair were present at Stratfield Saye on the northern edge of Hampshire together with more than 25 **Barnacle Geese**, of which 2 pairs were on nests, and 5 **Egyptian Geese** comprising one pair with 6 goslings, another pair which had had goslings three weeks ago but now had none, and a single dead bird probably killed by a Fox.

**Brent Goose:** The east shore of Southampton Water offers some shelter from the recent strong and chilly east and north easterly winds and is thus still attracting **Brent Geese** that are not keen to battle with those winds - on Apr 19 a total of 52 were seen there when reports of passage birds along the coast have virtually ceased

**Red-breasted Goose:** A pair have been flying along the north Kent coast recently - not thought to be wild birds

**Gadwall:** The large numbers seen recently may now start to diminish as Apr 17 brought reports of departing birds from several coastal watch points (though the highest count was of only 27 passing Dungeness)

**Teal:** The surge of departing wildfowl on Apr 17 included 90 **Teal** (and 18 **Pintail**) passing Dungeness but on Apr 18 there were still 63 **Teal** (and 15 **Shoveler**) apparently resident on the Lymington marshes

**Garganey:** Eight new reports this week included a pair on Budds Farm Pools at Havant on Apr 17 and two seen briefly at the Chichester lakes on Apr 19

**Shoveler:** 81 flew past Dungeness on Apr 17 and four more birds (probably the same two pairs) were seen passing Lymington and Sandy Point on Hayling on Apr 19

**Long-tailed Duck:** A single bird passing Dungeness on Apr 13 was the first reported anywhere since Mar 30

**Velvet Scoter:** On Apr 16 there was an impressive count of 130 passing Dungeness (with 29 seen from Selsey Bill that day) and another 21 went past Dungeness on Apr 17 with no reports anywhere since that day.

**Hen Harrier:** Three late birds reported - One at Woolmer Pond near Alton on Apr 13, one in the New Forest on Apr 15 and one at Ambersham Common near Midhurst on Apr 17

**Merlin:** Two reports of late birds in Dorset - one at Winspit near St Albans Head on Apr 17 and two grounded at Portland in the foul weather of Apr 19

**Hobby:** I now have reports of some 14 birds seen since the first came in at Gilkicker Point at Gosport on Apr 2. After a run of singles three came in at Portland on Apr 18

**Chukar Partridge:** A sighting of one on the cliff top at Beachy Head on Apr 15 sent me off to check the differences between these and the standard **Red-Legged Partridge**. These are different species but real ornithologists show their contempt by allocating the same Euring number to both. To identify them in the field concentrate on the throat - **Red-legged** has a small white area under the head bounded by a black band going horizontally across the top of the neck, with the lower side of this band becoming diffuse black streaking around the lower part of the neck and onto the top of the breast; **Chukar** has a much larger creamy patch continuing down the throat and around it is a narrow solid band of black making a V shape with its base at the top of the breast. This black band has a hard edge on both sides and outside it the blue grey colour, which the **Red-leg** has only on the lower breast, extends upwards in the **Chukar** to reach the back of the neck and the nape.

**Quail:** Two flushed at Durlston on Apr 17 were probably newly arrived migrants as may have been one flushed from the north Kent coast on Mar 26.

**Pheasant:** A cock bird seen in Kent on Apr 14 was pecking at something which turned out to be a **Shrew** which disappeared when the **Pheasant** tossed it in the air before catching and swallowing it whole.

**Avocet:** The Pett Level pools (east of Hastings) had a new site record when **50 Avocet** were seen there on Apr 13

**Ruff:** On Apr 19 one was in the Lymington area and another at Sidlesham Ferry pool at Pagham Harbour

**Snipe:** One was reported as 'displaying' at Woolmer Pond near Alton on Apr 13 - I assume that the display included drumming in flight

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** It seems that their spring passage is now underway with 27 passing Splash Point at Seaford on Apr 16 and 66 passing on Apr 17, increasing to 123 passing Dungeness on Apr 19. Although some scorn was poured on a report of an estimated 80 going east through the Solent on Apr 15 seen distantly from Titchfield Haven there is a good chance that these were **Bar-tails** as reported.

**Whimbrel:** These are now streaming east in large numbers - on Apr 16 Dungeness reported 131, Portland reported 166 and Splash Point at Seaford reported 321; on

Apr 17 the Hurst area near Lymington had 100+, Splash Point had 153, Dungeness had 162 and Christchurch Harbour reported a total of 186+. Of local interest I happened to be out in my garden in the afternoon of Apr 20 and heard **Whimbrel** piping high in the sky above me where four birds were heading north away from the coast.

**Spotted Redshank:** On Apr 19 one flew past Dungeness but several remained - one at Christchurch Harbour (with a belly now completely black), one in the Lymington Keyhaven area and five were in Lytchett Bay in Poole Harbour

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** A smart bird appeared at the Sidlesham Ferry pool (Pagham Harbour) on Apr 18 and was still there on Apr 19. This is the first I know of on the central south coast since one was in Poole Harbour on Aug 20 and 21 last year but I read that this north American vagrant turns up in Britain in all months at the rate of around six a year. It is slightly smaller than a Redshank and has a long thin dark coloured bill and long yellow legs. When feeding it moves its head rapidly and erratically from side to side, and in flight it reveals a square white rump and legs protruding well beyond the tail

**Common Sandpiper:** 15 reports this week, with a peak count of 12 together at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on Apr 17, shows that the migrants are now arriving

**Little Gull:** Counts of 79 at Dungeness and 111 at Splash Point, both on Apr 16, are just two of many reports this week and we have seen them locally with three at Budds Farm pools from Apr 16 to 19 at least, and a similar number of different birds were seen at Farlington Marshes

**Iceland Gull:** One flew past St Catherine's Point (IoW) on Apr 16, and on Apr 18 singles were seen at Seaford, Poole Bay and Radipole (Weymouth)

**Glaucous Gull:** Just one report from Newhaven on Apr 18

**Roseate Tern:** Just one possible sighting off Shoreham Fort on Apr 16

**Common Tern:** Dungeness recorded 334 on Apr 18

**Arctic Tern:** Six reports this week including a total of around 16 seen at Splash Point, Seaford, on Apr 16

**Little Tern:** Nine new reports include two from Sandy Point on Hayling (2 there on Apr 13 and 4 seen on Apr 16). Biggest count so far is of 7 at Rye Harbour on Apr 18

**Black Tern:** First for the year was one at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 16. On Apr 17 two were at Ivy Lake (Chichester) and three were there on Apr 19. Meanwhile the first had reached Dungeness on Apr 18

**Guillemot:** On Apr 18 a webcam at Durlston Head showed that the first egg had been laid on a cliff ledge but the weather has been such that the parents seem to have given up hope of incubating it. They abandoned the egg on Apr 19 and flew off to sea leaving the gulls a small breakfast.

**Turtle Dove:** At least two have arrived - the first was flying north up the east side of Thorney Island on Apr 15 and another was heard singing in the Rotherfield area near Crowborough on Apr 19

**Cuckoo:** I now have 17 reports since the first was in the Brighton area (Hurstpierpoint) on Apr 5. The only bird close to Havant was one at Farlington Marshes on Apr 8 with another on Midhurst Common on Apr 13

**Barn Owl:** A report of one over Sinah Common (south west tip of Hayling Island) on Apr 8 caused me to ask around to find other sightings in that area and I hear that there were regular sightings there 'earlier in the year' (no detail but it sounds as if at least one bird is settled there)

**Short-eared Owl:** Three sightings on Apr 16 may be the last of the winter (one was Poole Harbour, one at Brading on the IoW, and the third at Portland)

**Swift:** There was an odd sighting of one over the IoW on Mar 17 and a couple more were seen on Apr 2 and 5 (at Sandwich Bay and near Rye) but the first real arrival was probably one seen at Chilcomb near Winchester in Apr 16 followed by one at Sheppey (Kent) on Apr 17 and another over the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood that day. Apr 19 brought two more singles at Rye Harbour and Lodmoor (Weymouth)

**Hoopoe:** One seen at Lodmoor on Apr 13 and another nearby at Portland on Apr 18 may have been the same bird. Earlier in April one was seen twice in the Ashdown Forest area near Crowborough and before that there was a long stayer on Kingsley Common near Alton from Jan 2 to 11 at least with another reported at Alresford near Winchester on Feb 8

**Woodlark:** Apr 13 brought reports of song from the Stansted and Liss Forest areas

**Yellow Wagtail:** I have now seen 35 reports of these since the first was at Dungeness on Mar 30. Until Apr 15 no reports were of more than 6 birds but on Apr 15 a flock of more than 130 was seen in the Thanet area of Kent, plus a separate report of a **Blue-headed male** in Kent around that date. A second 'flock' was in fields beside the Titchfield canal on Apr 19 - only 36 birds in this group but one of them was also a **Blue-headed male**. The only other sightings of more than 6 birds were of 10 at Portland on Apr 16 and 7+ in the Avon valley on the Dorset side of the Avon Causeway on Apr 19 when another flock of 12 was in the Longham area where the A348 road crosses the River Stour immediately north of Poole.

**Nightingale:** These have now been heard at eight different sites including Pulborough Brooks where more than 6 were reported as singing on Apr 17

**Whinchat:** First of the year arrived on Apr 16 when 2 were at Christchurch Harbour and another two were at Portland. Another was at Portland on Apr 18

**Fieldfare:** A flock of around 90 was on Beacon Hill by the A34 near the Hampshire/Berkshire border on Apr 16 - no reports since then

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Just one report so far of a single bird heard singing on Apr 17 at Reculver on the north Kent coast

**Common Whitethroat:** Although the first was heard near Rye on Apr 3 I have only seen 25 reports so far with none of more than four birds together. I was lucky to see and hear one briefly near Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) on Apr 14 but I have not heard of any others in the immediate area around Havant until one at Sandy Point on Hayling on Apr 19

**Garden Warbler:** Only three reports so far - two singles singing in Sussex on Apr 9 near Haywards Heath and Horsham and one at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex on Apr 13 (by comparison **Blackcaps** are now abundant)

**Willow Warbler:** Christchurch Harbour had an influx of around 100 birds on Apr 13 and 200 on Apr 14 (when Portland had an additional 100). By Apr 16 the count of birds arriving at Portland was up to 500.

**Carrion Crow:** The large flock which seems to be resident in the Weston Shore area of the Southampton Water shore south of Southampton had 120 birds on Apr 19

**Hooded Crow:** Although these are common in Scotland and in parts of southern Europe they are rare in southern England and so one at Dungeness on Apr 19 was only the third I know of this year after singles in the Sheppey area of north Kent on Jan 5 and 9

**Starling:** When I was at Warblington Farm on Apr 18 the presence of several small groups of Starlings landing in the grass fields and then flying purposefully back to the residential area of Havant, where they probably have nests, suggested that they have already started collecting **Leatherjackets** from the fields to feed young in the nest.

**Brambling:** These seem reluctant to fly north (where snow is still falling) and on Apr 16 there were still more than 65 at Fleet Pond in north Hampshire. Apr 18 brought a report of 50+ still at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood and a Crowborough garden had 20+ on Apr 19

**Linnet:** These are now returning to the areas where they will nest, most of them arriving from across the English Channel - on Apr 16 some 400 arrived at Portland with another 170 coming in next day

**Cirl Bunting:** 10 were seen in a quick visit to Prawle Point (the southernmost tip of Devon) on Apr 12 by a birder who had been in that area to twitch a **Little Crane** at Exminster

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies**

Including the four species mentioned below there have been reports of **a total of 15 species on the wing this week** (including **Holly Blue** and **Small Copper**)

**Grizzled Skipper:** I have already reported 2 seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 10 as first of the year but I now see that one was flying at Levin Down (north of Goodwood in the Midhurst area) on that same day. Since then up to 10 have been seen at Mill Hill and two were out at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Apr 14.

**Clouded Yellow:** One presumed migrant had been seen at Portland on Apr 3 and on Apr 16 another reached the Dorset coast at Durlston

**Green Hairstreak:** One at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on Apr 14 seems to be the undisputed first of the year.

**Small Tortoiseshell:** These seem to be doing well this year despite the parasitic fly **Sturmia bella** which has only arrived from Europe in the past few years. One place where Tortoiseshells are doing especially well seems to be the Ferring Rife at Worthing (where 11 were seen on Apr 15 and 16 were counted on Apr 16) and that seems to be the result of an agreement to leave continuous banks of rough vegetation where in the past it would all have been mown flat

**Caterpillars: Red Admiral caterpillars** which have continued to feed through the winter in Sussex were starting to pupate on Apr 10

## Moths

**White-shouldered House Moth (0648 Endrosis sarcitrella):** As the name implies this moth lives indoors (the larvae eating dried plant and animal debris) and this allows it to breed all round the year. Two were reported at Newhaven on Apr 13

**White Plume Moth (1513 Pterophorus pentadactyla):** These moths normally fly in June and July with an optional second brood in September so I do not know why one should chose to appear on the window of a Fish and Chip shop serving soldiers in Aldershot on Apr 14

**Pine Beauty (2179 Panolis flammea):** This pretty moth is fairly common where there are pine needles for the caterpillars to eat - adults fly in March and April so this one seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 12 was late as first of the year

**The Mullein (2221 Cucullia verbasci):** First report also from Thanet on Apr 14, this species flies in April and May and is fairly common in the south

## Other Insects:

**Bee Fly:** One gave me a close view on Apr 16 when I found it hovering around my front door in the late afternoon before it settled on a sunlit rock

**Queen Wasp:** The first I know of out and about this year was in my garden on Apr 16

**Nursery Tent Spider (Pisaura mirabilis):** Two large specimens were typically resting on the sunlit leaves of low vegetation in my garden on Apr 20

## PLANTS

**220 species have been found in flower so far this year** (200 seen by me). The same totals for April so far are 153 and 142

**Adders Tongue Fern:** First mentioned in the Durlston rangers log on Apr 15

**Bracken:** Not flowering but some leaves fully unfurled by Apr 14

**Nootka Cypress:** Not yet flowering but the leaf tips of trees at the south end of South Moor Lane (just inside the Budds Farm fence) were bright yellow with the buds of male flowers on Apr 15

**Marsh Marigold:** Now at the peak of their flowering with some 60 small clumps found on the Langstone South Moors on Apr 15 and bigger plants seen elsewhere

**Shining Cranesbill:** The large mass of plants lining the footpath from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane in Havant had just started to flower when they were sprayed with weedkiller by council workers - starting to wilt on Apr 18.

**Least Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*):** Just one flower had opened by Apr 18 when I visited the only site that I know of for this plant (beside a footpath close to Southbrook Road running through the new Langstone housing).

**Bird Cherry:** The first flowers I have seen this year were on a tree growing where the footpath mentioned above meets the Langstone A27 round about (seen Apr 18)

**Salad Burnet:** Very early flowers reported at Durlston on Apr 19

**Wood Avens:** The very first flower I have seen was out in my Havant garden on Apr 20

**Pellitory of the Wall:** First flowers seen in Havant on Apr 17

**Wood Speedwell:** First flowers found by Brian Fellows in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth on Apr 14

**Wall Speedwell:** This was flowering in an Emsworth carpark flowerbed on Apr 16

**Bugle:** Two plants in flower in the marshy SSSI at Warblington Farm on Apr 18 did something to cheer up a day of miserable weather

**Toothwort:** This had been found in Lowtons Copse at Clanfield (north of Waterlooville) on Apr 12 but was omitted from last week's summary

**Elder:** The first two flowerheads had open flowers at Langstone on Apr 18

**Guernsey Fleabane:** This had started flowering at Warblington on Apr 18

**Slender Thistle:** Just one plant was in flower at Budds Farm on Apr 15 - good to see that the species is surviving as the site where it occurred in thousands for many recent years had been reclaimed and turned into a new carpark this year.

**Distant Sedge:** What seemed to be this species (with the female spikelets well spaced down the stem but not yet developed although the upper male flowers were out) was found in the Warblington SSSI on Apr 18

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Badger:** One dead at side of Marlpit Lane on Apr 16

**Common Seal:** A wanderer swimming east off Stokes Bay at Gosport on Apr 19

**Fallow Deer:** A small bunch of 12 females and youngsters seen by day in a field east of Pitts Copse (north of Aldsworth Pond) on Apr 14

**Water Vole:** A report of a pair seen (possibly mating) in the R Ems at Brook Meadow on Apr 16 could show that at least 3 pairs are present there

**Hare:** Michael Prior, head forester at Stansted, reported sightings of 3 on plough in the East Park and 3 in the arable field between Woodberry Lane and Horsepasture Farm - both reports dated Apr 13 and the latter report co-incides with a sighting of one on Woodberry Lane on Apr 10

**Slow-worm:** While at my computer on Apr 16 I saw a **Magpie** fly down from the garden wall into long grass from which it brought out a large **Slow-worm** which it dropped, wriggling violently, on the concrete garden path. I was able to get down in time to drive off the **Magpie** and move the **Slow-worm** to dense cover under bushes where the **Magpie** could not reach it. The **Slow-worm** had a fleck of blood showing where the **Magpie** had gripped it but seemed to have escaped serious damage. This is not the first time I have had **Magpies** do this in the garden at this time of year.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 14 - 20 (WEEK 15 OF 2008)

### Fri 18 Apr

#### Four new flowering plants plus some weedkiller

Another chilly, windy day did not promise much in the way of wildlife but I took a walk to Warblington, starting out past the Lymbourne triangle 'wildflower meadow' which had nothing better to show than an array of bindweed shoots covering the tilled area where the flowers are expected later.

More depressing was the evidence that council workers had recently been along the 'twitchel' path between Wade Court Road and Pook Lane with their weedkiller sprays, causing many harmless and beautiful wild flowers to wilt (and no doubt soon die). Among these were the host of **Shining Cranesbill** plants which were just starting to flower, the **Pellitory of the Wall** on which I saw the first flowers yesterday at a different location, and a small patch of **Wild Garlic (Ramsons)** now in full flower (but the first I had seen for myself).

Over the A27 in the old section of Pook Lane I was already aware of more destruction where a large patch of **Sweet Violets** that were flowering last month have been submerged under a bank of sludge recently dug out of the ditch that happens to carry any run-off from the A27 where roadworks have been taking place, but as I turned east towards Church Lane I did note my first sight of **Meadow Foxtail** grass in flower. More cheer came when I turned the corner of the 'Black Barn' from Church Lane into the carpark area - the **Common Ramping Fumitory** was still flowering and had been joined by two newly flowering plants - **Cornsalad** and **Guernsey Fleabane** - and further along the foot of the barn, hidden by **Nettles**, the out of season **Black Nightshade** still had its white flowers.

Entering the churchyard my spirits sank again as it seemed that all the grass had been cut down this very morning but luckily the mowing was restricted to the area around the paths leading to the church doors and the east end of the churchyard was still showing many unharmed **Cuckoo Flowers**.

Continuing east along the path to Emsworth I was approaching the main stream crossing when I heard the loud song of a **Cetti's Warbler** distantly upstream, and in the meadow north of the path (Field L on my map) two **Swallows** were on the wing with a **Song Thrush** on the ground. Beyond the stream two **Linnets**, seemingly a pair intending to settle, were feeding on weed seeds, and in the air I noticed several parties of **Starlings** that were probably already foraging in the fields for **Leatherjackets** to feed their young still in nests.

Heading south in the marshy SSSI a **Willow Warbler** was singing in the cemetery to my right but I was more excited by a couple of plants of **Bugle** in flower at my feet (first for the year). Soon I found two flowering **Sedge species** - one seemingly more **Spring Sedge** and the other seemingly **Distant Sedge**.

At the seawall I turned back west to Langstone, and passing the end of Pook Lane I had a view of the local **Buzzard** keeping a low profile in the strong wind by perching on a field gatepost. Another **Cetti's Warbler** was singing as I went past Langstone Pond and turned right to go through the meadow called Russell's Field on the east side of the pond and Lymbourne stream. **Buttercups** were just starting to flower in this field (**Bulbous, Meadow** and **Creeping** all in flower) but the bonus here was my first two open flowers on **Elder**.

I crossed the Billy Trail and went north up the path between the new houses heading for the Town Centre, and my luck was in when I had crossed Southbrook Road and looked under the **Blackthorn** bushes on the west side of the path - here I had only last year discovered the only colony known to me of **Least Yellow Sorrel** (**Oxalis exilis**), and already one minute flower was open.

The path I was on crosses the A27 close to the Langstone Roundabout by a footbridge going over the sliproads and under the A27 flyover. Having climbed to the southern edge of the bridge I found myself among the flowers of another species that was new to my year list - **Bird Cherry** - and in the Juniper Square area north of the A27 I was able to tick two more good plants (neither new for the year) being **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** and **Round-leaved Cranesbill**.

[Thu 17 Apr](#)

### Yesterday's News

The chill wind today meant that I have little to report other than my first sight of **Pellitory of the Wall** in flower as I paid a brief visit to the Eastern Road cemetery to have another look at the **Spring Sedge** (of whose identity I am now pretty certain). As well as checking that the **Sedge** plants had small rhizomes I noted the date of the grave in which they occur - the name on the tombstone is Edmund Sheppard and the date 1907. Perhaps he had his grave, which has a substantial stone surround preventing the grass mowers from desecrating it, covered with turf from Portsdown, though the abundance of gardens on Hayling Island which have **Autumn Ladies' Tresses** in their gardens shows that most turf on the market in this area has in the past come from a downland source.

Yesterday, in addition to working through the latest news from others for my summary, I got out into the garden on a couple of occasions to enjoy the warm sunshine which also attracted a **Peacock butterfly**, my first **Queen Wasp** of the year, two **unidentified hoverflies** of different species but both with gold and black

striped abdomens, and a **Bee Fly** which I found hovering around the front door before it settled on a sunlit rock to give me a very good view.

In the evening sunshine I paid a brief visit to Marlpit Lane at Woodmancote in the hope of an early **Nightingale** - no luck with any birds and the only notable sight was of a large **dead Badger** at the roadside.

[Tue 15 Apr](#)

### **Slender Thistle in flower and Cetti's Warbler seen!**

A walk down the Langbrook Stream this morning found **Red Campion** near to flowering and allowed me to see two of the many **Blackcaps** that are now present and singing. At the 'Butterbur site' both the female plants and the **Giant Butterbur** were now effectively over and hidden among tall nettles but by the stream edge three clusters of **Kingcups** were flowering and one plant of the **Creeping Comfrey** was still showing flowers.

On the South Moors 'Orchid field' few **Cuckoo Flowers** were out and some **60 plants of Kingcup were in bloom** while the first of three **Cetti's Warblers** was singing (the others were at the Budds Farm pools and Langstone Pond). Continuing towards Southmoor Lane the 'bird seed plot' still had a number of **Cabbage plants in flower** (now easy to see as the majority of last years plants are dead and have been flattened by wind and rain).

Reaching the lane and turning left I was surprised to see one plant of **Slender Thistle** already had flowers just inside the Budds Farm fence under the trees which have 'leather button' type cones suggesting **Macrocarpa (Monterey Cypress)** but now showing bright yellow male flowers at the tips of every leaf to show they are actually **Nootka Cypresses**. The **Slender Thistle** was doubly welcome now that the area that was once the IBM Club tennis courts (and in recent years has been the home of vast numbers of these uncommon thistles) has been turned into a new carpark (not yet in use).

On Budds Farm pools I was able to see that at least **four pairs of Gadwall** were present (outnumbering **Mallard** here). The **Swan** was sitting but **six Canada Geese** parading on the far bank seemed to suggest that none of them are currently nesting. One the water were **22 Tufted Duck** with the **two pairs of Shelduck** but only **three Shoveler** and **two Teal** among the **Little Grebes, Coot** and **Moorhens**. A **Cetti's Warbler** was singing loudly from various bits of thick cover but at one point it flew across the water and **allowed me to watch it for a short time on top of some brambles** (the first I have actually seen for years!) At least one **Willow Warbler** was heard here and there had been another in the South Moors central hedge.

Going back along the South Moors shore I watched **three Swallows** over the Moors and then saw **three Meadow Pipits** and heard **one Skylark**. At the mouth of the Langbrook the only birds were **two Shelduck**, half a dozen **Oystercatchers** and four **Redshank** plus a single **Whimbrel**. Upstream the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant** just within the Moors had started to flower.

At Langstone Mill Pond another **Cetti's** was singing unseen with **19 Egrets** in the trees at the back of the pond (the tide was high) and the **Swan** on its nest. In the pony field north of the pond a **Fox** was again sitting out in the open with one **Grey Heron** and half a dozen **Moorhen** not far from it.

[Mon 14 Apr](#)

### Hollybank Woods and Aldsworth Pond

A quick look at Aldsworth Pond this afternoon gave me my first **Whitethroat** briefly scratching out its song while a party of more than 6 **Swallows**, seemingly based on the local stables, circled overhead.

On the pond the **pair of Swans** were back with one sitting on a nest at the edge of one of the overgrown islands while one bird of **two pairs of Canada Geese** seemed to be sitting on a nest just behind the **Swan**. At least **two families of Coot chicks** were enjoying the excess of weed on the pond surface in the company of **four Tufted Ducks (three males)**, a couple of **Mallard** pairs, and a few **Little Grebe** and **Moorhens** but no **Shoveler** or **Gadwall** to be seen.

After looking at the pond I walked up the track towards Sindles Farm and enjoyed the sight of **two massive clumps of Kingcups** in full flower. North of the pond one field had a good showing of **Sheep with lambs** and a more distant field had around a **dozen Fallow Deer** (seemingly by their small size all Does or young from last year). Looking to Aldsworth Manor on the hill I could see activity around a few of the many **Rook nests** that are in that area.

Before getting to the pond I visited the Longcopse Hill area of the Hollybank Woods for another look at the small **Cherry or Plum trees** whose identity has so far baffled me. This time I took some photos and collected a few more samples which I will have a close look at later.

The count of flowering **Early Purple Orchids** was up to 20 and all the species seen last week were still flourishing. In addition I was pleased to find both **Wood Sorrel** in flower and a large patch of **Solomon's Seal** plants already more or less full grown but with no flowers yet. Strident **Mistle Thrush song** was more or less non-stop on the hill and at least one **Swallow** chattered as it flew over the tree tops out of my sight. Lower down I watched a **pair of Blue Tits** apparently visiting a nest they had made in an old **Woodpeckers nest hole**.

### **SUMMARY FOR APR 7 - 13 (WEEK 14 OF 2008)**

**Highlights of bird news** are the first **Greylag Goose** and **Great Crested Grebe chicks**; first **Little Tern** seen in Dorset and **Cuckoo** and **Spotted Flycatcher** (plus local excitement with **Pied Flycatcher** and male **Redstarts** seen well at Langstone); several **Hobbies** and a **Wood Warbler** have been seen and **Nightingale**, **Willow Tit** and **Tree Pipit** have been heard; vagrant rarities have been **Little Bittern**, **Purple Heron**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Hoopoe**, **Bluethroat**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Penduline Tit** and **Dark-eyed Junco**; one of several

migrant **Cranes** overshot France and landed in Hampshire while four **Black Kites** escaped from London Zoo.

**Insect news** includes the first **Small Copper**, **Grizzled Skipper** (and probably **Wall Brown**) on the wing and both **Silver Y** and **Emperor Moth** seen while I discovered more about **Mining Bees**.

The first **Green-winged**, **Early Purple** and **Twayblade orchids** flowered, as did **Horseshoe Vetch** in Dorset. Locally a **strange cherry type tree** is giving me trouble with its identification. Several other first flowerings included **Tartarian Honeysuckle**, **Spring Beauty**, **Bur Chervil** and **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant**, all found on Hayling. In Havant **Spring Sedge** has appeared on an old grave.

And in Dorset **Roe Deer** are turning reddish as they acquire their spring 'pelage' (or more simple their summer coat).

## **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** First **chicks** had hatched at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough by Apr 7

**Red-necked Grebe:** Three were still present in England on Apr 6 - singles now in summer plumage at Weir Wood, Weymouth Harbour and Buckden gravel pits in Bedfordshire. The Weir Wood bird still there on Apr 10

**Slavonian Grebe:** One still at the Swineham gravel pits on west shore of Poole Harbour on Apr 12 - photo on Dorset Bird Club webpage

**Manx Shearwater:** Now back in British waters to breed - at Portland an estimated 1000 birds were seen on Apr 11 and 500 on Apr 12 when one or two were in the Hurst area west of Lymington and two were as far east as Seaford

**Cormorant:** An inland tree nesting bird was on its nest in the Haywards Heath area (St George's Retreat Lake) on Apr 7

**Bittern:** One reported at Radipole (Weymouth) on Apr 9 was the first reported there since Feb 20. More interestingly one had started '**Booming**' at Stodmarsh (east of Canterbury) on Apr 10

**Little Bittern:** One arrived at Radipole (Weymouth) on Apr 8 - first to be reported this year.

**Cattle Egret:** Where there have been two birds in the Lavant area of Chichester since Feb 14 there were four present on Apr 7. In Britain as a whole there were - at the start of this week - still a total of 33 birds (19 in Cornwall, 5 near Plymouth, 2 elsewhere in South Devon and singles in Cheshire and Gloucestershire (Slimbridge) plus the Chichester birds and one still at Abbotsbury in Dorset. By the end of the week the only reports were of one at Abbotsbury in Dorset (still there on Apr 12) and two in the Bucklers Hard area near Lymington on Apr 11 (though only one seen there on Apr 12)

**Great White Egret:** A 'probable' flew east over the Lewes area on Apr 11

**Grey Heron:** Several young are now well grown in nests at Weir Wood

**Purple Heron:** One present in Somerset on Apr 8

**Spoonbill:** The bird at Titchfield Haven has not been reported since Apr 6 and the one at Lymington was last reported on Apr 9 while Apr 10 was the last report of 3 in Poole Harbour and 1 at Lodmoor. On Apr 12 one was at Abbotsbury and another seems to have been flying around the Langstone and Pagham Harbour areas (seen going north over the Hayling Oysterbeds and also going over Pagham towards Selsey - the latter sighting reported rings on both legs).

**Greylag:** The **first goslings** were seen on Apr 6 at Blashford Lakes (Ringwood) and on Apr 7 (though probably hatched Apr 6) in the Pannel Valley (Rye Bay)

**Barnacle Goose:** Two were seen at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream west of Langstone village on Apr 10 - presumably the same two that were first seen at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Mar 3, then at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 where they were present on Mar 16 and 26.

**Brent:** On Apr 7 there were 48 in Christchurch Harbour, 20 in the Lymington area and 12 off the Langstone South Moors. On Apr 8 a total of 230 flew past Seaford and Dungeness reported 162 flying east (probably including 87 that were seen passing Selsey). 10 were in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Apr 9 and 24 flew past Selsey Bill on Apr 10. Latest sighting is of 69 in Southampton Water on Apr 12

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The family of 4 were still at Lymington on Apr 7 but have not been reported since.

**Gadwall:** On Apr 10 there were still 4 birds (2 pairs) at Budds Farm pools in Havant with another 2 pairs (plus a spare male) on Bedhampton Mill Pool

**Teal:** On Apr 7 four were still on the flood behind Langstone Pond (closely watched by a **Fox** sitting back on his haunches within a few yards of them) and a similar number were still on Budds Farm pools

**Garganey:** The 'tame' drake was still at Pagham Lagoon on Apr 8 and four more genuine wild birds were at Rye Harbour on Apr 11

**Pintail:** One drake was still at Bembridge (IoW) on Apr 8

**Shoveler:** Still seven at Budds Farm on Apr 10

**Red-Crested Pochard:** A very tame pair were almost coming for bread at the Farlington Deeps pool on Apr 11

**Scaup:** What seems to have been a genuine female was in the Alver Valley at Gosport on Apr 12

**Eider:** These are still trickling past on their way north. 14 went past Dungeness on Apr 8, Selsey Bill reported 3 on Apr 10 and Seaford had 6 go by on Apr 12

**Velvet Scoter:** On Apr 8 five flew past Selsey Bill and two were seen passing Portland while one was with the estimated 600 Common Scoter still in Rye Bay. Another flew past Portland on Apr 10

**Merganser:** A flock of 42 at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream (west of Langstone Bridge) were presumably passing migrants

**Black Kite:** The birds seen recently near Salisbury and near Aldershot were not necessarily early migrants which had overshot France as we now hear that 4 of these birds recently escaped from London Zoo and have not been re-captured.

**Red Kite:** Among the almost daily reports of these one was seen over north Hayling, then over Portsdown, on Apr 9

**Goshawk:** The number of these in southern Britain increases year by year and a young male seen over a garden in Romsey at midday on Apr 9 was probably the progeny of birds breeding in Hampshire last year. Apr 10 brought a sighting of an adult male over Stodmarsh east of Canterbury in Kent.

**Osprey:** These continue to appear as they pause for refreshment on their way north - on Apr 8 one was again seen eating a fish on Thorney Island and others have been seen recently at Ringwood, Southampton and Bembridge. Apr 12 brought sightings from Lepe at the mouth of Southampton Water and from Littlehampton

**Merlin:** These are getting scarce by now but one was seen at The Fleet in Dorset on Apr 6

**Hobby:** On Apr 2 the first of the year flew in off the sea at Gosport and since then one was seen going north over Horsham on Apr 4 and another came in off the sea at Selsey Bill on Apr 8. Since then there have been sightings at Southampton (Lower Test) and Shoreham on Apr 10 and at Weir Wood near Crowborough on Apr 12

**Golden Pheasant:** These seem to be absent from Hampshire and West Sussex nowadays so a report of a male at Arlington in the Eastbourne area on Apr 11 is a reminder of the days when they could be found at Kingley Vale, long after they had vanished from the Q E Park near Petersfield

**Crane:** More than 30 of these seem to be permanently resident in Britain nowadays, most of them as a resident flock in Norfolk, but at this time of year huge numbers of these birds are on passage, returning to nest in northern Europe and a few of these stray into Britain. One of these (I assume) dropped in at Woolmer Pond near Alton on the evening of Apr 8 and was still there next morning (i.e. today). In addition to this bird (and the two which were seen mating at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 4) Lee Evans tells us of "migrant COMMON CRANES over Gibraltar Point NNR (Lincs), Birchmoor (Warks) and Upper Caldecotte (Beds)"

**Oystercatcher:** On Mar 6 we heard of one being drowned by an Oyster which had closed on the birds foot and would not let go as the tide rose on the west Hayling shore. A similar saga has recently occurred on the north Kent coast, but this time the bird was luckier as it was found by dog walkers while still alive but unable to move. The finders took it to a vet who removed the Clam (or was it a Whitstable 'native' oyster?) and released the bird where it was found.

**Black-winged Stilt:** Three of these arrived at The Lizard in Cornwall on Apr 6 and were still there on Apr 8

**Avocet:** These are now returning to breeding sites in large numbers. On Apr 11 there were 48 at Pett Level on Rye Bay and on Apr 12 the count at Rye Harbour was up to 26

**Little Ringed Plover:** A good number of these have already arrived in Britain (the first was at the Blashford Lakes as early as Feb 29) but a local sighting of one in the flooded pony field beside the main road on Thorney Island on Apr 8 is worth reporting

**Golden Plover:** Still some pausing on their way north - on Apr 12 there were 53 at Rye Harbour

**Knot:** Three were among a mixed flock of migrant Godwits sitting out the high tide on Apr 7 at the mouth of the Langbrook stream west of Langstone village. A bigger flock (85 birds) on the move was at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Apr 9

**Little Stint:** One at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Apr 9 was an unusual spring passage bird.

**Purple Sandpiper:** On Apr 6 Trevor Hewson watched a number of these birds flying in to form a continually growing flock on the shore off Barton on sea (west of Lymington) - by the time he left more than 30 were present and he speculated that these birds were gathering into a large flock intending to make a long distance passage flight together. If this was true it seems the birds did not depart immediately as there were still more than 20 there on Apr 9

**Godwits:** Black- and Bar-tailed Godwits normally keep themselves to themselves and are not often seen together so it was a surprise to find two mixed flocks on either side of Langstone village on the morning of Apr 7. To the east of the village there were at least 80 of each species, the smaller, paler Bar-tails gathered into a tight flock on dry ground while the longer legged and more colourful Black-tails continued to feed in the rising water. When I ceased watching them and head west to the South Moors shore I was surprised another mixed flock (about 15 birds of each species) on the shingle spit at the mouth of the Langbrook stream - neither species is normally seen here and the presence of three Knot in the flock was even more unusual so I concluded that this whole group of birds were unfamiliar with the area but had been travelling together and had just paused here for rest and refreshment (having to delay the refreshment until the rising tide had dropped to expose the mud). I guess the bigger flock was present for exactly the same reason.

**Whimbrel:** There is no doubt that their spring passage is now under way - on Apr 11 the first two migrant males to be seen in Langstone Harbour were off Farlington Marshes and on Apr 12 a flock of 10 was at Christchurch Harbour with another 2 flying past while four more were in Rye Harbour

**Spotted Redshank:** On Apr 7 singles were still at Christchurch Harbour and Yarmouth (IoW), and on Apr 9 two were seen on the Lymington shore

**Common Sandpiper:** Wintering birds have been regularly seen in both Christchurch and Poole Harbours but until Apr 6 there had been no mention of them in Portland Harbour so the arrival of 2 there may have marked the arrival of the first migrants (but it could equally have shown that wintering birds already in

Britain were feeling the call of spring and moving along the coast to new areas). Another possible migrant was seen flying up the River Stour near Wimborne Minster on Apr 12

**Great Skua:** An increase in numbers at Portland (6 passing on Apr 11 and 9 passing on Apr 12) probably reflects their spring passage getting under way

**Med Gulls:** Plenty of these now around but anyone wishing to get close views of them could try what I did on Apr 7 which brought me very close to six pairs in their full breeding plumage. I was wanting to get better views of the Godwits mentioned above and so walked out on the Langstone 'wadeway' to the very edge of the rising water - here I had the sun behind me and was as close as I could get to the Godwits but while watching them the calls of Med Gulls attracted my attention to a dozen of them resting on the mud in pairs much closer to me than they would have been on the Oysterbeds lagoon island, seen from the shore there.

**Iceland Gull:** The Newhaven bird was seen again on Apr 12

**Kumlein's Gull:** This is not a separate species but just a Canadian race of Iceland Gull. One was at Grafham Water in Cambridgeshire on Apr 8

**Glaucous Gull:** The immature bird was still in Shoreham Harbour on Apr 10

**Sandwich Tern:** These have been passing along the coast since the beginning of March but have not so far started to come into the Solent Harbours - a report of 2 in Emsworth Harbour on Apr 10 may show they are now doing so but the birds concerned could well be ones that have been in Chichester Harbour all winter.

**Little Tern:** The first and only report so far this year is of 3 seen at Ferrybridge (where you cross from Weymouth to Portland Island) on Apr 5. Last year the first was at Dungeness on Apr 12 with sightings at Lymington and Selsey on Apr 13 followed by daily sightings at many sites though I was not aware of any in Langstone Harbour until Apr 24. In 2006 one was at Lymington on Apr 5 with the comment that it was two days later than the first in 2005

**Guillemot:** Durlston reported more than 400 on breeding ledges there by Apr 9

**Puffin:** Although one had been seen at Portland on Mar 15 what seem to be the first returning breeders were three at Portland on Apr 8

**Cuckoo:** The first seems to have been one at Hurstpierpoint north of Brighton on Apr 5 but I hear that one was at Farlington Marshes on Apr 6. These have since been Dorset sightings at West Moors on Apr 8 and in the Purbeck area on Apr 10 followed by one at Pulborough Brooks, also on Apr 10, and another over Ampfield Woods near Romsey on Apr 12

**Short-eared Owl:** These are still passing through with sightings at three different Dorset sites on Apr 7, 9, and 10 (the last being at Pilsdon Pen, north of Bridpoer, which I find is the highest point in Dorset with a long distance Jubilee Trail footpath running over it as it crosses the county from south west to north east). A later bird was seen at Pagham Harbour on Apr 12.

**Hoopoe:** On Apr 4 one was seen in a private garden in the Crowborough area before it flew off north but was seen again on Apr 11 in the Ashdown Forest area.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** One was in Norfolk on or around Apr 8

**House Martin:** The biggest group seen together so far was of an estimated 30 birds over Ivy Lake at Chichester on Apr 10

**Tree Pipit:** Although some of these birds may have been here since the end of March Portland did not record its first arrival until Apr 8. Since then there have been sightings at Seaford and Weir Wood reservoir in East Sussex, and at Marley Common, just outside Haslemere but in West Sussex and in Wareham Forest in Dorset - the last two were both on Apr 12 and both birds were singing, apparently back on territory.

**Meadow Pipit:** These are still moving north - on Apr 12 around 50 came in off the sea at Lymington

**Nightingale:** The first report came from Dungeness on Apr 5 and we now have a second report of one singing at Woods Mill near Henfield in the Adur valley on Apr 10

**White Spotted Bluethroat:** On Apr 8 one arrived at Dungeness and another was present in Lancashire

**Common Redstart:** Although the first arrived in Sussex on Mar 25 and there were 7 reports from widespread sites on Apr 4 and another 7 on Apr 5 there was an exciting local sighting on the afternoon of Apr 6 of one on the shoreline hedge of the Wade Farm field between Wade and Pook Lane (immediately east of Langstone pond) - even better, there were two stunning males in the same place next morning.

**Wheatear:** A very early bird of the **Greenland race** was at Farlington Marshes on Apr 11

**Ring Ouzel:** After a wave of arrivals on Mar 30 the only reports have come from Christchurch Harbour (Apr 4 and 6) and Portland (Apr 8 and 9) with one briefly in a Bognor garden on Apr 12

**Sedge Warbler:** These were back at the Little Deeps on Thorney Island by Apr 8 (they have been seen at several other sites since Mar 26)

**Reed Warbler:** No further reports of the early birds which were heard singing at Emsworth and Lymington on Apr 4 - at a guess they immediately moved on north as the BTO Birdtrack map shows that Reed Warblers have by now arrived at seven locations in the Midlands. Latest news on the south coast is of one singing at Rye Harbour on Apr 8

**Garden Warbler:** First two reports both dated Apr 9 and both singing at Wivelsfield Green near Haywards Heath and in the Horsham area

**Wood Warbler:** First of the year at Horsham on Apr 9

**Willow Warbler:** I heard song from at least three birds at Budds Farm pools on Apr 7 but I guess many others will have heard them since Apr 8 when there was a massive arrival of 200 at Portland. (First for the year was at Selsey on Mar 16)

**Spotted Flycatcher:** The first report which I have heard for the year is of one near Highclere in north Hampshire (south of Newbury) on Apr 7. Previously the 'earliest ever' was Apr 8 in both Hampshire and Sussex, and as this report has not been confirmed it could possibly have been a sighting of a female Pied Flycatcher

**Pied Flycatcher:** The first of this year was at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 1 and at least six birds are known to have arrived by now - one of them was a male which showed well on the shoreline hedge of Wade Farm just east of Langstone Pond on the afternoon of Apr 6 and still there early on Apr 7. By chance Richard Ford was visiting the area and has captured a picture of it which you can see at <http://www.digitalwildlife.co.uk/birds/piedfly.htm>

**Willow Tit:** One was singing in the Test valley north of Mottisfont on Apr 11 - the first to be heard in Hampshire this year

**Penduline Tit:** In his Apr 8 round up Lee Evans told us of 2 males in Suffolk

**Great Grey Shrike:** A late bird was seen at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 8 and another was in the New Forest at Vereley Hill near Burley on Apr 9

**Serin:** After one in a Bognor garden on Apr 3 a second for the year was at Portland on Apr 9

**Greenfinch:** One was seen feeding young in a Worthing garden as early as Mar 17 and we now have a second report of young being fed on Apr 8

**Dark-eyed Junco** (also apparently now known in American English as a **Slate Colored Junco**): One has been showing well at Dungeness all day on Apr 7 and again on Apr 8. This species is the American equivalent of our Snow Buntings - breeding in the far north of north America and occasionally venturing south in the winter but rarely turning up on our side of the Atlantic. The first for Britain was also seen at Dungeness on 26 May 1960 (a bit late for a winter bird!)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies

**Red-veined Darter:** No, not yet on the wing but I was interested to see an entry by Sam Smith from Rye Harbour on the Rye Bay website telling how he had recently acquired a book on the identification of dragonflies from the exuviae left when they emerge from the larval state. Using this to check exuviae he had collected last summer he had been able to prove that **Red-veined Darters** seen at Rye Harbour had bred there and were not just visiting migrants

**Large Red Damselfly:** Again no reports so far this year but two teneral specimens were on the wing by Apr 7 last year when they started to emerge generally from Apr 18

## Butterflies

**Grizzled Skipper:** First two of the year seen at Mill Hill, Shoreham, on Apr 10. Looking at the Hampshire dates this is a few days earlier than in the last two years but not as early as 2003 (Apr 5) or 2002 (Apr 8)

**Green-veined White:** One was photographed at Portland on Apr 1 but the only other report so far is of one in the Gosport area on Apr 9

**Small Copper:** First for the year were 2 seen at Browdown, west of Gosport, on Apr 8 with another in the Gosport area next day

**Holly Blue:** Of the 13 reports so far this year the 12th came from Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Apr 10

**Peacock:** This species is thriving this year and a late report from Gosport says that more than 50 were seen there on Apr 4 (which is the same day on which more than 40 were seen around Pagham Harbour with 23 seen near Rye on the previous day). A more recent surge of sightings came from a wood in the Eastbourne area on Apr 9 when 29 were counted.

**Wall Brown:** These are normally not seen until May but there was a Hampshire record of one out on Apr 7 in 2002 so a possible sighting of one at Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Apr 9 this year may indicate an early emergence of the few which are left on the south coast.

## Moths

**Phyllonorycter messaniella (0321):** A moth of this species emerged on Apr 7 from a leaf mine taken from a **Holm Oak** in the Thanet area of Kent

**Pale Flat-body (0700 Agonopterix pallorella):** This is an uncommon species which I have not seen reported in previous years but one was found at Mill Hill, Shoreham on Apr 5. The new English name makes it sound drab but the photo on the UK Moths website shows the whole upper wing surface to be a delightful pale peach pink colour offset with a few tiny black dots. This nationally rare species will have emerged last year in August or September and then overwintered as an adult.

**Grapholita internana (1242):** One of these **Gorse specialist Tortrix moths** was found in the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 4 and turned out to be the first recorded in Kent since 1954

**Emperor Moth (1643 Saturnia pavonia):** Two of these spectacular moths were seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 11 - these were males which hunt by day for females (which only fly by night but give off pheromones to attract males into their hiding places)

**Barred Tooth-striped (1880 Trichopteryx polycommata):** This was a normal first for the year (this nationally rare species flies in March and April) found at Mill Hill, Shoreham, on Apr 5

**Siver Y (2441):** An early migrant (the first I know of for this year) was in a trap in the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 10

## Other Insects

**Yellow Meadow Ant:** The first to be reported this year was seen at Durlston on Apr 10. It was emerging from the nest tunnel of a mining bee where it had been enjoying a breakfast of bee egg or food intended for the bee larva

**Yellow-legged Mining Bee (*Andrena flavipes*):** This species came to my attention via a piece about it written by Brian Banks on the Rye Bay website after he had found the bees on Apr 6 on his garden lawn at Northiam, north of Hastings. This is a very common mining bee found in the short grass of lawns - The Garden Safari website reports a single colony of some 40,000 bees and where these large congregations occur gardeners naturally wish the bees would go elsewhere and not dig up their 'hallowed turf'. The species is said to be flourishing and extending its range northwards. There are around ten common *Andrena* species, all similar in size to Honey Bees but mostly blackish in colour, one exception being the **Tawny Mining-bee (*A. fulva*)** in which the female is covered in bright orange hairs.

Brian Banks adds to my knowledge with the following comment .. "These bees are the host of a number of other species. The **Dark-edged, or Common Bee-fly *Bombylius major*** and the **Dotted Bee-fly *Bombylius discolor*** are frequently photographed on this website in earlier posts. Both have been sighted in our garden this weekend. These attractive insects hover over bare soil flicking their eggs over the ground in the hope that some will find their way into the nests of the mining bee. On hatching the larvae search for and then devour the solitary bee larvae. These are not the only enemies of the solitary bees. A rather attractive cleptoparasitic **Cuckoo bee *Nomada fucata*** also deposits its eggs in their nests where they feed on the pollen provisioned by the solitary bee".

**Fabricius' Nomad Bee (*Nomada fabriciana*):** This is another predator on the contents of mining bee nests

## PLANTS

**The number of species seen in flower so far this year is 210 with 189 on my personal list.** The figures for April so far are 134 with 123 seen by me

**Field Horsetail:** First find of the fertile cones of this species was made by Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Apr 8

**Male Fern:** Fronds were starting to unfurl in the Hollybank Woods on Apr 8

**Hybrid Larch:** Large trees with larger cones than those described for either European or Japanese Larch were already green with new leaves in the Hollybank Woods on Apr 8

**Creeping Buttercup:** This was found in flower during Jan and Feb but I have not recorded it in flower since Mar 1 until Apr 9

**Stream Water Crowfoot:** I had seen a couple of flower buds in the outflow from the Bedhampton springs (water works) on Mar 27 and by Apr 7 there was a fair show of flowers in the Langbrook Stream.

**Early Wintercress (*Barbarea intermedia*):** Ignoring the odd single plant seen in Havant since Feb 27 flowering on a last year's plant stem my first of the year was found on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on Apr 12

**Cuckoo Flower:** The first of the year for the Brook Meadow site in Emsworth, a single plant, was found on Apr 8

**Field pennycress:** A single fresh plant in flower at Broadmarsh in Havant on Apr 10

**Hoary Cress:** Many plants in flower by Apr 10

**Spring beauty (*Claytonia perfoliata*):** This had just started to flower on the Sinah Common shores when I was there on Apr 12

**Red Clover:** A couple of flowering plants which had narrowly escaped road verge mowing on Hayling were the first I have recorded this year

**Horseshoe Vetch:** This was already starting to flower at Durlston on Apr 9

**Wild Cherry:** Trees in the Hollybank Woods were in full flower on Apr 8

**Dwarf cherry (*Prunus cerasus*)** or some sort of Wild Plum??: When visiting the extreme south east corner of the Hollybank Woods (the south slope of Longcops Hill) in the early spring over a period of years I have been puzzled about the identity of some very small and unimposing trees which have clusters of white blossom at this time of year.

These trees stand no more than three metres high, most of which is taken up by a thin, dark-barked, trunk with a circumference of 7 or 8 cm, supporting a diffuse umbrella-shaped (semi-weeping) crown of very thin branches that would be termed twigs on a larger tree. The branches are also dark-grey to black in colour with a few clusters of flowers and leaves at their tips.

The flowers occur singly or in clusters of two, and have green pedicels 5mm long supporting a large cup-shaped hypanthium on the base of which the ovary is visible with a single style arising from it. A variable number of stamens (I counted from 9 to 15) arise from the rim of the cup and on the outside, below the rim, are a variable number (5 to 7) of what I assume to be calyx lobes. The petals, which fall easily and were mostly absent, seem to be consistently 5 in number and are 7mm long giving a flower width of 15 mm.

Around the base of each flower pedicel the twigs are minutely pubescent and there are some very small (<1mm) red-brown bud scales. These bud scales suggest the species must be a **Plum** but the shape of the hypanthium suggests **Prunus cerasus (Dwarf or Morello Cherry)**.

The final evidence which I have is in the leaves - in the specimen I collected the flowers are spaced out on spurs along the last 3 cm of a twig with a single cluster of

(in this case 5) leaves emerging (at the same time as the flowers) from the tip of the twig only. The leaves will no doubt grow somewhat larger but currently measure 25mm long by 7mm wide with 'sharp' (acuminate to aristate) forward pointing teeth along each serrate edge. Hopefully someone will eventually point me to the true identity of these trees but at the moment they remain a mystery - at least they are not the **Alder Buckthorn** which was my first guess years ago.

**Crab Apple:** This was starting to flower in the Hollybank Woods on Apr 8 as it had been in Havant Thicket area on Apr 3

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** Walking round Havant today (Apr 9) I found grass cutters had been let loose by the local council and had shorn much of the grass in which I have been watching flowers develop - just one flower of the Juniper Square Strawberry patch had survived (and the patch will no doubt benefit from having its competition removed as most of the leaves and runners have survived unscathed). Two other areas in which mowers had been at work had removed the early **Ox-eye Daisies** from the bank by the Langstone roundabout just as they were about to start flowering, and had cut down the newly grown spikes of **Early Wintercress** in the Town End House carpark near the Arts Centre, which had just shot up in the past week. The mowers working in Juniper Square had parked their lorry (used for transporting the mowing machines) in a cul de sac where the road edge was lined with **Pigweed (Amaranth)** plants last year - these plants probably dropped off the equivalent lorry last year so I cannot complain too much but the roadside along the frontage of the abandoned Texaco garage in Park Road south (where lots of **Winter Heliotrope** and other weeds have flowered unseasonally in recent years) has been apparently lost to nature in the complete demolition of the site since last week.

**Rue-leaved Saxifrage:** In recent past years thousands of these delightful little plants have flowered in Havant around the Pallant carpark close to Beechworth and Fairfield Roads. The plants centre of origin seemed to be the lime mortar in the old brick wall at the west of this carpark but in the past few months this wall (starting to fall of its own accord) has had its top removed and rebuilt so the plants are having to survive elsewhere where they are more exposed to death by order of the Borough Council at the hands of road cleaners. Some have reached the block paving in my garden driveway and others cower at the foot of new ornamental metal posts put up at pavement edges where there is a danger of vehicles driving on the pavements to avoid obstructions on the narrow roads. Today my count of the surviving plants reached a year peak of 30!

**Red Currant:** First flowers on this in Hollybank Woods on Apr 8

**Field Maple:** This started flowering on Apr 7

**Basford Willows:** The very long bright yellow catkins on these hybrid trees planted by the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth are now on show.

**Bur Chervil:** This had just started flowering in the sandy soil of south Hayling when I was there on Apr 12

**Thrift (Sea Pink):** Very nearly, but not quite, flowering on south Hayling on Apr 12

**Duke of Argyll's Teaplant:** This did have its first flowers open when I was on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on Apr 12

**Germander Speedwell:** First flowers found in Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Apr 11

**Yellow Archangel:** The first genuine woodland flowers seen in Lowton's Copse at Clanfield on Apr 12

**Rib-wort Plantain:** First found flowering on Sinah Common on Apr 12

**Wayfaring Tree:** My first sight of one in flower came at Marlpit Lane near Funtington on Apr 8

**Tartarian Honeysuckle:** A hedge of this has been established on south Hayling for many years at the junction of Ferry Road and the road serving the Sinah Common gunsite and gravel pit. This was a mass of pink buds and flowers on Apr 12

**Woodruff:** This ancient woodland spring flower first seen in Lowton's Copse at Clanfield on Apr 12

**Yellow Flag:** Just one flower was out on the Iris plants in the 'Dolphin Pool' beside Park Road South in Apr 7 but it had faded by Apr 9

**Italian Lords and Ladies:** The common Arum now has spathes open in many places but on Apr 9 I saw my first example of an unopen spathe on the large garden version of the Arum.

**Twayblade Orchid:** One was starting to flower in Lowtons Copse on Apr 12

**Early Purple Orchid:** One plant had all its (few) flowers open in the Hollybank Woods on Apr 8. A second plant there had the lower flowers at right angles to the stem but non yet open and a third spike was merely starting to show colour on the lower flower still firmly pressed against the flower spike stem. Another plant was flowering in Blagdon Copse at Clanfield on Apr 12

**Green-winged Orchid:** This had started to flower at the Gunner Point (south Hayling) site and in the garden of Redlands House (north Emsworth) by Apr 9 and I found 23 spikes, many with all flowers open, when I was at Gunner Point on Apr 12

**Spring Sedge:** A surprising find on just one old grave in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Apr 11 was a mass of Spring Sedge with the upper male spikelets already flowering

**Sweet Vernal Grass:** This also was flowering in the cemetery on Apr 11

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Roe:** One at Durlston was showing its reddish spring coat (or pelage) by Apr 7

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 7 - 13 (WEEK 14 OF 2008)**

[Sat 12 Apr](#)

## Green-winged Orchids and other flowers on Hayling

Despite the threat of a heavy shower, and the certainty of cycling into a strong wind, I went down the Billy Track to south Hayling and around Gunner Point to have a look at the **Green-winged orchids** which were reported to have started flowering a couple of days ago.

The orchids were worth a visit as although I only saw 23 of them, where there may be 4,000 at the peak of their season, they were fresh and several were at their best with all flowers open. However, they were not the only good ticks in my notebook as I found five more firsts for my yearlist.

The first of these was the **Tartarian Honeysuckle** at the entrance to the Sinah gunsite - the bushes covered in pink buds with many of the flowers already open. A little further west, just before I reached the end of the Sinah Warren frontage, I saw my first genuine (i.e. excluding the plant in Havant flowering on the old stem of a last year's plant) **Early Wintercress (Barbarea intermedia)**, and at the roundabout at the Ferry Inn the **Early Forget-me-nots** were still giving a good show.

My second new plant for the year was **Spring Beauty**, found in the frontage of the wooden hut that is an Ice Cream stall when the summer crowds arrive (although there was lots more of this plant seen later!). Next tick was the orchids and then nothing more until I was in the area south of Staunton Avenue where the **Bur Chervil** had started to flower with **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** in flower next to it and **Ribwort Plantain** flowering for the first time close to the other two.

Other plants of interest were **Thrift (Sea Pink)** on which several unopen pink flowerheads were seen south of the main Golf Course, and **Red Clover** seen at the edge of Park Road despite close mowing the the roadside grass (also escaping the mowing were the plants of **Round-leaved Cranesbill** that regularly shelter at the foot of one of the street lamps in this road).

The only hint of bird life noted in this windy trip came from the **song of Skylarks and Linnet** around the Golf Course.

[Fri 11 Apr](#)

## Germander Speedwell and Spring Sedge in Havant cemetery

A short walk this evening took me to Havant cemetery off the Eastern Road and here I found quite a good first show of one of my favourite spring flowers - **Germander Speedwell**. Also new for the year was **Sweet Vernal Grass** in flower, and, as a real bonus, one of the older graves that may have been there the best part of 200 years had a small but dense patch of **a very small Sedge** with the uppermost male flower spikes open for business although the female spikes below them were very much undeveloped. There are not many **Sedge species** in flower at this time of year and I am pretty sure these were not the common **Glaucous Sedge** - in fact they had several characteristics indicating **Spring Sedge**, a species that I have difficulty in finding on Portsdown. I will have to go back in a week or so and have another look at these plants.

On my way to the cemetery via Prince George Street in Havant I found two more flowering plants of **Round-leaved Cranesbill** and one of a **Corn Salad** species. Also new were open flowers on **Yellow Oxalis** which has had yellow flower buds stuck in the half-open position for what seems like over a month.

[Thu 10 Apr](#)

### Swallows, Hoary Cress and Field Pennycress

A short cycle ride to Budds Farm pools this afternoon gave me my first **Swallows** of the spring, and later, in the Broadmarsh area, quite a few plants of **Hoary Cress** had their flowers open with a bonus of just one flowering plant of **Field Pennycress**.

Back at Budds Farm **Field Maple** was now in full flower and among the birds present were the sitting **Swan pair** and the **two pairs of Shelduck** (all four birds on the water). I suppose **Gadwall** might nest here as there are still two pairs present but I don't expect any of the **7 Shoveler** or **28 Tufted Duck** to stay much longer. With the tide high at Broadmarsh there were no waders or wildfowl other than **4 Redshank** and what I assume were about **30 Turnstone** roosting on the gunwhales of a distant moored boat.

Heading home up the Hermitage stream I met Jason Crook on his way to Farlington Marshes and he told me that there had been a **Cuckoo** there last Sunday. Cycling on to Bedhampton Mill Pool I saw **one Swan** on the water (and presume it has a nesting mate somewhere out of sight) with two more pairs of **Gadwall** and a spare male. Less expected, perched among pigeons in a tree at the north end of the pool, was a single **Jay**. Much more expected was the **pair of Grey Wagtails** seen flying over the Wayfarer's Way footbridge of the Hermitage Stream.

[Tue 8 Apr](#)

### Early Purple Orchids in flower

This afternoon I visited the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth to see how the **Early Purple Orchids** were coming on and found three flower spikes already up - **one had its flowers already open**, the second had its lower flowers at right angles to the stem but the flowers not open, and the third was merely showing purple colour in the base of a tightly close flowerhead, the top of which was still white.

Before reaching the orchid site I found flowers opening on a **Crab Apple** tree and saw a few flowers on wild **Red Currant** bushes. More colourful than these were the **Wild Cherry** trees in full flower and it was good to see **Male Ferns uncurling** and to see the fresh green of leaves on **Larches**.

In the orchid area the ground was covered with **Celandines**, **Primroses** and **Wood Anemones** with the blues of **Common** and **Early Dog Violets** scattered among them. Also near this area there was blossom on some trees which have puzzled me in previous years and which I still cannot name - this time I took some measurements and brought home a sample of blossom (clusters of small white-petalled flowers already going over with small, sharply toothed, leaves of a narrow elliptical shape but not yet fully expanded), all growing on a very thin

stemmed tree less than three metres tall and with very thin branches that would be described as 'twigs' on a more substantial tree - I assume it to be a *Prunus* species but cannot track it down so far. One of the puzzles about it is the variability of the flower parts - the number of calyx segments varies from 5 to 9 and the number of stamens is equally variable.

**Nuthatches** and **Woodpeckers** were heard, as was **Blackcap** and **Mistle Thrush** song plus the usual suspects.

I went on from here to Marlpit Lane where the interest was in a **Wayfaring Tree** covered with flowers, several **Spindle** trees covered with tight closed flower buds, and one specimen of **Caper Spurge** (no flowers on that).

[Mon 7 Apr](#)

### **Willow Warbler song plus Pied Flycatcher and Redstart at Langstone**

I had a phone call last night from someone who had just been watching both **Common Redstart** and **Pied Flycatcher** (both males) in shoreline trees just east of Langstone village, and while I was surprised that they were still around on the coast so late in the day I assumed that they would have flown on overnight. This morning, however, the phone rang again to tell me that the birds were still there with **two Redstarts** where only one had been seen yesterday, so I got on my bike to see if I could see them.

Before reaching the shore I noted a **Buzzard** again perched in the dead tree close to the presumed hidden nest, and also saw **four Egrets** perched in trees beside the pony fields. Reaching the shore at the end of Wade Lane I had a quick look for the **Redstarts** but saw nothing so I had a scan of the pony field south of Wade Court where **four Teal**, **two Mallard** and **one Moorhen** were floating quietly on the remaining flood water within a yard or so of the wire fence separating the field from the scrub around the Lymbourne stream. Nothing surprising about that until I looked to see if there was anything on the other side of the fence and saw a **smart red Fox** sitting back on his haunches hoping that the ducks, which were within a couple of yards of him, would come that little bit closer but both players knew the rules of the game, kept their distance and saved their energy as if they were the best of friends with no thought of any concern for their future wellbeing (or otherwise).

Before giving up the search for the **Redstarts** I cycled along the shore to the end of Pook Lane where I found a local birder with a 'digiscope' camera on which he showed me a picture of the **male Pied Flycatcher** which he had taken only a few minutes before I arrived - needless to say I never saw either of the special migrants...

Before leaving I scanned the distant water and shoreline, spotting a fair sized flock of waders which I felt sure had a mixture of **Black-** and **Bar-tailed Godwits**. As I was looking into the sun to see them I cycled back past Langstone Pond and walked out onto the Wadeway where I had the sun behind me and was closer to the birds which were being pushed in by the rising tide. It was now easy to separate a tight flock of some **80 Bar-tails**, looking small and almost white in their winter

plumage, from a similar number of **Blackwits**, mostly in summer dress, that were more scattered and were still feeding. Beyond these waders were **four Mergansers** and closer to me among the many **Black-headed** and **Herring Gulls** were a **dozen Med Gulls**, all paired and in their spotless breeding attire. Over to my left I could also see **7 Egrets** (maybe more) in the roost trees by Langstone Pond.

On such a lovely morning I wanted to see more so I headed west through Langstone village (passing the **Snakeshead Fritillary** plants which had retained many flowers despite the snow) to the South Moors where, around the mouth of the Langbrook stream, were **42 more Mergansers** and a **dozen Brent** (all able to fly but almost certainly intending to stay here for the summer). By the shingle spit at the mouth of the stream was another **mixed flock of Godwits** in which I counted **15 Black-** and **15 Bar-wits** plus **three Knot**. Elsewhere close by were **two Egrets** and singles of **Redshank** and **Oystercatcher** plus a sleeping raft of **seven Great Crested Grebe**.

Pressing on to Budds Farm I could see there had been **an arrival of Phylloscs** which were everywhere in the bushes on the mound, and as I climbed to the pools viewpoint I heard one **Blackcap** in song as well as several **Chiffchaffs**. Then, from the banks of the pools, I heard at least **three Willow Warblers in song** backed by the local **Cetti's**. The **Swan** was on her nest with her mate nearby on the water from which it had just driven a **Canada Goose** that had had to retreat to the far bank where a second isolated **Goose** seemed to indicate that two pairs of these birds already had nests nearby. On the water there were probably three pairs of **Gadwall** and two of **Shelduck** plus small numbers of **Mallard, Shoveler, Teal** and **Tufted Duck** as well as the **Coot** and **Dabchicks**

**Field Maples** here had leaves and flowers, and heading back to Havant the flowers were out on the **Stream Water Crowfoot** in the Langbrook, leaving one surprise flower to be seen in the 'Dolphin pool' opposite the end of Solent Road - this was a single flower of **Yellow Iris**.

Going shopping later in the day I noted at least twenty flowering plants of **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** plus a couple of flowering **Corn Salad** plants.

### **SUMMARY FOR MAR 31 - APR 6 (WEEK 13 OF 2008)**

**Highlights of bird news** are an early **Black Kite** over Aldershot on Apr 1; a **Hobby** seen at Gosport on Apr 2 seems to have been the first to reach Britain; a **Corncrake** was heard in Dorset near Bridport on Mar 31; two **Common Cranes** at Pulborough on Apr 3 and 4 proved they were a pair by mating; two **Swifts** flew over Sandwich in Kent on Apr 2 and one near Rye on Apr 5; first **Nightingale** was at Dungeness on Apr 5; first **Ring Ouzels** arrived at several sites on Mar 30 with the first **Yellow Wagtail**; first **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Seaford on Apr 5; first **Reed Warblers** were singing at Emsworth and Lymington on Apr 4; first **Common Whitethroat** was near Rye on Apr 2; first **Pied Flycatcher** was at Christchurch on Apr 1 and one was seen locally at Langstone on Apr 6 in company with a **male**

**Common Redstart**; other firsts in the news are **Serin** and **Common** (was **Mealy**) **Redpoll**

**Insect highlights** were the first **Clouded Yellow** at Portland on Apr 3; first **Green-veined White** and **Orange Tip** seen this week; 12 new moth species include a very early migrant **Diamond-back**, and early residents were **Small Waved Umber** and **Oak Tree Pug**; other interesting species were the **False Widow Spider** and **Black Millipede** plus **Gwynne's Mining Bee**

**Flower news** is of **Early Gentian** and **Early Spider Orchid** flowering at Durlston as was **Common** and **Chalk Milkwort**; locally **Crab Apple**, **Horse Chestnut**, **Wild Garlic** and **Cuckoo Flower** were out and the fertile cones of **Great Horsetail** were seen

Among **Other Wildlife** 14 **Common Seals** was a good count on Thorney Island and elsewhere **Hedgehog**, **Slow-worm** and **Brown Long-eared Bat** were seen

## **BIRDS**

**Manx Shearwater**: These have become a regular sight off Portland since Mar 28 and 60 were seen there on Mar 31. 10 were seen (with **57 Fulmars**) from St Catherine's Point (IoW) on Mar 29 and one went past Selsey Bill on Mar 30

**Balearic Shearwater**: One was off Portland on Mar 30 to become the third March sighting there (prior to 2008 March was the only month with no sightings of this species at the Bill)

**Cattle Egret**: None have been reported in Dorset since Mar 30 but two were still in the area near Bucklers Hard (east of Lymington) on Apr 3

**Little Egret**: Local numbers normally diminish at this time of year as **Egrets** return to their breeding sites (many of them, I think, returning to the continent) but maybe this year things will be different. My only reason for thinking this is that on Apr 2 one was seen arriving from the continent at Dungeness while on Apr 6 there appeared to be 25 or more high tide roosting in the Southmere field at Langstone village as I drove past and on Apr 4 at least 4 were in the trees above Langstone pond during high tide.

**Spoonbill**: More than a dozen of these have been in Dorset in January, February and March but the only reports from that county this month have been of a single bird in Poole Harbour on Apr 1 and two birds flying east over Christchurch Harbour to leave the county on Apr 5. Another new bird, which may have come from Dorset, was at Titchfield Haven on Apr 2 and 3

**Mute Swan**: In addition to the local birds already known to be nesting at Budds Farm, Langstone Mill and Peter Pond in Emsworth, this week has brought news of further pairs - one pair with a nest at Emsworth Marina, another pair seen together on Brick-kiln Pond at Stansted and likely to nest in the old 'boating lake' upstream of that pond, and the pair that normally nest in full view at the Thorney Little Deeps may have chosen a new site hidden in the reeds there as only one of the birds could be seen on the open water on Apr 2

**White-front Goose:** The single 'albifrons' bird which was seen at Farlington Marshes on Mar 1 and 2, and which has been at Titchfield Haven since Mar 14, is reported to have spent the intervening time on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth

**Brent:** The majority have now left but the past few days have brought several reports - on Mar 30 there were 125 in Southampton Water and 598 flew past Seaford; on Apr 1 there were at least 70 still around off Langstone village and Christchurch Harbour had 185. Reports since then include 94 on the Langstone South Moors shore on Apr 3 and on Apr 5 Selsey Bill watchers saw 35 flying east while 26 remained in Newtown Harbour (IoW)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The family of four were still on the Lymington shore on Mar 31

**Wigeon :** Around 100 were still at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 3 with **135 Teal, 40 Shoveler** and **4 Pintail**

**Teal:** Another 172 (and **62 Shoveler**) were in the Lymington area on Apr 4

**Garganey:** One flew east off Selsey Bill on Apr 4 and on Apr 5 there was a drake at the Lewes Brooks and 3 birds were at Rye Harbour

**Scaup:** Three seen at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Mar 30 and a single female was on the west Solent off the Beaulieu River on Apr 3

**Eider:** A peak of 86 birds is said to have been off Titchfield Haven during March

**Long-tailed Duck:** One was still on the Lymington shore on Mar 30 although all other wintering birds seem to have left

**Surf Scoter:** One still off Ovingdean (Brighton) on Apr 2

**Velvet Scoter:** On Mar 31 two were still in Rye Bay and five flew past Selsey Bill. Latest news is of three passing Portland on Apr 5

**Black Kite:** After the reported sighting in Wiltshire on Mar 28 one flew low north over Bourley Hill in the Aldershot area on Apr 1 leaving John Eyre in no doubt of its identity. This was almost certainly a visitor from the continent and maybe supports my feeling that quite a few of the Red Kites seen near the south coast recently are new arrivals.

**Hen Harrier:** An interesting report of one flying over the Stansted East Park on Mar 31 comes from Michael Prior who watched a local **Peregrine** attack it before the **Peregrine** went back to its perch in a Sweet Chestnut tree. Latest reports are of a ringtail over the Downs at Amberley and of a male flying west over Harting Down, both on Apr 4

**Buzzard:** An indication of the increasing number of these in our local Havant area come from sightings this week around a nest site in the Langstone area on Apr 5, and of pairs soaring and displaying in both the Leigh Park and Funtington areas on Apr 3

**Osprey:** The first to arrive at Thorney Island this spring was seen there on Mar 29 eating a fish before being disturbed by a passing jogger - it seems that did not prevent the Osprey coming back to the same perch with another fish on Mar 30.

Other Ospreys have been seen in the last few days at Pagham Harbour, Poole Harbour, Christchurch Harbour, Lower Test Marshes at Southampton and Newtown Harbour (IoW) with inland sightings near Midhurst and Faccombe north east of Andover. Latest report is of one over Hastings on Apr 4.

**Merlin:** Three sightings on Mar 30 at Chilling near Warsash, Chanctonbury Ring north of Worthing and at Dungeness. They were still arriving from the south at Portland on Apr 3 and at Dungeness on Apr 5

**Hobby:** Although one was rumoured to have been seen in Suffolk during February the first genuine arrival that I know of was seen by Peter Raby arriving at Gilkicker Point (Gosport) on Apr 2 with the only other report so far being of a bird going north over Horsham on Apr 4

**Corncrake:** One reported to have been heard near a Dorset nature reserve in the Bridport area on Mar 31. Hopefully it was uninjured, unlike one found on Hayling in the 1990s after it had flown into overhead wires and dropped down dead in a cabbage patch

**Coot:** The nest on a raft at the Slipper Mill Pond in Emsworth which had 3 new hatched chicks on Mar 29 had a fourth chick showing on Apr 4

**Common Crane:** Two birds were seen at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 3 and 4 (**seen mating on Apr 4**) and were probably the same two that were there on Mar 18 and 19.

**Avocet:** 18 were present at Titchfield Haven sometime during March and 11 were at Rye Harbour on Apr 4

**Golden Plover:** A flock of around 50 were seen in the Titchfield area on Apr 1, half of them in summer plumage, and 240 were roosting at Rye Harbour on Apr 4

**Knot:** 24 were still to be seen at Rye Harbour on Apr 4

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Christchurch Harbour had 95 on Mar 31 and on Apr 1 the count seen to the east from Langstone Bridge was around 120. Since then there have been reports of around 90 in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Apr 5 with 63 at Christchurch Harbour that day.

**Whimbrel:** After an early burst of birds passing through in the first half of March there has been a lull until Mar 30 when one arrived on Portland Bill. Since then there have been reports of 2 at Durlston on Apr 2, 3 at Lymington on Apr 4, 1 at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 5 when Durlston had 3

**Spotted Redshank:** Since Apr 1 there have been up to five still in Poole Harbour and singles at Christchurch Harbour and at Yarmouth (IoW)

**Med Gull:** No recent news from Langstone Harbour but Titchfield Haven had approaching 200 on Apr 2 and Rye Harbour had 113 on Apr 4.

**Little Gull:** 12 were seen at Dungeness on Mar 30 and on Mar 31 there were 2 at Ivy Lake (Chichester) with one there on Apr 1 and another at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood. One was still at Chichester on Apr 3

**Iceland Gull:** Sightings reported at Dungeness, Newhaven and Portland in the past few days but there have been no reports from anywhere since Mar 31

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird was still around on Mar 31, maybe after moving along the coast to Newhaven on Mar 30, and another has been at Dungeness. The Shoreham bird was still there on Apr 5

**Common Tern:** Following the firsts of the year at Milford (Lymington) and Selsey on Mar 28 there have now been sightings at Seaford, Rye Harbour and Dungeness

**Short-eared Owl:** One was at Portland on Apr 2 and two were there on Apr 4

**Swift:** After the single very early bird seen on the Isle of Wight on Mar 17 there have been two more recent sightings - two flew over Sandwich Bay in Kent on Apr 2 and a single bird was seen on Apr 5 over Icklesham in East Sussex near Rye

**Wood Lark:** At least one pair was still in the East Park at Stansted on Mar 31

**Swallow:** Numbers started to increase on Mar 31 with the arrival of 7 at Portland and on Apr 1 there were 15 in the Climping area near the mouth of the R Arun and 6 at Chichester Ivy Lake. On Apr 2 more than 40 flew in at Selsey and Portland record 100 on Apr 3. Apr 5 brought 50 to the Lewes Brooks and 25 to Stokes Bay at Gosport

**House Martin:** Highest count at any one site so far is 5 birds at the Chichester Lakes on Apr 5

**Tree Pipit:** Although one was reported to have been seen in the Bourley Hill area near Aldershot sometime before Mar 21 there have been no other reports of the species anywhere so one seen at Bourley Hill by John Eyre on Mar 30 may well have been first of the year in England. The next arrivals were singles at Portland and Christchurch, both on Apr 4

**Meadow Pipit:** The mass of birds that has been moving north since Feb 22 had reached a peak count of 1200 arriving at Portland by Mar 15 but plenty are still coming in with counts on Apr 2 of 200 at Portland and 530 at Christchurch Harbour. Quite a few are now on territory and on Apr 3 I heard at least three making their song flights over the Gipsies Plain to the west of Rowlands Castle

**Yellow Wagtail:** The first to be reported this year was at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Mar 30. Since then there have been reports from Christchurch Harbour, Haywards Heath, Sandwich Bay, Portland, Rye Harbour and Durlston though the sum of all birds reported is still only 14

**Nightingale:** First of the year was at Dungeness on Apr 5

**Black Redstart:** Sightings continue to be reported along the coast but the report which caught my eye was of one singing in a run down area of Hastings where it might possibly breed as many did in London bomb sites after the war. I wonder if global warming or a population increase will bring them back to breed in the forts on Portsdown Hill as they did in the 1970s?

**Common Redstart:** After the first early female at Ebernoe near Midhurst on Mar 25 a second bird was at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 30. By Apr 3 they were back at breeding sites in the New Forest and song was heard at two of these sites on Apr 4. Locally a male was seen on the Langstone shoreline between Wade and Pook Lanes on the evening of Apr 6

**Stonechat:** One or two pairs will probably breed at south Hayling sites but the only local place where I have seen apparently established territorial males is the Gipsies Plain west of Rowlands Castle with two birds seen in different places on Apr 3

**Ring Ouzel:** These arrived on a broad front on Mar 30 with reports from the Weymouth and Brighton areas plus one near Basingstoke and another in the Aldershot area. The only report since then is of one at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 4

**Fieldfare:** 55 still in the Pulborough area on Mar 31 and 47 there on Apr 4

**Grasshopper Warbler:** First of the year arrived at Seaford on Apr 5 and was still reeling there next day

**Sedge Warbler:** These have been heard singing in increasing numbers since Mar 26 in the Rye Bay, Dungeness and Christchurch areas but nowhere else so far

**Reed Warbler:** Apr 4 brought two very early birds to Emsworth and Lymington where both were heard singing

**Common Whitethroat:** First of the year was heard singing at the Pannell Valley near Rye Bay on Apr 2 with another heard at Durlston on Apr 3. Portland and Dungeness both had their first on Apr 5

**Blackcap:** Some of our summer birds may have arrived before Apr 1 but that day brought reports from eight widely separated sites, with song heard at three sites (at least). Apr 2 brought news of another singing bird at a new site (Pannell Valley near Rye), and Apr 3 gave reports of song at Stansted Forest, Hollybank Woods at Emsworth and Great Copse in Leigh Park, all close to Havant, plus more song in a north Fareham garden. On Apr 4 one was singing in Brook Meadow at Emsworth and on Apr 5 one was singing in the old rail line running behind my Havant garden

**Willow Warbler:** Now arriving in small numbers - several singing among 8 birds at Church Norton on Mar 30 when another 8 arrived at Dungeness, then 10 at Portland on Mar 31 increasing to 15 there on Apr 1, plus 12 in Christchurch Harbour and several other reports including 3 at Ivy Lake, Chichester, that day. Apr 2 brought a dramatic increase in numbers with 63 at Christchurch Harbour, and on Apr 4 there were 100+ at Portland and 350+ at Christchurch. On Apr 5 there were an estimated 500 at Portland and 370 at Christchurch

**Firecrest:** Thirteen reports between Mar 29 and Apr 1, with numbers up to 14 at Dungeness on Apr 30 and 10 at Portland on Mar 31, show that many are now reaching us from the south.

**Pied Flycatcher:** A male at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 1 was first for the year and Apr 5 brought another male to the Haywards Heath area and a female to the

Christchurch area. A very good local sighting on the evening of Apr 6 was of one in trees on the Langstone shoreline between Wade and Pook Lanes

**Serin:** The first report for this year is of one eating grass seeds in at Bognor garden on Apr 3

**Linnet:** Small number seem to be arriving from the south and on Apr 4 some were said to be back on territory in the New Forest

**Common (=Mealy) Redpoll:** One was reported from the Studland area of Dorset on Apr 5

**Yellowhammer:** Small flocks are now being reported from several places including the East Park at Stansted,, Lewes and Hastings so hopefully some are now arriving from the south to breed here.

**Corn Bunting:** A report of more than 50 in the Maiden Castle area of Dorset near Dorchester on Apr 5 gives some hope of a few coming back to Hampshire....

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Clouded Yellow:** An early first at Portland on Apr 3

**Brimstone:** 28 new reports with 17 in the Andover area, 20+ at Cissbury Ring north of Worthing and 12 in woods east of Arundel, all on Apr 4, show that a new burst of emergence has occurred this week.

**Large White:** At least one was seen in the Gosport area on Feb 12, and a female was out at Portland on Mar 19, but the real emergence of this species probably starts with a male seen at Gosport on Apr 1, with two there and another at Barton on sea on Apr 4

**Small White:** This species too had early examples on Feb 8, 13 and 18, followed by 8 reports in March, but the real emergence seems to have started on Mar 30 with 17 reports since then

**Green-veined White:** One seen and photographed at Portland on Apr 1 remains the only one reported so far this year.

**Orange Tip:** Early insects were flying on Mar 26 at Horsham, on Mar 27 at Titchfield Haven and at Alresford on Mar 30 but the season began properly on Apr 3 with one seen at Warsash. Apr 4 brought three reports from Emsworth, the A27 at Havant and Stoke village on Hayling while one flew round my Havant garden on Apr 5

**Holly Blue:** Two reports from Gosport on Feb 9 and 12 were clearly out of line with the rest of the species which had its first 'normal' report from Portland on Mar 31 followed by a sighting of 2 at Worthing on Apr 3 and four sightings on Apr 4 (at Gosport, Winchester, Southampton and Crawley) followed by one at Durlston on Apr 5

**Red Admiral:** Just six recent sightings, all of ones or twos

**Small Tortoiseshell:** This species seems to be doing well with 17 sightings between Mar 30 and Apr 5. I saw my first at Warblington on Apr 5.

**Peacock:** This is currently the most often seen species with 34 sightings in the latest news, including a report of more than 40 seen at Pagham Harbour on Apr 4, 23 near Rye on Apr 3, and 14 in the Gosport area on Apr 1

**Comma:** Also common with 24 recent sightings but with a maximum count of 8 at any one time

**Speckled Wood:** 11 recent sightings including my own first sighting of one at Warblington Farm on Apr 5

**(Pearl-bordered Fritillary caterpillar):** Seen feeding on violets in the New Forest on Mar 30

## Moths

**Large Birch Purple (0012 *Eriocrania sangii*):** First report from Ashdown Forest on Apr 3 - this is the normal time to find this Birch tree leaf-miner on the wing

**Diamond-back moth (0464):** First record from Newhaven on Apr 2 - this tiny but common migrant normally only flies between May and September.

**Brindled Flat-body (0697 *Agonopterix arenella*):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - this will have hatched last autumn and hibernated

**Orange Underwing (1661 *Archiearis parthenias*):** First in Basing Forest on Mar 30

**The Streamer (1747 *Anticlea derivata*):** First near Rye on Apr 2 - early but normal time of year

**Small Waved Umber (1781 *Horisme vitalbata*):** First at Findon (Worthing) on Apr 3 - very early as this normally flies in May and June with a second brood coming out in August

**Oak-tree Pug (1853 *Eupithecia dodoneata*):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - another May-June species

**Brindled Beauty (1927 *Lycia hirtaria*):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - a normal March-April species

**Muslin Moth (2063 *Diaphora mendica*):** First early male at Findon (Worthing) on Mar 30 - males are a dark grey colour, female a pure white with tiny black dots

**White-marked (2140 *Cerastis leucographa*):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - normal time of year

**Blossom Underwing (2183 *Orthosia miniosa*):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - normal time of year

**Powdered Quaker (2186 Orthosia gracilis):** First at Horsham on Apr 3 - normal time of year

## Other Insects

**Bee Fly:** A couple more sightings (one from Rye Harbour where the normally rare **Dotted Bee-fly** occurs but this was the common species)

**Hoverflies:** On Mar 30 both **Drone flies (Eristalis tenax)** and **Marmelade Flies (Episyrphus balteatus)** were on the wing at Rye Harbour

**Mining Bees:** On Apr 1 the Durlston rangers web diary commented on the small mounds of earth being created by the efforts of mining bees without mentioning the species - probably the **small black Halictus species** that we may also see on banks of dry soil around now. At Rye Harbour on Apr 3 they saw a species new to me called **Gwynne's mining bee (Andrena bicolor)** - see photo on the Rye Bay website.

**False Widow Spider (Steatoda grossa):** One found indoors on a table at Dungeness bird observatory on Mar 30 was a first for that site - the species has been spreading in Britain and was new to Kent last year. This is a species which is said to prey on Black Widow spiders in America so it is probably best avoided by humans. If you want to know more about the species use the latin name given here and not the one quoted on the Dungeness website as the genus is Steatoda not Steatodes.

**Black Millipede (Tachypodoiulus niger):** On Mar 31 the Rye Bay website has a picture of this creature which is 3 cm long and has 160 legs (or is that pairs of legs?)

## PLANTS

**Great Horsetail:** This species is just starting to re-appear at Warblington farm - on Apr 4 I came across three large fertile cones and one non-fertile spike

**Bracken:** The first fronds were starting to unfurl at Havant Thicket on Apr 3

**Harts-tongue Fern:** Tightly curled fresh fronds of this were seen in Pook Lane at Warblington on Apr 4

**Goldilocks Buttercup:** The first buds on plants at Pyle Lane in Horndean had started to break open on Apr 3

**Wild Radish:** One plant with white flowers seen on a Havant roadside on Apr 2

**Cuckoo Flower:** Although some had been found in flower as early as Feb 15 I only found my first in Warblington church yard on Apr 4

**Common Milkwort:** This had started to flower at Durlston by Apr 1 in reports of both blue and white flowers. More recent reports from there say they have **Chalk Milkwort** in flower and confirm this by writing of bright blue flowers only

**Round-leaved Cranesbill:** On Apr 1 one flower was open on the plants in The Ship inn carpark at Langstone where I last saw them flowering on Jan 29. By Apr 4 I had come on a second flowering plant in the Havant area.

**Wood Sorrel:** I found quite a lot of this in flower in the Long Avenue between Leigh Park Gardens and Havant Thicket on Apr 3 - the first I have seen but while I have no record of an earlier sighting I seem to remember John Goodspeed had found it last month.

**Crab Apple:** Close to the Wood Sorrel on Apr 3 I found a massive old Crab Apple tree covered with blossom in bud with some of the buds already open

**Wild Strawberry:** At Pyle Lane in Horndean on Apr 3 I found the flowers of this close to those of Barren Strawberry allowing the two plants to be compared.

**Rue-leaved Saxifrage:** This plant can be easily found on the Havant streets near my home, though in lesser numbers than in some recent years, so I was surprised to see it getting the treatment accorded to a real rarity at Rye Harbour in their website entry for Apr 5.

**Beech and Field Maple:** The leaves of both had started to appear in the Warblington area on Apr 4

**Norway Maple:** Bright yellow flowers were seen on this tree in Havant on Apr 2

**Horse Chestnut:** The first single white flower had opened on a tree in Havant on Apr 4

**Wood Spurge:** Although garden versions of this have been in flower for some time I found the genuine thing out in Havant Thicket on Apr 4 for the first time

**Scarlet Pimpernel:** Reported to be flowering at Durlston on Mar 30

**Early Gentian:** Also starting to flower at Durlston on Mar 31

**Corn Salad (*Valerianella locusta*):** One early plant showing its pale blue flowers in Havant on Apr 4

**Cleavers (*Goosegrass*):** Flowering in Havant on Apr 1 with more found on Apr 4

**Nipplewort:** One seen flowering in Havant on Apr 1 was my second for the year after one seen on Feb 1

**Black Bryony:** First leaves seen at Warblington on Apr 4

**Ramsons (*Wild Garlic*):** John Goodspeed found this flowering in Havant (Great Copse) on Apr 3

**Early Spider Orchid:** The first flowers seen on tiny plants at Durlston on Mar 31.

**Pendulous Sedge:** Also found by John Goodspeed flowering in Great Copse on Apr 3

**Glaucous Sedge:** Flowering on Portsdown on Apr 2

**Spring Sedge:** Flowering at Durlston on Apr 5

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** Two off Portland on Mar 23 were the first reported there since Feb 1, and on Mar 31 one came close in off Ovingdean (east of Brighton) to give the first report for the year from a site other than Portland

**Common Seal:** On Mar 30 Barry Collins found 14 Seals hauled out on the shore of Thorney Island in Chichester Harbour. Although there was a count of 14 there in Oct 2003 the next highest count was 11 in 2007 with peaks of just 10 in 2004, 5 and 6 and only 8 in 2000 and 2001 leaving 2002 with just 4.

**Hedgehog:** At least one was out of hibernation to be seen in a garden at Worthing on Mar 31

**Brown Long-eared Bat:** What was probably one of these was seen feeding by day at the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on Apr 4

**Common Lizard:** At least 20 seen in Pignal Inclosure area of the New Forest on Mar 30

**Slow-worm:** These are now active and one was seen in a Portsdown Hill garden on Apr 3

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 31 - APR 6 (WEEK 13 OF 2008)**

### **Sun 6 Apr**

#### **Snow in Havant**

Snow fell for a couple of hours this morning, sufficient to cover the ground and the banches of the trees with a coating more than an inch deep but before midday the sun had come out and most of the snow had melted

### **Sat 5 Apr**

#### **Blackcap song and Orange Tip butterfly in my garden**

Early this morning a migrant **Blackcap** was singing in the trees along the old rail line running past the end of my garden, and when the sun had warmed the air a male **Orange Tip** made several circuits of the garden - both were welcome firsts of the year for me

### **Fri 4 Apr**

#### **Around Warblington**

A delightful warm and sunny spring morning persuaded me to walk to Warblington and as I set out through the carpark on the Billy Trail by the Arts Centre I found the **Wintercress plants** there, which have shown basal rosettes of leaves for some time, have suddenly shot up and are now showing a hint of yellow in flower buds. While still in this area I noted a new addition to the 'wild flower meadow' at the end of Lymbourn Road - a single **Cowslip** is now flowering there.

Nothing much more until I was walking down the old section of Pook Lane - glancing west in case the **Buzzards** might be around I found one of them perched with no thought of concealment in the topmost branches of an apparently dead

tree. Back in the lane I saw the first leaves were opening on **Field Maple** but no flowers could be seen.

At the end of the lane the harbour water, almost at high tide, seemed devoid of birds but a scan found **five dozing Mergansers**, **two Brent** and a **single Swan** plus a few **Black-headed Gulls**, **Redshank** and **Oystercatchers** waiting for the tide to drop. In a tree behind Langstone Pond at least **four Egrets** were also sitting out the tide.

In Warblington cemetery **one Ash was in full flower** and in the carpark area both **Common Ramping Fumitory** and **Black Nightshade** were still in flower. In the grass of the church yard a small patch of **Cuckoo Flower** was the first I have seen, and as I continued east along the path to Emsworth distant repeated fluttering in a hedge caught my eye - looking through my bins I could not be certain but convinced myself I was watching **a male Robin fluttering up to and over a female** in attempted or successful mating.

In the biggest of the fields by this path I watched a **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly nectaring on a **Dandelion** and had a **male Brimstone** flying over it - later I was to see my first **Speckled Wood** of the year.

I have permission to roam the farm fields for the bird survey Tony Gutteridge has been undertaking for the past 30 years, so I went to have a look at the cress beds where an **Egret** was fishing and near which I found the **large fertile male cones of Giant Horsetails** - the first of many in this area. Reaching the eastern stream I put up a **Snipe** and walking up the 'Selangor Avenue' public path going north from Nore Barn I passed lovely shows of **Common Dog Violet**, **Barren Strawberry** and **Greater Stichwort** before encountering the **Speckled Wood** just before reaching the main road.

Going back west along the north side of the main A259 road I found much **Danish Scurvygrass** and **Common Whitlowgrass** with plenty of commoner plants. At the very entrance to the A27 pedestrian underpass a couple of flowers were out on **Round-leaved Cranesbill** (a plant which is spreading in this area and which I have not previously noted here). Emerging from the underpass the foot of the wooden fence panels around the first house I came to gave me my first **Corn Salad** plants of the year in flower and where the pavement rejoins the main road there was much **Garlic Mustard** in flower where there had been only one plant on my last visit.

Opposite the One Stop shore at the junction with Southleigh Road **a single white flower was open on the big Horse Chestnut** which always flowers early and a little further west I found my second example of **Cleavers** in flower. Back at home. later in the day, a **Small White** butterfly flew by me.

[Thu 3 Apr](#)

### Havant Thicket area

A walk across the southern edge of Havant Thicket and back across the centre of the open grassland known as the Gipsies Plain gave me views of perhaps **a dozen pairs of Lapwing on breeding territory** with **a pair of Buzzard** and **a single Sparrowhawk** soaring above Hammonds Land Coppice south of the grassland.

Starting from the Havant Thicket carpark I immediately had **Coal Tit**, **Chiffchaff** and **Song Thrush** in song, joined by **Skylarks** and the **calls of the 'Pewits'** when I got to the edge of the plain. I had hoped to hear **Willow Warbler song** in the dense birch wood north of my path but no luck today.

At the west end of this path along the north edge of the plain, where the **Birch** gives way to tall dark **Austrian pines**, there was a delightful show of fresh **Common Dog Violets** and among them were the first genuine wild **Wood Spurge** in full flower. Then, getting into the trees around the ponds at the north end of the Long Avenue (which leads south to Leigh Park Lake and Gardens), I found the ground covered with flowering **Wood Sorrel** and, even better, fresh blossom with one or two half open flowers among thousands of pink buds on a huge and ancient **Crab Apple tree**.

After a short walk south down the Avenue I turned east across the centre of the Gipsies Plain, almost immediately picking up a **male Stonechat** on fence posts along the stream to the south of me (one had been here on my previous visit so I guess he is settled and has a mate). After passing over this stream I heard and saw at least three **Meadow Pipits making their parachuting song flights**, and when more than half way across the plain I turned south on the only track branching off the one I was on.

Now looking south I saw the **two Buzzards** and the **Sparrowhawk** I have already mentioned, and on the fence line of my new track was a **second male Stonechat** (also seen on my previous visit and a second territorial bird for this area). My main interest in this track lies in the flower rich ditch on its east side - later it will have a great show of **Common Spotted Orchids** but now its repertoire was principally **Primroses** and **Wood Anemones** with well grown leaves of **Wild Angelica**.

Nothing much more before I got back to the car and drove north to have a look at the Pyle Lane site south of Horndean. Here I found at least one of the **Goldilocks buttercup** flower buds nearly but not quite open. I won't list all the other flowers here but if you come here, and park as I did in the first section of the road before it dips down into the narrow twisting section where most of the flowers are, have a look at the roadside bank on the north side at the very start of the downhill slope and you can compare the plants and flowers of **Barren** and **Wild Strawberries** alongside each other.

[Tue 1 Apr](#)

### A good start to the new month

Yesterday I ended the month of March with my first **Small White** butterfly seen flying through St Faith's churchyard in the centre of Havant.

Today I saw my first **Peacock** butterfly on north Hayling and two **Red Admirals** (plus a **Bee Fly**) during a windy but warm cycle ride around the north of the island. The only 'new flower' seen during this ride was on the **Round-leaved Cranesbill** plants in the carpark of The Ship inn at Langstone (where I saw a last flower of the previous year on Jan 29), but while walking around Havant in the morning I ticked

both **Nipplewort** and **Cleavers** as well as seeing the **fresh leaves on a Dawn Redwood tree** in Havant Park.

While crossing Langstone Bridge in the afternoon I counted some **120 Black-tailed Godwits** in three separate groups, and distantly saw around **70 Brent** still on the shore near Pook Lane. A good twenty **Shelduck** were on the water and (seen on my way home) there were still four **Teal** in the pony field south of Wade Court. The wind was far too strong to assess the number of **Med Gulls** at the Oysterbeds but their calls could be heard both from the island and overhead.

### **SUMMARY FOR MAR 24 - 30 (WEEK 12 OF 2008)**

**Swans settled into nesting** this week as **Coots** and **Mallard** both had their **first young of the year** on show.

Surprise of the week was the **re-appearance of the Finnish-hatched White-tailed Sea Eagle** which spent mid-Nov to mid-January in the Andover area - another surprise was a **Black Kite** reported to be in Wiltshire heading for Hampshire and another was the sighting of a **Quail** in north Kent.

New migrants were the first **Stone Curlews** back in Hampshire, the first **Common Terns**, **Common Redstart** and **Sedge Warbler** with a **Golden Oriole** reported near Hastings. Thorney Island hosted its first **Osprey** of the spring.

**Best insect sightings** were the first **Orange Tip** and **Speckled Wood** - less welcome news is of a **fly called Sturmia bella** which has recently arrived in Britain and **whose larvae feed on and kill our butterfly caterpillars** which use nettle as their foodplant

New flowers were **Stork's Bill**, **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** and **Stream Water Crowfoot** with **Hairy Woodrush** and **Arum lily** also on the list. In Langstone village **Snakeshead Fritillary flowers** were seen on plants that have been growing in the wild for several years

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** All three common species still being seen including a **Black-throated** seen from both Selsey Bill and Church Norton on Mar 25

**Grebes:** Four species still in the news with most birds showing their breeding plumage. **Red-necks** still in Portland Harbour and at Weir Wood on Mar 26. Two **Slavonian** were off the Lymington shore on Mar 24 and twelve were on the sea off Church Norton on Mar 25 and one **Black-necked** was still in the Pagham lagoon on Mar 27

**Fulmar:** On Mar 28 Dungeness saw 580 fly east and four of these were seen at Milford near Lymington that day with four off Christchurch Harbour next day (Mar 29)

**Manx Shearwater:** These are now beginning to appear in our waters with 99 off Portland on Mar 29 when one was seen as far east as Newhaven

**Gannet:** The major movement of Mar 28 brought 873 west past Dungeness with 64 seen from Selsey that day

**Cattle Egret:** The two birds were still at Lavant (Chichester) on Mar 24 with one still at Harbridge north of Ringwood on that day. One was at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Mar 26 and the Lymington area two were seen near Bucklers Hard on Mar 29

**Grey Heron:** Young could be seen in nests at Weir Wood near Crowborough on Mar 26

**Spoonbill:** Eleven were still in Poole Harbour on Mar 24 with another near Weymouth in the Fleet at Rodden Hive. By Mar 27 there were still 7 in Poole Harbour and 1 at Lodmoor (Weymouth) while one was still on the Lymington marshes on Mar 25 and 26

**Mute Swan:** The first to be reported on its nest this year was at Peter Pond in Emsworth, maybe as early as Mar 18 and certainly sitting by Mar 25 while one of the Langstone Pond pair were on or building their nest on Mar 24. The pair at Budds Farm here in Havant were also sitting by Mar 27 but on Mar 29 the pair at the Thorney Island Little Deeps (often the first to nest in our area) were both on the water there with no visible nest.

**Whooper Swan:** Hampshire had an unusual record on Mar 26 when a group of five were found on the Testwood Lakes at the mouth of the R. Test and were later seen flying north up the river past Romsey. Another odd sighting was of one passing over Sandwich Bay in Kent on Mar 20 and I hear that a group of five had been seen in Cornwall fairly recently. The last report of the five that were at the Chichester Lakes from Jan 15 was on Feb 10.

**Brent:** This is probably the last week in which Brent are seen in large numbers. At Dungeness 1060 went by on Mar 26 with another 243 on Mar 28. Locally there were over 500 still on the north shore of Langstone Harbour on Mar 27 and 80 in Emsworth Harbour on Mar 29 (when a flock of 220 on the Weston shore of Southampton Water was the largest seen there all winter!)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The family of four that have been on the Lymington shore since Feb 12 were still there on Mar 29

**Wigeon:** No reports since Mar 27 when there were only a dozen left on the Langstone Harbour north shore and 33 flew east past Dungeness

**Teal:** At least 20 could still be seen in the Langstone area on Mar 27 but the only report since then is of two in Emsworth Harbour on Mar 29

**Mallard:** A female on Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) had **ten tiny ducklings** with her on Mar 25 - the first young to hatch this year as far as I know and the first since mid-October last year when there was a family on Langstone Pond.

**Eider:** A single bird was in Langstone Harbour on Mar 24 - probably the same young male that was around the islands on Jan 28 and Feb 25. This week has also brought reports of a few flying east past Dungeness (5 on Mar 26, 5 on Mar 28 and 4 passing Brighton Marina on Mar 29)

**Long-tailed Duck:** More than one was still in the Lymington area on Mar 29 but the bird that had been in the Widewater Lagoon at Worthing up to Mar 16 probably left on Mar 24 when one was on the sea off Worthing.

**Common Scoter:** There were still an estimated 800 in Rye Bay on Mar 23 with 600 there on Mar 24 but numbers seem to be declining though Mar 29 still brought reports of 67 off Portland, 6 at Milford near Lymington and 13 off Newhaven.

**Surf Scoter:** The bird that has been off Ovingdean (east of Brighton) since Mar 15 was still there on Mar 29

**Velvet Scoter:** One was off Worthing on Mar 24, two off Selsey Bill on Mar 28 and one off Newhaven on Mar 29

**Goosander:** One paid a brief visit to Fleet Pond in north Hampshire on Mar 27 and the number roosting at the Blashford Lakes was down to 6+ by Mar 29

**Black Kite:** One was reported to have been seen heading south east from Devizes in Wiltshire towards Hampshire on Mar 28

**Red Kite:** These are fairly regularly seen in northern Hampshire nowadays but what may have been a pair in the general area between Basingstoke and Alton on Mar 23 may be indicative of a southward extension of their established range though one over West Wittering on Mar 25 was probably a wanderer (several recent reports indicate arrivals from the continent).

**Sparrowhawk:** Nine seen flying over Sandwich Bay on Mar 27 remind us that quite a few of these do migrate

**White-tailed Sea Eagle:** The bird which arrived in the Andover area last November, and was identified by rings to have come from a nest in Finland, had not been reported since January until Mar 24 when it was seen again in the same general area

**Osprey:** One was seen over Whitsbury (north west of Fordingbridge) heading north towards Salisbury on Mar 24 and since then there have been seven more reports including the first to reach Thorney Island on Mar 29

**Quail:** What may have been a very early migrant or an escaped **Chinese Quail** was flushed in the Whitstable area of north Kent on Mar 26

**Water Rail:** These can turn up in unexpected places when on passage at this time of year and on Mar 25 Alistair Martin was able to photograph one in the Lymbourne stream where it flows between the Hayling Billy trail and the grounds of Wade Court, then on Mar 27 Tony Gutteridge had a close encounter with one at the shore reed bed at Warblington Farm

**Coot:** The first report of nesting reached me on Mar 18 and on Mar 25 two birds were sitting on their nests at Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth), then on Mar 29 **three chicks** were seen at one of the nests on the floating rafts in the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth

**Stone Curlew:** Following last weeks report of one arriving at Dungeness on Mar 15 there is a sighting on Mar 28 of three birds back at a regular site in north west Hampshire

**Golden Plover:** A flock of around 70 on the Langstone village shore on Mar 27 may have been the last we seen there this winter

**Woodcock:** A brief glimpse of one fleeing my intrusion into its daytime hideout in the Stansted Forest Redwood Groves on Mar 25 brought my year list to 105 species. Since then there have been three reports of probable migrant arrivals in Kent and Sussex on Mar 27 and one report of roding in Ashdown Forest on Mar 26

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The only place reporting more than 100 birds at the start of this week was Fishbourne Channel near Chichester where Anne de Potier saw 127 on Mar 25 though there were 98 at Christchurch Harbour that day. Locally there were 40 on the Northney shore of Hayling on Mar 24. Since then there have been 112 in Christchurch Harbour and up to 80 in Emsworth Harbour, both on Mar 26, 40 at Broadmarsh on Mar 27 and 120 at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 29 when 22 were in Emsworth Harbour

**Spotted Redshank:** The Nore Barn bird at Emsworth has not been reported since Mar 18 but this week has brought reports of 4 still in Poole Harbour and singles at Lymington, Christchurch Harbour, Church Norton and (on Mar 29) in the outflow of the Ham Brook at Nutbourne Bay east of Emsworth.

**Med Gull:** I guess the majority of those that nest in Langstone Harbour are currently lurking in Pagham Harbour where 100+ were seen in the harbour mouth on Mar 25 against 20+ at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Mar 24. On Mar 27 there were 15 at Ivy Lake (Chichester) and on Mar 29 the count at Rye Harbour was up to 138

**Little Gull:** One was at Ivy Lake from Mar 26 to 28 when two (said to be in full summer plumage with jet black head and bright red feet) were seen at the Blashford Lakes

**Ring-billed Gull:** The bird that was still at the Gosport Cockle Pond on Mar 24 was described as looking very smart in full breeding plumage (though sadly it lacks a mate there). On Mar 27 the Poole Harbour bird was also in summer plumage.

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter was again seen in Poole Harbour up to Mar 28 and a 'probable only' flew over Basingstoke on Mar 22. Another has been at Newhaven on Mar 26 and 29

**Glaucous Gull:** The first winter bird was still in Shoreham Harbour area on Mar 28 (probably having taken a day trip to the other side of Brighton to be seen at Ovingdean on Mar 24). Other reports are from Newhaven and Portland on Mar 27 and Dungeness on Mar 29

**Kittiwake:** 230 went past Dungeness on Mar 22 and more than 500 were off Portland on Mar 29 so there have been a few other sightings on the south coast including 1 off Selsey and 9 off Lymington on Mar 28

**Sandwich Tern:** By Mar 29 there were 155 at Rye Harbour

**Common Tern:** Mar 28 brought the first of the year to Milford near Lymington (two seen there) and Selsey Bill

**Tawny Owl:** The Dorset Bird Club website on Mar 25 carried a picture of a **juvenile Tawny owl** perched out of its nest with a caption saying the photo was taken in the Osmington area but giving no date - and no mention of the species in the list of Dorset sightings for that, or any other recent, day. I guess the photo is a current one, not just a pretty picture from last year that has just been sent in for the website, but cannot be sure.

**Kingfisher:** Birds that intend to nest inland should have left the coast by now so one seen by the Brockhampton stream on Mar 27 may be going to nest somewhere in the Bedhampton area of Havant

**Sand Martin:** The count of birds over the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood was up to 260 on Mar 23 and these birds are now widespread and numerous

**Swallow:** One was at Brading (IoW) on Mar 23 and Durlston had its first arrivals on Mar 25. The first of the year was seen on Feb 13 on the IoW and so far I have only seen 35 reports featuring a total of 51 birds.

**House Martin:** Even fewer of these than of **Swallows** with 18 reports totalling 23 birds - one over the Test north of Romsey on Mar 27 seems to have been the third seen in Hampshire

**Meadow Pipit:** These are still pouring north, especially over Dorset. Here in Havant one was singing briefly over the South Moors on Mar 27 (the first song was reported at Durlston on Feb 22)

**Robin:** Nest building in Emsworth on Mar 23 - not the first as there was a report of a nest with two eggs in the Farnborough area back on Feb 24

**Common Redstart:** First for the year at Ebernoe near Midhurst on Mar 25 - unusually this was a female rather than a male

**Blackbird:** Nest building in Emsworth on Mar 23

**Fieldfare:** Flocks of 100+ were seen on Mar 24 in the New Forest and near Crowborough in Sussex with 107 seen in the New Forest on Mar 29

**Redwing:** These have been in short supply this winter (far fewer than **Fieldfare** in most reports) but on Mar 25 there were 10 of them at West Wittering near the mouth of Chichester Harbour with no accompanying **Fieldfare**. Perhaps the majority have wintered on the continent as a result of warmer than usual weather - there is some evidence for this is a report from Sandwich Bay (where they have not featured during the winter) of 287 passing north there on Mar 27

**Sedge Warbler:** First for the year reported at Rye Harbour on Mar 26 and several were singing there by Mar 29

**Blackcap:** The first of our summer birds may be starting to arrive - one bit of evidence comes from Christchurch Harbour where five suddenly appeared on Mar 29

**Pallas' Warbler:** The bird which was found in the Weymouth town area on Mar 12 started to sing regularly from Mar 22 and could still be heard on Mar 28

**Chiffchaff:** Plenty of these around and singing but a fall of 427 birds at Sandwich Bay on Mar 27 (and 50 at Portland on Mar 28) is worth noting

**Willow Warbler:** The first to be seen at Portland was there on Mar 24. I have seen just three earlier reports - Selsey Bill on Mar 16, Langstone village on Mar 18 (not certain if this was a correct report), and Christchurch on Mar 22. By Mar 29 I had seen 12 reports cover at least 16 birds with 2 singing inland at Andover on Mar 29

**Firecrest:** It looks as if more than usual are currently arriving to spend the summer here. Counts at Dungeness have been 6 on Mar 24, 7 on Mar 25, 10 on Mar 26 and 12 on Mar 29 when 8 more were in Christchurch Harbour and one on the Pagham harbour shore

**Golden Oriole:** One was reported in woods north of Hastings on Mar 27

**Great Grey Shrike:** What may have been the last of the winter birds was in Ashdown Forest on Mar 25

**Rook:** A survey of rookeries in Sussex during 1996 recorded 154 nests at Hambrook by the A27 west of Chichester (these are the birds seen in the Pig fields and MoD site west of Funtington) and until I looked back at the report of the survey I had the impression that Hambrook had the biggest rookery in Sussex. In fact the table from which I got this impression shows 13 Rookeries each having more than 100 nests and Hambrook is shown as top of the list with the following 11 sites having smaller numbers. What I failed to notice is that the table is in alphabetical sequence of site names and that the last entry (for Winchelsea on Rye Bay) had 351 nests, well ahead of all the others. My reason for mentioning this is that on Mar 27 the Rye Bay website carried an item about this rookery in which Cliff Dean said that it is .. "the biggest rookery in Sussex, with about 350 nests. This morning, I counted a mere 326, but quite a few of these were in the very first stages of construction. New nests appear into April until unfolding leaves conceal latecomers". Cliff added .. "The occasional croak betrays the presence of between 4 & 7 pairs of **Hérons**, standing on their massive nests high in the branches".

**Starling:** If you are worried about a shortage of **Starlings** it may be that this will soon be eased by the arrival of continental birds as on Mar 27 more than 11000 migrants passed over Sandwich Bay

**Tree Sparrow:** Their decline in southern England continues - in Jan and Feb 2007 there were reports of 40 at Dungeness and 44 at the Pannell Valley (Rye Bay). So far this year the only report from the Dungeness area has been of 'a few' there on Mar 24, and the only other reports from southern counties have been of 5 birds in the Henfield area (Arun valley) and now of just 1 'possible' sighting at Newtown Harbour on the IoW on Mar 25 and just 1 at Dungeness on Mar 27

**Chaffinch:** The surge of migrants passing Sandwich Bay on Mar 27 included 2300 Chaffinch

**Brambling:** 120 were still around Fleet pond in north Hampshire on Mar 27 and on Mar 29 there were more than 80 at the Blashford Lakes

**Linnet:** The flock in the Chilling area west of Titchfield numbered around 950 on Jan 19, then 750 on Mar 9 and now just 100 on Mar 25

**Corn Bunting:** The only Hampshire reports so far this year started well with a flock of up to 52 at Cheesefoot Head (east of Winchester) in early January. On Jan 17 two birds were seen in the Test valley at Kings Somborne but nothing since then until a report on Mar 23 from the area of open fields southwest of Fareham saying that one had been there recently. More recent good news is of several present and singing in the Andover area.

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** A few more out this week

**Small White:** One in the Horsham area on Mar 26 appeared at a more expected date than the four earlier reports on Feb 8, 13, 18 and Mar 5

**Orange Tip:** The first out at Horsham on Mar 26 and another at Titchfield Haven on Mar 27

**Red Admiral:** Just one at Gosport on Mar 19 became the 49th report of the year

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Two seen at Gosport on Mar 29. Also relevant is an entry on Brian Fellows' website referring to a report which got into the Daily Telegraph recently blaming the decline of this species in recent years to an increase in numbers of a fly called **Sturmia bella** whose larvae invade the caterpillars of Nymphalid butterflies and eat the caterpillar from the inside before pupating. **The fly is one of a group known as Tachinid flies which are related to House Flies and Bluebottles**, and this particular species is **an invader from Europe** that was first identified in Britain in 1998 when it was found killing Peacock caterpillars in Hampshire. Reading up about this fly I learnt to distinguish **'parasites'** (which attach themselves to another species and may cause it much discomfort) from **'parasitoids'** which kill off the species to which they attach themselves, but make sure their food supply lasts as long as possible by eating the non-essential organs of the prey first. While **Sturmia** is a new problem to Nymphalid butterflies there were already some **250 British species of Tachinid** before it arrived. Unlike **some Tachinids that lay their eggs directly into the living body of the prey species**, and others which **lay their eggs on the prey and leave the larvae to burrow in**, **Sturmia** uses the sneaky approach of **laying its eggs on the foodplant of the prey and allowing the unsuspecting caterpillar to ingest them** as they munch their way through the nettles on which this group of butterfly caterpillars feed.

**Peacock:** This was the most commonly seen butterfly of the week with 8 reports

**Comma:** Two of these were seen

**Speckled Wood:** First of the year seen at Normandy Farm on the Lymington Marshes - the farm is now home to Pete Durnell who wrote 'The Wildlife of Hayling Island' when living here

## Moths

**Water Carpet (1750 Lampropteryx suffumata):** First of year found in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Mar 26 - normally flies in April and May

**Mottled Grey (1775 Colostygia multistrigaria):** First report of this species since an exceptional early appearance in January - normally flies in March and April

## PLANTS

**136 flowering plants seen in March so far (130 seen by me)** against a total of 169 seen so far this year (159 seen by me)

**Buttercups:** Several **Bulbous** and one **Meadow** seen this week with **Goldilocks buttercup** already having well formed buds by Mar 25

**Stream Water Crowfoot:** Just two flowers seen on Mar 27 in the water overflowing from the Bedhampton springs into the Hermitage stream

**Dove's Foot Cranesbill:** One flower seen in roadside grass on Mar 28 was my first for the year

**Storks Bill:** Another first seen on Mar 27 at Broadmarsh slipway

**Lesser Periwinkle:** This has been flowering since Feb 12 but the massive show on the floor of Pits Copse (across Park Lane from the Stansted Redwood Groves) seen on Mar 25 deserves a mention - best I have ever seen here.

**Moschatel:** A good showing in Pyle Lane near Horndean on Mar 25 was my first but the first flowers were seen by John Goodspeed on Mar 11

**Butterbur:** Brian Fellows counted the plants flowering at Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Mar 26 and obtained a total of 201 which is the lowest of all the annual peak counts made over the years 1999 to 2008 (max was 458 in 2001) - it is possible that a few more will appear next month

**Snakeshead Fritillary:** No doubt these were planted ten years or more ago but a few plants continue to flower in grass under trees on the north side of the short footpath from the main road roughly opposite the Langstone High Street to connect with Mill Lane. Twelve flowers were seen on Mar 27

**Arum Lily (Lords and Ladies):** The first spathe was unsheathed to allow the spadix to 'flower' at Nore Barn, Emsworth, on Mar 26 with another seen in Mill Lane at Langstone on Mar 27

**Hairy Woodrush:** First flowers seen in The Holt wood near Pyle Farm at Horndean on Mar 25

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** 2 off Portland on Mar 23 were the first reported since Feb 1

**Water Vole:** Two were seen actively rushing around (and possibly mating) for at least 30 minutes in the R Ems at Brook Meadow around midday on Mar 25 - this is the first sighting of two together here this year. At least one other sighting at Emsworth since then plus a note from a visitor to Arundel Wildfowl Reserve that many Voles can be seen alongside Mill Road before you reach the reserve

**Hare:** Another comment from a birder on the Sussex Ornithological Society website is that the area called The Burgh above the east bank of the R Arun where it cuts through the Downs near Amberley is a great place to see **Hares**

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 24 - 30 (WEEK 12 OF 2008)

### Fri 28 Mar

#### Narrow-leaved Lungwort and Dove's Foot Cranesbill

Not much encouragement to get out today until late afternoon when the rain ceased and the sun came out so I only took a short walk with the aim of having another look at the Eastern Road cemetery.

The **Primroses** and **Early Dog Violets** in the cemetery are still at their best and this visit added **white flowered Sweet Violet** and **Bulbous Buttercup** to the plants flowering there, with good growth on a **White Bryony** plant.

More interesting finds came before and after the cemetery. Before getting there I found **Lungwort** flowers poking up through a mass of brambles beside the old rail track (now known as the Hayling Billy trail cycle way) just before it reaches New Lane. I had not spotted this plant here in previous years and the flowers looked somewhat different to those on the normal garden escapes so I pushed my way into the brambles for a closer look and found that the basal leaves were of the type that distinguishes **Narrow-leaved Lungwort** (i.e. a narrow elliptic blade on a long very thin stem) and the flowers appeared smaller than those on the normal garden plants. I am sure that this is not the wild native plant but maybe some sort of 'reversion' to the form from which the garden plants were bred.

Walking up New Lane after leaving the cemetery I had a genuine discovery of a nice new plant for the year list - one flower of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** in the roadside grass verge. Other finds were a clump of **Common Ramping Fumitory** (with flower buds not yet open) at the edge of the allotments and one plant of **Meadow Buttercup** in flower plus a couple more plants of **Garlic Mustard** in flower

### Thu 27 Mar

#### Snake's Head Fritillary in flower and Meadow Pipit song

A clear sunny sky this morning allowed me to enjoy a cycle ride to Broadmarsh and back, giving me sightings of a **Kingfisher** still present on the Brockhampton stream and **Swans now sitting on nests** on Budds Farm and Langstone Pond.

I set out heading for Bedhampton Mill and found my first two flowers on **Stream Water Crowfoot** in the overflow from the Bedhampton springs and my first **Storksbill** flowers at the Broadmarsh slipway. Along the shore here around **400 Brent** were still present with **40 Black-tailed Godwit**, **8 Wigeon** and a couple of **Mergansers**.

Heading down the Brockhampton stream I disturbed the **Kingfisher** from its usual perch just below the second bridge, and on the Budds Farm shore I added half a dozen **Turnstone** and a single **Shelduck** to my bird list.

On the Budds Farm pools one of the two **Swans** was sitting on a nest in the usual place with seven **Canada Geese** present on the water but surprisingly **no Shelduck** to be seen. Other wildfowl included **4 Gadwall**, **6 Shoveler**, and **10 each of Tufted Duck and Teal** but **no Pochard**. The expected **Mallard**, **Dabchick**, **Coot** and **Moorhens** could be seen and a **Cetti's Warbler** was singing (as was one **Chiffchaff**).

**120 Brent** and **4 more Wigeon** were on the South Moor shore where the seawall path has had a battering in the recent storms - shingle from the beach covers the whole length of the path, the path has collapsed at one point where the sea has undermined the wall, and in another place large blocks used to raise the height of the wall have been swept off the wall and onto the path.

Perhaps today's best bird was a **Meadow Pipit** making a **single parachute drop** over the grass of the Moors while uttering a **faint version of its song** to show its intention to stay here and try to breed despite global warming. A single **Skylark** also sang.

In Mill Lane I found **my first unsheathed Arum lily** and a single plant of **Bulbous Buttercup** in flower, then (in the small enclave of grass among the trees north of the footpath cutting the corner to head straight towards the main road) I was delighted to find **twelve flowers of Snakeshead Fritillary** which had appeared sometime in the past week - these were presumably planted here and I have been seeing them for at least 5 years.

On Langstone Pond both **Swans** were at the nest (seen by looking left from the duck feeding point on the seawall) and on the saltings some **70 Golden Plover** were resting with **30+ Shelduck** on the seawater. The Wade Court fields had **11 Teal** and **1 Heron** on the remains of the flood and **3 Egrets** on the pony fields north of the house.

Yesterday Alistair Martin was making a circuit of Wade Court from Langstone and got a good photo of a **Water Rail in the Lymbourne stream** beside the Billy Trail, and early this morning Tony Gutteridge was at the Warblington Farm shore reedbed when **another Water Rail** popped up close to him - both birds were presumably on passage and had broken their overnight long distance flights to hide by day in places that were strange to them.

[Tue 25 Mar](#)

## Goldilocks buttercup in bud and my first Woodcock of the year

This morning I took a regular stroll around Havant and ticked 42 plants in flower but added nothing to my year list. Among the plants I saw were **Rue-leaved Saxifrage**, **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** and **Lesser Celandine** all showing an increased number of flowers over last week - in particular the early flowering **Celandines**, which were beginning to die back, seemed to have been superseded by a new wave of fresh plants.

After lunch I drove to Pyle Lane, just south of Horndean, for a walk down the narrow part of the lane in the dip west of Pyle farm where **Goldilocks buttercups** flower each year. They were not yet out but I was pleased to see a sprinkling of plants with unopen buds that should be in flower before the month is out. The flowers I did find in the lane included a great mass of **Moschatel**, backed by **Dogs Mercury** and **Blackthorn**, with a sprinkling of **Early Dog Violets** and **Wood Anemones**.

Walking south into The Holt wood I was greeted by **Chiffchaff song** and the **mewing of a Buzzard** patrolling the woodland edge. Under the young Beech trees northeast of the path running southeast through the wood to Links Lane in Rowlands Castle the massive ground cover of **Bluebells** was beginning to turn blue but my interest was in a much duller plant - the first **Hairy Woodrush** I had seen in flower. Going off the well used paths to the extreme northwest corner of the wood I found many **leaf rosettes of Early Purple orchid** but only a couple had any sign of a sheathed flower stem starting to develop.

Back at the car I drove on via Finchdean and Forestside to go through Stansted Forest and park at the end of Park Lane (just before reaching Brickkiln pond). Walking along the lane I passed the way into the Stansted Groves and jumped the ditch on the south side of the lane to follow a well used deer track into Pits Copse where the whole ground for several acres is currently **a mass of Lesser Periwinkle flowers** - well worth seeing as I think this year's show is the best I have ever seen there.

Back in the Stansted Groves I found a great show of **wild Primroses** but very few signs of **Early Purple orchids** - however one of two plants nestling under an isolated **Hawthorn** had a sheathed flower spike some 4cm high. Just after seeing this the peace of the wood was shattered by the clatter of a **Woodcock** departing from a nearby thicket - the bird had to fly up vertically to escape the tangle, giving me a second or less to take in its rich brown plumage before it dropped down to make a typical escape flying just above ground level and zig-zagging through the trees.

Another good bird here was a **Tree Creeper** which I spotted when trying to locate the bird making a noise like the quiet contact calls of a **Chiffchaff** but louder and more regular - I'm pretty sure the sounds did not come from the **Tree Creeper** (too loud for it) and I suspect they came from a **Great Tit** which was in the area, though if they did the **Tit** must have been following the **Tree Creeper** from tree to tree for some time during which I could see neither bird so the mystery is unsolved.

My final stop was at Aldsworth Pond where a **Mallard had a brood of around ten tiny ducklings** out on the water but constantly disappearing among the mass of weed which rises above the surface of this pond (much of it the uncommon **Mare's-Tail** plant). Also on the pond were at least **8 Shoveler**, **half a dozen Tufted Duck** and the usual **Little Grebes**, **Moorhen** and **Coot (two of these already sitting on nests)**. No **Swans** here this year but in the field west of the pond **one pair of Canada Geese** were on parade and will probably nest on the very overgrown island previously used by the **Swans**.

On the subject of **Swans** Nik Knight tells me that **one of the Langstone pond birds was on a nest** (or building it) for the first time yesterday.

### **SUMMARY FOR MAR 17 - 23 (WEEK 11 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** include a **very early Swift** on the loW and a **Girl Bunting** at Portland. Unusual reports were of a **Rough-legged Buzzard** going north over Christchurch, **three Cranes** briefly at Pulborough, a **Kestrel catching a Daubenton's Bat** by day and a **Ring-necked Parakeet** at Sandy Point on Hayling. Other good items were the **first Peregrine egg** being laid, **Willow (and Pallas') Warbler song** and the reported arrival of a **Tree Pipit** in north east Hants - and for amusement I learn that **Jackdaws** living on the cliffs at Hastings are called **Coastguard Chickens**.

**Large White**, **Large Tortoiseshell** and **Bee-fly** are all in this week's **Insect news**. **New flowers** include **Greater Stitchwort** and **Crosswort**, **Common Dog Violet** and **Garlic Mustard**, **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** and four more trees (**Oak**, **Hornbeam**, **Black Poplar** and **Hawthorn**)

### **BIRDS**

**Slavonian Grebe**: One in partial summer plumage was off Selsey Bill (with a **Great Northern Diver**) on Mar 18. Two more of the grebes were in Dorset (Poole Harbour on Mar 19 and Longham Lakes on Mar 20) in almost full summer plumage

**Black-necked Grebe**: On Mar 21 one was still on Pagham Lagoon with at least one still at the Blashford Lakes, and on Mar 18 one in summer plumage was still on Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough

**Cormorant**: Several were carrying nest material to the loW cliffs near the Needles on Mar 20 - also in the area were **3 Shags**

**Bittern**: On Mar 20 one was still at Rye Harbour and another at the nearby Dungeness RSPB reserve

**Cattle Egret**: The two birds were still at Lavant (Chichester) on Mar 20 when another flew north over Christchurch Harbour and on Mar 21 one was seen at Abbotsbury in Dorset

**Spoonbill**: 12 birds were still in Poole Harbour on Mar 16 with at least 4 seen on Mar 19 while one was still being seen at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Mar 21.

**Mute Swan**: One was **already on a nest** at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 21

**Whooper Swan:** One seen at Sandwich Bay on Mar 20 was the first I have seen reported anywhere since two were at Rye Harbour on Feb 17 (the last report of the family of five at the Chichester Lakes was on Feb 10)

**White-front Goose:** A single tundra race (albifrons) bird was at Farlington Marshes on Mar 16 - two **Barnacles** and one **Pale-bellied Brent** also there that day. Maybe the **Whitefront** then flew to Titchfield Haven where a first winter bird was seen on Mar 19 and 20

**Brent Goose:** There were still around 200 along the shore from Langstone to Emsworth on Mar 18 (seemingly mainly families with young), and Christchurch Harbour still had 189 birds that day. By Mar 22 the number on the water around north Hayling was down to less than 100 but I was surprised to find a flock of at least 500 on the Hayling West Lane fields

**Shelduck:** On Mar 22 I found a pair alone in the old Holiday Camp boating lake at Northney on Hayling and had the impression that they were intending to stay and nest here while a group of 14 at the Oysterbeds were still in winter mode. Last year the first duckling was seen on May 7 and as they incubate their eggs for four weeks those **Shelduck** that intend to nest here should be laying their eggs at the beginning of April.

**Wigeon:** Around 50 still on the Warblington shore on Mar 18 with some **30 Teal** in the Langstone area but I have seen neither since then

**Garganey:** Latest additions to the sightings of this species include one flying past Seaford on Mar 16, one new in at Bembridge (IoW) on Mar 17 and still there the following morning, a pair on the north Kent coast at Oare Marshes also on Mar 17, and one at Dungeness RSPB on Mar 18. On Mar 19 a male was seen on the lagoon at Pagham and it was still there on Mar 21 but its origin is in doubt as it shows none of the wariness of a normal **Garganey** and comes to breed with the **Mallards**.

**Aythya hybrid:** What was at first reported as a **drake Scaup** on the Pagham Lagoon on Mar 19 was agreed to be a **Tufted Duck hybrid** by Mar 21. It is probably a different bird to the one on the Thorney Little Deeps from Feb 12 to 22 as that was thought to be a **Pochard hybrid**

**Long-tailed Duck:** The last report for this winter seems to have been the Widewater (Worthing) bird reported on Mar 16

**Surf Scoter:** The first winter female which appeared on the sea off Ovingdean (east of Brighton) on Mar 15, and was still there on Mar 18, is a different bird from the similar bird which has been in The Fleet at Weymouth since Feb 13 and was still being reported there on Mar 17. Both birds were still at their respective sites on Mar 21

**Goldeneye:** Three were still at Pagham lagoon on Mar 19

**Goosander:** The number roosting at the Blashford Lakes was down to 8 on Mar 21

**Sparrowhawk:** A male (by its small size) was high over my garden in Havant on Mar 19 being noisily harrassed by an adult pair of **Herring Gulls**, adding to my belief that these gulls intend to nest on rooves in the Havant area.

**Buzzard:** Sightings on Mar 18 of one bird flying over a tall tree carrying a stick in its talons, and of a second bird perched in that tree, help to confirm my belief that a pair are intending to breed in the Langstone/Warblington area this year.

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** On Mar 17 one flew over the Christchurch Harbour area, presumably returning northward from a winter spent on the continent. It was said to be only the second ever recorded at that site - the first having been seen in Mar 2002.

**Osprey:** The first to reach us was over Gloucestershire on Mar 4, with another over the M3 at Winchester on Mar 7, and what was maybe the fourth to arrive was over Weymouth on Mar 19.

**Kestrel:** On Mar 15 one caught a **Daubenton's bat** as the bat was flying by day low over the lake at The Vyne National Trust site near Basingstoke

**Merlin:** Still a few around. On Mar 16 a female was seen at Farlington Marshes, on Mar 17 one was at Lodmoor near Weymouth in Dorset and on Mar 18 there were sightings in Kent (female flying north at Sandwich Bay) and at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough in Sussex. Latest report is of one in off the sea at Christchurch harbour on Mar 22

**Peregrine:** The **first egg was laid** in the nestbox on the Sussex Heights tower block in Brighton on Mar 18

**Water Rail:** The bird that has been seen in the River Ems at Brook Meadow (Emsworth) since Feb 12 was still there on Mar 19

**Moorhen:** A pair were seen mating on Mar 15 at Swalecliffe on the north Kent coast between Whiststable and Herne Bay

**Common Crane:** Three birds landed at the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve on the afternoon of Mar 18 and were still there (and feeding) on the morning of Mar 19 though they flew off west at around 9am

**Golden Plover:** There were still 440 at Rye Harbour on Mar 21

**Purple Sandpiper:** At least 7 were seen at Southsea Castle on Mar 16

**Common Snipe:** The sight of 81 all visible together at Yarmouth (IoW) on Mar 16 must have been impressive - presumably these were birds on passage, maybe having a rest after just crossing the channel.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A group of at least 40 was feeding off Langstone village on Mar 18 and there were at least 25 on the Northney shore on Mar 22 when the number at Christchurch Harbour was up to 84. On Mar 19 there were 79 in Yarmouth Harbour on the IoW

**Curlew:** A pair were seen back on breeding territory in the New Forest on Mar 16

**Spotted Redshank:** The Nore Barn bird was still present on Mar 18 though difficult to spot while it was 'sleeping like a log' among floating seaweed just offshore before the tide had fallen much from high. More recent reports are of 5 at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Mar 19 and one still at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 22

**Green Sandpiper:** These seem to be fairly scarce this winter and the only report for this week is of one at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 21

**Med Gull:** Although quite a few are present in Langstone and Chichester Harbours I have seen no significant counts yet - on Mar 22 there were probably only 20 at the Oysterbeds. Elsewhere there were 96 at Rye Harbour and more than 85 in Pagham Harbour on Mar 21 with 92 at Titchfield Haven on Mar 19

**Little Gull:** Numbers now increasing - this week there was one inland in the Romsey area on Mar 16 and on Mar 21 there were 22 at Dungeness, 1 in Pagham Harbour and 1 'walking on the water' at the Westhampnet Lake where the A27 goes east from Chichester

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird has not been mentioned since Mar 9 but on Mar 20 one was in Poole Harbour

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** 325 flew west along the north Kent coast on Mar 22 in a major movement involving **3100 Herring Gulls, 90 Great Black-backs, 60 Common, 7 Kittiwakes** and a **Glaucous Gull**.

**Iceland Gull:** On Mar 16 an adult was seen in Poole Harbour and on Mar 18 a first winter bird was seen at Newhaven. The Poole Harbour bird was still there on Mar 22

**Glaucous Gull:** The first winter bird was still at Shoreham on Mar 21 when a different first winter bird was at Dungeness

**Sandwich Tern:** By Mar 21 there were 85 present at Rye Harbour

**Stock Dove:** On Mar 18 a flock of at least 40 was feeding on one of the large fields at Warblington Farm which still has stubble. Adding to the meagre supply of left over grain was some from one of the large circular bales of straw which had burst open. Flocks of **Pied Wagtails** and **Chaffinches** were also seen here.

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** One paid a brief visit to the Sandy Point area of Hayling on Mar 19, almost a year to the day since a similar visit in 2007

**Long-eared Owl:** One was a surprise sight at Dungeness on Mar 19, presumably arriving from the continent.

**Swift:** First for the year was seen over Luccombe Down near Ventnor on the Isle of Wight on Mar 17, a good three weeks earlier than the previous 'earliest ever' in either Hampshire or Sussex

**Sand Martin:** By Mar 16 an estimated **110 Sand Martins** could be seen over the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood and on Mar 18 there were around 80 over the Chichester Lakes with plenty of smaller groups seen all across southern England by now

**Swallow:** Five early birds were reported between Feb 13 and Mar 3 with no more reported until Mar 12 but thereafter they have been seen daily in groups of up to four birds. The nearest to Havant have been three birds at Ella Nore (near Wittering) on Mar 15

**House Martin:** These too started to be seen daily from Mar 14 but the one seen at Langstone on Mar 4 remains the third report of the year for the country as a whole and the only one so far in the Havant area

**Tree Pipit:** First for the year was reported from the heathland south of Farnborough shortly before Mar 21

**Meadow Pipit:** Lots are now moving north - on Mar 18 the count at Portland was 300 and on Mar 20 there were 200 going over Christchurch Harbour

**Scandinavian (*littoralis*) Rock Pipit:** As these acquire breeding plumage they are much easier to recognize and we now have the first reports of them for the year. On Mar 15 three landed at Farlington Marshes and on Mar 16 the first was identified at Ovingdean in the Brighton area. On Mar 18 one was seen at Sandy Point on Hayling, on Mar 20 two were at Sandwich Bay in Kent and another was in East Sussex at the Cuckmere valley.

**Water Pipit:** Also seen at Farlington on Mar 16 were two **Water Pipits** - possibly the same two that were there in January. Also on Mar 16 singles were at Pagham lagoon and at Keyhaven marshes. More recently one was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Mar 21

**Black Redstart:** One had been seen on the roof of Chichester cathedral on Mar 2 and maybe the same bird was seen again there on Mar 22

**Stonechat:** These are still arriving from the south - Portland reported 30 on Mar 15, 25 on Mar 16 and 25 again on Mar 17 (maybe these were all hangers on from Mar 15 but more likely most were new birds) On Mar 16 Hayling Bay shore had at least six birds.

**Wheatear:** On Mar 16 Portland had a count of 150, and larger than usual numbers turned up at many other places - the best count locally being 27 at Farlington Marshes but there were also 22 on the South Hayling shore and 9 in the Warblington Farm shore field immediately west of Nore Barn wood. On Mar 17 there was an interesting find of 11 inland near Romsey at Abbotswood

**Blackbird:** By Mar 18 most males were singing occasionally and on Mar 21 one was seen on a nest at the Blashford Lakes (I guess others were sitting earlier than that date)

**Mistle Thrush:** For the first time this year I heard distant Mistle Thrush song from my garden on Mar 17 and **on Mar 23 two birds were singing at full blast**, one just east of my garden, one to the north (appropriately for Easter Day the latter was perched atop a **Tree of Heaven**)

**Blackcap:** Brief bursts of song were heard in Brighton on Mar 16 and at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 18, then on the Isle of Wight on Mar 20 and at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 21

**Pallas' Warbler:** The bird which has been in the Weymouth area since Mar 12 was still there and **singing** on Mar 22

**Willow Warbler: Chiffchaffs** are now to be heard and seen daily everywhere but so far I have only seen three reports of **Willow Warbler**. On Mar 16 one was said to be in the 'Bill House garden' at Selsey, and this was presumably seen well enough to be sure of the longer projection of the closed wing behind the bird's body to separate it from **Chiffchaff** (leg colour is usually dark in **Chiffchaff** and light in **Willow Warbler** and the latter does not regularly dip its tail as it moves around the branches, but both these features can mislead). On Mar 18 one was reported to have been in a Langstone garden, but I am not sure if the observer noted these features - that report said that the bird had been heard and if that means that it sang that would give conclusive proof of its identity but if it just refers to the bird's contact calls they can be difficult to assess as to the species making them. **Earliest ever Willow Warbler in Hampshire** is given as Mar 16 in 2001 though Sussex has a record of one on Mar 4 (year not stated). The **first bird reported to have been heard singing** was at Cowards Marsh alongside the River Avon at Christchurch on Mar 22

**Firecrest:** Quite a few seem to have arrived in the country from the south this week with reports of new birds from Dungeness, Rye Harbour, Beachy Head, Christchurch Harbour and Portland. **Song** has been heard in several places including Christchurch Harbour and the New Forest

**Willow Tit:** More song was heard at a Sussex site (probably near Arundel) on Mar 20 after an earlier report on Mar 11

**Great Grey Shrike:** Just two were found in the New Forest during the monthly survey which took place on Mar 15,16 and birds were still in Dorset (Wareham Forest) on Mar 17 and in Sussex at Lavington Common near Pulborough on Mar 19

**Jackdaw:** An attempt to count the birds making their homes in the crumbling cliffs east of Hastings on Mar 20 came up with a total of 240 but also introduced me to the local name for these birds - **Coastguard Chickens**

**Starling:** There was a significant movement of these on Mar 17 and 18. On 17 Mar 300 birds went past Fairlight near Hastings and on Mar 18 'thousands' were said to have flown north along the Rye Bay coast while 'thousands more' were feeding in wet grassland east of Rye - Sandwich Bay gives some idea of the number moving with a count of 2800 seen there on Mar 18 increasing to 7000+ on Mar 19

**Chaffinch:** These were moving north with the **Starlings** and other passerines - the count at Fairlight on Mar 17 was 500 and at Sandwich Bay on Mar 18 it was 1950 with 1412 seen there on Mar 19 and 672 on Mar 20. This movement seems to have included the pair that have been regularly feeding in my garden since the beginning of January but have not been seen since Mar 18

**Cirl Bunting:** One was briefly at Portland on Mar 20 - its rarity indicated by the dates of the three most recent sightings (28 Mar 1990, 16 Apr 1975 and 15 Apr 1968)

## **INSECTS**

## Butterflies

**Brimstone:** Three reports of singles seen on Mar 15 at Winchester, Ropley and Worthing

**Large White:** A female was out at Portland on Mar 19 - not the first, that had been seen in Gosport on Feb 12 but none have been reported since until this one which is still very much earlier than the normal date of mid-April

**Red Admiral:** Two reports on Mar 15 from Lewes and from the north Kent coast

**Small Tortoiseshell:** A single seen near Whitstable on the Kent coast on Mar 15 and another at Portland on Mar 19

**Large Tortoiseshell:** One was disturbed from hibernation in a barn at Normandy Farm on the Lymington marshes on Mar 14. This is not the first for the year as one had been seen in an Isle of Wight garden near Ventnor on Feb 18, and there had been four sightings at Portland (maybe of different individuals) between Jan 27 and Feb 10.

**Peacock:** One observer came across a dozen of these in the Thanet area of Kent on Mar 15 and on Mar 19 singles were seen at Newhaven in Sussex and Oxenbourne Down near Petersfield in Hampshire

**Comma:** Three reports, again all on Mar 15, from the Sussex downs, from Seaford and from the Whitstable area. Hampshire got its tenth report for the year with one at Overton near Basingstoke on Mar 17

## Moths

**Phyllonorycter anderidae (0347):** First find of this **Birch leaf miner** was in Kent on Mar 16

**Phyllonorycter kleemannella (0360):** Another first in Kent on Mar 17 - both this **Alder leaf miner** and the previous species should not fly until May or August

## Other Insects

**Bee Fly (*Bombylius major*):** One was flying in the Denvilles area of Havant on Mar 21

**Greater Bloody-nose Beetle:** One seen walking along the back of a **basking Adder** at Durlston on Mar 18

**Oil Beetle (*Meloe proscarabaeus*):** Also seen at Durlston on Mar 18 - id only probable

**Common Green Shield Bug (*Palomena prasina*):** Seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Mar 18

## PLANTS

**121 Species have been reported in flower so far this month with 116 seen by myself.** The year to date totals are 170 and 149

**Bay tree:** Flower buds on these tree suddenly opened on Mar 18

**Garlic Mustard** or **Jack by the Hedge:** One plant flowering by the A259/A27 junction east of Havant on Mar 21

**English Scurvygrass:** Flowers were newly out on this when I visited Nore Barn on Mar 18

**Common Dog Violet:** A good show of these plants already flowering along Daw Lane on Hayling on Mar 22

**Sweet Violet:** The white form was seen for the first time in flower at Emsworth on Mar 20

**Greater Stitchwort:** More than a dozen plants were in flower at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads in the Denvilles area of Havant on Mar 23

**Shining Cranesbill:** A single first flower seen on Mar 18

**Hawthorn:** A few flowers open on one young tree on Mar 18

**Rue-leaved Saxifrage:** One bud had opened on the first of these tiny plants on Mar 19

**Pedunculate Oak:** At least one tree with flowers and leaves opening on Hayling on Mar 22

**Hornbeam:** First catkins seen on Mar 18

**Horse Chestnut:** Not flowering yet but the first 'candles' of potential flowers could be seen among the emerging leaves on Mar 18

**Ash tree:** Flowers had been seen in Emsworth on Feb 3 but the buds on most trees remained closed until Mar 18 when I found several just opening.

**Hybrid Black Poplar:** Red male catkins torn off by the wind and lying on the road through Northney village on Hayling on Mar 22

**Yellow Archangel:** These had been reported in flower near Hastings on Mar 15, possibly on wild woodland flowers, but the only flowers I have seen were on the **garden variety (subspecies argentatum)** with large flowers and white blotches on the leaves - seen on Mar 18

**Crosswort:** First flowers seen on plants close to the **Greater Stitchwort** on Mar 23

**Groundsel:** This has of course been flowering all year but on Mar 18 I was pleased to find one plant of the '**rayed**' form in an arable field at Warblington Farm

**Field Woodrush (aka Good Friday Grass):** Flowers opened on my rough lawn on Mar 17

**OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Daubenton's Bat:** One was seen flying low over the lake at The Vyne National Trust site near Basingstoke by day on Mar 15 before it was taken by a **Kestrel**. Normally this species would only fly at night but I suspect that it, as with other bats, will emerge from hibernation for brief daylight flights at well spaced intervals during the winter - I believe these flights are necessary both to allow the bat to defecate and thus not allow toxins to build up in its body, and maybe also to give its muscles minimal exercise to prevent them atrophying.

**Common Newt:** One was seen out of water at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Mar 16 - the photo on the Rye Bay website shows it to be small and pale in colour and probably indicates it was hatched last year and is not yet full grown. Full adults were recorded returning to breeding ponds in the first half of January but presumably this youngster will not be participating the breeding process this year and so is free to wander.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 17 - 23 (WEEK 11 OF 2008)**

### Sun 23 Mar

#### Mistle Thrush song and Greater Stitchwort flowers

The first thing I heard when I went into my garden this morning was the sound of **two Mistle Thrushes** answering each other with full song - one bird was east of the garden and out of sight, the other was some hundred metres to the north, atop a **Tree of Heaven**. I have heard both these birds once each before today but this was the first time they have been singing together and at full blast.

After lunch I cycled through the Denvilles area to the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads where, on the north bank of Southleigh road, I had hoped to see **Greater Stitchwort** in flower and I was not disappointed - at least a dozen plants were in flower on the south facing hedge bank. As a bonus I also found the first flowers on **Crosswort** here.

### Sat 22 Mar

#### A lovely show of Common Dog Violets

Foiled by a weather forecast that the afternoon was going to be more enjoyable than the morning had been I got on my bike after lunch and achieved a 'personal best' with the speed at which I crossed Langstone Bridge going south with the wind behind me, finding just seven **Brent** on the choppy water before I reached the Oysterbeds.

There were a few more **Brent** in the relative shelter of the pools and Stoke Bay to the south, giving me a total of around 50, plus **half a dozen Merganser**, **fourteen Shelduck** and **four stoic Egrets** hunched on the bund walls. On the tern island **around twenty Med Gulls** were present and a patient birder watching the rough waters of the harbour told me there were still around **50 Merganser** out there. The only birds I could see here in any numbers were **200+ Oystercatchers** on the bar of Stoke Bay.

After sitting out the first squall of the afternoon under the welcome shelter of the **Monterey pines** I continued south to the carpark as best I could as the normal

shore path had disappeared under masses of shingle of flotsam thrown up by recent high tides and south-westerly winds. My next objective was to see the show of **Primroses** in the small shore copse of **Oak trees** just south of Knotts Marsh and hopefully to find **Dog Violets** flowering beside the coastal path where it starts to run alongside the open West Lane fields. Before leaving the narrowing triangle of saltings on my right south of Stoke Bay I spotted just one clump of **English Scurvygrass**.

No problem with the **Primroses** and at least one **Common Dog Violet** was out but there was no sign of any half-expected **Red-legged Partridges** at the edges of the open field. While scanning for them I noticed a dark line in the distance and this turned into a flock of more than **500 Brent** when they took off and flew to land again close to me.

Turning back north I noticed my **first show of Oak leaves and flowers** on a tree in the copse before I took the path to West Lane, then went south down it to Daw Lane which turned out to be the high spot of my afternoon with a massive display of **Primroses** and **Celandines** in the north side ditch, liberally spotted with many more **Dog Violets**. The colour increased as I neared the main road with a grand show of the **Intermediate Periwinkles** (with their narrow bladed propeller like petals) before they gave way to **Greater Periwinkles** in the garden of the house at the end of the lane.

Taking Copse Lane towards Northney I ticked another tree in flower as I approached the village - here there is a long line of **hybrid Black Poplars** between the road and the open north Hayling fields and while I did not stop to scan their tops I noticed plenty of the blood red catkins on the road after a vain struggle with the fierce wind. After passing through most of the village I made a very rough count opposite Northney Farm of **30+ Rook nests** managing to withstand the force of the wind and with plenty of **Rooks** active around them.

While passing I thought I would have a look round North Common but all I saw was a **pair of Shelduck** in the old boating lake and a total of around **50 more Brent** in the marina area and off Warblington. Crossing Langstone Bridge again I added a group of at least **25 Black-tailed Godwits** feeding on the tide line east of the bridge

### [Fri 21 Mar](#)

#### **Garlic Mustard welcomes the spring**

Very strong north winds and sudden sharp showers today were the antithesis of March 'going out like a lamb' but the increasing day length as we reach the spring equinox still exerts its influence on plant growth and today I was pleasantly surprised to come on the **first flowers of Garlic Mustard** (or **Jack by the Hedge**) in a sheltered south facing site near the Warblington A27 interchange.

### [Tue 18 Mar](#)

#### **Buzzards at their nest and English Scurvygrass in flower**

On a cloudy but dry and almost windless morning I decided to walk to Nore Barn and was rewarded with several good finds before I reached Warblington. The first surprise was to find that flower buds had opened on many of the **Bay trees** which abound in the Havant area and the next was to see flowers on the garden version of **Yellow Archangel**. Then, entering the twitchel path between Wade Court Road and Pook Lane, I found my **first spring flower open on a Hawthorn bush**. As an

aside on this yesterday I happened to be in the Leigh Park area near the Hermitage Stream where an eccentric **Hawthorn** had flowers on it from late October to Christmas - it had no flowers yesterday.

Further along the twitchel (just after crossing Norris Gardens) I saw a single first flower on the **Shining Cranesbill** plants which line the east end of this path, and as I left the built up section of Pook Lane to cross the A27 bridge I found that the **Horse Chestnut buds**, which had opened last week to let out the first leaves, now had **incipient flower 'candles'** visible.

Coming down off the bridge into the old section of Pook Lane I found workmen still clearing out the ditch and thinning the hedge. Further down the lane I looked across to the tall **Monterey Pines** north of Wade Farm and saw a **Buzzard** circling over them - when I got my bins onto the bird I saw it was carrying a stick and I expected it to land and add the stick to the nest which I have guessed for some time is being built there but instead the bird drifted off to the south. A little later, when I was further down the lane, I heard **Buzzard 'mewing'** and expected to see the original bird coming back to the tree but a close look showed me the second bird of the pair perched in the tree with just its head and neck showing - perhaps the call I heard was the complaint of the female who had seen the male bringing a stick to help with home building but then drifting off to avoid any house work...

Reaching the sea there seemed to be no birds on the water but a scan located around **100 Brent** and some **50 Wigeon** with **3 Mergansers** and **one Egret** plus a few gulls. Later I found **another 100 Brent** and more **Wigeon** on the Warblington Farm shore with a total of over **10 Shelduck**, a similar number of **Oystercatchers** and just **2 Teal** on the sea. Coming back with the falling tide starting to expose the mud I found some **40 Black-tailed Godwits** on the Langstone shore with more than **30 Teal** (mostly on the flood south of Wade Court).

On the way out, with the tide still high, I walked through the Warblington cemetery and followed the public path to Nore Barn. In the cemetery **flower buds were opening on the Ash trees** and outside the farm the **Common Rampion Fumitory** and the **Black Nightshade** were both still in flower. Better things were to come, for when I reached the big field ('M' on my map) I found an example of the **rayed form of the Groundsel** which has persisted in this field for several years. Also in this field, along its northern edge, several of the huge circular straw bales had burst open revealing a meagre source of left over grain and this had attracted more than **40 Stock Doves** - also with them were at least **30 Alba Wagtails** though they were probably more interested in any insects there as the result of slurry having been spread over the field recently. Overhead **a Skylark was singing**.

At Nore Barn I hoped to see the **Spotted Redshank** by the Maisemore Gardens stream but the tide was still highish and the bird was nowhere to be seen on the mud or in the stream, so I looked for my second target species, **English Scurvygrass**. This is the place where I find this plant flowering each year at Easter time so I was very pleased, but not too surprised, to find several plants already flowering. For anyone not familiar with this plant it has larger white flowers than the **Danish Scurvygrass** which is now flowering along miles of roadsides which have been salted in the past. The leaves are very different (long, thin and slightly

spatulate) and the plant grows among the **Sea Purslane** on saltings regularly covered by the tide. It is easy to find here if you start from the bridge over the stream and walk round the west bank of the stream until you come to the start of the low earth wall separating the saltings from the grass. Here you will see a rusty metal pipe sticking up vertically on the seaward side of the wall - go to this pipe, then walk on about three paces and you should see the first white flowers at your feet (if not there are plenty of others to be found).

Before leaving the area I glanced at a **Swan**, preening in the edge of the water, and near it, among some floating seaweed, was what I thought was a piece of driftwood. Using my bins to check it out I found I was looking at the **Spotshank**, floating on the water and apparently asleep. It probably noticed my interest in it as before long it stirred, then swam/walked to shallow water and began its usual search for food.

Going home along the shore I had a quick look at the Conigar Point field which has had slurry spread on it (and maybe a dose of weed-killer as all the grass has gone yellow) but I was still able to find both **Field Woundwort** and **Corn Spurrey** with flower buds. No birds in the field today but in the **Tamarisks** further west along the seawall at least three migrant **Chiffchaffs** were searching for food.

Back at Langstone several **Blackbirds were singing** and the first **catkins were out on a Hornbeam** at the field end of the footbridge over the Lymbourne stream. Later in the day I noted a good show of **yellow Rape flowers** (on plants left over from last year) in fields lining the road near Mill Rythe on Hayling.

## [Mon 17 Mar](#)

### **Good Friday Grass flowers early**

The only new flower to record today was the humble **Luzula campestris** or **Field Wood-rush**, which is also called **Good Friday Grass** because of the date at which it flowers. Walking across my lawn I noticed that it had suddenly appeared among the rough grass and already had a frothy look to some of the black flower buds where the anthers had burst out.

Nothing else was new for the year in a short walk around Havant but I was pleased to see one bright yellow globular flower bud starting to open on the **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** plants in Juniper Square - having been flowering in January and February before 'going quiet' I thought it might rest for longer before flowering again.

**Chiffchaff song** was heard again today, as was a distant **Mistle Thrush** but otherwise there was nothing worth a note here

## **SUMMARY FOR MAR 10 - 16 (WEEK 10 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** include the arrival of **Osprey** and **Stone Curlew** with a major influx of **Chiffchaff** on Mar 15. Also in the news are the first **Puffin** and a very early/wintering **Curlew Sandpiper** plus the arrival of several more **Garganey** and **Whimbrel**

The number of flowering plants seen in March is now 115, including **Moschatel**, **Wild Daffodil** and **Early Forget-me-not** plus **Blue Anemone** and **Spring Starflower**

Other wildlife features **Frogs having their bottoms wiped with cotton buds** and **fish killed by too much water**

## **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**Slavonian Grebe:** On Mar 13 at least three were on the sea off Pagham Harbour and another three off the north east of the Isle of Wight. On Mar 14 two were off Selsey Bill

**Black-necked Grebe:** One was on Pagham lagoon from Mar 12 to 15 at least and three were still at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 13 with at least one there on Mar 15

**Cormorant:** In a discussion about the British and Continental races the opinion of someone in Holland was quoted as being that the spread of the Continental (sinensis) race would continue to push out the British/Atlantic (carbo) birds - Nick Hull wrote on Hoslist .. "A Dutch acquaintance of mine reckons that carbo will disappear within the next twenty years and be absorbed into sinensis, time will tell".

**Bittern:** The Blashford bird has not been seen since Mar 1 but one was still at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Mar 9 and two were seen at Stodmarsh (east of Canterbury) on Mar 14 but the latter were flyng off to the east, maybe leaving.

**Cattle Egret:** The two Chichester (Lavant) birds were last reported on Mar 11 but at least one was still in Sussex at Piddinghoe on Mar 15 when one was also seen near Wareham in Dorset

**Little Egret:** The flooding of shore fields by the exceptional high tides and rain on Mar 10 forced earthworms to the surface in an attempt to escape drowning (many failed to escape that fate) and **Egrets** were attracted to this bonanza - I counted 32 in the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone and saw others around the flooded South Moors.

**Grey Heron:** 25 nests were occupied in the Weir Wood heronry near Crowborough by Mar 9 and I assume that other heronries are equally busy now.

**Spoonbill:** On Mar 14 there were still 9 together in Poole Harbour and two more at Lodmoor (Weymouth) with one at Keyhaven from Mar 11 to 13 at least

**Bewick's Swan:** The only new report is of a single bird flying over Christchurch Harbour on Mar 9 - it looks as if the winter birds have now left

**Whitefront Goose:** A flock of around 100 were still in the Rye Harbour area with around 60 **Barnacles** on Mar 9

**Canada Goose:** Those which intend to breed are now returning to their proposed nest sites - a pair were back at Aldsworth pond north of Chichester on Mar 11 and on Mar 12 two pairs were on the still flooded area of the Langstone South Moors, probably intending to nest at Budds Farm

**Brent:** Dungeness reported another 1345 passing there on Mar 9 when the number seen at Farlington Marshes was only 500+. On Mar 10 there were still an estimated 200 in one of the Warblington shore fields - probably preferring not to travel while the 'great storm' was on (though watchers at Seaford that day saw a dozen **Brent** heading east, keeping low among the huge waves). More recently another large exodus took place on Mar 15 with 1700 passing Dungeness but that day also found the best part of 1000 (including many of last year's young) still on the Broadmarsh shore of Langstone Harbour (though probably just there in transit)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The family of four were still at Keyhaven on Mar 15 with two others seen on the Titchfield shore on Mar 14 and 15

**Brant:** Two were still present on Mar 9 - one on the fields north of Pagham Harbour and one in Portsmouth Harbour at Priddy's Hard, Gosport.

**Wigeon:** A lot of the local birds in Chichester and Langstone Harbours seem to have left but on Mar 15 there were still 50+ in the Broadmarsh area

**Pintail:** More than 40 were still at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 15 (but possibly just passing through as only one was reported there on Mar 13)

**Garganey:** Lee Evans' national report on rare birds dated Mar 10 listed **three Garganey** currently in the UK - one had reached the Hebrides by Mar 4, another had settled on Barnes Reservoir in London from Mar 2 to 10 while a different bird was in the London area on Mar 8. These are in addition to the exceptionally early bird reported at Pagham Harbour on Feb 27. **Another surge of arrivals was reported on Mar 15** with at least 12 seen passing Seaford in addition to four which arrived in the Keyhaven area that day and probably in addition to another three seen on Pagham Lagoon that day.

**Shoveler:** Seven were on Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) on Mar 11 and at least 15 were on Budds Farm pools on Mar 12 but only one was still there on Mar 15 (when 16 flew east past Dungeness)

**Long-tailed Duck:** One was still in the west Solent at the mouth of the Beaulieu river on Mar 11 and more seem to have arrived on Mar 14 when there were 6 in Poole Harbour, 2 in Portland Harbour and one on Widewater Lagoon near Worthing. On Mar 15 another three were seen in the Lymington area.

**Common Scoter:** A flock of around 1000 was in Rye Bay off Pett Level on Mar 9

**Surf Scoter:** The young female was still in The Fleet near Abbotsbury on Mar 15 but may have left that morning as one answering to the same description (first winter females) was on the sea off Ovingdean (east of Brighton) that same day

**Velvet Scoter:** At least one was in Rye Bay on Mar 9 and two were seen at Dungeness on Mar 11 and 12 with another off Selsey Bill on Mar 13

**Goosander:** The count at the Blashford Lakes was down to 15+ birds by Mar 15 (peak of 62 there in Jan)

**Ruddy Duck:** This year the only previous report that I have seen of one at Budds Farm pools was dated Jan 26 but on Mar 12 I had a good view of a smart male there.

**Osprey:** Lee Evans tells us that **Osprey** have started to return with one over Gloucestershire on Mar 4, one over Warwickshire on Mar 7 and even one over Hampshire (M3 at Winchester) also on Mar 7

**Water Rail:** Brian Fellows glimpsed one on the banks of the Ems in Brook Meadow on Mar 9 - it had probably been there unseen since a previous sighting in the same place on Feb 12 and it was still there on Mar 14 though it is unlikely to stay much longer - a migrant already leaving us was seen at Sandwich Bay on Mar 15

**Avocet:** The number at Rye Harbour had grown to 13 on Mar 15 since the first arrived back there on Mar 4

**Stone Curlew:** First of the year arrived in the Dungeness area on Mar 15

**Golden Plover:** A report of 560 at Rye Harbour on Mar 11 is an increase on recent counts there, probably reflecting continental birds moving north, though it is nowhere near the counts of 1700 on Jan 2 and 1400 on Feb 18. By Mar 14 there were 830 at Rye Harbour. Locally there were still 100+ at West Wittering on Mar 5 (and just 7 at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9).

**Knot:** 120 were still to be seen at Church Norton on Mar 11 when some 380 were in Newtown Harbour on the IoW

**Sanderling:** I had close views of 100 or more feeding on the Hayling Gunner Point tideline on Mar 14

**Little Stint:** One was at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 (presumably the same bird that was there on Jan 22 and 27). The West Wittering bird was last reported on Mar 1

**Curlew Sandpiper:** What was presumably an early passage bird was reported from Tilbury in Essex on Mar 10 - last year spring passage did not start until May 10 so the current bird may well have been here through the winter.

**Ruff:** Five were at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 15

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A flock of 250 was at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 - the only other reports of this species at Farlington Marshes which have been published this year were of 17 birds there on Jan 27 and 20 on Jan 29

**Whimbrel:** In last week's summary I guessed that three birds seen in Dorset on Mar 7 were the first, early, passage birds. This seems to have been borne out with further reports of singles at Climping (mouth of R Arun) on Mar 9 and at Keyhaven on Mar 11, while Lee Evans tells us that he is aware of some four reports from the south coast recently. Further confirmation that they are on passage comes in a report of 24 seen at the Dartford Marshes in north Kent on Mar 13 and at least one heard passing in the Purbeck area of Dorset on Mar 15

**Arctic Skua:** A single at Dungeness on Mar 10 was the first to be reported on the south coast since Jan 31 and marks the start of spring passage for this species. This is backed up by four reports of **Great Skua** starting on Mar 8 after a gap with no reports since Jan 15

**Med Gull:** More than 100 were back at Titchfield Haven by Mar 15 and 115 were at Pagham Harbour on Mar 12

**Little Gull:** On Mar 15 more than 10 were recorded passing Seaford and one was at Pagham Lagoon that day

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still at the Cockle Pond on Mar 9

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter bird was at Newhaven on Mar 9 and maybe the same bird at Dungeness on Mar 11, while an adult was among Med Gulls at the Badminton Common pool just inland of Calshot on Mar 12. The Dungeness bird was still there on Mar 13 and a first winter was seen at Ovingdean near Brighton on Mar 15 before flying south.

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird was still there on Mar 15 though maybe it took an excursion to Selsey Bill on Mar 14

**Kittiwake:** I had my first of the year off Gunner Point at Hayling on Mar 14

**Sandwich Tern:** One or two remain in the Dungeness area, where they arrived on Mar 4, and the first to be seen at Portland was there on Mar 10. By Mar 11 the number at Rye Harbour was up to 11 and on Mar 15 there were 8 at Dungeness

**Puffin.** First of the year seen at Portland on Mar 15

**Stock Dove:** A winter flock of 116 birds remains in the Chilling area near Warsash where they have been seen since January

**Short-eared Owl:** One flew in to Portland on Mar 15 but the R. Arun seems to be the favoured route north for these birds this spring - a total of 8 were seen on the Downs about the river near Amberley on Mar 15

**Kingfisher:** One seen on the River Ems at Brook Meadow on Mar 4 and 9 may well stay to nest somewhere upstream. Similarly in Havant (where a pair used to nest regularly in the Bedhampton area) it was good to see one still on the Brockhampton stream on Mar 12

**Sand Martin:** No shortage of these now - on Mar 14 there were well over 200 in Dorset and on Mar 15 there were 50 at the RSPB Arne reserve on the shore of Poole Harbour and 40 at the Blashford Lakes in Hampshire

**Swallow:** After half a dozen early birds turned up between Feb 13 and 21, plus one in Dorset on Mar 3, **Swallows** have started arriving from Mar 12 onwards.

**House Martin:** One arrived at Portland on Mar 14 to become the fourth bird known to have arrived since the first on Feb 29 (one of the four is reported to have been at Langstone on Mar 4)

**Meadow Pipit:** The arrival of these began in earnest on Mar 6 with 100+ going over Portland and by Mar 15 the count at Portland was 1200 with another 420 over Christchurch Harbour.

**Rock Pipit:** One was still on the Langstone Harbour shore by Budds Farm on Mar 12

**Water Pipit:** One or two were around Farlington Marshes in January but the last report from there was on Feb 2 with no more Hampshire reports until a couple were seen at Keyhaven on Mar 13

**Wheatear:** The first arrival for the year seems to have been one at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 8 and the first in Hampshire was at Calshot on Mar 12 but since then they have been arriving on a wide front with e.g. a total of 6 on the south coast of Hayling on Mar 15 when nine more were at other Hampshire sites (and 30 arrived at Portland)

**Mistle Thrush:** These are now rare in the immediate area of Havant so it was good to see at least one near Bedhampton Mill on Mar 12

**Blackcap:** One singing at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 15 was a migrant but probably a departing bird.

**Pallas' Warbler:** The bird in Oakers Wood near Bere Regis in Dorset has not been seen since Mar 2 but maybe the same bird has been on the outskirts of Weymouth from Mar 12 to 15 at least

**Chiffchaff:** Although there had been plenty of song from wintering birds reported since Feb 7 there was a sudden outburst of song everywhere on Mar 15 to indicate a major arrival of migrants (one was singing in the Billy Line here in Havant almost all day)

**Firecrest:** Quite a few migrants are now around with counts from Dungeness of 10 on Mar 14 and 15 on Mar 15

**Bearded Tit:** A flock of 13 birds were '**high flying**' at Rye Harbour on Mar 15, signalling their intention to pluck up courage for a flight into the unknown.

**Willow Tit:** One was singing 'somewhere in Sussex' on Mar 11 giving hope that they have not yet ceased to breed in that county. No reports so far from Hampshire but song was heard last year between Mar 15 and Apr 21 in two areas of northern Hampshire near Andover and Basingstoke so there is still hope.

**Rook:** These are generally thought of as sedentary birds but some do move around at this time of year. At Portland Bill two were seen on Mar 5, four on Mar 9 and eleven on Mar 15

**Chaffinch:** The biggest count of passage birds seen so far this spring is of 110 at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Mar 15

**Brambling:** A wave of birds passing north through Hampshire is indicated by reports of 14 **Brambling** with **Chaffinches** in the Chilling (Warsash) area on Mar 9, 52 at Blashford Lakes on Mar 10, and on Mar 11 counts of 150+ near Badbury

Rings in Dorset and 14 in one Romsey garden which also had 50+ **Siskin** on an array of feeders. In addition to birds on the move quite a few are still happy to stay at their winter feeders and Ian Julian tells us that he recently visited **a small garden in Petersfield where 280 Brambling were still present on Mar 11** and had been there for months.

**Siskin:** More than 50 were still at feeders in a Romsey garden on Mar 11

**Linnet:** The flock of 1000 birds seen in the Chilling area west of Titchfield in January still numbered 750 on Mar 9

**Twite:** Six winter residents were still in the Pegwell Bay area of Kent on Mar 14

**Lapland Bunting:** Despite the ploughing up of their favourite stubble field at Keyhaven one of the birds that has been there was seen on both Mar 13 and 15

## INSECTS

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### Butterflies

**One Brimstone was seen in Chichester on Mar 15**

### Moths

**Red-green Carpet (1760 Chloroclysta siterata):** First for the year trapped at Friston near Eastbourne on Mar 13 - newly flying after over-wintering as an adult

**Tawny Pinion (2235 Lithophane semibrunnea):** First for the year trapped at Friston near Eastbourne on Mar 13 - also newly emerged from hibernation

**Pale Pinion (2236 Lithophane hepatica):** First for the year trapped at Friston near Eastbourne on Mar 13 - also newly emerged from hibernation (I see this is recorded in my database as Lithophane socia but it is now listed as L. hepatica in UK Moths)

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**115 Species have been reported in flower so far this month** with 101 seen by myself. The year to date totals are 147 and 136. One species which had failed to open its first bud by the end of the week is **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** growing in central Havant pavement cracks and walls

**Meadow Buttercup:** A single plant in flower in Havant on Mar 11 was the first for the year

**Marsh Marigold (Kingcup):** By Mar 12 there were around 80 flowers out on four clusters of plants at the north end of the Langstone South Moors 'orchid field' - apparently none the worse for flooding by the high tide of Mar 10

**Blue Anemone (*Anemone apennina*):** Although I have probably seen this species in gardens I have never before come across it established in the wild and had to put a name to it until Mar 11 when I found a cluster of these plants, four of them flowering, in a dark corner of the virtually abandoned cemetery at Eastern Road in Havant - see my Diary for Mar 11

**Eastern Rocket:** One plant flowering near the Ferry Inn on Hayling on Mar 14

**Wallflower:** On Mar 14 I collected flowers from two roadside plants by the Ferry Road on Hayling which I had often thought might possibly be of the 'wild' species. At home I extracted the stigma from each flower and compared it to the drawings in Stace's Flora showing the wild plant to have two divergent lobes at the tip of the stigma whereas the garden plant has the two lobes pressed together. One of my specimens was clearly of the garden variety but the other had distinctly divergent lobes (but were they sufficiently divergent???)

**Cuckoo flower (aka Milkmaids):** This was reported in flower at Wisborough Green near Pulborough on Feb 15 and now we have another early report of the species flowering in Guestling Wood near Hastings on Mar 15

**Honesty:** One flowering outside gardens in Wade Lane at Langstone on Mar 10 was my first for the year

**Hoary Cress:** This plant usually shows its tightly closed flowerheads a week or more before the first flowers are seen in April (last year my first date was Apr 4 but that was unusually early). This year, however, roadside plants on a sunny bank in Havant had the beginnings of flowerheads visible on Mar 12 and since then I have seen similar buds in two other places

**Sea Kale:** Not in flower but the purple leaves were starting to emerge in the shingle of the Hayling shore on Mar 14 - the action of recent storms had swept away much of the shingle leaving up to 20cm of woody stem exposed and making the fresh leaves look like fronds on woody stemmed palm trees

**Early Dog Violet:** A mass of flowers was making a great display under old conifers at the east end of the Eastern Road cemetery in Havant on Mar 11

**Round-leaved Cranesbill:** A single flower seen on Hayling on Mar 14 was the expected first of the year though I had seen a couple of 'oddity' flowers at Langstone village on Jan 29

**Common Vetch:** Flowers on Hayling on Mar 14 were probably genuine first flowers though I had seen a plant flowering in Havant on Feb 1

**Horse Chestnut:** Leaf buds had burst on at least one local tree by Mar 10

**Cowslip:** The first flowers were reported from the Sussex Downs on Feb 24 but I did not see any locally until Mar 12 when a couple of plants had started to flower on the roadside of Mill Lane in Langstone with more near Broadmarsh on Mar 15

**Black Nightshade:** On Feb 4 I was very surprised to find a plant of this in flower at the foot of a brick wall at Warblington Farm. I have looked for it more than once

since, but not closely enough, for on Mar 10 I again found it, still in flower but hidden by other plants growing up around it.

**Slender Speedwell:** Since I found the first flowers in Havant St Faith's churchyard on Mar 6 I have seen more flowers in both Warblington cemetery and in Old Bedhampton churchyard

**Yellow Archangel:** Reported flowering in Guestling Wood near Hastings on Mar 15

**Early Forget-me-not:** A good show of these tiny flowers in the centre of the roundabout near the Ferry Inn on Hayling on Mar 14

**Green Alkanet:** The first flowers of the year seen on two plants at different sites around Havant on Mar 10

**Creeping Comfrey (*Symphytum grandiflorum*):** Although I had seen this flowering in cultivation last month the first flowers on plants long abandoned to the wild were seen on Mar 10 close to the similarly abandoned **Giant Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*)** by the Langbrook stream at Langstone.

**Moschatel:** The first flowers on this tiny '**Town Hall Clock**' plant were found on Mar 11 by John Goodspeed in Gundrymoor Wood on Portsdown close to South Downs College near the A3M. This is about two weeks earlier than normal in recent years.

**Field Madder:** Although this was flowering in both Jan and Feb I did not see any this month until Mar 12

**Oxford Ragwort:** I found buds opening in several places in Havant on Mar 11 and 12, later seeing fully open flowers in Solent Road which must have been open on Mar 11

**Sticky Groundsel:** One plant with flowers found close to one of the **Oxford Ragwort** plants on Mar 12

**Ox-eye Daisy:** A single cluster of plants has continued to flower in a sheltered spot by the Langbrook stream up to Mar 10 when they were still flowering but looking distinctly battered - interestingly on that same day I found a number of this spring's fresh plants starting to grow on a nearby bank and expect them to be flowering before this month is out

**Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*):** Some of these pretty blue spring garden flowers had, some years ago, been chucked onto the side of a ditch in Mill Lane at Langstone and still flower each spring though this year you have to peer deep into a bramble bush to spot them as I did on Mar 10

**Bluebell:** A few plants have started to flower but I think these are all Spanish or hybrid Bluebells rather than our genuine wild Bluebells. The Spanish plant which is commonly grown in gardens has a stout erect flower stem with flowers coming off it all round, while the genuine wild plant has a thinner flower stem which bends over at the tip with all its flowers hanging from the underside of the curve of the stem. As our plant hybridises easily with the Spanish species you find a wide range of

intermediate types. There is also an Italian Bluebell but that should not cause confusion as it is much more like a Hyacinth than either of the others and has narrow leaves and pyramidal flowers. Maximum leaf widths given by Stace are 12 mm for Italian, 20 mm for the native Bluebell and 35 mm for Spanish

**Spring Starflower (*Tristagma uniflorum*):** On Mar 14 around 30 of these pale mauve Crocus or Squill-like flowers were out in the usual place on Sinah Common (Hayling) opposite the end of Staunton Avenue

**Wild Daffodil:** John Goodspeed found a great display of these already out when he visited the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on Mar 11

**Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*):** I came on the first two spathes, still firmly sheathed, on Mar 10

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hare:** A visitor to the Sussex Downs south of Amberley on Mar 15 reported numerous Hares

**Frog:** An item on the Rye Bay website dated Mar 13 describes how researchers in East Sussex are **catching Frogs and wiping their bottoms with cotton buds** - not to ensure their cleanliness but to learn about the spread of a disease called **Chytrid** which is thought to have been brought into this country with **North American Bullfrogs**

**Fresh water fish:** When the high tide overtopped the seawall on Mar 10 and inundated Langstone Mill Pond with salt water many fresh water creatures got a nasty shock. Coupled with this the water level of the pond was raised allowing fish to swim (or be carried by the unusual flow of water) beyond the normal boundaries of the pond. Some may have been swept out to sea while others became stranded on 'dry land' as the tide fell - Nik Knight found **five small Rudd** (around 15 cm long) on or near the path between the pond and sea when he was there shortly after high tide on Mar 10. I guess there will have been even greater loss of fish in the Hilsea Moat (at substantial financial cost to the Portsmouth anglers who stock and fish the pools).

As an aside to this subject I recall walking round the tarmac path around the IBM Lake (many years ago) after a severe thunderstorm and finding **several 'minnow type' fish lying dead on the tarmac** - their fate must have been the result of being sucked up by the storm and dropped nearby (no dead cats or dogs were found on that occasion!)

**Fox cubs:** Still with the flooding of coastal fields on Mar 10 I watched a **Fox** in the field north of Langstone Pond when I was there just after the high tide. The sight of the adult **Fox** reminded me that this year's cubs are being born at this time, and I wondered how many may have been drowned before their eyes have opened - presumably **Foxes** dig their underground dens in places that will not flood with normal rain but they can have no defence against the sea flooding the area they have chosen for their den. This thought can be extended to a wide range of creatures living in these fields.

**Fungi:** Several finds of **Jew's Ear** recently, on Buddleia as well as Elder. In the Havant Eastern Road cemetery, where there was a great display of **Field Blewit** in January, the 'fairy ring' in which they grow is now clearly visible as much lusher and greener grass than its surrounds and on Mar 11 I found **four fresh Blewits** there.

## **Wildlife diary and news for Mar 10 - 16 (Week 10 of 2008)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

### **Sun 16 Mar**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Summary of past week's news**

My latest weekly summary of reports is now available by clicking [Weekly Summary](#) here

### **Sat 15 Mar**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Migrant Chiffchaff song and many Brent**

At least one **Chiffchaff was singing** in the trees along the old rail line behind my garden through much of the day - probably part of a wave of newly arrived migrants finding the rail line a good way of making their way north while still having a good chance of a meal.

I managed to get out on my bike before the rain arrived but I had not got far before I ran into light rain - not enough, though, to stop me getting to Broadmarsh and back via Budds Farm.

On the Budds Farm pools there were very few duck left - **half a dozen Teal, one Shoveler, one Pochard with very few Mallard and Tufted Duck**. The most obvious birds were those that intend to nest here - the **Swan pair** and **two pairs of Shelduck** (which had a good territorial squabble while I was watching). A couple of **Herring Gulls** perched on an island were clearly paired and maybe thinking of nesting on one of the new buildings at the sewage works? As an aside I still haven't got proof that **Herring Gulls** nest on the New Lane factories in Havant but I am already seeing adult birds in breeding plumage coming over my garden and circling the factories as they have done in recent years.

Moving to the shore around Budds Farm I found some **200 Brent with half a dozen Wigeon** and **forty plus Redshank**, but when I got to the Broadmarsh shore **the count of Brent went up to around a thousand birds**, many of them still showing the wing markings of last year's young. At a guess these were not our local birds but strangers from further west pausing here to feed on a relatively leisurely passage. With them were around **50 Wigeon** but there were few waders, probably because the tide was approaching high, but out on the water there were **half a dozen Merganser**.

Pausing by the Brockhampton stream I heard and saw a **pair of Grey Wagtails** fly over - they may well breed here - while enjoying the sight and sound of **50 Goldfinch** perched atop a streamside tree - they were presumably on passage.

[Fri 14 Mar](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Early Forget-me-not and Sanderling near Hayling Ferry

This afternoon I walked round the Hayling Golf Course, adding two bird species and four flowering plants to my year list.

Before starting my walk I stopped in the area south of Staunton Avenue to see if there was any sign yet of either the **Proliferous Pinks** or the **Cock's Eggs** plants. I found no hint of either species but did find many examples of another speciality at this site - a pale mauve Squill or Crocus like flower called **Tristagma uniflorum** which is sometimes called **Ipheion** but which Stace names as **Spring Starflower**. This was tick number one.

Parking by the Sinah Gravel Pit lake I set off west towards the Kench, finding **Round-leaved Cranesbill** in flower by the abandoned houses just before reaching the Kench - just one flower open but enough for my second tick. On the Kench at high water were **46 Brent** with a few **Redshank** round the tideline and **5 Shelduck** out on the gravel bank of the ancient failed attempt to save money on land purchase by building a railway line on an embankment in the harbour.

At the roundabout by the Ferry Inn, where you turn south into the public carpark south of the Ferry, I had my best new flower - a good show of the minute deep blue flowers of **Early Forget-me-not**. Look carefully for them among the very short grass (their stems are even shorter - almost non-existent) in the centre of the roundabout (mostly to be found on the west side behind the south end of the currently empty notice board).

Just before reaching the roundabout, on the north side of Ferry Road, is a show of **Wallflowers** and I took the opportunity of picking a couple of flowers to learn how to distinguish **Garden Wallflowers** from the native **Erysimum cheiri**, spurred to do this by recently receiving an email on this subject from Brian Fellows. According to Stace there is only one test to be made and it involves checking the lobes at the top of the stigma in the flower - if the lobes diverge it is the native species, if they are tightly pressed together it is the garden variety. When I got back home I made this test (but not until I had completely destroyed each of the two flowers as the stigmas are shorter than the ring of anthers which surround and completely hide the stigma). I had vaguely thought that these **Wallflowers** might possibly be native but the first stigma clearly matched Stace's drawing of the stigma of the **Garden Wallflower** - the other, however, had widely separate and divergent lobes, though not looking quite like Stace's illustration for the native plant. Once again, as with most attempts to identify species with which you are not familiar, the identification rested on the interpretation of what 'divergent' meant and I really need to see the stigma of a plant which has already been approved as native by an expert before I can be sure of the identity of the second plant I found.

In the shore carpark I added an expected fourth new flower - this time **Eastern Rocket** (only one plant in flower but others I think have been killed and blackened by recent inundation), and close to it was an unexpected find of **Wild Carrot** in flower (though this is not my first find for the year of that species)

After passing Gunner Point and reaching the point at which the shoreline straightens up into an easterly line I walked over the shingle to check for any birds on the tideline. My luck was in as the gloomy weather had kept the dog walkers and kite surfers away, allowing a large flock of waders to rest and feed at the edge of the high tide. The majority were **Sanderling** (at least 100) and these were the first I had seen this year. With them were **60+ Turnstone**, about **50 Dunlin**, two or three **Ringed Plover** and a single **Oystercatcher**. By standing still I did not worry the birds and the whole flock, which was working its way along the beach (mainly motivated by the insatiable restlessness of the **Sanderling** which were searching endlessly for food items) came within 20 metres of me.

While there I added another bird to my year list when a **Kittiwake** flew by, then landed on the water, showing the pure black tips to its long thin wings. I also noted the presence of a single **Ringed Plover** which seemed to already feel territorial about this stretch of beach - it flew low and fast from somewhere behind me (i.e. inland) calling strongly and seemingly trying to drive the other birds away from the beach. When it had passed through the line of birds at the water's edge it carried on out over the sea but its flight changed to the erratic butterfly like display of this species.

On the way back to the car I noted the effect of the recent storms in sweeping away the shingle around the stems of many **Sea Kale** plants so that up to 20 cm of hard woody stem were now exposed, having a tiny turf of purple new leaves at the top of each stem turning them into miniature look-alikes of some sort of exotic palm trees. To make it even more odd I discovered a **Strawberry Snail** (or similar species) established on one of the fresh plant leaves - where on earth did it come from? My final note on this walk was of flowers on **Common Vetch** (not new for the year) but I must add to today's tally the excitement of finding the first **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** with a nearly open flower bud when out in Havant this morning.

## [Thu 13 Mar](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Mid-week Summary

#### **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**Great Crested Grebe:** 40 birds on the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough are already paired but there were still some 300 birds on the sea off Dungeness on Mar 9

**Red-necked Grebe:** The lone bird at Weir Wood was still there on Mar 9 when one was still in Portland Harbour (nearly into its full summer plumage)

**Black-necked Grebe:** The two birds were still at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 11, now wearing breeding plumage, so two seen flying west over Christchurch Harbour on Mar 10 must have come from elsewhere

**Manx Shearwater:** The first of these for the current season arrived off Portland on Mar 1 but there were no further reports until Mar 10 when there were two off Portland and another off Christchurch. Two were again seen from Portland on Mar 11

**Balearic Shearwater:** After the 'first ever' March record of one seen off Portland on Mar 6 another (maybe three) was seen there on Mar 9

**Bittern:** The Blashford bird has not been reported since Mar 1 but one was still at Dungeness RSPB on Mar 9

**Cattle Egret:** The two birds at Lavant (Chichester) were still present on Mar 11 and there were sightings of singles at two places in Dorset on Mar 9 and 11

**Little Egret:** The flooding of shore fields by the exceptional high tides and rain on Mar 10 forced earthworms to the surface in an attempt to escape drowning (many failed to escape that fate) and **Egrets** were attracted to this bonanza - I counted 32 in the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone and saw others around the flooded South Moors.

**Grey Heron:** 25 nests were occupied in the Weir Wood heronry near Crowborough by Mar 9 and I assume that other heronries are equally busy now.

**Spoonbill:** Only four were seen on the edge of Poole Harbour recently (Mar 9) and on Mar 11 one turned up at the Keyhaven marshes

**Bewick's Swan:** The only new report is of a single bird flying over Christchurch Harbour on Mar 9 - it looks as if the winter birds have now left

**Whitefront Goose:** A flock of around 100 were still in the Rye Harbour area with around 60 **Barnacles** on Mar 9

**Canada Goose:** Those which intend to breed are now returning to their proposed nest sites - a pair were back at Aldsworth pond north of Chichester on Mar 11 and on Mar 12 two pairs were on the still flooded area of the Langstone South Moors, probably intending to nest at Budds Farm

**Brent:** Dungeness reported another 1345 passing there on Mar 9 when the number seen at Farlington Marshes was only 500+. On Mar 10 there were still an estimated 200 in one of the Warblington shore fields - probably preferring not to travel while the 'great storm' was on (though watchers at Seaford that day saw a dozen **Brent** heading east, keeping low among the huge waves)

**Brant:** Two were still present on Mar 9 - one on the fields north of Pagham Harbour and one in Portsmouth Harbour at Priddy's Hard, Gosport.

**Garganey:** Lee Evans' national report on rare birds dated Mar 10 listed three Garganey currently in the UK - one had reached the Hebrides by Mar 4, another had settled on Barnes Reservoir in London from Mar 2 to 10 while a different bird was in the London area on Mar 8. These are in addition to the exceptionally early bird reported at Pagham Harbour on Feb 27

**Shoveler:** Seven were on Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) on Mar 11 and at least 15 were on Budds Farm pools on Mar 12 but only four were seen at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9

**Long-tailed Duck:** One was still in the west Solent at the mouth of the Beaulieu river on Mar 11

**Common Scoter:** A flock of around 1000 was in Rye Bay off Pett Level on Mar 9

**Surf Scoter:** The young female was still in The Fleet near Abbotsbury on Mar 11

**Velvet Scoter:** At least one was in Rye Bay on Mar 9 and two were seen at Dungeness on Mar 11

**Goosander:** The count at the Blashford Lakes was down to around 10 birds by Mar 11 (peak of 62 there in Jan)

**Ruddy Duck:** This year the only previous report that I have seen of one at Budds Farm pools was dated Jan 26 but on Mar 12 I had a good view of a smart male there.

**Osprey:** Lee Evans tells us they have started to return with one over Gloucestershire on Mar 4, one over Warwickshire on Mar 7 and even one over Hampshire (M3 at Winchester) also on Mar 7

**Water Rail:** Brian Fellows glimpsed one on the banks of the Ems in Brook Meadow on Mar 9 - it had probably been there unseen since a previous sighting in the same place on Feb 12.

**Golden Plover:** A report of 560 at Rye Harbour on Mar 11 is an increase on recent counts there, probably reflecting continental birds moving north, though it is nowhere near the counts of 1700 on Jan 2 and 1400 on Feb 18. Locally there were still 100+ at West Wittering on Mar 5 (and just 7 at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9).

**Knot:** 120 were still to be seen at Church Norton on Mar 11 when some 380 were in Newtown Harbour on the IoW

**Little Stint:** One was at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 (presumably the same bird that was there on Jan 22 and 27). The West Wittering bird was last reported on Mar 1

**Curlew Sandpiper:** What was presumably an early passage bird was reported from Tilbury in Essex on Mar 10 - last year spring passage did not start until May 10 so the current bird may well have been here through the winter.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A flock of 250 was at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 - the only other reports of this species at Farlington Marshes which have been published this year were of 17 birds there on Jan 27 and 20 on Jan 29

**Whimbrel:** In last week's summary I guessed that three birds seen in Dorset on Mar 7 were the first, early, passage birds. This seems to have been borne out with further reports of singles at Climping (mouth of R Arun) on Mar 9 and at Keyhaven on Mar 11, while Lee Evans tells us that he is aware of some four reports from the south coast recently

**Arctic Skua:** A single at Dungeness on Mar 10 was the first to be reported on the south coast since Jan 31 and marks the start of spring passage for this species. This is backed up by four reports of **Great Skua** starting on Mar 8 after a gap with no reports since Jan 15

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still at the Cockle Pond on Mar 9

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter bird was at Newhaven on Mar 9 and maybe the same bird at Dungeness on Mar 11, while an adult was among **Med Gulls** at the Badminton Common pool just inland of Calshot on Mar 12

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird was still there on Mar 11

**Sandwich Tern:** One or two remain in the Dungeness area, where they arrived on Mar 4, and the first to be seen at Portland was there on Mar 10

**Stock Dove:** A winter flock of 116 birds remains in the Chilling area near Warsash where they have been seen since January

**Kingfisher:** One seen on the River Ems at Brook Meadow on Mar 4 and 9 may well stay to nest somewhere upstream. Similarly in Havant (where a pair used to nest regularly in the Bedhampton area) it was good to see one still on the Brockhampton stream on Mar 12

**Rock Pipit:** One was still on the Langstone Harbour shore by Budds Farm on Mar 12

**Wheatear:** The first arrival for the year seems to have been one at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 8 - since then birds have been seen at Portland, Newhaven and Climping (mouth of R Arun)

**Mistle Thrush:** These are now rare in the immediate area of Havant so it was good to see at least one near Bedhampton Mill on Mar 12

**Willow Tit:** One was singing 'somewhere in Sussex' on Mar 11 giving hope that they have not yet ceased to breed in that county. No reports so far from Hampshire but song was heard last year between Mar 15 and Apr 21 in two areas of northern Hampshire near Andover and Basingstoke so there is still hope.

**Brambling:** A wave of birds passing north through Hampshire is indicated by reports of 14 with Chaffinches in the Chilling (Warsash) area on Mar 9, 52 at Blashford Lakes on Mar 10, and on Mar 11 counts of 150+ near Badbury Rings in Dorset and 14 in one Romsey garden which also had **50+ Siskin** on an array of feeders.

## INSECTS

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

Nothing to report other than a **Brown Plume Moth (*Emmelina monodactyla*)** disturbed by my gardening efforts in Havant

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**95 Species have been reported in flower so far this month with 91 seen by myself.** The year to date totals are 143 and 131

**Meadow Buttercup:** A single plant in flower in Havant on Mar 11 was the first for the year

**Marsh Marigold (Kingcup):** By Mar 12 there were around 80 flowers out on four clusters of plants at the north end of the Langstone South Moors 'orchid field' - apparently none the worse for flooding by the high tide of Mar 10

**Blue Anemone (*Anemone apennina*):** Although I have probably seen this species in gardens I have never before come across it established in the wild and had to put a name to it until Mar 11 when I found a cluster of these plants, four of them flowering, in a dark corner of the virtually abandoned cemetery at Eastern Road in Havant - see my Diary for Mar 11

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**Oxford Ragwort:** This is just starting its spring flowering season with just one flower half open on plants in Havant on Mar 12

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## Wed 12 Mar

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### A walk to old Bedhampton

In today's sunshine I took a longer walk than usual, starting with a visit to the Eastern Road cemetery where I found the **Blue Anemones** yesterday - this was to confirm their identity by looking for pubescence under the petals (which I found). Once again I walked west, this time finding both **Sticky Groundsel** and a single flower opening on **Oxford Ragwort** in the station carpark boundary hedge. Next find was of **Field Madder** on the roadside by the Petersfield Road roundabout, and further on towards Bedhampton I found plants of **Hoary Cress** already showing incipient flower heads.

In Old Bedhampton churchyard **Slender** and **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** were both in flower, and nearby the leaves of **Greater Celandine** plants could be seen peeping over a wall.

Bedhampton Mill pool had three or four each of **Gadwall** and **Tufted Duck** but I found nothing else of great interest until I was walking down the path by the Brockhampton Stream and nearly had my head lacerated by the talons of a big female **Sparrowhawk** in hot pursuit of a **Blackbird** - the **Blackbird** got away and the **Sparrowhawk** perched on a branch about 20 metres away and glowered at me.

I walked on downstream and out onto the bridge which leads nowhere. From it, as I had hoped, I had a good view of a **Kingfisher** flying downstream from its regular perch close to the bridge.

Reaching Budds Farm shore I saw a **Rock Pipit** fly low along the shingle past me but few other birds were braving this exposed shore - just one female **Merganser** was with a few gulls on the sea.

Budds Pools did have a bonus - a **male Ruddy Duck** looking resplendent in the sunlight. Other birds included two pairs of **Shelduck**, a pair of **Swans**, **15 Shoveler**, **5 Gadwall**, a couple of **Pochard** and a few **Tufties**. A smart **Med Gull** called as it flew over.

The 'birdseed' plot on the old IBM playing fields had **Cabbage still in flower** (with a single **Rook** unexpectedly flying over into the headwind), and in the still wet 'orchid field' I found around **80 Kingcup flowers** on four clusters of plants. While in that area I put up a **Snipe** and later I found the small stream feeding the **Tamarisk pool** was still swollen with flood water and had both **Wigeon** and **Mallard** on it together with found **Canada Geese**.

Finally the banks of Mill Lane had two fresh **Cowslip** plants - one with open flowers - and beside the Billy Trail I passed a single plant of **Spanish Bluebell** with one flower open

## Tue 11 Mar

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Blue Anemone in Havant cemetery

I did not expect to find anything unusual in a brief visit to the Eastern Road cemetery in Havant but in fact I found a plant that I had never knowingly seen before and which I have had to add to my database - this was **Blue Anemone** (**Anemone apennina**), of which a small cluster have established themselves in a

corner of the cemetery and currently have four very attractive blue flowers with pubescence below the petals and on the pedicels to show they are not **Balkan Anemone**. If you want to see them enter the cemetery from New Lane (not the main entrance in Eastern Road) and turn right to follow the wall of the cemetery south to its junction with an internal dividing wall - the plants are in the corner formed by the junction of these walls, under the shade of a tree.

These plants were probably planted on a fresh grave years ago, then chucked out in some clean up operation to end up in the dark corner of the cemetery where I found them - certainly they have not had any human care for many a year but nevertheless some dozen plants are flourishing. Maybe they have been exposed to view recently through the work of a team of offenders that have been paying for their offences by clearing up this, until they came along. very neglected and overgrown cemetery.

The reason for my visit here today was to check what effect this team's clearance work might have had on the large show of **Early Dog Violets** which I have enjoyed for several years. In fact their raking up of leaves, etc, seems to have enhanced the display of **Violets** which are currently at their best, colouring the ground pale blue over an area of more than 10 x 10 metres and giving the effect of a tiny 'bluebell glade' under the shade of the old conifers at the eastern end of the cemetery. Not far away, in the south east corner, there is also a great display of apparently wild **Primroses** which have presumably spread from a few plants introduced to graves in the past.

Another unexpected find in the cemetery today was fresh growth of **Field Blewit toadstools** around a 'fairy ring' of dark lush grass which is easily spotted if you come in from Eastern Road and turn left to follow the wall west for about 30 metres. I had found a display of at least 50 toadstools around this ring on Jan 12 but they had decayed by the end of that month and we are now having a minor second show - I only saw four toadstools this time.

A final bonus after leaving the cemetery and walking towards Havant station was to find a single plant of **Meadow Buttercup** in full flower where the Lavant stream disappears into a tunnel under the railway.

[Mon 10 Mar](#)

### **Walking on water at Langstone**

Everyone was aware that today's spring tide was likely to be much higher than usual as a result of low pressure (which dropped to 962mb as recorded on the Clanfield Weather Station website) and very strong winds. Driving back from an eye-check at a Hayling Island optician around mid-day I crossed Langstone Bridge half an hour before the time of high tide. By that time the sea had covered the carpark of the Ship Inn and as I passed Langstone High Street I saw the water coming up it had very nearly reached the main road. Later I heard that shortly after we had crossed the bridge the sea had flooded over the main road south of the bridge by the Texaco garage.

After lunch I thought I would walk down to Langstone and see for myself the results of this tide and I chose to go down the path by the Langbrook stream which brought me to a view of the South Moors that I had never seen before - the whole of the SSSI, and most of the 'orchid field' reaching up to the new industrial estate, were one lake of seawater with just the tops of the bramble bushes and fence posts still above water, much of which must have been a metre deep. The depth can be checked by anyone who goes there as the water was overtopping the concrete casing of the old sewage pipe which many people use as their path to get south to Mill Lane. It was here that I had to do my 'walking on water' if I was not to turn back up the Langbrook stream - luckily the water was only just lapping over the concrete on which I was walking but the wind was quite strong enough to have blown me off the pipe if my concentration lapsed, and that would have left me waist deep in water even if I had not fallen over in the process of coming off the concrete.

By the time I got to the Royal Oak the sea level had fallen below the raised walkway but the pub's 'Beer Garden' was a sheet of water, as was the walled vegetable garden behind it.

Turning from the matter of the high tide my walk gave me a list of 51 flowering plants to start the week with, not counting my first two full grown but still **sheathed spathes of Lords and Ladies** and the freshly emerged leaves of both **Horse Chestnut** and **Wild Garlic (Ramsons)**.

New flowers for the year were **Green Alkanet**, **Spanish Bluebell** (flowers now fully open). and **Honesty**. Other good finds were **Black Nightshade** (a re-discovery of the plant at Warblington Farm which I first saw on Feb 4 but had failed to see on more recent visits as other plants had grown up to screen it) and **Creeping Comfrey (Symphytum grandiflorum)** which I have seen before in gardens but which I found today for the first time this year flowering 'in the wild' (for those who know the **female Butterbur** and **Giant Butterbur** plants by the Langbrook stream they can hopefully see this ground hugging **Comfrey** by walking on past the bramble bush covering some of the **Giant Butterbur** towards the wooden fence lining the concrete track to the bridge which allows cattle to get from the old Dairy Farm buildings onto the Moors - if you do this you will certainly tread on the leaves of the **Comfrey** though whether you spot its flowers is more problematical!)

Perhaps the most pleasing find came as I was passing the entrance of the West Mill in Mill Lane - here, under brambles on the bank of the ditch running down to the main stream, the blue flowers of **Glory of the Snow (Chionodoxa forbesii)** could be seen alongside the taller **Summer Snowflake**. In Warblington Cemetery I ticked flowers on **Slender Speedwell** (having got **Grey Field Speedwell** at two other sites), and finally I found a couple of flowers open on roadside **Broom** by the Emsworth Road junction with Meadowlands.

A couple of bird sightings are worth mentioning - firstly the presence of **32 Little Egrets** in the fields north of Wade Court (in addition to half a dozen or so around the flooded South Moors), and secondly the continued presence of at least **200 Brent** in the Warblington fields between Pook Lane and the cemetery (I suspect a lot of the local Brent left yesterday when there was a notable increase in the

number passing Dungeness - their website reported .. "**a steady easterly flow of Brent Geese with 1345 birds seen up to 1030hrs**"). As an aside I see that the first **Wheatears** arrived yesterday at three sites - Portland, Christchurch Harbour and Climping near Littlehampton.

Finally spare a thought for creatures which live underground in the areas suddenly flooded today - on the South Moors the ground was littered with washed up drowned **Earthworms**, and the pony field south of Wade Court (almost half of it under water today) had a sorry looking **Fox** in it.

### **SUMMARY FOR MAR 3 - 9 (WEEK 9 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** include news of **Sand Martins** at the Chichester Lakes and a **House Martin** at Langstone while **Sandwich Tern** migrants have reached Dungeness. A very early **Wood Sandpiper** was on the Isle of Wight and possible migrant **Whimbrel** were seen in Dorset.

For general interest read how an **Oystercatcher was killed by an Oyster** and what happens when a **Sparrowhawk hits its prey but fails to get a 'stranglehold' on it.**

We start with a **Diver coming to Farlington Marshes to die (?)** and have good news of **Lapwing breeding locally** plus links to photos showing the **differences between British and Continental 'forms' of Stonechat**

**Insect news** has no new butterflies but the survival of over-wintering **Red Admiral caterpillars** in Sussex is good news. Interesting to me is the appearance of **seven different Leaf-miner moth species of the genus Phyllonorycter** - well worth a look at their pictures on the internet. Moths appearing about a month earlier than usual were **Brindled Pug, Early thorn and Lead-coloured Drab**. The first **Red-tailed Bumblebee** has been seen and this week's news introduced me to the **Rosemary leaf beetle (Chrysolina americana)**

**Best new flowers** are **Wood Anemone, Hairy Violet** and **Slender Speedwell**. Although they may be regarded as garden shrubs I was delighted to welcome the first flowers on **Flowering Currant, Cherry Laurel** and **Broom**

**Other Wildlife news** has the story of a **Water Vole which has taken up residence in a raft designed as a trap for Mink** and a description of yet **another unwelcome invader of British habitat - the Chinese Mitten Crab**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** A surprising report appeared on Bird Guides saying that on Mar 4 one of these divers had been seen at Farlington Marshes "by the path in landward side channel 100m west of the Deeps". I take it this means that the bird was in one of the narrow channels of the area just within the eastern seawall of the reserve - if so I guess it was feeling very unwell and seeking somewhere to die in peace rather than to nest! I wonder if this is the same bird that was seen on Feb 11 hauled out on the mud of the Warblington shore and probably already feeling unwell then? The report reminds me of a personal find many years ago of a dead

diver in the Sinah Gravel Pit lake on Hayling - I think many species seek out a quiet retreat before they die.

**Great Northern Diver:** Although many divers have already departed from south coast waters the regular winter **Great Northern** was still in the Chichester Harbour entrance channel on Mar 3

**Great Crested Grebe:** More than 700 of these were still feeding off Dungeness on Mar 2 but only 200 were seen there on Mar 3 - maybe the rest were still somewhere in the area but I guess it is more likely that the big winter flock has broken up.

**Red-necked Grebe:** The Weir Wood (Crowborough) bird was still present on Mar 8

**Black-necked Grebe:** The two birds at the Blashford Lakes were still there on Mar 8, by which time they had acquired much of their breeding plumage. The third bird that had been seen on Feb 29 was still there on Mar 5

**Fulmar:** **Fulmars** and **Kittiwakes** were back at their nests on the Telscombe cliffs at Newhaven on Mar 7

**Balearic Shearwater:** Until now these have been seen off Portland Bill in every month of the year except March but a sighting of one on Mar 6 plugged that gap.

**Cattle Egret:** The two birds at Bergerie Farm near Lymington were still there on Mar 5 and at least two birds were still at Dorset sites on Mar 6

**Grey Heron:** At least 20 nests were active at the Weir Wood heronry near Crowborough on Mar 3

**Black Swan:** The bird which has been at Harbridge near Ringwood had moved the Blashford Lakes proper on Mar 4

**Red-breasted Goose:** This, and the Wittering **Brant**, were still present on Mar 3 when they were seen commuting from Wittering to the Tournurbury shore of Hayling at dusk - two **Barnacle Geese** were also seen from Black Point on that day. On Mar 6 Andy Johnson had a very close view of the **Red-breasted** bird when it came to feed in the creek alongside the Black Point causeway

**Emden Goose:** Two were still to be seen at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Mar 6 but the ravages of time plus much disturbance as the surroundings of the pond are being rebuilt seem to have ended the saga of the 'Baffins Gang' which once had **42 Barnacles** and at least one **Snow Goose**. The only birds seen at Baffins on Mar 6 were **30 Tufted Duck**, **14 Shoveler**, about **100 Mallard**, **4 Canada Geese** and the resident **2 Emden Geese** along with the usual Coot and Moorhen but no Cormorants and no Mute Swans

**Wood Duck:** The female was still on the River Alver (west of Gosport) on Mar 2 where it has been present near the Apple Dumpling bridge since Feb 16 (prior to that it may have been at Titchfield Haven on Feb 3)

**Goosander:** The number roosting at the Blashford Lakes decreased from 40 on Mar 1 to 35 on Mar 5 and on Mar 1 one was seen flying north over The Fleet in

Dorset while on Mar 9 two flew up Southampton Water and then up the River Itchen so it looks as if the winter birds are now heading north

**Marsh Harrier:** One flying in off the sea at Portland on Mar 4 was presumably another migrant arriving to swell the numbers already here - similarly a **Red Kite** flying northwest over Brading Marshes on the Isle of Wight on the same day was probably new to our shores.

**Sparrowhawk:** I scatter bird seed daily on both my front and back lawns so the local **Sparrowhawks** will know that this is a good place to include in their hunting forays - to confirm this a female went high over the garden on Mar 6, not hunting but patrolling her territory in a way that would be visible to all concerned. On a couple of occasions in recent years I have seen **Sparrowhawks** in the garden with prey on the ground but much more frequently I have found substantial clusters of feathers (usually Blackbird or pigeon) with no evidence of the predator which caused the prey to lose its feathers, nor any evidence of the success of the attack. I am therefore grateful to Brian Fellows for an observation in his Emsworth garden on Mar 7: **Brian says he was .."in our back room overlooking the garden watching the birds feeding on the grass when, whoosh, down streaked a Sparrowhawk and hit a Collared Dove sending up a cloud of white feathers. There was a brief struggle for a few seconds and then the Dove fly off with the Hawk in close pursuit. They passed over the house and out of sight."** This shows that if the Sparrowhawk does not get his talons firmly around the throat of its prey (I think they usually kill by throttling the prey, not breaking its neck as a Peregrine might do) the prey bird can wriggle free and fly off having suffered no more than some bad scratches and a severe shock. If this happens more frequently than successful kills (and I suspect it does) it would account for the feathers I have seen on the lawn and also for **the curious 'pictures' of birds (usually Collared Doves) which are left on window glass after a dove has flown into the glass at high speed in its haste to escape a hawk.** These pictures can show every feather of the Dove's wings, plus other parts of the body, in a semi-permanent fashion on the glass (even persisting after a light window cleaning!) - the picture is 'drawn' using the lubricating powder which 'oils' the bird's feathers, this powder being shaken from the edges of the feathers by the force of the impact and the oily powder then adheres to the glass.

Another account of a Sparrowhawk kill (dated Mar 5) came from Neal Ward in Crowborough via the SOS website - it said .. "While washing the car in my driveway, I became aware of a commotion from the local corvid flock, followed by **the thud of a Woodpigeon hitting the road only 20 feet away.** At first I thought it had hit an overhead power cable, but as the cloud of Woodpigeonfeathers cleared, the reason became clear. **A female Sparrowhawk was struggling to overpower it,** and the more it struggled, the greater were the cries from the corvids. I dashed indoors for my camera and took a number of shots, before **a passing motorcycle interrupted the show. The Sparrowhawk reluctantly released its hold on the Woodpigeon, which amazingly flew off, but only for a few yards. The Sparrowhawk pounced again, but was met with ferocious struggles, which continued for several more minutes,** when both birds disappeared under the hedge. After that it went quiet, so I presume that execution was achieved".

**Hobby:** A reported sighting of one at Yateley in north Hampshire on Mar 1 was more likely to have been of a **Peregrine** but the person who reported it quoted another reported **Hobby** sighting in Suffolk during February. Currently the earliest ever **Hobby** in Hampshire according to HOS records was seen on 16 Mar 2002

**Peregrine:** With the arrival of many exhausted passerine migrants likely to reach our shores in the next few weeks a pair of **Peregrines** were seen on Mar 8 patrolling over the sea off Hengistbury Head (Christchurch Harbour), clearly aware of the possibility of an easily acquired meal. A quote from the Rangers' Diary at Durlston country park on Mar 6 will further illustrate this .. "A pair of **Stock Doves** clatter in off the sea, as a **Peregrine Falcon** puts on an impressive display of aerobatics to snatch an unfortunate **Meadow Pipit** out of the air"

**Oystercatcher:** Shore birds are always at risk of losing a foot or a leg to one of two causes - the first is frost gripping the foot while the bird is sleeping so that the bird cannot move the foot when it wakes and tries to fly, the other is the equivalent of a human or land animal stepping on a gin trap whose jaws snap shut and trap or break the leg. This equivalent trap is, for birds, the jaws of a shellfish (particularly a large clam). I have heard of both of these disasters affecting birds but on Mar 6 Alistair Martin put an entry on Hoslist which made me aware of a different way in which shore birds can die - he had found **an adult Oystercatcher drowned and washed up on the west Hayling shore, the cause of death being obvious as the tip of the bird's bill was firmly clamped within the shell of a very large Oyster**. Presumably the Oyster was too heavy for the Oystercatcher to lift as it could then have carried the Oyster to a stony area and bashed the mollusc against the stones (something the Oystercatcher had probably done many times before until it met its match!)

**Avocet:** By Mar 5 a total of 11 Avocet were back at Titchfield Haven from their winter quarters (though I see that a flock of 109 birds was still on the mud at the mouth of the Medway in north Kent on Mar 6 - there had been 133 birds there in January)

**Little Ringed Plover:** After the early arrival of one at the Blashford Lakes on Feb 29 there were more sightings of one there on Mar 3 and 5

**Lapwing:** Few of these can now be seen at coastal sites and the 2006 Hampshire bird report indicated that there are now only around 20 sites where they still breed in the county. Bird reserves such as Farlington Marshes and Titchfield Haven still have nesting birds (though at Farlington very few eggs escape the Foxes which methodically quarter the ground where the birds nest) and luckily we still have one place in Havant Borough where up to half a dozen pairs still nest. This is on the 'Gipsies Plain' rough grassland south of Havant Thicket and west of Rowlands Castle. Five pairs were back there on Mar 8 but this site is currently destined to be 'developed' as a huge water storage reservoir and it remains to be seen if the fringes of the reservoir will continue to attract the birds.

**Purple Sandpiper:** I think Trevor Carpenter set a new record for the number seen at Southsea Castle when he counted 14 there on Mar 2

**Woodcock:** I know that some continental birds come here to escape the cold of winter but at least one flew in off the sea at Dungeness on Mar 2 as a spring arrival

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The 300+ birds seen in the Fishbourne Channel on Mar 1 were still there on Mar 4 (but no news of the big flock of **Pintail** seen there on Mar 1). I don't know where these birds came from but I guess that a few of those that have left the Avon valley went to the Isle of Wight where 105 were in Newtown Harbour on Mar 3 (previous counts there have been 44 on Feb 7 and 59 on Feb 29) - admittedly these birds may have just moved along from Yarmouth where there were 120 on Feb 21 but only 6 on Mar 3. I think that all we can really say about Godwit movements is that the birds are very mobile and are prepared to fly fairly long distances 'at the drop of a hat'.

**Whimbrel:** A report of three flying along The Fleet near Weymouth on Mar 7 attracted no special comment on the Dorset website where it was reported but did make me wonder if these were early migrants, especially as I have only seen one mention of **Whimbrel** in Dorset earlier this year (one flew over Portland harbour on Jan 28) and I am not aware of any regular wintering birds in that county. Passage birds do not normally appear until early April but in 2006 the first was reported in Sussex (passing Birling Gap where they do not winter) on Feb 25 with seven more flying by on Feb 26.

**Green Sandpiper:** A slight increase in the number of reports this week, including two from sites where the birds are not normally seen (one was a downland pond near Ventnor of the IoW, and the other a pond within the Gatwick airport perimeter), suggests that these are leaving their winter quarters.

**Wood Sandpiper:** This species only appears on the south coast as a rare passage migrant and the 'earliest ever' in Hampshire was seen on 23 Mar 2003 (none before 10 Apr in Sussex) so a sighting of one near Ventnor on the IoW on Mar 5 was another exceptionally early bird

**Great Skua:** There have been no reports of this species since Jan 15 so one passing Dungeness on Mar 8 was an indication of the start of spring movement

**Little Gull:** One seen at Arundel Wildfowl Reserve on Mar 5 was the first to be reported anywhere on the south coast since Feb 5 after daily reports during January but I expect it will not be long before regular sightings are resumed

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport Cockle Pond bird was still present on Mar 6

**Common Gull:** A sighting of more than 160 at Alresford Pond (east of Winchester) is probably the result of a significant number now moving east through our area on spring passage, though this species is much more likely to be found inland than at the coast during the winter and these birds may have been around for some time.

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter bird was at Arlington reservoir in the Cuckmere valley on Mar 1 and Mar 8, and an adult was seen in Gosport (HMS Sultan playing fields) on Mar 2

**Glaucous Gull:** The first winter bird was seen again at Shoreham Harbour on Mar 4 and 8. Also on Mar 8 there were sightings at Seaford, the Chesil area near Weymouth, and at Durlston

**Great Blackback:** Two of these were among a large inland movement of gulls seen at Weir Wood reservoir (near Crowborough) on Feb 25 - with them were 50+ **Herring Gulls** and 15 **Lesser Blackbacks**

**Kittiwake:** Some were back at nest sites on the cliffs at Telscombe (close to Newhaven) on Mar 7

**Sandwich Tern:** Two birds seen at Rye Harbour on Mar 2 and then at Dungeness on Mar 4 were almost certainly the first migrants as none had wintered at either site. By Mar 8 three birds were at Dungeness. A winter bird was still in the Chichester Harbour entrance on Mar 3

**Guillemot:** Among the 200+ birds seen on the Durlston cliffs on Mar 7 was one with a distinctive white plume of feathers on his head, earning him the name of 'Tufty' - this bird has been coming there to breed for 16 years and must be around 20 years old.

**Little Auk:** Immense numbers of these were in British waters between mid-September and the end of December last year but the only one I have heard of this year is one found dead in the Sandy Point area of Hayling on Feb 17 - this late news only came to light in Keith Betton's summary of Hampshire birding during February to be published in Bird Watching magazine.

**Sand Martin:** We now have fourteen reports of these migrants since the first was seen in Dorset on Feb 26. By Mar 3 around 6 were at the Blashford Lakes and 8 over a lake at Sherborne in Dorset, and on Mar 5 five birds were over Runcton Lake at Chichester.

**Swallow:** The first was seen on the Isle of Wight on Feb 13 and by Mar 3 I had seen 6 reports coming from Dorset, Kent and Sussex but not Hampshire

**House Martin:** After a report of one in Cornwall on Feb 29 one was seen at Sherborne in Dorset on Mar 3 and on Mar 4 one was seen hawking over the fields on the Langstone shore between Wade and Pook Lanes

**Meadow Pipit:** Northward passage is increasing with more than 100 birds coming in off the sea at Portland on Mar 6

**White Wagtail:** There have been a number of reports of **Alba Wagtails** on passage recently but the first definite report of a **White Wagtail** came from Portland on Mar 3 with another single bird seen at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 5

**Black Redstart:** These are starting to move around and on Mar 2 one was seen on a roof at Chichester cathedral posing alongside a **Grey Wagtail**.

**Stonechat:** First report of one in song came from Christchurch Harbour on Mar 2. The number of birds returning from the continent to breed here is growing with a count of 20 at Portland on Mar 6. The Portland website had a couple of photos with that day's report, one showing a normal British breeder ('**hibernans**' form) and the

other of a '**rubicola**' bird which would normally breed on the continent - the latter has distinctly paler underparts, a blacker mantle and a white rump.

**Blackbird:** A number of reports indicate that there have been more continental birds than usual in our gardens during the past winter but in at least one Southampton garden the winter visitors had abruptly vanished on Mar 5

**Fieldfare:** Numbers are now declining as the birds move north but more than 80 were close to Stansted House on Mar 2

**Blackcap:** The birds which have been wintering in our gardens began to sing in mid February and comments at the time suggested that they do this for about a week before they start to head east to their breeding areas in central Europe. The first reported indication that they are now leaving their winter haunts came on Mar 7 when one 'arrived' at Portland (of course that could have been one coming from the south to breed here) and on Mar 8 one was seen out in the open of the Christchurch Harbour area, probably having just left a local garden.

**Pallas' Warbler:** The bird in Oaker's Wood near Bere Regis in Dorset has not been seen since Mar 2

**Chiffchaff:** There have now been many reports of these singing since the first was heard on Feb 7 but it was nice to hear two answering each other near Sinah gravel pit on south Hayling when I was there on Mar 5

**Firecrest:** One was in a Langstone village garden on Mar 5 - interestingly it was in a Mimosa tree, as had been the one seen on Feb 12 in a Havant garden

**Raven:** An interesting bit of behaviour seen on Mar 1 was of a pair of **Ravens catching Toads** in a shallow stream somewhere in Hampshire

**Greenfinch:** A count of 80 at Portland on Mar 6 may indicate a new influx which will increase the numbers in our gardens this spring

**Bullfinch:** Although I have heard what were almost certainly **Bullfinches** on more than one occasion this year it was not until Mar 3 that I saw one - a lovely male briefly perched in the open before flying west over the Warblington Farm fields. It became the 100th species I have seen this year.

**Hawfinch:** Another interesting observation of behaviour comes from the Haywards Heath area on Mar 4 - a pair feeding at a garden peanut feeder.

**Reed Bunting:** First **report of song** comes from Pett Level (Rye Bay) on Mar 4. On Mar 3 there were still at least 6 based in the Conigar Point field at Warblington Farm - this is just one of many sites where increased numbers of Reed Buntings have been seen this winter.

**Escapees:** A recent report of a possible **Golden Eagle** seen on the ground in a field near Denmead on Mar 2 may have been a mis-identification of a **Buzzard** but we know from the story of the **White-tailed Eagle** in the Andover area this winter that wild eagles can end up in Hampshire. A similar report of an eagle seen in the Brede valley (Rye area) on Mar 4 brought out news that a **Bateleur Eagle** (which escaped from the Ardingly show two years ago) was still being regularly seen in the

Hastings area, while another source revealed that an escaped **Golden Eagle** had been seen between Hailsham and Hastings within the past month

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Small White:** After a very early first sighting on Feb 8 there were two more sightings in February before the latest report of a male seen at Eastney (Portsmouth) on Mar 5. In the photo which Brian Fellows took of this one the small central black spots indicate its sex to be male but the normally distinctive black wing tip markings are virtually absent - Jeremy Thomas says this is not uncommon with the spring brood

**Peacock:** One seen in Ropley on Mar 5 was probably one of three that had been hibernating in Lynn Fomison's garden shed (only two there now!)

**Comma:** One seen at Shoreham on Mar 7 is the only butterfly seen flying in Sussex so far this month

**Caterpillars:** In the 2006-7 winter a good number of **Red Admiral caterpillars** in the Sussex Ouse valley survived the cold and successfully pupated at this time of year. This winter it seemed that none had survived there until a tent was found on Mar 8 with three caterpillars in it

### Moths

**Phyllonorycter species (Leaf miner moths):** Anyone who thinks that the moths which emerge from the tiny larvae that munch their way across less than the full width of a tree leaf, leaving both upper and lower 'skin' of the leaf intact, before pupating, cannot turn into 'things of wonder and beauty' should visit

[http://www.planetthanet.org/Moth\\_news\\_and\\_updates\\_March\\_2008.htm](http://www.planetthanet.org/Moth_news_and_updates_March_2008.htm) to see pictures of the insects that have just emerged from larvae collected in the east Kent area. Click the pictures of the Phyllonorycter species whose thumbnails appear down the righthand side of this page to see them more clearly, and if you are impressed then visit Mike Wall's website [http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/moths/moth\\_0315.htm](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/moths/moth_0315.htm) to see a fuller collection of photos of both the moths and their distinctive 'leaf mine patterns' (starting with the page given click the links at the top right of each page to see some 50 other species in the genus). Note that the Planet Thanet website mis-spells the specific name of one species as **P. ragella** where other official sources give it as **P. rajella**

**Early Flat-body (0666 Semioscopis avellanella):** First trapped in the Horsham area on Mar 1 and normally flying in March. Note that the Sussex BC website reporting this misspells the specific name as **avellana** though other sources agree that it is **avellanella**

**Shoulder Stripe (1746 Anticlea badiata):** First trapped at Blean Woods near Canterbury on Mar 6 - first appears in March

**Brindled Pug (1852 *Eupithecia abbreviata*):** First trapped at Blean Woods near Canterbury on Mar 6 - single generation normally appears in April

**Early Thorn (1917 *Selenia dentaria*):** First trapped at Blean Woods near Canterbury on Mar 6 - first generation normally appears in April

**The Engrailed (1947 *Ectropis bistortata*):** First trapped at Blean Woods near Canterbury on Mar 6 - first generation normally appears in March

**Lead-coloured Drab (2185 *Orthosia populeti*):** Another first at Horsham on Mar 1 - normally appears in early April

**Grey Shoulder-Knot (2237 *Lithophane ornitopus*):** First trapped at Blean Woods near Canterbury on Mar 6 - just out of hibernation

## Other insects

**Red-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*):** First report for year is from Gosport on Mar 4

**Pine ladybird (*Exochomus quadripustulatus*):** Seen in the Northiam village area north of Hastings on Mar 2 - not uncommon in parts of Britain but new to the 10K square where it was found

**Rosemary leaf beetle (*Chrysolina americana*):** Brian Banks, the Natural England officer for Dungeness, writes on the Rye Bay website (Mar 3) ... "Another new arrival, found on the rosemary bush in our garden today. A rather pretty beetle, just under 1cm long, with maroon and metallic green stripes. It is a **rosemary leaf beetle *Chrysolina americana*** and feeds on rosemary and lavenders causing damage to the leaf tips. Despite its Latin name it seems to be an inhabitant the Mediterranean coast of southern Europe and N Africa". For a good picture of the beetle go to <http://www.west-crete.com/dailypics/crete-2007/3-27-07.shtm> and for an account of its habits and recent arrival in Britain visit [http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/projects/rosemary\\_beetle.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/projects/rosemary_beetle.asp)

[http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/projects/rosemary\\_beetle.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/research/projects/rosemary_beetle.asp)

## PLANTS

**So far I know of 68 species flowering in March and have seen 66 for myself.** The equivalent figures for the year to date are 132 and 122

**Wood Anemone:** John Goodspeed found the first of the year in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Mar 3 with more in Great Copse (Havant Leigh Park area) on Mar 6

**Common Ramping Fumitory:** Still flowering at Warblington farm on Mar 3

**Yellow Corydalis:** Back in flower on Mar 3 after a very short winter break

**Hairy Violet:** John Goodspeed found the first flower on Portsdown on Mar 2 and I saw a couple of flowers there on Mar 4

**Field Pansy:** Still flowering in the Conigar Point field at Warblington on Mar 3

**Yellow Oxalis:** Flowering by the Havant to Emsworth road on Mar 3

**Broom:** I found flowers on one bush at the Leigh Park Gardens on Mar 8

**Cherry Laurel:** Also at Leigh Park Gardens on Mar 8 I found the first white 'candle' with open flowers

**Flowering Currant:** The pink flowers were open on a bush of this in a Havant garden on Mar 3

**Grey Willow:** Newly flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Mar 8, reported by Brian Fellows

**Slender Speedwell:** First flowers of the year in St Faith's churchyard on Mar 6

**Field Woundwort:** Still flowering in the Conigar Point field at Warblington on Mar 3

**Butterbur:** After an odd appearance by one male plant at Emsworth on Jan 20 these began their normal appearance at Brook Meadow on Mar 2

**Hairy Garlic:** No flowers (I have never seen this in flower!) but the distinctive leaves were found at Nore Barn in Emsworth on Mar 3

**Wild Garlic (Ramsons):** Nowhere near flowering but it was good to see the first leaves coming up in Great Copse (Havant Leigh Park area) on Mar 8

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Weasel:** First report of the year comes from Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Mar 4

**Wood Mouse:** Also seen and photographed at Brook Meadow on Mar 4. I wonder if this sighting was connected with that of the **Weasel** - although I have read several reports of **Wood Mice** active by day and coming close to houses to gather left overs under bird tables these mice are supposedly mainly nocturnal, making the day time sighting at Brook Meadow somewhat unusual. Much more unusual was the apparently very wet fur on the mouse as if had just been in the river - perhaps the mouse had just had a narrow escape from the **Weasel** by hurling itself into the river?

**Water Vole:** More proof that these animals have roused themselves from winter inactivity comes in two sightings at Brook Meadow, both in areas well away from recent sightings (one further downstream in the Ems but in a place where they have been seen regularly in past years but the other sighting was in the Lumley stream on the other side of the meadow - I don't think the voles have been seen there before)

An interesting item on the Rye Bay website (entry for Mar 6) describes how a **Water Vole has made its home in a floating raft that was designed as a Mink trap**. The raft has a box structure on it with an underwater entrance ramp below the raft and a **Water Vole** which came across this ready built home floating in the reeds at Rye Harbour has settled in, coming back to it despite being disturbed when the lid of the box was raised to inspect the contents while the vole was taking a nap. I presume that when used for trapping **Mink** the raft would have had a device to

prevent the **Mink** getting out once it was in but that has not prevented the **Vole** from coming and going.

**White Squirrel:** White coated **Grey Squirrels** have been widespread in the greater Portsmouth area for at least twenty years so another sighting of one in Cosham is no surprise

**Toad:** We have heard many reports of **Frogspawn** recently but Mar 1 brought the first news of **Toad spawn** in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden pond where it is expected each year

**Great Crested Newt:** A report of eggs found under the leaves of **Water Soldier** plants in Great Dixter garden at Northiam (north of Hastings) is not unexpected - some eggs had been reported from the Romney Marshes area in the first week of January this year.

**Chinese Mitten Crab:** This gets into the Rye Bay website news after one was found dead on the Camber Sands, and this news set me to search out more information about yet another species I had not previously heard of. This is an unwelcome ship-borne alien invader from the Far East which arrived in the Thames estuary (where it is now well established) as long ago as 1935 and has been spreading around the east coast - the dead one was the first to be found in Rye Bay and may have been washed there after it died, but live ones are probably not far behind. The name '**Mitten Crab**' comes from the tufts of hairs that grow between the joints of the crab's limbs giving the appearance of a crab wearing gloves. The reasons for this species being unwelcome include the fact that it is able to flourish and multiply in our waters, but are mainly based on its habit of tunnelling into the banks of streams, causing the banks to collapse, and on its willingness to enter buildings (including inhabited houses). It probably also has an adverse effect on longer established species here.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 3 - 9 (WEEK 9 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 8 Mar**

#### **Lapwings back on territory at Havant Thicket**

This morning I drove to the Staunton Country Park carpark as the starting point for a walk in which I first went to the Great Copse wood in Leigh Park to see my first **Wood Anemones**, finding at least a dozen already in flower along the banks of the stream which flows out of the country park. Not yet in flower, but a noteworthy first find, were the leaves of **Wild Garlic** (or **Ramsons**).

From the copse I headed north into the country park proper where I added a new site for **Lesser Periwinkle** - lots of it in flower in the woodland immediately north of the Leigh Park Gardens lake where the understorey has recently been cleared, letting light get to these woodland floor plants.

Heading up the Long Avenue of trees joining the lake area to Havant Thicket I turned off it to take the track across the centre of the Gipsies Plain grassland, going east towards Rowlands Castle. This is where I found the **Lapwing back on breeding territory - at least five pairs** in the two fields north of the track I was on with one pair further west than those I saw last year (this one was in the western of

the two fields, south of the block of **Austrian Pine**). South of the track I saw two male **Stonechats**, and overhead a **Skylark** was singing despite the dull weather and strong wind.

Coming south down the track leading to Hammonds Land Coppice I was pleased with a good display of **Primroses** in the 'orchid ditch', and in the Coppice I found a few more **Wood Anemones**.

Finally, the grounds of Leigh Park Gardens gave me two new first flowers - **Broom** and **Cherry Laurel**

### Thu 6 Mar

#### Slender Speedwell now flowering

Having spent the better part of the day at my computer completing my mid week summary I made a quick foray to the shops to restock with bird seed. While in Havant I visited St Faith's churchyard where I was rewarded with the sight of half a dozen flowers on the mass of **Slender Speedwell** leaves which have escaped mowing by hiding among the stems of flowering **Daffodils**.

The only other item of note for today was the sight of a **female Sparrowhawk** beating the bounds of her territory and pirouetting in the strong wind high above my garden.

### Tue 4 Mar

#### Hairy Violets on Portsdown

Despite the strong and chill wind I went to the Fort Widley area on Portsdown and walked along the southern slopes of the hill until I found a couple of isolated **Hairy Violets** in flower (and one mass of **Sweet Violets**). The only other plant of any note here was **Coltsfoot**, seen on the path round the north side of the fort.

With time to spare I visited the Hollybank Woods on my way home in the slight hope of seeing the **Wood Anemone** which John Goodspeed has reported - I guessed it might be in the area just behind Hollybank House where there will be a great show of **Bluebells** and **Wild Cherry** in a little while. No luck there or anywhere in my brief circuit but I did note a mass of fallen **Crab Apples** still intact on the ground (presumably not appetising to birds or mammals!) and enjoyed strong song from a **Blackbird**. I think I also heard a **Marsh Tit** in song but could never see it - typically the bird was singing from the highest tree tops so unlikely to have been a Great Tit

### Mon 3 Mar

#### At last a Bullfinch (and Hairy Garlic)

This afternoon I walked via Warblington to Nore Barn and back to start filling my March flower list which was up to 58 species when I got home.

Nothing very special went on the list though I did count **Lesser Periwinkle** on the basis of one flower peeping through a garden fence (hopefully of wild origin as it was on the fringe of a large garden where it was growing under trees, not in a flower bed). At Warblington Farm the **Common Ramping Fumitory** was still flowering, as were **Field Woundwort** and **Field Pansy** in the Conigar Point stubble field. In Nore Barn wood I confirmed that the **Three-cornered Leek** plants had withered, split spathes quite unlike the single, erect spathes on **Summer Snowflake**, and under the northern hedge separating the public path along the north of the wood from the fields I found a mass of **Hairy Garlic** leaves (no flowers and most uninspiring leaves!) - should you want to see them come along the path from Emsworth until the path makes a slight change of direction to the right, allowing you to see a long

straight section almost to the kissing gate into the Warblington fields. After a yard or so there is a **Hawthorn** tree in the hedge on your right - ignore that one and continue to the next (multi-stemmed) **Hawthorn** about twenty yards further on and you will see an untidy mass of long thin leaves sprawling on the ground - this is the **Hairy Garlic** which you can prove by looking closely (lens probably needed) to see the hairs sticking out from each side of a leaf.

In the Conigar Point field I had seen around **30 Skylarks** (one in full song), half a dozen **Reed Buntings** and around **20 Linnets**. After passing Nore Barn I went north up the footpath to the main road opposite Selangor Avenue, and it was here that I heard the calls of a **Bullfinch** but could not see it - eventually it flew to a high branch and showed the lovely breast of a male before flying on west. This is a species that has frustrated me since the start of the year - heard on several occasions but never seen so not on my year list until now when it became number 100 for the year.

Birds seen on the shore included three **Ringed Plover** with a few **Dunlin**, **Grey Plover**, **Redshank** and singles of **Oystercatcher**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Greenshank**. Plenty of **Brent** were still around (at least 1000 seen when a mass flew up for the north Hayling fields) and there were plenty of **Teal** but hardly any **Wigeon** (ten at most) and only three **Shelduck**. A few **Meadow Pipit** and **Common Gulls** (both now on passage through the area) were also seen.

### **SUMMARY FOR FEB 25 - MAR 2 (WEEK 8 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** include the first **Sand** and **House Martins** and the first **Little Ringed Plover** and **Garganey** plus the first **Manx Shearwater** back in British waters prior to breeding. More **Wheatears** have arrived but no more **Swallows** have been reported this week. Other birds of interest are a **Rose Coloured Starling** on the IoW and both **Robin** and **Raven** incubating eggs

**Insect news** features more **Holly Blues**, a lot of **early moths (Bright-line Brown-eye** in particular) and both **Ants** and **Jumping Spider** active in my garden.

Best new **flower find** was **Alpine Squill** flowering in the Hollybank Woods, while **Bulbous Buttercup**, **Early Flowering Wintercress** and **Hemlock Water Dropwort** were new in the wild. Naturalised garden plants newly flowering were **Grape Hyacinth** and **Flowering Currant** and a single **Spanish Bluebell** was found with flower buds about to open.

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Many are now heading east up channel (205 went past Dungeness on Feb 18, 56 on Feb 21 and 50 on Feb 25) but the single bird which had been in the River Itchen near Northam Bridge in Southampton from 3 Oct to 24 Nov last year, and which was reported to have left the river on Nov 24, has recently been reported again in the Northam Bridge area on Feb 21 and 24

**Great Crested Grebe:** In Southampton Water some of these were displaying on Feb 17 but there were still 570 in winter mode on the sea off Dungeness on Feb 18 and around 200 in Rye Bay on Feb 24

**Slavonian Grebe:** 6 were on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Feb 23

**Black-necked Grebe:** Visiting birders from Sussex found 9 in Langstone Harbour, seen from the Oysterbeds, on Feb 24. At the Blashford Lakes the two which have been there since Jan 1, but were thought to have left after Feb 17, were still there on Feb 29 and Mar 1 (maybe with a third passing bird joining them on Feb 29)

**Manx Shearwater:** Portland reported the 'first of the year' there on Mar 1 (though they had reported a single passing bird on Jan 8)

**Cormorant:** 42 were on power cables in the Adur Valley near Steyning on Feb 25 - I think this is a regular roost, and probably a more 'environmentally friendly' one than others (as at Ivy Lake at Chichester or at Rye Harbour) where the birds droppings kill the trees on which the birds roost and pollute the water below the trees - so far as I know the Adur Valley roost does not threaten to damage the power lines and disrupt the electricity supply.

**Bittern:** The Blashford Lakes bird was still present on Feb 29 and Mar 1

**Cattle Egret:** On Mar 1 two were still at Lavant (Chichester) with one at Piddinghoe (Lewes area) and at least two in Dorset. On Feb 29 Lee Evans reported a new arrival near Swansea with the flock of 18 remaining in Cornwall and one still in the Macclesfield area, and on Feb 27 the single was still at Harbridge (Ringwood) and two were still at Bergerie Farm (Lymington area).

**Great White Egret:** The bird which moved from the Blashford lakes to Fordingbridge after Jan 13 is now reported to be back at the Cotswold Water Park where it spent last summer.

**Spoonbill:** On Feb 28 one dropped in at Church Norton but flew on southwest after two hours and since then the only reports have been from Dorset where a group of 10 was at Ridge Wharf (near Arne) on Mar 1 with at least three others elsewhere in the county.

**Bewick's Swan:** The group of 6 were still at Ibsley near Ringwood on Feb 25 but the count in the Arun valley at Burpham was down to 15 on Feb 25 and just 9 on Feb 27 (after which no further reports from anywhere)

**Black Swan:** The one which arrived at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on the day after one was last seen at Emsworth (Feb 9) was still in the Blashford area (at Harbridge) on Feb 25. Also on Feb 25 there was a report of two on the Itchen in the Bitterne area of Southampton where I think they have been since Jan 14. On Mar 1 Brian Fellows could only see one bird at the West Ashling pond near Chichester. This pond, where there have been 'captive' birds for a good many years, had 7 birds on 4 Apr 2007, and on 8 Nov 2007 two pairs were present, one pair having 5 newly hatched young,

**Greylag Goose:** Up to now the area immediately around Havant has not been invaded by the hordes of Greylag that are found in much of southern England but the arrival of four birds on the field west of Aldsworth Pond (north of Emsworth) may mean our immunity is coming to an end - these birds were reported on Feb 25 as having been there for several days

**Barnacle Goose:** The group of 18 birds which has remained on Thorney Island (the remnant of the 43 which arrived there on Feb 14) were still around on Feb 25 when disturbance on Thorney sent them flying west over Hayling Island - they landed in Langstone Harbour but only stayed for 45 minutes before flying back east.

**Brent Goose:** Another 900 flew east past Dungeness in the three days from Feb 23 to 25 - the sum of the counts from Dungeness alone is now 5739 since the geese started leaving us on Feb 3 (and of course many more will have got away without being counted)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** A photo which appeared with the Feb 23 entry on the Portland website shows how clearly a Pale-bellied bird stands out from a group of Dark-bellied when seen from below in flight. When I was at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 27 I was able to see this for myself when a flight of around 20 Brent flew over my head with two Pale-bellied among them - the birds I saw landed in Stoke Bay just south of the Oysterbeds.

**Red-Breasted Goose:** Still in the Wittering area of Chichester Harbour, seen on Mar 1 on the mud at Ellanore (maybe it has ceased to feed on the carpark area grass and has changed to feeding on the harbour tideline - this would account for the lack of reports from Feb 12 to 29)

**Pintail:** Mar 1 brought a surprising report of more than 150 seen in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester - presumably this was a large flock of passage birds resting after an overnight flight and intending to move on when darkness fell again.

**Garganey:** The first summer migrant arrival, a male, was in the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Feb 27

**Eider:** Jason Crook saw one from the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 25, possibly the same young male that he saw there on Jan 28. Also on Feb 25 Dungeness reported 10 Eider flying east following 3 passing on Feb 21 - as the only other report of Eider at Dungeness this year was on Jan 3 the two current reports may mark the start of passage for this species.

**King Eider:** Not in our area but maybe of general interest Lee Evans reports a first winter drake has been in north Devon since Feb 18

**Surf Scoter:** A young bird seen in The Fleet near Abbotsbury on Feb 28 and 29

**Goldeneye:** A substantial increase in numbers at the Blashford Lakes on Feb 29 was probably accounted for by passage birds dropping in.

**Merganser:** A pair were displaying at Lymington on Feb 24

**Goosander:** Still 40 roosting at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 1

**Red Kite:** Mar 1 brought a sighting of one over the Castlepoint shopping centre in Bournemouth - an indication of how rapidly these birds are spreading through Southern England

**Marsh Harrier:** One seen at Titchfield Haven on Feb 24 may have been the same female that was there on Feb 20 but one seen flying east over the Lymington Marshes on Feb 26 was probably a newly arrived migrant still on passage.

**Kestrel:** On Feb 25 a pair were seen displaying in the Barcombe area north of Lewes by Robin Pepper, who writes on the SOS website .. "**Pair of Kestrels displaying at Clay Corner (TQ428165). Male flying above female with rapid wing beats and then swooping and diving.**" Around the same date **Sparrowhawks** were displaying over gardens in Cosham at the southern foot of Portsdown, and I mention this as I believe male and female **Sparrowhawks** make solo display flights (the male flying in a roller coaster style, the female high and straight), more to mark out their claim to a territory than to impress each other, but I would like to know if I am wrong in this. Most of us will have seen **Kestrels** and/or **Sparrowhawks** displaying by now and I quoted Robin Pepper's observation as I have not seen such a distinctive display - the displaying **Kestrels** I see are normally very noisy males flying around on their own, maybe trying to impress an unseen female or possibly to lead her to a potential nest site.

**Avocet:** A single bird was an unusual visitor to the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 25, presumably on passage, and from Titchfield Haven we have a cryptic report on Feb 24 of 'numbers increasing' there. On Feb 21, however, more than 200 were still in winter quarters on the Exe estuary in Devon.

**Little Ringed Plover:** A male at the Blashford Lakes on Feb 29 was another very early first migrant arrival - the previous earliest ever arrival date for Hampshire was 5 Mar 1997.

**Little Stint:** The wintering bird was still in the Wittering area of Chichester Harbour on Mar 1

**Purple Sandpiper:** Eleven new reports from at least five sites (including 4 birds at Southsea Castle on Feb 26).

**Ruff:** One was in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Mar 1

**Woodcock:** The first report of **roding** comes from Pondhead Inclosure in the New Forest on Feb 21 with more seen in another New Forest wood on Feb 22

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Brian Fellows saw more than 300 on the Exe estuary on Feb 21 - he tells us that this large flock tends to remain in situ throughout the winter and does not move around dramatically in the same way that the birds in the Solent do. Although there was more than one recent report indicating that the **Godwits** seem to have deserted the Avon Valley entirely a flock of 388 were at Harbridge on Feb 27 but most have left Pulborough area while Chichester Harbour has regained a flock of 300+ in the Fishbourne area (seen on Mar 1) and up to 35 in the Emsworth area

**Spotted Redshank:** The regular bird in the Nore Barn area west of Emsworth is still being seen there and on Feb 27 it was joined by a second bird seen in the pond just within the seawall in the Warblington Farm field immediately west of the Nore Barn wood. Since then there have been two birds at Nore Barn again on Mar 1 when a single was in the Fishbourne Channel

**Med Gull:** When I visited the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 27 two **Med Gulls** in summer plumage were making their presence known by their calls as they flew over the area while at least half a dozen were on the water of the lagoon. One of the latter revealed that it had a green plastic ring on its legs when it made a short flight. After Jason Crook had been there on Feb 25 he commented on the value of these plastic rings .. "I have so far seen six ringed birds in two visits, including a long returning Hungarian-ringed bird, and another bird which winters in Spain."

**Iceland Gull:** A first winter bird was at Dungeness on Feb 27 and maybe the same bird was at Seaford on Mar 1

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird has not been reported since Feb 26 but what I think is a different bird was still at Dungeness on Feb 28

**Sandwich Tern:** One was fishing in the Nore Barn area of the Emsworth shore on Feb 25 and another was seen in Poole Harbour on Feb 26 and 27 - both were almost certainly wintering birds.

**Long-eared Owl:** On Feb 23 one was reported to have been seen perched on a post near Church Norton church

**Kingfisher:** On Feb 18 one was seen flying up the River Ems at Brook Meadow and over the railway to the north, reviving hopes of breeding somewhere along the Ems south of Westbourne. This is the first sighting in the Brook Meadow area this year though there were four coastal sightings in the Emsworth area during January.

**Sand Martin:** First migrant arrival was at Radipole (Weymouth) on Feb 26 and on Feb 29 Lee Evans was reporting several in the country

**House Martin:** Lee Evans reports one seen in Cornwall on or before Feb 29

**Meadow Pipit:** Durlston reported the **first northbound passage birds** on Feb 24 with more seen on Feb 25

**Robin:** A **nest with two eggs** was found in the Farnborough area on Feb 24

**Stonechat:** Portland reported the first few migrant arrivals on Feb 18 and around 20 were at Portland Bill on Feb 24, while Christchurch Harbour reported 5 'new' birds there on Feb 26

**Wheatear:** I have already mentioned a second hand but very probable report of one seen in Kent on Feb 10 and by Feb 29 Lee Evans tells us that several are now in the country

**Blackbird:** These have mostly started singing, if intermittently. Walking around Emsworth on Feb 24 Brian Fellows heard nine different birds singing.

**Song Thrush:** I think a pair is already nesting close to my garden - both birds were seen searching for food on my lawn on Feb 26 with one of them being seen there most days. Their presence, and the cessation of song, both suggest that they have a nest but do not wish to attract attention to it.

**Blackcap:** Three reports of males in full song suggest that our winter birds are getting ready to depart - one has been singing continuously in a Havant garden since Feb 18.

**Pallas' Warbler:** One has been in Oakers Wood south west of Bere Regis in Dorset from Feb 24 to Mar 1 at least

**Goldcrest:** Although these sing throughout the winter I suspect there has been a surge of song in the past week based on my hearing birds singing on both Feb 28 and 29

**Long-tailed Tit:** One pair was lining its nest in a Cosham garden here in the Portsmouth area on Feb 24

**Raven:** These are early nesters and a pair 'somewhere in Sussex' which fledged 5 young last year has already begun incubation of this year's eggs some 3 weeks earlier than last year

**Rose Coloured Starling:** On Feb 25 Kris Gillam's website (<http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/wightvogels/news.html>) had a close up photo of a first winter male at a garden feeder in East Cowes on the IoW. Kris says .. "A juvenile was seen in a garden c.150yds from there in October so it seems most likely that this bird has over-wintered in the area."

**Tree Sparrow:** The presence of **five Tree Sparrows** among finches and buntings feeding in the Henfield area of West Sussex on Feb 28 was, I think, the first report for the year for Sussex (none reported at Rye Harbour or the Pannel Valley so far this year). No reports at all from Hampshire this year.

**Lapland Bunting:** One of the birds seen in the Keyhaven (Lymington) area since Nov 17 last year was still feeding with **Reed Buntings** on Feb 26 despite most of the stubble field which they frequent being recently ploughed (it seems the farmer has deliberately left them a wide headland). That respite did not last long and when the rest of the field was ploughed the birds disappeared.

**Escapees:** A white **Little Corella parrot** which was first seen in the Widewater lagoon area of Lancing (Worthing) last November was still alive there on Feb 25

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** A single male was seen at Ambersham Common near Midhurst on Feb 25 This brings the number of reports for this year to 19

**Holly Blue:** The earliest ever was in a Gosport garden on Feb 9 and on Feb 12 two more were seen there. These are the only two reports for this year.

**Red Admiral:** One was flying in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Feb 18 and counts of three came from Gosport on both Feb 14 and 26. Now 44 reports for the year

**Comma:** One seen in Gosport on Feb 18 and another in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden around Feb 24 brings the number of reports for this year to 9

## Moths

**Spindle Smudge (451 *Ypsolopha mucronella*):** First taken at Worthing on Feb 28 This species overwinters without hibernating

**Depressaria daucella (670):** First of year trapped at Newhaven on Feb 23. This species overwinters without hibernating

**Brown-spot Flat-body (695 *Agonopterix alstroemeriana*):** First of year at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23. This species overwinters without hibernating

**Grey Birch Button (1051 *Acleris logiana*):** First of year at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23. I think this species overwinters without hibernating

**Tufted Button (1054 *Acleris cristana*):** First of year out after hibernation at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23

**Lichen Button (1061 *Acleris literana*):** First of year after hibernation out at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23

**Plume moth species (1497 *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*):** First out of hibernation at Worthing on Feb 27

**Yellow Horned (1659 *Achlya flavicornis*):** First of year somewhere in Sussex on Feb 23 This is a genuine first emergence - moths only fly in the March to April period

**Bright-line Brown-eye (2160 *Lacanobia oleracea*):** A very early first somewhere in Sussex on Feb 23 - normal flight period is May to July

**Clouded Drab (2188 *Orthosia incerta*):** First of year at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23 Normal flight period is March to May

**Twin-spotted Quaker (2189 *Orthosia munda*):** First of year in the Northiam area north of Hastings on Feb 26 Normally flies in March and April

**Early Grey (2243 *Xylocampa areola*):** First of year at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 28 Normal flight period is March to May

**The Chestnut (2258 *Conistra vaccinii*):** First of year at Rusper (Horsham) on Feb 23 Flies from September to May without hibernating

## Other insects

**Ruby Tiger caterpillar (Woolly Bear type)** nearly full grown enjoying the sun at Rye Harbour on Feb 25

**Chequered Hoverfly (*Melanostoma scalare*):** Probable id only of a small thin bodied hoverfly seen in Havant on Feb 27

**Black Garden Ant:** These started to come out in my Havant garden on Mar 1

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*):** A worker seen with full pollen sacs in the Northiam area north of Hastings on Feb 24 indicates that this species has continued nesting through the winter (normally only Queens survive)

**Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*):** Living up to its name, a queen seen prospecting for a nest site at Northiam on Feb 24

**Zebra spider (*Salticus scenicus*):** First of the year hunting in my Havant garden on Mar 1

## PLANTS

**My March list of flowering species stands at 41 after the first couple of days (124 species for the year)**

**Bulbous Buttercup:** First flower seen on Feb 28

**Early Flowering Wintercress (*Barbarea intermedia*):** First flower found on Feb 27 - fresh growth on a woody stem of a last year's plant!

**Flowering Currant:** First bush in flower in Havant on Mar 1

**Hemlock Water Dropwort:** First flowers in Havant on Feb 27

**Cowslip:** Found in flower near Lewes on Feb 24 after Durlston had reported plants 'about to flower' on Feb 22

**Elder:** On Feb 28 an old tree near the Viewpoint carpark on Portsdown was covered with unopen flower buds

**Shasta Daisy:** One flower seen in Havant on Mar 1

**Grape Hyacinth:** Flowering in Havant on Mar 1 after unopen buds seen on Feb 11

**Spanish Bluebell:** A single erect flower stem with closed blue flower buds seen in Havant on Mar 1

**Alpine Squill:** Five plants in full flower in the 'orchid corner' of the Hollybank woods on Feb 25. These plants were first seen last year but have probably been there for years (likely to be the result of deliberate introduction as the site is extremely remote from roadside or gardens from which the plants could have been thrown out)

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Roe Deer:** By Feb 29 a buck at Durlston had regrown its antlers to full size though they were still in velvet

**Vole species:** On Feb 27 John Goodspeed's website reported a Vole seen inside a garden bird feeder at some unspecified location in the Portsmouth area - it was reported as a **Field Vole**, and while I have no evidence that it was not that species. I understand that **Bank Voles** are commoner and more given to climbing while **Field Voles** (aka **Short-tailed Vole**) are less common and are normally restricted to rough grassland. Google gave me a reference to

<http://www.wildyorkshire.co.uk/naturediary/docs/2003/8/3.html> which has a useful summary of the differences between the two species and is illustrated with attractive drawings

**Water Vole:** Now becoming more frequently seen in the River Ems at Brook Meadow

**Frog:** Recent frosts killed off some of the early spawn but since the frosts ended Frogs have become active enough locally to get a photo in the Portsmouth NEWS of a small garden pond brimming with spawn and John Vigay reports his garden pond in the Lovedean area of Waterlooville is equally full, as is a pond in nearby Yoells Copse

**Fungi:** A good show of **Jews Ear fungus** on **Buddleia wood** in my garden this week

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 25 - MAR 2 (WEEK 8 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 1 Mar**

#### **First Bluebell and Flowering Currant**

A walk around Havant today put 41 plants on the new month's flowering list. including a **Flowering Currant** bush in full flower but not including a single **Spanish Bluebell** holding erect its cluster of blue flower buds as if they might start to open tomorrow. Also close to opening were buds on **Hawthorn**.

Both **Ox-eye** and **Shasta Daisy** had flowers as did both **Black** and **Spotted Medick**. The **Hemlock Water Dropwort** and **Early Wintercress** which first appeared on Feb 27 both went on the March list but today I noticed that the apparently fresh leaves and flowers on the **Wintercress** were sprouting from a dead, woody stem of a last year's plant!

No newcomers among the birds today but I was intrigued to see the speed at which a couple of **Long-tailed Tits** could fly, weaving in and out of close-knit branches, in what I assume was a territorial dispute.

### **Fri 29 Feb**

#### **Wigeon and Teal still numerous at Langstone**

A circular walk to Langstone and back via Pook Lane found **11 bird species in full song** (12 if you include the 'Chiff, chiff' of **Redshank** on the shore) with another **Goldcrest** among them (following the one heard yesterday). Other signs of breeding were a **Long-tailed Tit pair** working through the lichen covered trees in my garden and yet another sighting of a **Buzzard** flying into the tall Monterey Pines in the Wade Farm fields.

Well over 100 **Brent** were scattered around the Langstone shore with more than 20 **Shelduck** and 30+ each of **Teal** and **Wigeon**. The Langstone pair of **Swans** were not on the pond but I'm pretty sure they were the pair on the harbour from which they could immediately spot any other pair flying in to take over the territory.

### **Thu 28 Feb**

## Portsdown Hill in the rain

Having to visit the Q A Hospital for a check up this morning I parked at the View Point and walked down the hill via London Road and back up over the grassland. There is now a great mass of **Alexanders** in flower but no sign of the two plants I was looking for - **Cowslips** and **Hairy Violet** (**Cowslips** have been seen flowering in Sussex near Lewes on Feb 24 and were 'nearly out' at Durlston on Feb 22). The only addition to my personal year list was a single opening bud of **Bulbous Buttercup** which, with the **Hemlock Water Dropwort** and **Early Wintercress** (**Barbarea intermedia**) that I saw in Havant yesterday, make three new flowers this week.

Near the hospital a **Goldcrest** was singing from an Ivy covered tree, and near the hilltop carpark an ancient **Elder** tree was covered with white flower 'umbels' (flowers still tightly closed)

## **SUMMARY FOR FEB 18 - 24 (WEEK 7 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** include another **Swallow** seen at Sandwich Bay on Feb 21 brings the total of arrivals so far to four, maybe five. Three **Common Cranes** flying north over Horsham on Feb 21 were unexpected, less so is the start of passerine arrivals with **Grey Wagtail** and **Stonechat** both seen coming in off the sea at Portland. A **Spotted Crake** briefly at Shoreham on Feb 19 was also probably a migrant arrival. **Insect highlights** include a **Large Tortoiseshell** and a **Camberwell Beauty** on the Isle of Wight. Among **flowering plants** finds of **Ground Ivy** and **Kingcups** were pleasing. **Other Wildlife** has news of the **cross channel travels of a tagged Seal** and some info on **Reindeer antlers**.

## **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** One was reported between Oct 3 and Nov 24 last year as being regularly seen in the Itchen near Northam Bridge in Southampton. The Nov 24 report said it had left the Itchen and was seen in Southampton Water, and we have heard no more of it until now - on Feb 21 it was back in the river near the same bridge

**Black-throated Diver:** One seen in Chichester Harbour from Black Point on Hayling on Feb 22

**Slavonian Grebe:** On Feb 23 two were at the mouth of the Beaulieu river and on Feb 22 more than 20 were off Pagham Harbour.

**Black-necked Grebe:** It seems that the two which have been seen daily at the Blashford Lakes left on or after Feb 17, and on Feb 22 none could be seen from the Hayling Oysterbeds by three experienced Sussex birders (admittedly the water was choppy)

**Cattle Egret:** On Feb 18 Lee Evans national bulletin of rare bird news said that there are currently around 55 Cattle Egrets in Britain. Those at Harbridge near Ringwood, Bergerie Farm near Lymington, at Piddinghoe on the Sussex Ouse, the Weymouth area in Dorset and near Lavant at Chichester were all reported in the past few days.

**Spoonbill:** An adult seen in the Thorney Deepes on Feb 17 has not been reported again but on Feb 18 there were still 9 in the Arne area of Dorset.

**Bewick's Swan:** Six still at Ibsley on Feb 18 and 20 at Burpham near Arundel on Feb 20 are the latest reports I have seen

**Barnacle Goose:** In my last summary I suggested that the flock of 43 seen at Piddinghoe on the Sussex Ouse on Feb 14 had flown on to Thorney Island where 40+ arrived late that day but this was contradicted as 42 were still at Piddinghoe on Feb 15 and the flock of 43 were still at Thorney Deepes on Feb 18 and 19 (with 18 still there on Feb 22). On Feb 21 a total of 160 were seen at Rye Harbour.

**Brent Goose:** Although the initial surge of departing birds is now over a few are still moving east - on Feb 21 Seaford reported 27 heading east and on Feb 23 another 32 flew east past Portland

**Pale Bellied Brent:** I was also wrong about the family of four of these seen at Lymington marshes on Feb 12 - I thought they were already on passage and would not stay there but they were still present on Feb 23 at least. Another single was found at Calshot on Feb 16 and was still there on Feb 23

**Aythya hybrid:** The bird on the Thorney Little Deepes which was originally **thought to be a male Scaup** has been recognised as a hybrid since at least Feb 12 and on Feb 19 it was declared to be (probably!) a male with both Tufted Duck and Pochard in its parentage. Still there on Feb 22.

**Goosander:** 37 were still roosting at the Blashford Lakes on Feb 20 but the number there is now diminishing and maybe one of these appeared on the scrape at Hook (Warsash) on Feb 21

**Marsh Harrier:** A male was seen briefly over Thorney Little Deepes on Feb 17 before flying off east, and a female was at the same place on Feb 22. Another female was at Titchfield Haven on Feb 20 - these are all presumably arriving migrants.

**Merlin:** Numbers at the coast seem to be diminishing as birds return to breeding areas but one was perched on the outer bund wall of the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 22

**Spotted Crake:** One was seen and photographed at Shoreham Harbour on Feb 19 but then flew north suggesting it was on passage. Quite a few winter in Britain but the majority fly on to Africa after a prolonged autumn stopover in southern Britain. Very few are seen here on spring passage (and those generally in March) but my guess would be that this was one of the few heading north from Africa earlier than usual.

**Common Crane:** Three of these flew north over Horsham on Feb 21, presumably newly arrived from the continent.

**Golden Plover:** A count of 1400 at Rye Harbour on Feb 18 was the highest count there since 1700 on Jan 2 and may reflect birds now moving north across the English Channel. On Feb 20 there were 80 on the Langstone shore, on Feb 22

some 200 were in the Oakley area west of Basingstoke and on Feb 23 around 500 were still in the Lymington area.

**Lapwing:** On Feb 8 there were at least 50 on the Langstone shore with one of them practising territorial display flights over the saltings. On Feb 20 I only saw one Lapwing anywhere on the shore from Langstone to Emsworth - it looks as if they have headed off to breeding grounds although several large flocks can still be found (on Feb 21 there were 300 at Brading Marshes and 200 in the Yarmouth area - both on the loW - and there were at least 400 on the Pevensy Levels on Feb 23)

**Purple Sandpiper:** One seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 23 is thought to be only the third seen inside Langstone Harbour since 1950 (the others were there in Nov 1955 and Aug 1996). The current bird may have been lurking around the Oysterbeds for some time as John Goodspeed heard an un-named birder saying he had seen one there in mid January this year.

**Ruff:** On Feb 18 there were 11 Ruff at Rye Harbour increasing to 29 on Feb 19 - more evidence for birds already moving north from the continent? The flock of 29 was still at Rye Harbour on Feb 21

**Black-tailed Godwit:** These are still on the move, probably spurred by the need to find the best feeding places where they can fatten up in advance of their approaching flight north. This year the floods in the lower part of the Avon valley did not persist for long and the crowd of up to 2500 Blackwits which moved there at the beginning of February was down to just 600 birds by Feb 13 and these have now dispersed. A good number seem to have gone back to Poole Harbour but at least 360 flew north up the Avon valley to roost at Ibsley Water and spread out by day to feed at places such as the Hucklesbrook floods (some 2 km north of Ibsley Water) - at least 170 were in that area on Feb 18. A very small number have returned to Chichester Harbour, probably from the Pagham or Pulborough areas. Interestingly the count at Yarmouth on the loW was 120 on Feb 21, a significant increase on 96 there on Jan 13 and just 44 on Feb 7.

**Spotted Redshank:** No recent reports from the Emsworth shore but three reports show that at least one is still around Thorney Island (Chidham Point on Feb 16, near the Emsworth marina on Feb 17 and in the Great Deeps roost on Feb 22)

**Greenshank:** A group of 14 were roosting at the Thorney Great Deeps on Feb 22

**Med Gull:** The number around Weymouth at built up to 150 by Feb 20 and on Feb 23 a count of 45 was reported at the mouth of the Beaulieu River (where the first pair bred in 1968)

**Ring-billed Gull:** Still at the Gosport Cockle Pond on Feb 23

**Common Gull:** A flock of 60 at the mouth of the Beaulieu River on Feb 23 may have been the result of spring passage having started. On the same day a leucistic individual was seen at Alresford Pond

**Lesser Blackback Gull:** On Feb 23 Portland reported a 'trickle passing east' as their passage gets under way.

**Iceland Gull:** An adult was seen briefly at Seaford on Feb 21 but flew east

**Sandwich Tern:** One seen at the Lymington marshes on Feb 23 was presumably a wintering bird

**Stock Dove:** There have been few reports of large flocks this winter so news of a flock of 120 on the Sussex Downs by the Arun south of Amberley on Feb 18 stands out (maybe birds gathering prior to leaving us?). The only other report of 100 birds came from the Chilling area near Warsash on Jan 19 when they were feeding with many small birds (e.g. the huge Linnet flock)

**Short-eared Owl:** 5 were still hunting over the Downs south of Amberley on Feb 17 and on that day 2 were hunting the south side of the Thorney Great Deeps east end but at least one of these moved on, flying high to the east.

**Kingfisher:** One was seen at the outflow of the Lymbourne stream opposite the Royal Oak at Langstone on Feb 20

**Swallow:** Two new reports bring the total of sightings to four, possibly five. One of the new reports is the earliest so far - one flying in off the sea at Ventnor on Feb 13 (maybe it was that bird seen around St Catherine's Point on the following day). We then have a sighting in the Rye Bay area (Jury's Gap) on Feb 16 and now one seen flying over the A27 in the Nutbourne area early on Feb 19 by someone heading from Havant to work in Chichester. Latest news is of one at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Feb 21

**Meadow Pipit:** First report of song comes from Durlston - definitely heard on Feb 22 and probably singing for a couple of days before then.

**Rock Pipit:** We are told this had started to sing at Durlston on Feb 11 and the full song flight could be heard and seen there on Feb 23

**Grey Wagtail:** One of these coming in off the sea at Portland on Feb 23 was among the very first indications of spring passage bringing us passerines

**Stonechat:** On Feb 18 the news from Portland included a mention of 'a few new Stonechat arrivals' - I guess that refers to birds flying north from the continent. More of them arrived there on Feb 23

**Blackbird:** Still no general start of song but one was singing sporadically in Havant on the morning of Feb 20 (following one in full song at Emsworth on Feb 13). Also on Feb 20 I was told that one in a Havant area garden had been seen carrying food to young in a nest. By Feb 23 prolonged song was heard in Havant in the late afternoon.

**Song Thrush:** The bird which has been singing strongly around my garden up to Feb 20 has now ceased to do so, yet one of the pair that have been coming to feed in my garden is still doing so on Feb 24, suggesting that they have started nesting.

**Goldcrest:** Many were singing in the Chichester West Dean Woods on Feb 20

**Carrion Crow:** On Feb 23 a flock of 210 were in the Weston shore area of Southampton Water where the regular large flock peaked with an estimated count of 500 in September last year.

**White-Crowned Sparrow:** The bird at Cley in Norfolk has now been resident there for 40 days and so far has raised £5730 for local church funds.

**Lapland Bunting:** The Selsey Bill bird was last reported on Feb 20 but the Hurst area birds near Lymington have not been in the news since Feb 17

**Reed Bunting:** Still at least 8 in the Warblington Farm field behind Conigar Point on Feb 20 - half a dozen **Skylark** were still there with plenty of **Wood Pigeon** but **no Linnets, Yellowhammer** nor **Stonechat** were seen

**Hawaiian Goose:** An unusual escapee of this species was with Canada Geese at Rye Harbour on Feb 17

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Small White:** Another sighting in Gosport on Feb 18

**Red Admiral:** Seen on Feb 17, 18 and 20

**Small Tortoiseshell:** One seen in Steyning (north of Worthing) on Feb 18 with another in Farnborough the same day and a third at Horsham on Feb 19

**Large Tortoiseshell:** Following the sightings at Portland on Feb 9 and 10 there is one from the Ventnor area of the IoW on Feb 18

**Camberwell Beauty:** One in the Ventnor Botanic Gardens seen on Feb 18 is an even greater surprise than the Large Tortoiseshells - can these all be insects that have started to succeed in hibernating here?

**Peacock:** Two sightings in Sussex on Feb 18 and 19

**Comma:** One seen in Friston Forest near Eastbourne on Feb 17

### Moths

No new reports but I have learnt the **origin of the 'new names' for micro moths now appearing on the Sussex BC website** (e.g. Red-letter Flat Body). Sam Bayley tells me these are the work of Jim Porter (an eminent entomologist with several books to his credit) and can be found in a booklet he has published but which has not yet been given national support, hence the new names cannot be found online on the Butterfly Conservation or UK Moths websites, nor in counties other than Sussex where the county Moth Group has adopted them. I am told that when they appear in reports on the Sussex BC website the new name should always be accompanied by the scientific name of the species but that rule has already been violated once and is likely to be increasingly violated as Sussex moth-ers get used to the names.

## PLANTS

I now have reports of **84 species flowering during February with 82 seen by myself**

**Marsh Marigold (aka Kingcup):** On Feb 21 I found just one plant flowering on the Langstone South Moors but I could not see any more leaves indicating further plants still to flower - the three flowers and ten buds were a delight but the decline in numbers (from around 600 plants here before the new industrial buildings went up to just one now) is saddening.

**Common Ramping Fumitory:** A couple of plants with larger flowers than those of **Common Fumitory** seen at Warblington Farm on Feb 20

**Thale Cress:** I found the first to be reported in February in Havant on Feb 20

**Sweet Violet:** The first two flowers of the **pale pink form** were out in Nore Barn wood on Feb 20

**Spotted Medick:** A few flowers seen in Havant on Feb 18 and more found on Feb 22

**Wild Carrot:** A substantial bushy plant in the Warblington Farm stubble field on Feb 20 had shielded its flowers from the recent frost to increase the February flowering list by one

**Cowslip:** None yet flowering but at Durlston the plants are now close to opening their flowers

**Ground Ivy:** A very pleasing find at Warblington on Feb 20 was of two plants in flower at Pook Lane in a sheltered spot where I have found early flowers in past years, but none this early. To back up this early find I came on at least ten flowering plants in Mill Lane at Langstone on Feb 21

**Butterbur:** The **female flower spikes** were flourishing by the Langbrook stream on Feb 21 but the **male flowers** at Brook Meadow have yet to make a serious show - Brian Fellows found one or more spikes flowering on Jan 20 but on Feb 22 when I went to see them I could only find one spike looking sorry for itself and still not fully emerged from the ground. They may have been set back by recent frost which has severely blackened many of the white flowers of the **Giant Butterbur** flowers by the Langbrook stream

**Three-cornered Leek:** Another pleasant surprise in the Nore Barn wood was to find a cluster of half a dozen plants of this in full flower on Feb 20

**Summer Snowflake:** The flowers of garden chuck-out plants (now growing up through bramble bushes) were seen in Mill Lane at Langstone on Feb 21

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common Seal:** The colony of Common Seals in Chichester Harbour is the source of most seals seen locally but there are occasional sightings of both Common and Grey Seals along the south coast for which the origin of the Seal is unknown. An entry on the Rye Bay website this week provides further information in the account of the travels of a **Seal (species not stated) which was fitted with a radio tag by researchers at the University of Rochelle and is known to have swum in November 2007 from northern France across the channel to the Isle of Wight (taking 24 hours to do so) and then headed east, calling at Shoreham, Newhaven and passing Hastings two days later** - sadly its radio then failed so

further travels are unknown. Clearly some Seals are long distance swimmers, at least at some periods of their life.

**Adder:** Five were basking on the cliffs at Durlson on Feb 19

**Fungi:** A specimen of **Scarlet Elf Cup** was found at the Blashford Lakes on Feb 14 and now there is another find reported from woods in the Hastings area on Feb 21.

**Reindeer:** Sorry - none seen locally but maybe of interest is a fact that I only learnt this week when I was sent some Honeymoon photos from a young couple just back from Finnish Lapland. **A couple of the photos contained pictures of Reindeer, one with a full set of antlers and the other photo showing two Reindeer, neither of which had antlers.** I already knew the both sexes of Reindeer (aka Caribou in North America) grew antlers but I had not thought that these, like those of other deer, are renewed annually so there comes a time when each animal drops the set it has been carrying and starts to grow a new set. Wikipedia tells us .. **"Both sexes grow antlers, which (in the Scandinavian variety) for old males fall off in December, for young males in the early spring, and for females, summer"**.

My request to Google had been for "Reindeer antlers", not thinking that this would bring many offers of buying antlers to adorn my own head for fun at Christmas. I ignored these but did look at an excerpt from the BBC News for 29 Sep 2002 describing how a **Bull Reindeer (not Buck or Stag!) had had its antlers removed by a vet after it had gored two human walkers in the Highlands** - the female Reindeer (cows?) in his 'harem' approached the walkers (perhaps thinking they had food) and the Bull took exception to what he saw as an attempt to seduce his harem. This also confirmed that the Reindeer rut lasts from late September to early November.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 18 - 24 (WEEK 7 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 22 Feb**

#### **Many Early Dog Violets now flowering**

A stroll around Havant this morning discovered some **Coltsfoot** in flower by the roadside just south of the New Lane level crossing and at least 100 flowers of the **Early Dog Violets** (called **Wood Dog Violets** in some books) in the Eastern Road cemetery. Another roadside find was of **Spotted Medick** in flower by the roundabout at the junction of Elmleigh Road and Petersfield Road (no doubt flowering early due to the warm microclimate induced by the many vehicle engines perpetually running as they wait to negotiate the busy roundabout) - this was my second find of this plant in flower, previously seen on Feb 18.

Later in the day I cycled via Warblington Farm (where I confirmed the identity of the **Common Ramping Fumitory** by the length of the flowers) to Brook Meadow at Emsworth where I found one sorry looking flower spike of **Butterbur** (Brian Fellows found it flowering here a month before me). At Lumley Mill I collected a specimen of the **Periwinkle** which regularly flowers around the gateway of the Mill property, and which I had previously thought to be the **Intermediate Periwinkle**, but which turns out to be **Lesser Periwinkle** by the length of the corolla tube and calyx teeth (the tests used in Stace's key)

[Thu 21 Feb](#)

### Kingcups in flower on Langstone South Moors

A walk down the Langbrook stream today confirmed that the **female Butterbur** and the **Giant Butterbur (Petasites japonicus)** were both in flower though many of the white flowers of the latter had turned black with frost.

From this streamside site I went to the South Moors 'orchid field' in search of **Kingcups**, and to my surprise found one with three open flowers and ten buds. The absence of leaves indicating the presence of other plants that will flower later made me wonder if the one plant I saw was the very last to be seen on this site where I can remember around 600 plants in flower before the industrial buildings went up. Just after seeing the **Kingcup** I put up a single **Snipe**.

On Budds Farm pools **two pairs of Shelduck** were back (and will hopefully breed) and there were representatives of all the commoner duck species though **Teal** were today in the minority. My rough counts were of **32 Shoveler, 13+ Tufted Duck, 9 Gadwall and 9 Pochard** but only **6+ Teal. Mallard, Coot, Little Grebe and Moorhen** were all present as was one **Swan**.

Coming back along the seawall the tide was exceptionally low after a spring tide and the waders at the tide line were too far away to see clearly but I did note that far more **Dunlin** (perhaps more than 2000) were feeding, no doubt getting a bonanza of food as the mud exposed by this very low tide is only exposed at some of the monthly spring tides and consequently usually out of reach of the waders.

A final surprise find came in Mill Lane where at least a dozen plants of **Ground Ivy** were in flower following yesterday's exceptionally early first find at Warblington. Also in Mill Lane, growing up through brambles, were the flowers of garden chuck out **Summer Snowflake** plants looking very similar to the **Three-cornered Leek** (or Garlic) but having several differences. The **flowers** of the **Snowflake** have green spots at the tip of the petals, while the **Leek** has green stripes all down the petals. The **stems** of the **Leek** are three sided but look almost flattened, those of the **Snowflake** have two sharp edges giving a sense of being three sided but they do not have the 'flattened' feel to them. Finally the **spathes** of the two differ (the spathe is the outer cover of the cluster of flowers before they appear, forming a sheath to the cluster) - that of the **Snowflake** remains erect and pointed after the flowers emerge, that of the **Leek** splits into two papery sections that shrivel after the flowers emerge.

[Wed 20 Feb](#)

### A walk around Warblington Farm

This afternoon I walked down to Langstone, then along the shore to Nore Barn and back across the fields, adding **Ground Ivy, Common Ramping Fumitory and Three-cornered Leek** to my year's flower list as well as seeing the Langstone **Kingfisher** and my first **Knot**. Earlier in the day, from my garden, I heard rather desultory **Blackbird song** early in the morning.

In addition to the **Kingfisher** at the Royal Oak I heard at least one **Med Gull**, and on the mud saw some **80 Golden Plover** as well as my first two **Knot** of the year. Further east, off Warblington, there were still **50 Wigeon, 23 Shelduck** and some **300 Brent**, but only **1 Lapwing**.

In the field behind Conigar Point there were at least 8 **Reed Buntings** and half a dozen **Skylarks** (one in full song), but **no Linnets, Yellowhammer or Stonechat**. The only flowers were **Charlock, Scentless Mayweed, Stick Mouse-ear, Field Woundwort** and **Wild Carrot** with a large plant of **Oxford Ragwort** having many flower buds but none open.

In Nore Barn wood the first two **pink flowered Sweet Violets** were out as well as a clump of flowering **Three-cornered Leek**.

Coming back over the Warblington fields I watched one **Buzzard** heading west to roost, harrassed by a pair of **Crows** until out of their territory. Two good plant finds were **Common Ramping Fumitory**, flowering at the south west corner of the old Black Barn where Church Lane turns abruptly into the parking area outside the Church, and two flowering plants of **Ground Ivy** at the south west corner of the Old Rectory area where you turn from the tamac access road into Pook Lane proper.

### [Mon 18 Feb](#)

#### One more bird and one more plant for my year list

A short walk around Havant this morning added **Spotted Medick** to my year list of flowering plants, and a drive to Up Marden in the afternoon added **Red-leg Partridge** to my bird list - just one bird running along the road as we passed the Bevis Thumb Long Barrow on the minor road from Up Marden to Compton. Also amongst the 33 flowering plants seen in the morning were **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** in Juniper Square and **Danish Scurvygrass** alongside Park Road South where the **Spotted Medick** was growing right alongside **Black Medick**.

### **SUMMARY FOR FEB 11 - 17 (WEEK 6 OF 2008)**

This week's **bird highlights** are two reports of **Swallows** and one of a **Wheatear** plus discussions of **Crows stealing food from Raptors** and **Gulls stealing earthworms from Flamingos**. **Insect highlights** are the early emergence of **Holly Blue** plus both **Large** and **Small Whites**, while **Plant news** includes a very early find of **Cuckoo flower**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** See diary entry for Feb 12 describing an unusual sighting of one 'beached' on the Warblington shore soon after that day's high spring tide had dropped. An easterly movement on Feb 14 took 126 past Dungeness

**Black-throated Diver:** One was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Feb 9

**Great Crested Grebe:** The flock in Rye Bay still numbered at least 200 on Feb 10 and on that day an even bigger flock of 220 birds was off the north Kent coast seen from Seasalter. On Feb 17 several birds in a flock of around 40 in Southampton Water were displaying to each other.

**Slavonian Grebe:** On Feb 10 there were still 9 off Pagham Harbour and there have been reports from five other sites this week. The arrival on Feb 16 of a third bird to join the two which have been wintering at Dungeness RSPB reserve probably indicates the start of their movement away from winter quarters.

**Shag:** Several were carrying nest material to the cliffs at Durlston on Feb 11

**Bittern:** The Blashford Lakes bird was still present on Feb 15. Other reports this week have come from Radipole (Weymouth), Rye Harbour, Pevensy Levels and Dungeness RSPB

**Cattle Egret:** One was still at Harbridge near Ringwood on Feb 16, one was at the Chichester Lakes on Feb 14 (with two more in the Lavant area north east of Chichester up to Feb 16) and the two in the Bergerie Farm area near Lymington were still around on Feb 14

**Great White Egret:** The only two reports this week are of birds on the move. On Feb 13 one flew south east over Eastleigh and on Feb 16 Portland had its first ever sighting of the species with one flying south (leaving the UK?)

**Spoonbill:** On Feb 12 a flock of 12 were seen together near Arne in Poole Harbour and another single was reported that day at Lodmor (Weymouth). Evidence that these birds are on the move came on Feb 11 when one flew east over Worthing - maybe it was this one which turned up in the Cuckmere Valley near Beachy Head on Feb 14 and was still there on Feb 16

**Bewick's Swan:** All six were still at Ibsley near Ringwood on Feb 16 but only 19 were seen at Burpham (near Arundel) on Feb 12 - there had been 37 there on Feb 5

**Whooper Swan:** The family of 5 were still roosting at the Chichester Trout Lakes on Feb 10 but there have been no further reports of them this week

**Black Swan:** The bird which has been in the Emsworth area since Jan 26 was seen to fly off to the west on Feb 9. Maybe it was the one which suddenly appeared on Ibsley Water near Ringwood on Feb 10 (and was still there on Feb 16)

**Barnacle Goose:** A series of reports from Sussex this week suggests that some wild (not local feral) birds have reached us. A group of at least 27 arrived in the Cuckmere Valley on Feb 14 and were still there on Feb 16. Also on Feb 14 a flock of 43 flew west over the Sussex Ouse near Piddinghoe and (maybe co-ocidentally) a flock of more than 40 was seen over Thorney Island later that day, apparently landing near the Little Deeps though there have been no further reports of them so far.

**Brent Goose:** Plenty more reports of these heading east - 3250 went past Splash Point at Seaford over the three days Feb 7 - 9 and on Feb 9 Dungeness reported 2600 passing against only 1800 at Seaford that day. Dungeness had another 1750 passing on Feb 10 and on Feb 12 Christchurch Harbour reported the first passage birds seen passing Hegistbury Head (albeit just 30 birds). Further reports on Feb 14 were of 40 going east off Seaford and 129 passing Dungeness - nothing more since then

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Some of these are also on the move if the report of a family of four seen in the Lymington area is taken as evidence (first report of **Pale-bellied** there for this year)

**Red-breasted Goose:** Maybe this too is getting the itch to be on the move - at any rate on Feb 12 it changed its daily routine of commuting between south east Hayling and the West Wittering carpark and appeared on Thorney Island. Maybe that change of routine was a first step to leaving us as the bird has so far not been reported again.

**Mandarin:** An interesting report on Feb 15 came from a gardener at Paulton's Park near Romsey - he said that around **40 Mandarin** flew into the Park each evening to roost in the trees there. John Clark commented that in his experience **Mandarin** roost in trees by day and forage for food in woodland by night.

**Wood Duck:** A female arrived in the River Alver (east of Gosport) on Feb 8 and could still be seen near the Apple Dumpling Bridge on Feb 13

**Pintail:** Signs that these are leaving us came on Feb 13 when three flew past Portland and 9 went east at Dungeness - this was re-inforced on Feb 16 when a flock of 38 left the Avon valley and flew out to sea over Christchurch Harbour

**Scaup:** A bird looking very like a **male Scaup** has been hiding at the east end of the Thorney Little Deeps but on Feb 12 it was stated to be just another of those '**Aythya hybrids**'. On Feb 16 single genuine birds were seen in Poole Harbour and at Tundry Pond west of Fleet in Hampshire

**Peregrine:** In the entry for **Barn Owl** below I say that I had not previously been aware that one reason for **Crows mobbing raptors** is that they hope to make the raptor drop its prey so that they can 'pirate' it. Since writing that I read of a **Peregrine** perched in a tree at Pulborough Brooks, eating a **Moorhen** it had just caught, being hassled by **Crows** until it decided to move to a more secluded perch but dropping its prey in the process - presumably the **Crows** then ate the corpse of the **Moorhen**.

**Water Rail:** One was seen on the bank of the River Ems running through Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Feb 12 - as this is a well watched area, and there have been no previous sightings there, the bird is likely to have been 'just visiting', dropping in for one day to hide up before continuing its flight back to its breeding area after nightfall.

**Coot:** First report of nest building comes from the Slipper Mill pond at Emsworth on Feb 11

**Avocet:** Three were still to be seen at Farlington Marshes on Feb 12, with one in Pagharn Harbour on Feb 15

**Golden Plover:** There was still a flock of around 500 on the Lymington marshes on Feb 15 and at least 50 were on the Langstone village shore on Feb 15

**Knot:** A small flock of around 30 were on the north shore of Chichester Harbour close to the Emsworth Sailing Club on Feb 11

**Black-tailed Godwit:** There were still around 600 in the Dorset section of the Avon valley on Feb 13 but by Feb 15 a comment on the Christchurch Harbour website said the most of these had left and that some had flown north up the valley to an unspecified site south of Fordingbridge while 800 had returned to Poole Harbour. I

also see that on Feb 15 a flock of 220 was on a flood in the Keyhaven area near Lymington (where none had been reported since a count of 150 in mid-January). A small number have returned to local sites (e.g. 34 at Emsworth on Feb 12, 30 at Hook/Warsash on that day). At Pulborough Brooks more than 50 were still present on Feb 16

**Med Gull:** Following the first report of hearing their catlike mewling calls at Gosport on Feb 7 a second report of hearing these calls, which are nowadays almost as evocative of spring as the call of the Cuckoo, came from Rye Bay on Feb 11. On Feb 15 Jason Crook reported a minimum of 20 birds in the Langstone area (including a flock of 13 around the Oysterbeds). I heard one calling at the Oysterbeds that day - my first for the year.

**Herring Gull:** A couple of sightings this week of **Herring Gulls 'pattering' their feet** on wet grass in order to fool earthworms into thinking that it is raining (thus bringing them to the surface to be eaten by the gulls) has produced a correspondence on the subject of what Bob Chapman calls "**Podifaciliphagy**" (taking the three latin words which make this term in reverse order we have 'Eating' 'Facilitated by' 'Feet'). Last year there was a discussion of this in relation to **Black-headed Gulls** (which could be seen doing it at night in Southampton by the light of streetlamps). It seems that many species do this (e.g. **Blackbirds** or **Song Thrushes** making short fast runs over the grass then stopping to see if a worm pops up in response) and Glyn Young from the 'Durrell Zoo' on Jersey tells us that **Flamingos** also do it, though there is a twist to this example as the tall **Flamingos** are often successful in bringing up worms but the local **gulls**, closer to the ground and more agile, have learnt to watch the **Flamingos** and to dash in and grab the worms before the **Flamingo** can bend down to get its rightful prey.

**Sandwich Tern:** A sighting of one off East Head at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Feb 9 is unlikely to be of an early migrant but much more likely to have been one of two or three birds that have wintered thereabouts.

**Barn Owl:** Feb 12 brought another report of a **Barn Owl losing its prey**, this time to a **Kestrel** which succeeded in taking a vole from the Owl's talons soon after the owl got airborne in the Adur valley near Steyning. It would seem that this form of piracy is not uncommon but this instance is worth reporting for the accompanying comment from Alan Kitson who said .. "**This is of course why crows mob raptors - to get them to drop any food they might be carrying**" I'm not sure if that is the only reason why Crows mob raptors but it is one which I personally had not previously thought of. (See entry for **Peregrine** above)

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Three reports in the past few days - on Feb 9 drumming heard in the 'wood pasture' area of Stansted Forest probably came from a Lesser, on Feb 10 one was seen in the Rempstone Heath area on the southwest shore of Poole Harbour, and on Feb 11 one was heard calling at Warnham in the Horsham area. I can add another 'probable' heard in Lordington Copse (eastern fringe of the Stansted estate) on Feb 12 - very quiet drumming in very short bursts, strongly contrasting with the loud and long response of a Great Spotted in the same area.

**Woodlark:** At least seven birds have been seen recently in the Rosamund's Hill fields at Stansted according to Michael Prior on Feb 12. On Feb 16 Brian Fellows added a new site for these birds to the local cluster of sites where the birds seem to have bred in recent years - a string of sites runs east from Markwells Wood (north of Stansted Forest) to Locks Ash Farm and Up Marden area and on to Wildham Wood north of Stoughton. A little south of this line come the birds on Rosamund's Hill just east of Stansted Forest and now Brian's new site by the B2146 just north of Walderton village.

**Swallow:** Not one but two early sightings this week. On Feb 14 one was watched for some time flying along the cliff edge near St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight and on Feb 16 one was seen at Jury's Gap on the east side of Rye Bay. A cursory check of the continental sites where Swallows might be expected to be seen before they cross the channel found no sightings so these two are presumably oddities, not forerunners of a mass arrival.

**Rock Pipit:** On Feb 11 the first report of song came from Durlston and on that day Christchurch Harbour reported an unusual count of 23 in a flock (presumably birds on the move to breeding quarters including Hengistbury Head). A few are known to breed on the Hampshire coast west of Southampton Water and they may well be extending their range but so far none of them have been seen in the Portsmouth area between the end of March and late summer so one still at Southsea Castle on Feb 11 and another on the Langstone South Moor shore on Feb 10 are unlikely to breed at those sites.

**Stonechat:** Of local interest the male in the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone was still present on Feb 13 (and the other one in Warblington fields close to Conigar Point was seen on Feb 7)

**Wheatear:** On Feb 10 a Kent birder was told by a farmer that he (the farmer) had seen a male Wheatear at Edenbridge that morning. The birder was sceptical, but became convinced by the farmer's detailed description of the bird.

**Blackbird:** Still no general start to spring song but one was singing in mid-morning in a north Emsworth garden on Feb 12 and one was in full song at Emsworth at dusk on Feb 13

**Chiffchaff:** Four reports of song - heard in Brighton on Feb 7, at Brading sewage farm (IoW) on Feb 13 and also at Langstone village that day, then at Sidlesham sewage works (Pagham Harbour area) on Feb 14

**Firecrest:** Bird watching in a small town garden doesn't get much better than having a **Firecrest** working through a **flowering Mimosa tree** only 12 feet from the house windows but that was Martin Hampton's lucky experience here in Havant on Feb 12

**Bearded Tit:** The Christchurch Harbour website says that **Bearded Tits** there were heard calling for the first time this year on Feb 13 - I think that they have been present there through the winter but keeping a low profile, if so this news gives hope of hearing more of the birds at local sites in the near future.

**Blue Tit:** A bird with a greatly deformed bill (the upper mandible four times as long as it should be and strongly downcurved) must have great difficulty in surviving but on Feb 10 Mike Rafter saw one managing to eat peanuts in his Romsey garden - presumably the bird had survived for the best part of a year.

**Rook:** Some birds were back in the rookery trees at Forestside church on Feb 16

**Siskin:** On Feb 9 Martin Hampton found a total of around 250 Siskin in four flocks on Larches in Stansted Forest, then on Feb 14 John Simons reported a large flock of around 150 seen and heard in the north west of Stansted Forest and on Feb 15 the flock was estimated by Brian Fellows to have around 200 birds feeding on larch cones. I found a few in the north east of the Forest on Feb 16 and one of these was singing.

**Redpoll:** There have been relatively few reports of these this year, the peak count being of around **40 Lesser Redpoll** in Ashdown Forest on Feb 8. Another report of 16 birds came from that area on Feb 16 when Christchurch Harbour reported **2 Common Redpolls** there (what we used to call **Mealy Redpolls**).

**Hawfinch:** A second dawn watch on birds leaving their New Forest roost trees on Feb 12 recorded at least 38 birds against the 17 seen at first light on Feb 9

**Lapland Bunting:** The Selsey bird was seen again on Feb 16 and one of the Keyhaven birds was still there on Feb 15

**Yellowhammer:** First song reported at Durlston on Feb 13

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** Eight new reports between Feb 8 and 13 with a total of 14 butterflies seen, six of them seen on Feb 9 in Barnett Copse (more than a mile south east of the QE country park with the Sussex Border Path running along its northern edge)

**Large White:** An early first sighting in the Gosport area on Feb 12 - these normally appear in early April and the earliest previously recorded in Hampshire since 2000 was on Mar 25.

**Small White:** Two sightings in different parts of Southampton on Feb 8 followed by one in Brighton on Feb 13

**White species:** Feb 9 brought distant sightings of two white butterflies in the Gosport area - maybe Large or Small White or female Brimstone

**Holly Blue:** The earliest ever recorded in Hampshire was seen in Gosport on Feb 9 (seen by Peter Bowker in the Hermitage Garden)

**Red Admiral:** Eight more reports in the latest news

**Small Tortoiseshell:** We have already had reports of these seen on Jan 6 and Jan 22. Latest news is of one in north Hampshire (Axmansford) on Feb 8, one in Stansted Forest on Feb 9 with another near Henfield in Sussex

that day, and one near Brighton on Feb 10. Another was seen in Lee on the Solent on Feb 10 and one in a Shoreham garden on Feb 13.

**Large Tortoiseshell:** The mystery of why these keep appearing at Portland so early in the year continues. A probable sighting there was reported on Jan 27 and there have now been three more sightings (with a photo) on Feb 6, 9 and 10 at different places on the island. Last year there were sightings at Portland on Jan 28, Mar 3 and Apr 6 with another at Crawley on Mar 7.

**Peacock:** Ten new sightings in recent news

**Comma:** Three sightings on Feb 9 were the joint firsts for the year (one in each of Hampshire, West and East Sussex). Since then two more reports have come from Gosport on Feb 11 and 13

## Moths

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth (1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*):** Three reports are probably of insects emerging from hibernation rather than migrants. On Feb 10 one was feeding in a Seaford garden, on Feb 11 one was on *Daphne odora* in an Eastbourne garden and on Feb 12 one was seen in a Fareham garden.

**Red Chestnut (2139 *Cerastis rubricosa*):** First of year at a Findon (Worthing) moth trap on Feb 11

## PLANTS

**66 species have so far been reported flowering in February, 64 seen by myself**

**Green Hellebore:** A good show of plants already in flower alongside Woodlands Lane at Walderton (east of Stansted Park) on Feb 12

**Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*):** Two very early plants in flower by the roadside at Wisborough Green near Pulborough on Feb 15

**Danish Scurvygrass:** A good show of flowers in grass beside the south east end of Langstone Bridge seen on Feb 15

**Early Dog Violet:** The number of early flowers to be seen in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery had increased to 23 on Feb 11

**Blackthorn:** The first normal spring flower was seen on Portsdown on Feb 11 on a small bush about to open a thousand more flowers. Another find of fresh Blackthorn in flower came on Feb 15 near the Hayling Oysterbeds where the 'winter flowering oddity' also still had flowers despite recent hedge trimming.

**Barren Strawberry:** Two flowers seen just inside the Stansted Groves on Feb 13 were the first for the year

**English Elm:** First flowers open on trees above the Langbrook stream at Langstone on Feb 10

**Grey Poplar:** The tall old tree in Wade Court Road in Havant which had opened its first catkins on Jan 29 had dropped the majority of them onto the road by Feb 15

**Lesser Periwinkle:** A good show of flowers already out on plants in the foot of an old hedgerow at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh Roads at Locks Farm in the Denvilles area of Havant on Feb 12. On Feb 13 a few more flowers were seen in Pits Copse adjacent to the Stansted Groves

**Coltsfoot:** The first flowers were out at Pagham Harbour north walls and at Chichester gravel pits on Feb 6 but I did not see any until Feb 15 when I found two flowers in the overflow carpark area at the Hayling Oysterbeds

**Grape Hyacinth:** Plants in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery were starting to flower on Feb 11

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Badger:** As these become more active an increase in road casualties and sightings is reported from the Petworth area. Of local interest I learnt from the BBC film about **Badgers** that they help to grow **Wild Cherry trees** by unintentionally depositing the cherry stones in their latrines - digestive juices and well manured soil help the seed to germinate. Hence, I assume, the name Cherry Row for the thin strip of woodland running north from Wellsworth Farm at Rowlands Castle towards Finchdean.

**Common Seal:** Two reports of individuals hauled out on shores where they are not usually seen - one at Rye Harbour on Feb 14 and more interestingly one on the Weston shore of Southampton Water on Feb 16. Some years ago a very young **Seal** was found on top of a concrete pillbox beside Southampton Water, presumably separated from its mother by the falling tide leaving the pill box some distance from the water. Could the current sighting be of this same animal returning to the place of its childhood memories? Maybe it is a female thinking of giving birth in this area in the coming summer?

**Roe Deer:** On Feb 14 a buck at Durlston was said to have his antlers in velvet and growing fast

**Brown Rat:** While birdwatching at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 15 I came on a large **dead Rat** lying on the southern bund wall of the lagoon - possibly a sign that the war against **Rats** which predate **Tern eggs** and chicks is already under way?

**Water Vole:** Two sightings in the Ems at Brook Meadow on Feb 10 and 11 indicates that they are becoming more active with the approach of spring

**Hare:** At least one was seen in the Up Marden area on Feb 16. After just three reports in January this is the first report for February.

**Frogspawn:** On Feb 11 a garden pond in Cosham was said to be overflowing with spawn and on Feb 13 more spawn was reported from a Havant garden in the Denvilles area. Sadly, when cycling through north Emsworth on Feb 12, I passed the squashed remains of one female (its sex identified by the yellow colour of the underbelly skin)

**Adder:** These have been reported out of hibernation at Durlston since Jan 26 and we now have two reports of sightings in Hampshire - at Hook near Fleet in north Hampshire on Feb 9 and in the Lymington area on Feb 12. On Feb 13 three **Adders** were seen basking at Pulborough Brooks

**Slowworm:** One seen out of hibernation at Hook in north Hampshire on Feb 9. However a corpse found recently in the Hastings area and a sighting of one active there on Dec 24 shows that some **Slowworms** are not hibernating (and are more exposed to predation when out in the open while in a torpid state)

**Fungi: Scarlet Elf Cup** was seen at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Feb 14

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 11 - 17 (WEEK 6 OF 2008)**

### **Fri 15 Feb**

#### **A visit to the Hayling Oysterbeds**

A cycle ride from Havant to the Oysterbeds added **Danish Scurvygrass** to my list of flowering plants, seen in the roadside grass on the east side of Langstone Bridge just before reaching the turning to Northney. At the Oysterbeds I had my first find of **Coltsfoot**, just two flowers well hidden in the vegetation between the overflow carpark and the shore carpark.

At the pools I heard the **call of a Med Gull** for the first time this year - Jason Crook told me later that he had (on this same day) seen 13 of these gulls around the Oysterbeds area with another 7 seen at Langstone village shore.

While at the pools I found a **large dead Rat** lying on the southern bund wall separating the lagoon from the harbour - probably the result of Havant Borough having sent a pest controller to the site in an attempt to stop predation of the Tern eggs and chicks by rats this year.

On my way home I saw some **50 Golden Plover** on the Langstone village shore and there may have been more out of sight behind the saltings.

As it was now approaching sunset I saw a total of **9 Little Egrets** in the fields around Wade Court, presumably intending to use the roost trees at Langstone Pond.

Further up Wade Court Road I was surprised to find the road deeply littered with the furry male catkins of the early flowering **Grey Poplar** which overhangs the road opposite the entrance to North Close.

### **Tue 12 Feb**

#### **Lesser Periwinkle and Green Hellebore in flower**

This morning I cycled from Havant through the Stansted estate to Walderton in the Ems valley aiming to see the wild **Green Hellebore** which grows in Lordington Copse on the hill above Walderton (the copse is private but luckily the flowers extend outside the wood and can be seen along the north side of Woodlands Lane coming from Stansted East Park before plunging down to Walderton village).

There was a better than average showing of the **Hellebores**, with **Spurge Laurel** in full flower nearby, but long before I saw these I found a lovely display of my first **Lesser Periwinkle** flowers here in Havant at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads (look at the foot of the banked hedge on the north side of Southleigh and the east side of East Leigh road). A few more flowers of this woodland speciality were also seen at the foot of a tree alongside Hollybank Lane.

Where Hollybank Lane enters the woodland I heard my first daytime **Blackbird song** of the year, and in Stansted I watched a couple of **Buzzard** soaring in the blue sky and heard at least one **Fieldfare** near the main house. I happened to meet Michael Prior while passing through the estate and he told me that there are still half a dozen or more **Woodlark** to be found towards the top of Rosamund's Hill.

[Mon 11 Feb](#)

### Red-throated Diver beached on Warblington shore

A phone call late in the afternoon gave me today's most interesting news. It came from John Sawtell who had been walking the shore from Langstone to Emsworth - he told me that at around 4:30 pm he had seen what he felt sure was a **Red-throated Diver** on the mud close to where the Warblington Castle stream emerges through a stone culvert after being piped under the seawall.

John said that the bird did not appear to be oiled or injured, and was moving its head (no doubt keeping an eye on the many people who will have been out on the shoreline on such a lovely afternoon, though it did not seem overly worried by their presence).

There had been a high spring tide peaking at 2pm, and that will only just have started to drop shortly before John saw the bird - perhaps it was dozing in the sunshine and was caught out by the rapidity with which the water levels drops after a long high tide 'stand'.

**Red-throated Diver** is by far the commonest species of diver found in the English Channel each winter - high counts during this month have been 373 passing Dungeness on Feb 1, 391 seen there on Feb 4, and on Feb 8 there were 172 off Rye Harbour and 43 off Shanklin - but they do not often come into our local harbours whereas up to three **Great Northern** and one **Black-throated** have been in the mouth of Chichester Harbour fairly regularly in Jan and Feb so far though they do not normally go further than the area of Stocker's Lake (between Black Point, Pilsey Island and West Wittering).

The only other reports of **Red-throated Diver** in the harbours this winter were of one seen in Langstone Harbour on Nov 19 and again (assuming it was the same bird) on Nov 22 when it was close to the west end of the Emsworth shore seen just off Nore Barn. That was said to be a young bird and I see that it was seen in similar conditions to the present sighting, i.e. two and a half hours after a high spring tide.

### First Blackthorn flower

Aside from the odd **Blackthorn** at the Hayling Oysterbeds which has had a few flowers open in both December and January of this and the previous winter I today saw a young tree covered with buds just about to open and with one flower fully out.

This was in the 'Children's Wood' planted in 1990 on Portsdown just behind the Churchillian pub.

Earlier in the day I had been in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery where two **Grape Hyacinth** plants were opening their first flowers, and where the **Early Dog Violets** were getting into their stride - I counted 23 flowers open where there will soon be a carpet of them

## SUMMARY FOR FEB 4 - 10 (WEEK 5 OF 2008)

### BIRDS

**Little Grebe:** This is not normally a newsworthy species but the presence of a pair on Langstone Mill Pond on Feb 8 may be of local interest as I don't think they have ever bred there (and I can only recall one previous sighting of them on the pond this winter)

**Great Crested Grebe:** On Jan 29 Cliff Dean counted 691 of these around the west side of Rye Bay and wanted to use this count to stake a claim for Rye Bay as the premier wintering site for Great Crested Grebes on the south coast. On Feb 4 Dungeness reported a count of 900 of them offshore there. In view of the proximity of Dungeness to Rye Bay this new count supports Cliff's claim - on the other hand, being outside the bay proper, we might take the view that those seen off Dungeness are a different set of birds to those wintering in Rye Bay. I'll leave any readers to make up their own mind on that question - for myself I reflect that this just confirms that wild life is always more complicated than we like to think, and that it never behaves according to our view of the world. (Another example of this failure to conform can be taken from the current attempt to compile a complete atlas of British birdlife with every bird recorded in its proper place - the authorities have decreed that a bird's proper place is in a 2 by 2 km 'Tetrad' delimited by straight lines on an Ordnance Survey map, but those birds in Rye Bay refuse to accept such constraints and continually float across Tetrad boundaries, driven by wind, tide, and their food sources.)

**Red-necked Grebe:** Another bird refusing to stay in its 'proper place' was a Red-necked Grebe seen on the sea off Branksome Chine (part of the Bournemouth and Poole shoreline) on Feb 3 - was this the bird that had been seen from Selsey Bill on Jan 20, then off Sandy Point on Hayling on Jan 28 and just inside Chichester Harbour on Jan 29? or was it the one seen in Brands Bay (Poole Harbour) on both Jan 20 and 28 (and again on Feb 7)? or was it a 'new bird on the block'?

**Slavonian Grebe:** A count of more than 25 on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Feb 4 was the second highest count there so far this winter after a pre-Christmas party of 40 seen there on Dec 23.

**Black-necked Grebe:** A count of 22 had been recorded in Langstone Harbour on Jan 1 (also that day there was a slightly dubious claim to have seen 28 there) and we now have a peak count of 26 in the harbour on Jan 22 - this comes from Jason Crook in Keith Betton's report of Hampshire birding in January. In Dorset 2 of 3

birds seen in Studland Bay on Feb 5 were 'approaching summer plumage', and on Feb 6 six were still in Langstone Harbour seen from the Oysterbeds.

**Fulmar:** A lot of these were on the move on Feb 3 when 185 were seen off Ventnor (thought to be a new record count for the Isle of Wight). Dungeness reported 257 seen that same day. On Feb 9 at least 15 were seen at Seaford but these are birds that will nest there.

**Sooty Shearwater:** One flew west past Ventnor (IoW) on Feb 3, the first anywhere since Jan 2 when one was off Dungeness.

**Bittern:** One was seen at Titchfield Haven up to Jan 27 but has probably remained throughout as it was seen again on Feb 6 when the Blashford Lakes bird was also seen

**Cattle Egret:** The two birds which had been seen together in the North Mundham area (south of Chichester) from Jan 19 to 22 then moved a short distance to fields around the Chichester lakes where both were seen on Jan 27, but on Jan 29 one of them apparently flew north east to the Crowborough area. On Feb 5 that bird may have returned to Chichester as two were again seen together in the field close to the East Trout Lake. Since then the only other reported sighting in the Chichester area has been on Feb 9 when one was back in the East Lavant area on the north east fringe of the city - before this the last report there was on Jan 6. Latest reports of other birds at known sites are of the Harbridge (Ringwood) bird seen on Feb 8, the Piddinghoe (Sussex Ouse) bird on Feb 6, and one of the Weymouth area birds coming to roost at Radipole on Feb 6 - maybe the flock of six that were in the Upwey area have split up as there are reports this week of one at Bere Regis (by the A35 half way between Dorchester and Wimborne) and one near Frampton (by the A37 northwest of Dorchester). In addition to these this week has brought sightings from two new sites - in the Lymington area two birds were discovered on Feb 6 at Bergerie Farm (north east of Sowley Pond on the minor road which takes the Solent Way path from Beaulieu to Lymington) and one near the Tesco store at New Milton on Feb 8. The Bergerie Farm birds roosted with 28 Little Egrets at Sowley Pond on Feb 6

**Little Egret:** Although most of these have deserted coastal sites many of them return at night to roost - at Rye Harbour 47 roosted on Feb 9, at Radipole 55 roosted on Feb 6 and at Sowley Pond near Lymington 36 roosted on Feb 6. An unusual report came from the Normandy area of Lymington marshes on Feb 7 of a Little Egret eating a Rat - apparently it managed to swallow it but I hope the Egret survived as the Rat may well have been poisoned, making it easy for the Egret to catch.

**Grey Heron:** On Feb 7 a birder at Weir Wood near Crowborough noted 'much mating in the heronry' there and on Feb 9 six Herons were seen on the ground close to the Tournerbury Wood heronry on Hayling - it would seem that their breeding season is now underway (though pairs of Herons stagger the time of their nesting through a season lasting from February to June - supposedly this benefits them as only a few pairs are needing extra supplies of fish to feed their young at any one time)

**Mute Swan:** On Jan 29 a count of Swans on the Romney Marshes between Rye and Dungeness found 448 Mute - more than 1 percent of the UK population - and 370 Bewick's but only 2 Whoopers

**Whooper Swan:** The family group is still spending its nights on the East Trout Lake at Chichester (last reported on Feb 9) and the count seems to have settled down to five birds where several of the original reports were of four birds (one adult and three young) but no one has yet stated if the additional bird is the second parent or another youngster.

**Black Swan:** The bird which arrived on the Town Millpond at Emsworth on Jn 26 has not been reported since Feb 4 and has probably moved on.

**Pink-foot Goose:** The single bird first seen at Amberley Wild Brooks on Jan 27 has not been reported since Feb 1 but two others have just been seen on Feb 3 at Bisterne in the Avon valley where none have been reported earlier this year

**Brent Goose:** Feb 3 brought the first reports of spring passage with counts of 265 going east past Ventnor on the IoW and, more significantly, 170 flying east past Dungeness. This start of their departure is slightly later than last year when 145 flew east off Dungeness on Jan 29 followed by 127 on Feb 4 and 1360 on Feb 5. None of the local birds seem to have left the Solent area yet but a steady flow of birds coming from further west and south has undoubtedly started and has been seen from Durlston, the Isle of Wight, Worthing and Seaford with a minimum of 1284 birds flying east between Feb 7 and 9 inclusive (total of all birds reported moving was 1798)

**Brant:** Keith Betton's Hampshire Birding report for January shows that three Brant were in Langstone Harbour sometime during the month. On Feb 9 one was still at Gosport, seen in Portsmouth Harbour at Priddy's Hard

**Red-breasted Goose:** Still being seen at Wittering on Feb 6

**Gadwall:** On Dec 28 Bob Chapman reported 900+ present on the Blashford Lakes but there have been no more quantified reports from the Ringwood area until Feb 3 when John Clark found 150+ in the area north of Ibsley bridge (no mention of the Blashford Lakes)

**Mallard:** A pair were seen mating on Budds Farm pools in Havant on Feb 5

**Pintail:** On Feb 3 John Clark reported a total of more than 600 in an area of the Avon valley reaching from the watermeadows in Dorset just south of the Avon Causeway to the Hucklesbrook area north of Ibsley (150+ of these were, I think, in Dorset)

**Pochard:** On Jan 27 Bob Chapman reported a peak of 190 birds on the Blashford Lakes and suggested that this peak was caused by the arrival of birds already moving on their spring passage. On Feb 3 he confirmed this by saying that there none left at Blashford. By Feb 10 only one could be seen on the Havant Budds Farm pools from which all but two Shoveler and a very few Mallard had also gone though quite a few Teal were still present.

**Marsh Harrier:** Kris Gillam tells us that the bird which has been wintering at the Brading Marshes on the IoW is the first ever to winter on the Island.

**Goshawk:** At least one was seen displaying in the New Forest on Feb 8, along with **Buzzards** and **Ravens**

**Merlin:** The number of **Merlin** sightings reported has dropped off noticeably since the end of January but one was over Portsmouth Harbour (Gosport area) on Feb 9

**Water Rail:** Following the report of one **Water Rail** killing another at Titchfield Haven on Jan 20 a report from Pulborough Brooks on Feb 7 describes how a **Water Rail killed and ate a Bullfinch** when the finch came to the water's edge to drink.

**Golden Plover:** A small flock of around 30 was on the Langstone shore on Feb 4

**Lapwing:** These are a daily sight on the Langstone shore through the winter but the sight of one practising its territorial display flights over the saltings on Feb 9 indicates that they will soon be leaving us

**Knot:** A flock of around 2000 was in the Gutner Point wader roost (east Hayling shore) on Feb 9, considerably more than the 1500 which were on the Pilsey Sands (just across the Emsworth Channel) on Jan 12 and the 700 seen at Black Point on Jan 23.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** The young bird was still at Rodden Hive on The Fleet near Weymouth on Feb 9

**Black-tailed Godwit:** It seems that these have now become very restive, maybe spurred by the start of urges to migrate or maybe by urges to find the best feeding grounds to put on fat prior to migration. One significant move was to Pagham Harbour where around 1200 birds appeared on Jan 29 (maybe coming the short distance from Langstone and Chichester Harbours, but maybe at least some coming north across the Channel from France). Some of these seem to have moved further north to the Arun Valley south of Pulborough where more than 170 were seen on Feb 1 on Amberley Wild Brooks (and these have been edging north again into the Pulborough Brooks reserve with some 160 there on Feb 5).

Over in Dorset numbers at Christchurch Harbour increased gradually during January (12 there on Jan 1, then 175 on Jan 15, 240 on Jan 21, 300 on Jan 27 and 400 on Jan 29). Feb 3 brought a sudden invasion of 2500 to the watermeadows just south of the Avon Causeway and on that same day Christchurch Harbour had 850 that seem to have been in addition to those in the Avon valley (interestingly 550 of this 850 were seen to fly on west towards Poole Harbour from whence the Avon valley flock was thought to have come, so maybe there was some tendency to go round in circles from Poole to Avon then back via Christchurch, though I suspect that there was also an influx from the south across the Channel). I have not seen any counts from Poole Harbour this year but 1550 were at Brownsea Island on Oct 12, increasing to 1617 on Oct 29, and I suspect the Dorset Bird Club would have got hold of any substantial increase since then and published it, so my guess is that the Poole Harbour birds must have been swelled from other sources to give 2500 in

the Avon valley (let alone the 2550 + 850 that seem to have been in the area on Feb 3).

On Feb 4 the Avon Valley flock was down to 2000+ and on Feb 5 to 1500+.

**Spotted Redshank:** The Nore Barn bird was still there on Feb 9

**Redshank:** One was heard making its territorial 'Chiff, chiff' song on the Langstone village shore on Feb 8

**Med Gull:** A pair both in full summer plumage were seen in the Lee on Solent seafront on Feb 7 and were the first to be reported making their quiet catlike mewling calls

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still at the Cockle Pond on Feb 6

**Iceland Gull:** An adult was seen at Lee on Solent on Feb 9 - it flew inland towards Fareham Creek

**Glaucous Gull:** The first winter bird was back in Shoreham Harbour on Feb 5 and 6 after maybe straying to Brighton marina on Feb 3

**Kittiwake:** 300 were off Ventnor on Feb 3

**Guillemot:** Dungeness reported 3250 flying west in two hours on Feb 5 so the vast movement of Auks and Gulls which has been going on since just after the New Year has not yet ceased despite breeding birds having been back at the Durlston cliffs since early January. With so many birds in the channel it is not surprising that one or two have fallen by the wayside - a **Razorbill** on the Hengistbury Head shore on Feb 9 was thought to be sick but not oiled, but a **Guillemot** on the Langstone Harbour shore at Sinah Warren that day was oiled though still active

**Barn Owl:** On Feb 2 feathers were seen to fly when a **Barn Owl** was attacked by a **Sparrowhawk** in the Amberley Wild Brooks area and this reminded me of a very similar attack which I myself saw in that same area on a winter's day many years ago. My observation came after we had been watching the **Barn Owl** hunting and saw it drop to the ground onto its prey. When the Owl eventually rose into the air again carrying a vole a **Kestrel** decided to rob the Owl of its prey, flying at high speed to crash into the Owl - as far as we could see the Kestrel came away with nothing more than a scrap of the large vole and the Owl flew off with its meal.

**Long-eared Owl:** The group of four which arrived at Rye Harbour on Feb 2 had increased to five by Feb 8

**Short-eared Owl:** During January several birders watched a group of **Short-eared Owls** in the Ashley Warren area just east of the A34 north of Whitchurch and two reports mentioned that 5 Owls had been seen. In his summary of Hampshire birding in January Keith Betton states that the peak count at that site was as high as 9 Owls, beating the Sussex maximum of 6 seen at The Burgh site on the Downs south of Amberley on Jan 4

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Flakes of rotten wood on the ground under an oak in Nore Barn Wood at Emsworth on Feb 4 probably indicated that a Woodpecker

heard drumming there had also been excavating a nest hole - Tony Gutteridge found one excavating a nest in Wildham Wood near Stoughton (source of R Ems) on Feb 5

**Woodlark:** Tony Gutteridge also heard **Woodlark song** in Wildham Wood on Jan 29 and John Eyre heard the first song in the Bourley Hill area south of Farnborough on Feb 4. The earliest date for song that I have seen this year was Jan 12 at an unspecified site in Hampshire with Sussex birds following on Jan 26 at Slinfold. These birds have been increasing in number and extending their range in our local area in recent years, and on Feb 9 John Goodspeed heard and saw one in a new area at the northern foot of Portsdown near Mill Lane which goes north from Fort Widley on the hill.

**Skylark:** A flock of around 100 birds was seen in the Abbotstone Down area north of Alresford on Feb 3

**Dipper:** The first known records of this species breeding in Hampshire came in the 1930s with less than 6 known instances of breeding in the second half of that decade. The next report of breeding came in 1954 followed by nothing more than very occasional reports of single birds until 1990 when a pair bred successfully in the Romsey area in each of 1990, 91 and 92. Another half dozen isolated sightings in the years up to 1997 were followed by a gap until 2003 when a bird made a two day appearance at Overton at the head of the River Test in December. This account of the historical background should illustrate why I was interested to hear that **a Dipper had been seen in Dorset on Feb 2** - not much chance of it reaching Hampshire as it was seen at the far end of the county in Lyme Regis.

**Stonechat:** Of local interest two males are still present in fields near the shore between Langstone and Emsworth

**Chiffchaff:** The first report of one singing this year came from Brighton on Feb 7

**Bearded Tit:** Keith Betton's summary of Hampshire birding in January gives a peak count of 25 birds at Farlington Marshes in that month

**Long-tailed Tit:** A pair had started nest building in a Cosham (Portsmouth) garden on Feb 4

**Chaffinch:** Many have now started singing (as have **Greenfinch**)

**Crossbill:** Two were singing among a flock of 13 in the New Forest on Jan 27

**Hawfinch:** The Rhinefield Arboretum area in the New Forest is a good spot to see a communal roost of Hawfinches in winter. Most people visit just before dusk to see the birds arriving and on Jan 12 a peak count of 16 was reported. On Feb 9 Martin King was at the site at dawn and had good views of at least 17 in the tree tops together (not slinking into the roost in small groups and immediately disappearing from view as they do at dusk).

**Lapland Bunting:** Single birds were still being seen at both Keyhaven and Selsey Bill on Feb 5. On Feb 7 all three of the Lymington birds were seen together.

## **INSECTS**

## Butterflies

**Brimstone:** A male and female were both seen in the Meon valley on Feb 8 but it was Feb 9 that brought a general emergence of this species with six reported sightings ranging from Romsey in the west to Friston Forest near Eastbourne in the east. One was in my Havant garden briefly.

**Small White:** One was seen in Southampton on Feb 8 - a very early date. I had to look back to the year 2000 before I found any year with a first earlier than March and in 2000 the date was Feb 25, more than two weeks later than this year's first.

**Red Admiral:** Seven new sightings this week

**Peacock:** Five new sightings this week

## Moths

**Variable Smudge (0461 *Ypsolopha ustella*):** First of year taken at Horsham on Feb 7

**Common Flat Body (0688 *Agonopterix heracliana*):** First of year taken at Horsham on Feb 7

**Winter Shade (1025 *Tortricodes alternalla*):** First of year taken at Horsham on Feb 7

**Rusty Birch Button (1045 *Acleris notana*):** First of year taken at Horsham on Feb 7

**Small Brindled Beauty (1925 *Apocheima hispidaria*):** First of year taken at Horsham on Feb 7

**Oak Beauty (1930 *Biston strataria*):** First of year somewhere in Sussex on Feb 7

**Hebrew Character (2190 *Orthosia gothica*):** Although one had been taken at Portland on Jan 27 this trapping somewhere in Sussex on Feb 7 was still earlier than usual - moths normally out in April.

**The Satellite (2256 *Eupsilia transversa*):** First of year somewhere in Sussex

## Other Insects

**Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*):** One of these common hoverflies was feeding at Winter Jasmine in my Havant garden on Feb 6 (some do hibernate)

**Harlequin Ladybird:** Around 60 of these were active inside the windows of a house at Kingston near Lewes on Feb 9

## PLANTS

**So far I have recorded 55 species flowering in February and have seen 53 of them myself**

**Sea Mouse-ear:** Tiny white flowers on several plants no more than 2cm high were seen in the short grass north of the Sinah gravel pit lake when I was at south Hayling on Feb 6

**English Elm:** This had started to flower by Feb 10 when I saw flowers on trees above the narrow bridge connecting Mill Lane at Langstone to the South Moors.

**Ash:** Brian Fellows found several trees had flowers open in Emsworth on Feb 3. I assume these were male flowers but I could not remember if Ash trees were of separate or mixed sexes. A glance at Alan Mitchell's Field Guide showed why I was uncertain - he says .. "Total sexual confusion: some trees all male, some all female and others a mixture with male and female on different branches"

**Black Nightshade:** A very unexpected find on Feb 4 of a small fresh plant with flowers growing in the carpark area at Warblington Church

**'Garden Forget-me-not':** I use this name for the very common weed which is a form of **Wood Forget-me-not** but must be distinguished from that uncommon native species as the garden form has no special merit. This weed started to flower in my garden on Feb 8

**Lungwort:** This is also a garden plant which flourishes as an escape and I saw one of the escapes in flower in Havant on Feb 4.

**Coltfoot:** Coming back to genuine wild spring flowers Brian Fellows found this one flowering in several places around the north of Pagham Harbour on Feb 6

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Frogspawn:** The first spawn that I am aware of was seen in the Portsmouth/Havant area on Jan 22 with a more definite report from the Cosham area on Jan 30, and this has now been followed by reports from the Lumley area of Emsworth of spawn appearing on Feb 5 and from the Northiam area near Rye of first spawn there on Feb 6.

I find it interesting that the Northiam report (which comes from Brian Banks, who is clearly an experienced professional naturalist with a senior post at one of the Dungeness reserves) comes so long after Brian first reported that Frogs has started to move back to ponds in that area on Jan 10, and after his first report of Frogs in amplexus (i.e. males gripping females and waiting for them to spawn) on Jan 18 - those males must be very patient to hold on for 19 days before the females felt like satisfying their needs.

**Adder:** At Durlston two females could be seen sunning themselves on Feb 9 - not their first appearance as one had been seen there on Jan 26

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 4 - 10 (WEEK 5 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 9 Feb**

#### **Brimstone in my garden**

The arrival of grand-children on a day trip from London kept me busy for much of the day but did not preclude the enjoyment of a **male Brimstone** seen briefly in the garden (I see many of these butterflies made their first appearance today, giving rise to widespread reports of them).

Nor did the children stop me enjoying close views of the **Spotted Redshank** as it worked its way along the water's edge south of the Nore Barn wood when we took a walk around the wood in the afternoon

## [Fri 8 Feb](#)

### **Around Langstone**

Despite a light frost this morning I found new flowers in my garden on two plants of what I call **Garden Forget-me-not** - originally cultivars of **Wood Forget-me-not** sold for planting in gardens but now growing as weeds everywhere.

The sunshine which encouraged at least ten species of garden birds to sing (including **Chaffinch**, **Greenfinch** and **Coal Tit**) as I cycled to Langstone also spurred a single **Redshank to sing its 'Chiff, chiff' song** on the shore when I reached it. Plenty of other birds were on the water with the tide nearly high, in particular lots of **Brent**, **Teal**, **Wigeon** and **Lapwing** - one of the latter practising display flights over the saltings.

On Langstone Pond a **pair of Little Grebe** were a surprise that I can only recall seeing there once before - I wonder if they will stay? The **Swans** which I expected to see on the pond were in fact on the sea but close to the seawall where I watched to see their re-action when **another pair of Swans flew low over the pond**, circling over it but then flying on towards Langstone Harbour - had they landed I think they would have had a warm reception.

As I was about to enter Wade Lane a **Red Admiral** flew across my path and settled on the old railway sleepers which form a seawall in front of the Wade Farm fields, and as I went on up the tunnel of **Cherry Plum** blossom I watched a **Long-tailed Tit**. Best of all, just beyond the houses around Wade Court, I found the **male Stonechat** still in the pony field and looking very smart in his breeding plumage.

## [Mon 4 Feb](#)

### **Buzzards and Black Nightshade at Warblington**

This afternoon I walked from Havant to Langstone and along the shore to the west end of Emsworth at Nore Barn then back across the fields of Warblington Farm.

Across East St from the old Post Office in Havant the **Whitlowgrass** was just starting to flower (it is fully out in several other places) and in the carpark on the Billy Trail the leaves of **Early Wintercress** show that it will soon be flowering there.

Reaching the shore via the tunnel of white **Cherry Plum** blossom in Wade Lane I could hear the '**bellling**' of **Teal** on the flood in the pony field beside the Lymbourne stream while out on the shore some 30 **Golden Plover** were standing motionless among clumps of seaweed.

As usual the low tide mud was packed with **Brent** and **Shelduck** but surprisingly I saw **no Wigeon** at all anywhere between Langstone and Nore Barn - unlike the **Shelduck** which like to sift through the mud for minute invertebrates the **Wigeon** are 'grazers' which enjoy a bit of weed when it has been washed clean by the rising tide but are not normally keen on acres of bare mud so they may well have moved to local wet grass though I have the feeling that some of these winter visitors are already leaving (the 'belling' of the **Teal** is a sign that they are thinking of breeding and yesterday Dungeness reported that **Brent had started flying east** - 170 passing there and another 265 seen going east past Ventnor on the loW).

At the mouth of the Warblington Castle stream I found two **Ringed Plover** on the shore - they too are probably on the move as I have not seen any thereabouts this winter.

Just beyond the reedbed here I left the shore to walk through the two fields which still have the stubble of last year's **Sweetcorn** crop and which now have a wide selection of both birds and flowers. First sign of this came when some **20 Skylarks** rose from the stubble (there were at least another 20 in the next field but only one sang fully) and I found a large plant of **Field Pansy** among the many plants of **Field Woundwort**.

In the second field the birds included half a dozen each of **Reed Bunting** and **Yellowhammer** plus a flock of **15 Linnet**.

In Nore Barn wood I heard **Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming** and found wood chips on the ground that may have come from excavation of a nest though I did not see the hole. Nearby a **Chaffinch** was practising its song and a **Greenfinch** was trilling.

In Warblington churchyard **pollen blew from a Yew branch** when I reached over the wall to shake it, and in the carpark area I found **Black Nightshade** in flower at the foot of the barn wall on the north side of the area.

Passing the Old Rectory at dusk I heard the calls of a male **Kestrel** that flew there from the Castle area, then saw **two Buzzards** on the ground in the field south of the Rectory and adjacent to Pook Lane

## **SUMMARY FOR JAN 28 - FEB 3 (WEEK 4 OF 2008)**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** Dungeness reported a count of 283 flying west on Jan 28 and 373 passing on Feb 1 - maybe these did not all go far as on Jan 29 more than 100 'diver species' could be seen fishing in Rye Bay.

**Great Northern Diver:** At least one was still to be seen on Feb 2 from Black Point on Hayling with another out in Hayling Bay that same day

**Great Crested Grebe:** Cliff Dean puts in a bid for claiming Rye Bay as the main wintering site for this species in southern Britain with a count of 691 spread out around the west side of the bay (Winchelsea to Hastings) on Jan 29

**Red-necked Grebe:** One was seen off Sandy Point on Hayling Island on Jan 28 and next day one was seen off East Head just inside Chichester Harbour. Regular

birds were two in Portland Harbour, one in Poole Harbour and one well inland on Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough.

**Slavonian Grebe:** On Jan 27 one was seen in Langstone Harbour south of the Farlington Marshes southern point. Others reported that day were 2 in Portland Harbour, 2 at Dungeness RSPB reserve, and 2 off Lymington. On Feb 1 six were seen from West Wittering and at least one of these was still off Black Point on Feb 2

**Black-necked Grebe:** Some were seen in Langstone Harbour from the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 28 when there were still 17 in Studland Bay and one in Portland Harbour

**Fulmar:** Although there have been reports of these back at their breeding sites throughout January perhaps the first real indication that they are about to start nesting came from the Brighton area when, on Jan 27, a report on the SOS website read .. "Pair of Fulmars seen together in crevice within cliff approx 300m short of Ovingdean, some Fulmars in the air."

**Balearic Shearwater:** There were still at least 2 of these lingering off Portland on Feb 2 following the count of around 50 there on Jan 13 (numbers have been gradually diminishing since then)

**Cormorant:** These are now getting their breeding plumage - I first saw one with a grey head and nape on Jan 29 and another was seen at Petersfield Heath Pond on Jan 30

**Bittern:** Despite fears that the Blashford Lakes bird had left the site on Jan 27 it was still there on Jan 28

**Cattle Egret:** The two birds that have been in the North Mundham area were still present on Jan 27 but one may have flown off as on Jan 28 only one was seen in the Chichester Lakes area and one was seen in fields by the B2110 just east of Hartfield village between Crowborough and East Grinstead. The one remaining at Chichester was in the Leythorne Meadow SWT reserve east of Runcton Lake and only viewable from the minor road going south from the A259 Bognor road roundabout on the Chichester by pass to Runcton village (looking at the map I discover that the Pagham Rife stream seems to originate in this meadow). It was back in the fields adjacent to the East Trout Lake on Feb 1 and 2

**Great White Egret:** The last sighting at the Blashford Lakes was on Jan 13 but on Jan 27 Bob Chapman heard a report that the bird was now upstream in the Fordingbridge area.

**Bewick's Swan:** Six were seen to fly north over Harbridge (Ringwood) on Jan 27, probably the same group which were seen at Ibsley on Jan 24 to set this year's peak count in the Hampshire Avon valley. In the Arun valley 12 were at Amberley on Jan 20 and 29 were at Burpham near Arundel on Jan 29 - by Feb 1 the count at Burpham was up to 35

**Whooper Swan:** The family of one adult and 3 cygnets was still being seen on the East Trout Lake at Chichester, but only using that lake as an overnight roost - for most of the day they fly a couple of kilometres south east to a lake near South Mundham which is said to have its own large population of Swans. My map shows a good sized lake at SU 884008 but the site is described as having both a lake and a reservoir with public access to neither. Some reports of the Chichester birds give a count of 4 birds but an equal number of reports are of 5 birds as was the case with the latest sighting at dusk on Feb 2. In Dorset three birds remain in The Fleet near Weymouth.

**Black Swan:** Two were at Pulborough Brooks on Jan 27 and on Jan 28 one was on the Hampshire Avon at Hale (a mile or so north of Fordingbridge). In past years there has been a small population of these birds further upstream in Wiltshire with regular successful breeding near Salisbury. The single bird at Emsworth Town Millpond was still there on Jan 30

**Pink-foot Goose:** The single bird on the Amberley Wild Brooks has now had its identity confirmed and was still present on Feb 1

**White-front Goose:** Regular reports continue to come from the Rye Bay area with a peak count of 110 flying over the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Jan 27

**Cackling Canada Goose:** The half size bird was still at Ivy Lake (Chichester) on Feb 1

**Pale-bellied Brent:** In addition to the two at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) one was seen at Titchfield Haven on Jan 27 among 310 Dark-bellied birds

**Brant:** One was still at West Wittering on Feb 1 and another in the Fleet at Weymouth on Feb 2

**Red-breasted Goose:** Still at Wittering on Feb 2 when it was seen from both Hampshire and Sussex

**Gadwall:** These are not often seen on sea water so a group of three in the Delme Pool at the head of Fareham Creek was slightly unusual (though this pool is fed by fresh water from the Wallington River as well as being a tidal part of Portsmouth Harbour)

**Pochard:** An increase in the number at the Blashford Lakes from 101 on Jan 25 to 190 on Jan 27, and increased activity among these and other ducks, suggested to Bob Chapman that some of our winter visitors are already starting to move back to breeding areas.

**Eider:** A lone first winter male was in Langstone Harbour on Jan 28, seen from the Oysterbeds

**Velvet Scoter:** One was in the west Solent off Lymington on Jan 29 and another nine entered the English Channel via Dungeness on Jan 31

**Goldeneye:** 35 of these (with 100+ Mergansers) could be seen from the Hayling Oysterbeds at high tide on the evening of Jan 28 and small groups (including full males) have given close views at the tidal limit of the local harbours - on Feb 1 a group of 6 with 2 full males was off Thornham Point in Chichester Harbour and on Feb 2 a group of 7 (with 3 males) was at the head of Fareham Creek where one of the males was seen throwing its head back in display mode.

**Ruddy Duck:** One was displaying at Dungeness (RSPB) on Jan 29 but only one female was seen on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Feb 1 (no reports from Budds Farm since Jan 26)

**Sparrowhawk:** On Jan 27 two females were both seen in the Adur valley at Henfield marking their territorial boundaries with slow flap and glide flight fairly high above the ground. On Jan 28 I watched another female do the same over Havant, coming right over my house.

**Merlin:** The bird (a female) currently resident in Langstone Harbour was seen on both Jan 28, 29 and Feb 2

**Peregrine:** Both male and female birds were seen from the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 28

**Coot:** At least one of the birds at the Budds Farm Pools had become territorial by Jan 28 and was seen aggressively attacking another. Similar aggression was seen at Emsworth on Jan 30

**Avocet:** A total of 27 were seen from Farlington Marshes on Jan 27 and at least 24 were there on Jan 28. Some of the birds may have left as only 8 birds were seen on Feb 2

**Ringed Plover:** These were starting to make territorial displays at Rye Harbour on Jan 28 and on Jan 29 I had my first sight of the species at the Hayling Oysterbeds while on Jan 30 a flock of around 20 was high tide roosting on the shingle of the Langstone South Moors shore (by the stream mouth) where I have not seen them earlier in the month - maybe both flocks were of birds on the move?

**Golden Plover:** 1700 were estimated to be present in Pagham Harbour on Jan 30 and some 600 were still in the Lymington area on Jan 27

**Lapwing:** Some were already making territorial displays over Rye Harbour on Jan 28

**Little Stint:** The bird wintering in Langstone Harbour was seen at Farlington Marshes on Jan 27

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** One turned up at The Fleet (Weymouth area) on Feb 1 and was still there on Feb 2 (said to be the first in Dorset since Nov 2000 although one has been at Topsham in Devon as recently as Jan 25 this year)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Both Chichester and Langstone Harbours seem to have been deserted by these birds (on Jan 27 only 17 could be seen at Farlington Marshes) but there has been a big increase in numbers in Pagham Harbour, Amberley Wild Brooks and the Christchurch area - on Jan 29 the number at Pagham was estimated as 1200 and there were some 400 at Christchurch Harbour, increasing to 2000 in the Dorset part of the Avon valley on Feb 2, with more than 170 newly arrived at Amberley Wild Brooks on Feb 1). The nearest flocks to Havant are currently at Titchfield Haven (where 100 were seen on Jan 20) or in Portsmouth Harbour (where a flock of around 100 has been seen a couple of times near Port Solent in Paulsgrove Lake north of Portchester Castle). There could be a larger flock on the grass of the Defence Munitions MoD site just south of Fareham Creek but I have seen no reports from there this winter.

**Whimbrel:** The single bird wintering in Langstone Harbour was seen from Farlington Marshes on Jan 28 and Feb 2 provoking reports of other wintering birds. Putting these together with earlier reports shows that one is in Pagham Harbour, at least three in Chichester Harbour (3 seen in the Emsworth Channel on Jan 9 and 1 in the Fishbourne Channel on Jan 5), two are at the head of Southampton Water (Eling Great Marsh), while another was in the Medina estuary at Cowes (IoW) on Jan 1. Reports of one seen occasionally in January at Langstone on both sides of the bridge to Hayling may be of the Langstone Harbour bird. An additional bird flew over Portland Harbour on Jan 28.

**Common Sandpiper:** What was presumably the bird which has been wintering in the Broadmarsh/Hermitage Stream area of north Langstone Harbour was seen on Feb 1 further east in the Langbrook Stream at Langstone village.

**Med Gull:** One was in full summer plumage at Stokes Bay (Gosport) on Jan 28 and on Jan 30 the first of the year was seen at the Pannel Valley reserve (near Rye). Last year the first report from the Pannel Valley was of 15+ there on Feb 27 and by Mar 25 there were 85 there on islands where they might breed (but so far have not done so despite a good breeding colony at nearby Rye Harbour).

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still to be seen at the Cockle Pond on Feb 2

**Iceland Gull:** On Jan 28 a second winter bird was seen passing Durlston while on Jan 29 a first winter bird was reported at Selsey

**Glaucous Gull:** A first winter bird at Shoreham Harbour (Southwick Canal section) was seen on four days between Jan 28 and Feb 2

**Sandwich Tern:** A single bird was seen again in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Jan 30

**Guillemot:** The supply of these seems endless with another 5000 seen at Dungeness on Feb 1

**Razorbill:** Only 480 reported at Dungeness on Feb 1 but Portland Bill reported more than 10,000 there on that day

**Barn Owl:** In response to an unusually high number of Barn Owl sightings reported recently Barrie Watson tells us that 2007 seems to have been a good year for these owls to breed, with a plentiful supply of voles.

**Little Owl:** On Jan 28 one was heard at dusk close to the Hayling Oysterbeds (probably in the fields east of the Billy Line and north of the Oysterbeds)

**Long-eared Owl:** We have had very few reports of wintering birds so far this winter but on the morning of Feb 2 four of them were found roosting in trees at Castle Water (Rye Harbour) and on Jan 27 there was a report of four seen on the Downs just east of the R Arun (with several reports of Short-eared Owls in that area recently I would like confirmation of this isolated report)

**Short-eared Owl:** Two were still hunting the fields west of Pagham Harbour on Jan 27, at least one was at the Ashley Warren site (north of Whitchurch) on Jan 28 and four were seen hunting the Downs above the R Arun on Jan 29

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Three reports show that these elusive birds still exist! On Jan 27 a male was seen within the boundary of Gatwick airport, and that day also brought a probable sighting in the Chichester lakes area, while on Jan 29 a male was seen in the Horsham area.

**Woodlark:** More song was heard in the New Forest on Jan 27 and at Ambersham Common near Midhurst on Jan 29

**Rock Pipit:** I saw my first of the year on the Langstone South Moors shore on Jan 28 and saw another at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 29

**Water Pipit:** The Farlington Marshes bird was seen again on both Jan 27 and 28 - it seems this bird is to be found close to the southern Point

**Black Redstart:** One was seen on Jan 28 just east of the start of the Eastoke Promenade at Eastoke Corner on Hayling and on Jan 29 there was an unexpected sighting of one on seaweed washed up by the west seawall of Farlington Marshes close to the carpark area. On Feb 2 there was another sighting of the Eastoke Promenade bird with the additional info that it is a female or immature bird and was

seen at SZ 735983 which (for those who know the area or who have a street map) is in an area of the Promenade east of the cul de sac called The Stand and west of the start of Eastoke Avenue (both being roads off Southwood Road)

**Stonechat:** The male in the pony fields immediately north of Wade Court at Langstone was still present on Feb 1

**Blackbird:** Two isolated reports of song on Jan 14 and 19 have been followed by two consecutive days (Feb 1 and 2) on which song gets a mention in the Durlston rangers diary

**Mistle Thrush:** I now have seven reports of Mistle Thrush song heard since Jan 17 including three in the Havant local area

**Dartford Warbler:** The first report of one singing this year came from Ambersham Common near Midhurst on Jan 29

**Goldcrest:** One of these was singing at Durlston on Feb 1

**Bearded Tit:** More than 25 put on a good show in the reeds by the Farlington Marshes lake on Jan 28 and some should be seen here on any visit in the near future (latest report is of more than 6 seen on Feb 2).

**Great Grey Shrike:** A 'new' bird has been seen from Jan 27 to Feb 2 close the The Sportsman pub at Amberley by the River Arun - maybe this is the bird that was being seen regularly at Lavington Common until Dec 20 last year. The Morden Bog (west of Poole Harbour) bird was seen again on Jan 30 and on Feb 2 two birds were seen in the New Forest.

**Carrion Crow:** An opportunistic **Crow** at the Fareham ASDA site spotted a **Feral Pigeon** being run over by a car near the supermarket garage on Jan 30. The **Pigeon** was not killed but it seems that its wing was broken so it could not fly off. The **Crow** took this as an invitation to pluck and eat the **Pigeon** while it was still alive - not a pleasant sight for motorists coming to fill up with petrol ... This report attracted several similar reports of past observations of brutal opportunism among **Crows** showing this current incident was not exceptional.

**Chaffinch:** **Chaffinch song** usually starts before the end of January but this year none was reported until Feb 1 when two birds were heard at Up Marden and one at the Emsworth Marina, followed by two more birds heard in Fareham, and others at Durlston, on Feb 2

**Linnet:** Feb 2 brought the first mention of **Linnet song** from Durlston. Also that day a **Linnet** was seen on a bird table in the Horsham area and the observer asks is this is unusual.

**Lapland Bunting:** One of the two birds in the Hurst area at Lymington was seen on Jan 27, 30 and Feb 1. Another single bird was seen at Selsey Bill on Jan 29 and again on Feb 2.

**Corn Bunting:** Although a total of 52 were seen at Cheesefoot Head (east of Winchester) on Jan 12 (with 20+ seen on the Sussex Downs that day) these birds are becoming very difficult to find in either Hampshire or Sussex but while scanning

Kent birding websites I was pleased to see that a flock of at least 60 came to roost in reeds in the Stour Valley (east of Canterbury) on Jan 30

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** We have already reported a male flying at Grayshott (near Haslemere) on Jan 26 and now we have a probable sighting of a female out that same day at Lower Froyle near Alton.

**Red Admiral:** Eleven more recent sightings at widespread locations

**Painted Lady:** An unexpected sighting of one in a Gosport garden on Jan 25 was thought to be a re-appearance of the same insect seen previously in the same garden on Dec 8 and presumably trying to hibernate here.

**Small Tortoiseshell:** One also seen in the Gosport area on Jan 22 plus a late report of one in the Henfield area of West Sussex on Jan 6

**Large Tortoiseshell:** A sighting of one at Portland on Jan 27 sounds very unlikely (and it was reported as 'probable only') but one was definitely seen there on 28 Jan 2007 (that one was captured and taken indoors but died on Feb 3). Last year also brought sightings at Portland on Mar 3 and Apr 6, possibly the result of attempted hibernation, early migration, or the work of a local breeder/hoaxer. Photographs confirmed the identity of some of these sightings. The possibility of early migration was supported when one was found in pristine condition at Crawley in Sussex on Mar 7 and the finder of that one thinks he may have seen it on Mar 3 (same date as one of the Portland sightings) but initially dismissed that sighting as being of a Comma

**Peacock:** On Jan 27 one was out at Portland and another at Bartley Heath near Hook in north Hants. On Jan 28 one was seen near Pagham Harbour with another at Horsham on Jan 29 when a total of 7 were found hibernating in the Ashdown Forest

### Moths

**Rush Veneer (1398 *Nomophila noctuella*):** First for year at Portland on Jan 28

**March Moth (1663 *Alsophila aescularia*):** First of year trapped on Jan 29 somewhere in Sussex

**Dotted Border (1934 *Agriopsis marginaria*):** First of year at Edburton (north of Brighton and the Downs) on Jan 29

**Small Quaker (2182 *Orthosia cruda*):** First for year somewhere in Sussex on Jan 29

**Common Quaker (2187 *Orthosia stabilis*):** First for year somewhere in Sussex on Jan 29

**Hebrew Character (2190 Orthosia gothica):** First of year at Portland on Jan 27

**Angle Shades (2306 Phlogophora meticulosa):** First for year somewhere in Sussex on Jan 29 (On Jan 26 a **caterpillar** of this species was seen feeding in an **Ivy flower** at Newhaven)

**The Herald (2469 Scoliopteryx libatrix):** First of year found in Ashdown Forest on Jan 29

## Other Insects

**Early Bumblebee (Bombus pratorum):** This is a buff or ginger tailed species slightly smaller than the others that may be out at this time of year. The only evidence for it at the moment is the finding of a roadside corpse at Tenterden in Kent on Jan 27 - apparently they often feed at flowers growing in roadside verges and suffer the penalties of this habit.

## PLANTS

**My count of species reported in flower during January now stands at 90** (including garden Daffodils and Snowdrops) - my personal count is 82 - these counts do not include several new species seen in February.

**Yew:** Brian Fellows was the first to be able to shake pollen from the flowers of a male tree at Petersfield on Jan 30

**Wallflower:** The yellow flowers of this native wild plant were already out on the walls of Portchester Castle on Jan 29

**Early Dog Violet:** On Jan 31 I saw the very first flowers open on plants growing on ancient graves in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery - I was prompted to look for them by the sight of the first unopen but coloured bud on plants in my own garden on that day.

**Round-leaved Cranesbill:** Two flowers seen on Jan 29 at the edge of the Ship Inn carpark at Langstone

**Common Vetch:** One plant had three fresh flowers in Havant on Feb 1

**Black Medick:** Another first flower in Havant on Feb 1

**Blackthorn:** The single tree which flowered during last winter, and which I had already seen in flower last month, was showing flowers at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 29 (definitely **Blackthorn** and not **Cherry Plum** which is now fairly abundant in flower)

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** The plants which have become established on the roadside in Juniper Square (Havant), and which had been flowering on Jan 13, again had a couple of flowers on Feb 1

**Common Alder:** Although only seen distantly with binoculars on Jan 29 I am pretty certain the trees with open catkins by the Lymbourne stream just north of Langstone Pond were **Common**, not **Grey, Alder**

**Grey Poplar:** The tall old tree growing on the east side of Wade Court Road in Havant (opposite North Close) had started to open its catkins on Jan 29

**Grey Field Speedwell:** A single flower was found in St Faith's churchyard in Havant on Feb 1

**Borage:** A small plant with one as yet unopen flower was found beside Park Road South in Havant on Feb 1 - several plants were seen there in December but this is the first for 2008

**Black Knapweed:** A single fresh flowerhead was seen beside the main road to Hayling outside the Ship Inn at Langstone on Jan 29

**Three-cornered Leek:** This had started to flower at Durlston on Jan 28

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** A pod of at least three has been off Portland from Jan 22 to Feb 1

**Fallow Deer:** I see that an attempt to count the Black-tailed Godwit flock on Amberley Wild Brooks area on Feb 2 was interrupted by galloping **Fallow bucks**...

**Hedgehog:** One was seen on Feb 1 wandering across a garden lawn in the Wade Lane area of Langstone on Feb 1 - I am not the only one to have been tempted to do some tidying up in my garden in the past few days and I suspect this animal had become homeless when someone cleared up the pile of leaves and rubbish in which it had been hibernating, though it could have woken naturally in the relatively warm weather.

**Hare:** A third report for the year was of **2 Hares** seen on the Sussex Downs south of Amberley came on Jan 29

**Bat species:** A small bat seen at dusk on Jan 27 over the Titchfield Canal was probably a **Pipistrelle** (I think **Daubentons** like to hunt low over broader stretches of open water).

A separate observation of my own on Feb 2 was the sight of three or four **bat boxes** positioned around a sturdy oak standing by the little pond beside the public path from Pyle Lane in the Horndean area to The Holt woodland (and subsequently to Links Lane at Rowlands Castle).

**Adder:** A very early emergence was observed at Durlston on Jan 26 when one came out to bask on a cliff ledge.

**Fungi:** **Sulphur Tuft, Jew's Ear, Yellow-brain** and **Candlesnuff** were all noted at various places on Jan 28 and 29

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 28 - FEB 3 (WEEK 4 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 2 Feb**

#### **Early Purple orchid leaves**

Bird song heard from my garden this morning included a distant **Mistle Thrush** as well as the local **Song Thrush**. **Wrens** are now being heard frequently with the **Dunnocks** and **Robins**.

A short afternoon trip to the Pyle Farm area south east of Horndean found little sign of spring flowers in Pyle Lane where the **Goldilocks buttercups** and **Moschatel** will flower later in the spring but a wander into The Holt wood found the spotted **leaves of at least 15 Early Purple orchids** showing (in the past thee have been 600 flowering spikes here)

### [Fri 1 Feb](#)

#### First Chaffinch song and three new flowering plants

The **Chaffinch song** was almost the last thing I heard when out this afternoon and it would probably have gone un-noticed if I had not stopped cycling to protect my binoculars (and my bare head) from the first drops of rain as I was cycling through the Emsworth marina on my way home from Thornham Point. The only other bird observations worth noting on this trip were a good view of six **Goldeneye** (including two males) in the Thorney Channel and a glimpse of the male **Stonechat** still present in the pony field north of Wade Court.

The new flowers were all seen in a walk around Havant this morning. Before anything new for the year I found a couple of flowers on the **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** plants in Juniper Square where I had found them on Jan 13.

First of the newcomers was **Common Vetch** - a single plant with three fresh flowers near Bosmere School. Next was **Black Medick** found alongside Park Road South close to a tiny new plant of **Borage** with one as yet unopen flower (so not added to the list yet). Third on the list was **Grey Field Speedwell** found in St Faith's churchyard - the only specimen of this which had a flower was still in bud but I was pretty certain from the length of the flower stem and the smaller leaves that this was not **Common Field Speedwell**. I took the specimen home and put it in water in a sunny place indoors - a couple of hours later the flower had opened and I took it into the next room to show my son the lovely deep blue of all petals, then put it back on the window-sill where it had been, but when I looked for the flower a few minutes later there was no sign of it - the petals must have all been blown off by the slight wind pressure as I carried the plant from room to room. I have noticed the ease with which petals fall from these flowers when trying to collect specimens on previous occasions!

At the end of my afternoon trip I passed a **Yew Tree** covered with male flowers, some of which had lost their pollen in the high wind leaving none for me to scatter by shaking the branches. This was a first for me but Brian Fellows had beaten me to the first observation for the year, seeing one on Jan 30

### [Thu 31 Jan](#)

#### First Wild Violets

Gale force winds and driving rain this morning gave way to a somewhat quieter afternoon allowing me to take a short walk to the Eastern Road cemetery where I found at least half a dozen **Early Dog Violets** had opened their flowers in an area that will be thickly carpeted with them in March.

### [Tue 29 Jan](#)

## Five new flowering plants and one new bird

This afternoon's outing took me round north Hayling where I came on my first **Ringed Plovers** of the year in the Oysterbeds high tide roost.

The first new flowers were the catkins of **Grey Poplar** on the tall old tree towering over Wade Court Road opposite the end of North Close - this was expected and I stopped purposefully to get my binoculars on the topmost branches from which quite a few catkins were dangling.

My second new plant was also a binocular job - **Common Alder** catkins seen in the distance on tree above the Lymbourne stream seen across the pony field south of Wade Court - but the third and fourth finds were both accidental at the roadside outside The Ship Inn at the north end of Langstone Bridge, seen by chance as I cycled by. The first of these was a plant of **Round-leaved Cranesbill** on which two fresh pink flowers caught my eye and brought me to a halt, while the second was a single fresh flower of **Black Knapweed** under the white roadside railings.

At Northney I did have a first, though not a new species - this was my first sight of a **Cormorant with a full grey 'judge's wig'** of spring head feathers. Passing Northney church there was still one cluster of white flowers on the **Strawberry Tree** but my next real find was at Stoke Bay immediately south of the Oysterbeds - with the tide high there was a substantial wader roost on the bar of the bay and a small patch of uncovered mud in the bay had a group of 8 **Ringed Plover** (invisible until I scanned the area with binoculars). There were clearly more of these out on the bar, and from the shoreline close to me I heard the wheesy call of a **Rock Pipit** as it flew off low along the shingle.

My fifth new flower for this year was **Blackthorn**, seen on the single tree beside the Billy Trail just south of the vehicle access track to the pools (this had been flowering in December, though I had not looked for it in January until now). In the access track just mentioned two cars were parked and I was pleased to see a small group of volunteers clearing and burnind **dead Teazels** and other clutter which would otherwise diminish the show of **Dames Violet** and **Bee Orchids** to be expected here in a few months time. Another unusual sight (nowadays) was of **two trawlers searching for Oysters** on the bed of the Langstone Channel (it does not seem very many years ago that I was able to count 70 trawlers working simultaneously shortly after the Nov 1 start date of the Oyster season).

## **SUMMARY FOR JAN 21 - 27 (WEEK 3 OF 2008)**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** 14 flew west past Ventnor (IoW) on Jan 13 and another 13 went past Portland on Jan 22 with a total of 40 passing Durlston on Jan 23 - all part of the massive movement of seabirds west through the English Channel recently

**Black-throated Diver:** On Jan 20 one was seen at Selsey Bill and one in the Lymington area where another was seen going west on Jan 23. On Jan 24 two were seen in Chichester Harbour from the Wittering shore

**Great Northern Diver:** On Jan 22 six were in Portland Harbour and another four were nearby in Weymouth Bay. At least one remains in the mouth of Chichester Harbour and on Jan 26 there was an unusual observation of three divers flying by at Selsey Bill with one of each of the three common species in the group

**Great Crested Grebe:** The large flock which has been in Rye Bay may have moved a little east as 350 of them were off Dungeness on Jan 22. Locally I had a group of 11 brought together at the north end of the Thorney Channel as the tide drained from the Nutbourne and Prinsted Bay area on Jan 22

**Red-necked Grebe:** One was off Selsey on Jan 20 with others seen this week at Dungeness and in Poole and Portland Harbours

**Slavonian Grebe:** One was seen in the north of Langstone Harbour on Jan 19 and more than 10 were off Selsey Bill on Jan 20. On Jan 22 there were 4 in the west Solent off Lymington and another 3 off the north east of the IoW. On Jan 24 two were in the mouth of Chichester Harbour and on Jan 26 there were four off Pagham Harbour and three off Puckpool Point (north-east IoW)

**Balearic Shearwater:** A small group remain off Portland Bill - counts on Jan 24, 25 and 26 were 10, 12 and 9

**Shag:** These are not commonly reported in Chichester Harbour but on Jan 24 one was seen from the Wittering shore

**Bittern:** One is still at the Blashford Lakes and another at Hatch Pond on the north of Poole Harbour while another is at Burton Mill Pond west of Pulborough - the latter gave further proof at dusk on Jan 22 of their habit of roosting high in the reeds, well off the ground (I would imagine this could lead to sleepless nights if the wind gets up and the reeds grasped by one leg are constantly blown away from or towards those grasped by the other leg)

**Cattle Egret:** Lee Evans weekly bulletin of national bird news for the week ending Jan 25 reported a total of 53 in southern Britain (the majority in Cornwall but others widely distributed). The two birds recently reported at North Mundham near the Chichester lakes were down to one by Jan 24 but that one was in a field only separated from the East Trout Lake by the grounds of a bungalow and the bird could be seen by turning right from the track going between Ivy Lake and the Trout Lakes when you reach the T junction. The Harbridge bird in the Avon valley was still present on Jan 22 and there are now three at Combe Haven (Bexhill) - I see that I have been guilty of mis-spelling this site as Coombe Haven!

**Spoonbill:** Poole Harbour still has eleven of these (seen together at Arne on Jan 26 when a twelfth bird was at Abbotsbury)

**Bewick's Swan:** By Jan 24 the flock at Ibsley had increased from three to six birds (all adults). On Jan 20 there were six by the Ouse south of Lewes and another 10 by the Adur between Henfield and Steyning

**Whooper Swan:** The family of one adult and four young was still at the Chichester Lakes on Jan 26 and the three birds that have been in The Fleet near Weymouth

since the beginning of November were still at Abbotsbury on Jan 26 (they have not succumbed to Bird Flu)

**Black Swan:** On Jan 24 a group of 5 were on a lake in Princes Park at Eastbourne (said to have been there since at least Jan 10) and on Jan 26 one turned up on the Emsworth Town Millpond (the first there since Aug 2004)

**Bean Goose:** One or more were seen on Amberley Wild Brooks on Jan 26 - the first report from anywhere this year (3 birds in the Littlehampton area from Dec 24 to 28 was the only report for the end of last year)

**Cackling Canada Goose:** The 'half size' Canada Goose was still at the Chichester Lakes on Jan 26

**Barnacle Goose:** An interesting local sighting of two among the Brent off Warblington on the evening of Jan 20. Earlier that day one had been seen in the Adur valley near Steyning - that is the only other report so far this year other than the huge flock of feral birds just across the water on the loW (as many as 300 of them have been seen in the past but this year the only report is of 120 seen at the Hersey nature reserve at Seaview on Jan 8)

**Gadwall:** Four pairs were on the Budds Farm pools at Havant on Jan 26 when another 10 were in the Emsworth Harbour area (unusually on sea water)

**Pintail:** 25 had been seen in Nutbourne Bay (Chichester Harbour) on Jan 20 and I saw around a dozen there on Jan 22 - in contrast there were more than 300 in the Pulborough Brooks area on Jan 25

**Shoveler:** An odd looking bird among the flock of 150 at the Blashford Lakes seemed (to Bob Chapman) to have traces of Blue-winged Teal in its make up - see next entry

**Red-crested Pochard:** A male which appeared on the Blashford Lakes on Jan 22 possibly came from a large collection of wildfowl kept on a pond in the Harbridge/Bleak Hill area just across the River Avon from the Blashford Lakes - this collection is penned in by wire to prevent the birds walking off (or foxes getting in) but the pond is open to the sky so unpinioned birds can fly out

**Scaup:** 13 at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Jan 21

**Long-tailed Duck:** The long staying bird on the Brooklands lagoon at Worthing is no longer there as that lake has been drained - it continues to be seen on the nearby Hove lagoon. One was in the Lymington area on Jan 20 and both Poole Harbour and Portland Harbour each have three birds.

**Velvet Scoter:** Three were still in the Lymington area on Jan 23 while a westward movement took four past Portland on Jan 22 and five past Dungeness on Jan 25

**Smew:** The escaped female bird on Swanbourne Lake (just across the road from the Arundel Wildfowl reserve) was seen again on Jan 22

**Goosander:** 62 were still coming to roost at the Blashford Lakes on Jan 23 and one was at the Calshot marshes on Jan 20 with two seen on Jan 22 at Cowards Marsh by the Avon where it enters Christchurch

**Ruddy Duck:** One female was on Swanbourne Lake at Arundel on Jan 22, two females were on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Jan 25 (with at least one there on Jan 26), and one was on Budds Farm pools here in Havant on Jan 26 (Last sighting at Budds Farm was of a pair there on Dec 16)

**Red Kite:** Up to three are still being seen regularly near the Chichester West Dean woods

**Marsh Harrier:** These are commonplace in Kent, East Sussex and Dorset so it was good to have one in the Southampton Water area on Jan 23, only the second Hampshire report for this year after one in the Titchfield area on Jan 5

**Sparrowhawk:** These often land on garden fences and the like to rest after failed attacks on small birds but in a Rowlands Castle garden one was twice seen using the bird table as a 'rest and recuperation' perch. With spring nearly with us these birds are already in breeding plumage and at least one report this week remarks on the brightness of a male's red breast.

**Merlin:** On Jan 19 one was seen to make two unsuccessful attacks on a flock of **Skylarks** in fields beside the railway line just south of Rowlands Castle

**Grey Partridge:** A report of at least 10 calling pairs heard on the Downs south of Amberley on Jan 24 indicates that these are moving from winter mode when they go about in silent coveys to spring breeding mode

**Water Rail:** I seem to remember Chris Packham talking about **Water Rails** in one of his TV programs and describing their ability to eat almost any food and to attack it with considerable force, illustrating this by saying that if you offered a **Water Rail** a tin of Sardines it would have no hesitation in opening the tin with its beak and eating the contents. Mark Rolfe witnessed similar behaviour near the Titchfield Canal Path on Jan 20 when he saw **two Water Rails fighting** - as he approached one of the Rails disappeared but the other lay still on the ground and was seen to have a 'hole in its head' where the bill of the victor in the fight had pierced the loser's brain.

**Coot:** Also seen by Mark Rolfe at Titchfield Haven on Jan 20 was the sight of two **Coot's fighting** each other - this will soon become a common sight as more and more **Coots** abandon their winter flock mode to become territorial.

**Crane:** In addition to the established resident flock of around 30 birds in Norfolk Lee Evans reports 14 vagrants in Scotland (11 at a Moray site and 3 more in Caithness)

**Avocet:** The SOS website carried news of **11 Avocet** present in Nutbourne Bay (east of Emsworth) on Jan 20 and when I was there on Jan 22 all 11 were still present in the outflow of the Ham Brook stream at high tide but moving to the Thorney Channel as the tide fell. Jason Crook tells us that a flock of **26 Avocet** has

been in Langstone Harbour off Farlington Marshes 'recently' but he gives no date of last sighting. On Jan 26 an unspecified number were in Pagham Harbour.

**Ringed Plover:** These seem to have been in short supply this winter and I still do not have one on my year list but on Jan 23 Andy Johnson saw 300 of them in the Black Point wader roost at the mouth of Chichester Harbour - with them in an exceptionally large roost were **15000 Dunlin, 700 Knot, 220 Sanderling, 200 Oystercatcher, 150 Turnstone and 91 Grey Plover**

**Golden Plover:** Following a report of 4000 at the Thorney Island old airfield on Jan 11 a flock of around 400 were seen distantly over Thorney on Jan 23 and on Jan 26 a flock of 300 was on the mud of the Emsworth Channel over the seawall from the Thorney Great Deeps

**Knot:** Also on the Emsworth channel mud on Jan 26 was a feeding flock of around **50 Knot**

**Little Stint:** Jason Crook saw one in Langstone Harbour during 'the week-end's WeBS count' which I assume to be Jan 12 or 13 but Langstone has a tradition of carrying out its WeBS counts on different days to those scheduled by the BTO and followed by other local coastal sites so the date may have been Jan 19 or 20. The wintering bird at West Wittering was seen on Jan 24

**Purple Sandpiper:** An unusually high count of 21 seen together at Newhaven Pier on Jan 20 may indicate that these birds are already starting to move back east thinking that the winter is over (or maybe these are birds seeking a less exposed site after being battered by recent storms on more exposed shores). Christchurch Harbour also had a site record count of 13 birds on Jan 24

**Ruff:** Two remain at the Lyminster marshes, seen on Jan 22

**Black-tailed Godwit:** A count of 240 at Christchurch Harbour on Jan 22 was the highest there so far this winter - maybe these were birds heading for floods in the Avon Valley but the flooding there is said to have abated very quickly before it could attract any substantial number of extra birds. At Titchfield Haven there were at least 101 birds on Jan 20 and on Jan 25 a flock of 103 was in the north of Portsmouth Harbour at Portchester (maybe the same birds as at Titchfield). With virtually none currently in Langstone or Chichester Harbours there has been an exceptional count of around 1000 in Pagham Harbour on Jan 25 after 400 were seen there on Jan 22

**Whimbrel:** Jason Crook confirms that one is wintering in Langstone Harbour and has been seen 'recently'

**Spotted Redshank:** The very tame bird which feeds at the west end of the Emsworth shore was still present on Jan 23

**Common Sandpiper:** The bird wintering around the mouth of the Hermitage Stream in the Langstone Harbour Broadmarsh area was seen on Jan 1 but I have seen no further reports of it until I saw the bird myself on Jan 26 - it was feeding just north of the Harts Farm Way bridge on the east bank at high tide

**Phalaropes:** Very stormy weather on Jan 21 rewarded the few birders who ventured out onto the Hurst spit at Lyminster with the very exciting sight of **three**

**Phalaropes together**, one of them showing the smaller size and darker plumage which confirmed its identity as **Red-necked** while the other two were **Grey**. **Grey Phalarope** is not unknown along the south coast in winter but this seems to be the **first ever Red-neck to be recorded anywhere on the south coast in January**. Russell Wynn comments that with global warming it may not be the last one to winter here.

**Iceland Gull**: No Hampshire sightings since Jan 13 but on Jan 22 one was seen in the Portland Harbour area with a further probable sighting of it on Jan 26

**Glaucous Gull**: On Jan 20 one was seen off Ventnor (IoW) - this was a first winter bird and maybe the same as one seen off Dungeness on Jan 19. A first winter bird was seen at the mouth of Pagham Harbour on Jan 26 and what is thought to be a different first winter bird was at Shoreham Harbour on both Jan 25 and 26

**Kittiwake**: Many of these have been heading west through the English Channel recently - 167 went past Dungeness on Jan 20 and 180 were off Durlston on Jan 23 with 300+ passing Portland on Jan 26

**Sandwich Tern**: Only two reports of wintering birds so far this year - one in Chichester Harbour on Jan 4 and now one off Dungeness on Jan 25

**Guillemot**: On Jan 13 there was a very unexpected sighting of one amongst Swans in the north of Chichester Harbour off the Emsworth west shore - possibly a weak bird that had abandoned the struggle to move west down the channel with thousands of others. Since then there has been a report (in the Portsmouth NEWS) of one on the Southsea shore. On Jan 23 at least one oiled bird was seen in the west Solent and the TV News that day mentioned that several oiled auks had been washed up on the IoW. While on this species I learnt from the Durlston website that **the collective noun for Guillemots is 'a Bazaar'**. Latest news is of another 1800 going west past Dungeness in one 40 min period on Jan 24

**Razorbill**: No recent reports to match the 20,000+ moving west off Portland on Jan 19 but on Jan 23 Durlston was able to report 2,000+ passing and on Jan 26 Portland reported 5000+ going west

**Stock Dove**: On Jan 22 I at last added this species to my year list with a flock of 14 going to roost in trees at the Nutbourne orchards and on Jan 25 I heard one singing in Stansted Forest

**Barn Owl**: Several people have reported recent sightings from their cars as they drive after dark and there have also been reports of **Tawny Owls** hooting.

**Short-eared Owl**: Groups of up to four have been seen hunting and displaying both at The Burgh on the Sussex Downs south of Amberley and at Ashley Warren north of Whitchurch. Another two have been seen at Bransbury Common near Andover

**Woodlark**: At least two were in fields on Rosamund's Hill east of Stansted Forest on Jan 19 (a flock of 14 had been seen in the Stansted East Park on Jan 1 and may well still be in the area). One had been heard signing in Hampshire on Jan 12 and 2 were singing in the Slinfold area near Horsham on Jan 26

**Water Pipit:** Two have been seen recently around Farlington Marshes, one of them appearing fairly regularly on seaweed washed up at the foot of the seawall not far south of the main lake.

**Fieldfare:** Plenty of these around but a flock of around 300 on the grassland west of Stansted House on Jan 25 was particularly impressive.

**Redwing:** These are currently much less numerous than Fieldfare with maximum counts of no more than 50 at any one site

**Mistle Thrush:** The first that I have heard singing this winter was in Havant on Jan 23

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** These seem to be unusually scarce this winter - Lee Evans tells us that he knows of only 1 currently in Britain (up in the north at Jarrow)

**Crow:** This species went onto my 'singing' list when I heard the first 'motor horn' notes from one near my garden on Jan 22

**Raven:** A pair were displaying to each other at Isfield (just upstream from Lewes) on Jan 21

**Starling:** A very impressive pre-roost display was seen in Portsmouth (near the Portsmouth Harbour Rail Station) at dusk on Jan 24

**White-crowned Sparrow:** The bird at Cley in Norfolk (far from its American home) has so far raised £3,500 in voluntary donations from twitchers for the Cley village church restoration fund (the bird was first found in the Rector's garden)

**Lapland Bunting:** One of the two birds that have been spending the winter on the Lymington marshes, together with a single **Twite**, was seen on Jan 23 (all three are thought to be still present). Latest sighting was of one on Jan 26.

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Brimstone:** The first and so far only sighting was of a male flying at Grayshott on the Hampshire/Sussex border east of Petersfield on Jan 26

**Red Admiral:** Twelve sightings so far this year from widely separate sites - most recent report is from Huckswold Lane north of Rowlands Castle on Jan 26

**Peacock:** Six reports so far this year - the first being in the Newhaven area on Jan 6 and the first in Hampshire at Hook (Warsash) on Jan 12

### Moths

**Light Brown Apple moth (0998 *Epiphyas postvittana*):** First of year at Portland on Jan 23

***Acleris hastiana* (1053):** First of year at Portland on Jan 23

***Crociosema plebejana* (1157):** First of year at Portland on Jan 23

***Euchromius ocella* (1289):** First of year at Portland on Jan 23 (on southerly winds which are said to have brought a fall of Saharan dust)

**Narrow-winged Grey (1342 *Eudonia angustea*):** First of year at Worthing on Jan 22

**Rusty-dot Pearl (1395 *Udea ferrugalis*):** Another first at Portland on Jan 23

**Brown Plume (1524 *Emmelina monodactyla*):** I disturbed the first I know of on Jan 21 in my garden - also taken at Portland on Jan 24

**Double-striped Pug (1862 *Gymnoscelis rufifasciata*):** An interesting first at Newhaven on Jan 20

**Spring Usher (1932 *Agriopsis leucophaearia*):** First for the year at Worthing on Jan 22

**Dark Chestnut (2259 *Conistra ligula*):** Another first at Portland on Jan 23

## Caterpillars

Last winter a number of **Red Admiral caterpillars** in the Sussex Ouse valley managed to continue to feed through the winter on nettles that remained free of frost (they were seen to pupate at around this time of year and to emerge earlier than usual in the spring) but this year all known Red Admiral caterpillars have succumbed to wind and rain though a few caterpillars of **Large** and **Small Whites** which were taken indoors have recently pupated.

## Other Insects

**Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*):** First report of this species comes from Northiam in the Rother valley near Rye but is sadly of a road kill corpse - apparently quite a few of these are hit by cars as they forage at roadside plants

**Lesser Bloody Nosed Beetle:** Several of these were active at Durlston on Jan 20 - I think they do not normally appear until April but I suspect that adults survive for more than one year and are normally dormant in winter, waiting for warmer weather. This year temperatures in January are probably around those expected in April and as these beetles are herbivores they should find food at this time of year (assuming they eat grass).

**Ground Beetle:** A black Ground Beetle was rescued (still alive) from the water of a bird bath on my garden lawn on Jan 25

## PLANTS

**81 species have been seen in flower so far this month, 76 of them seen by myself.** (My count includes **Garden Daffodils** and **Snowdrops** but not **Croci**)

**Thale Cress:** I noticed one plant of this flowering on Jan 23 and have seen others since

**Cherry Plum:** The lovely white blossom of these trees could be seen in Southmoor Lane and at Broadmarsh on Jan 26

**Goat Willow:** The first golden 'pussy paw' catkins were seen in Havant on Jan 21

**Hogweed:** Not a first for the year but the unusual pink colouration of the flowers on a fresh plant in Church Lane at Warblington on Jan 25 is worth seeing

**Alexanders:** Although I had found this flowering in December it only went onto my January list with a find in Harts Farm Way, right outside the Public Amenity (Rubbish Tip) site, on Jan 26

**White Comfrey:** Just one plant had started to flower at the foot of the 'Broadmarsh mountain' on Jan 26 - probably flowering as a result of welcome tree clearance letting in the light.

**Heath Groundsel:** A new addition to the year list with one 'old plant' flowering at Stansted on Jan 25

**Sticky Groundsel:** One small plant freshly flowering in Town Hall Road at Havant on Jan 24

**Butterbur:** One spike of the **normal male plants** was flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Jan 20, one day after I had seen a **female plant** out near the **Giant Butterbur** plants in Langstone

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** A small party of them off Portland on Jan 22 - first report of them for the year

**Grey Seal:** One off Bembridge, IoW, seen on Jan 12

**Roe Deer:** After two recent reports of these dying on rail line and road it is good to know that the group resident on the north Hayling fields is still present - a count of 12 there on Jan 21 is equal to the highest count reported last year

**Mole:** With their breeding season approaching and the soil easy to shift after rain evidence of their activity can be seen in many places but on Jan 20 Brian Fellows observed a less common facet of their behaviour when he came across a ridge of raised earth running across the surface of Brook Meadow at Emsworth - this surface tunnelling does not require the creation of mole hills as the earth displaced by the tunnel is immediately pushed up to the surface as the mole progresses. As Brook Meadow has recently been subject to partial flooding from a swollen River Ems plus rainfall directly on the meadow my guess is that the **Mole** could not make its tunnel any deeper underground without drowning in the waterlogged soil.

**Hare:** Late news of one at Yew Hill (south of Winchester) on Jan 19 - only the second report I have seen for this year after one on the Sussex Downs on Jan 10

**Common Frog:** Jan 22 brought the first report of **frogspawn** from a pond somewhere in the Portsmouth/Havant area and on Jan 23 there was a further report of **Frogs** back in a Gosport garden pond

**Newts:** Following news of **Newts** returning early to breeding ponds in the Rye area (see last Sunday's Weekly Summary) there has been a further report of early return from the Pennington area of Lymington where, on the evening of Jan 23, there were at least 16 Newts in a small garden pond (both **Smooth** and **Palmate** being found with the use of a net). On Jan 24 this same pond was found to have a **half-grown Common Newt larva** (or tadpole) maybe indicating that **Newts** sometimes take more than one season to fully develop and emerge from their birth pond (**Frog tadpoles** are known to do this when conditions are not suitable for their normal development)

**Goose Barnacles:** Among the flotsam and jetsam found on the shore of Portland recently was at least one small cluster of the **Goose Barnacles** whose normal life is a nomadic one attached to floating objects in the open sea.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 21 - 27 (WEEK 3 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 26 Jan**

### **One bird and three new flowering plants for the year**

This afternoon I cycled to Budds Farm and found one **Cherry Plum tree** covered in fresh white blossom on the east side of Southmoor Lane just before reaching the height barrier at the end of the lane - later I found at least half a dozen more trees of this starting to flower around the foot of the 'Broadmarsh mountain' between the approach road to the slipway and the Hermitage stream.

Passing the Harts Farm Way 'public amenity site' I found **Alexanders** in flower (new to this year for me though I had seen it on Portsdown in December), and at the foot of the 'mountain' just before reaching the slipway I saw my first flowers on **White Comfrey** - possibly out early after getting more light as a result of the extensive tree clearance all round the lower slopes of the 'mountain'.

A few male catkins were out on **Goat Willow** overhanging Budds Farm pools and later I noticed several **Grey Alders** with their catkins open beside the Brockhampton stream (and another flowering plant of **Cow Parsley**).

No uncommon birds on the pools but plenty of **Teal** (at least 50) and at least five **Gadwall** with plenty of **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck** plus the usual suspects. Later, going up the Hermitage Stream with the tide high, I had my first sight of **Common Sandpiper** for the year, feeding along the water's edge just north of Harts Farm Way.

This morning, around 8am in full daylight, a healthy looking **Fox** was following some scent across our lawn before nimbly springing onto the garden wall and down into my neighbour's garden. Mentioning this to the neighbour later in the day he asked me about a bird he had seen while doing the RSPB garden birdwatch. He described a '**Blackbird with a reddish breast**' which is exactly what I had been asked about by someone living in Hambledon a few days earlier - my best guess is that both were young female Blackbirds that had not yet acquired their adult plumage and still had the orangey plumage of a juvenile on the breast (in the Hambledon case the observer also commented on some speckling on the breast 'like a juvenile Robin'). I am not sure how long it takes for a young bird to acquire full adult plumage - no doubt some birds take longer than others, but maybe these two are examples of out of season breeding by Blackbirds (winter nesting as a result of global warming?)

## [Fri 25 Jan](#)

### **Many Fieldfares at Stansted**

This afternoon I took a longish walk around Stansted East Park with a faint hope of coming across the **Woodlarks** which Michael Prior has seen on at least two occasions this winter. No sign of them but I was impressed by a flock of around **300 Fieldfare** on the grassland west of the house, heard at least three **Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming**, had close views of **Tree Creeper** and **Marsh Tit** as well as hearing my first **Stock Dove song** of the year.

I started from the 'layby' on the road north through the Forest where Park Lane starts, went north through the Groves and across the path immediately in front of Stansted House (this is where I saw the **Fieldfares** with some **Starlings** and a couple of **Mistle Thrushes** but no **Redwings**) before taking the path up Rosamunds Hill on the east edge of the woodland. From the hilltop I used the field path to Lumley Seat (just before reaching that house I had a new flowering plant for

the year - a specimen of **Heath Groundsel** covered with flowers) and then had to walk the full width of the newly ploughed field to reach the track running across the centre of the East Park. After heading back towards the house on that track I took another field path heading south west across fields (this time with a solid footing over a root crop and young wheat) back to Park Lane leading back to where I had parked the car.

At the closed gate which prevents vehicular access to Park Lane from the public road there was a **fresh notice and map (dated yesterday - Jan 24) which seemed to announce that West Sussex county council were proposing to change the status of Park Lane and its continuation along Monument Lane to the Racton Folly, plus the route going north from Park Lane up Park Slip (the eastern boundary of Stansted East Park) to join the existing lane to Walderton, to allow public access for vehicles** - presaging the possibility of these quiet lanes becoming four wheel drive rat races! I hope I am wrong...

Earlier in the day I had been in Church Lane at Warblington and had found a very pretty freshly flowering plant of **Hogweed** in which the normally white **flowers are all a delicate shade of pink** (look on the west side of the lane near a field gate in the hedge north of the cottages at the entrance to Warblington Castle and south of the turning to Pool Lane)

Even earlier, when putting out bird food, I found and rescued a still living **black Ground Beetle species** in one of the water containers sitting on the lawn - another sign of unusual insect activity in the winter following the news from Durlston that **Lesser Bloody-nosed Beetles** are already active there.

### [Wed 23 Jan](#)

#### **Mistle Thrush song in Havant**

This morning I took a short walk to check out the Eastern Road cemetery here in Havant where I found evidence of spring in the shape of **Snowdrops, Primroses** and **Celandines** plus the first blossom on a species of ornamental plum which is popular in the area. Among the birds a **Dunnock** was singing and among the graves the big ring of **Field Blewits** that was fresh on my last visit was by now decaying.

Emerging from the cemetery I was greeted by **Mistle Thrush song** from the top of a tree at the junction of New Lane and Eastern Road - the first I have heard from this species since last spring.

### [Tue 22 Jan](#)

#### **Sunshine at last**

What will probably be a short lull in the wind and rain brought the sun out in a clear sky early this morning with no breathe of wind and the birds responded to this with a taste of a dawn chorus comprising strident **Song Thrush**, soothing **Wood Pigeon** and lyrical **Robin** plus the first sounding of motor horn by **Carrion Crow**. Later I heard a subdued **Dunnock**.

#### **Avocets at Nutbourne Bay**

After lunch I went to Prinsted just before the high tide started to fall and found all **11 Avocets** that had been seen last Sunday were still in Nutbourne Bay, giving close views in the water's edge right opposite the end of the path from Farm Lane and

adding one to my year list. Before seeing them, thanks to another birder pointing it out, I watched a **Kingfisher** skimming the harbour water.

Other birds in the bay area among the host of **Brent** and **Black-headed Gulls** included at least **100 Wigeon** and perhaps a dozen **Pintail** (mostly males), a dozen or so **Shelduck** but only two **Teal**. **Oystercatcher**, **Redshank** and a few **Curlew** were feeding at the water's edge where I spotted just one **Turnstone**.

By the time I had walked round the bay to Chidham Point the tide had gushed out, leaving acres of mud on which I saw at least **1000 Dunlin** with a liberal mixture of **Grey Plover** (but neither **Knot** nor **Ringed Plover**, neither of which are yet on my year list). By now the group of **Avocet** had moved to the top end of the Thorney Channel where there was still enough water for me to see ten **Merganser** and a surprising flock of 11 **Great Crested Grebe**.

In the shore fields I noted half a dozen cock **Pheasants**, a noisy male **Kestrel** in the air, two **Song Thrushes in full song**, and on the way home with the evening sun lighting them, a mixed flock of **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** with at least one each of **Blackbird** and **Song Thrush** plus a good admixture of **Starlings**. Finally another addition to my year list, bringing the total to 88 species, when 14 **Stock Dove** came to roost in the trees around the orchards

## Mon 21 Jan

### Spring flowers in Havant

Exceptionally high January temperatures today brought an exceptional (though still small) display of spring flowers to a day of gloomy low cloud, occasional rain and continuous strong wind.

My first find was of **Goat Willow 'Pussy Paw' catkins** already showing their golden anthers on a young tree peeping over a stout brick wall from a Grove Road garden as I was walking down the 'Twitchen' alleyway between Town Hall Road and South Street. Crossing South Street and taking the path along the south of St Faith's churchyard I found at least half a dozen of the **Ivy Leaved Speedwell** plants now had flowers and under the yew tree in the northwest corner of the churchyard the show of **Sweet Violets** had become a carpet of many blooms.

Coming home along Waterloo Road the flowering **Whitlowgrass** was also now too numerous to count, and as I turned into Fairfield Road I found another carpet of flowers which I had not noticed before - this time of **Celandines**.

## **SUMMARY FOR JAN 14 - 20 (WEEK 2 OF 2008)**

### **BIRDS**

**Black-throated Diver:** On Jan 16 one **Black-throated** and two **Great Northern Divers** were seen in the mouth of Chichester Harbour from the West Wittering area

**Slavonian Grebe:** A total of 9 were seen from West Wittering on Jan 16 (previous highest count in the Chichester Harbour mouth area had been just five birds) - another 5 were in the west Solent off Lymington that day

**Fulmar:** 23 were seen moving west past Dungeness on Jan 19 - a very small part of the vast numbers of birds recently leaving the North Sea.

**Balearic Shearwater:** Perhaps the most surprising species among the birds moving west past Portland in the past week (but not coming from the North Sea, just returning west after being blown up the English Channel by recent gales) was **Balearic Shearwater** with an estimated 50 passing Portland on Jan 13. My first guess was that this was the largest number ever recorded there but I see that 52 were seen there on 22 June 2007 and July 8 brought a count of 117 (with 88 next day) while 74 were recorded there on Sep 20. (In 2006 the highest count of the year was only 32 on Sep 22, and in 2005 the peak was just 7 birds)

**Storm Petrel:** The Dorset Bird Club has a report of one seen over Poole Harbour between Poole Quay and Brownsea Island on Jan 19 - I suppose it was blown in by the gales which have brought the Shearwaters but it is the first report I have seen since Dec 2 and that was a probable only with the last confirmed sighting on Nov 19. None were seen in 2007 before May 7 though Hampshire in the past has had a couple of January records

**Bittern:** Wintering birds were seen this week at the Dungeness RSPB reserve (Jan 16), Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough (Jan 18) and the Blashford Lakes (Jan 19) but one flushed from the River Test at Mottisfont on Jan 14 could have already been on its way back to its breeding site after leaving winter quarters.

**Night Heron:** One seems to have been moving around south west Hampshire this week. First report is of it seen in flight low over a stubble field just west of the Beaulieu River on Jan 14. On Jan 16 there was a probable sighting of it high over Christchurch and also a report of it being flushed from Sowley Pond (east of Lymington) during a shoot. Latest news of it came on Jan 17 when it was flying over East Boldre village near Beaulieu (and a mile or so north of Sowley Pond)

**Cattle Egret:** Recent reports come from the Weymouth area (5 birds), the west of Poole Harbour, Avon Valley (Harbridge), Lewes Brooks and Coombe Haven at Bexhill. Most recent news is of **two seen locally** on Jan 19 at a new site between the Chichester lakes and the hamlet of North Mundham

**Spoonbill:** A total of nine probably remain in the Poole Harbour area but the biggest group was of seven seen at Arne on Jan 14 (with a single seen about a mile away that day). Five were together there on Jan 19

**Bewick's Swan:** Four were still in the Ringwood area on Jan 19 and during the week there have been sightings of 8 on Amberley Wild Brooks (Jan 14) with 11 more at Warningcamp on the R Arun south of the Downs that day, and on Jan 16 nine birds were seen on the R Adur in the Henfield area

**Whooper Swan:** One adult with 4 young was at the Chichester Lakes on Jan 15

**Black Swan:** Two turned up at Pulborough RSPB reserve on Jan 16

**Brent Goose:** Brian Fellows thinks that the past year was moderately successful for Brent breeding - the overall percentage of young to adults which he has recorded this winter is 6.41- putting this in perspective among the percentages achieved in in the past 20 years he says that the percentage was 0 or 1 in six years (89, 92, 95, 98, 2000, 06), between 6 and 10 in seven years (94, 96, 97, 01, 02, 03,

07), and above 10 in seven years (12 in 04, 16 in 90, 18 in 93, 24 in 99, 25 in 05, 27 in 88 and 31 in 91)

**Red-breasted Goose:** Still being seen daily at West Wittering - on Jan 19 it was sheltering from the wind behind the East Head carpark cafe.

**Shelduck:** An unusually large number (in present day terms) has been in Chichester Harbour recently - on Jan 11 Barry Collins saw 187 around Thorney Island and on Jan 16 I found at least 150 in the Langstone to Warblington area. These are good counts for recent years but looking back to the 1982 Sussex Bird Report I see there was a peak count of 4242 Shelduck in the whole of Chichester Harbour in Jan 1982 (admittedly a hard weather peak) and 2514 in Jan 1989 (a more normal count for those years). By Jan 1992 the harbour peak was down to 1863 and in Feb 1999 there were only 784 as a year peak. Recent year peaks for the harbour have been 810 in Feb 2004, 825 in Feb 2005, and 793 in Feb 2006.

**Wigeon:** Flooding of the Pulborough Brooks area became widespread on Jan 16 and there were counts of **2300 Wigeon** at Pulborough with another 1000 at Amberley Wild Brooks

**Teal:** Counts of these on Jan 16 were 2280 at Pulborough and 850 at Amberley

**Pintail:** On Jan 12 there were 65 in the Thorney Island area and on Jan 16 there were 630 at Pulborough and 100 at Amberley. On Jan 18 the count at Blashford (Ringwood) was 72

**Shoveler:** The overall count for the Pulborough area was 150 on Jan 16 and the Blashford Lakes had 136 on Jan 18

**Scaup:** An adult male was at the Thorney Deeps on Jan 12 with 20+ remaining in Dorset during the past week

**Velvet Scoter:** 21 flew west past Dungeness on Jan 16 with another 16 going by on Jan 19

**Red Kite:** Two continue to be seen in the Chichester West Dean Woods area and I got the species on my year list with one flying low over my car as I negotiated the busy M40/A34 junction north of Oxford late in the afternoon of Jan 15 (a very wet and windy day)

**Quail:** Also on Jan 15 someone called Sam Hill was driving along the foot of the Sussex Downs on the B2139 from Storrington towards Amberley when a Quail flew across the road in front of his car. The Sussex Bird Report now describes the species as a scarce summer visitor "formerly occasional in winter", and the 1982 report says of Quail .. "Although sometimes recorded in winter, one at Graffham Common on the early date of Apr 1 may have been a migrant". In Hampshire there were two sightings of a presumed wintering bird at the Hayling Oysterbeds in Jan 2003 (flushed there on both Jan 1 and 31) and the Hampshire Bird Report then gave the species status as "A very rare and erratic summer visitor; rarely recorded in winter" - it added that the Jan 2003 bird was the first to winter in the county since 1961. In both counties the possibility of escapes has to be considered - on the Sussex website Tim Lincoln pointed out .. "I could very well be wrong, but the

winter Quail sighting sounds very much like it could relate instead to an escaped Japanese Quail, a bird farmed here in huge numbers and virtually indistinguishable, even by experts, from the European version"

**Golden Plover:** 95 were on the Langstone village shore on Jan 16 but on Jan 11 there was a flock of 4000 at the old airfield on Thorney Island and on Jan 17 there were around 400 in the Lymington area

**Lapwing:** The start of flooding in the Hampshire Avon valley had brought 1000+ Lapwing there by Jan 15 and a similar number were at Amberley Wild Brooks on Jan 16 (when Pegwell Bay in East Kent had a flock estimated at 12,000 birds)

**Knot:** 1500 were on the Pilsey sands south of Thorney Island on Jan 12

**Purple Sandpiper:** Six were seen at Southsea Castle on Jan 14

**Ruff:** Two were in the Lymington marshes on Jan 17 (on Jan 16 there was a flock of 22 at the Oare Marshes near Faversham on north west Kent)

**Jack Snipe:** On Jan 9 Barry Collins had a total of 14 birds on Thorney Island

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The number seen at Christchurch Harbour was just 12 on Jan 1 and had not exceeded 55 up to Jan 14 but on Jan 15 there were 175 there, presumably heading for the Avon Valley floods. By Jan 18 Christchurch had 192 birds with 127+ seen on Jan 19. In 2007 there were already more than 2000 in the Avon Valley by Jan 7 and in 2003 the count was 2000+ on Jan 12 and 2750+ on Feb 2. Also in Jan 2007 there was a flock of up to 800 birds in the fields north of Pagham Harbour but the presence of large flocks there seems to be even more occasional than in the Avon Valley where the big numbers have in the recent past only been seen on average every five years or so.

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** The presence of 800 on the Pilsey sands of Thorney Island on Jan 12 is the first large count anywhere in Chichester Harbour since there were 700 on the Warblington shore on Oct 17 last year. The last count I have seen from Pilsey was of 341 on Sep 30

**Whimbrel:** A couple of these are usually found on the west side of Thorney Island each winter and on Jan 9 Barry Collins saw three of them at Wickor Point (the Pagham Harbour bird was still to be seen at Church Norton on Jan 12)

**Spotted Redshank:** The tame bird in the stream running into Chichester Harbour on the east side of Nore Barn wood (west end of the Emsworth shoreline) was present on Jan 13 and 16 - at high tide it probably joins two others roosting at the Thorney Island Deeps where a group of three were seen on Jan 12

**Greenshank:** At least 12 were still at the high tide roost at the Thorney Deeps on Jan 12 and at low tide these birds disperse to give sightings at several places in the Emsworth to Langstone area (maybe even visiting the Hayling Oysterbeds though any birds seen there are more likely to be based at Farlington Marshes). On Jan 17 Brian Fellows found 6 on the Emsworth west shore

**Pomarine Skua:** I have come across a couple of second hand reports that an immature is hanging around in the Lymington area but have no factual info

**Arctic Skua:** A juvenile was seen in the Calshot area at the mouth of Southampton Water on Jan 19

**Franklin's Gull:** An adult was reported in the north of Poole Harbour off a private nature reserve called Holton Lee on Jan 17 and the Friends of Holton Lee immediately offered access to their private land to any birders who paid up £15 subscription to join their group. Not sure how many did pay up but I do know that there have been no further reports of the bird

**Ring-billed Gull:** Regular winter birds were at the Gosport Cackle Pond on Jan 12 and at Radipole in Dorset on Jan 13 when there was also an immature bird seen well inland among a large gull flock at Wivelsfield Green south of Haywards Heath.

**Iceland Gull:** An immature bird flew past Portland on Jan 18

**Glaucous Gull:** A first winter bird was at Dungeness on Jan 19

**Auk species:** An estimated 20,000 flew west past Portland on Jan 13, with a similar number seen on Jan 16, and they were still passing Dungeness in large numbers on Jan 17 - most of them were Razorbills

**Feral Pigeon:** These do not often attract attention but a report that some 600 were present in the Chilling area near Warsash on Jan 19 is worth noting. Also in the area that day were some **100 Stock Doves** and only **100 Woodpigeons** (though 5000 of these had been at this site on Jan 12)

**Wood Pigeon:** A recently fledged bird was seen in the Horsham area on Jan 16

**Collared Dove:** While writing this summary on Jan 20 a very recently fledged **Collared Dove** was brought to my front door for advice on how to help it survive - it may well have a chance!

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** More than 30 were seen in Ramsgate cemetery in Kent on Jan 16 showing they have not abandoned that area. (This and many other news items appearing on the Planet Thanet website come from someone known only as 'Gadget', I wonder how earned this tag?)

**Short-eared Owl:** Although none seem to be wintering on Thorney Island nor at Farlington Marshes this winter there were 3 on Bransbury Common near Andover on Jan 14 when another group of four were showing well in the Ashley Warren area north of Whitchurch and just east of the A34, Another group of three were seen on Portland this week while a similar number have been in the area south of Pulborough

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Two sightings this week at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood and in the Pannel Valley near Rye are a reminder that the next few weeks are the best time of year to track down these elusive tree top birds by their 'pee-pee-pee' calls and prolonged, quiet drumming.

**Stonechat:** Two sightings of local interest - one was in the pony fields north of Wade Court at Langstone on Jan 12 and still there on Jan 16 when a second bird was in the Warblington Farm shore field behind Conigar Point

**Blackbird:** One was in full song in St Faith's churchyard in central Havant at dusk on Jan 14 and a report of 'first full song' came from the Sway area near New Milton on Jan 19

**Song Thrush:** Four different birds could be heard singing as I made my way home from Warblington to Havant at dusk on Jan 16, and snatches of song can be heard most days despite the strong winds.

**Mistle Thrush:** Several were singing at Pulborough Brooks on Jan 16 and further reports of song came from the Pannel Valley near Rye on Jan 17 and from Sway near New Milton on Jan 18

**Marsh Tit:** First report of song for the year came from the Pannel Valley near Rye on Jan 17

**Willow Tit:** On Jan 12 two were seen and positively identified by call in the unlikely location of the steep slope of the Sussex Downs above Rackham Woods (near Pulborough) and on Jan 13 one was also seen (and positively identified) on a feeder in a garden in the Hastings area.

These sightings prompted an interesting discussion on the SOS website from which I learnt that (a) there are still at least two sites in Sussex where Willow Tits can still be found though they are virtually extinct in the county, (b) Willow Tits have small and well defined territories which they stick to throughout the year and (c) despite bird books saying that Willow Tits do not visit garden feeders there are plenty of proven instances where they visit feeders regularly. No one could explain the presence of the birds half way up the Sussex Downs!

**Jackdaw:** A pair were nest building in a chimney in the Horsham area on Jan 16

**Rook:** On Jan 15 while waiting at traffic lights to turn from the A1 to the A14 in Bedfordshire I watched some 20 Rooks apparently taking an interest in their nests, and on Jan 16 there was a similar report of **Rooks** active at a rookery in the St Cross area of Winchester

**Tree Sparrow:** Although these are effectively extinct all along the south coast an ex-Hampshire birder, now living in the Stourhead area of Wiltshire, reports that they still flourish there, probably on account of the continuance of small mixed farms and old farming practice there.

**Brambling:** More than 300 were seen in the Cheesefoot Head area east of Winchester on Jan 13 and up to 40 have been in the Chilling area near Warsash

**Siskin:** On Jan 18 Bob Chapman commented that the presence of a greatly increased number of **Siskins** on feeders at the Blashford Lakes site, probably indicating that natural food in the countryside was becoming difficult to find

**Linnet:** The huge flock of around 1000 birds was still in the Chilling area near Warsash on Jan 19. A much smaller flock of up to 40 was in the Warblington Farm shore field at Conigar Point during the week

**Yellowhammer:** A small flock of around 10 birds was still at Conigar Point, Warblington Farm, on Jan 16 with a similar flock of **Reed Buntings**

## INSECTS

**Peacock butterfly:** One seen flying at midday on Jan 16 in Arundel town was the third report of the species for the year after two sightings on Jan 6

**Mottled Grey moth:** One of these was the only result of the first moth trapping session at Portland Bill for this year on Jan 16

**Pale Brindled Beauty** and **Early Moth:** Both were seen at Edburton at the north foot of the Sussex Downs on Jan 16

**Sawfly larva:** On Jan 20 when replenishing the water put out on my lawn in low bowls for birds to drink and wash I found in one bowl the corpse of a chubby pale green caterpillar nearly 3cm long which must have crawled into the bowl and drowned - I have found similar drowned larvae on several occasions in the past but not in January. I'm pretty sure it was a sawfly larva but have no idea of the species.

**Bumblebee species:** There have been several reports of queens actively feeding in recent days and one of them included a photo and specifically referred to **Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*)** seen feeding at a Hellebore on Jan 15, but other reports refer more vaguely to 'white-tailed bumblebees' and a glance at [www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk/bumblebees\\_id.htm](http://www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk/bumblebees_id.htm) shows that three of the six commonest species (which make up 90% of all the Bumblebees commonly found in Britain) all have whitish tails. The one with the purest white tail and the brightest lemon yellow bands is ***Bombus lucorum* (White-tailed Bumblebee)** but the **Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*)** is very similar, the main difference is the the central yellow band is around the 'waist' between thorax and abdomen where ***B. lucorum*** has its bright yellow band around the abdomen only with black around the waist. Perhaps the commonest species (***B. terrestris***) is generally duller and more 'fuzzy' in both the yellow and white areas, the tail being much more 'Buff tailed' in appearance.

## PLANTS

**The number of plant species which I am aware of as being in flower this month up to Jan 20 is now 74, of which I have seen 67 for myself.** Recent new comers to the list are noted below.

**Common Fumitory:** A fresh plant with one cluster of flowers was seen at Warblington Farm on Jan 16

**Cabbage:** One plant was flowering in the 'bird seed' plot on the Langstone South Moor nature reserve on Jan 19 - I guess this is closely related to the cabbages we grow for human food and is not Wild Cabbage

**Wavy Bitter Cress:** I thought this was already on the list but I seem not to have noted it until Jan 17

**Common Whitlowgrass:** I have already noted first flowering of this on Jan 10 but by Jan 20 at least 85 plants were out in the Waterloo Road site and on that day I discovered a mass of plants (none yet in flower) at the foot of the brick wall on East

Street in Havant immediately east of the entrance to the Townend House (Museum) carpark

**Wood Avens:** Brian Fellows found this flowering in the Palmers Road Copse adjacent to Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Jan 14 (before the R Ems started to flood the copse!)

**Hazel:** Brian Fellows also found the first female flowers on Hazel at Brook Meadow on Jan 18

**Sun Spurge:** This was added to the list on Jan 18 in the Langstone area

**Ivy Leaved Speedwell:** I found the very first flower on this in Havant on Jan 17

**Field Woundwort:** Brian Fellows found this in flower on Warblington Farm on Jan 13

**Field Madder:** I found this out at Warblington on Jan 16

**Butterbur:** Just one spike of flowers was out on Jan 19 on one of the female plants growing by the Langbrook stream close to the South Moors

**Giant Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*):** At least two plants had started flowering on Jan 19 at the site by the Langbrook stream

**Cat's Ear:** This seems to be new this week, flowering in Juniper Square at Havant on Jan 17

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Frogs:** First report of a pair of **Frogs 'in amplexus'** came on Jan 18 from Brian Banks garden pond at Northiam near Rye and Brian has also commented on the increasing scarcity of Frogs on the Romney Marshes where there is a large population of **Marsh Frogs** but he disputes the claim that these newcomers are responsible for the decline of our native **Frogs** which have been vanishing equally rapidly in all the areas where no **Marsh Frogs** exist. (For anyone interested he tells us the **Marsh Frogs have been given a 'new name' of *Pelophylax ridibundus*** by the taxonomists). Brian first reported the movement of **Frogs back to breeding ponds on Jan 10** and then gave a simple test for distinguishing the sexes - look at the throat and belly and you will see that females are yellow while males are whitish

**Toads:** On Jan 19 Bob Chapman noticed **Toads** crossing a New Forest road between Ringwood and Bransgore - a very early first report. Brian Banks tells us that .. "Toads are in trouble, and have recently been added to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This amphibian is known to be vulnerable to a new disease, Chytridiomycosis, but this disease appears to be very localised in Britain at the moment, and other factors appear to be at work". One of these factors seems to be the well motivated efforts of conservation organisations seeking to save wildlife but (not for the first time) inadvertently destroying it - Brian goes on to say .. "Another study undertaken at the Offham Marshes, near Lewes, found that changes in ditch management resulted in significant declines of this species. Counts of adults at this site fell from 2,500 animals to less than 100 in less than ten years. This coincided with a move from annual clearance of whole ditches, to a practice where only half the ditch width was cleared in any year. Increased quantities of vegetation in the

water increased numbers of predatory invertebrates, which impacted on tadpole survival. A return to the previous practice of total ditch clearance resulted in a partial recovery in the toad population within a few years".

**Common (Smooth) Newt:** Up to Jan 10 Brian Banks had only 4 of these in his Northiam garden pond (near Rye) - on that day the number was up to 9, on Jan 18 it was up to 19 and on Jan 19 the number was up to 30. The name of this species has changed to **Lissotriton vulgaris**

**Palmate Newt:** Jan 18 brought the first of these into Brian Banks' garden pond - new name is **Lissotriton helveticus**

**Great Crested Newt:** When Brian Banks visited a pond where these can be found on the Romney Marshes he was told that the first eggs had been laid about two weeks earlier - amazingly these have retained their name of **Triturus cristatus** and are thus now regarded as being in a separate genus from the other Newt species

**Polecat:** What looked like a **Polecat** rather than a **Ferret** was one of many animals and birds killed by trains on the Basingstoke to Salisbury main line recently and seen by a railwayman walking the line in the Tadley area - among other species were **Roe Deer** and **Buzzard**

**Fungi:** The only species mentioned by name this week was **Yellow Brain Fungus** seen in the Forestside area north of Rowlands Castle

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 14 - 20 (WEEK 2 OF 2008)**

**Sat 19 Jan**

### **Two unusual Butterbur species flowering by the Langbrook stream**

Late this afternoon I drove to the south end of Southmoor Lane alongside Budds Farm and walked east to the Langbrook stream and back across the South Moor nature reserve to check on plants which might be in flower. By the Langbrook stream, in a bit of 'no man's land' immediately north of the concrete track to the bridge used by cattle to access the South Moor grazing, I found both the plants I was expecting there - both of which were planted in or before the 1980s by landscape gardeners working for IBM but which have had no-one to care for them for the past 20 years.

One is **Giant Butterbur (Petasites japonicus)** which looks a bit like a cauliflower with pale green leaf-like bracts on its stem topped by a conical spike of tiny white flowers - at least two of these were already in flower on the land in and bramble bushes. The other is **the unusual female plant of the common Butterbur** (in the wild females are only found in the north of England so presumably the many male plants found in southern England propagate vegetatively and flower each year in vain). One of these was already flowering at the water's edge (the flower spikes are taller and thinner than those of the males which come out later).

On the way back across the South Moor I added **Cabbage** to my flowering list when I saw one plant among the crop of bird seed plantings in the plot adjacent to Southmoor Lane. At the kissing gate to get our onto Southmoor Lane the **Pussy**

**Willow catkins** were not yet out, nor were the flowers on the **Cherry Plum trees** lining the road here, but these trees now had large, distinctly white buds which should open in a few days.

## Wed 16 Jan

### Golden Plover on the Langstone shore

With the tide rising this afternoon I visited the shore from Langstone to Nore Barn at Emsworth, adding three new bird species to my year list as well as a couple of flowering plants.

Starting at the Ship Inn carpark and using my scope I picked out 95 **Golden Plover** and counted a **large number of Shelduck** which totalled (with those off Warblington) at least 150 birds - much more than usual (a good peak count in recent winters is not much more than 100). I did not see a single Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, or Bar-tailed Godwit.

In the Maisemore Gardens stream at Nore Barn the **Spotted Redshank** was giving very close views (and seemingly finding a lot of miniscule food items if the frequent jobs of its bill into the water of the stream were being successful in getting food).

I then doubled back along the shore for a walk around the 'set aside' field behind Conigar Point (Field V on my map of the farm), and here I notched up my third new bird with a flock of **25 Linnet** (the other two additions were **Golden Plover** and **Spotted Redshank** - these, with a very unexpected addition in yesterday's wind and rain of a Red Kite flying low over my car at the M40/A34 junction north of Oxford, bring my list up to 84 species). **Yellowhammers**, **Reed Buntings** and **Skylarks** were still in the field with newcomers in the shape of several **Chaffinches** and a single **Stonechat**.

New flowers for my personal yearlist in this field were **Field Woundwort**, **Field Madder** and **Common Fumitory**.

On the way home towards sunset I heard at least four different **Song Thrushes** **singing** and saw a **male Stonechat** in the pony fields north of Wade Court as I went up Wade Lane - Nik Knight tells me this bird has been there since last Saturday (Jan 12)

## Mon 14 Jan

### Blackbird song at dusk

Passing St Faith's church just after dark at around 5pm I heard **Blackbird** song for the first time this year and was able to see the singing bird silhouetted on the bare branch of a tree

## **SUMMARY FOR JAN 7 - 13 (WEEK 1 OF 2008)**

## **BIRDS**

**New Year's Day bird races:** All three common divers seen off Selsey Bill were among the early ticks in a Sussex record breaking Day List of 121 species made on Jan 6 by the West Sussex team calling themselves "The Bald Eagles" (Dave Smith, Dorian Mason & Richard Ives). They did particularly well on Thorney Island with 3

Jack Snipe, pinging Bearded Tits, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, 3 Goldeneye, Cetti's Warblers and a few others, and at Amberley they added a species they have never encountered before in many similar winter outings - 3 Ruff.

Since then Dorset birders have also set a new record for their county - the Dorset Bird Club website tells us that on Jan 12 .. "The Bird Race teams today scored well in the brighter weather, the winning team recording **an impressive 129 species to set a new county winter race record**. Equally one team confined themselves to doing Poole Harbour only and scored 119".

**Red-throated Diver:** Plenty of these about with 15 off Christchurch Harbour on Jan 6 and 27 passing Portland on Jan 12

**Great Northern Diver:** In addition to those in the open sea one was seen in Sweare Deep off north Hayling on Jan 12 - it probably then went south to be seen with two others in the mouth of Chichester Harbour later that day

**Great Crested Grebe:** The flock in the Solent continues to increase with 112 off the Chilling area on Jan 12 (prev peak count was 102 on Jan 5)

**Slavonian Grebe:** Five were seen in the mouth of Chichester Harbour from Black Point on Jan 12

**Manx Shearwater:** **Balearic** and **Sooty Shearwater** have both been seen along the south coast this year but a single **Manx Shearwater** off Portland on Jan 8 was the first of the year and the first anywhere since Nov 18 (and in 2007 none were reported in the early part of the year until Mar 28)

**Shag:** At Durlston one was seen showing a breeding crest on Jan 6 and on Jan 7 it or another was seen bringing seaweed to the cliffs for nest building.

**Cattle Egret:** Latest sighting at Rodmell on the Sussex Ouse was on Jan 10, the bird which arrived at Coombe Haven (Bexhill) on Jan 5 was still there on Jan 7, five were still together in fields north of Weymouth on Jan 11, and on Jan 6 the single bird was seen at Lavant (Chichester) while the other loner at Harbridge near Ringwood was still being reported on Jan 12

**Great White Egret:** The bird which has been regularly seen at the Blashford Lakes has not been reported since Jan 6

**Bewick's Swan:** The count in the River Arun south of the Downs increased by one to 27 on Jan 12. In Hampshire the 5 birds were still by the Avon at Ibsley on Jan 12

**Black Swan:** Two which have been on the Test in the Eling/Redbridge area at the beginning of January had moved down Southampton Water to the Hythe area on Jan 11

**Greylag:** 173 of these were in the Avon valley south of Ringwood on Jan 12 along with **465 Canada Geese**

**Cackling Canada Goose:** First report for the year of one of the '**half size**' **Canada Geese** came from the Chichester Lakes on Jan 11. John Goodspeed was leading the group which saw it and he suggests it was of the **Aleutian Canada Goose**

**subspecies (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*)** but I think the differences between the subspecies of small Canada Goose are too difficult for the amateur to sort out. **Last May I wrote the following about this group of birds ...**

Brian Fellows found two newcomers at Baffins Pond on May 14 which he noted as 'small Canada Geese'. He rightly points out that there are some **12 different races/species/subspecies of Canada Goose** and isn't going to commit to naming the bird he saw but his mention of them has led me to **revise my previous idea of recording these small geese as a subspecies (*Branta canadensis minima* or Cackling Canada Goose) of the normal Canada Goose.**

Wikipedia tells me .. "The **Cackling Goose** was originally considered to be the same species or a subspecies of the Canada Goose, but in July 2004 the American Ornithologists' Union's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature split the two into two species, making **Cackling Goose** into a full species with the scientific name ***Branta hutchinsii***. The British Ornithologists Union followed suit in June 2005". (Wheels turn slowly in these matters and I see that in the latest version of the list of Euring Codes which I downloaded in order to find the code for the Masked Booby this change from *Branta canadensis* to *Branta hutchinsii* has not yet been made!)

I think we now have to be aware of **two species, each with subspecies**. The larger sized **Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)** appears to have subspecies named ***B.c.occidentalis* (Dusky Canada)**, ***B.c.maxima* (Giant Canada)**, ***B.c.interior* (Todd's Canada)**, and ***B.c.moffitti* (Moffitt's Canada Goose)**. The smaller **Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)** has subspecies named **Richardson's Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*)**, **Aleutian Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*)**, **Small Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii minima*)** and one with no common name (***Branta hutchinsii taverneri***).

Wikipedia says .. "**The distinctions between these geese have led to a great deal of confusion and debate among ornithologists**" but for my purposes I will continue to record under just two names - **large birds as Canada Goose** and **small birds as Cackling Goose** with the two small birds at Baffins going under the latter name when I have changed its scientific name from *B.c.minima* to *Branta hutchinsii*.

**White-front Goose:** Two Greenland birds were still in Dorset (near Puddletown) on Jan 7 but over on Sheppey in Kent a flock of 181 could be seen on Jan 5

**Brent Goose:** It seems there are nearly 4000 of these based around the mouth of Chichester Harbour - on Jan 12 the WeBS count at West Wittering recorded 2600 Brent (including a couple of Brent x Brant hybrids) while the equivalent count for south east Hayling found 1109 there.

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The birds that have been in the Weymouth area since Oct 19 seem to have moved west as on Jan 7 four birds were reported in the Burton Bradstock area (still there on Jan 10)

**Brant:** One remains a regular sight in the Chichester Harbour mouth area and another at Gosport seems to have moved from the HMS Sultan playing fields on the west side of Gosport to the mud of Portsmouth Harbour off Priddy's Hard (maybe it regularly moves between the two places depending on the state of the tide).

**Red-breasted Goose:** After the first report on Jan 1 of this bird coming to roost at night off south east Hayling (possibly in the Fishery Creek or Mengham Rithe area) it was seen to do so again on Jan 8. On Jan 12 it was seen on its return journey from the Hayling side to West Wittering - it seems that it usually pauses for up to an hour on the bank of shingle and mud lining the east side of the harbour entrance opposite Black Point both when moving west in the evenings and then east in the mornings, giving good opportunities to see it from the Hampshire side either in the first or last hour of daylight each day so long as the tide is not at its highest (and thus covering the mudbank) at those times

**Pintail:** A flock of 94 birds was in the Avon valley south of Ringwood on Jan 12, seen by John Clark when making the WeBS count - John comments that the low lying fields of the valley are just starting to flood and soon should be attracting vast numbers of wildfowl and waders

**Pochard:** Mike Collins recently reported (Dec 30) that a **Pochard** on Budds Farm pools had a plastic plate (with a unique id number on it) fixed to the top of its bill and there have been several similar reports in recent years. **To find out more about the practice of fitting birds with these 'nasal saddles' go to <http://pt-ducks.naturlink.pt/>**

**Ferruginous x Pochard hybrid (or Fudge Duck):** On Jan 13 one of these hybrids was on the Budds Farm pools associating with Pochards. Until Feb 2007 it was common to talk of 'the Fudge Duck', referring to a single male hybrid which had been coming back to the north of Langstone Harbour each winter since the autumn of 1999 (first seen 23 Nov 1999) when it was a juvenile/first winter bird. Last February however Jason Crook told me that a second female hybrid had joined the first, and I think the bird I saw on Jan 13 was the female (less colourful than the male). Another reason to be uncertain as to which bird we are seeing is that this winter there have been similar hybrids (two birds at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Oct 6 and 7 only - were those our two having got off course on their flight to the south coast? - and a single at Rye Harbour (referred to there as a Pochard) on Nov 24 and 25)

**Long-tailed Duck:** In addition to the regulars in Portland Harbour, at Rye Harbour and at Brooklands in Worthing, a new bird was seen on Jan 6 at the head of Southampton Water in the Eling Great Marsh area. Jan 12 brought a first sighting of one in Brands Bay, Poole Harbour (there were 5 in Poole Harbour on Dec 22, but no reports since then until now)

**Smew:** Still none further west than the Rye Bay area but the count at the Dungeness RSPB reserve was up to 18 (5 of them males) on Jan 12

**Red Kite:** Three were seen on Jan 6 in the area north of the Goodwood Trundle race course. In the north of Hampshire these birds are much more common - on

Jan 12 there were at least 7, probably 13, in the Ashley Warren area east of the A34 and north of Whitchurch.

**Marsh Harrier:** On Jan 5 more than 20 could be seen over Sheppey looking from the Kent mainland coast and 11+ were in the Stour valley east of Canterbury on Jan 6

**Sparrowhawk:** On Jan 9 a pair were already displaying to each other in the Pulborough Brooks area

**Buzzard:** On Jan 7 I had an unexpected local sighting of one flying west over the Warblington farm fields at dusk - it went west of Pook Lane but may have been intending to roost in the tall Monterey Pines in the field boundary half way between Pook Lane and Wade Lane

**White-tailed Sea Eagle:** Still being seen in the Andover area on Jan 12

**Peregrine:** A large female was the 80th bird to go on my personal year list when I saw it perched on the ground at Gutner Point (East Hayling) on Jan 12 (from what I have heard from others who saw it it may have been eating prey)

**Avocet:** The wintering flock in the Swale estuary (north Kent alongside Sheppey) seems to have numbered 133 on Jan 10 but this is taken from the sum of two flocks reported the same day (if they were not different birds then the total is only 80)

**Ringed Plover:** The high tide roost at Black Point (Hayling) numbered 220 on Jan 12

**Golden Plover:** So far this winter the highest count of these along the south coast has been 1100 at Rye Harbour but on Jan 5 an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 could be seen over Sheppey

**Sanderling:** A good count of 245 in the Hayling Black Point high tide roost on Jan 11

**Ruff:** Four were seen on Amberley Wild Brooks on Jan 6 and maybe the same four were at Pulborough Brooks on Jan 9

**Jack Snipe:** Three were seen on Thorney Island on Jan 6 and another count of three came from the Wittering area on Jan 12

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Numbers remain low in Chichester Harbour but on Jan 12 Titchfield Haven had 326 and the Oare Marshes in north Kent had a flock of more than 500. At Pulborough Brooks the count on Jan 6 had increased to 42 (from 15 on Jan 1)

**Whimbrel:** The wintering bird is still in Pagham Harbour, getting its first mention for this year on Jan 8 (seen again on Jan 12). On Jan 1 one was seen in the Medina estuary on the IoW and on Jan 5 one was in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour

**Spotted Redshank:** The bird which had been a daily sight on the shore west of Emsworth at the end of last year is now elusive but was seen on Jan 6. One was seen on Thorney Island on Jan 6 with another seen at Church Norton on Jan 8

**Sabine's Gull:** The first and only sighting so far this year was an adult passing Dungeness on Jan 4

**Ring-billed Gull:** Still present at Gosport Cockle Pond on Jan 12

**Iceland Gull:** The Titchfield Haven bird had not been reported since Jan 5 until Jan 13 when two different birds were there - the 'regular' adult was in the reserve and an immature bird flew west along the coast

**Glaucous Gull:** The Shoreham Harbour bird has not been seen since Dec 29 but on Jan 6 one was seen passing Portland Bill

**Kittiwake:** On Jan 7 both Dungeness and Portland reported many flying west and on Jan 9 Durlston mentioned them passing there at the rate of 350 an hour. They were still going west in large numbers on Jan 10 and 11

**Auks:** On Jan 5 Dungeness reported 2550 passing there with other counts of 5000+ **Guillemots** on Jan 4, and 2600 on Jan 6, 1500 on Jan 7 and 4000+ on Jan 8 (mostly **Guillemots** and all flying west)

**Stock Dove:** A flock of 84 was in the Chilling area between Titchfield and Warsash on Jan 12 (with some 5000 Woodpigeons) and one of 30+ was on the Sussex Downs above the R Arun on Jan 10

**Collared Dove:** A pair in a Burgess Hill garden (north of Brighton) had been sitting on a new nest for two days by Jan 6 - I think this is the same garden where a fresh broken egg was seen on the ground on Dec 23

**Long-eared Owl:** A single bird at Rye Harbour on Nov 9 seems to have been the only indication of wintering birds settled on our south coast at the end of last year so the presence of one at the Hastings Country Park on Jan 7 is of interest (though it may have been just an arrival from the continent pausing briefly - as several have done at Portland - rather than a bird intending to stay there)

**Short-eared Owl:** Two were still to be seen hunting the fields west of Pagham Harbour on Jan 6 and since then the number being reported has increased substantially with reports from five different sites on Jan 12 including 4 together on the Sussex Downs (at The Burgh above Amberley) and maybe 5 in the Ashley Warren area north of Whitchurch (are these birds moving north from the continent because they think spring is on the way? - among the reports there was one of two birds at Portland which might have arrived from the south)

**Hoopoe:** The Kingsley Common (east of Alton) bird was still there on Jan 11 but a sighting from nearby Broxhead Common (less than a mile south east of Kingsley Common) indicates that it is not tied to one spot.

**Woodlark:** First report of song for this year came from a Hampshire site on Jan 12

**Shore Lark:** The Rye Harbour bird was still there on Jan 12

**Song Thrush:** I have not heard one singing around my garden since Jan 1 but one was in full song in central Emsworth on Jan 8

**Dartford Warbler:** A pair were seen fairly regularly on Sinah Common (south Hayling) last summer and probably bred there so it is good to hear that a pair have been seen again there recently

**Hume's Leaf Warbler:** Still at the Beachy Head site on Jan 12

**Firecrest:** More than 3 were at Southampton Common on Jan 6 and one was seen at Church Norton on Jan 8 when two remained in Christchurch Harbour

**Bearded Tit:** Several were heard at the Thorney Deeps on Jan 6

**Hooded Crow:** A single Hooded Crow was among a flock of Carrion Crows on Sheppey on Jan 5 and at the nearby Oare Marshes on Jan 9

**Brambling:** 400+ could still be seen in the Cheesefoot Head area east of Winchester on Jan 6 and 200+ were still in the Badbury Rings area of Dorset on Jan 7. Good numbers were still in the Chichester West Dean Woods on Jan 11 and at least 49 were in the Chilling area near Warsash on Jan 12

**Greenfinch:** These remain distinctly scarce this winter so the sound of one trilling as it flew over Emsworth on Jan 8 was welcome (one had done the same over Havant on Jan 1)

**Linnet:** A flock of around 1000 birds was in the Chilling area near Warsash on Jan 12

**Hawfinch:** At least 16 were using the main roost in the New Forest on Jan 12, and 9 came to roost in the Chichester West Dean Woods on Jan 11 (3 were at the Romsey site on Jan 6)

**Yellowhammer:** A flock of around 12 birds was still in the Warblington Farm field behind Conigar Point on Jan 7 and 49 were in Hastings country park that day with 60 on the Downs above Worthing on Jan 8. Another flock of 22 was seen in north Solent farm fields between Calshot and Lepe on Jan 10

**Corn Bunting:** On Jan 9 a count of 32 was reported from Cheesefoot Head east of Winchester and by Jan 12 at least 52 were there. In Sussex some were **singing** on Jan 10

**Escapees:** A **Hooded Merganser** was on the River Stour in Dorset on Jan 9

## INSECTS

The only insect sightings in the latest news are of one **Red Admiral** seen on the Sussex Downs (Bignor area) on Jan 6 with two **Peacocks** seen the same day at Wiggonholt Common (Pulborough) and Newhaven

## PLANTS

**By Jan 13 I had recorded a total of 54 plant species in flower during January, with 49 of them seen by myself**

**Lesser Celandine:** The first sign of these becoming a widespread sight came on Jan 13 with many scattered along the edge of the Emsworth Road in Havant (and elsewhere)

**Winter Aconite:** A few were flowering in the Bishop's Palace garden at Chichester on Jan 8 - worth recording despite being planted there

**Black Mustard:** On Dec 15 I wrongly reported **Sea Radish** as having flower buds on the sea wall of Emsworth Marina but another look at the same plant on Jan 8 showed that the flowers (some of which had now turned to seed) were on a plant of **Black Mustard** growing up through the large leaves of several **Sea Radish** plants

**Wild Radish:** A flowering bush of this was a surprise find in the Warblington Farm field behind Conigar Point on Jan 7

**Common Whitlowgrass:** This started to flower beside Waterloo Road in Havant on Jan 10

**Sweet Violet:** Three flowers were visible in St Faith's churchyard in Havant on Jan 8 with one or two more seen on plants beside the path running along the north side of Nore Barn woodland at Emsworth

**Field Pansy:** A much larger than usual plant of this (with correspondingly large flowers) was seen in the Warblington Farm field on Jan 7

**Corn Spurrey:** Also in the Warblington field on Jan 7 was a substantial 'bush' of this with many fresh (though closed) flowers

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry (*Duchesnea indica*):** I had seen this in flower in Havant during December but had not been able to name it then. On Jan 13, however, I did realise what it was - see my Diary entry for Jan 13 for more detail

**Spurge Laurel:** This had open flowers on plants in Markwells Wood (north of Finchdean and west of Forestside) on Jan 10

**Grey Alder:** Catkins were open on these trees above the Lavant stream running through Havant on Jan 12

**Strawberry Tree:** The tree by Slipper Road at Emsworth still had a few white flowers on Jan 8

**Wild Primrose:** I found an single genuine wild flower in the ditch beside Daw Lane on Hayling on Jan 11 (others had been found in flower as early as last November)

**Hawkweed Oxtongue:** Brian Fellows found this still flowering on Portsdown on Jan 9

**Garden Daffodils:** My first sight of these came on Jan 13 but others have been seen in December

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common Seal:** First report of the year from the Chichester Harbour colony - just one seen off West Wittering on Jan 12

**Hare:** Also first report for the year - one seen on the Sussex Downs in the area known as 'The Burgh' above the R Arun south of Amberley

**Frog:** Brian Banks reports on the Rye Bay website (Jan 10) that both male and female Frogs are starting to return to his garden pond in Northiam near Rye - he gives id tips on separating males from females by the colour of their throat and belly (females yellowish, males whitish)

**Common Newt:** Brian Banks also tells us that on the night of Jan 10 the number of these Newts in his garden pond had suddenly increased to 9 from the 4 which had already been there for some time

**Fungi:** On Jan 12 I visited the Eastern Road cemetery in Havant and found a massive ring of around 50 good specimens of **Field Blewit** on display (just over the Eastern Road boundary wall and not far west of the main entrance gate)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 7 - 13 (WEEK 1 OF 2008)**

### **Sat 12 Jan**

#### **A 'fairy ring' of Field Blewits in Havant cemetery**

The sunny morning encouraged me to extend a trip to the Havant shops by going via the Eastern Road cemetery where I found a **large 'fairy ring' of around 50 Field Blewit toadstools**.

The only other notes for today were of a **Coal Tit** singing loudly (and showing well on bare branches) in my garden and a couple of Greenfinch wheezing and trilling in the cemetery, plus **Common Mallow** and **Hairy Bittercress** in flower.

### **Fri 11 Jan**

#### **Peregrine and Wild Primrose on Hayling**

In yesterday's notes I mentioned my find of **Spurge Laurel** but forget a find made in Havant during the morning - the first open flower on the **Common Whitlowgrass** in Waterloo Road. Another botanic first for the year was also omitted from my notes for Wednesday - that was **Grey Alder** which had full open catkins on trees overhanging the Lavant stream flowing around the Prince George Street carpark in Havant just before the stream vanishes in a tunnel which takes it under North Street to emerge again on the south side of Havant Park. The alder did not go down at the time as I was uncertain as to which Alder species it was, but I now have specimens of the cones and leaves as well as the smooth grey trunks of the trees to confirm that it is **Grey Alder** (which I also see is the earliest species to flower each year). This afternoon I cycled south over Langstone Bridge into a strong headwind, half hoping to see either **Knot** or **Goldeneye** at the Oysterbeds, but no luck there. I rode on along Daw Lane where I found a single flower of genuine **Wild Primrose** in the roadside ditch, and this spurred me to take the path along the north side of Verner Common in hope of seeing either early **Coltsfoot** or a flock of **Golden Plover** - again no luck, but at the east end of this shore path you get a fairly close view over Gutner Point on which a large and magnificent female **Peregrine** was perched (on the ground), and this become the 80th bird on my year list.

### **Thu 10 Jan**

#### **Four new birds for the year list and Spurge Laurel in flower**

Despite strong wind and driving rain I drove to the Finchdean area to look for **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** on the slope of Idsworth Down near Heberdens Farm where they had been seen on Dec 31. Unlike many birds that would be deterred from showing by the weather I expected these birds to stick to their endless hopping and running in search of food in the pony fields, and so they were - an estimated 40 **Fieldfare** and at least 10 **Redwing** among **Starlings**, **Woodpigeons** and **Magpies** (for some reason this area attracts the thrushes right through the winter and they can usually be seen here up to the end of March).

Having achieved my primary objective it might have been sensible to turn back, but being an eternal optimist I went on over the ridge of Idsworth Down into the valley beyond and I am glad that I did so as this gave me two bonus birds. The first was a **Marsh Tit** in the roadside hedge, calling persistently to make sure I did not miss seeing it as I passed only a few feet away from it. After that I added **Mistle Thrush** to the year list (now standing at 79 species) when I heard its unmistakable 'football rattle' call and saw several birds (maybe all **Mistles**, maybe one among some **Fieldfares**) flying over.

Rather than expose myself again to the gale on the bare hill top I walked through Finchdean village and took a path up towards South Holt farm, turning into Markwells wood before I got to the farm, and this gave me shelter for the final part of the outing. It also gave me a final bonus in the shape of open flowers on **Spurge Laurel**.

### [Tue 8 Jan](#)

#### **Greenshank and Canada Goose go on my Year List**

Walking around Havant today I found **Red Deadnettle** in flower and saw at least three flowers on the **Sweet Violets** in St Faith's churchyard. In the afternoon I cycled to north Thorney Island and added the few flowers left on the Slipper Mill Road **Strawberry Tree** before reaching the Emsworth Marina where **Hemlock** and **Black Mustard** were both flowering (just!) on the sea wall - the **Black Mustard** could now be indentified by some incipient seeds, forcing me to admit being in error last month in calling this plant **Sea Radish** (it is surrounded by the leaves of **Sea Radish** plants but is growing up through those sturdier plants).

Earlier in the outing, coming along the Emsworth West Parade shore, I had a good but short view of a **Greenshank** in one of the mud gullies at low tide but could not see the **Spotted Redshank**, nor could I find anything at the Little or Great Deeps to add to the year list. In desperation, needing one more species to bring me up to 75, I cycled down the Thorney Road to look at the fields by the Great Deeps where I felt sure I would find **Canada Goose** which was not yet on the list - at a guess there were over 50 of them.

### [Mon 7 Jan](#)

#### **Yellowhammers and Corn Spurrey at Warblington**

The Langstone to Warblington shore was crowded with **Brent**, **Wigeon** and **Shelduck** this afternoon but the only addition to my year list here was **Lapwing** - a flock of 50+ in the air.

At Conigar Point I went into the stubble field and immediately disturbed a flock of around a dozen **Yellowhammers**, the yellow heads and necks of the male showing well in the setting sun. Walking further into the field **Skylark** began to rise from the

ground until at least 20 were milling around in the air - both species were additions to the year list.

Three further surprises in this field were flowering plants of **Wild Radish**, **Field Pansy** and **Corn Spurrey**. I had expected **Field Woundwort** but saw none.

Heading home via Church Lane and Pook Lane I kept scanning the trees for Little Owl but never saw one - instead I had a **Kestrel** flying over bringing the Year List to 73 species and then watched an unexpected **Buzzard** lumbering west over Pook Lane, possibly going to roost in the tops of the tall **Monterey Pines** in the field boundary half way from Pook Lane to Wade Lane. Still looking at the lower branches and trunks of the mature trees near the Old Rectory for a possible **Little Owl** I found myself watching a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**.

I passed Langstone Pond just after the sun had set but saw **no Egrets in the trees nor flying in** - it looks as if they have abandoned this night roost, at least during the winter.

On the final stretch up the Billy Trail I found the single plant of **Lesser Celandine** by the Lymbourne Stream now has ten flowers in various states from bud to decay, and passing the end of Grove Road many **Hazel catkins** are fully extended. Also at this point I heard the calls of a **Goldcrest** but never saw it.

## SUMMARY FOR DEC 31 - JAN 6 (WEEK 1 OF 2008)

### BIRDS

**New Year's Day bird races:** From the news I have seen so far it seems that a new Hampshire record has been set by Steve Keen who ticked 111 species on New Year's Day (not perhaps a day list record compared to totals that are achieved in May and approach 150 but probably the most that has ever been achieved in the short daylight hours and cold conditions of New Year's Day). John Norton and Peter Raby together also beat the 100 mark with 103, and on the Isle of Wight Derek Hale scored 93. The highest scores I have seen claimed by Sussex teams are 85 and 81 respectively but I am pretty sure these will be beaten by others in that county.

**Red-throated Diver:** 60 were seen in Rye Bay on Dec 30 and 5 flew past Sandy Point (Hayling) on Jan 1. By Jan 5 larger numbers were being reported from Dorset with 20 seen at Christchurch and 13 passing Portland

**Black-throated Diver:** One was off Selsey Bill on Jan 1 and two were in Portland Harbour (still there on Jan 5)

**Great Northern Diver:** Andy Johnson has confirmed that at least one was in the Chichester Harbour entrance area throughout December with three there on Dec 17 and two on both Jan 1 and 5. On Jan 4 there were 10 in Portland Harbour

**Great Crested Grebe:** The 'raft' of these on the sea off Titchfield Haven which had first been noticed on Dec 23 with 43 birds in it had risen to 65 on Dec 26, 78 on Dec 30 and 83 on Dec 31. It is still growing with a total of 102 there on Jan 5 (99 in one flock plus three loners)

**Slavonian Grebe:** Andy Johnson reports that up to seven of these were in the Chichester Harbour entrance area throughout December and he had 3 there on Jan 1 with 5 seen there on Jan 5

**Black-necked Grebe:** 23 were seen off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Dec 31 and 22 were counted from Budds Mound on Jan 1 but I have no confirmation of a rumoured count of 28 in Langstone Harbour that day. In Dorset there were 15 in Studland Bay on Jan 4 with at least another 2 in Portland Harbour (3 there on Jan 5)

**Fulmar:** One was seen from Selsey Bill on Jan 1 when 25 were reported from Dungeness and 9 from Seaford

**Sooty Shearwater:** Autumn passage sightings of this species ceased after Nov 18 and the only report since then has been of one passing Sandy Point on Hayling on Dec 1 with another seen at Dungeness on both Jan 1 and 2

**Balearic Shearwater:** An isolated report of one from Selsey Bill on Jan 5 was the first that I have seen since one was at Portland on Dec 9

**Shag:** On Jan 6 the Durlston ranger's log commented on a Shag already showing its breeding crest

**Bittern:** Four were reported at Titchfield Haven on Dec 21 and on Jan 1 there was proof of two at the Blashford Lakes but at both sites you will be lucky to see even one of these elusive birds. Jan 5 brought the first report of one at Burton Mill Pond (west of Pulborough) while others remain at Radipole (Weymouth), Hatch Pond (Poole), and no doubt in the Rye area, at Dungeness and the Kent Stour Valley

**Cattle Egret:** It seems likely that there are still six in the Weymouth area, one at Harbridge (upstream of Ringwood), one at Lavant (Chichester) and one at Rodmell near Lewes. On Jan 5 what maybe another bird turned up at Coombe Haven (Bexhill west of Hastings)

**Great White Egret:** One continues to be regularly seen at the Blashford Lakes up to at least Jan 1 when there was a single report of one briefly by the Sussex Ouse near Southease (this one seen again at Piddinghoe on Jan 2 but not since)

**Spoonbill:** The half dozen birds that were in the Weymouth area up to Dec 24 have not been reported since (other than singles at Abbotsbury on Jan 1 and at Ferrybridge on Jan 4) but Jan 5 brought a report of 4 back in Poole Harbour. On Dec 30 there was an isolated report of one flying over the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood.

**Bewick's Swan:** No reports from the R Arun (where there had been 25 birds near the Wildfowl Trust reserve on Dec 26) until Jan 5 when 6 birds were seen there (Burpham area)

**Pink-foot Goose:** Two of these were seen by the River Avon on both the Dorset and Hampshire sides of the county boundary in the Avon Causeway area on Dec 31

**White-front Goose:** On Jan 1 a group of 8 flew over the Pulborough Brooks reserve but maybe they stayed in the area as on Jan 5 there is a report of 8 seen at Widney Brooks (the area west of the River Arun immediately north of Greatham Bridge, complementing Waltham Brooks which are south of the road to the bridge)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** The number in The Fleet at Weymouth was up to 5 on Jan 1

**Red-breasted Goose:** On Jan 1 the bird which is regularly seen by day at West Wittering flew west at dusk to roost off the east Hayling shore (I think in the Mengham Rithe area). It is still being seen daily at Wittering up to Jan 5 but seems to fly west at dusk to roost on the south east shore of Hayling.

**Mallard:** I watched a pair displaying to each other on Jan 1

**Pintail:** I only saw a single male in the Chalkdock area of Langstone Harbour on Jan 1 but along the coast at Hook (Warsash) 45 were present, probably in addition to 11 seen at Titchfield Haven on Dec 31

**Pochard:** On Dec 30 Mike Collins noted that a male among the birds on Budds Farm pools was fitted with a 'bill saddle' marker.

**Ferruginous Duck:** One arrived at Rye Harbour on Jan 4 and was still there on Jan 5 - comments are invited on the purity of its breeding.

**Scaup:** On Jan 1 the number at Abbotsbury in Dorset was up to 12 with another 10 still in Poole Harbour. One was at Normandy (Lymington) on Dec 31 but I think it left overnight and could not be found on Jan 1 - it may have flown to Poole Harbour where the total increased by one from 10 to 11 on Jan 5

**Eider:** The number on the sea off Titchfield Haven was up to 69 on Dec 31 (with 65+ being reported on Jan 1)

**Long-tailed Duck:** On Jan 1 one remained in Hove lagoon (Brighton), three were in Portland Harbour and five in Poole Harbour with one or two probably still present in the Rye Harbour area. Brian Fellows saw at least two (presumably part of the collection) at the Arundel reserve on Jan 1 and was fascinated to hear these two males 'howling like small dogs'. Since then the Hove bird has flown to Brooklands in Worthing (arrived there on Jan 5) and the number in Portland Harbour has increased from 3 to 4

**Smew:** One seen on Swanbourne Lake at Arundel on Jan 1 was probably part of the Wildfowl Trust collection which had flown over the fence - I have not heard of any Smew anywhere west of the Rye Bay area along the south coast this winter.

**Red Kite:** One was in the Chilgrove area north of Chichester on Jan 5

**Marsh Harrier:** A female was active in the northern part of Titchfield Haven on Jan 5 and another was seen at Rodmell near Lewes on Jan 2

**Sparrowhawk:** These are adept at using their long legs to catch and kill prey hiding in crevices which the hawk is too big to enter and Jan 3 brought a good example of this in a description on Hoslist of how a Sparrowhawk caught, killed, and extracted a Greenfinch from within one of those metal cage 'Squirrel proof' bird feeders

**White-tailed Sea Eagle:** Still being seen in the Andover area on Jan 2

**Peregrine:** On Jan 1 one was perched on the nestbox on the chimney of the Shoreham power station - not sure if this was by chance or if it indicated the start of their breeding season

**Water Rail:** A bonus for my New Year's Day list was the sight of a **Water Rail** openly preening among the vegetation around Budds Farm pools - I watched it for at least a minute before it strode off purposefully into the surrounding cover. Brian Fellows has also seen a Water Rail by the Lumley stream at Emsworth on Jan 3.

**Great Bustard:** One of these (presumably a wanderer from Salisbury Plain) was seen in a field near the A35 in the Dorchester area on Dec 30. In Oct 2005 one of these wing-tagged birds caused a minor sensation by flying around the Portland Bill observatory at eye level while it was photographed - I think one or more escapees were in Dorset until March 2006 when they returned to Salisbury Plain.

**Avocet:** Six were in Pagham Harbour on Dec 30 but the only one I have seen claimed on New Year's Day was the single bird wintering in Christchurch Harbour - since then I have seen a report of 14 birds in the mouth of the Beaulieu River on both Dec 31 and Jan 1). On Jan 4 one was found at a new site (Fishbourne Channel near Chichester) and it was still there next day.

**Golden Plover:** The species was claimed as seen 'somewhere on Hayling Island' on New Year's Day when 25 were seen in the Medina estuary at Cowes (IoW). The count at Rye Harbour on Jan 2 was 1700, well exceeding this winter's previous peak count there (1100 on Dec 4)

**Knot:** Around 300 were seen in Pagham Harbour on Dec 29 and around 100 were in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Jan 1 with at least one seen from Hayling

**Sanderling:** Jan 1 found an estimated count of 80 on the Ryde west sands (IoW) with some seen on Hayling

**Purple Sandpiper:** No Hampshire reports for Jan 1 but 8 were seen at Southsea Castle on Jan 3

**Jack Snipe:** Simon Ingram had one at Eastleigh Lakeside as an early Christmas present on Dec 24 when another was seen in the Worthing area (at Ferring Rife). Locally there was one in the Sandy Point area of Hayling on Dec 21

**Black-tailed Godwit:** As usual after Christmas some of these birds are moving from the coastal mud to wet grassland. On Dec 31 Titchfield Haven had 239 (not a significant increase as 400 had been there in November and 313 had been seen on Dec 23) but Pulborough Brooks (which had no more than 3 before Christmas) had 15 on Jan 1, 26 on Jan 2 and 41 on Jan 5. No news so far from the Avon Valley

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** One was seen in full summer plumage at West Wittering on Jan 1 and what may have been the same bird was at Titchfield Haven area on Jan 2 (I think it is not unknown for several wader species to have a genetic disorder which gives them summer plumage in the winter and non-breeding plumage in the summer)

**Whimbrel:** One wintering bird was in the Medina estuary at Cowes (IoW) on Jan 1 and another was in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on Jan 5

**Greenshank:** One was seen in the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour on Jan 1 but the only other reports of this species for 2008 are of a single in the Fishbourne Channel on Jan 4 and 5, and of two in Emsworth Harbour on Jan 4

**Common Sandpiper:** I failed to see the wintering bird when I was in the Broadmarsh-Budds Farm area on Jan 1 but Peter Raby confirms it was still there. Inland Dave Ryves had 3 of these Sandpipers at Curbridge on the River Hamble and the regular bird was still at Christchurch Harbour. On Jan 2 two **Common Sandpipers** were seen by the River Arun in the Ford area south of Arundel and on Jan 3 two were at the Lower Test (Southampton).

**Pomarine Skua:** Seven were seen at Dungeness on Jan 2 with singles there on Jan 1 and 3

**Arctic Skua:** Two seen at Dungeness on Jan 1 and 2 were the first to be reported anywhere since Dec 2

**Great Skua:** Dungeness also did well with these having 9 there on Jan 1

**Med Gull:** There were 118 at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Dec 30

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still at the Cockle Pond on Jan 1 and 3

**Iceland Gull:** The bird which returned to Titchfield Haven area on Dec 23 was still around on Jan 5 (but the Shoreham Harbour **Glaucous Gull** seems to have departed on Dec 29)

**Kittiwake:** This week has seen several large movements of seabirds in the English Channel including 820 **Kittiwake** at Dungeness on Jan 2 and 250 off Portland on Jan 4

**Sandwich Tern:** At least one was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour throughout December (with five seen from Black Point on Dec 8) and one was seen at West Wittering on Jan 4

**Auk species:** 4220 were recorded at Dungeness on Jan 2 and 1300 flew east off Worthing in 1 hour on Jan 3

**Guillemot:** More than 200 were on their breeding ledges at Durlston on Jan 6 - they have been there since the beginning of December

**Razorbill:** More than 300 flew past Portland on Jan 4

**Barn Owl:** One was hunting over the East Park at Stansted at 7:30am on Dec 24 and the latest news includes daytime sightings of these birds at Walland Marsh and Pannel Valley (both near Rye), Rye Harbour, Steyning Brooks on the R Adur and West Bexington near Weymouth. Following reports of late youngsters fledging in November I am not sure if these are young birds desperately trying to find food in order to survive or adults needing extra food as they come into breeding condition (or just generally hungry birds). As well as the weather **Barn Owls** often die from

collisions with cars as the owls hunt roadside verges - a dead bird was found beside the A23 just north of Brighton on Jan 5

**Long-eared Owl:** With no **Tawny Owls** present on the Isle of Wight their niche is taken by **Long-eared** but there have been relatively few reports of them in the last few months. On Dec 30, however, a group of four were flushed by a **Buzzard** from cover on the hills south of Newport - presumably by day.

**Short-eared Owl:** Two could still be seen hunting over fields west of Pagham Harbour on Jan 1

**Kingfisher:** I had a good sighting of one flying up the Brockhampton stream (west of Budds Farm) on Jan 1 - unlike last winter there have been few sightings at Langstone Mill Pond (last report I have from there was on Nov 21)

**Hoopoe:** One which arrived at Kingsley Common (east of Alton) on Dec 24 was still being seen on Jan 5

**Woodlark:** Michael Prior tells us that a flock of 14 were feeding in stubble in the East Park fields at Stansted on Jan 1

**Skylark:** A flock of more than 100 were feeding in stubble near South Warnborough (near Hook in north Hampshire) on Jan 3

**Shorelark:** The Rye Harbour bird was still there on Jan 4

**Black Redstart:** One was seen at Portchester Castle on Jan 3

**Stonechat:** At least one was at the Langstone South Moors on Jan 2

**Fieldfare:** John Clark saw more than 600 come to a night roost in the Greywell area west of Fleet in north Hampshire on Dec 31

**Mistle Thrush:** I read on John Goodspeed's website that someone had seen "Redwings among Mistle Thrushes" in Staunton Country Park (north of Havant) on Jan 2 but have no further details - Mistle Thrushes are nowadays in very short supply and I have not yet seen one in the Havant area this year

**Cetti's Warbler:** One sang from the vegetation surrounding Budds Farm pools while I was there on Jan 1

**Hume's Leaf Warbler:** This rare vagrant is almost indistinguishable from a **Yellow-browed Warbler** except for a di-syllabic call which has the stress on the start rather than the end syllable. A bird generally agreed to be this species has been in the Horseshoe Plantation on Beachy Head from Dec 29 to Jan 5 at least

**Firecrest:** Several local reports - on Dec 24 Michael Prior had one in his Woodberry Lane garden at Rowlands Castle, on Dec 29 there were reports from the Fordwater Road area of Chichester and from Church Norton on Pagham Harbour, and on Jan 1 Mike Collins had one in the north of Stansted Forest close to the footpath entering the wood east of the road almost opposite Forestside Church.

**Tree Creeper:** I had good views of one in Stansted Forest on Jan 5

**Jackdaw:** More than 2150 birds came to a night roost in the Greywell area west of Fleet in north Hampshire on Dec 31 (some 3000 **Starlings** also came to roost there)

**Brambling:** Among several recent reports there is a claim of a 1000+ flock at Longwood Warren (east of Winchester) on Dec 24.

**Greenfinch:** As these are in very short supply at the moment I was pleased to hear one trilling as it flew over Havant on New Year's Day

**Linnet:** Dan Houghton reported a flock with more than 1100 birds seen in fields in the Chilling area between Titchfield and Hook on Dec 30 - John Clark commented that this would be the second largest flock recorded in Hampshire after one of 2000 birds seen at Morestead (Winchester area) in 1974

**Twite:** The last report I have seen of the Keyhaven area bird was dated Dec 30

**Hawfinch:** Four were seen at the Mercer's Way site in Romsey on Jan 3 and at least 7 were using the Rhinefield arboretum roost in the New Forest on Jan 2. Eight were seen in the Chichester West Dean Woods on Jan 5

**Yellowhammer:** Although these remain scarce in south east Hampshire there are two recent reports of flocks of 20 a little further north - in the Shalden area north west of Alton on Jan 2 and in the Greywell area west of Fleet on Dec 31

## INSECTS

### Butterflies

**Red Admiral:** One seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Dec 30

**Peacock:** One seen at Mouth Harry (Lewes area) on Dec 26

### Moths

**Small Purple Flat-body (0691 - *Agonopterix purpurea*):** This tiny micro is mostly seen in August and has not been recorded in Hampshire during winter months - that may be because it does not appear in outdoor moth traps at this time of year but one was found on Jan 2 by searching the inside walls of a cottage in Sussex.

**Garden Cosmet (0892 - *Mompha subbistrigella*):** - Also found indoors on cottage walls in Sussex on Jan 2

**Light Brown Apple moth (0998 - *Epiphyas postvittana*):** Four in a trap at Newhaven on Dec 31

**December Moth (1631 - *Poecilocampa populi*):** One at Haywards Heath on Dec 24 and another at Newhaven on Dec 31

**Common Quaker (2187 - *Orthosia stabilis*):** Perhaps the least expected species at this time of year (mainly seen in March and April) one was trapped in the Haywards Heath area on Dec 24

### Other Insects

**Liancalus virens:** Sandstone rocks in the Hastings cliffs capture heat from the sun and create a warmer than average microclimate which is also wet from rain percolating through the porous rock. Andy Phillips of the Hastings Country Park wrote (entry for Jan 2 on the RX website) .. "This probably accounts for the amount of invertebrate life on the wing here recently, providing prey for a small number of black redstarts, pied wagtails and grey wagtails wintering on the undercliff. The most notable species on the wing has been the scarce fly **Liancalus virens**. This colourful fly lives amongst the mosses, liverworts and algae growing under and beside waterfalls and fast running water. The species is very common beside the Ecclesbourne waterfall where the Ecclesbourne stream falls over the cliff edge onto the beach, but can be very difficult to find anywhere else in Sussex". This fly is one of the **Long-legged (Dolichopid) Flies** which look slightly like Mosquitos.

**Shore Ant (Temnothorax albipennis):** It was assumed that this rare species living on the shingle at Dungeness would be hibernating at this time but when a Sea Kale stem was blown from the beach against a fence on Jan 5 the stem broke and revealed active (if sluggish) ants within - they are clearly able to survive hard frost but have little defence against gales blowing away their homes

## PLANTS

**A total of 26 species seen in flower so far this year.** Not counted or listed below is **Common Whitlowgrass** which has white flower buds about to open on one of the plants in Waterloo Road, Havant, on Jan 6

**Hairy Buttercup:** A surprise find on the last day of 2007 was a single plant of **Hairy Buttercup** flowering in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Dec 31

**Sticky Mouse-ear:** Flowering in Havant on Dec 31

**Musk Mallow:** A couple of plants still flowering in Marlborough Park (Denvilles area of Havant) on Dec 31

**Goat Willow:** At the Arundel Wildfowl Reserve on Jan 1 Brian Fellows noted that some of the Willows had lost the brown leathery outer cover of their flower buds to reveal the silky white hairs which form a secondary cover to the 'Pussy Paw' catkins which will start to open on some trees during January

**Fools Parsley:** Also flowering in Marlborough Park on Dec 31

**Stone Parsley:** One or two white flowers found on a plant in a sheltered situation on the Emsworth west shore on Jan 5

**Angelica:** Two plants in full flower at the Arundel Wildfowl Trust reserve on Jan 1 were the best find of the New Year so far

**Primrose:** Flowers were out on wild plants in woodland at Durlston country park on Jan 1

**Wood Sage:** A very few flowers still to be found on one plant in Stansted Forest on Jan 5

**Water Forget-me-not:** Several plants flowering by the Langbrook stream in Havant on Jan 1 (by the water wheel immediately north of the A27)

**Creeping Comfrey:** A garden flower but its first flowers of the year were a welcome sight in Havant on Jan 2. Another garden flower also seen for the first time on Jan 2 was **Lungwort**

**Sea Aster:** A single plant in full flower on Jan 2 at the Langstone South Moors where sea water seeps out of the concrete cover to the old sewage pipe

**Giant Butterbur:** Not yet in flower but plenty of developing plants at the Langstone site by the Langbrook stream on Jan 2

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Wild Goat:** I occasionally see references to these in the Isle of Wight news as I think several roam the open areas of the south coast of the Island but I was surprised to see a photo of two Goats which appeared on the Portland website on Jan 1. I have never been sure of the origin and exact species of the IoW animals but we are told that those on Portland are a small herd of **British Primitive Goats** that were released there last year to exercise natural scrub control (which they are good at). Enquiring via Google I found a web page for a **British Feral Goat Research Group** and on it I read - "The **British Primitive Goat** (a feral goat with no modern goat blood in it) is now one of our rarer breeds. All our domestic breeds of today are descended from foreign imports, and our primitive breed would have died out completely but for the fact that some escaped or were turned loose on the hills to run wild. But having all died out in domestication our feral population has been in decline for some time. Recent large culls (eg circa 1,200 in Galloway) have seen numbers drop dramatically. Known introgression with modern breeds has spoiled some herds. The number of true **British Primitive Goats** has therefore been severely reduced (possibly to circa 1,500). Urgent action is needed to protect, preserve and promote what is rapidly becoming a remnant of our Primitive breed".

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 31 - JAN 6 (WEEK 1 OF 2008)

### [Sun 6 Jan](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### [Summary of past week's news](#)

My latest weekly summary of reports is now available by clicking [Weekly Summary](#) here

### [Sat 5 Jan](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## Woodland birds

A visit to Stansted Forest this morning brought my yearlist up to 70 species with some woodland birds. At the Groves I added **Nuthatch, Jay, Pheasant** and **Coal Tit** but at the northern boundary of the woodland (opposite Forestside Church) I did better with **Tree Creeper** and **Buzzard** (though I did not get **Marsh Tit** nor the **Firecrest** which had been seen here on New Year's Day). **Rook** also went on the list here.

## **Stone Parsley and Common Whitlowgrass**

This afternoon I spent a few minutes in the Nore Barn shore area of Emsworth on the off chance of seeing the **Spotted Redshank** or **Greenshank** but neither was visible. I did however get a surprise at finding flowers still showing on a plant of **Stone Parsley** sheltering under the wall of one of the seafront properties to bring my January flowering list to a minimal 23 species - including very last gasp flowers on **Wood Sage** seen this morning at Stansted but not including the **Common Whitlowgrass** lining Waterloo Road in Havant on which I found white flower buds showing on just one plant yesterday (and they had not opened by Sunday morning). A better addition seen in my garden yesterday was **Thyme-leaved Speedwell**.

## [Wed 2 Jan](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## **Snipe and Stonechat on the South Moors**

On my way down the Langbrook stream footpath this afternoon I checked out the patch of rough ground on which the **Giant Butterbur (Petasites japonicus)** should soon be flowering (in 2007 I saw several flowers as early as Feb 3). This year they could well flower earlier.

Following the path into the South Moors area I first found **Butcher's Broom** in flower before getting a surprise at seeing a fresh looking plant of **Sea Aster** in flower, growing in a wet puddle beside the concrete housing which used to cover the pipes carrying sewage from Havant's old sewage farm down to the harbour - nowadays no sewage flows down but each high tide brings sea water up inside the concrete housing and this salt water escapes onto the grassland through cracks in the concrete.

A walk around the wetland areas of the Moors eventually gave me a single **Snipe** and then a single **Stonechat**.

Earlier in the day I had noted **Intermediate Periwinkle** still flowering around Havant Health Centre and elsewhere around Havant found **Feverfew** and **Herb Robert** flowering. The day also brought first sightings of flowers on two garden plants - **Creeping Comfrey** and **Lungwort**.

## Mid-week Summary

## **BIRDS**

[\(Skip to Insects\)](#)

**New Year's Day bird races:** From the news I have seen so far it seems that a new Hampshire record has been set by Steve Keen who ticked 111 species on New Year's Day (not perhaps a day list record compared to totals that are achieved in May and approach 150 but probably the most that has ever been achieved in the short daylight hours and cold conditions of New Year's Day). John Norton and Peter Raby also beat the 100 mark with 103 and on the Isle of Wight Derek Hale scored 93. The highest scores I have seen claimed by Sussex teams are 85 and 81 respectively but I am pretty sure these will be beaten by others in that county.

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**Sooty Shearwater:** Autumn passage sightings of this species ceased after Nov 18 and the only report since then has been of one passing Sandy Point on Hayling on Dec 1 with another seen at Dungeness on Jan 2

**Bittern:** Four were reported at Titchfield Haven on Dec 21 and on Jan 1 there was proof of two at the Blashford Lakes but at both sites you will be lucky to see even one of these elusive birds

**Cattle Egret:** It seems likely that there are still six in the Weymouth area, one at Harbridge (upstream of Ringwood), one at Lavant (Chichester) and one at Rodmell near Lewes

**Great White Egret:** One continues to be regularly seen at the Blashford Lakes up to at least Jan 1 when there was a single report of one briefly by the Sussex Ouse near Southease (this one seen again at Piddinghoe on Jan 2)

**Pink-foot Goose:** Two of these were seen by the River Avon on both the Dorset and Hampshire sides of the county boundary in the Avon Causeway area on Dec 31

**Red-breasted Goose:** On Jan 1 the bird which is regularly seen by day at West Wittering flew west at dusk to roost off the east Hayling shore (I think in the Mengham Rithe area)

**Pintail:** I only saw a single male in the Chalkdock area of Langstone Harbour on Jan 1 but along the coast at Hook (Warsash) 45 were present, probably in addition to 11 seen at Titchfield Haven on Dec 31

**Pochard:** On Dec 30 Mike Collins noted that a male among the birds on Budds Farm pools was fitted with a 'bill saddle' marker.

**Scaup:** On Jan 1 the number at Abbotsbury in Dorset was up to 12 with another 10 still in Poole Harbour. One was at Normandy (Lymington) on Dec 31 but I think it left overnight and could not be found on Jan 1

**Eider:** The number on the sea off Titchfield Haven was up to 69 on Dec 31 (with 65+ being reported on Jan 1)

**Long-tailed Duck:** On Jan 1 one remained in Hove lagoon (Brighton), three were in Portland Harbour and five in Poole Harbour with one or two probably still present in the Rye Harbour area. Brian Fellows saw at least two (presumably part of the collection) at the Arundel reserve on Jan 1 and was fascinated to hear these two males 'howling like small dogs'.

**Smew:** One seen on Swanbourne Lake at Arundel on Jan 1 was probably part of the Wildfowl Trust collection which had flown over the fence - I have not heard of any Smew anywhere west of the Rye Bay area along the south coast this winter.

**White-tailed Sea Eagle:** Still being seen in the Andover area on Jan 2

**Peregrine:** On Jan 1 one was perched on the nestbox on the chimney of the Shoreham power station - not sure if this was by chance or if it indicated the start of their breeding season

**Water Rail:** A bonus for my New Year's Day list was the sight of a Water Rail openly preening among the vegetation around Budds Farm pools - I watched it for at least a minute before it strode off purposefully into the surrounding cover. (Being behind schedule in writing this summary I have already seen that Brian Fellows has also seen a Water Rail by the Lumley stream at Emsworth on Jan 3)

**Great Bustard:** One of these (presumably a wanderer from Salisbury Plain) was seen in a field near the A35 in the Dorchester area on Dec 30. In Oct 2005 one of these wing-tagged birds caused a minor sensation by flying around the Portland Bill observatory at eye level while it was photographed - I think one or more escapees were in Dorset until March 2006 when they returned to Salisbury Plain.

**Avocet:** Six were in Pagham Harbour on Dec 30 but the only one I have seen claimed on New Year's Day was the single bird wintering in Christchurch Harbour

**Golden Plover:** The species was claimed as seen 'somewhere on Hayling Island' on New Year's Day when 25 were seen in the Medina estuary at Cowes (IoW). The count at Rye Harbour on Jan 2 was 1700

**Knot:** Around 300 were seen in Pagham Harbour on Dec 29 and around 100 were in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Jan 1 with at least one seen from Hayling

**Sanderling:** Jan 1 found an estimated count of 80 on the Ryde west sands (IoW) with some seen on Hayling

**Purple Sandpiper:** No Hampshire reports for Jan 1 but 8 were seen at Southsea Castle on Jan 3

**Jack Snipe:** Simon Ingram had one at Eastleigh Lakeside as an early Christmas present on Dec 24 when another was seen in the Worthing area (at Ferring Rife)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** As usual after Christmas some of these birds are moving from the coastal mud to wet grassland. On Dec 31 Titchfield Haven had 239 (not a significant increase as 400 had been there in November and 313 had been seen on Dec 23) but Pulborough Brooks (which had no more than 3 before Christmas) had 15 on Jan 1 and 26 on Jan 2. No news so far from the Avon Valley

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** One was seen in **full summer plumage** at West Wittering on Jan 1 and maybe the same bird was at Titchfield Haven area on Jan 2 (I think it is not unknown for several wader species to have a genetic disorder which gives them summer plumage in the winter and non-breeding plumage in the summer)

**Common Sandpiper:** I failed to see the wintering bird when I was in the Broadmarsh-Budds Farm area on Jan 1 but Peter Raby confirms it was still there (he also saw **Greenshank** there). Inland Dave Ryves had 3 of these Sandpipers at Curbridge on the River Hamble and the regular bird was still at Christchurch Harbour. On Jan 2 two Common Sandpipers were seen by the River Arun in the Ford area south of Arundel

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still at the Cockle Pond on Jan 1

**Iceland Gull:** The bird which returned to Titchfield Haven area on Dec 23 was still around on Jan 2 (but the Shoreham Harbour **Glaucous Gull** seems to have departed on Dec 29)

**Sandwich Tern:** At least one was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour throughout December (with five seen from Black Point on Dec 8) but I have seen no January reports so far - no doubt at least one is still around.

**Barn Owl:** One was hunting over the East Park at Stansted at 7:30am on Dec 24 and the latest news includes daytime sightings of these birds at Walland Marsh and Pannel Valley (both near Rye), Rye Harbour, Steyning Brooks on the R Adur and West Bexington near Weymouth. Following reports of late youngsters fledging in November I am not sure if these are young birds desperately trying to find food in order to survive or adults needing extra food as they come into breeding condition (or just generally hungry birds)

**Woodlark:** Michael Prior tells us that a flock of 14 were feeding in stubble in the East Park fields at Stansted on Jan 1

**Shorelark:** The Rye Harbour bird was still there on Jan 1 and 2

**Stonechat:** At least one was at the Langstone South Moors on Jan 2

**Fieldfare:** John Clark saw more than 600 come to a night roost in the Greywell area west of Fleet in north Hampshire on Dec 31

**Cetti's Warbler:** One sang from the vegetation surrounding Budds Farm pools while I was there on Jan 1

**Hume's Leaf Warbler:** This rare vagrant is almost indistinguishable from a **Yellow-browed Warbler** except for a di-syllabic call which has the stress on the start rather than the end syllable. A bird generally agreed to be this species has been in the Horseshoe Plantation on Beachy Head from Dec 29 to Jan 2 at least

**Firecrest:** Several local reports - on Dec 24 Michael Prior had one in his Woodberry Lane garden at Rowlands Castle, on Dec 29 there were reports from the Fordwater Road area of Chichester and from Church Norton on Pagham Harbour, and on Jan 1 Mike Collins had one in the north of Stansted Forest close to the footpath entering the wood east of the road almost opposite Forestside Church.

**Jackdaw:** More than 2150 birds came to a night roost in the Greywell area west of Fleet in north Hampshire on Dec 31 (some 3000 **Starlings** also came to roost there)

**Brambling:** Among several recent reports there is a claim of a 1000+ flock at Longwood Warren (east of Winchester) on Dec 24

**Greenfinch:** As these are in very short supply at the moment I was pleased to hear one trilling as it flew over Havant on New Year's Day

**Linnet:** Dan Houghton reported a flock with more than 1100 birds seen in fields in the Chilling area between Titchfield and Hook on Dec 30 - John Clark commented that this would be the second largest flock recorded in Hampshire after one of 2000 birds seen at Morestead (Winchester area) in 1974

**Twite:** The last report I have seen of the Keyhaven area bird was dated Dec 30

**Hawfinch:** Four were seen at the Mercer's Way site in Romsey on Jan 3 and at least 7 were using the Rhinefield arboretum roost in the New Forest on Jan 2. Others can probably be seen in the Chichester West Dean Woods.

## **INSECTS**

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### **Butterflies**

**Red Admiral:** One seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Dec 30

**Peacock:** One seen at Mouth Harry (Lewes area) on Dec 26

### **Moths**

**Light Brown Apple moth (*Epiphyas postvittana*):** Four in a trap at Newhaven on Dec 31

**December Moth:** One at Haywards Heath on Dec 24 and another at Newhaven on Dec 31

**Common Quaker:** Perhaps the least expected species at this time of year (mainly seen in March and April) one was trapped in the Haywards Heath area on Dec 24

## Other Insects

**Liancalus virens:** Sandstone rocks in the Hastings cliffs capture heat from the sun and create a warmer than average microclimate which is also wet from rain percolating through the porous rock. Andy Phillips of the Hastings Country Park wrote (entry for Jan 2 on the RX website) .. "This probably accounts for the amount of invertebrate life on the wing here recently, providing prey for a small number of black redstarts, pied wagtails and grey wagtails wintering on the undercliff. The most notable species on the wing has been the scarce fly **Liancalus virens**. This colourful fly lives amongst the mosses, liverworts and algae growing under and beside waterfalls and fast running water. The species is very common beside the Ecclesbourne waterfall where the Ecclesbourne stream falls over the cliff edge onto the beach, but can be very difficult to find anywhere else in Sussex". This fly is one of the **Long-legged (Dolichopid) Flies** which look slightly like Mosquitos.

## PLANTS

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Hairy Buttercup:** A surprise find on the last day of 2007 was a single plant of **Hairy Buttercup** flowering in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Dec 31

**Sticky Mouse-ear:** Flowering in Havant on Dec 31

**Musk Mallow:** A couple of plants still flowering in Marlborough Park (Denvilles area of Havant) on Dec 31

**Goat Willow:** At the Arundel Wildfowl Reserve on Jan 1 Brian Fellows noted that some of the Willows had lost the brown leathery outer cover of their flower buds to reveal the silky white hairs which form a secondary cover to the 'Pussy Paw' catkins which will start to open on some trees during January

**Fools Parsley:** Also flowering in Marlborough Park on Dec 31

**Angelica:** Two plants in full flower at the Arundel Wildfowl Trust reserve on Jan 1 were the best find of the New Year so far

**Primrose:** Flowers were out on wild plants in woodland at Durlston country park on Jan 1

**Water Forget-me-not:** Several plants flowering by the Langbrook stream in Havant on Jan 1 (by the water wheel immediately north of the A27)

**Creeping Comfrey:** A garden flower but its first flowers of the year were a welcome sight in Havant on Jan 2. Another garden flower also seen for the first time on Jan 2 was **Lungwort**

**Sea Aster:** A single plant in full flower on Jan 2 at the Langstone South Moors where sea water seeps out of the concrete cover to the old sewage pipe

**Giant Butterbur:** Not yet in flower but plenty of developing plants at the Langstone site by the Langbrook stream on Jan 2

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Wild Goat:** I occasionally see references to these in the Isle of Wight news as I think several roam the open areas of the south coast of the Island but I was surprised to see a photo of two Goats which appeared on the Portland website on Jan 1. I have never been sure of the origin and exact species of the IoW animals but we are told that those on Portland are a small herd of **British Primitive Goats** that were released on Portland Island last year to exercise natural scrub control (which they are good at). Enquiring via Google I found a web page for a **British Feral Goat Research Group** and on it I read - "The **British Primitive Goat** (a feral goat with no modern goat blood in it) is now one of our rarer breeds. All our domestic breeds of today are descended from foreign imports, and our primitive breed would have died out completely but for the fact that some escaped or were turned loose on the hills to run wild. But having all died out in domestication our feral population has been in decline for some time. Recent large culls (eg circa 1,200 in Galloway) have seen numbers drop dramatically. Known introgression with modern breeds has spoiled some herds. The number of true **British Primitive Goats** has therefore been severely reduced (possibly to circa 1,500). Urgent action is needed to protect, preserve and promote what is rapidly becoming a remnant of our Primitive breed".

## **Tue 1 Jan**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **A short outing to start my 2008 Year List**

I was unable to make my usual dawn start for a full day's birding but nevertheless I had 15 species on my list before I left home, including singing **Song Thrush** and **Wren** as well as the more expected **Woodpigeon**, **Collared Dove**, **Dunnock** and **Great Tit**.

When I was able to get away I found my bike had a flat tyre causing another 20 mins delay before I was off and heard a **Starling** singing a solo from a chimney pot (a definite song rather than communal chatter).

Arriving at Broadmarsh I added another 23 species of waders, wildfowl and gulls. Best among them was a flock of **11 Black-necked Grebe** with a single male **Pintail** as a nice bonus. Among the gulls I had one **Great Blackback** standing close to a lone Scandinavian **Lesser Blackback** to show the size difference as well as the latter's yellow legs.

Heading back along Harts Farm Way I was accompanied by the calls of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** making a lengthy flight eastward and at the lower of the two bridges over the Brockhampton stream I had an excellent view of the **Kingfisher** which started off downstream then changed its mind and came back under the bridge on which I was standing to disappear upstream.

At the foot of Budds Mound on the Southmoor Lane side I watched a flock of **Goldfinch** and saw a single **Chiffchaff** among them before I climbed to overlook the pools on which I saw neither a **Ruddy Duck** nor the **Fudge Duck** but did add **Teal, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Gadwall** and **Shoveler** to my list plus an excellent bonus telescope view of a **Water Rail** among the water's edge vegetation preening before defecating and strolling off. A lesser bonus here was **Cetti's Warbler** song and a sight of two **Green Woodpeckers** flying over the pools.

At this point I found I had another puncture in my bike's front tyre and so had to walk home along the South Moors shore where I had more good luck when four unidentified small birds flew over me and landed in Blackthorn scrub - getting my scope onto where they had disappeared I was lucky to get a good view of **Reed Buntings**.

From Mill Lane I headed up the Billy Trail and as I passed Wade Court a **Grey Wagtail** flew up from the stream - even better a tiny bird gave me an overhead silhouette that could only have been a **Gold** or **Firecrest** and I felt quite justified in listing it as a **Goldcrest** (in recent winter's there has usually been a **Goldcrest** in the bushes and Holm Oaks hereabouts and about ten years ago there was a regular **Firecrest** here for one winter)

**Long Tailed Tit** was the last bird on the list, heard and seen in the trees by the Havant Museum carpark, bringing my bird species total for the day to exactly 60 species.

To complete the day's news I found a few flowers during my outing - **Water Forget-me-not** was still out by the Langbrook stream water wheel and in garden situations I saw new flowers on two semi-wild species, **Creeping Comfrey** and **Lungwort**

**[Mon 31 Dec](#)**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

**Hairy Buttercup flowering in Havant cemetery**

A quick look at the Eastern Road cemetery today gave me an end of year bonus in a single freshly flowering plant of **Hairy Buttercup** (possibly **Bulbous** but I could not detect a bulb at the base of the plant). **Ox-eye Daisy** was also still in flower here.

Continuing north up New Lane I found **Cow Parsley** flowering near the Colt factory but nothing of interest in the Bartons Road playing fields.

Coming back via Denvilles I diverted into the Marlborough Park cul de sac and found both **Fools Parsley** and **Musk Mallow** still flowering as they had been before Christmas

