

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 24 - 30 (WEEK 52 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers** : Plenty of **Red-throated** this week with as many as 24 to be seen off Selsey Bill on Dec 28 and around 20 in Christchurch Harbour on Dec 24 with just 1393 seen off The Hague in the Netherlands on Dec 26. The only place to see more than one **Black-throated** was Anstruther in Scotland with 3 on Dec 27 but singles were seen at Sandy Point (Hayling Island) on Dec 23, Christchurch Harbour on that day and Dec 24, with one in the Stokes Bay area of Gosport on Dec 27 and 28. On Dec 23 Torbay in Devon had 10 **Great Northern** and on Dec 24 there were 11 at Gerrans Bay (south Cornwall) while on Dec 27 Selsey Bill had 5, Portland Harbour had 4 and there was one in Southampton Water - on Dec 28 one even came into the mouth of Langstone Harbour.

**Grebes** : No mention of the east Solent **Great Crested** this week but there were 33 in the Torbay area of Devon on Dec 23 and 55 off Folkestone on Dec 27. Single **Red-necked** were heading west past Selsey Bill on Dec 27, Weymouth Bay in Dorset on Dec 26 and Gerrans Bay in Cornwall on Dec 23. Portland Harbour had the most **Slavonian** (but only 4 on Dec 27 with Selsey Bill coming second with 3 on Dec 23). Dorset had no counts of **Black-necked** higher than 31 on Dec 21 when 21 were in Portland Harbour and another 10 in the Studland area, and this was topped by Cornwall where 35 were reported in Carrick Roads (Falmouth) on Dec 23. Devon reported no more than 3 in Torbay on Dec 24

**Balearic Shearwater** : There were plenty of these in the English Channel in the first half of October but only the occasional single has been seen since Oct 19 until this week when more than 3 were in Carbis Bay (Cornwall) on Dec 28 and one got as far east as Portland on Dec 27

**Leach's Storm Petrel** : One at Selsey Bill on Dec 27 was rarity of the week there

**Bittern** : Seen this week at Titchfield Haven (two birds), Marazion and Falmouth in Cornwall, Rye Harbour, and the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood (two).

**Great White Egret** : RBA told us on Dec 27 that there were at least 9 in the UK and five of these seem to have been at Dungeness RSPB with another being the regular at Bickerley Common/Blashford Lakes beside the Hampshire Avon

**Glossy Ibis** : The only one reported this week was the regular at Bickerley Common (just south of Ringwood in the Avon Valley) which has been there since Dec 2 (possibly the same bird which flew in over Christchurch Harbour on Oct 25 but headed north to spend some time in Pembrokeshire before returning to the Hampshire Avon - I have no facts to back up this conjecture)

**Spoonbill** : The flock of up to 16 which have been in Poole Harbour since mid-November have not been reported since Dec 17 but the single bird seen in the Scillies since Dec 4 suddenly increased to four on Dec 18

**Bewick's Swan** : A herd of 10 which appeared in the Adur valley near Henfield on Dec 18 had become 17 birds since Dec 24 though they have not been reported since Dec 28

**Red-breasted Goose** : The Farlington Marshes bird was still present on Dec 27 as was the Sussex bird in the Adur valley

**Pintail** : The Avon valley flock south of Ringwood had increased from 100 on Dec 21 to 400 on Dec 27

**Red Crested Pochard** : One made a monthly appearance at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Dec 24 (it had been there on Nov 23)

**Scaup** : A male flying west past Selsey Bill on Dec 28 was an unexpected tick there

**Eider** : A male was off East Head in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Dec 28 - the first report from inside the harbour since the end of November when two were seen there on a couple of days

**Smew** : A redhead has been reported at the Longham Lakes north of Bournemouth on both Dec 21 and Dec 24 when there were also seven at the RSPB Dungeness reserve

**Goosander** : Up to 45 were at the Blashford Lakes in November but there have been no reports from there in December until Dec 24 when 64 were seen (I suspect these birds disperse during the day and do not re-appear to roost until most visitors have left). Another first report for this winter of a regular roost at Bramshill Plantation on the Hants/Berks border comes from John Clark who saw 17 there on Dec 28

**Marsh Harrier** : Up to 4 seen at Titchfield Haven this week

**Hen Harrier** : One seen around Arne to the west of Poole Harbour and possibly two in the New Forest with one seen over Yew Tree Heath near Beaulieu Road Station and another over Ocknell Plain nine miles north west as the Harrier flies

**Kestrel** : A good many years ago I was surprised to see a **Barn Owl mugged of its vole prey** at Amberley Wild Brooks by a **Kestrel** which flew straight at and crashed into the Owl in its attempt to snatch the vole from the Owl's talons as soon as the Owl became airborne with its meal. I mention this because a similar snatch and grab was seen on Dec 21 this week at the Pevensey Levels near Eastbourne, the only difference was that the Kestrel's victim here was a **Short-eared Owl** (which learnt its lesson, staying on the ground to eat a second vole and not taking off to expose itself to the Kestrel for a second time).

**Merlin** : As I was going through this week's reports on the internet it occurred to me that there seemed to be a shortage of Merlin sightings this winter so I attempted to capture all current reports of this species for this week but could only find two from Dorset (Christchurch Harbour and Wool), one from Cornwall

(Bodmin Moor), two from Sussex (one at The Burgh where the Arun cuts through the South Downs and one at Rye Harbour). The only Hampshire report was not from the sort of open site such as Farlington Marshes where this species is usually present - though rarely seen - but from a town rooftop in Havant West Street rousing my scepticism (could this have been a Kestrel) as there was no backing info about the bird's plumage or behaviour (other than perching on a roof) to support this unusual claim.

**Avocet** : On Christmas Day a flock of 37 were in Broom Channel of Langstone Harbour (between Farlington Marshes and the Eastern Road into Portsmouth) but there were no reports from Sussex and the nearest were 316 in Poole Harbour at Brownsea Island

**Purple Sandpiper** : The number seen at Southsea Castle this winter reached 10 on Dec 7 but all other counts there have been in single figures until this week when 17 were seen on Dec 23, not quite matching counts at Christchurch Harbour of 18 on Dec 28 and 24 on Dec 19 though we did exceed any recent Sussex counts (12 at Shoreham on Dec 15 and 10 at Newhaven on Nov 13)

**Ruff** : Dec 27 brought 4 to Pagham Harbour North Walls (uncommon there) and 2 to Bisterne in the Hampshire Avon valley

**Woodcock** : Hampshire was the only county to report sightings this week with two flushed deep in the Botley Woods north of Fareham and one at Longwood Warren near Cheesefoot Head to the east of Winchester

**Blacktailed Godwit** : A couple of probable record counts this week were made on Dec 27 with 1070 at Pagham Harbour North Walls and 4000 in the Hampshire Avon valley at Bisterne (these were balanced by a notable shortage of the birds in Chichester Harbour)

**Med Gull** : Also in short supply in Langstone Harbour at this time of year but at least two were present in the Eastney Lake area - not sure where the birds are currently to be found, the last report which I felt of sufficient interest to note was of 176 at Weymouth (Ferrybridge) on Oct 30. I can only find 21 reports of Hampshire sightings since the end of October and other than four seen at the mouth of the R Itchen in Southampton on Dec 29 and three on the flooded University fields (just south of the Milton reclamation on the south east shore of Porstsea Island), two at Sandy Point, Hayling Island, on Nov 25 and two further up the Itchen in Southampton (Riverside Park) on Nov 30, these were all of single birds.

**Ring Billed Gull** : The Gosport bird was around the Cockle Pond on Dec 25 and 26

**Common Gull** : A flock of more than 261 were seen around Newlands Farm (between Fareham and Stubbington) on Dec 25 while another bird got into the news this week when it was captured on film at the Arundel Wildfowl Reserve on Dec 22 swallowing a large Eel that looked to big to fit into the bird's crop (see the

photos in Brian Fellows diary entry for Dec 22 at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> or for a short cut to the first of these photos go to <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x904-common-gull-eel-1-RT.jpg>.)

**Sandwich Tern** : On Dec 27 5 were seen at the mouth of Chichester Harbour and 1 at Christchurch Harbour but the total still on the French Normandie coast at Ouistreham on that day was still 102

**Guillemot** : Locally one was seen at Sandy Point on Hayling Island on Dec 23 and three were in Southampton Water (Weston Shore) on Dec 27.

**Razorbill** : Again of local interest among the thousands of Auks currently in the English Channel area were one at Sandy Point and 9 in Southampton Water this week

**Black Guillemot** : One of these (often called 'Tysties') was in Portland Harbour on Dec 26

**Short-eared Owl** : I have already mentioned that one was hunting the Pevensey Levels this week when it was robbed of its prey by a Kestrel. Another Sussex bird was at Lewes Brooks, one was in Dorset at Wyke Down near Cranborne Chase and two were not far away in Hampshire at Whitsbury in the Fordingbridge area

**Buff-bellied Pipit** : A Boxing Day present for the twitchers was the arrival of a **second American vagrant Buff-bellied Pipit** at the Queen Mary Reservoir near Heathrow to join the first which has been there since Dec 14 (I wonder when birds will learn to stow away in the undercarriage of transatlantic aircraft? there must be room for them but could they withstand the cold and lack of oxygen?)

**Dipper** : An even better Christmas present for Hampshire birders was found by Simon Woolley on Dec 30 when cycling up the Avon valley from Ringwood towards Fordingbridge and turning off the busy A338 on the minor loop road which runs alongside the Avon at Bickton. I have fond memories of this place from when I lived at North Gorley during the war and the river at Bickton (the pool below the second weir upstream from the Mill) was the swimming pool used by us local children in the summer after we had enjoyed the Yellow Wagtails nesting on the watermeadows on the west side of the river (I think these were the last to be properly managed as working Water Meadows in the UK before the academics and conservationists started to run them as 'living museums' such as the Harnham Water Meadows near Salisbury and the Iron Age Village near Petersfield). A less pleasant memory is of seeing a carthorse dead (from old age and hard work) on the main road to Fordingbridge at the cross roads where you turn off to Bickton with the wagon it had been pulling standing with empty shafts on the road. I haven't made a detailed check but I think it is quite a few years since **a Dipper was last seen in Hampshire** - the last record I can find is of one by the River Test near Overton in December 2003, preceded by one in the Test valley in 1997. There were three sightings by the Test in 1996 while 1995 brought one to the Meon Valley as well as one in the Test Valley but this search has not

unearthed my memories of the years in which **breeding by the Test at Romsey** occurred. Before I learnt that it was a waste of time trying to make suggestions for the **improvement of the annual Hampshire Bird Report** I thought it would be a good idea to include a mention of every bird on the Hampshire list in every issue with a one line entry telling you the year in which that bird was last seen in the county so that you could quickly turn to that volume to see the detail (and of course that entry would point you back to the year of the previous sighting) but I was told that the extra cost of all that paper made the suggestion impossible to put into effect (I reckon the objective could be achieved at the cost of no more than one additional page per year as you only have to do it for those species which do not get an annual mention and it would have the double benefit of presenting the full list of Hampshire species in each year's report and save the work of searching through every volume which I had to do in this case to find the last Dipper entries listed above)

**Waxwing** : On Dec 21 RBA had reports from 43 counties with flocks of 211 in Gloucestershire, 100 in each of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, 93 in Yorkshire and 90 in Essex and on Dec 24 they were reported in 37 countries with a flock of 470 in Yorkshire. Here in the south most reports came from Sussex with a flock of up to 20 in Eastbourne and 11 at Lewes plus 10 at Hastings (Fairlight), 20 at Hailsham and 15 at Pease Pottage near Crawley but there were 15 to be seen at the North Camp railway station in Farnborough (Hants), 43 at a Tesco store at Swalecliffe on the north Kent Coast and 12 in Folkestone and one lost bird seemed to be stuck in the Scillies with only 3 reported in Dorset and none in Devon or Cornwall

**Fieldfare** : On Dec 28 two reports showed birds coming back into Hampshire - a flock of 100 were seen in the Northington area near Alresford and 70 were on the Solent shore at Chilling near Warsash (neither accompanied by Redwings)

**Great Grey Shrike** : Two new birds seem to have reached Britain but are currently to be found in Surrey and Oxon respectively

**Magpie** : A night roost of around 200 birds was seen at Southampton Common on Dec 23

**Hawfinch** : I see that up to 14 birds were seen entering the New Forest roost on Dec 23

**Foreign Birds** : As Steve Copsey continues with the Navy's Ice Patrol around the Antarctic he was almost due south of Cape Horn this week and the only 'new' birds he had to show us through his photos were **Pale-face Sheathbills** and **Snow Petrels** . Follow his Blog at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> or see a couple of his photos directly at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/12/Snow-Petrel-1-Gerlache-Straits-Antarctica-10-Dec-20121.jpg> and <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/12/Pale-faced-Sheathbills-1-Lemaire-Channel-10-Dec-2012.jpg>

**Vagrants** : The **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** which arrived on the Scillies on Dec 18 was still there on Christmas Day but the website on which I was hoping to point you to a photo of the bird seems to have morphed into a commercial one so the best I can do is to point you to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose-breasted Grosbeak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose-breasted_Grosbeak)

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies :

**Unsurprisingly no reports this week**

### Butterflies :

**Surprisingly there were reports this week**

### Species reported this week :

**Brimstone** : One seen flying near Fleet in north Hampshire on Dec 22

**Red Admiral** : Four reports of butterflies active on Dec 21 and 22 at Gosport and Fleet in Hampshire and at Worthing and Polegate (near Eastbourne) in Sussex

**Peacock** : One also seen on Dec 21 near the head of the Ems valley in Sussex - this was reported locally and included in last weeks summary where the other sightings above did not appear on the internet in time for me to mention them last week although that is when they were seen.

## Other Insects

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth** : Although included in the moths above this day flying migrant deserves a special mention for being still active (a few now regularly hibernate in this country) seen on Dec 23 flying at Portland (and this potentially a migrant in December!)

## PLANTS

Just one new species flowering this week - **Lesser Celandine** - but there were still plenty of wild plants in flower including **Cow Parsley** and a white flowered variant of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** . I have put photos of these on my Diary pages and you can see them in the entries for Dec 24 and 27 at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm>. Other plants seen during the week included more **Sweet Violets** out in St Faith's churchyard plus **White Comfrey**, **Yellow-flowered Strawberry**, **Ivy-leaved Toadflax** and **Wood Avens**

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Slugs** : Matthew Oates appeared on TV this week with a brief review of Wildlife in 2012 for BBC News and declared that this had been '**The year of the Slug**' but did not mention that this had been the year in which what is probably the best known British Slug ( **Arion ater** , the big one which can be found in most gardens, usually dressed in black but sometimes in other brighter colours), had been driven from England to seek refuge in the Scottish Highlands by a look-alike invader from Spain called **Arion vulgaris** . For a balanced account of that species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish slug](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_slug) but even that source admits that it is one of the 100 worst alien species in Europe and illustrates one of its bad habits with a photo of it engaging in cannibalism (eating one of its own species). For less balanced views just put "Spanish Slug species" into Google and read what British Newspapers have printed about it this summer. The Independent says "14 Sep

2012 – A plague of “super-slugs” has arrived in the UK from Spain, ... species which threatens to eat its way through our crops and native slug species." The Daily Maily writes of "Monster Spanish Slugs that feast on dead rabbits .." The Daily Telegraph refers to the species as "Slimy and Savage" while the Mirror Online tells us that "Giant mutant slugs from El: Spanish beasts invade Britain and threaten to wipe out local species." To put this invasion into perspective Wikipedia tells us that the first of these invaders was found in Britain as long ago as 1954 and to show that this is not a premeditated attack on the British and their way of life the species has now been recognized as a pest in most European countries including Sweden.

**Antarctic Whales** : Steve Copsey is still reporting on Antarctic wildlife from on board HMS Protector and this week he tells us about the **Killer Whales (Orca)** and **Antarctic Minke Whales** (a variation on the Minke Whales of the northern hemisphere) seen in the Gerlache Strait which runs between a couple of large ice-covered islands (called Anvers and Brabant) and the northern tip of a long promontory reaching out from the Antarctic continent to Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America. Follow Steve on the Three Amigos website at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/>

**Water Voles** : Nearer home Brian Fellows reports the **latest ever winter sighting of an active Water Vole** by the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Dec 26. See Brian's website at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> or just see Andy Brook's excellent photo of the vole having a late vegetarian Christmas dinner at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x903-water-vole-bm-AB-26.12.12.jpg>

**Fungi** : Going back to Matthew Oates brief review of the wildlife year he told us that while the autumn had been wet enough for a good display of fungi it had not been warm enough so I thought I would mention that before writing this on Sunday morning (Dec 30) a lone new toadstool had appeared on my lawn (possibly **Laccaria laccata** which is given the English name of **Deceiver** from the variability of the shapes and colours it can take) to accompany the remains of the last two **Meadow Waxcaps** which can still be seen.

**Greenpeace and inshore fishing quotas**: For those who still think that we can save the natural world (which is essential to support our human life with both food and friendship) from the power of global capitalism and the self-defeating human urge for 'MORE' of everything, Barry Yates has made available on the Rye Bay website a 5 minute video produced by Greenpeace illustrating the inevitable death of the small inshore fishing fleet which is still to be seen in action around Rye Bay, its boats marked with the RX registration from which Barry's website gets its name (<http://www.rxwildlife.info/>) - you can also see the video directly at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=SLmY\\_gVHeAw#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=SLmY_gVHeAw#!)

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 24 - 30 (WEEK 52 OF 2012)**

**Thu 27 Dec**

## Wild flowers thriving on traffic fumes

Despite the wind I was able to take the photos shown below of two wild flowers that seem to thrive on the warmth and fumes produced by motor vehicles. First I went to Havant Bus Station where what seems to be a white-flowered form of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** can be found in flower from May to December - I have found it there throughout the last two years but today was the first occasion on which I found some flowers seemingly reverting to the normal purplish colour.

From the Bus Station I walked south along Park Road until, just beyond the Solent Road junction and on the east side near the entrance to Bosmere School grounds, I found the three clusters of **Cow Parsley** which have been flowering there since Nov 2 (and are now past their best). Although I am of the opinion that their flowering has also been traffic assisted (by traffic queueing to enter the Langstone roundabout) I must admit to also finding this plant in flower during the past two months in other places where there is no similar traffic (one is beside Church Lane at Warblington near the junction with the link road joining Church to Pook Lane, the other is beside the Brockhampton stream on the west side of the Budds Farm site)

Also noted on today's walk was the absence any flowers on the **Prickly Lettuce** which was still flowering earlier this month on the builders rubbish site in the road called The Twittens and the complete absence of the '**Greater Herb Robert**' plants on the brick wall of an alley south of East Street where I first found them in the late autumn of 2011 and (after being told they were a cultivar of **Geranium reuteri**) recorded them throughout much of this year - they may return but seem to have been the object of a recent garden clean up. To balance these losses I found the **Sweet Violet flowers** in St Faith's Church yard had increased in number to five and the **White Comfrey** was still flowering there.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 17 - 23 (WEEK 51 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers** : Plenty of **Red-throated** now in the English Channel and southern North Sea - biggest count was of 3244 off a Netherlands site on Dec 21 when 130 were seen off Folkestone and 15 off Portland. Cornwall was the best place to see **Black-thoated** with 5 in St Austell Bay which also had 10 **Great Northern** (the week's peak count). No one reported the **Pacific Diver** this week.

**Grebes** : No news of the **Great Crested** in the east Solent but there were 20 near the mouth of Chichester Harbour. Over on the continent one Netherlands site reported 3589 but that was well down on the 5845 reported last week. The only reports of **Red-Necked** were of one in Poole Harbour and 2 at Falmouth in Cornwall. Poole Harbour had 4 **Slavonian** and 1 was off Puckpool on the Isle of Wight but no one reported any off Paghham Harbour. Dorset remained the place to see **Black-necked** with 41 in Studland Bay, another 11 inside Poole Harbour and 18 in Portland Harbour.

**Shag** : Dec 18 brought the first news of one just inside Langstone Harbour but we have a long way to go to match the 350+ that were in Falmouth Roads on Dec 17. At Durlston the birds were starting to show breeding crests.

**Little Egret** : Warmer weather seems to have brought a few more back to the coast - walking around Langstone on Dec 17 I came across a total of at least 9 and there were four in the Nutbourne/Prinsted area on Dec 21

**Glossy Ibis** : The single bird remained in the Avon valley at Bickerley Common south of Ringwood

**Swans** : Small numbers of both **Bewicks and** Whoopers were seen in Sussex but the flock of 25 Bewicks at Burpham in the Arun valley seem to have moved on

**Red-breasted Goose** : The one which likes to be in the company of Brent was still at Farlington Marshes on Dec 17 but has not been reported since but the one that favours the company of Greylags and Canadas was still in the Adur valley on Dec 18

**Shelduck** : These are now a common sight all along the south coast but the highest reported number (204) came from the Kingsbridge estuary in south Devon on Dec 18

**Pintail** : There are now at least 100 in the Avon valley south of Ringwood and this week there were 85 at Pulborough Brooks. Locally there were 6 off the Emsworth Western Parade shore and probably some in the Nutbourne Bay area though when I was there on Dec 21 the tide was at its lowest and the birds were distant and difficult to see with the sun behind them.

**Smew** : Hampshire had its first of the winter with a redhead at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 21

**Red-breasted Merganser** : These are now a regular sight in the Solent Harbours

**Goosander** : No reports so far from the Solent Harbours but they are now widespread on smaller inland waters with reports this week of 2 on Tundry Pond in north Hampshire, 1 on a lake at Petworth and 7 in the Padstow area of Cornwall

**Avocet** : No reports from Langstone or Chichester Harbour this week but in Devon there were substantial flocks on both the Exe (250+) and the Tamar (297) - both on Dec 16

**Godwits** : Extensive flooding every where in southern England has brought millions of worms to the surface of fields and attracted Godwits away from the harbour mud to easy pickings inland. On Dec 21 Brian Fellows could only find 6 **Black-tailed** in an area of Chichester Harbour off Emsworth where there have normally been more than 100 birds. A more unexpected effect of this worm bonanza may have been the cause of Trevor Carpenter's report of unusually large numbers of both **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Knot** at Farlington Marshes on Dec 16 - the Bar-tails were in flight over the marshes but many of the Knot were uncharacteristically on the grass. Also on Dec 16 I see that more than 199 Bar-tails were on the Bowling Green Marsh beside the Exe estuary.

**Whimbrel** : By now any passage migrants will have passed through so any current sightings must be classified as winter visitors and this week these include two seen on Eling Great Marsh at the north end of Southampton Water, one in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester and one photographed in flight over Emsworth Harbour on Dec 17 showing the short, sharply curved bill and prominent eye-stripe of a Whimbrel

**Little Gull** : These are still on passage and 23 flew west past Dungeness on Dec 20

**Herring Gull** : Last week Barry Yates at Rye Harbour was impressed by the capacity of a Herring Gull to swallow three full sized Starfish in quick succession (See photos at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2012/12/10/greedy-herring-gull.html> ) and this week a similar illustration of Herring Gull swallowing capacity appeared on Brian Fellows website (see his entry for Dec 22 at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> showing photos of a Herring Gull managing to swallow a large eel)

**Sandwich Tern** : Three seen at the mouth of Langstone Harbour on Dec 18 with another two seen from East Head just inside the mouth of Chichester Harbour. A few days earlier (Dec 15) one was at Forton Lake near the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour

**Auks** : Plenty of these now in the English Channel with a report of 7355 passing Hope's Nose at Torquay on the south Devon coast on Dec 19

**Kingfisher** : On Dec 17 I disturbed one from a regular fishing post on the metal flap which allows an over flow of waste water to escape from the Budds Farm sewage works into the Brockhampton Stream and thus into Langstone Harbour. The Kingfisher flew downstream into the harbour area and may have continued east under Langstone Bridge for at roughly the same time that day one was seen in the Langstone village area. This same pattern may well have accounted for a sighting that I had at Langstone on Dec 4 when one flew from the seawall around Langstone Pond - at the time I could not think where the bird had come from and concluded that it was probably a new arrival at the coast from distant inland waters.

**Pied Wagtail** : When these arrive on the south coast each winter they often use the coastal reed beds as a night roost, following the Swallows and Sand Martins which had used them on their way south but as winter advances and the reed beds become colder and windier the birds move to more sheltered and warmer places. We had an example of a night roost in a town last week when 150 birds were seen using a conifer bedecked with Christmas lights outside the Boots shop in Fleet and in past winters I have found them around the Tesco store in Havant and heard of them settling on the lagging around hot steam pipes at either the Oil Refinery or the Power Station at Fawley on Southampton Water (I was told that the heat there made the birds so drowsy that you could go and pick them up in your hands!). This week's reports includes one of several dusk sightings of birds arriving in the West Street pedestrianised area of Havant but without confirmation of where the birds eventually settled (maybe near the Bus Station to the north or the multi-storey carpark to the south). This is not the first winter in which the birds

have been seen in this area but no one so far has tracked them down so maybe it is just a pre-roost assembly area. There is similar inconclusive evidence of a roost in the general area of the Town Millpond in Emsworth and at Newlands Farm south of Fareham.

**Waxwing** : Still widespread and numerous in England with the bigger flocks moving gradually south but not yet reaching the south coast in great strength - on Dec 19 RBA said they were present in 33 counties with 220 birds in Nottinghamshire as the biggest concentration followed by 180 in Gloucestershire. In the south it seems that Devon had the most birds but the biggest number I saw reported there was only 21 at Torquay on Dec 17 but there were up to 8 in Sussex at Lewes and smaller numbers in Kent (Stour Valley, Folkestone and Sandwich Bay), Sussex also had 24 in Hove on Dec 21, the Isle of Wight had 2 briefly on Dec 19, Dorset had at least one at Portland on Dec 18 and the only report from Hampshire came from Farnborough on Dec 23 where 18 birds had found a supply of berries at the North Camp railway station and so may stay over Christmas

**Fieldfare** : No big flocks in southern England, the best being 300 using the Stour Valley as a roost area, and only one was seen in the Havant area during the week (Wade Court area of Langstone on Dec 18)

**Redwing** : Even fewer reports this week with 20+ in north Cornwall being the highspot

**Great Grey Shrike** : One turned up at Wyke Down in the north east corner of Dorset on Dec 16

**Hawfinch** : Three reports this week are of nine birds in the West Dean Woods north of Chichester, five at the Mercer's Way site in Romsey and two at Eastleigh Lakeside

**Snow Bunting** : There were probably some on the north Kent Coast but the last report there was of 6 at Swalecliffe on Dec 15. One remained at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) during the week and 8 were at Sandwich Bay on Dec 21

**Foreign Birds** : For those interested in Antarctic species Steve Copsey continues to supply photos from points on the route of HMS Protector to take up its duties as the Navy's Ice patrol vessel. Species mentioned this week on <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> are **Black-bellied Storm-petrels, Chinstrap Penguin, Cape Petrels, Subantarctic Skuas, Kelp Gulls, Gentoo Penguins and Antarctic Shags** (eating volcano cooked Krill at Deception Island), **Southern Fulmars and Wilson's Storm-petrels** . Another of the Three Amigos, Mark Cutts, wrote of the **Sooty Terns, Masked Boobies and Brown Noddy** seen on Ascension Island where he joined an Army Ornithological Society expedition

**Vagrants** : One of the many reported on the RBA site was a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** seen on the Scillies from Dec 18 to 20 at least - this American vagrant gets its family name from the big Hawfinch like beak which they have. Find out more about it in its normal habitat from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose->

[breasted Grosbeak](http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob18870.htm) and about its few appearances in Britain from <http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob18870.htm>

## INSECTS

### Butterflies:

Species reported this week:

**Brimstone** : One seen in Romsey on Dec 18

**Red Admiral** : Three reports - one at Worldham near Alton on Dec 16, one at Lewes on Dec 17 and what was almost certainly another in Havant on Dec 17 (seen by me but only from the underside as it flew over)

**Peacock** : One seen in Inholmes Wood near Stoughton at the source of the River Ems to complete an unusual mid-December trio

### Other Insects

### Selected sightings this week:

**Hornet** : What sounds as if it must have been a very late Hornet was seen in the North End area of Portsmouth on Dec 14

**Honey Bee** : Two seen gathering pollen in the Folkestone area on Dec 16

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*)** : These are becoming a regular sight on warm winter days in recent years and this week they were seen in Folkestone on Dec 16 and in Emsworth on Dec 17

## PLANTS

**Bryophytes** : Graeme Lyons latest blog entry at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/tom-ottley-crew.html> describes how he met the new recorder of Mosses for Sussex (Tom Ottley) at Malling Down near Lewes and was shown four tiny moss species including one which Tom had recorded as new to the county earlier in the week (possibly previously overlooked as it was no more than 1 mm high and growing beneath other species!)

**Goat Willow** : A foretaste of spring was seen on Dec 17 near the Southmoor Lane entrance to the Langstone South Moors where at least two trees had shed the leathery outer coating of their flower buds to reveal the layer of silvery hairs still tightly covering the stamens that have yet to emerge and welcome early insects

**Cow Parsley** : In addition to the plants that have been flowering for some time beside Park Road South in Havant (outside Bosmere School) I found another cluster of flowering plants on Dec 17 beside the Brockhampton Stream where it passes the old Corn Wharf

**Sticky Groundsel** : Another good find on Dec 17 was this plant still flowering in Juniper Square near to where **Yellow -flowered Strawberry** blossoms can still be seen

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Wild Boar** : An entry on the Rye Bay website

(<http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2012/12/17/boar.html> ) described how Brian Banks had been out on the Walland Marsh area on Dec 17 and had found signs of Wild Boar in this area where he was not aware of their presence though they are well established in woodland on both sides of the Kent/Sussex border since some escaped from a farm near Tenterden in the 1980s. If you want to know more about these animals in Britain have a look at

<http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/news/uk-wildboarinbritain.html#cr> which lists the areas in which populations are known to be established and for pictures of the species in Britain see <http://www.britishwildboar.org.uk/> Although the size and extent of the population in Britain is not known in detail the animals appear to be extending their range and it is very likely that they will invade our urban areas to find food in our rubbish bins as they have done on the continent (Several culls have been organised to deal with this problem in Berlin). An article in The Guardian last March gives a pretty comprehensive account of the current situation - see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/mar/04/trouble-return-wild-boar-britain>

**Humpback Whale** : One was seen off the Netherlands on Dec 20 and another had been seen in the Antarctic by Steve Copsey on Dec 16 (see

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/12/20/deception-island-part-5-departure-humpback-whales-and-chinstrap-penguin/> )

**Pipistrelle Bat** : One seen flying around in Brighton just before sunset on Dec 17 may have been making one of the mid winter flights which hibernating bats make in order to prevent a build up of poison in their bodies or may have been confused by this autumn's weather pattern and not yet settled into its winter sleep

**Yellow Slug (*Limax flavus*)** : On Dec 14 my kitchen drain was overflowing and I set about the regular chore of clearing the build up of material which had blocked the grill at its base. The first part of this operation is to take away the bricks which I have placed over the open drain to stop leaves blowing into it and in the 'frog' - the hollow in the top of the brick - of one brick I found a medium sized slug which I identified as a **Yellow Slug** - see

[http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow\\_slug.jpg](http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow_slug.jpg) and <http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/adlib/defra/content.aspx?doc=178453&id=178456> )

This species was new to me and I now think that it was this species that I saw on the bird table in my garden on Sep 11 and at the time thought was a **Leopard Slug** and that its small size was due to its young age.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 17 - 23 (WEEK 51 OF 2012)

Tue 18 Dec

### A new route on Portsdown and a new slug in my kitchen drain

Before coming to the blockage in my kitchen drain I enjoyed some superb sunshine on Portsdown where I failed to find any wildlife more exciting than a brief burst of Dunnock song, a glimpse of what I think were the rapidly disappearing white rumps of two Bullfinches, and an unexpected cock Pheasant on the hilltop. I did, however, discover a new route from the base of Candy's Pit up a well hidden 'staircase' from the southern end of the pit bottom to the hilltop where an 'interpretation board' told me that the name 'Candy's Pit' is thought to derive from a lady called Miss Candy having lived in the pit (presumably in some long lost cottage) around the time that I was born in the early 1930's

The more interesting find of the day was a **Yellow Slug (*Limax flavus*)** which you can see at [http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow\\_slug.jpg](http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow_slug.jpg) and can read about at

<http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/adlib/defra/content.aspx?doc=178453&id=178456> This is what I found in the 'frog' of a brick which I had placed over the drain taking the waste water from the kitchen to prevent the drain becoming blocked with leaves. I find that this is not an uncommon species and is often found around houses (sometimes in their cellars) and I am pretty sure this is what I have found on a couple of occasions this year on and around my bird table though I did not identify it at the time and thought it was a young specimen of the **Leopard Slug (*Limax maximus*)** which can grow to 20 cm long - the Yellow Slug never exceeds 10 cm

Mon 17 Dec

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Brockhampton, Budds Farm and back

A sunny, almost windless morning saw me walk west to the Brockhampton Stream, down it to the mouth of the Hermitage Stream and back home via Budds Farm, the South Moors, Langstone Village and the Billy Trail. En route I found 33 plant species in flower and saw 39 bird species.

Bird highlights were a **Kingfisher** on the metal flap through which excess sewage flows from Budds Farm into the Brockhampton Stream, a **Buzzard** over the Moors, around 20 **Mergansers** but only 2 **Brent Geese** on the water (I guess there were hundreds grazing various fields), a welcome increase in the number of **Egrets** to 11 in various places with six on Langstone Pond, and a total absence of **Shoveler** at Budds Farm (where a **Cormorant** was among the **Mallard, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Pochard and Teal** ), ending the trip with a **Jay** on my lawn. During the walk I came on two **tit flocks** (mainly Long-tailed) and one **Chiff-chaff** , two different **Grey Wagtails** and a small flock of **Pied Wagtails** . I also heard one **Great Spotted Woodpecker** .

Best of the flowers was **Cow Parsley** with at least half a dozen flowering plants (some at the Bosmere School roadside and several more beside the

Brockhampton stream). A surprise was to find **Sticky Groundsel** in flower at Juniper Square where just one **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** was seen, and another unexpected species was **Wood Avens** with two plants seen with flowers. At the start I saw a single **Sweet Violet** flower in St Faith's churchyard and at the south end of Southmoor Lane I was pleased to find a couple of **Goat Willow** trees which had cast the outer casing of their flower buds to reveal the inner silvery hair coating (not counted as flowering!) Also not counted was a **Cordyline Palm** tree with a couple of bunches of white flowers dangling below its green leaves - I say flowers but possibly they were bright white seeds?

A final bonus when nearly home (well after noon) was what I am pretty sure was a **Red Admiral butterfly** which never settled and only allowed me to see it dark underside so it could possibly have been a Peacock.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 10 - 16 (WEEK 50 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers** : Sightings of a single **Red-throated** in the entrance to Chichester Harbour and eleven of them in Portland Harbour give little idea of the number currently present in the English Channel area - on Dec 12 there were 780 off Calais, on Dec 9 there were 1308 off the Suffolk coast and on Dec 8, when Folkestone reported 162 passing there and Sandwich Bay had 173, Trektellen reported a total of 3884 at five sites (with 1074 seen at just one of the five).

The highest count of **Black-throated** was just 9 (Netherlands) with 6 at one Cornish site, 2 off Selsey Bill and one at the Chichester Harbour entrance. Jersey (Channel Isles) had the peak count of 12 **Great Northern** with smaller numbers at 8 English south coast sites. As first reported last week the **Pacific Diver** was still in the Penzance area of Cornwall

**Grebes** : The raft of **Great Crested** off the Brownwich Cliffs (near Titchfield Haven) had 134 birds on Dec 13 but on Dec 14 two Netherlands sites had 7,291 between them. A single **Red-Necked** was off the Isle of Wight on Dec 12 while the count of **Slavonians off Pagham Harbour was 19 on Dec 11 and 51 Black-Necked** were in Studland Bay on Dec 8 (with another 18 in Portland Harbour that day). Dec 16 brought a sighting of 10 Black-necked at the Hayling Oysterbeds (along with 6 **Goldeneye** ) - previous reports from the Oysterbeds area this winter have been: 2 on Nov 2, 3 on Nov 17, 12 on Nov 23 and 13 on Dec 6

**Shag** : None reported inside Langstone Harbour yet but one was just outside off Eastney on Dec 5

**Little Egret** : These have almost vanished from the Solent Harbour shores but in Havant on Dec 11 three were seen on the small stream running from the Havant Thicket area through Great Copse in Leigh Park before joining the Hermitage Stream in the Stockheath area of Leigh Park. Further inland there were six in the cress beds at Alresford near the source of the R Itchen

**Great White Egret** : Trektellen reported a total of 173 at 15 Netherlands sites but in southern England the only regular sighting was of the Blashford Lakes bird, currently based on the Hampshire Avon at Bickerley Common just south of Ringwood. Elsewhere two were roosting at Rye Harbour on Dec 13 and one was on a pond near Robertsbridge north of Hastings on Dec 12 and another was at the Alresford cress beds in Hampshire on that day.

**Glossy Ibis** : One remains at Bickerly Common near Ringwood and another four flew over Essex on Dec 10

**Spoonbill**: The flock of 15 remains in Poole Harbour

**Bewick's Swan** : At least 23 were still at Burpham near Arundel on Dec 13 with up to 176 in the Netherlands

**Whooper Swan** : Up to 27 in the Netherlands and two in Devon

**Red-breasted Goose** : The Hampshire bird has been seen at more than one site in Portsmouth during the week but was back on Farlington Marshes on Dec 15 and 16. What is almost certainly a different bird was seen in Sussex (near Beeding on the R Adur) on Dec 13 (one day only) in company with Greylags and Canadas (suggesting that it has not come from the Arctic although it is said to be fully winged, un-ringed and eating voraciously as if it had just finished a long flight). I note that the Hampshire bird was not reported on Dec 13

**Egyptian Goose** : A flock of 23 flew north over Christchurch Harbour on Dec 10 suggesting they might be new arrivals from the near continent though the locals assumed they were from the Avon valley (the highest number recorded in Hampshire this year is shown as 15 in the Avon Causeway area on Oct 11 though there could be much bigger flocks in Berkshire)

**Shelduck** : 25 were on the mud off Warblington (east of Langstone) on Dec 10 when another 16 were on the mud off north Hayling - this was my first indication that birds have settled on the Langstone/Warblington shore this winter. On Dec 11 Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight had 50 which may have been new (though there were 41 there on Oct 27 - maybe just transient?)

**Gadwall** : An indication of the huge increase in numbers of this species (from their status of being as rare as Smew in the 1950s to sometimes outnumbering Mallard today) came from a report of 150 on the sea off Folkestone on Dec 6 (noted as a site record)

**Pintail** : A count of 100 in the Avon Valley south of Ringwood on Dec 12 was the largest number seen in southern England this winter (with the exception of up to 150 at Exmouth as early as Oct 31)

**Scaup** : Nine were reported at Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset on Dec 12 (I see the same number were there on Dec 6)

**Long-tailed Duck** : Three have been on the Fleet in Dorset since Dec 10 (and one in the Exe estuary with another in Cornwall this week)

**Smew** : Seven reports this week with a peak count of 13 in the Netherlands on Dec 13 and 5 at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on Dec 11 followed by 2 at Rye Harbour on Dec 13

**White-tailed Eagle** : Last year one attracted much attention in the New Milton area of Hampshire at the start of the year and was so reluctant to leave England that it could still be seen in Lincolnshire in August but none were seen here at the year end. This year one arrived over Folkestone on Feb 14 (seeking its Valentine?) but headed north to Norfolk before returning to the continent a week after arriving. I'm still hoping one will return to Hampshire but the only report of one in England so far comes from Norfolk on Dec 10 ...

**Marsh Harrier** : Four were seen at Titchfield Haven on both Dec 9 and 14 (not yet up to the count of 13 roosting in the Kent Stour Valley on Dec 6) while at Farlington Marshes the species remains an occasional visitor with one passing over on both Dec 12 and 13.

**Hen Harrier** : The New Forest survey on Dec 8/9 found 7 at five sites

**Rough-legged Buzzard** : No return so far of the bird that was in the Arun valley around Burpham last winter, staying up to mid-April after arriving on Nov 9. This week one was reported in the UK but at Anglesey in Wales on Dec 12

**Great Bustard** : In Week 47 I reported that the Bustard seen flying south over Durlston on Nov 18 had reached France and was likely to spend the winter there while another which made its get away from Salisbury Plain on Nov 4 had been found in an exhausted state, also in France, had been brought back to England to recuperate. This week one flew over Portland on Dec 10 leaving me to wonder if this was the Nov 4 escapee now recovered from its first attempt and making a second bid for the good life in France.

**Avocet** : There were 40 in Langstone Harbour off Farlington Marshes on Dec 13 and 6 were seen at the Chichester Harbour entrance on Dec 8 but I guess neither of these flocks have yet settled for the winter. Over in Devon, where 250 were seen in the R Tamar (west of Plymouth) on Dec 5, the absence of any reports of Avocet from the Exe estuary had almost convinced me that the Avocet had abandoned the Exe in favour of the Tamar but on Dec 11 there was one report of 300+ on the Exminster marshes

**Lapwing** : Still relatively few of these in England but over in the Netherlands one site reported what looks like a binary count of 11,101 on Dec 8 when the total at 15 sites there was 47,992

**Woodcock** : Still crossing the Channel in small numbers with three at Sandwich Bay on Dec 13 and two at Rye Harbour on the same day

**Black-tailed Godwit** : The number in the Avon valley was up to 2,500 (at Bisterne) on Dec 12

**Whimbrel** : Bob Chapman had one on Baker's Island in Langstone Harbour on Dec 15 which he has reported on Going Birding but which I first read about in his Blog at <http://solentreserves.wordpress.com/> (I recommend that anyone interested in south Hampshire wildlife add this to their 'favourites')

**Herring Gull** : Gannets are traditionally one of the greediest bird species but a Herring Gull at Rye Harbour has been putting in a challenge for the greediest bird title by wolfing down three large starfish in rapid succession - see Barry Yates photos at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2012/12/10/greedy-herring-gull.html>

**Swallow** : What seems likely to be the last sighting of 2012 was of one at Stoke Gabriel near Paignton in Devon on Dec 8

**Pied Wagtail** : This species does not usually feature on Christmas Cards but a roost of 155 birds in a tree adorned with Christmas lights outside Boots shop in Fleet could possibly feature in that firm's sales campaign next Christmas

**Waxwing** : 29 reports this week come from Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon but not Cornwall and my impression is that the birds are constantly on the move for lack of food and I suspect that a sighting of three in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle could be an excuse to think of them as the new Tolpuddle Martyrs. The sad prospect for them if they stay in England prompted me to check on the Trektellen 'Migration Pattern' to see if any were heading south or west on the continent but that site indicates that England is their sole winter destination with no sightings south or west of the Channel Isles.

**Dunnock** : Robin, Wren, Collared Dove, Woodpigeon and some Tits can be heard singing at this time of year and I think I have heard Dunnock three times this week but on all three occasions the 'musical box' was turned off within seconds of being turned on, leaving me wondering if I really heard Dunnock song or just imagined it. Checking on last years records I see that there were five such isolated bursts heard in November and early December with regular song from Dec 18 on.

**Black Redstart** : One of these was heard singing at Truro in Cornwall on Dec 5

**Blackbird** : This week I came on the clearest statement I have so far seen of why some birders claim to be able separate Continental from British Blackbirds at this time of year. Charlie Fleming posted the following on the Devon Bird News site on Dec 12 ... "It's my understanding that our UK Blackbirds develop their yellow beaks in the first winter whereas winter visiting Blackbirds from the continent retain their dark beaks until the following spring. This last few days there has been quite a noticeable influx of Blackbirds in front of my private hide on the outskirts of Exeter. Several of these birds have dark beaks and are noticeably different somehow. Can anyone confirm this to me or have I been misled?" ... However the question remains un-answered.

**Wheatears** : A single **Northern Wheatear** was reported on Dec 8, seen at West Bay on the Dorset coast near the Devon border, and a **Desert Wheatear** was still in Aberdeenshire on Dec 14

**Melodious Warbler** : One was reported from the Mundham area south of the Chichester lakes on Dec 10

**Dartford Warbler** : I am pleased to see that the New Forest survey on Dec 8/9 found a total of 109 Dartford Warblers - last year the totals found by the survey were down to 19 on Nov 27 and 10 on Dec 18

**Great Grey Shrike** : Only two have so far arrived in the New Forest to be found by the Dec 8/9 survey and the same number were present last December but there were four around in Dec 2010

**Bullfinch** : I cannot recall any previous year in which Bullfinch were regularly reported in flocks but a sighting of 13 in a loose flock on Bransbury Common near Andover on Dec 15 caused me to check on the seemingly large number of flock sightings this year - what I found was that 10 had been seen in two groups of five (so maybe families?) near Crawley on Jan 8, 12 were near Midhurst on Jan 31, a flock of 14 was in Beckley Woods near Hastings on Jan 31 when another flock of 12 were in Earham Wood east of Arundel. In the autumn 13 were at Start Point in Devon on Oct 20, 14 were at Dibden Bay on Southampton Water on Oct 28, 25 were at Durlston on Oct 30, 15 were at St Catherine's Hill at Winchester on Nov 1, 13 were at Berry Head in Devon on Nov 6, 15 were at one Netherlands site on Nov 11, 10 were again at Dibden Bay on Nov 11 with 13 there on Nov 17, also on Nov 17 **the Netherlands hit the jackpot with 63 at one site** , and finally 17 were in a loose flock at the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on Nov 25 before the Dec 15 flock of 13 on Bransbury Common. I have not included the multiple site totals returned by the two recent New Forest surveys but they were 34 birds at 10 sites in November and 50 birds at 14 sites in December

**Foreign Birds** : Those who do not already follow the Three Amigos blog may be interested to know that they can extend their knowledge of birds they are unlikely to see in southern England through the eyes and cameras of the three Portsmouth based Naval birders who write the blog at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> Of the eight blog entries for the current week seven come from Steve Copsey on board the Navy's Ice Patrol vessel HMS Protector as it heads south into the Antarctic from the Falkland Islands - the eighth comes from Mark Cutts who has been auditing stores in the Falklands and this week has joined the Army Ornithological Soc monitoring **Sooty Terns** on Ascension Island on his way home. The birds seen by Steve have been **Great Albatross, Southern Royal and Wandering Albatross** off Falklands; **Cape Petrels and Antarctic Prions** in Drake's Passage; **Antarctic Petrels and Cape Petrels** off South Shetlands; **Snow Petrel and Adelie Penguin** off King George Is; **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** off South Shetlands; **Southern Giant Petrels, Subantarctic Skuas and Chinstrap Penguins** on South Shetlands. The third member of the trio is Mark Cutts, currently based in Portsmouth and as I write this he is the first of the bloggers to be encountered on their website describing with a

couple of superb photos the American vagrant **Buff-bellied Pipit** he saw at the Queen Mother Reservoir near Heathrow on Dec 15

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies :

Just one sighting of a single **Common Darter** in Norfolk on Dec 8

### Butterflies :

No sightings this week!

### Other Insects

None

## PLANTS

**Lesser Celandine** : I normally find the first flowers of this around mid-December and on Dec 16 I found one bud that will surely open next week at the junction of New Lane and Eastern Road in Havant (just outside the cemetery wall)

**Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)** : I have not seen this in flower since Nov 8 but several flowers could be seen on a bush beside the Hayling Billy trail in the Langstone area on Dec 13

Nothing else new or surprising but this week's sightings bring my month list of species in flower (excluding the Celandine) to 55. Also excluded, but very nice to see, was the **first fresh Camellia flower** in a Hayling Island garden

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Sea Mouse (*Aphrodita aculeata*)** : On Dec 15 160 of these were found washed up on the tideline at Folkestone. Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea\\_mouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_mouse) ) tells me these are 15 cm long worms which burrow head first into a sandy seabed at depths of up to 2,000 metres when not crawling about scavenging on the sea bed. It also tells me that they get the name Aphrodite because of the resemblance of their underside to human female genitalia but they are of more practical use to us through the structure of the hairs on their upperside which could show us how to create more efficient optical fibres - this is briefly described in the Wikipedia entry but you can read more about it at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1099278.stm>

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 10 - 16 (WEEK 50 OF 2012)

### Tue 10 Dec

#### Around Hayling

Today I cycled to south Hayling via the Billy Line and back via Northney in chilly sunshine with a moderate northerly wind.

Before setting out I had **two Jays** searching for buried nuts in the lawn and passing through the Langstone area heard **a brief single burst of Dunnock song** along with Robins and Wrens.

In the Oysterbeds area at least two **Sweet Violet flowers** were out and a south Hayling garden had the **first Camellia flower** I have seen and Northney Church had the expected Strawberry tree flowers but otherwise there was little of note - I only listed 9 plant species in flower.

A little excitement when I arrived at North Common was to see a bird land on the nest box which was used last winter by Barn Owls but this time it was only a Kestrel perching on it briefly. In the old boating lake 75 Teal were sheltering from the wind while on the exposed mud were a few Lapwings and around **16 Shelduck with another 25 on the mud off Pook Lane** (the first flock there this winter to my knowledge)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 3 - 9 (WEEK 49 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers** : 80 **Red-throated** headed west past Dungeness on Nov 30 and 1005 were off the Netherlands on Dec 2 - later in the week 14 were off Portland with another 286 off the Normandie coast. Peak count came from the Netherlands on Dec 5 with 1362 off Westkepelle.

**Black-throated** remained scarce with just 2 off Rye Harbour on Dec 3, 1 at the Chichester Harbour entrance on Dec 6 and 1 passing Durlston on Dec 7 - late news is of one (in company with a Great Northern) in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Dec 8.

The peak count of **Great Northern** was 15 in Mounts Bay off Penzance in Cornwall but there were up to 5 in Portland Harbour and singles were seen off Southsea Castle, in Southampton Water and off Pagham Harbour. No more sightings of last week's White Billed Diver in the North Sea but the Mounts Bay area off Penzance celebrated the return of the **Pacific Diver** which has wintered there each year except one since 2007

**Grebes** : The Scottish Western Isles had one for the twitchers on Dec 7 when a **Pied-billed Grebe** was seen but down here the most exciting report was that the raft of **Great Crested** on the Solent off Brownwich Cliffs (west of Titchfield Haven) reached a count of 80 on Dec 4 (there were 143 there on 3 Jan 2011 and 232 on 11 Jan 2010). A single **Red-necked** was in Portland Harbour for much of the week and the small flock of **Slavonian** off Pagham Harbour had more than 6 birds on Dec 1. No reports of **Black-necked** in Langstone Harbour but there were up to 17 in Portland Harbour and 49 in the Studland Bay area

**Bittern** : Reports from eight sites including the first of this winter at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough

**Great White Egret** : What is probably the 'Blashford Lakes regular' has been downstream at Bickerley Common this week but there have been sightings of two possible new comers - one flying north at Ferring Rife at Worthing, another at Hengistbury Head (Christchurch Harbour) - plus a probable regular at Dungeness

**Glossy Ibis** : One has been in the Hampshire Avon valley just south of Ringwood from Dec 3 to 8

**Spoonbill** : Poole Harbour remains the only place to see these with up to 15 at Holes Bay towards the end of the week

**Bewick's Swan** : Several small groups have settled in recently including 16 at Burpham close to Arundel - I think these are separate from the seven that were on Amberley Wild Brooks last week. A group of four were on the Adur north of Henfield on Dec 4 but have not been reported again and a different four were in north Kent (Reculver and the Stour valley) while up to 35 have been seen at two Netherlands sites

**Canada Goose** : Brian Fellows was very surprised to find there were none at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth when he was there on Dec 4 - he was told that they are nowadays rare there other than during the July moult period

**Black Brant** : One was seen at Bembridge Harbour on the Isle of Wight on Dec 3 and this may account for the absence of regular sighting from the Witterings/Langstone Harbour areas this winter.

**Red-breasted Goose** : The Langstone Harbour/ Portsmouth bird also seems to have been wandering around the area and has only been reported once this week - on the Southsea Cricket Pitch near the Canoe Lake on Dec 2

**Shelduck** : The Dungeness website was not updated for several days last week so I have only now seen that it did observe the return of Shelduck with counts of 85 passing on Nov 28 and 48 on Dec 30. 24 were seen in the Emsworth area on Dec 4 but the birds do not seem to have settled for the winter yet.

**Mandarin** : A single drake was with Mallard at Christchurch Harbour on Dec 6 giving further evidence that these birds are currently spreading from their London area and Forest of Dean strongholds. On Oct 27 a group of 28 were seen at Sutton Waldron in Dorset with a single bird flying past Durlston that day and during November a bird turned up on Fernyhurst Lake in the Rownhams area of Southampton but the big eye-opener was the discovery of a flock of more than 80 in the Hembury Woods area of south Devon (near Buckfast Abbey) and I see that at the time I wrote that one reason why numbers in this country are increasing (now more than 7,000 breeding birds) is that their flesh tastes horrible and so they are not shot.

**Smew** : Last week I reported the arrival of the first Smew of the winter, not in Kent but in off the sea in Devon. This week there are two more reports - on Dec 2 one arrived in Yorkshire and on Dec 5 a total of 13 were at three sites on the near continent.

**Goosander** : These are starting to pop up across southern England with reports from Portland, Shoreham, Reculver on the north Kent coast, Lodmoor in Dorset,

the Lower Tamar Lake near Plymouth, Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex, Petworth Lake near Pulborough, Sandwich Bay and Lakeside Park at Eastleigh. Max count was 10 at Plymouth.

**Buzzard** : One unexpectedly seen in the grounds of the Langstone Technology Park at Havant on Dec 4 may have been an escaped captive bird.

**Avocet** : On Dec 3 a flock of 200 had reached Cornwall to be seen at the Tamar estuary on the Devon border - by Dec 5 there were 250 there making me wonder if the Exe estuary flock have decided to move further west (last report from there was of 250 on Nov 13). Local numbers in west Sussex have also increased with reports from Nutbourne Bay (east of Thorney Island) of 40+ on Dec 1 and 31 on Dec 4. On Dec 8 there were 23 in Langstone Harbour Broom Channel ( between Farlington Marshes and the Portsmouth Eastern Road.

**Ringed Plover** : The Rye Harbour website made us aware of an interesting new BTO web facility illustrating the global distribution of ringing recoveries of birds ringed in Britain. Have a look at <http://blx1.bto.org/ring/countyrec/resultsall/rec4700all.htm> (I'm not sure how you get the results for other species - this URL is for Ringed Plover)

**Knot** : The first flock to be seen off the Emsworth shore this winter was 90 birds on Dec 5 (I know winter birds have been arriving since late August and that there were more than 150 in Pagham Harbour on Nov 19)

**White-rumped Sandpiper** : The bird which arrived at the Longham Lakes on the northern fringe of Bournemouth on Nov 30 was still there on Dec 8 within reach of amateur twitchers from the Portsmouth area.

**Purple Sandpiper** : 10 were at Southsea Castle on Dec 7, beating this winter's previous maximum of 8 set on Nov 27 (but not the 22 seen at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 22)

**Black-tailed Godwit** : This winter's maximum count so far was 1200 in the Avon Tyrrel farm section of the Avon just south of Ringwood on Dec

**Common Sandpiper** : Reports of up to 2 beside the Itchen in Southampton remind me that I have yet to see any reports of wintering birds in the Langstone or Chichester Harbour areas

**Sandwich Tern** : A report of 12 in the Chichester Harbour mouth area on Dec 4 (and counts of 164 at Ouistreham on the Normandie coast on Nov 25 with 61 there on Dec 2) suggest that wintering numbers in the English Channel may be higher than usual this winter.

**Barn Owl** : On Dec 7 one was seen at Titchfield Haven but four were on show in sheep shearing sheds on the Falkland Islands - see Steve Copsey's reports on the Three Amigos blog at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> (the latest entry of which comes from Tony Tindale, 'the Amigo who stayed at home in

Fareham' but will be in the Falklands next month). Tony visited the Longham Lakes at Bournemouth this week to see the White Rumped Sandpiper and to show us the habitat there (and in the New Forest) with his photos.

**Short-eared Owl** : On Dec 6 two were hunting over the Hayling Golf Course

**Swallow** : Some still with us until mid-week - sightings this week from Durlston, Gosport, Southsea (one flying out to sea). Latest so far are two at Folkestone on Dec 5

**Water Pipit** : Sightings this week from Radipole and Lodmoor at Weymouth, Lymington marshes, Coombe Haven at Bexhill (8 there), Brading sewage works on the IoW and Pinglestone cress beds at Alresford near the River Itchen

**Waxwing** : More are arriving on the south coast each day giving me 52 reports spread from Cornwall to Kent during the week. On Dec 8 a flock of 17 flew across the Chichester Harbour entrance, one was in the Bedhampton area of Havant and 6 were in Stubbington (between Fareham and Gosport) but the biggest flock in Hampshire so far was of 56 at Elvetham Heath in the north near Fleet.

**Robin** : Both Brian Fellows in Emsworth and myself in Havant have seen Robins already behaving as paired couples with no aggression between them. Maybe the same applies to their cousins the **Black Redstarts** , a male of which was heard singing at Truro (Cornwall) on Dec 5

**Fieldfare** : I heard my first of the winter from my Havant garden on Dec 2 as a small party (including a Mistle Thrush) made their way south down the Hayling Billy ex-rail track. In Kent the Stour Valley night roost was estimated to have 4,000 birds at the start of December increasing to an estimated 10,000 on Dec 6

**Song Thrush** : The bird that was singing its heart out around my Havant garden daily from Nov 14 to Dec 1 has not been heard since. Other than the occasional Robin and Starling the only species I have heard singing this week have been Wood-pigeon and Collared Dove saying a brief thank-you for the return of sunshine after frosty nights.

**Corn Bunting** : A flock of more than 30 by the River Arun in the Burpham area close to Arundel seems to have been the first substantial winter flock in West Sussex

**Foreign Birds** : Steve Copsey's accounts of birds seen in the Falklands this week mention **Red-backed Hawk, Ruddy Headed Goose, Black-crowned Night Heron, King Shag, Rock Shag, Gentoo Penguin, Falkland Skua, Turkey Vulture** and **Southern Caracara** - keep up with the action and the photos at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/>

**Escapes and Domestics** : Visiting Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on Dec 4 Brian Fellows found a group of around 10 ducks that were new to him and discovered they were a species of 'Call Duck' (the name came from their one-time use as decoys to attract wildfowl into nets though nowadays they are kept for ornamental purposes). Brian has photos of some on his website (

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x919-call-ducks-fem-baffins-05.12.12.jpg> ). To find out more go to <http://www.callducks.net/index.html> which says "Call ducks are cute. They are the 'toy' ducks of the domestic waterfowl breeds". **The term Call Duck does not refer to a species but to a set of species used for a common purpose (as does Terrier in relation to Dogs)**

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

No reports since a Migrant Hawker on Nov 26

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

One **Brimstone** seen near Basingstoke on Dec 7 with a **Red Admiral** at the same place that day. Also this week one **Peacock** on Dec 4 in the Candover valley south of Basingstoke

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Yellow Dung-fly (*Scathophaga stercoraria*)** : On Dec 3, as last winter, Brian Fellows found one of these on a Hogweed umbel at Brook Meadow in Emsworth searching for smaller insects to eat

**Common Wasp** : On Dec 4 Brian Fellows found a few Wasps, Flies and Hoverflies still visiting Ivy Flowers on a south facing hedge near Nore Barn at the west end of the Emsworth seafront

## **PLANTS**

Among the few flowering plants seen this week in the Havant and Emsworth area were Hedge Mustard, Lesser Swine Cress, Broad Leaved Willowherb (one last flower), Common Nettle, Pellitory of the Wall, Ivy, Annual Mercury, Cow Parsley (three plants in flower beside Park Road South outside Bosmere School in Havant), Fools Parsley, Stone Parsley, Hogweed, Hemlock Water Dropwort, Common Field Speedwell, Red and White Dead Nettles, Water Forget-me-not, Groundsel, Guernsey Fleabane, Daisy, Winter Heliotrope, Yarrow, Scentless and Scented Mayweed, Dandelion, Prickly Lettuce, Cat's Ear, Smooth Hawksbeard, Hawkweed Ox-tongue, Bristly Ox-tongue, Smooth and Prickly Sow-thistle, plus Butcher's Broom.

Also reported at Rye Harbour was an impressive show of Henbane seed heads while on Portsdown Bee Orchids were building up their reserves for next summer's flowering by exposing their leaf rosettes to the winter sunshine as the vegetation previously covering them died back

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Humpback Whale** : First mention of this species that I am aware of with 2 off the Netherlands on Dec 4

**Brown Rat** : One photographed in the act of climbing a tree at Brook Meadow also on Dec 4 (but a less rare occurrence than the Humpback Whales!)

**Brown Hare** : Another species that is rarer than the Brown Rat. A sighting of two at Atherfield on the Isle of Wight on Dec 3 was only the ninth observation I have picked up this year. I am glad to see that the previous report came from Thorney Island back on Aug 15 and that they have also been seen in the Stansted/West Marden areas. I also see that while 'boxing' was noted in March it was also seen in mid-July (is out of season sex becoming fashionable or was the quarrel about something else?)

**Cod and Bass** : On Dec 6 the Durlston Rangers Diary told us that large Bass and Cod, currently migrating to winter spawning grounds (coming in from the Atlantic and heading for the North Sea where they spawn between January and April), are currently coming inshore to feed up en route. Wikipedia tells me that .. "Spawning of northeastern Atlantic cod occurs between January and April (March and April are the peak months), at a depth of 200 metres (660 ft) in specific spawning grounds at water temperatures between 4 and 6 °C (39 and 43 °F). Around the UK, the major spawning grounds are in the middle to southern North Sea, the start of the Bristol Channel (north of Newquay), the Irish Channel (both east and west of the Isle of Man), around Stornoway, and east of Helmsdale." It also tells me, without giving any source for its information, that .. "Prespawning courtship involves fin displays and male grunting". This comes from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cod#Life\\_cycle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cod#Life_cycle)

**Fungi** : My only note for the week is of the appearance of Velvet Shank fungi on a tree trunk overhanging the Langbrook stream just south of the footbridge connecting Mill Lane at Langstone to the South Moors

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 3 - 9 (WEEK 49 OF 2012)**

### **Tue 4 Dec**

#### **Budd's Farm and Langstone area**

My first decent walk of the week took me to Budd's Farm and back along the shore to Langstone Mill Pond, then home via Wade Lane.

The small plot of builders rubbish beside The Twittens still had **Prickly Lettuce** and **Fool's Parsley** in flower while three plants of **Cow Parsley** were still in full flower beside Park Road South outside Bosmere School (halfway south from the bus stop to the roadside school entrance). Reaching the Langbrook Stream water wheel beside the A27 several plants of **Water Forget-me-not** still had flowers as did several of **Stone Parsley** as I followed the path along the north side of Langstone Technology Park, at the west end of which a **Buzzard** was being mobbed in trees before reluctantly flying north over the A27 as I approached.

Nothing special beside Southmoor Lane, nor along Penner Road (though a Grey Wagtail flew over) as I returned to the Langbrook Stream after avoiding the muddiest section. Entering the South Moors I disturbed a **small flock of Blackbirds**, seemingly all young males which had not yet acquired yellow bills. On the Moors I made my usual tour of the orchid field but this time failed to put up any Snipe and saw no Marsh Marigold flowers though a few young leaves gave promise that they will appear.

Budd's pools had a good range of ducks including 10 Pochard as well as the expected Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Teal with just one Little Egret but no Heron or Swans. Along the South Moors shore at highish tide I saw my first three Mergansers of the winter among the Brent and Wigeon (with a few Gadwall that are now regular as sea-ducks). Waders included a few Turnstone and I put up one Skylark from the shingle but only had a very fleeting glimpse of a small bird that came up from the shore to land on the seawall before it saw me and disappeared - almost certainly a Rock Pipit.

Turning into Mill Lane I noted the yellow of Velvet Shank toadstools near the footbridge on the tree trunk which curves down to be immersed in the water at the highest tides.

At Langstone Pond a Kingfisher flew out over the harbour from the sea wall, the pair of Swans were on the pond and one Egret was again in the trees while a few Teal were back on the water of the flood in the field north of the pond. My final note for this walk was of a single flower still showing on Broad-leaved Willowherb though I did also spot a 'new to me' good growth of Mistletoe on a garden apple tree.

Writing this on Thursday morning (Dec 6) I can confirm Brian Fellows recent observation of already paired Robins - a pair came together to breakfast on the breadcrumbs I put out in my garden as I went round removing the thick ice from the various bowls of water which they also need.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 26 - DEC 2 (WEEK 48 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** Cold weather brought 1241 Red-throated to a Netherlands site on Nov 26 and on Nov 28 there were 32 passing Reculver on the north Kent coast - max on the south coast was 7 at Portland. Up to 18 Black-throated were on the north French coast and 7 in St Austell Bay (Cornwall) - Hampshire had just one reported at Milford. Surprisingly very few Great Northern were reported but there were 10 in Portland Harbour and on Nov 28 a White-billed Diver was seen passing Flamborough Head in Yorkshire

**Grebes:** A flock of 61 Great Crested on the sea off Brownwich Cliffs near Titchfield had a wintery feel to it but not yet up to the 604 off a Netherlands site. Two Red-necked Grebes were off Cornwall, one in Portland Harbour and another was seen from West Wittering on Nov 29. By Nov 30 the flock of Slavonian on the sea off Pagham Harbour was up to 10. On Nov 25 the number of Black-necked in the Studland/Poole Harbour area was 47 and on Nov 30 there were 14 in Portland Harbour with 17 at Falmouth on Nov 29

**Little Egret:** Numbers in the Havant area have plummeted this week - on Dec 1 I saw just one - and the only two other reports for this week are both from inland -

one from Longparish near Andover and one "in the middle of suburban Farnborough where it was disturbed by a dog-walker"

**Cattle Egret:** The first report since Oct 30 came from Devon on Nov 29

**Spoonbill:** Poole Harbour remains the only area where these can be seen with up to 15 seen in the Arne area this week

**Bewicks Swan:** Ten were seen at Pagham Harbour on Nov 29 and seven arrived at the Amberley Wild Brooks near Pulborough on Dec 1 (maybe travelling there via Fleet Pond were seven were an unusual sight on Nov 29). I wonder if the birds at Pagham included those which usually spend their winter nights at the Chichester lakes (disappearing to nearby feeding sites each day)

**Whooper Swan:** Four of these were in Kent during the week and another four were on the Devon/Cornwall boundary at Tamar Lake on Nov 28

**Red-breasted Goose:** The almost certainly wild bird which was at Farlington Marshes from Oct 25 to Nov 25 seems to have moved to Portsea Island and has been seen at least twice on the grassland beside Tangier Road set aside by Portsmouth City as a Brent Goose refuge. The second bird which appeared in Cumbria on Nov 16 was still there on Nov 30 but on Nov 28 a third bird was reported in Cornwall

**Shelduck:** Although these have been returning from the southern North Sea shores since mid-September it is only now that the majority are moving here for the winter - a flock of 479 arrived on the northern French coast on Nov 28 and on Nov 29 Sandwich Bay had 114 while on Nov 30 Thurlestone Bay in south Devon had their first Shelduck since July and Christchurch Harbour commented that 'the main body is now returning'. Another sign of the times came in the Six O'Clock BBC News when one of the photographs shown before the weather was of a flock of Shelduck flying past Emsworth.

**Long-tailed Duck:** Among greatly increased number of nearly all wildfowl species this week I noticed that a male Long-tailed Duck had been seen in Chichester Harbour from East Head on Nov 30

**Smew:** Another sign of the arrival of winter was the **first sighting of a Smew** on Nov 27 - not in Kent or on the east coast but at Berry Head near Brixham in south Devon

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A flock of 30 in Chichester Harbour off West Wittering on Nov 29 shows that they are now here in full strength (though so far no one has seen more than 9 **Goldeneye** together!)

**Avocet:** We have come to expect up to 20 to be in Nutbourne Bay (east of Thorney Island) in winter months so I was surprised to see that a flock of 40+ had been seen in that area on Dec 1 - the question is were they just in transit or will they stay?

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** A report of one at Longham Lakes (on the northern fringe of Bournemouth) on Nov 30 was unexpected at this time of year - there had been one in Staffordshire in mid-November and three or four throughout the UK in Sep and Oct but I see they winter in South America and the only ones I have heard about recently are in the Falklands Islands (mentioned in Steve Copsey's current Three Amigos blog)

**Whimbrel:** The first two reports of wintering Whimbrel (since the last migrants on Sep 15) came from Southampton Water (near the Fawley Refinery) on Nov 30 and from the Fishbourne Channel at Chichester on Dec 1

**Spotted Redshank:** There seem to be a few more than usual this winter with Lymington Shore flock up to 9 on Nov 25 (though I see there were 10 there on Dec 7 last year), and 2 at Nore Barn, Emsworth since Oct 27 where only one had been seen for several years. Now we have a report of 4 at Snow Hill in the West Wittering area on Nov 29

**Sand Martin:** A very late single bird (the first since Oct 27 in Sussex ) was at West Bexington in Dorset on Nov 30

**Swallow:** On Dec 1 one was at New Milton in Hampshire, two were at Newquay in Cornwall and one was in the Wembury area of Plymouth. On Nov 30 three were at Folkestone with sightings in Dorset on Nov 27, in Kent on Nov 25 and on the Isle of Wight on Nov 24

**House Martin:** One in Folkestone on Nov 29 and one in the Netherlands on Nov 25

**Waxwing:** By the end of this week these had been seen in every southern county and a flock of 400 on the Stonelees Golfcourse (between Margate and Sandwich on the East Kent coast) seemed to promise more to come. Here in Havant the nearest I have heard of was one in Wickham (in the Meon Valley north of Titchfield Haven) on Nov 30 but other sightings have been at Basingstoke and Winchester

**Black Redstart:** Reports on Nov 25 and 26 seem to indicate that on Hayling Island a Black Redstart is back on the Eastoke promenade just east of the Sandy Point reserve

**Blackbird:** On Nov 29 at least 100 migrant Blackbirds were still arriving on Portland with other species

**Fieldfare:** Of local interest Dec 2 brought both Mistle Thrush and Fieldfare within earshot of my Havant garden but I have still to see a Redwing there.

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

**Species reported this week:**

**Common Darter** - on Nov 23 three were seen at a Berkshire site and one was in the Farnborough area

**Migrant Hawker** (or maybe Southern Hawker) - the only report for Nov 26 comes from East Devon and reads .. "Today at approx 12.30pm a thud sounded on our Conservatory glass and when I looked outside there was a Dragon Fly - identified I think as a Southern Hawker [perhaps Migrant Hawker this late in the year? - Ed], clearly stunned it just sat there on the patio until it started flapping its wings and crawling around"

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Red Admiral** - just one seen on the Hampshire shore near New Milton on Nov 27,

**Peacock** - one seen at Farnborough on Nov 23 .....

### **OTHER INSECTS**

**Hoverflies** and other insects were still being attracted to **ivy flowers** exposed to warm sunshine at Nore Barn in Emsworth on Nov 29, where a late **Garden Cross spider** was still on its web, and at least one **Common Wasp** was in my garden on the colder morning of Dec 2. What I found more interesting was a report from Tony Wilson in Edburton at the foot of the Sussex Downs saying that he has seen very few **Ladybirds** attempting to use his house as their winter residence this autumn. In recent years he has had up to 800 of these squatters. I too have hardly seen any around my house this autumn where I could previously hosted more than 100 - I had put this down to better defences since I have had double glazing fitted but perhaps there is something else going on with Ladybird populations (in addition to a very insect-unfriendly start to the year)

### **PLANTS**

**Traveller's Joy (aka Old Man's Beard)** was flowering on Portsdown on Nov 30

**Stone Parsley:** just one cluster of these plants was still bearing flowers in east Havant on Dec 1

**Burnet Saxifrage:** A couple of young plants were only just starting to flower on Portsdown on Nov 30

**Sticky Groundsel:** One fresh young plant had just started to flower on Dec 1 in a Havant site where I have not seen it before

**Winter Heliotrope:** continues to flower in Havant and Emsworth

**Black Knapweed:** was another unexpected late flowerer on Portsdown on Nov 30

**Three-cornered Leek:** Brian Fellows made the first find of this 'Winter Bluebell' in Westbourne village on Nov 30. As usual I had to check the difference between this and the confusingly named '**Summer Snowflake**' which started to flower in Mill Lane at Langstone on Nov 21 last winter but which I have not seen yet this winter. My method of separating them is to look at the flower petals - the **Three-cornered**

**Leek** has faint green vertical lines running down the flowers where the **Summer Snowflake** has more prominent green 'blobs' at the tip of each petal

**Nostoc commune:** This alga looks very similar to some types of seaweed but as it grows on land I call it 'Landweed'. I have only found one colony this week and have photographed and commented on it in my notes on the wildlife of the Havant Cemetery - see my observations for Nov 28 at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm>

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fish:** On Nov 30 Derek Mills photographed a **Merganser on Thorney Great Deeps with a bony fish in its bill** which was giving it a problem of how to swallow it without damaging itself internally. Brian Fellows published the photo and asked for help in identifying the fish, receiving two different answers: John Bogle thought it was a **Ruffe (Gymnocephalus cernua)** and Mark Tutton that it was a **Scorpion Fish (Taurulus bubalis)**. If you want to make your own mind up and learn a little more about what goes on under the surface of our local waters have a look at Brian's Diary entry for Dec 1 at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> For my own interest I looked at pictures of **Ruffe** but could not see the structure protecting the gills of the fish which is apparent in Derek Mills photo whereas the photo of the **Scorpion fish** seen at <http://www.carolscornwall.com/On%20the%20Beach/Fish-Taurulus%20bubalis24-05-09.jpg> had more than enough armour. I think I favour the latter which is common around British shores though maybe it is happier in rock pools than in the deeper, muddier wates of the deeps. One fact which I learnt is that these **Scorpion Fish do not have swim bladders** and so sink to the bottom as soon as they stop swimming - that's no problem for them as their lifestyle is to lay on the bottom and wait for small prey (prawns and the like, rarely fish) to come within reach. For a much more comprehensive account of the species go to <http://www.glaucus.org.uk/bullhead.htm>

**Fungi:** This week brought a greater variety of fungi in the local area and you can see some that I found in Havant and Warblington cemeteries by visiting <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> For more colour go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2012/11/27/grassland-fungi.html> to see the **Scarlet Waxcaps** found at Rye Harbour on Nov 27 (I think the other two species show are **Bolbitius vitellinus (Yellow Cowpat toadstool)** and the **Snowy Waxcap (Hygrocybe nivea)**) A less eye-catching species, but which is normally very common in the heathland of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth, is the **Common Earthball** of which Brian Fellows found just one when he was there on Nov 28 (photo at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x926-cm-puffball-hollybank-28.11.12.jpg> )

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 26 - DEC 2 (WEEK 48 OF 2012)

### Sat 1 Dec

#### A new month of wild flower

The sun was shining and the wind light for a walk to Warblington for which I followed a slightly unusual route in the hope of maximising the flowering plants seen, starting through Juniper Square where the **Yellow Flowered Strawberries**

were still in flower but the expected **Green Alkanet** was not to be seen - there was one bonus in the form of a flowering **Sticky Groundsel** plant which I have not seen here before. Over the A27 and across the Lymbourne Stream brought me to Wade Court where there were **four Winter Heliotrope flowers** and on to Langstone pond where I saw **five Herons but only one Egret** (the only one seen all morning). On the sea with the tide nearly high I saw what I thought were the two **Swans** from the pond and watched one take off to do an aerial survey of the pond (in case of intruders) before flying off on unknown business.

In Pook Lane the **Dog's Mercury** flowers were found but not the **Cow Parsely** in Church Lane, and in Warblington Church yard was a large troop of what I assumed to be **Tawny Funnel Cap** fungi.

In the Conigar Point field I was surprised to find **a falconer with a seven month old Harris Hawk** but I did not see it fly - its presence had not deterred a flock of at least **32 Skylarks** and a couple of Meadow Pipits.

The only excitement on the way home (via the Selangor Ave footpath, the A27 and the Emsworth road in Havant) was to find a **mass of Stone Parsley** still in flower near the Castle Avenue/Emsworth Road junction after going through the underpass.

Discounting some pretty garden escape Pansies my December flower list started with a creditable 38 species. One other observation that I found unusual was the **large number of corvids** in the Warblington Fam area - I have been used to find flocks of over 100 attracted to the shore and fields in winter but today my impression was of more than 300 with almost as many Jackdaws as Crows (and only half a dozen Starlings in the whole outing)

**Fri 30 Nov**

### **A brief look at Portsdown**

With some spring plants flowering exceptionally early I thought I would have a look at the **Alexanders plants** growing beside the London Road as it climbs Portsdown, getting the warmth both from the sun and the continual traffic. No luck with that but I was surprised to find **Black Knapweed, Burnet Saxifrage** and **Traveller's Joy (aka Old Mans Beard)** in flower

**Thu 29 Nov**

### **Updates to my Cemeteries page**

The homespun HTML code which has served me since at least 1996 proved to be outdated when I changed my browser from Internet Explorer to Google Chrome at the end of last week and the absence of updates to this Diary has been in part the result of having to rewrite some of my code but I have not been entirely idle and have made visits to both Warblington and Havant cemeteries in order to compile the monthly 'Wildlife Observations' posters which I have undertaken to provide to Havant Borough for display on notice boards in those cemeteries. I have today added the content of those posters to my Cemeteries page and you can see them by clicking the link to Cemeteries in the bar at the head of this page.

Two things which may be of general interest in those posters are my finds of what I call 'Landweed' (in contrast to 'Seaweed') which is the alga called generically

Nostoc (I believe that what I found is Nostoc commune but am not sure), and a bright yellow Waxcap which I think is Hygrocybe vitellina which I have not come across before. Another thing noticed this week has been the presence of Mistle Thrushes guarding the arils of Irish Yews in both St Faith's churchyard and the Havant cemetery at New Lane.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 19 - 25 (WEEK 47 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** Nov 21 brought a report of 631 **Red-throated** off one site in the Netherlands (with a potential total of 1389 from three continental sites on that day) and on Nov 22 Sandwich Bay had 14 while on Nov 20 Folkestone reported 11 and on Nov 19 at least 8 were off Dorset. On Nov 18 watchers at Selsey Bill saw 1 **Black-throated** and on Nov 19 there were 2 off Portland (one was also off Sandwich Bay). **Great Northern** were seemingly just as scarce with Southampton Water doing as well as other sites with just one seen on Nov 20 and 24 though later in the week 16 were off Torbay in Devon on Nov 23 (Late news from the Scillies shows that they still had 10 on Nov 1)

**Grebes:** At least one **Red-necked** was seen from England (Selsey on Nov 18 and Portland Harbour on Nov 23). The flock of **Slavonian** in the Church Norton/Selsey area reached 8 on both Nov 18 and 23 - two more were in Southampton Water on Nov 24. **Black-necked** showed their preference for Dorset by putting 63 on show there on Nov 23 (11 in Portland Harbour and 52 in the Poole Harbour/Studland area) though Langstone Harbour also did well that day with 12 seen off the Oyster Beds

**Storm Petrel:** We might have expected a lot of these during this week to justify their association with storms but I have only seen one report (of 3 off Durlston on Nov 21, the first sighting on the south coast since Oct 7 when 11 were seen from Berry Head in Devon).

**Spoonbill:** One flew west over Thorney Island on Nov 19 but probably continued west to Poole Harbour which seems to be the only site on the south coast to have a small resident flock of around a dozen birds.

**Black Brant:** Three are currently being reported in the central south coast area: one remains at Ferrybridge (Weymouth), a second in the north of Pagham Harbour while a third has been reported on Portsea Island (usually at an 'undisclosed location' though it has been seen at the Tangier Road area set aside by Portsmouth City as a Brent Goose feeding area and on the Southsea seafront cricket pitch).

**Red-breasted Goose:** The presumed wild bird has not been reported at Farlington Marshes since Nov 18 (when a second probably wild bird turned up in Cumbria associating with Barnacle geese). I hope that the reason that no-one has mentioned the Farlington bird this week is that it is now 'old hat' and that to

mention its continuing presence is to lower your standing as a birder by reporting it as if you had not seen it before.

**Shelduck:** Small flocks have been passing through Chichester and Langstone Harbours for some time as they head west to winter sites but on Nov 19 I saw around a dozen feeding on mud around north Hayling, looking as if they were happy to stay there for the winter.

**Pintail:** These too are now seeming to settle down for the winter - on Nov 18 there were 21 at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood, on Nov 19 there were 6 in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight and on Nov 21 there were 80 in the Hampshire Avon valley where it flows into Dorset. Also during this week the Blashford Lakes had **220 Shoveler** and **50 Pochard**

**Goldeneye:** Still no substantial numbers - highest reported count is of just 8 at the Blashford Lakes on Nov 17

**Hooded Merganser:** The Pagham Harbour bird which arrived in the first week of November has not been seen since Nov 17 and is presumed to have helped to prove its genuine vagrancy by moving on

**Buzzard:** These are normally thought of as non-aggressive to other birds, limiting their diet to carrion, worms and the occasional rabbit, but on Nov 18 one of them in the Black Down area near Haslemere on the east Hants/west Sussex border got fed up with the Jackdaws that were mobbing it, lunged at and caught one the Jackdaws, and let it fall to the ground dead or dying.

**Quail:** A captive bred bird, perhaps from a farm which supplies Quail Eggs to supermarkets (or maybe a butterfly farm where Quail are kept to control the numbers of unwanted insects) made a break for freedom recently and turned up at the Portland Bird Observatory on Nov 18 after crashing into the roof of a nearby house during the previous night and being taken into care by the householder. It survived its crash and flew off strongly when released next morning

**Coot:** Large numbers of these have already flown, from inland sites where the water may soon freeze, to ice free seaside waters (and no doubt more will follow when it does become cold). On Nov 23 Brian Fellows noticed that this winter passage had brought a flock of around 40 Coot into Emsworth Harbour though he was unable to separate those regarding Sussex as their winter home from those which had been heading for Hampshire as the county boundary follows the centreline of the narrow Emsworth Channel in which they were milling around

**Great Bustard:** The scheme to re-introduce these birds to Britain has been running since 2004, importing eggs from Eastern Europe and Russia to be hatched here and then released on Salisbury Plain. I have looked through the Project's website ( <http://greatbustard.org/> ) but cannot find any figures for the current population of these birds but I did learn that the bird which had been seen flying south over Durlston on Nov 18 did reach northern France as others have

done in previous years, returning of their own accord next spring in some if not all cases. I also read that another adult bird had left on Nov 4, reaching the west coast of France two days later - it was found in an exhausted state and has been brought back to Wiltshire. The organisers of the Project already put something in the birds food which is supposed to deter them from flying off but it did not work in this case! Perhaps the cause of this bird's departure was disturbance by the Great Bustard Morris Group from Swindon - to learn more about them follow the link from the Bustard site to the dancers Facebook page to learn more

**Knot:** Riding around the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour on Nov 23 at low tide I thought, from their apparent size and ponderous feeding behaviour, that there were a lot of Knot in the harbour and I see that the number reported in Pagham Harbour broke the 100 mark with 150+ reported on Nov 19, increasing to 340 on Nov 22 (and what I think was the first of the winter on the Emsworth shore was at Nore Barn on Nov 9).

**Black-tailed Godwit:** An unconfirmed estimate that there were more than 1000 now feeding on the lower Avon valley north of Christchurch was made on Nov 21 when an actual count of the birds in just one section of that valley (around the Avon Causeway) was reported as 650. In Devon there are more than 750 in the Exe estuary and even inland at Pulborough Brooks there were around 100 on Nov 18

**Sandwich Tern:** I would have expected that birds intending to migrate south would have done so by now, leaving small numbers to spend the winter in the English Channel area so I was surprised to see a count of 60 from a French site on the Normandie coast on Nov 24

**Auks:** Thousands of Razorbills and Guillemots are now in the English Channel and southern North Sea and among the reports was one of a **Tystie (Black Guillemot)** in the Brixham area of the south Devon coast on Nov 20. The week has also brought sightings of single **Little Auk** at Brixham on Nov 19 and at Selsey Bill on Nov 22

**Barn Owl:** I have long been aware that drowning is almost as common a cause of Barn Owl death as is being hit by motor vehicles (in summer the only source of water for drinking or bathing in their rural territories is often the cattle troughs in fields and unless a sloping plank is in the trough the owl gets into the water, its feathers - which are not waterproof - become waterlogged and it drowns). Knowing this I was very surprised to read that, in heavy rain on Nov 21, a Barn Owl was seen in the Martin village area (north west of Fordingbridge) standing forlornly in a roadside puddle.

**Kingfisher:** Of local interest on Nov 23 one was back on the Brockhampton stream, perched on the metal flap through which excess storm water is discharged from Budds Farm sewage works into Langstone Harbour

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** These are not normally seen until they start their territorial calls and drumming in the early spring but one has been showing well at Pulborough Brooks recently and this week one has been in the trees overhanging

the River Alver near the Gosport Wildgrounds nature reserve with another at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood

**Skylark:** Many have been arriving in southern England from the continent since the end of September - my starting point is a report of 10 at Sandwich Bay on Sep 20 followed by 300+ in south Devon on Oct 5. On the continent two Netherlands sites each reported more than 2000 passing over on Oct 11 and 12, increasing to 23,406 at one site on Oct 19. With this background it seems odd that no flocks of more than 100 were seen in Hampshire until Nov 20 and when I visited Warblington Farm on Nov 22 I did not put up more than a dozen from the wheat stubble.

**Swallow:** These were still being seen daily in southern England until Nov 23 when one was seen at Durlston (and I don't expect it will be the last of the year)

**Waxwing:** On Nov 22 the Rare Bird Alert (RBA) organisation received reports totalling 3,430 birds in the UK but this is almost certainly an undercount as those reports came from just 35 counties whereas on Nov 18 RBA had reports from 51 counties but gave no total for the number of birds involved. Although most remain in the north at least one was in a Devon garden on Nov 22 and 2 were in the Basingstoke area on Nov 20 with 9 near Sandwich in Kent on Nov 19 and 22 flew over Folkestone heading south west on Nov 18

**Desert Wheatear:** One was an unexpected sighting on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent on Nov 18 and 19

**Ring Ouzel:** Singles were reported in Cornwall and the Scilles on Nov 18 to be the last that I know of in England

**Fieldfare:** An impressive roost of an estimated 22,000 birds was in the Kent Stour Valley on Nov 22

**Redwing:** There have been reports of their calls heard over Hampshire after dark this week but the only reported sighting of any significance in the county was a flock of around 50 on Abbotstone Down (near Alresford, upstream of Winchester) on Nov 23

**Subalpine Warbler:** A young bird has been at St Just in west Cornwall from Nov 17 to at least Nov 21

**Asian Desert Warbler (*Sylvia nana*):** The 12th bird of this species to be recorded in Britain and the first since October 2004 was spotted by a birder called Roger Card who was lucky to have his camera ready when a 'little brown job' arrived in the weedy edge of a well used footpath in the Folkestone area on Nov 18. No one else has seen this bird and without the photos the bird would not have been identified and recorded. To get background on this species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian\\_Desert\\_Warbler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_Desert_Warbler) and to see Roger's photos go to <http://www.freewebs.com/folkestonebirds/index.htm>

**Blackcap:** On Nov 19 a Brian Fellows was told that a Blackcap had been singing recently in an Emsworth garden, seemingly the first winter song.

**Nuthatch:** Of local interest one has been visiting bird feeders in a garden at Wade Court (Langstone)

**Great Grey Shrike:** Still only one in the New Forest and one at Morden Bog in Dorset but on Nov 21 RBA reported a newcomer in Essex

**Chough:** Following the death of one in the Scillies on Nov 2 there is better news of one on Lundy Island since Oct 30 which may have arrived from Ireland or Wales and gives hope that a new colony will establish itself on Lundy without human interference

**Tree Sparrow:** A flock of around 20 birds was at Arlington Reservoir near Beachy Head on Nov 18 - possibly from the established colony on the nearby Pevensy Levels but more likely to be continental birds. A more surprising report dated Nov 23 is of one visiting a garden bird table at Kingsbridge in south Devon

**Bullfinch:** Bigger than expected numbers have been seen in many places this year and this trend continues with a report of 13 at Dibden Bay (Southampton Water) on Nov 17. Evidence of a similar population increase on the continent comes from a report of 63 at a Netherlands site, also on Nov 17

**Snow Bunting:** Reports of ones and twos at five south coast sites in recent weeks increased on Nov 23 when a new pair were found at Langney Point on the Eastbourne seafront

**Foreign Birds:** Steve Copsey, on board the Navy's Ice Patrol vessel HMS Protector, is continuing his voyage to the Antarctic and has been reporting his sightings between Tristan da Cunha and the Falklands. Anyone interested in his sightings and photos of **Southern Royal Albatross, Spectacled Petrel, Slender Billed Prion, Blue Petrel, Southern Fulmar, Southern and Northern Giant Petrel plus Wandering Albatross and Cape Petrel** should read his reports at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/>

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

Species reported this week:

**Migrant Hawker** (just one in Norfolk on Nov 18), **Common Darter** (5 reports on Nov 18 totalling 8 insects in Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Sussex and Northhamptonshire),

### **Butterflies:**

Species reported this week:

**Brimstone** (two in the Brighton area on Nov 17), **Red Admiral** (18 reports covering 33 insects during the week with the last on Nov 23), **Peacock** (one in Pagham area on Nov 18), **Comma** (3 reports from Gosport, Petersfield and Haywards

Heath area - last on Nov 18), **Speckled Wood** (2 reports from Gosport - last on Nov 18)

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Drone Flies** and **Honey Bees** were seen in the Emsworth area. **Lesser Bloody Nosed Beetles** were on the downland at Dursleston and if you follow the link below to Other Wildlife news you will find a report of a **stridulating grasshopper**, a **Common Darter**, a **seven-spot Ladybird** and **wasps** seen in Shoreham Beach on Nov 18 along with the **Wall Lizards** that were the reason for that entry in that section Other reports were of caterpillars that will probably remain active for some time yet.

## **PLANTS**

I am aware of **46 plants species flowering this week** some of the more interesting are listed below.

**Common Fumitory:** One in full fresh flower at Warblington Farm on Nov 22

**Black Mustard:** Still flowering at Emsworth Marina on Nov 19

**Sweet Violet:** Following the first seen in Havant on Oct 25 I found more fresh flowers at both the Oysterbeds and North Common on Hayling on Nov 19

**Common Mouse-ear:** The first I have seen in flower since Oct 12 were out by the west Emsworth A27 underpass on Nov 22

**Ribbed Melilot:** A fresh plant flowering at Broadmarsh on Nov 23 was unexpected

**Ornamental Cherry:** Not a wild flower but nevertheless a welcome sight was the first tree flowering in Warblington cemetery (with a group of white alabaster angels hanging among the blossom)

**Dwarf Spurge:** This autumn's massive growth of this species in the Warblington Farm Conigar Point field was still looking fresh on Nov 22

**Strawberry Tree:** The first fresh flowers were out on the Northney Village Church tree (Hayling Is) on Nov 19 ( and near my home in Havant a small tree planted a few years ago in a garden had even more blossom)

**Field Woundwort:** One or two of the plants discovered by Brian Fellows on July 30 growing in the cycle path gutter near the west Emsworth A27 underpass were still showing fresh flower buds on Nov 22

**Sea Aster:** A battered elderly plant still had flowers on Hayling Island on Nov 19

**Blue Fleabane:** An equally elderly plant found in the Broadmarsh area on Nov 23 still had fresh flowers

**Spear Thistle:** Creeping Thistle flowers are still fairly common but I only found one Spear Thistle plant flowering near the Hayling Oysterbeds on Nov 19

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Cetaceans:** Although I have not been recording sightings of these for some time I noticed a report for Nov 22 on the Devon Birding site from a birder seawatching from Berry Head (which is the end of the southern arm of Torbay) on the south Devon coast saying that the strong winds meant that there were few birds but going on to say .. "the cetaceans where brilliant! At least **6 Harbour Porpoise** often surfing the waves and some leaping clear of the water, then a pod of **8**

**Bottle-nosed Dolphins with a medium sized calf** moved south and better still **two White-beaked Dolphins** feeding off the end of the headland about 600m offshore initially, although they were underwater much of the time they stayed in the area for 20+minutes from 0950hrs before moving off south." Another part of the cetacean story this week comes from the Camber Sands on the shore of Rye Bay where, on Nov 17 a **dead Porpoise** was washed up - no details as to cause of death

**Roe Deer:** Deer populations have been increasing for many years - when I first started exploring wildlife on Hayling Island in the early 1980s I never saw Roe Deer but nowadays they are commonplace, regularly seen from houses bordering the north Hayling open fields. This week I was made aware of new area where they are being regularly seen among an even busier human population on the south west slopes of Portsdown in the abandoned (?) fields of the 40 Acres Farm close to where the A3M meets the A27

**Noctule Bat:** Nov 20 seems a late date for any bat to be regularly appearing to hunt at dusk but the Devon Birding news reports what is thought to be a Noctule being still a regular sight over the disused Upottery Airfield on the north west side of the A30 a little north east of Honiton

**Wall Lizards:** Another late sighting of these comes from Shoreham on the Sussex coast where Richard Roebuck (a regular contributor to the Sussex Butterfly News) reports seeing more than 80 (mainly young) of these Lizards in warm sunshine at midday on Nov 18. As Richard's report gives such a good impression of the wildlife to be seen on the Shoreham seafront in mid-November (contrasting with the weather we have experienced later in the same week) I feel I must quote his entry in full ...

"After a frosty start Sunday was nice and warm and at Shoreham Beach shingle reserve temperature was 12 degrees C with lovely warm sunshine. Insect life was surprisingly busy with the following seen, garden ants, male wasps nectaring, grasshopper stridulating, Seven-spot Ladybird, hover-flies, Buff-tale Bumble Bees, male Common Darter, Silver Y (2) Angle Shades moth 1, unidentified micros (2), **Wall Lizards (mainly young ones 80+)**. Large White caterpillars 8, various instars on one remaining patch of sea kale. I also saw several <1 cm long hairy caterpillars normally on the kale But found one on a mallow - I think they may be an overwintering early instar as I have seen many before of exactly the same size over the past few months on Sea Kale. it seems rather distinctive, maybe someone knows what it is? A large patch of the Hot n Tot fig, is a reminder of the relatively mild climate at this habitat. I hoped I would see a Red Admiral on the wing but alas no. (Richard Roebuck)"

If you are wondering what Hot n Tot Fig may be translate that modern-speak into ancient English to become **Hottentot Fig** and see <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/most-unwanted-species/established/terrestrial/hottentot-fig> to learn what the descendants of St Patrick are doing to defend Ireland from this menacing invader (and hopefully to drive it, like the Snakes, from the Emerald Isle)

**Cellar Snail (*Oxychilus alliarius*):** When checking out the 'arable weeds' in the harvested field behind Conigar Point on the Warblington Farm I noticed a moderately sized 'flat-shelled' snail which I mentally noted as a probable Rounded Snail (*Discus rotundatus*) but which I now think may have been a Cellar Snail (these are common and not confined to Cellars!). Sadly I did not measure it, smell it for the scent of Garlic, nor turn it over to check the size of its 'umbilicus' (the hole in the centre of the whorls of the shell named for its supposed resemblance to our 'tummy button') so I cannot have any confidence in naming it as any one of five similar species named in the identification table at the back of my Shire Natural History series booklet on Land Snails of the British Isles by A A Wardhaugh

**Fungi:** I have so far been unable to name one species which was fairly common in the Warblington Farm Conigar Point field on Nov 22 despite having taken measurements, examined a specimen in detail and obtained a good spore print - I think it is a *Hebeloma* species but will have to visit the site again to see if the thick slimy mucus covering the caps of the specimens I saw was natural to the species or the result of the unusual weather conditions! One species I did identify was the common **Tawny Funnel Cap** found in leaf litter beside Daw Lane on Hayling Island on Nov 19 and another that I was previously unfamiliar with was the whitish grey jelly like species (like a white form of Black Bulgar) covering the barkless trunk of a small fallen tree in Pook Lane at Warblington on Nov 22 - this seems to be ***Mollisea cinerea*** (now having the English Name of **Common Grey Disco**). On my lawn more **Meadow Waxcaps** have appeared during the week but nothing new.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 19 - 25 (WEEK 47 OF 2012)**

Thu 22 Nov

### **An alabaster angel among the first Cherry Blossom**

With a very high wind this morning I left my bike at home and walked to Emsworth and back in sunshine, finding a selection of healthy looking wild flowers, several fungi and one late Red Admiral butterfly.

My route took me from the Havant Arts Centre along the path which meets Pook Lane at the point at which it is bisected by the A27, then over the main road and on down Pook Lane to the shore where I was exposed to the full force of the southerly gale. Turning inland again through Warblington cemetery I continued east along the church path but turned off to return to the shore at Conigar Point from where I followed the shore to Nore Barn and the Maisemore Gardens stream before heading back along the north of the Nore Barn woodland and up the path which meets the A259 near Selangor Avenue before following the road back into Havant.

In Pook Lane I only saw one **Dogs Mercury** plant, now in full flower, and found a **whitish, gelatinous fungus** covering the fallen trunk of a small and now barkless tree - my best guess at its name is ***Mollisia cinerea*** which can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3koR0uqPAS0>

In Warblington cemetery the first thing that I saw as I entered from the path from the shore was the first **Cherry Blossom** of the season and when I approached the

small Cherry tree I found a small group of **alabaster angels** hanging from one of its branches to enhance the flowers.

My next notes are of things seen in the two fields south of the Church Path which I crossed to reach the shore at Conigar Point - in both were a few scattered **small mushroom like fungi** which I have not yet identified. The cap of the specimen which I collected measured 55mm across and was whitish (tinged with pale brown) with a small depression at its centre and a slightly inrolled rim, covered all over with a shiny, sticky goo. The gills were fairly widely spaced and pale brown in colour and the stem measured 30 x 10 mm with a slightly bulbous base and was covered with brownish fibres though giving an overall whitish look - when separated from the cap it turned out to be hollow and fragile. I am now waiting to get a spore print before trying to name it.

In the Conigar Point field masses of **Field Madder** was in flower and I came across a single plant of **Common Fumitory** among the **Scentless Mayweed** and **Perennial Sowthistle**. Masses of **Dwarf Spurge** were everywhere along with some **Sun Spurge** and on coming out onto the shore I found **Tamarisk flowers** on trees less exposed to the wind.

Approaching the Nore Barn trees I watched many corvids seemingly having great fun flying south over the wood and then being hurled up by the strong updraught where the wind roaring in over the open harbour met the trees and was forced up. When I reached the shelter of the trees I heard the only bird song of the walk from a solitary **Collared Dove**.

On the way home I found a dead tree stump covered with **Candle Snuff fungus** and noted several wild flowers that are no longer common including the **Field Woundwort** which Brian Fellows found at the end of July and which has persisted since then - nearby were several plants of **Common Mouse-ear** in flower (something I have only seen once, in October, since it ceased to flower generally at the end of August). These two flowers were both seen near the A27 underpass where a more surprising find was of a **Red Admiral** still capable of flight when I disturbed its sun bathing.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 12 - 18 (WEEK 46 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** 13 **Red-throated** were off Folkestone on Nov 9 but this does not indicate the scale of the build up of these birds in the southern North Sea during the week which is revealed by the Trektellen website - on Nov 11 it records 149 at one Netherlands site (205 if you add in those seen at a second site without any check on double counting), on Nov 14 the single site total was 219 (with a potential 222 from two sites), and on Nov 17 the single site figure was 420 with a potential 727 if you add in those seen at a second site). **Black-throated** were much less common with single birds seen at seven sites (one of them Scotney Court at Rye Harbour). **Great Northern** were more widespread with reports from nine sites including singles in Southampton Water, Portland Harbour and on the sea off Church Norton in Sussex - the Channel Isles were the only place to report multiple birds with a potential total of 16

**Grebes:** **Red-Necked** increased to a potential 3 in the Netherlands plus 2 at Christchurch and 1 in Portland Harbour. **Slavonian** were seen in singles in Langstone Harbour, Portland Harbour, Southampton Water and off Penzance while the usual winter flock off Pagham Harbour had started with 3 there on Nov 11 and 2 were in Christchurch Harbour on Nov 16. The first two **Black-necked** had been in Langstone Harbour (off the Hayling Oysterbeds) on Nov 2 and this week there were 9 there on Nov 11 but Dorset still remains in the lead with 12 off Studland on Nov 15 (37 had been there on Nov 4). Devon still had 5 in Torbay on Nov 12. This week's surprise was one seen in the Southwick Canal at Shoreham on Nov 17

**Little Egret:** Back on Sep 24 Langstone Pond had 45 Egrets there during the daytime high tide (and a night roost of 106 on Sep 6). This autumn peak diminishes rapidly as winter approaches and last winter it seemed that only 7 birds regarded the pond as their home but it may be that this winter even fewer can be seen there - during the very high tide on Nov 16 I could only see two Egrets there

**Glossy Ibis:** The only mention of this species in this week's news comes from Lee Evans who, on Nov 9, declared that there was only one Ibis in the UK (in Wales). Lee also told us that there were only 12 **Great White Egrets** in the kingdom

**Spoonbill:** At least 11 were still in Poole Harbour this week with another four in Cornwall

**Black Brant:** Two of these were at Weymouth from Oct 18 to Nov 3 since when only one has been reported there. Maybe one of them flew east to appear in Poole Harbour on Nov 6 but if it continued east there is no certainty as to where it went next as on Nov 12 one appeared in the Portsmouth area and another in the north of Pagham Harbour. Both these birds were reported again in Nov 13 and were still present on Nov 17 (Pagham) and Nov 16 (Portsmouth)

**Red Breasted Goose:** Still being seen at Farlington Marshes on Nov 17 where it has been since Oct 25

**Hooded Merganser:** The female (possibly a young male) which has been in the north of Pagham Harbour since the beginning of November was still there on Nov 17 and is now regarded as a genuine wild vagrant from across the Atlantic

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** One seen in Norfolk on Nov 15 is not the first of the winter - one was reported in Essex on Oct 9 but nothing more has been heard of it (by me) since.

**Common Crane:** The bird which arrived at Amberley Wild Brooks on Nov 11 was still there on Nov 17 (having survived a shoot in the area) but the one at Rye Harbour from Nov 9 to 12 has not been reported again

**Avocet:** The first birding boat trip of the winter down the River Exe on Nov 13 saw 250 Avocet. Locally a small flock seems to have settled in Chichester Harbour east of Thorney Island, being seen in Nutbourne Bay (the end of the

Thorney Channel) on Nov 3 (around 20 birds which probably continued west to be seen at Farlington Marshes on Nov 6), Nov 10 (15 birds) and Nov 13 (14 birds)

**Woodcock:** Continental birds continue to arrive all along the south coast. This week there have been sighting in Bognor (flying over), Durlston, Portland, Dungeness, Romsey and Fareham

**Woodpigeon:** It looks as if the autumn movement is now over. The only English sites to report them this week were Dungeness with 810 over on Nov 12 and 630 on Nov 14 and Torbay in Devon with more than 1500 over on Nov 11. Across the channel Jersey reported 10,700 on Nov 11, 5,800 on Nov 12 and 5,210 on Nov 13

**Ring Necked Parakeet:** The sight of 24 flying west over Lewes may indicate that a few are leaving the overcrowded population in London.

**Little Owl:** Young birds do wander in search of new territories each autumn but I think there was some exaggeration in describing one seen at Dungeness this week as a 'grounded migrant'

**Short-eared Owl:** One was still based at Farlington Marshes this week but two seen over the Thornham Marshes (east end of the Thorney Great Deeps) and one sitting on the fence of the Hayling Golf Course may have been new arrivals from the south

**Hoopoe:** One was a 'one day wonder' at Portland on Nov 15

**Swallow:** Seen at 11 English sites this week. The two latest reports have been from Devon on Nov 16 (two birds coming in off the sea to fly north up the Exe estuary) and Sussex on Nov 17 (five birds heading east over Seaford)

**House Martin:** Not reported in England since Nov 11 when two were over Durlston.

**Waxwing:** Back on Nov 9 RBA News reported a total of 4,274 in the UK (spread over 35 counties) but although I have seen no higher total I suspect the number is still rising - on Nov 12 RBA reported a single flock of 1000 birds at the Kyle of Lochalsh in Scotland. To encourage you to keep your eyes open for them see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x936-waxwings-findhorn-RS-16.11.12.jpg> - this was taken in the north of Scotland and sent to Brian Fellows who put it on his website where he posed the question - "Will they be seen in Emsworth?" My answer is that I think it very likely that they will - this week's sightings include some from Basingstoke, Exeter, Dungeness and Cornwall while early sightings in late October included Hailsham in East Sussex, Reculver on the north Kent coast and the Scilly Isles and in early November they were seen in Cornwall, Folkestone, Sandwich Bay and Dorset. As with nearly all our winter visitors the majority cross the North Sea but a fair proportion follow a land route across Europe and finally cross the English Channel to our south coast

**Wheatear:** Three late departers were in the Poole Harbour area on Nov 11

**Ring Ouzel:** Another late bird was one of these at Durlston on Nov 15

**Fieldfare:** All species of Thrush are still on the move but the largest numbers I have seen reported have been of Fieldfare with around 2800 in the Netherlands on Nov 12 and I suspect that a flock of more than 270 seen on Butser Hill near Petersfield on Nov 15 may have been part of that mass as it spread out in search of good places to settle for the winter - other parts were recorded on Nov 15 at Portland (70), Dungeness (10), Berry Head in Devon (270+) and Durlston (210)

**Song Thrush:** One bird apparently satisfied that it has reached its winter destination and is happy to settle there is a single **Song Thrush which has been singing its heart out** around my house here in Havant each morning and evening since the afternoon of Nov 14 (Also in the Havant area I have been told of a **Blackbird in subsong** this week)

**Firecrest:** Both Gold and Fire-crests seem to be more numerous than usual this winter and a search of Southampton Common this week found 36 **Firecrests** there and here in Havant 2 were found in trees around the carpark on the Billy Trail adjacent to the Havant Arts Centre

**Great Grey Shrike:** Just one was found in the New Forest on Nov 10 during the second of the Forest wide bird surveys of this winter. It was in the Beaulieu Road station area where it arrived on Nov 6

**Spanish Sparrow:** The single bird which was found in the Newchurch area of the Isle of Wight on Nov 4 seemingly disappeared but was refound in the same area on Nov 11

**Brambling:** These have been arriving in southern England since Sep 27 when singles appeared at both Folkestone and Christchurch Harbour. There have been well over 100 reports of them since then (including an arrival of 2000 in Yorkshire on Oct 22) and some have already settled down in gardens (e.g. 5 in a Chandlers Ford garden near Eastleigh on Nov 11 and 14)

**Snow Bunting:** This week's reports include sightings at Folkestone, Pett (Rye Bay), Cornwall (near Lands End), Dorset, Dungeness, Seaford and Rye Harbour

**Foreign Birds:** The BTO Migration Blog ( [http://btomigrationblog.blogspot.co.uk/?dm\\_i=NXK,10KUS,3UEDCR,33J08,0](http://btomigrationblog.blogspot.co.uk/?dm_i=NXK,10KUS,3UEDCR,33J08,0) ) tells us that large numbers of **Pine Grosbeak** are leaving Denmark and may be heading our way while Steve Cosey (engaged in Naval duties around Tristan da Cunha in the south Atlantic) has been keeping us up to date with his bird sightings via the Three Amigos Blog ( <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> ) Currently the first entry in the blog is an account by Tony Tindale of his visit to Pagham Harbour to see the **Hooded Merganser** but that is followed by Steve's photos of **Tristan Albatross, Broad-billed Prion, Antarctic Tern and Antarctic Skua**.

**Vagrants:** A couple of sightings which caught my eye in the RBA News ( <http://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/RealData/dailysummary.asp> ) were of a **Cedar Waxwing** in Ireland on Nov 10 and a **Black-bellied Dipper** in Norfolk on Nov 15

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Species reported this week with latest dates:

**Southern Hawker** (female in Devon on Nov 13), **Migrant Hawker** (one on Isle of Wight on Nov 14), **Common Darter** (13 on the Isle of Wight on Nov 14 - one still egg laying)

### Butterflies:

#### Species reported this week with latest dates:

**Brimstone** (female near Crowborough on Nov 13), **Red Admiral** (five seen in Sussex on Nov 3), **Small Tortoiseshell** (one active near Eastbourne on Nov 11), **Comma** (one in Sussex on Nov 13), **Speckled Wood** (one in Gosport on Nov 11)

### OTHER INSECTS:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Water Boatman:** One still active on a Portsdown pond on Nov 10

## PLANTS

A total of 101 plant species have been found in flower during November and some of the more unexpected seen this week are listed here

**Oilseed Rape:** Found in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Wild Radish:** Also in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Pale Flax:** One flower seen at Durlston on Nov 17

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** Several still flowering in Juniper Square (Havant) on Nov 15

**Wood Avens:** One plant flowering in Havant on Nov 15

**Cow Parsley:** Two plants flowering in Havant (Park Road South) on Nov 15

**Wild Parsnip:** Flowering at Durlston on Nov 17

**Hemlock Water Dropwort:** Flowering in Emsworth on Nov 15

**Red Bartsia:** Flowering in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Balm:** Flowering in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Wood Sage:** Flowering in Hollybank Woods (Emsworth) on Nov 14

**Field Forget-me-not:** Flowering in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Field Scabious:** Flowering at Durlston on Nov 11

**Common Fleabane:** Flowering at Emsworth on Nov 16

**Golden Samphire:** Flowering at Emsworth on Nov 11

**Michaelmas Daisy:** Both Common and Narrow Leaved flowering in Emsworth on Nov 16

**Winter Heliotrope:** On Nov 16 the first flowers of this for this winter were seen in both Langstone and Emsworth

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fungi:** More **Fly Agaric** were seen in the Alver Valley at Gosport on Nov 15 and more **Honey Fungus** were seen in Emsworth on Nov 10. First sightings of species

in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Nov 14 were of **Trooping Funnel** (*Clitocybe geotropa*), masses of **Russet Toughshank** (*Collybia dryophila*), tiny **Foetid Parachute** (*Micromphale foetidum*) - I did not detect any nasty smell from this - and the pretty **Milky Bonnet** (*Mycena lactea*). Photos of these can be seen in my diary entry at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#1411> Another newcomer this week was the tiny black **Hairy Earthtongue** (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*) peeping through the grass and moss in my garden lawn on Nov 16

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 12 - 18 (WEEK 46 OF 2012)**

### **Fri 16 Nov**

#### **First Winter Heliotrope flower**

A brief cycle to Langstone after lunch today found **a single Winter Heliotrope flower, first of the season**, beside Wade Lane where it passes Wade Court.

At the pond with the tide very high I found **just two Little Egrets** giving further confirmation that the large number which used the pond as both a high tide and a night roost during the summer and autumn have now moved elsewhere.

On the way home I met Tony Gutteridge who had also heard the Song Thrush in the Beechworth Road area of Havant (it is still singing today) and had also heard a **Blackbird in subsong**

In my garden this morning I spotted the first **Black Earth-tongues** (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*) which appear each year in the mossy grass of the lawn

### **Wed 14 Nov**

#### **Fungi in Hollybank Woods**

Before the fungi I have to report that yesterday in the late afternoon I heard **Song Thrush song** coming from somewhere near but out of sight of my garden. This morning and afternoon the same bird (presumably) gave a similar brief performance and before I wrote this on Thursday morning I heard it again so I take it that here in Havant regular Song Thrush song started on Nov 13 (Last year it was heard from Nov 7 through to Dec 21, resuming on Jan 1 but with a further gap between Jan 13 and Feb 20 this year)

I set out for the Hollybank Woods in north Emsworth in mid-afternoon so had limited time for my search for fungi though I think a longer period would not have given me much more. My best find came as I was walking from where I had parked on Hollybank Lane towards the woods. In one of the last gardens on the west side of the road before it becomes an unsurfaced lane, under a massive oak, I found this troop of more than half a dozen large **Clitocybe geotropa** with caps around 15cm across and stems around 12cm high.

Clitocybe geotropa in a Hollybank Lane garden

In the woods I walked a long way without finding any fungi until, under the tall conifers southwest of the major path junction as you go up the continuation of Hollybank Lane, I came on a large number of what I think were all **Collybia**

**dryophila** - the cap colour did not match Roger Phillips photos but he does say that it is variable and the flattened reddish stems are unique to this species.

Collybia dryophila showing the distinctive stem

Heading west from the lane near its junction with Emsworth Common Road, among the mass of uncleared tree saplings intermixed with mature Yew trees, I found more Collybia but also, on Yew trunks, two smaller species which I think may be **Mycena lactea** (the tiny white 'bonnet') and **Micromphale foetidum** (the slightly large brown cluster of bonnets with distinctive radial lines in their caps)

Two tiny 'bonnets' - maybe Mycena Lactea and Micromphale foetidum

**Tue 13 Nov**

### **Colour in Havant Cemetery**

Yesterday brought some colour into my garden in the form of **two Jays** which spent a little time searching for buried treasure in the lawn with no apparent success. Today I went looking for autumn colour and found some in Havant cemetery. Most obvious were the colours in the leaves both on the ground and still on the trees.

Autumn colour in the trees

There was little colour in the few remaining flowers but there was plenty (if you looked for it) in the **fungi**. The first that caught my eye was a single pure white **Lepiota (almost certainly L. leucothites)** after which I found a good show of **Parrot Waxcaps** which are named after their variable bright colours - usually green predominates with splashes of yellow but here yellow tending to red was the dominant and finally I found rich browns and rust colour in what I assume to be a **Cortinarius species**

Cap and underside of **Lepiota leucothites**

Cap and underside of a presumed **Cortinarius species**

A couple of photos of **Parrot Waxcaps**

In addition to the fungi I also found attractive but small orange-red **berries on the Duke of Argyll's Teaplat**. These fruits are sold as **Goji Berries (aka Wolfberries)** and supposedly confer long life on those who eat them regularly. The berries here in the cemetery were small and too high up for me to get a decent picture so I have copied one from Wikipedia

A photo of **Goji Berries** from Wikipedia

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 5 - 11 (WEEK 45 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** This week there were two **Red-throated** in Portland Harbour and at least one in the Scillies but the arrival of more from the north was shown by a report of

86 at a Netherlands site on Nov 10. **Black-throated** numbers also increased with the first report of a 'flock' of 8 in St Austell Bay (Cornwall) where the number is likely to grow through the winter. One of these was off the Park Shore east of Lymington on Nov 4 and single **Great Northern**s were off the Lymington shore on both Nov 7 and 9

**Grebes:** Small winter flocks of **Great Crested** have been seen this week at Fleet Pond (11), Chichester gravel pits (14) and on the sea off Church Norton (9) while the first single I have seen on the water off Langstone Pond was there on Nov 5. At least one **Red Necked** was seen from the French Normandie coast on both Nov 5 and 10. Two **Slavonian** were in Hayling Bay on Nov 7 and in Pagham Harbour on Nov 10 while others have been seen this week in Cornwall and Dorset. The first in Langstone Harbour was seen from Farlington Marshes on Nov 10. The flock of **Black-necked** off the Studland beaches had 29 birds on Nov 6 with at least another 3 in the Torbay area of Devon

**Bittern:** Sightings this week at Hatch Pond in Poole Harbour (1), Radipole (1) and East Bexington (1) in Dorset, at Rye Harbour (1) in Sussex and at Blashford (1) and Titchfield Haven (1) in Hampshire

**Little Egret:** A further sign that the Langstone Pond trees may have been abandoned as a night roost came on Nov 5 when I was passing at dusk and saw two Egrets fly over without stopping and just one perch on a tree-top to assess whether it would have company for the night before flying down to a sheltered perch (I assume it flew off to north Thorney though I did not wait to see it leave). The Thorney Island (Little Deeps east) roost had 75 birds on Oct 28.

**Mute Swan:** Two flying past Langstone Pond on Nov 5 were the first I can recall airborne since the adults settled down to nesting in the spring though I suspect some have been flying for a month or more (e.g. to get in and out of the fenced Budds Farm pools where the full family of two adults and five cygnets were again present on Nov 8)

**Whooper Swan:** A group of six that have been in the Scillies since Oct 18 increased to 17 on Oct 28 when there were 28 in Yorkshire. Oct 29 brought a count of 40 from Spurn on the Yorkshire coast. On Nov 3 five flew over Folkestone but there is no news yet of the family that spent several winters at the Chichester Lakes up to 2010 but were not reported in 2011

**Greylag Goose:** A flock of 450 grazing by the R Adur near Bines Bridge (north of Henfield) was more than twice the size of the previous largest flock in Sussex (206 in 1992 at Weir Wood Reservoir near Crowborough)

**Red-Breasted Goose:** The bird that has been at Farlington Marshes since Oct 25 was still there on Nov 10 and it remains the only one currently in southern England

**Mandarin Duck:** In the past the only place where I recall these being present in big numbers was Virginia Water on the southern edge of Windsor Great Park so I was surprised to see a report on Nov 8 of more than 80 on a lake in the Hembury Woods (near Buckfastleigh in south Devon). Checking on their current status the

RSPB website gives a total of 7,000 birds breeding in England and the BBC says that the Forest of Dean is the best place to see them (they like to breed in trees overhanging small ponds or streams). One reason for the growth of their wild population is that they taste horrible and consequently are not shot.

**Pochard:** The highest count reported this autumn before Nov 7 was just 39 in the Kent Stour Valley (Chichester pits had at least 30 on Nov 6) but on Nov 7 Rye Harbour had 180 and on Nov 8 I saw my first four back at Budds Farm pools in Havant

**Ferruginous Duck:** No reports so far this autumn of the Langstone Harbour 'Fudge Duck' but on Nov 7 Rye Harbour reported the arrival of a similar hybrid

**Goldeneye:** After the arrival of 3 at the Blashford Lakes on Oct 28 singles were seen in Devon, Dorset and the Isle of Wight before the end of October. So far November had brought two to the Pagham Lagoon on Nov 3 and five to Langstone Harbour on Nov 7 but we are still waiting for the influx that normally occurs before the end of October.

**Hooded Merganser:** What is probably a genuinely wild young female (though it could be a first winter male) has been in the north of Pagham Harbour since the week of Oct 29 to Nov 4 and may have been propelled here by 'Superstorm Sandy'. The last reported sighting was on Nov 9 and it was not found on Nov 10. Discussions about its origin have revealed that the 'male of unknown origin' that has been in the Weymouth area since June 2008 is still to be seen at Radipole

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A flock of 101 arrived in the Netherlands on Oct 5 and another wave brought 127 there on Oct 12 after 16 had been seen in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 10. Plenty of smaller groups seen since then with a flock of 126 in Langstone Harbour on Nov 7

**Goosander:** By Nov 9 the number at Blashford Lakes had risen to 45 but the only sign of passage birds over the English Channel coast was of one flying south east over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 6 - this bird may have been a northerner overshooting but may equally be one of the local breeding population

**Osprey:** Last week I assumed that we had seen the last for this year but reports seen this week show that one was near Plymouth on Oct 4 and one was in the Netherlands on Oct 6

**Hobby:** A very late report of one in the Gosport area on Nov 8 (previous last in England was at Rye Harbour on Oct 25)

**Common Crane:** One at Rye Harbour on Nov 9 seems to have been the last of a movement which brought a reported total of 5720 in Belgium on Oct 27

**Avocet:** By Nov 2 more than 190 were already in the Exe estuary in Devon and on Nov 3 a party of 20 were seen in Nutbourne Bay (east of Thorney Island) where some have spent the winter in past years. A further report of 15 at

Nutbourne on Nov 10 may or may not be of the earlier flock (in between these two reports came one of 14 birds west of Farlington Marshes which may have been some of the Nutbourne birds continuing west)

**Golden Plover:** The flock of 95 seen on the River Hamble at the Bunny Meadows on Oct 26 had grown to 197 on Nov 6 and on Nov 7 there were 39 at Lymington Marshes, 70 at Horsebridge (on the R Test just south of Stockbridge), and 200 at Maiden Castle in Dorset (the flock there had grown to 515 on Nov 9)

**Lapwing:** Of local interest the first to arrive back on the Langstone village shore were there on Nov 3

**Knot:** Also of local interest the first to be seen on the Emsworth shore this winter was there on Nov 9

**Purple Sandpiper:** The number at Southsea Castle was up to 4 on Nov 10

**Snipe:** I saw one at the Langstone South Moors 'orchid field' for the first time this winter on Nov 8

**Little Gull:** A few seen along the south coast (e.g. 17 at Pagham Harbour on Nov 10) after a surge of passage birds brought a count of 2100 at Cap Gris-Nez on Nov 5

**Sabines Gull:** Just one in the Scillies on Nov 3

**Bonaparte's Gull:** One at Dawlish Warren in south Devon seen on Nov 6 and 9

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird is still there - last seen on Nov 11

**Common Gull:** More than 1000 were reported in the Fishbourne Channel at Chichester on Nov 8 and I still find it odd that the string of counts which have come from this site since Oct 12 (when 500 were reported) remain consistently far higher than those from anywhere else in southern England and all come from the same observer

**Lesser Blackback:** The night roost at the Blashford Lakes was of only 3000 on Nov 9 (against 4500 on Oct 30) but the numbers agree with counts made there by more than one experienced observer over several years.

**Stock Dove:** A peak count of 450 over Christchurch Harbour on Nov 5

**Wood Pigeon:** I think no-one fully understands the annual massive Wood Pigeon movement which is seen along the south coast but I was surprised to see on what appears to be an authoritative blog on the subject of bird migration written by the BTO's chief Press Officer (Paul Stancliffe) that .. "Every year sees this migration spectacle but it is unclear where these birds are coming from or going to. They seem to appear along the east coast and the Pennines, but aren't seen coming in off the sea. They travel south and upon reaching the south coast **head west as far**

**as Dorset.** Once there they seem to disappear" This has probably been true in the past but this year the birds have certainly been seen in huge numbers on the south Devon coast. On November 5 Mark Thomas of the RSPB was in Torquay to appear in court for the prosecution of egg thieves but went out for an early breath of fresh air and during an hour from 07:15 to 08:15 he counted 40,000 Wood Pigeons passing SW overhead. Next day (Nov 6) the hotspot was Poole in Dorset with a count of 47,902. It is possible that the movement is now over for this year but that idea is based on the very slender evidence that when I woke up on the morning of Nov 10 the small crowd of Woodpigeons that have been in my garden for several weeks waiting to be fed had vanished.

**Swift:** One seen at Church Norton (Pagham Harbour) on Nov 9 was the first I have heard of anywhere since one was in Belgium on Oct 19 and the first in England since one was at Brighton on Oct 9

**Bee Eater:** One that was in Dorset from Oct 28 to 30 may have moved north to County Durham where it was seen on Nov 6 and 7

**Hoopoe:** Presumable unconnected reports of these in Dorset, Somerset and the Shetlands on Nov 3 followed by one in Norfolk on Nov 6

**Swallow:** Sightings this week have been - On Nov 5 up to 6 at four sites in Kent, East Sussex and Dorset; on Nov 6 up to 12 at nine sites in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and Dorset; on Nov 7 counts of 90 at Dungeness and 43 at Sandwich Bay, 12 at Durlston and 4 in Cornwall; on Nov 8 there were 18 at Durlston, 11 at Portland and one at the Goodwood House stables near Chichester; Nov 9 brought 5 to Black Point on Hayling Island and on Nov 10 there were 46 at Durlston

**House Martin:** Four were seen at several sites including Chichester on Nov 6 with four at Pett Level on Nov 7 and a dozen over Eastbourne on Nov 8. Nov 9 saw two at Black Point on Hayling Island and on Nov 10 there were two at Durlston

**Yellow Wagtail:** A late report of 5 in the Itchen Valley Country Park north of Southampton on Nov 8

**Pied Wagtail:** On Nov 8 a flock of 95 were seen heading to a night roost at Southampton airport

**Waxwing:** On Nov 6 the BTO Bird Migration Blog claimed that there were then 2000 in the UK and on Nov 7 RBA said the biggest number were 250 in the Highland region of Scotland with 150 each in Lothian and Kinross, 130 in the Western Isles and 100 in Cleveland - that only accounts for 630 leaving over 1,300 scattered over England and Wales but of these I have only seen reports accounting for just over 100 (but including 2 in Cornwall). A good photo of one at Sandwich Bay on Nov 2 can be seen at <http://www.sbbot.co.uk/galleries/avian/images/Waxwing2Nov12SRay.jpg> Latest news is of 8 near Basingstoke on Nov 11

**Whinchat:** One was still at Radipole in Dorset on Nov 9

**Wheatear:** The last I know of in England was at Sandwich Bay on Nov 6

**Ring Ouzel:** The last in England seems to have been at Portland on Nov 6

**Blackbird:** On Nov 6 a total of 2246 arrived in the British Isles including 1900 at Spurn Point in Yorkshire and another 949 arrived on Nov 7 including 625 at Hunstanton in Norfolk.

**Fieldfare:** This week saw a further influx on Nov 6 of 2000 per hour on the north Kent coast

**Redwing:** The only large arrival noted this week was of 2179 at Widnes in Lancashire (near Liverpool) on Nov 9 - these had presumably just crossed the Pennines after crossing the North Sea

**Mistle Thrush:** Nov 6 brought the first report of several guarding the village church Yew tree from Redwings at Isfield (upstream of Lewes)

**Blackcap:** Wintering birds have been appearing in gardens since at least Nov 1 when three birds arrived in a Dartmoor garden, and of local interest Brian Fellows found a female bathing in his Emsworth garden on Nov 10

**Pallas' Warbler:** A 'probable' was seen at Durlston on Nov 4, only the second for this winter after one seen in Folkestone on Oct 21

**Firecrest:** Searches of Southampton Common on Nov 8 and 9 turned up a total of 22 apparently there for the winter

**Penduline Tit:** After recent sightings in the Scillies, at Dungeness and at the Oare Marshes in north Kent, this week brought sightings of up to three at Stodmarsh in the Kent Stour Valley on Nov 6 and 8

**Great Grey Shrike:** One arrived in the Beaulieu area of the New Forest on Nov 6 and another arrived at Morden Bog in Dorset (just west of Poole Harbour) on Nov 7

**Chough:** One which flew from Cornwall to the Scillies on Oct 30 was found dead on Nov 2

**Raven:** A count of 49 at Painswick in Gloucestershire on Nov 8 is presumably of a roost site

**Spanish Sparrow:** A bird found on a garden feeder at Newchurch, Isle of Wight, on Nov 4 was seen again on Nov 5 but not since

**Greenfinch:** Flock sizes are increasing with 235 at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 5 and 300 at Pagham Harbour on Nov 10. Numbers of other finches such as Goldfinch and Linnet now seem to be decreasing

**Foreign Birds:** If you want to become more familiar with southern species seen by Steve Copsey around Tristan da Cunha (and its capital called Edinburgh of the Seven Seas) go to <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> and scroll down to the entries for this week starting with 'Seabirds at Tristan da Cunha' posted on Nov 8 (and ending with the entry posted on Nov 6) in which you will find text and pictures of **Rufous-chested Dotterel, Two-banded Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Yellowlegs (Great & Lesser), American Golden Plover (Falklands) and Tristan Albatross (South Atlantic)**

**Vagrants:** The BTO Migration Blog tells us on Nov 6 to look out for an influx of **Pine Grosbeaks** which are massing in record numbers over in Norway

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Common Darter:** Pairs still mating and egg-laying on Isle of Wight on Nov 6

### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker (latest in IoW on Nov 6), Migrant Hawker (latest in Cornwall on Nov 4), Common Darter (latest 2 in Sussex on Nov 9 after 1 in Emsworth on Nov 8 and 19 in IoW on Nov 6)

### **Butterflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Painted Lady:** One at Peasmarsh near Hastings on Nov 9

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Maybe last of year at Shoreham on Nov 5

### **Species reported this week:**

Brimstone, Small White, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

**Caterpillars:** **Buff Ermine moth** - what seems likely to be one of this species was seen on the wall of Brian Fellows house in Emsworth for several days this week - that is the only difficulty in identifying it since it should now be pupating in leaf litter.

**Caterpillar poster:** The Sussex Moth Group is planning to publish a poster showing all 45 species of **Butterfly caterpillar** to be found in Sussex but will not complete it until July of next year. Anyone with top quality photos of these caterpillars on their foodplant is asked to send them to [caterpillars@bignature.co.uk](mailto:caterpillars@bignature.co.uk)

**Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*):** Still active at Durlston on Nov 6 along with several Hoverfly species

**Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus pascuorum*):** Still active in Brian Fellows Emsworth garden on Nov 8

**Granary weevil (*Sitophilus granarius*):** See

<http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2012/11/7/an-unusual-weevil.html> for an account (with photo) of how this species (normally found indoors in granaries) was found recently on a saltmarsh at Rye Harbour

**Southern Oak Bush Cricket (*Meconema meridionale*):** This species first appeared in Britain in 2001 and has spread widely since then, making its latest appearance at Folkestone on Nov 4 (where the announcement of its presence was accompanied by the question of how this flightless insect could have crossed the channel and spread widely here in England). For the answer see <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/species-of-the-day/evolution/meconema-meridionale/distribution-habitat/index.html>

## PLANTS

**Sweet Violet:** Two weeks ago I announced the find in Havant St Faith's churchyard of the **first Sweet Violet flower of the new season**, seemingly surprisingly early as I usually don't find them until Christmas time. This week I think I have discovered why I do not see them until later - the reason being that the flowers are attractive to Pigeons and Sparrows for the sugars in them and when few are emerging they tend to get eaten up as soon as they open (later their opening outpaces the hunger of the birds and some are left for us to enjoy). This theory is backed up by the fact that I saw one flower on Oct 25 and two on Oct 31 by which time the Pigeons had realised that they were good to eat and so when I next visited there were none to be seen.

**Dove's Foot Cranesbill:** Seen flowering by the Brockhampton stream in Havant on Nov 8 two months after my previous sighting of this common species

**Ash die-back:** For information about this and to find out how to report cases go to <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara> (by way of an aside I see on this evening's Countryfile programme that **Larch trees** are the latest species to be undergoing a fungal attack making me wonder if there will be any trees left in Britain when Global warming brings about the demise of the **Beech** in southern England - we were warned to expect this some years ago as a result of higher temperatures drying out the upper layers of the soil which the shallow rooted Beeches rely on for their nourishment)

**Hemlock:** I was surprised to find a tall specimen covered with fresh flowers on Nov 8

**Stone Parsley:** Similar I came of several plants of this with fresh flowers on Nov 8

**Greater Periwinkle:** I had not seen this in flower since Aug 9 until I saw a single flower in Havant on Nov 8

**Common Toadflax:** I thought we had seen the last of this in flower on Oct 20 but came on a single flowerhead on Nov 5

**Wall Speedwell:** Another surprise this week was to see tiny blue flower buds on this species in Havant on Nov 7

**Borage:** This normally ceases to flower in September but I came on a cluster of plants in full flower in a 'semi-wild' Havant garden on Nov 5

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Mink:** On Nov 6 a strange noise coming from a reed bed on the north edge of the Pevensey Levels turned out to be a **Mink chewing up an Eel**

**Grey Seal:** The onset of winter is possibly causing these to extend their hunting range - on Nov 9 one turned up unexpectedly at Christchurch Harbour

**Fungus:** On Nov 8 Durlston reported the colourful **Scarlet Hood Waxcap** seen on downland turf and **Coral Spot** on trees. Here in Havant another large cluster of **Honey Fungus** was found in Emsworth this week

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 5 - 11 (WEEK 45 OF 2012)

### Sat 10 Nov

#### Catching up on the past week

Back on Oct 29 I bought one of the last computers available with the Windows 7 operating system before the alien-to-me Windows 8 superseded it and a week later I received a Wireless Router to give it (and my ten year old computer) access to the internet in place of a simple cable and modem. As you can imagine this has been a period in which an old dog has been struggling to learn new tricks - hence the lack of updates to this website.

I am now able to use the new computer for the normal purpose of a 'normal user' but still have a long way to go before I can throw away the old machine on which I have over the years built up a home-made method of collecting data from the internet and other sources, storing it in a home made series of databases, accessing and processing it through a series of home-made programs, and converting the resultant text into the HTML needed for my website.

My home-made programs are written in Visual Basic and there is no problem in running them on the new machine but I will not feel confident in moving them (and all the associated data) across until I am more familiar with the new version of Visual Basic that comes with the EXCEL function in Microsoft Office (every program which uses files will have to be modified to respecify the new 'path' to where the file is stored). The second major problem is that I have up to now relied on Microsoft WORDPAD to convert text to HTML and it seems that that facility is no longer available and so I will have to learn to use some other web-building system.

This statement of my personal problems is only made to give an advance warning of probable future delays in keeping my website up to date!

Coming back to this week's wildlife observations I see that on Monday (Nov 5) I walked down to the Langstone shore and back, seeing **Borage** flowering out of season in a semi-wild Langstone garden (my first record since July). From the shore I watched two **Swans flying** over the harbour - the first time I have seen

them airborne since the spring. Another first here for some time was the sight of a **Great Crested Grebe** on the water.

On Tuesday (Nov 6) I cycled to the Thorney Deeps and on along the shore to Nutbourne where **three or four Bearded Tits** flew into the reeds between Nutbourne Bay and Farm Lane - I was only able to identify them by their 'pinging' calls which made me wonder how many miles these birds, which spend all but a few days each year in the closed environment of a single reed-bed, had travelled and whether (when they took off from their previous home reed-bed) they had any idea of where they were heading - do they just fly on until they spot a new home by chance, do they have some inherited navigation instinct, and how many fail to reach a suitable destination and perish en route).

Wednesday (Nov 7) took me around St Faith's Churchyard where I had on Oct 25 seen the first **Sweet Violet flower** since last March. On Oct 30 the single flower had become two but on this visit there were none to be seen though a couple of **Wood Pigeons** were searching the area and I realised that the Violet flowers which give us pleasure to see also provide **an attractive supplement to the winter diet of birds** such as Pigeons and Sparrows.

Thursday (Nov 8) saw me at the Harts Farm Way rubbish tip taking advantage of a van hired by my eldest son (who is moving house) to get rid of a metal bed frame that would not fit into my car. After dumping the bed I set out to walk home down the Brockhampton Stream and back home via Budds Farm and the South Moors. At the Brockhampton Gravel Quay a Kestrel flew low overhead to disappear in a crevice in the metal piles which form the outer wall of the Quay and I made a mental note to check out this site next spring as **a possible Kestrel nest site** (maybe that is where the birds which last year used the nest box in a tree close to the Budds Farm pools view point had this years nest?).

At the pools the **first four Pochard** that I have seen there this winter were present as was the complete Swan family of two adults and five young. Moving on to the South Moors I saw my **first Snipe of the winter** at the north end of the 'orchid field' but saw no sign yet of the Marsh Marigolds that had their first flower on show there as early as Oct 10 last year. Later, by the Billy Trail, I came on two bushes of **Japanese Honeysuckle in fresh flower**. Nearby a wintering **Grey Wagtail** was in the Lymbourne Stream where I had first seen it on Nov 1

This morning (Nov 10) there was a **strange absence from my garden of the ten or more Woodpigeons** which have for several weeks hoovered up the breadcrumbs that I scatter each morning - maybe they have joined the many thousands that have recently been heading to Spain? In their place I heard **Wren and Robin song**, saw various Tits and Finches flitting through in their endless winter search for food. and also saw a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** fly across but then return to sit on my bird table and look accusingly at me through the window where I was having breakfast because I had not supplied him with nuts.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 29 - NOV 4 (WEEK 44 OF 2012)**

## BIRDS

**Late news not included in the summary below:** On Nov 3 a party of **20 Avocet** were seen in the **Nutbourne Bay area** east of Emsworth and were later reported as a flock of 19 at Stanbury Point on the east side of Thorney Island and also on Nov 3 a **Hoopoe** was seen at **Studland** in Dorset. Also on Nov 3 what I think are the first Lapwing to return to the Langstone village shore were seen and on Nov 4 the **Red-breasted Goose** was still at **Farlington Marshes**

**Divers:** **Red-throated** are now widespread in southern England with reports from seven sites and a max count of 7 in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 31. **Black-throated** were only seen once on the southern English coast (two of them at Dungeness on Oct 26 but on that same day there were 26 at Le Clipon near Calais just across the Channel. **Great Northern** were only seen at three southern English sites but Oct 27 brought a **White-billed Diver** to the North Sea shore at Whitburn in Co Durham

**Grebes:** The first substantial flock of **Great Crested** for the winter on English Channel water were 110 on the Normandie coast of France on Oct 28 when as many as six **Red-Necked** were at four Channel Sites. **Slavonian** were seen at six southern English sites including sightings on Oct 28 at Hengistbury Head (2), Shell Bay in Dorset (2), Lymington area (1). The first two **Black-necked** in Langstone Harbour were seen from the Oysterbeds on Nov 2 while a flock of 33 were off Knowle Beach at Studland in Dorset on Oct 30 with another two near Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour that day

**Cattle Egret:** One was at Colyford Marsh, Seaton, in Devon on Oct 28 and 30

**Little Egret:** Although I have not checked the Langstone Pond night roost since Sep 6 I walked past it at dusk on Oct 22 but could see no Egrets anywhere so it is possible they have ceased to use it as a night roost (though at least 8 were in nearby fields on the afternoon of Nov 1). Proof that they are still using trees near the Little Deeps on Thorney Island comes from Barry Collins who reported a night roost of 75 birds there on Oct 28

**Great White Egret:** It would seem that a few have arrived in southern England recently after reports of up to 72 in the Low Countries on Oct 27 - that day brought a newcomer to Itchenor (Christchurch Harbour) and another to the Cuckmere Valley in Sussex (neither stayed) while the fifth ever to be seen in the Scillies was there on Oct 25

**Red-breasted Goose:** The bird which arrived at Farlington Marshes on Oct 25 was still there on Nov 4 and seems to be the only one currently in southern England

**Shelduck:** These are still 'dribbling' back into southern England - in this week's news Oct 27 saw 8 passing Dungeness and a flock of in Newtown Harbour (IoW) with another 10 passing Dungeness on Oct 28

**Pintail:** On Oct 31 there were more than 150 in the Exe estuary in Devon after a potential total of 1615 in the Calais area on Oct 26

**Pochard:** These are also returning with 39 in the Kent Stour Valley on Oct 28 when 6 were in Christchurch Harbour. On Oct 29 more than 12 were on Ivy Lake at Chichester and Nov 1 Bembridge Pond on the Isle of Wight had 21

**Long-tailed Duck:** One reached the Dorset coast on Oct 28 and was in Weymouth Bay on Oct 29

**Surf Scoter:** One has been on the north Devon coast among a flock of Common Scoter for at least three days from Oct 28 to 30

**Velvet Scoter:** A flock of 14 went past Christchurch Harbour on Oct 28 and a total of 52 were off the Netherlands on Oct 30 (when one was seen at Selsey Bill)

**Goldeneye:** These are appearing at last - after 30 were seen in the Netherlands on Oct 26 three turned up in Hampshire at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Oct 28 and singles have since been seen in Devon, Dorset, Isle of Wight and Kent

**Red-breasted Merganser:** The first migrant returnees were two at Dungeness on Oct 5 with a surge of 127 in the Netherlands on Oct 12 and since then small numbers have been seen in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon with one reaching the Scillies on Oct 18. Still no large number - 12 on the Exe estuary in Devon on Oct 23 and 16 in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 20

**Goosander:** The number on the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood had risen to 36 by Nov 2 but these may all be ones that have spent the summer locally and one seen flying past Worthing on Oct 27 was going east so may be leaving us rather than arriving from the north

**Osprey:** Still 2 in the Netherlands on Oct 28 but none in England this week

**Merlin:** One of the many now with us was killed by a Sparrowhawk on the New Forest shore on Oct 30

**Hobby:** None left in England but one was seen in Belgium on Oct 28

**Coot:** For those who love these there were 186 in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 28 and no doubt winter flocks are massing on other coastal sites

**Common Crane:** A total of 4080 was reported in the Netherlands on Oct 27 and part of that movement brought three to fly over Dorset that day

**Avocet:** The number on the Exe estuary in Devon was up to 190+ on Nov 2 and 11 had been seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 28 so the first winter flock reported in Chichester Harbour (20 at Nutbourne Bay on Nov 3) was not unexpected

**Stone Curlew:** A late departing migrant was heard over Portland on Oct 26

**Golden Plover:** A new peak count of 2,500 wintering birds was reported from north Kent on Oct 29 while nearer home there were 230 in Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Oct 27 and up to 120 have been seen at the Bunny Meadows near the mouth of the River Hamble

**Lapwing:** The first to be seen on the Langstone village shore were there on Nov 3 but Rye Harbour had a flock of 300 by Nov 1

**Purple Sandpiper:** The first to be seen at Southsea Castle in Portsmouth were three there on Oct 30 but they have been back on the Kent coast since Oct 13

**Spotted Redshank:** The single bird which has been returning to Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore since Dec 2004 suddenly become two and then three this week but this is still not in the same league as the Lymington shore where a total of 14 were present on Oct 28. See <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/x-spotted-redshank.htm> for details of sightings there

**Lesser Black-back Gull:** The number spending the night at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood in winter months is always high and on Oct 30 some 4500 had returned there after feeding in fields across a large inland area. With them were around 3500 Black Headed

**Sandwich Tern:** I think all the migrants have now left and ones seen recently will stay with us through the winter. On Oct 27 one was seen on the Emsworth shore at Nore Barn, on Oct 29 three were in the south of Langstone Harbour and one was in the Harbour mouth on Nov 2 while on Oct 30 one was on the Lymington shore. Porbale late migrants this week were two **Common Terns** seen in the Netherlands and single **Arctic Terns** seen at Dungeness on Oct 27 and at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 29

**Little Auk:** A surge of birds headin south on Oct 27 and 28 brought 534 to our North Sea coast on the 27th and 959 on the 28th

**Stock Dove:** Counts of more than 100 have come from severl English sites since Oct 26 with a peak of 420 passing Dungeness on Oct 28

**Woodpigeon:** On Oct 27 a major passage occurred with 5,000 seen in the Beachy Head area, increasing to 12,000 over Dorset and 20,000 over Devon

**Bee Eater:** One was seen over Swanage in Dorset on Oct 28 and was seen again nearby on Oct 29 and 30

**Wryneck:** Two late birds were at Portland on Oct 26

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Singles were seen at Fleet (north Hampshire) on Oct 29 and at the Arundel Wildfowl Reserve on Oct 30 - worth keeping your eyes open elsewhere?

**Shore Lark:** One seen in the Eastbourne area on Oct 30 (Hailsham and Cuckmere Haven)

**Sand Martin:** Last seen in England at Worthing on Oct 27

**Swallow:** We have not seen the last yet - 17 were seen at Durlston on Nov 1, 8 on the north Kent coast on Nov 2 with 7 there on Nov 3 (among many more lesser reports)

**House Martin:** Fewer than Swallows but still being seen daily to Nov 3 (in Devon)

**Yellow Wagtail:** What was probably the last was one at Bexhill on Oct 31

**Waxwing:** After an isolated report in the Netherlands on Sep 26 more regular reports started on Oct 22 with 30 'in the north' (Scotland?) Southern England had its first on Oct 27 in Sussex and another was on the north Kent coast on Oct 28. Oct 30 brought a total of 19 to the Norfolk coast and ten more were in Scotland on Oct 31 with two at Truro in Cornwall on Nov 3

**Black Redstart:** This week's news includes 16 reports with up to 41 birds in the Scillies on Oct 29 while local reports have come from Hayling Island, the Bedhampton area of Havant and the West Dean Woods north of Chichester

**Common Redstart:** Latest report is of one at Portland on Nov 2.

**Wheatear:** The last report I have seen was of one on Hayling Island on Oct 29

**Desert Wheatear:** The Worthing seafront bird has not been seen since Oct 26 but one turned up in Dorset at the West Lulworth Army Camp on Oct 27

**Ring Ouzel:** Nine were still seen at 4 sites on Nov 1 and Nov 2 brought reports of two at Durlston and one on Butser Hill near Petersfield.

**Blackbird:** Vast numbers still fleeing Europe - e.g. a potential total of 4130 birds at 8 Netherlands sites on Oct 28 and more than 350 on the north Kent coast on Oct 29

**Fieldfare:** Oct 26 saw a potential total of 73,484 at 23 sites in the Netherlands and Oct 29 brought a count of 3,000 from the Kent Stour Valley among many smaller numbers. Most recent was 50 at Thurlestone Marsh in south Devon on Nov 3

**Song Thrush:** Reports dried up at the end of October but among the last was a report of one in full song at Pett on Rye Bay

**Redwing:** Among many reports Oct 28 saw 3000 pass over the Aldershot/Fleet area as part of a potential total of 6,090 from four sites that day. Oct 29 brought a

report of 400 in the Kent Stour Valley. On Nov 1 there were 40 at St Catherine's Hill at Winchester and on Nov 3 there were at the Exe estuary in south Devon

**Blackcap:** Two Devon sites (one on Dartmoor) reported their first winter garden Blackcaps slightly earlier than last year on Nov 1 and 2

**Bearded Tit:** Some autumn migration is under way - on Oct 29 two arrived out of the sky at the north Kent Oare Marshes and on Oct 27 there were 7 newly arrived birds at Christchurch Harbour

**Penduline Tit:** Some of these have also been on the move with one at Minsmere in Norfolk on Oct 27, one over Dungeness on Oct 28 and maybe that bird arriving at the Oare Marshes near Faversham on Oct 30

**Chough:** One was added to the Scillies list on Oct 30, presumably after flying from Cornwall (so maybe others are moving in search of new territories for the future?)

**Jackdaw:** The large numbers still arriving from Europe for the most part go unobserved but a local sighting on Oct 28 was of 350 flying west over Selsey Bill

**Rook:** An arrival of 46 on the Norfolk coast on Oct 29 shows that these are not as sedentary as most people think

**Starling:** Just under 50,000 arrived from the continent on each of Oct 28 and 29 while the night roost in south Devon numbered over 250,000 birds on Oct 30

**Twite:** The number heading south is increasing with reports from 5 sites this week - on Oct 29 there were 16 at a Yorkshire site and another 13 seen at Dungeness

**Bullfinch:** This year seems to have seen an explosion in their numbers and this week there were 15 on St Catherine's Hill at Winchester on Nov 1, 14 at Dibden Bay on Southampton Water on Oct 28 and 25 at Durlston on Oct 30

**Vagrants:** One of the more unusual arrivals this week was of an American Bobolink in the Shetlands on Oct 28 while on Oct 27 Portland had a visit from an Egyptian Vulture

**Foreign Birds:** With two of our local Three Amigos recently birdwatching in the southern hemisphere while on naval duties (Steve Copsey in South Africa and Mark Cutts in the Falklands - Mark is now back and has added photos of the Farlington Red-breasted Goose to their blog) I have listed the various species they have seen recently to encourage more people to visit their blog where they can enjoy excellent photos of most of the species and a good descriptive text - see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/>

In South Africa Steve has seen Greater Striped Swallow, Grey-headed Sparrow, Mountain Chat and Masked Weavers and Acacia Pied Barbet, Fairy Flycatcher, Pririt Batis, two Tit-babblers (Chestnut-vented and Layard's), Southern Pale-

chanting Goshawk, Spike-heeled Lark, Karoo Eromomela as well as two desert loving Chats (Tractrac and Karoo), Verreaux's Eagles pair nesting, African Black Swifts, Rock Martins and a Familiar Chat, Rock kestrel and Yellow-billed Kite, Spotted Thick-knee, Fiscal Flycatcher, Common Fiscal Shrike, Karoo Lark, Cape Sparrow and Bokmakierie plus Grey-winged Francolin, Bank and Crowned Cormorants, Swift and Sandwich Tern, Black-shouldered Kite, Yellow-billed Kite and Black Harrier, Red-knobbed Coot, Cape Shoveler, Great White Pelican, Red Bishop, Brimstone Canary and White-throated Swallow, Spotted Eagle-owl, Thick-billed, Red-capped and Cape Clapper Larks in Karoo Desert, Namaqua Warbler, Common Waxbill, Lark-like Bunting and Karoo Prinia  
In the Falklands Mark has seen Magellanic Oystercatcher, Blackish Oystercatcher, Magellanic Snipe with other wader species to follow

## INSECTS

### **Dragonflies:**

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker (latest on Oct 30), Brown Hawker (Folkestone on Oct 30), Migrant Hawker (Essex on Nov 1), Common Darter (Havant on Nov 2), Beautiful Demoiselle (Cornwall on Oct 30)

### **Butterflies:**

#### Species reported this week:

Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma and Speckled Wood

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

**Eristalis pertinax Hoverfly:** Brian Fellows got an excellent close photo of this species at Emsworth on Nov 3. A good site for starting to identify a species that you do not recognise is <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/content/species-library> and another is <http://www.uknature.co.uk/> (both of them have a good selection of Hoverfly photos).

**Eristalis tenax (Drone fly):** This is another Hoverfly species on the wing for most of the year (and hibernating through the winter) - one was flying at Durlston on Oct 30

**Hornet:** Last sighting that I know of was at Isfield near Lewes on Oct 28 (typically on Ivy flowers)

**Ivy Bee (Colletes hederæ):** Still flying at Durlston on Oct 30

## PLANTS

**Pale Flax:** Plenty of flowers still to be seen this week (119 species recorded in flower), among them a single flower of Pale Flax seen on Portsdown on Oct 30

**Cow Parsley:** Freshly flowering plants seen at Warblington on Nov 1 and in Havant on Nov 2

**Dog's Mercury:** I do not expect to see this in flower until after Christmas but I found more than one plant starting to flower in Pook Lane at Warblington on Nov 1 - see photos at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#0111>

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Water Vole:** A sighting on Oct 27 of a **Water Vole munching Water Cress in broad daylight in the central Havant pond** beside the main road into Havant from the A27 (opposite the turning into Solent Road where the Havant TESCO is sited) was very surprising but the description did not fit that of a Brown Rat, the only species likely to be confused with Water Vole, so **I searched the Internet for evidence that Water Voles do wander away from the places where they are normally seen and found it in a BBC article** at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-19503827> and this confirms that **they do occasionally travel long distances**. A study of small isolated groups of these Voles in Scotland showed that younger animals which, for whatever reason, feel the need to leave their family and its limited territorial area of few hundred square metres, would wander several kilometres before settling down in a new territory - the longest recorded journey in this limited study was one of 15 kilometres. This study shows that occasional sightings of Water Voles in places where there is no known established colony of them are probably of individual animals engaged in these youthful wanderings and, although not stated in the summary published on the BBC website, the autumn seems the most likely time for such journeys to take place (when young born earlier that year have grown sufficiently to travel and are most likely to feel the urge to do so before they are stuck at home for the winter).

The pond where this sighting was made is a likely place for a Vole to pause in its travels after coming up the Langbrook Stream and, after passing under the A27, taking a right turn off the narrowing main stream north of the 'Water Wheel' into the less polluted water of the minor stream which flows out from the Homewell Spring near St Faith's Church. After coming to a dead end there the Vole might well have turned back and decided to stock up on food while wondering where to go next.

**Grey Seal:** Birds such as Cormorants and Heron are sometimes seen struggling with eels, trying to get one end of the eel into their bill after which they can eventually swallow it but on Nov 3 an even more titanic struggle was seen on the north Devon coast between **a Grey Seal and a metre long Conger Eel** - the outcome was not seen

**Fungi:** Species found this week include a troop of **Tricholoma ustale (Burnt Knight)** under Willows in the Palmers Road Copse (Brook Meadow) in Emsworth (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x954-fungi-zz-palmers-rc-bm-29.10.12.jpg>) and some **Agrocybe cylindracea (Poplar Fieldcap)** on an unnamed tree in the same area (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x950-agrocybe-cylindr-02.11.12.jpg>). In my garden lawn **Snowy Waxcaps (Hygrocybe virginea)** have come up alongside Meadow and Parrot Waxcaps while **Parrot Waxcaps** have also

appeared in Havant Cemetery. In Pook Lane at Warblington I came on a good show of **Clustered Bonnet** (*Mycena inclinata*) - see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#0111> - later in that same outing I came on what I have called **Bramble Oysterling** (*Crepidotus pubescens*) near Nore Barn and a probable old example of **Chicken of the Wood** (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) on a big Oak tree.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 29 - NOV 4 (WEEK 44 OF 2012)**

### **Thu 1 Nov**

#### **A walk to Nore Barn finds Dogs Mercury coming into flower**

With high tide at 12:36 I waited until 14:30 before setting out to walk along the shore to Nore Barn in the hope of seeing the Spotted Redshank but by the time I got there the light was fading and the stream was empty - however the reason I was late arriving there was that there was much to see and photograph en route.

First stop was at the Lymbourne stream just south of the A27 where a **Grey Wagtail** was back, hopefully for the winter, and looking across the stream into the fields beside Wade Lane there was another winter scene with **5 Egrets in the pony field** hoping to find food there during the high tide period when they could not use the harbour (during the long summer days they would be prepared to sit out the high tide in trees, but with limited daylight in winter it is important not to waste time - before reaching Warblington Farm I saw a total of 8 Egrets in three separate fields where the horse and cattle droppings might attract insects - hopefully bigger than the fungus midges which I noticed in several places)

Passing Wade Court I looked for **Winter Heliotrope flowers** which will soon be out (last year I saw the first here on Nov 21) but although there were many fresh leaves there were no flower stalks to be seen yet.

When I reached the shore the tide was still high but falling and there was plenty of room to walk along the shore before turning up Pook Lane in search of the first **Dogs Mercury** flowers which I do not really expect to see until the New Year but today my luck was in and I found a couple of fresh plants with flowers starting to develop (not yet really open) and near them was a fresh cluster of what I think are **Mycena inclinata fungi** though my first thought was that they were Fairies Bonnets (*Coprinus disseminatus*). Reaching Church Lane and turning south towards the church the first thing I saw were a couple of **Cow Parsley** plants in flower, then in the cemetery I noted **Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Scarlet Pimpernel and even Field Forget-me-not** all with flowers.

Dog's Mercury coming into flower very early in Pook Lane

<="" p="" border="0" height="400" width="481">>  
Mycena inclinata cluster in Pook Lane

Cow Parsley flowering in Church Lane

In the trees I could hear the rattle of a **Mistle Thrush** and the song of a **Goldfinch**, and, back on the Church Path at the far end of the cemetery area, I came on a small flock of **Redpoll**, one of which still retained a pinkish breast.

In the big field east of the Warblington stream the Sweetcorn crop had been cut though no weeds had yet started to grow there but after turning south the Conigar Point field had plenty of interest. First came a single flower left on a **Field Scabious** plant in the north hedge and as I began to cross the field I found more and more **Dwarf Spurge** plants - there must have been well over 100 of them among the other expected species - **Field Madder**, **Perennial Sowthistle**, **Field Bindweed** and **Black Nightshade** though I could not see the Common Fumitory that I found there on my last visit. I did come across a late plant of **Common Fleabane** and a young plant of **Round-leaved Fluellen** which I am pretty sure is yet to flower (having found one flowering on Portsdown yesterday)

Last flower (and calyx of another) on Field Scabious in the Conigar Point field of Warblington Farm

Field Madder and Dwarf Spurge in the Conigar Point field

One of at least 100 plants of Dwarf Spurge

Last flowers on Perennial Sowthistle and Rough Leaved Fluellen still to flower On the shore line there were still some **Tamarisks** in flower and at Nore Barn some sheltered plants of **Golden Samphire** still had fresh flowers. After failing to see the Spotted Redshank (there were plenty of Brent and both Wigeon and Black-tailed Godwits) I set off for home in the gathering dusk but still managed to find eight more plants species in flower (including **Stone Parsley** and **Field Woundwort**) to bring my count of flowering species on this first day of November to 39

Late flowers on the shoreline Tamarisks

Also seen on the way home was a stem of dead bramble hosting many tiny white fungi (probably **Crepidotus pubescens** or **C. variabilis**) to add to the **Waxcaps** seen on my lawn this morning (**Parrot**, **Meadow** and **Snowy**)

[Wed 31 Oct](#)

### **Around Havant**

Heading for the shops this morning I added some 17 flowering plants to those seen yesterday on Portsdown but only a couple were of interest - one was a fresh plant of **Pineappleweed**, the other was a find of **two more Sweet Violet** flowers and a plant of **Common Orache** in St Faith's Churchyard.

In the late afternoon a brief look at the Havant Cemetery found three species of toadstool - a big mass of **Parrot Waxcap** and small groups of two other species that I could not identify.

[Tue 30 Oct](#)

## Portsdown Hill below Fort Southwick

This afternoon a two hour walk on the south facing slopes of Portsdown gave me a list of 73 plant species still in flower, little in the way of birds and **just one butterfly - a Meadow Brown**.

The first 'hot spot' was the arable field south of the hilltop road west of Fort Southwick, now covered in 'weeds' which included **Round-leaved Fluellen, Dwarf Spurge and Field Pansies**. Next stop was Portchester Common where I began to find **Marjoram, Small Scabious, Yellow Wort and Wild Basil**. Turning back and heading east to the bottom of the hill I had the only interesting bird observations of the trip - first came three **Skylarks** heading determinedly west into the wind and then I watched a **Kestrel** hovering over the higher slopes of the hill.

Along the path following the foot of the hill I found odd plants of **Vipers Bugloss, Kidney Vetch, Ploughman's Spikenard and Ribbed Melilot** still flowering in the shelter of the taller vegetation but there was little to see in the more exposed higher slopes as I climbed back to the western entrance to the Paulsgrove Chalkpit where I headed back down the steep path to the bottom of the pit and began to find more interesting flowers including **Black Mustard, Blue Fleabane** and a big bush of a **large flowered Hypericum species** which may have been the **Tall Tutsan** which I found nearby on Aug 1 but it could have been **Rose of Sharon** (though the remains of the few flowers still on the bush were nowhere near the 7 to 8 cm across given for that species but were about right for **Tall Tutsan** at 3 to 4 cm). Another prolific ornamental plant here was the white flowered **Narrow-Leaved Michaelmas Daisy** but much more exciting was a single very late flowering plant of **Pale Flax**.

Starting back up the hill at the east end of the chalk pit I came on the single **Meadow Brown** which was the only insect of the day and a single plant of **Hedge Woundwort** and some **Blue Fleabane** but once again the exposed higher slopes of the hill were without flowers until I reached the path running back west parallel to the road and here the shelter of the shrubbery and the slight extra warmth from the passing vehicles (especially near the two min-roundabouts giving access to Fort Southwick), added several plants to my list - **Agrimony, Tansy, Sticky Groundsel, Japanese Knotweed** and the more acceptable **Old Man's Beard, Ox-eye Daisy and Musk Mallow**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 22 - 28 (WEEK 43 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** The count of 76 **Red-throated** at a Netherlands site on Oct 13 has not brought similar numbers to the English coast but on Oct 26 there were 10 at Reculver on the north Kent coast. **Black-throated** only brought one to the north Kent coast and one to Christchurch while reports of **Great Northern** were limited to singles at Portland (Oct 21) and two in the Scillies (Oct 22)

**Grebes:** The first **Little Grebes** I have seen in Langstone harbour this winter were two off the Budds Farm shore on Oct 22 but the variety of species is increasing. A **Red-necked** was at Dungeness on Oct 26 and **two Slavonian** were seen at Selsey on Oct 21 with another at Studland in Dorset on Oct 24 - latest news is of

one on the Lymington shore on Oct 28. **Black-necked** were seen at Dungeness and Christchurch while Studland had 14 of them on Oct 24

**Bittern:** Blashford Lakes had their first of the winter on Oct 25 and Devon had its first on Oct 12

**Great White Egret:** Nothing special in southern England but Belgium had 14 at one site on Oct 22 when the potential total from 31 continental sites reporting them that day was 193

**Grey Heron:** I know that this species is semi-migratory but I was surprised to see that Christchurch had 12 coming in off the sea on Oct 22

**Glossy Ibis:** Two were at Sennen near Lands End on Oct 23 (4 were there on Oct 12) and there has been some movement this week with one flying over Aveton Gifford in Devon and another over Christchurch

**Spoonbill:** Two have been moving around in Hampshire - on Oct 23 one flew west over Gosport and on Oct 24 two flew west over Titchfield Haven with maybe the same two flying west over the Blashford Lakes that day

**Whooper Swan:** One probably remains at the Exe estuary as do six in the Scillies but new arrivals in Scotland totalled 40 on Oct 24 and 31 (after some dispersal) on Oct 25 when there was a newcomer at The Lizard in Cornwall

**'Lesser Canada Goose':** The first report of a small race Canada Goose in southern England this winter was of one at the Lower Test Marshes near Southampton on Oct 20

**Dark-bellied Brent:** These are still arriving (1470 past Dungeness on Oct 26) and families with young are usually among the later arrivals (having stopped more often to feed en route) but it seems unlikely that this will turn out to be anything but a poor year for their breeding. So far Brian Fellows count of 7 young among a flock of 41 birds on the Emsworth shore seems to be the most optimistic indicator but again it probably reflects the fact that family groups do not remain in the big flocks that tend to stay out in the middle of the harbours but head to places such as the Emsworth shore where there is more exposed mud with eel grass to feed the youngsters. The WeBS count at West Wittering on Oct 27 recorded a flock of 1160 Brent of which only 14 were young.

**Black Brant:** Two are probably still in the Weymouth area where one arrived on Oct 10 to be joined by a second on Oct 18. Another arrived in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 12 and seems to have then flown to Chichester Harbour where it was seen on Oct 14. This weekend an adult was seen at West Wittering accompanied by a couple of hybrids (probably all related to each other) but it is not clear if this group includes the Oct 14 bird.

**Red-breasted Goose:** The bird which arrived on the north Kent coast on Oct 14 has not been reported there since Oct 23 and it may have flown west to be the

bird seen on the Lymington shore on Oct 24 and the absence of further reports from Lymington makes it possible that this individual headed back east on Oct 25 to be seen grazing on Farlington Marshes (from where it flew east into oblivion). Since then the only report has been on one in Argyll (Scotland) which I presume to be a new individual.

**Shelduck:** The only report for this week is of 28 on the Emsworth shore on Oct 22

**Pochard:** The arrival of 12 birds at Eastleigh Lakeside site on Oct 23 is as good as it gets (though there were 68 in the Kent Stour valley on Oct 13)

**Scaup:** One has been lurking at Christchurch Harbour since Oct 1 and at least one has been at the Exe estuary in Devon since Oct 7. More recent news is of three on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Oct 27 after a flock of nine were seen at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire on Oct 25

**Eider:** Numbers increasing slowly with nine on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Oct 23 and eleven at Christchurch on Oct 24, then 110 at Filey Brigg (Yorkshire) on Oct 25

**Velvet Scoter:** On Oct 25 thirteen were off the Yorkshire coast, four off North Kent and three at Christchurch. On Oct 28 four flew east along the north coast of the Isle of Wight

**Goldeneye:** Still no real arrival off southern England. On Oct 27 one was at the Blashford Lakes (first there) and three were in Pagham Harbour

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Also very few so far with a maximum of 16 in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 20 and 12 at the Exe estuary in Devon on Oct 23 when five were in Pagham Harbour (on Oct 24 two were on the sea near Titchfield Haven). Latest news is of 10 in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 28

**Osprey:** One was still at Warnham near Horsham on Oct 25

**Red Footed Falcon:** One was reported at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight on Oct 24 and 25

**Hobby:** One was still at Rye Harbour on Oct 25

**Grey Partridge:** Red-legs are well known for appearing in unexpected places but on Oct 24 one was happily searching for food in the small garden of a terraced house at Steyning (north of Worthing). On the previous day the first two autumn arrivals were seen in the Climping area of the coast west of Worthing

**Water Rail:** Winter birds seem to be turning up at southern sites with two at the Eastleigh Lakes on Oct 24 and one parading outside the visitor area window at the RSPB Pulborough Brooks site on Oct 25 (maybe the same bird that was

trained to show itself to visitors there last winter by laying a trail of food for it on the open grass next to a reed bed).

**Spotted Crane:** The first to be reported since Oct 11 was seen in the Scillies on Oct 24

**Common Crane:** On Oct 26 one flew over the Cuckmere valley in east Sussex and five flew east along the north Kent shore

**Stone Curlew:** On Oct 13 one was heard flying over Christchurch Harbour

**Golden Plover:** The flock at Rye Harbour now numbers over 1000 but only three were at Titchfield Haven this week and just one was at Climping on the west Sussex shore

**Lapwing:** The biggest counts reported from the south coast this week were 43 at Christchurch Harbour, 40+ on the Exe estuary in Devon and 280 in the whole of the New Forest while just across the water there were potentially 12,000 in the Netherlands and 9,000 in Belgium

**Purple Sandpiper:** This week's reports were of one in north Kent, two at Brighton marina and one at Folkestone

**Woodcock:** This week brought reports from eight south coast sites with a peak of 11 in the Scillies on Oct 24. I wonder how many of them were welcomed with gunshot from 'sportsmen'?

**Grey Phalarope:** On Oct 28 one was seen on the Lymington shore. Also this week one was seen in the Scillies and another on the north Kent coast

**Ring-billed Gull:** The regular winter resident of the Gosport 'Cockle Pond' arrived back on Oct 21

**Common Gull:** Reports of more than 500 in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Oct 18 followed by 700+ there on Oct 23 suggest that the reporter needs to attend a course on gull identification - these numbers must surely be counts of Black-headed Gulls which are the common species of gull here on the south coast

**Black Tern:** One was still to be seen at Spurn Head on the Yorkshire coast on Oct 25 (and a Common Tern was in Christchurch Harbour on the same day - will these soon start to winter here with the Sandwich Terns?)

**Auk species:** Dungeness reported a mixed bag of 428 Guillemots and Razorbills on Oct 25

**Little Auk:** 5 were seen at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire on Oct 25 and on Oct 27 one was at Reculver on the north Kent coast (accompanied by a single Puffin)

**Stock Dove:** We should be seeing more of these soon. On Oct 15 Dungeness was the first site to report a three figure count with just 100. By Oct 27 Folkestone had 150 and Seaford recorded 150+

**Wood Pigeon:** Plenty of these have already reached southern England (e.g 4120 over Seaford on Oct 24 and around 5,000 there on Oct 27 when Durlston reported 10,000) but on Oct 22 one site in Belgium had 51,750 (and a potential total of 322,843 at 18 sites) after a German site had had 144,235 on Oct 19 (with a 19 site potential total of 943,496)

**Ring-necked Parakeets:** The onset of winter weather seems to have brought these out of hiding at a couple of 'out of London' sites - Swanage in Dorset reported 11 on Oct 20 and Bexhill near Hastings produced a single on Oct 21

**Long-eared Owls:** A few of these are now arriving in southern England in addition to the many Short-eared. Two Long-eared were at Portland on Oct 25 after singles had been seen at three other sites (Dungeness, Reculver and Lands End)

**Short-eared Owls:** Reports from eight sites this week include two birds at the east end of the Thorney Island Great Deeps, two at Farlington Marshes and 8 at Portland

**Wryneck:** Still one at Lands End on Oct 21 and one at Portland on Oct 24

**Skylark:** The shortage of these seems to be ending. This week flocks of 120 were seen at Climping, 163 at Christchurch, 175 at Reculver in Kent and 200 at Steyning north of Worthing

**Shorelark:** One still at Reculver on Oct 24

**Sand Martin:** 4 at Worthing on Oct 27

**Swallow:** Latest were 25 at Folkestone on Oct 27 after 160 over Sandy Point on Hayling on Oct 24

**House Martin:** 41 at Christchurch on Oct 24 and 2 at Seaford on Oct 27

**Olive-backed Pipit:** On Oct 23 RBA reported sightings in 8 counties and 1 was still in Cornwall and another in the Scillies on Oct 24

**Pechora Pipit:** There had been one previous sighting on Shetland on Sep 21 before one was seen at Portland on Oct 26. This has probably come for the tundra east of Russia

**Rock Pipit:** Of local interest two or three were back on the South Moors shore at Langstone on Oct 22. They are now widespread winter residents in southern England

**Water Pipit:** Singles have now been seen at six sites in southern England including one in the Titchfield area on Oct 21 after one had been seen nearby south of Fareham on Oct 18

**Yellow Wagtail:** What may well be the last two sightings in England for this year were two birds at Portland on Oct 22 and one at Start Point in Devon on Oct 23

**Waxwing:** A report of one feeding on Hawthorn Haws in East Sussex near Hailsham on Oct 27 met with some scepticism from me as it was the first report I had seen from anywhere in the British Isles but I subsequently heard that 30 birds had been seen somewhere in the north of the British Isles as early as Oct 22

**Robin:** These continue to pour into England from the continent, mostly going unnoticed as migrants except where they are seen arriving on the coast (e.g. 180 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 22 and 70 at Christchurch on Oct 24)

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** With memories of the bird that was at Sandy Point on Hayling for several days around Oct 21 in 2010 a report of one in Norfolk on Oct 24 roused hopes of a local repetition which has not yet been reported.

**Black Redstart:** These have turned up on Hayling - three at Sandy Point on Oct 23 and one at the Inn on the Beach on Oct 24. Others are now widespread in southern England

**Common Redstart:** Latest sighting was of one at Pagham Harbour on Oct 24

**Whinchat:** Also still here this week the latest sighting was of two at Sandwich Bay on Oct 25

**Stonechat:** 148 were found in the New Forest on Oct 20,21 and on Oct 23 there was a Siberian race bird at Birling Gap on Beachy Head followed by another at Portland on Oct 25

**Wheatear:** The last sighting I have recorded is of one at Hook near Warsash on Oct 24

**Desert Wheatear:** One was found on the Worthing shore on Oct 24 and was still there on Oct 25. For photos see

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/dessertification.html> and

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/operation-desert-wheatear.html>

**Ring Ouzel:** No shortage of these with over 20 reports this week including five reports on Oct 25

**Blackbird:** Among many reports of continental birds arriving Portland reported an estimated 1000 there on Oct 22 - on Oct 23 Sandy Point on Hayling had 80.

**Fieldfare:** Oct 22 brought a mass invasion of these across the North Sea to Yorkshire where some 9000 were reported - this was in addition to the smaller numbers that have been entering southern England since mid September

**Song Thrush:** Only 800 arrived in Yorkshire on Oct 22 when 'hundreds' arrived from the south at Portland

**Redwing:** Around 21,000 came into Yorkshire across the North Sea on Oct 22 while the influx to southern England continued (on the foggy morning of Oct 24 many of their corpses were lying on the ground under a south Devon Lighthouse at Slapton Ley)

**Mistle Thrush:** On the weekend of Oct 20,21 a total of 125 were found in the New Forest and on Oct 23 a total of 27 were found on the shore west of Selsey Bill

**Dartford Warbler:** The Oct 20,21 survey of the New Forest found 113 there - a very low count to be starting a potentially very cold forthcoming winter

**Lesser Whitethroat:** One was still at Bishopstoke near Eastleigh on Oct 24

**Garden Warbler:** The last I know of was one at Portland on Oct 22

**Pallas' Warbler:** The first and so far only British report for this year is of one at Folkestone on Oct 20 and 21

**Dusky Warbler:** In addition to one in the Shetlands on Oct 12 one was found in southern England (at Reculver on the north Kent coast) on Oct 22

**Goldcrest:** Continental birds continue to arrive in large numbers - a peak count of 100 at Dungeness on Oct 20, 80 at Christchurch on Oct 24, 60 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 22 and 55 at Durlston on Oct 22, etc..

**Firecrest:** Small numbers compared to the Goldcrest - max was 12+ in Dorset (several sites) on Oct 20. One that did reach Portsmouth was found dead on the ground on Oct 25 after flying into a window near the Guildhall (perhaps fleeing a Sparrowhawk?)

**Flycatchers:** Reports from the Scillies of Pied Flycatcher up to Oct 21, Spotted Flycatcher up to Oct 24 and Red-breasted Flycatcher also up to Oct 24 (which is the latest date currently available online so the birds may still be there)

**Daurian Shrike:** This Chinese race of Isabelline Shrike arrived at Portland on Oct 23 and was still there on Oct 25

**Red-backed Shrike:** One was at the Lizard in Cornwall on Oct 20 and 21

**Great Grey Shrike:** RBA reported one 'somewhere in England' on Sep 25 but it was not seen again. The next was in Shetland on Oct 17 but that's all so far for

the UK. Oct 19 seems to have brought a total of 16 into the Low Countries but reports have dried up since then

**Hooded Crow:** The first of the winter in England was at Spurn Head in Yorkshire on Oct 25

**Starling:** The season of nightly 'murmurations' has started with more than 10,000 birds at Thurlestone Bay (South Devon) on Oct 25. On Oct 24 more than 6,000 were at Weston-super-mare.

**Chaffinch:** Weston-super-mare also reported the highest number of these (5,200) on Oct 25 and on Oct 24 Sandy Point on Hayling recorded the arrival of 376 heading north-east

**Brambling:** 2000 arrived in Yorkshire across the North Sea on Oct 22 but smaller numbers were still coming into southern England (Oct 25 brought 65 to Reculver in north Kent and 58 to Weston-super-mare in Somerset)

**Goldfinch:** Large numbers still circulating in southern England with a max of 11,550 over Christchurch on Oct 24 (plus 6200 Linnet there that day)

**Hawfinch:** Reports of birds passing through 9 southern English sites this week including 2 arriving off the sea at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Oct 24

**Snow Bunting:** One was on Tennyson Down (Isle of Wight) on Oct 22 and 23 while others have been seen at Sandwich Bay, Folkestone and Reculver in Kent, with others in Dorset, Cornwall and the Scillies

**Non-British Birds:** Followers of the Three Amigos blog ( <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> ) have this week enjoyed photos and news of the following birds in the south Atlantic - Red-billed Tropicbirds, Black-browed, Shy, Wandering and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Ostrich, Cape Cormorant, Cape Bunting, Cape Bulbuls, Cape Robin Chat, Southern Boubou, White-necked Raven, Red-winged Starling, Great Shearwater, Kelp Gull, Wilson's Petrel, White-Chinned Petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel, African Black Oystercatchers.

## INSECTS

### DRAGONFLIES:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Black Darter:** One in Anglesey on Oct 21 - first sighting since Oct 6

**Red-veined Darter:** Two still in Cornwall on Oct 22

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** One in Cornwall on Oct 25 was the first seen since Sep 3

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Black Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Beautiful Demoiselle

### BUTTERFLIES:

### **Notable sightings this week:**

**None**

### **Species reported this week:**

Large White, Small White, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Comma and Speckled Wood

**Also of interest** was a sighting of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding on Buddleia at Storrington in Sussex on Oct 22 and another of one dead in a Hampshire Lavender Bush on Oct 24. A good number of these do successfully hibernate in Britain

The Dorset moths website also published a report of an unusual number of Fox Moth caterpillars seen on the Dorset Heaths this week (many of them parasitised)

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

**Scorpion Fly:** One seen on Oct 23 at Swalecliffe in north Kent was the first I have heard of since June

**Drone Fly:** This hoverfly regularly hibernates and was happily feeding on Ivy blossom this week up to Oct 27

**Ivy Bee:** Also enjoying Ivy this week and active to Oct 24 at least

**Speckled Bush Cricket:** Seen at Dungeness on Oct 23

### **PLANTS**

**Common Polypody:** This was added to the Emsworth Brook Meadow list with a find there this week. It was also among many plants recorded at St Faith's Church in Havant on Oct 23 (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm#F2310> for an account of the finds with photos)

**Sweet Violet:** The very first flower of next spring was out in St Faith's Churchyard on Oct 25

**Glasswort Species:** These are now starting to add a red colour to the mud flats of our harbours

**Ash tree dieback:** There is probably little we can do about this except express opinions such as those of Cliff Dean in his blog at

<http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/10/27/ash-crash-splash/>

**Burnet Saxifrage:** Three freshly flowering plants in St Faith's churchyard were a surprise find this week

**Cross-leaved Heath:** This was still flowering in Havant Thicket on Oct 27

**Common Centaury:** Also still flowering at Durlston on Oct 27

**White Comfrey:** A plant still flowering at St Faith's church on Oct 23 enabled me to learn how to differentiate it from 'white flowered' plants of Common Comfrey

**Cleavers (Goosegrass):** A single plant flowering at St Faith's church yard on Oct 23

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Stoat:** Many years ago I heard the screams of a **Rabbit being killed by a Stoat** and then watched the Stoat dragging the dead Rabbit away from the scene and I was amazed by the strength and persistence with which the Stoat surmounted the obstacles in its path (such as the trunk of a fallen mature Beech tree) so my eye was drawn to a report in this week's bird news from Devon in which the observer saw a Stoat kill a Rabbit only six feet from where he was standing.

**Water Vole:** A sighting of two in the River Ems at Brook Meadow brought the tally of reports of this species at that site this year to 199 - who will make the 200th observation?

**Black Grey Squirrel:** John Goodspeed's website has a report for Oct 20 of a black coated Grey Squirrel at Purbrook Heath in the Waterlooville area. We have had plenty of sightings of white coated Grey Squirrels in the Portsmouth area going back for around 30 years (and even more of black rabbits) but I think this is the first report of a Black Squirrel.

I was aware that this variation was not uncommon in parts of east Anglia but when, in response to this new sighting, I checked on the current status of Black Squirrels in England I was surprised to see how widespread they now are. Go to <http://blacksquirrelproject.org/node/22> and click 'View Black Sightings' to get a map of the UK showing that they have been seen in (I think) every English County with around 20 sightings in southern Scotland 4 in northern Ireland (and at least four in the Portsmouth area). It also has a link for anyone to report sightings. For more background info see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_squirrel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_squirrel) which shows that they are common in the USA, and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2093826/Black-squirrel-Nationwide-hunt-100-years-introduced.html> which, in true tabloid style, predicts that the Greys are about to be wiped out by the Blacks

**Noctule Bat:** The RX (Rye Bay) website reports the finding of a dead Noctule under the walls of Camber Castle on Oct 22 - no cause of death is given or suggested. Also in this week's news a cross channel migrant bat (species not given) was seen flying in on the Kent coast.

**Newts heading back to breeding ponds:** At Northiam (north of Hastings) Brian Banks has recorded Palmate Newts close to a pond towards which they may have been heading although this is a very early date for them to start breeding. Last year Brian found the first Common Newts in a pond on Nov 30 but Palmates did not turn up there until Jan 12.

**Lapidary Snail:** I am delighted to see that Graeme Lyons has recovered from the exhaustion induced by his race to tick 4,000 species and is now back in the chase

(which benefits us all through his blog at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> ) The arrival of a Desert Wheatear on the Worthing shore (which became his 4095th species) has helped get him back to his blog as has the excitement of the Fungus season and at the end of the Fungi reported in

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/nice-n-spicy.html> is a photo of this snail species which I will be watching out for.

**Fungi:** We are now fully into the fungus season and this was emphasised by the number of species seen in Havant Thicket on Oct 27 by the Havant Wildlife Group and the increasing number of reports from other sources. The first **Fly Agaric** was reported on Oct 15 from the Bixley Wood north of Hastings and others were seen this week in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth and on Oct 27 in Havant Thicket as were colourful **Amethyst Deceiver**, **Red-cracking Boletus** (or was it **Boletus chrysenteron**?), the less common **Bloodred Webcap** (**Cortinarius sanguineus**) and the smaller **Yellow Stagshorn** (**Calocera viscosa**) and its black and white version - **Candlesnuff Fungus**. Other common species in Havant Thicket were the **False Death Cap** (**Amanita citrina**) and **Sulphur Tuft** plus **Common Earthball**. Not all the fungi found in Havant Thicket could be confidently named and one very small white bracket on a tree stump is probably the **Oyster Rollrim** (once called **Paxillus panuoides** but now called **Tapinella panuoides**)

In central Havant St Faith's Churchyard produced an increasing crop of a *Melanoleuca* species (for some reason this genus have been given the English name of 'Cavalier') which I think is **Melanoleuca arcuata** - photos appear towards the end of <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm#F2310> Also among to my local finds this week was the first sight of a large toadstool that should soon be common in fields now bare of their crops and it is called the **Stubble Rosegill** (once known as **Volvariella speciosa** but now called **V. gloiocephala** ). A more interesting find, growing from the wood of a bench overlooking Langstone Harbour from the South Moors shore, was a **Gymnopilus hybridus** toadstool of which a photo can be seen in my diary entry for Oct 22 (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2210> )

Other colourful fungi reported by Graeme Lyons from the Ebernoe area of West Sussex are **Cordyceps Militaris** (**Scarlet Caterpillar Club**) and **Saffrondrop Bonnet** (**Mycena crocata**) - photos of the first appear in

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/nice-n-spicy.html> which mentions finding *Mycena crocata* but to see it go to

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mycena\\_crocata.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mycena_crocata.jpg) *Cordyceps* is a genus of many species each of which targets a specific insect species - *C. militaris* goes for the underground pupa of a moth species. Another species in the Ebernoe churchyard was the **Garlic Parachute** (**Marasmius alliaceus**)

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 22 - 28 (WEEK 43 OF 2012)**

**Thu 25 Oct**

## The week so far

My time so far this week has mainly been spent on investigating the wildlife of St Faith's churchyard in central Havant and the results of this can be seen at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> where the current top entry has photos and comment on some 35 plant species found in a perambulation of the church yard on Oct 23.

One surprise find on Oct 23 was a new plant of **Burnet Saxifrage** just coming up and showing its flower buds (this downland species is not supposed to flower after the end of August) so I had a further look at it today to confirm its identity only to find two other more advanced plants of the same species plus nine more of the toadstools (believed to be *Melanoleuca melaleuca* as seen in Roger Phillips book but seemingly now called **Melanoleuca arcuata** - see <http://www.rogersmushrooms.com/gallery/DisplayBlock~bid~6408~source~gallerychooserresult.asp> (To identify any fungus that you come across try starting with <http://www.rogersmushrooms.com/gallery/visualkey.asp> which takes you to the first of three pages on which you can select the image which seems closest to your find, click the name associated with that image and that takes you to a gallery of photos illustrating the species in that group, click the photo most like your find and you will get more info and the vital statistics that will confirm or deny that this is your find - if your first choice is not right go back to the gallery and try again!)

While at St Faith's today I had an excellent new find - the first **Sweet Violet** flower of next year was out - I expect to see them start flowering before Christmas but not usually this early - and on Oct 23 I also had a good find close to East St on my way home - a superb **Grey Wagtail** strutting on a garden shed roof from which it was flying up to catch flies.

## Mon 22 Oct

### Rock Pipits back on Langstone South Moors shore

An afternoon cycle ride around the Budds Farm area and back along the shore to Langstone Mill Pond was made worth while by the sight of a **Kingfisher** heading out into the harbour from the mouth of the Hermitage Stream and then by my first sighting of two (possibly three) **Rock Pipits** on the South Moors shore.

Before I saw the Pipits I had a look at Budds Farm pools where the only thing out of the ordinary was the absence of the two adult **Swans** and the presence of two out of the five cygnets. I last saw the whole family here on Oct 4 - since then Brian Fellows saw what may have been the five cygnets at Nore Barn (Emsworth) on Oct 9, on Oct 15 I found one adult but no cygnets at Budds Farm, and on Oct 19 the five cygnets were seen again at Nore Barn. Although I have seen no Swans airborne this autumn I think the only way Swans can get in or out of the Budds Farm pools is by flying.

While near Budds Farm I had my first find of a single **Volvariella speciosa toadstool** which used to be called just *Volvariella speciosa* but has recently been given the English name Stubble Rosegill (I see Roger Phillips website varies that to Common Rosegill) - now the English mycologists who introduced the name Stubble Rosegill have also changed the scientific name to *Volvariella gloiocephala* - finding fungi is so much easier than finding their names!

The **Rock Pipit** sighting was made likely by the tide being at its highest, forcing the Pipits to search for food in the very narrow strip of beach not covered by water and I watched two birds flying up onto the seawall ahead of me, then back onto the shingle and tideline debris. One of them flew over my head to perch on the fence posts separating the seawall path from the moors, allowing me to see its dark flanks and belly and to hear its calls that are distinctly softer than those of a Meadow Pipit. Having flown ahead of me towards the Langbrook Stream mouth both birds doubled back to the west end of the shore and after they had done so I saw a single bird near the stream mouth - it could have been one of the two but I think it was a third individual

At the stream mouth **18 Wigeon** were on the water but a more exciting find was made on the rather battered wooden bench at the edge of the shingle. Out of a circular hole at one end of the bench (presumably where there was a bolt holding the seat to its support) grew an orange brown coloured toadstool cap which I took home and (after waiting overnight for a rust coloured spore-print) I guessed to be **Gymnopilus hybridus** though I have previously only found this in conifer woods.

Gymnopilus cap and its spore print (photo taken three days after bringing the specimen home!)

One more unusual observation at Langstone Mill Pond was the apparent complete absence of Little Egrets despite the tide being high and dusk approaching. I was reminded of something I was told several years ago when discussing an Egret roost survey - although experience at Langstone up to now has refuted the idea I was told that experience elsewhere 'proved' that **Egrets never use places where they breed as winter roosts**. Maybe that is going to be the case here?

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 15 - 21 (WEEK 42 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** All three common species are now widespread around southern England

**Grebes:** **Black-necked** have been seen at several sites with 11 back in the Studland area of Dorset by Oct 17. One reported on the Emsworth shore of Chichester Harbour on Oct 16 and another single at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 17 were probably part of the movement which brought 11 to Studland and are likely to re-join the others rather than stay where they first landed. Another lone arrival was a **Slavonian** which was in Arlington Reservoir (Sussex Cuckmere valley) on Oct 19 when a **newly hatched chick of a Great Crested** was seen in Poole Harbour

**Bittern:** One seen at Radipole (Weymouth) on Oct 18 is presumably the bird seen there first on Oct 8 but one at Marazion (Penzance) on Oct 18 seems to be the first to reach Cornwall this winter.

**Great White Egret:** Singles were at Pagham Harbour and in the Avon Valley near Ringwood this week, neither being new arrivals, but more may be on the

way as reports from the Netherlands for Oct 19 show that a potential total of 244 birds were seen at a total of 38 sites (by far the highest figure for the year so far)

**Dark-bellied Brent:** Juveniles started to be noticed among birds arriving this week but the eventual total is likely to be low. Christchurch Harbour had its first juvenile on Oct 18 and the highest reported number of young I have seen so far occurred on Oct 11 when a flock of 398 birds at Seasalter on the north Kent coast contained 11 young but on Oct 13 that site had just 6 young among a flock of 2500 - that same site commented on "a lot more juvs" in its news for Oct 20 (no figures given). On Oct 15 I saw at least one young bird in a flock of 160 distant birds on the Langstone South Moors shore but 900 birds at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) that day had no young among them.

**Black Brant:** The first two that I know of were at Cap Gris-Nez on Oct 7 and the first in southern England was at Weymouth (Littlesea) on Oct 10 with a second bird arriving there on Oct 18. On Oct 12 there was a possible sighting of one in Portsmouth Harbour but that may have flown east to Chichester Harbour where one was seen near the east shore of Hayling Island on Oct 14.

**Red-breasted Goose:** The first of the winter was seen on the north Kent coast in the Swale estuary running past the Isle of Sheppey on Oct 14 and seemed to be associating closely with Brent so it is a contender for being a wild migrant arrival. For some good photos go to [http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/October12\\_000.htm](http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/October12_000.htm)

**Egyptian Goose:** A flock of 31 at the Avon Causeway south of Ringwood on Oct 14 is the biggest count at an English site this year - there were already 15 there on Oct 14 and they may have come from Petworth Lake in Sussex where 15 were present back in July but the additional 16 may have come from the Netherlands where a flock of 55 were seen on Oct 10. A pair seen near Fleet in north Hampshire had proof of their residence in this country by having three very young goslings with them

**Shelduck:** Back on July 5 I watched a flock of more than 70 flying east over Thorney Island, presumably heading for their moult site on the north German coast and the first sign of returning birds was in a report of 24 in Christchurch Harbour on Sep 1 followed by a sighting of 7 flying west past Dungeness on Sep 13 and then a flock of 38 on the Emsworth shore of Chichester Harbour on Sep 25. On Oct 8 a flock of 121 on the French Normandie coast indicated a more substantial return before on Oct 10 a group of 3 flew west over Climping (near Worthing) and these movements led to the arrival of a flock of at least 40 off Emsworth on Oct 14 with a similar group being seen there on Oct 15. These waves are likely to continue to arrive until the end of December when wintering numbers in the Solent harbours reach their peak.

**Wigeon:** A big wave of these brought 850 to Pulborough Brooks on Oct 15 when I first noticed 24 back in the mouth of the Langbrook stream at Langstone

**Teal:** Also on Oct 15 Pulborough Brooks had 550 Teal and the Fishbourne Channel at Chichester had a flock of 50 with small increases at Budds Farm and Langstone Mill Pond

**Honey Buzzard:** Two late birds flew over Milford (west of Lymington) on Oct 13 and one was still in Belgium on Oct 19

**Hen Harrier:** A potential total of 31 birds in Belgium on Oct 14 may presage the arrival of more in England - at least one bird has been in the New Forest since Oct 10

**Osprey:** We have not yet seen the last bird for the year - this week brought sightings of singles over the M27 where it crosses the R Hamble, at Warnham Mill Pond near Horsham and on the Lymington River in the New Forest

**Hobby:** Singles seen at Pett Level near Rye Bay on Oct 14 and near Titchfield Haven on Oct 19

**Dotterel:** One was still in the Scillies on Oct 18

**Lapwing:** Still very few on the Hampshire coast but 100 (probably on their way south) were at Winchester sewage farm on Oct 17 and the first of the autumn (just 10) were at an east Devon site on Oct 19. Signs that this may soon change come from the Netherlands on Oct 19 where one site had 5825 birds and there was a potential total of 12,000 at seven sites

**Purple Sandpiper:** Singles had been seen in the Netherlands on Sep 14 and Oct 4 with two seen on Oct 7. They reached England on Oct 14 with 1 in the Scillies, followed by 1 at Brighton Marina on Oct 15 and 2 at Newhaven Pier on Oct 16

**Woodcock:** One or two have been seen in unusual places since the beginning of August but the first to make a lengthy passage flight turned up in the Scillies on Oct 17

**Spotted Redshank:** There have been almost daily reports of this species in southern England since July 28 with a count of 10 or more at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour since Sep 22 (13 there on Oct 16). The early returning birds are likely to have been females whose work in the breeding areas ends when they have laid eggs in several nests tended by different males. The males and young arrive here a couple of months later, around the end of September, and one of the last to show up is the bird which is now spending its 9th consecutive winter based at Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore. It arrived on Oct 9 but then disappeared again for nine days - maybe exploring the neighbourhood to see if it could find a better place to spend the coming winter or maybe reacting to unusually high tides during those days. Sightings on Oct 19 and 20 suggest it has decided to stay at its regular site in the stream draining the Maisemore Gardens area on the western flank of the Emsworth built up area

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** On Oct 14 one was reported to have been seen in the north Hayling bay which houses the Northney marina but there have been no subsequent reports and I wonder if this was a mis-identification of a Greenshank (as seems to have been the case with one of the same species reported as being at the Testwood Lakes in Totton (west of Southampton) at the beginning of September.

**Wood Sandpiper:** A late bird was reported on the Lymington marshes on Oct 13 (over a fortnight later than the previous report of one at Rye Harbour on Sep 28)

**Iceland Gull:** With the exception of August this species has been reported on the south coast at least once in every month of this year and this week has brought the October report - this time of one passing St Catherine's point on the Isle of Wight on Oct 19

**Glaucous Gull:** This species has also been reported in the English Channel area in every month up to June with one at Dungeness on Oct 18 and 19 to end the no show period from June 27 until Oct 18

**Terns:** In addition to the Sandwich Terns which will winter here this week has brought sightings of 2 Common Terns in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 17 and a single Little Tern at Dawlish Warren in south Devon on the same day

**Little Auk:** The first for southern England this year was one at Portland Bill on Oct 19 - a flock of 20 had been seen off eastern Scotland on Oct 12

**Stock Dove:** Now moving west into southern England in numbers which peaked with 376 at Dungeness on Oct 14. Reports of smaller numbers (minimum flock of 17) have come from Folkestone (155), Seaford, Durlston, Portland and south Devon on the south coast and from Reculver in north Kent (max 60)

**Wood Pigeon:** By Oct 18 the number of birds in the Netherlands had reached a potential total of 200,985 including 42,180 at one of the 12 reporting sites. Oct 19 brought news from Germany of up to 934,496 birds at 19 sites including one with a count of 144,235. The biggest count reported in England so far is of 5,070 birds at Black Bank in Staffordshire on Oct 14

**Turtle Dove:** Two were still to be seen in the Scillies in Oct 18

**Long-eared Owl:** The first reports of probable migrant arrivals in England for the winter are of one at Dawlish Warren in south Devon on Oct 12 and another single in north Kent on Oct 20

**Short-eared Owl:** These continue to pour into southern England as they have been doing since mid -August (on Oct 14 Barry Collins announced that one seen on Thorney Island was the first of the autumn there but I see that one had been reported at the Thornham marina back on Aug 24). Other reports this week have come from Martin Down near Fordingbridge, Farlington Marshes, Seaford Head,

Fowley Island in Chichester Harbour (5 said to have been seen there on Oct 16), Portland, Reculver (north Kent) and Bembridge (IoW).

**Common Swift:** At least one bird has been in Belgium this week with reports from three different sites on Oct 14, 18 and 19

**Alpine Swift:** One over Jersey on Oct 19

**Wryneck:** One at Portland as late as Oct 14 and one still at Lands End in Cornwall on Oct 20

**Skylark:** By Oct 19 one Netherlands site was reporting a site total of 23,406 birds with a potential overall total of 267,653 birds at the 60 sites reporting unusual numbers. Over here the highest count I have seen has been 300+ in South Devon on Oct 5 and just 100 (also south Devon) on Oct 20 this week

**Shorelark:** These have been reported in the Netherlands since Oct 7 but the first to be seen in England was one at Reculver (north Kent) on Oct 20 - for a great photo see <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/images/shore1012marc.jpg>

**Sand Martin:** No English sightings this week (still up to 8 in Belgium)

**Swallow:** Plenty still in England (14 reports with a peak count of 400 at Dungeness on Oct 19 and 270 at Folkestone on Oct 20)

**House Martin:** Reported at 12 English sites with a peak of 300 at Dungeness on Oct 19 and 275 at Folkestone on Oct 20

**Water Pipit:** One at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 14 and one at Newlands Farm (south of Fareham) on Oct 18

**Yellow Wagtail:** Last three reports so far are of one at Farlington Marshes on Oct 14, two at the Lymington marshes on Oct 17 and one on the Worthing seafront on Oct 18

**Grey Wagtail:** Local reports of birds back at winter sites came from Nore Barn at Emsworth and from the Havant town area (heard overhead) both on Oct 15

**Pied Wagtail:** First report of a winter roost is of 363 bird at Hatch Pond in the Poole area on Oct 19

**Ring Ouzel:** Oct 14 found 10 at Beachy Head and Oct 15 brought a count of 12 from the Black Gutter area of the New Forest near Godshill - these are the peaks from 20 reports this week

**Fieldfare:** On Oct 15 a flock of 65 was in the north west of the New Forest (Pitts Wood) and on Oct 19 there were 25 in the Millfield area of Basingstoke but also on Oct 19 there were more than 4,000 in the Netherlands

**Song Thrush:** Peak count in England this week was 60 at Durlston on Oct 13 when one site in the Netherlands had 4,196 and the overall total of 21 sites there was 22,439. The numbers are impressive but far more exciting for me was to hear one bird in continuous song at Warblington Church on Oct 18 - I imagined the bird to be rejoicing at having completed its journey to arrive at what should be a good place to spend the winter while at the same time challenging any local opposition to put up or shut up.

**Redwing:** These are now widespread in England and I no longer think it unusual that the majority of winter thrushes that we see in late autumn arrive from the south and move north through England rather than reaching us from the north. The highest count for southern England in this week's figures was 55 at Durlston on Oct 13. In Hampshire a flock of 20 was seen at Farley Mount near Winchester on Oct 19 with at least 6 at Brading on the Isle of Wight that day when one Netherlands site had 24,653 and the potential total of 16 sites over there was 76,062

**Subalpine Warbler:** One of these was at Portland on Oct 14 - the first for England since June

**Barred Warbler:** This large warbler species is named for the barring along the edges of its breast, belly and undertail area - it breeds in eastern Europe and winters in East Africa but more than 100 usually reach England each autumn and they are normally seen on our east coast but this year at least one has reached the Scillies and others have been seen at Durlston and Portland and there have been reports from both Devon and Cornwall. A good photo of one standing on sandy ground is among those available at <http://www.arkive.org/barred-warbler/sylvia-nisoria/>

**Lesser Whitethroat:** One still to be seen in the Scillies on Oct 14 - Common Whitethroat still there on Oct 18

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** Seen this week in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire (Sandy Point on Hayling), Dorset and the Scillies (where there is also a Hume's Leaf Warbler ) with others almost certainly still present in Devon and Cornwall

**Wood Warbler:** One still to be seen at St Just near Lands End in Cornwall on Oct 18

**Willow Warbler:** Just one reported this week - at Portland on Oct 19

**Goldcrest:** I am not sure if this is an exceptional winter for this species but I do not recall flocks of e.g. 150 at Portland and 52 at Soar in south Devon (both on Oct 19)

**Firecrest:** Two sites had parties of 10 this week (Penberth in Cornwall and Portland) while one bird at Southampton Common on Oct 16 was singing

**Great Tit:** One of these was singing at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Oct 15 - I suspect that, like the Song Thrush at Warblington, it was happy to have completed a cross channel flight

**Great Grey Shrike:** The second to reach the UK this winter was in Shetland on Oct 17 (the first was reported by RBA on Sep 25 but I did not record the location). The likelihood of others arriving soon can be judged by the presence of 6 at one Belgian site on Oct 19 with a total of 16 at 10 sites (previous max total this autumn was just 4 birds on Oct 7)

**Jay:** The invasion of continental birds continues with the arrival of 123 at Hunstanton Cliffs in Norfolk on Oct 15 with another 23 there on Oct 18, 38 at Folkestone on Oct 20 after 37 were seen there on Oct 14, and 8 moving west along the north Kent coast on Oct 20. Although the evidence is not so clear in some other cases I suspect that the count of 40 moving west over the Fleet/Aldershot area on Oct 13 was more likely to be of continental birds than local birds dispersing after breeding.

**Jackdaw:** On Oct 14 510 birds flew west over the Broadlands estate at Romsey, 662 went west over Sandy Point on Hayling and 1200 were seen at Weston Shore on Southampton water. While some birders consider these to be just part of the re-adjustment of local birds to winter conditions it seems more likely that they are fuelled by the arrival of continental birds that has been going on since the beginning of October. Having arrived here and chosen to settle in traditional night roost woodlands from which they disperse to feed in the morning and to which they return to roost at night it is inevitable that many of these daily movements will be eastward, seeming to deny the westward movement expected of continental birds - e.g. the report on Oct 19 of 1000 Jackdaws flying east over Portsmouth Harbour in 10 minutes

**Brambling:** 22 reports this week, many of them from English sites, though the highest count from an English site is of 16 at Durlston on Oct 15 compared to counts of up to 5,463 from continental sites

**Greenfinch:** These are no longer a rarity in southern England and I suspect that the arrival of 300 at the Hunstanton Cliffs on the Norfolk coast on Oct 15 is a clue as to where the increased numbers are coming from

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Willow Emerald:** Just four of these were still active in Essex on Oct 13 having been on the wing in England (mainly Kent and Essex) since June 20. These species was effectively new to Britain in 2009

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Common Darter and Willow Emerald

### **Butterflies:**

## Notable sightings this week:

**Painted Lady:** A note on the Rye Bay website this week gave a pointer to an article on the Butterfly Conservation website which is well worth reading - go to [http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/article/9/307/painted\\_lady\\_migration\\_secrets\\_revealed\\_.html](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/article/9/307/painted_lady_migration_secrets_revealed_.html)

Researchers at Butterfly Conservation co-ordinated the observations of thousands of ordinary people and used radar to find that during the course of each year Painted Ladies set out from Africa on a northward flight which takes them on a 9,000 mile round trip to near the Arctic Circle and back and discovered that two major factors make this possible. The first is that the butterflies do this in a six stage relay race (those that start from Africa stop off to breed in France and it is their progeny that make the next step into the British Isles and so on).

That much was already known but what the current investigation has revealed (using Radar) is that, although the butterflies can sometimes be seen moving in vast numbers at ground level, they mainly cover the ground by flying at an average height of over 500 metres (beyond our unaided eyesight) travelling at up to 30 mph. The numbers involved during the survey year are indicated in the paragraph that says .. "Radar in Hampshire operated by Rothamsted Research revealed that around 11 million high-flying Painted Ladies entered the UK in spring 2009 with 26 million departing in autumn." The reason for this journeying is that if the butterflies stayed in one area for the whole season their caterpillars would eat all the available food - the huge population can only be maintained by moving to a new area for each new generation of caterpillars.

## Species reported this week:

Clouded Yellow, Large White, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown and Meadow Brown

## OTHER INSECTS:

### Selected sightings this week:

**Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus pascuorum*):** Several still active at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Oct 18

**Dark Bush Cricket:** Still active at Durlston on Oct 17

**Mediterranean Stick Insect (*Bacillus rossius*):** A fascinating partial story appeared on John Goodspeed's website this week. The story apparently started with a reported **find of a Stick Insect in a public toilet on Hayling Island** which appeared on John's website a week ago (but that part of the story has now vanished from cyberspace) What we can now see is that an expert on these insects called Paul Brock thinks the insect is of the species named (which is common in the Mediterranean and has for several decades had a viable colony on the north French coast but is unlikely to survive English winters). This is the second Stick Insect to be found on south Hayling - an **Indian Green Stick Insect (*Carausius morosus*)** was found in an empty beach hut on 28 Nov 2010 but I have heard no more of that one

**Spiked Shieldbug (*Picromerus bidens*):** I understand this is a common species in southern England but I was not previously aware that it enjoys a diet of

caterpillars which is no doubt why it raised some concern when one was found at the Magdalen Down Butterfly Conservation reserve this week

## PLANTS

**Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*):** On Oct 17 Brian Fellows noticed that the roadside brick wall of two houses in Emsworth's North Street (Numbers 90 and 90A near the railway station) supported at least four species of Fern. Harts Tongue and Wall Rue were easy to name and the third appeared to be a young male Fern but the fourth was initially a mystery but has now been identified as **Black Spleenwort** which I have only come across on the Church at Chalton (north of Finchdean) where the mature specimens could be recognised by their black main stems (properly called their 'rhacis'). The young specimens do not show this feature and so could be confused with Sea Spleenwort (although that is supposed to require sea-spray for it to survive a useful website for the identification of Ferns - <http://www.ferns.rogergolding.co.uk/index.html> has a photo of a specimen happily living on a brick wall in London)

**Cut-leaved Cranesbill:** I found a specimen of this flowering in the Havant cemetery on Oct 15, exactly a month after what I thought was to be my last record for the year on Sep 15

**Meadowsweet:** A freshly flowering specimen by the Langbrook stream in Havant also seen on Oct 15 was the first I had seen since Aug 9

**Wild Angelica:** A lot of very impressive plants of this flower in Brook Meadow in Emsworth but I thought I had seen the last for the year on Aug 22 only to find new flowers on Oct 10 and 18

**Common Centaury:** Durlston report that this was still flowering there on Oct 20, long after my last personal record of it on Aug 31

**Yellow-wort:** Durlston also report this flowering on Oct 16 where my last record of it is for Aug 31

**Wood Anemone:** An even greater gap between expectation and actuality is found in a report (see under Fungi below) that Wood Anemones were flowering in a wood near Hastings on Oct 15

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Garfish:** This 'pipe fish' shaped species is usually found at the surface of the open sea but some must have been washed into a normally landlocked pool at Rye Harbour in the past where they have grown and multiplied. They are now attracting the interest of Little Egrets enabling Barry Yates to take a portrait shot of one of the fish in the bill of an Egret and another magnificently posed photo of three Egrets and three Cormorants arriving for a meal - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/10/15/fishy-surprise.html>

**Cuttlefish bones:** These are a common enough sight on the shoreline but they are apparently now being used by a group wishing to increase the number of live Cuttlefish and Squid in the English Channel as a form of 'Scratch card' which can win you a £50 prize. Apparently the way to win is hidden in a website called <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/cresh/> but with my usual luck I have been unable to find any reference to this potential prize in a quick visit to the site

**Fungi:** The first **Fly Agaric** photos for this autumn have appeared on the web - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/10/15/fascinating-fungi.html> (the photos were taken in Bixley Woods near Hastings and the article tells us that **Wood Anemones** are currently flowering there!). That find was made on Oct 15 and on Oct 16 I found a single specimen of **Melanoleuca melaleuca** in St Faith's churchyard grass - I tried to find an English Name for this species but M. melaleuca does not appear among the four Melanoleuca species accorded common names (the others are Spring Cavalier, Smoky Cavalier, Common Cavalier and Clouded Cavalier so I guess the one I found should be called the **Autumn Cavalier**). Also found somewhere in Havant on Oct 15 were a couple of **Tawny Funnels** and my first **Shaggy Inkcap** while at Warblington Cemetery on Oct 18 I found hundreds of (appropriately named for the site) **Weeping Widows**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 15 - 21 (WEEK 42 OF 2012)**

**Thu 18 Oct**

### **First Song Thrush song of the winter at Warblington Church**

Today I went to Warblington cemetery to gather material for the next wildlife poster for that site and was rewarded with the unexpected pleasure of **persistent Song Thrush song** which stood out from the background of occasional Robin Wren and Collared Dove song. Brian Fellows had a similar pleasant surprise on Oct 15 with **full Great Tit song** heard in Brook Meadow, causing me to reflect on **what prompted this song at this time of year** - it could of course be a hormonal response to the completion of their summer moult and the restoration of a 'fully fit' feeling in the bird but I prefer to imagine that these are birds which have just completed an arduous journey from Europe, have reached what seems to be a good place to spend the winter, and are combining their feelings of pleasure in a safe arrival with a check on any opposition they may encounter from other birds already here. A check on the number of birds on the move, many of them heading for southern England, shows a significant increase in the number of Great Tits gathering in the Low Countries (prior to making mostly unseen night flights across the channel) since the beginning of October ... on Oct 8 the total of Great Tits reported as 'remarkable' (i.e. noticeably different from the number normally seen there) in the Netherlands was 437, on Oct 13 it was 2385, and on Oct 14 it was 6069 declining to 4583 on Oct 15 when the Brook Meadow bird was heard. The same check on Song Thrushes gives a total of 20697 on Oct 12 and 22439 on Oct 13 dropping back to just 180 on Oct 14

Also seen at Warblington was **a massive outburst of Weeping Widow toadstools** (I could not help but reflect on the appropriateness of this name for fungi seen in a graveyard), some 29 wild flowers still in bloom and a show of Cockspur Thorn berries outdoing that at the Havant cemetery and the **first autumn molehills**.

One of the Weeping Widow fungus troops and a closer view of a small group

I also took photos of three 'oddities' starting with the battered remains of a 'fairy' on an ancient grave, **three (floral) parrots** on a very recent grave, and the grave of a child called 'Holly' whose family had shown a striking appreciation of the unity of all life on earth by planting **a holly tree at the head of her grave and carefully trimming it to grow as part of her headstone**. One final 'oddity' was a personal memory stirred by the sight of some plastic pipe around the stem of an ornamental apple tree - many years ago when carrying out the annual Bird Census of the farm area (including the Church and cemetery) I saw a similar piece of plastic pipe going down into the soil around the roots of a newly planted tree - its purpose was to allow water to be delivered directly to the roots but luckily it had not been in use for that purpose when I saw **a Great Tit disappearing down it with food for an underground nest of young**.

Ancient 'Grave Fairy' and Holly's grave headstone united with a Holly tree

An unusual grave tribute of Three Parrots and a plastic pipe reminding me of a Great Tit nest site

## Tue 16 Oct

### Colour in Havant cemetery

I spent some time in the New Lane cemetery enjoying today's sunshine and taking photos for the monthly 'Cemetery Wildlife' poster that will appear in the notice board there and which can be seen on the 'Cemeteries' page of this website (access via the Homepage). As the number of wildflowers and insects is diminishing I included some beginner's thoughts on the Lichens to be found on the tombstones but the 'meat' of this visit was the bright red berries on Cockspur Thorn, Yew, Holly, Bittersweet Nightshade and Dog Rose plants. I also found a number of **Common Wasps** visiting the Ivy flowers but saw no butterflies or dragonflies (though I did have a Migrant Hawker Dragonfly in my garden and the inevitable Red Admiral en route to the cemetery).

Also seen today was a **ladybird** on the outside of a window, probably the first of many hoping to spend the winter inside my house. Also seen on the outside of another window was an even smaller insect which I did not recognize - sadly by the time I had gone outside to have a look at its upper surface it had flown off leaving me wondering if it could have been one of the **small woodland cockroach species** which its cigar shaped body and long antennae suggested (e.g. *Ectobius sylvestris*)

## Mon 15 Oct

### First flock of Brent on the South Moors shore

Of 51 plant species seen flowering in an afternoon walk to Budds Farm and back only one was unexpected - a freshly flowering **Meadow Sweet** by the Langbrook Stream - but I did find three types of fungi - one was my first **Shaggy Inkcap** of the season just pushing its cigar-shaped fruiting body up through the ground, the other

two were both trooping and were probably *Psathyrella* species but I could not name them on the spot and had no convenient bag in which to bring specimens home for investigation. Later, in the Langstone area, I came on a couple of **Tawny Funnel Caps**.

At the Budds Farm pools I could only see one adult Swan so the 5 cygnets may have left and could be the group of five which turned up in Emsworth on Oct 9 rather than the Langstone Mill Pond family (when last seen on Sep 24 there were still six cygnets in that family). Also at Budds Farm there were 56 Coot, well over 30 Mallard, 20+ Gadwall, at least 8 Shoveler and around the same number of Teal.

Out on the very windy harbour shore, with the tide approaching its lowest point, there were hardly any waders but plenty of gulls, among them an increased number of **Common Gulls**, but the most interesting sight was of around 160 **Brent** (with, I think, just one juvenile among them). When I got to the mouth of the Langbrook stream I found **Wigeon** present for the first time this winter - at least 24 of them.

Langstone Mill Pond had no **Egrets** at all but it did have **Teal** for the first time (I only saw less than ten of them).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 8 - 14 (WEEK 41 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** On Oct 13 a Netherlands site counted 76 **Red-throated** but the highest number at any of the five English sites reporting them was just 4 at Reculver on the north Kent coast (singles were off Christchurch, Durlston and Portland). On Oct 12 Le Clipon near Calais reported 12 **Black-throated** but the only English south coast report was from Dungeness which had just one. **Great Northern** only had three reports - 2 birds at Flamborough Head, 1 at Sandwich Bay and 1 at Portland

**Grebes:** **Black-necked** have been reported in the Netherlands since mid August and two were at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 26 with another two at the Weir Wood reservoir in Sussex on Aug 29 but there have been no further reports until this week when one was seen in Poole Harbour on Oct 10 followed by one in the Netherlands on Oct 12 with another reported at the Dungeness RSPB site. One **Slavonian** was reported in the Netherlands on Sep 22 with the next report coming from Cornwall on Oct 8

**Bittern:** The first to move to a southern site for the winter was seen at Christchurch on Aug 21 with a further sighting at Fishlake meadows near Romsey on Sep 20 and another sighting at the Testwood Lakes near Southampton on Sep 21 with no more reports until Oct 9 when one was seen at Radipole near Weymouth followed by one at the Dungeness RSPB site on Oct 12 when one was also seen at Rye Harbour and on the south Devon coast at Beesands Ley

**Great White Egret:** The Blashford regular ringed bird has been seen in the Avon valley south of Ringwood this week but several others have been seen including one at Pagham Harbour on Oct 10 with other arriving at Christchurch, at

Dungeness and in Cornwall on Oct 12. These probably reflect growing numbers on the move in the Netherlands (up to 77 at 27 sites on Oct 7 increasing to up to 107 at 23 sites on Oct 14)

**Purple Heron:** The sighting of one at Radipole in Dorset from Oct 7 to 11 is probably part of a movement that brought 17 to one Netherlands site on Oct 6

**Glossy Ibis:** On Oct 6 15 flew over Lands End and a string of other reports from Cornwall may or may not have been part of that influx (no reports elsewhere in England)

**Spoonbill:** A report of 114 at one Netherlands site on Oct 6 (with a potential total of 277 from 6 Netherlands sites that day) indicates a movement that brought 19 to Poole Harbour on Oct 7 followed by other sightings including singles at Rye Harbour, Christchurch Harbour and Farlington Marshes this week with a group of four in Pagham Harbour

**White Front Goose:** Several goose species have started to arrive in force this week - after a peak count of 402 White Fronts back on Sep 29 a total of 12584 are in the Netherlands this week (**Bean Goose** shows a smaller increase from just 19 on Sep 29 to 2209 on Oct 12)

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose:** The peak of these was seen in France with 11,699 at Le Clipon near Calais on Oct 7 (when the total from 25 sites came to 81,348) but English sites have also been reporting larger numbers this week with 1224 passing Dungeness on Oct 8, 1500 on the north Kent coast on Oct 9 (only 12 of them juveniles) and 170 in Portsmouth Harbour and 120 at Lymington both on Oct 12 (with no young seen in either flock)

**Pale-bellied Brent:** A flock of 4591 on the French Normandie coast on Oct 10 was the first report to exceed the previous peak of 111

**Black Brant:** Two were at Cap Gris Nez on Oct 7 and one at Littlesea in Weymouth on Oct 10 with a distantly seen 'probable' in Portsmouth Harbour on Oct 12

**Egyptian Geese:** A flock of 15 were at the Avon Causeway south of Ringwood on Oct 11 and may have been continental birds but I guess they may be the flock of 15 that were at Pulborough Brooks on July 14 - last year a total of 174 were at the Eversley pits on the Hants/Berks border on Oct 5 and I believe they were English resident birds, not part of the population in the Low Countries.

**Pintail:** We should be seeing a few more in the near future after counts of 296 in the Netherlands on Oct 7 and 246 in France on Oct 10

**Garganey:** Late reports of 1 at the Avon Causeway (Dorset side) on Oct 9, 2 at the Exe estuary in Devon on Oct 11 and 1 at Eastbourne (West Rise Marsh) on Oct 12

**Shoveler:** The Blashford Lakes still hold the highest count so far this autumn with 175 on Oct 4

**Scaup:** Just three singles on the south coast (Scillies, Exmouth and Christchurch Harbour)

**Goldeneye:** These normally start to reach us at the end of October but no sign of an arrival yet (4 were in the Netherlands on Sep 23, 1 at Radipole on Oct 2 and 3 in Belgium on Oct 7)

**Red Breasted Merganser:** These are starting to arrive - 101 were in the Netherlands on Oct 5 and a potential total of 234 were at four sites there on Oct 12 while Oct 11 brought news of 16 in Portsmouth Harbour (also 2 at Exmouth on Oct 5, 2 at Dungeness on Oct 9 and 3 on the north Kent coast on Oct 11)

**Honey Buzzard:** A late single at Durlston on Oct 13 after 1 in the Netherlands and 2 in Germany this week

**White Tailed Eagle:** None yet in England but 1 in the Netherlands on Oct 7 and 1 in Belgium on Oct 13 (in both cases potentially 2 birds as reports were from 2 sites)

**Hen Harrier:** There have been odd reports of singles for some time but a count of 11 at a Netherlands site on Oct 13 (potential total of 26 from 10 sites) suggests they are on their way

**Sparrowhawk:** Birds now fleeing northern latitudes brought a count of 900 at one German site on Oct 12

**Buzzard:** Also on Oct 12 the same German site reported 1245 Buzzards

**Rough Legged Buzzard:** The same German site also had 12 Rough Legged on Oct 12 but RBA had also reported one in Essex on Oct 9 (there had been one reported in Yorkshire on Sep 26)

**Osprey:** One was in the Sussex Adur valley up to Oct 7 at least and another was at Warnham Mill Pond near Horsham on Oct 10. The most recent report is of one flying over the M27 where it crosses the River Hamble on Oct 14

**Hobby:** Reported at 8 English sites this week with the last at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 13. The Portland website has an interesting photo of one apparently trying to enter the observatory building to stay there for the winter and so save itself a long journey - see

[http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/bp\\_hobby\\_17\\_111012\\_500.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/bp_hobby_17_111012_500.jpg)

**Avocet:** The number on the Exe estuary had reached 59 by Oct 11

**Stone Curlew:** On Oct 7 one was seen briefly at Berry Head in south Devon and another was in Belgium

**Dotterel:** What may have been the last for the year was over Reculver in north Kent on Oct 13

**Golden Plover:** On Oct 9 there were more than 100 in Pagham Harbour (and 1500 at Rye Harbour). Locally there were 150+ at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on Oct 10 and 136 at the mouth of the R Hamble on Oct 12

**Solitary Sandpiper:** First for this year was on the Scillies on Oct 12

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** No reports of the Lodmoor bird since Oct 6

**Spotted Redshank:** The regular Nore Barn bird at Emsworth made its first appearance on Oct 9 and was there again on Oct 10 but has not been seen since

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** Birdguides carried an anonymous report of one in Chichester Harbour close to Northney Marina (Hayling Island) seen mid-afternoon on Oct 14

**Common Gull:** After a report of 405 on the Yorkshire coast on Oct 7 there was a sighting of 500 in Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Oct 12

**Little Auk:** First for this autumn was a flock of 20 off Anstruther (Fife in Scotland) on Oct 12

**Stock Dove:** Now starting to reach us from the continent. After 266 reported by three Netherlands sites on Oct 7 we have 26 at Seaford Head on Oct 7 and 45 at Durlston on Oct 12 with flocks of 41 and 90 in Belgium on Oct 8 and 10

**Woodpigeon:** These also seem to be coming over from the continent. 1000 were seen near Alton on Oct 7, 914 at Seaford Head on Oct 10 with 500 near Titchfield that day while a site in Germany reported 124,855 birds on Oct 11 and a different German site had 37,357 on Oct 12

**Turtle Dove:** One was still in Cornwall on Oct 9

**Cuckoo:** One was seen in the Scillies on Oct 8 and singles were in the Netherlands on Oct 7 and 10

**Long-eared Owl:** One arrived on the south Devon coast (Dawlish Warren) on Oct 12 when two more were seen in the Netherlands

**Short-eared Owl:** Reports from ten sites in southern England (including Farlington Marshes) this week

**Swift:** Late reports of one in the Scillies on Oct 6 and another over Brighton on Oct 9

**Wryneck:** One was still in Dorset on Oct 13 after others in Cornwall and the Scillies this week

**Skylark:** No reports from England of flocks bigger than 35 this week there were potentially 8,637 in total at 5 Netherlands sites on Oct 13

**Shore Lark:** First three reports of the autumn come from the Netherlands this week with at least three birds involved

**Sand Martin:** Now few left - max count of 30 at Christchurch on Oct 9

**Swallow:** Plenty still here with a max count of 2500 at Dungeness on Oct 11

**Red-rumped Swallow:** After a group of 7 were seen near Penzance on Oct 5 one was still in Cornwall (Falmouth) on Oct 8 and other singles were in South Devon and the Scillies on Oct 6. Oct 7 brought one to Seaford Head in Sussex.

**House Martin:** Oct 7 saw a massive passage over south Devon (estimate of 45,000 House Martins and 5,000 Swallows). Plenty of other reports ending with an estimated 2,560 over north Kent on Oct 13

**Yellow Wagtail:** Most have now left England - only reports on Oct 12 were of three singles on the Sussex Downs, at Portland and in south Devon. Biggest count during the week was of 64 at Seaford Head on Oct 7

**Robin:** Many continental birds arriving in England this week - on Oct 8 Portland had around 200 and on Oct 10 Portland reported more than 100 (98 out of 225 birds ringed there that day were Robins)

**Black Redstart:** These seem to be arriving back at our south coast sites for the winter though none yet on south Hayling

**Stonechat:** Plenty now along the south coast - five new arrivals were on Sinah Common (Hayling) on Oct 12

**White's Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*):** One was regarded as a MEGA when it turned up at St Just in Cornwall on Oct 8. This is the first time I have recorded the species which I see comes from wet coniferous forests in East Siberia and should winter in southeast Asia making it all the more surprising that it is named after Gilbert White. It has a very distinctive 'scaly' plumage

**Grey-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*):** One on the Scillies on Oct 6 was this year's first for Britain

**Ring Ouzel:** A massive exodus this week with one Belgian site having 33 of them (out of a potential total of 83 at 19 sites) on Oct 12. In England there was a peak count of 11 at Beachy Head on Oct 13 (with another 5 on the Downs above Worthing). Latest news is of two young birds seen in the Sinah Warren site (south Hayling) on the morning of Oct 14

**Blackbird:** Plenty of continental birds arriving in England with 50 at Portland on Oct 8, 35 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 9 and 21 at a New Forest site on Oct 10 being the peak counts

**Fieldfare:** 18 at Basingstoke on Oct 9 was the peak count for England so far

**Song Thrush:** By Oct 13 one Netherlands site had a count of 4,196 (and a potential total of 22,439 from 21 sites)

**Redwing:** Plenty of reports from English sites with the peak count being of 565 passing over the Fleet/Aldershot area on Oct 10. An indication of more to come is the report on Oct 12 of 8,034 at one Netherlands site (part of a total of 55,170 at 19 sites, though this may include some double counting). Incoming birds were seen at 12 English coastal sites with a max count of 40 at Portland on Oct 8

**Mistle Thrush:** Fewer reports than of the other thrushes but Oct 12 brought a report of 16 from the Pevensey Levels area and 43 at one Belgian site

**Barred Warbler:** Singles were seen at Folkestone on Oct 9, at Portland on Oct 11, and at Durlston on Oct 13 (that one was caught and ringed)

**Yellow Browed Warbler:** 24 reports from southern English sites this week include one at Sinah Warren (south Hayling) on Oct 9 and one at Peel Common south of Fareham on Oct 10

**Blackpoll Warbler (*Setophaga striata*):** The Scillies had their first visit from this north American warbler since 2008 when one appeared there on Oct 11

**Spotted Flycatcher:** One was at Langstone Mill Pond on Oct 7 and another in Southsea on Oct 10

**Red Breasted Flycatcher:** One of four reports this week came from Climping on the West Sussex shore on Oct 6

**Jay:** The massive invasion of continental birds continues - here are a few of the 33 reports this week starting with the arrival of 668 on the Norfolk coast at Hunstanton on Oct 6 (when a potential total of 875 arrived at 9 sites). On Oct 7 more than 40 flew over the Isle of Wight, on Oct 9 Basingstoke had 26 and on Oct 10 37 flew over the Fleet/Aldershot area and by Oct 12 at least 8 had reached south Devon. On Oct 13 there was said to be a continual stream flying west along the Sussex Downs at Cissbury Ring

**Jackdaw:** There seems to be a similar stream of these arriving from the continent but often passing un-noticed. This seems to have started on Oct 7 with 2000 birds over Brighton and by Oct 10 one Belgian site had 4,035 birds with a potential total of 13,969 at 11 sites

**Starlings:** These are also arriving - on Oct 13 a total of 19,266 came in at Hunstanton on the Norfolk coast.

**Chaffinch:** By Oct 13 Durlston has 1115 passing west and 35,100 were in the Netherlands waiting to cross the sea

**Brambling:** 33 reports this week with 80 at Anstruther in Fife on Oct 12. Portland had 10 on Oct 9 and 15 on Oct 11 while Sandwich Bay had 10 arriving on Oct 13

**Greenfinch:** After their apparent absence earlier this year it is encouraging to hear of a huge flock at Topsham in Devon on Oct 10 and a count of 205 over East Bexington in Dorset on Oct 13. Locally I found at least ten moving east along the Warblington shore on Oct 10

**Goldfinch:** These remain the most numerous species in southern England with 1000 at Beachy Head on Oct 7 and 930 over Climping on the west Sussex coast on Oct 10, then 1100 at Folkestone on Oct 11 and 799 at Sandwich on Oct 13

**Siskin:** The week's peak count for Southern England was 269 at Sandwich on Oct 13

**Linnet:** Durlston had 870 on Oct 9

**Lesser Redpoll:** Peak count of 115 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 13

**Two-barred Crossbill:** Among the ongoing stream of Crossbills arriving through the autumn the first **Two-Barred** were a group of three at Portland on Oct 11

**Reed Bunting:** 100 arrived at Dungeness on Oct 9 to be the largest of the week's 8 reports

**Vagrants:** I use this category to record overseas sightings as well as those seen here and this week two of our Three Amigos have been describing and photographing interesting species seen while on their naval duties. Mark Cutts is still in the Falklands seeing duck species (see

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/10/07/falklands-ships-inspection-steamers/> to learn about **Steamer Ducks (flying and flightless)** and

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/10/09/falklands-ship-inspection-ducks/> for **other duck species including Chiloe Wigeon**).

Steve Copsey has been ashore on St Helena and has some lovely pictures of **Fairy Terns** (and the house where Napoleon was exiled) at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/10/12/st-helena-fairy-terns-and-tropicbirds/> and an entry about

**Wirebirds** (and attempts to control the feral cats which prey on them) at

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/10/11/wirebirds-on-st-helena-part-2/>

A vagrant seen of Co Cork (Ireland) on Oct 12 was a very unexpected **South Polar Skua**

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Lesser Emperor:** One seen on Tennyson Down (Isle of Wight) on Oct 6

**Red-veined Darter:** One seen at Badminton Common near Calshot in the New Forest on Oct 6 and one at Pennington near Lymington on Oct 7

**Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Lesser Emperor, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Emerald Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly

**Butterflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** One seen at Hill Head near Titchfield Haven on Oct 10 was the first to be recorded as a pale *Helice* variant this year.

**Species reported this week:**

Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Small Heath.

## PLANTS

**Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*):** A young tree on the western edge of St Faith's church yard in Havant has started to show the glorious red colour of its leaves this week

**Apple of Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*):** One of the very few new flowers to be found at this time of year was seen in a Fourth Avenue garden (Denvilles area of Havant) on Oct 8

**Mulleins:** A walk around the New Lane industrial estate in Havant on Oct 8 discovered a **Dark Mullein** plant in full flower and a couple of **Great Mulleins** still showing some flowers

**Weasels Snout (*Misopates orontium*):** Also on Oct 8 I found several plants still flowering at the Havant New Lane allotments

**Common Comfrey:** Of a couple of freshly flowering plants found in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Oct 12 one had pure white flowers with all the other diagnostic features of Common Comfrey. Stace's Flora says .. "The flowers are often wrongly described as white but except for very rare albinos they are pale creamy yellow or purplish" I suggest that the Brook Meadow plant qualifies as a 'very rare albino'.

**Goosegrass (aka Cleavers):** The plant which I found flowering in St Faith's churchyard on Oct 1 was still bearing flowers on Oct 12

**Cockspur Grass:** Plants were flowering in the road called The Twitten off South St in Havant on Oct 10

My total of flowering plant species seen during this week was 79

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fungi:** **Parasol Mushrooms** are up in the Rye Bay area (and I feel sure elsewhere) and Cliff Dean has a photo of them in his web blog at <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/10/13/peet-level-15/> The fungi photo

comes at the end of an entry which also features a photo of two drink bottles which have Japanese labels causing Cliff to wonder if these have drifted all the way from Japan after hearing the Radio 4 'Costing the Earth' programme which centred on the arrival on the west coast of north America of debris from the Japanese tsunami of Mar 9 in 2011. I suspect the objects Cliff found have a much more local origin (as does the 5000 year old tree root which he also found) but the Radio 4 programme did report the end of the journey of Japanese debris across the Pacific (but not the end of its effect on nature)

Other fungi reported at Durlston this week are the common bracket called **Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*)**, colourful **Orange Peel Fungus (*Aleuria aurantia*)** and **Dead Man's Fingers (*Xylaria polymorpha*)**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 8 - 14 (WEEK 41 OF 2012)**

**Wed 10 Oct**

### **First flock of Bar-tailed Godwits at Langstone**

Warm sunshine today was a lovely contrast to yesterday's rain as I set out on my bike along the shore from Langstone to the Thorney Deeps. My first surprise came in the meadow south of Wade Court where water from the Lymbourne stream has created a flood that should persist through the winter and will soon attract a flock of Teal. Today the thing that caught my eye was an elderly looking **Fox** sunning itself on a drier part of the meadow.

Reaching the shore I had my first view of the flock of **Bar-tailed Godwits** that will also be a regular feature through the winter - around 150 of them lining the waters edge with very few other waders and no wildfowl in sight.

At Conigar Point I had a walk around the farm field where the many **Dwarf Spurge** plants are now growing into very small bushes and **the number of birds had increased** - only one Swallow and four Meadow Pipits but perhaps a dozen Skylarks, 20 to 30 Linnets and around 50 Goldfinch (though the latter showed no interest in the field but flew on east). In the hedgerows I found some ten Greenfinch with at least one each of Blackcap (male), Chiffchaff and Dunnock with several Blackbirds that would not normally be here and a few House Sparrows that have not yet finished their autumn holiday in the harvest fields. Also in the northern hedge I found an unexpected plant of **Field Scabious** in flower and near the point where three fields meet the plant of **Rayed form Groundsel** was still in flower.

At Nore Barn I was too late for the **Spotted Redshank** which Brian Fellows had seen there earlier (on the second day of this winters visit) but I did have my first view of the sea defence work now underway.

The **Thorney Deeps had few birds** - all I could see on the Little Deeps were 18 Coot, a couple of Tufted Duck and a single Little Grebe and at the Great Deeps one Grey Heron, three Egrets and one Cormorant seemed to complete the list until I spotted a small passerine perched on a low shrub too far from me to be certain of its id - my impression was of a **Whinchat** and that was supported by its bright buff breast, its size and jizz. After a time it flew off when I was not watching

it but when I picked it up in flight I could see no white and the flight pattern did not suggest Wheatear.

On the sea wall at the Great Deeps I once again found around **50 Pointed Snails** and as I cycled back north with the sun behind me I saw **one Small Copper** and **two Peacock butterflies** sunning themselves on the path with at least **three Common Darters** and **one Migrant Hawker** in flight.

Coming home through Brook Meadow I found one plant of **Wild Angelica** still just in flower and two plants of **Comfrey** in full flower - one of the latter had the expected reddish mauve flowers but the other had pure white flowers and the more upright stance of **White Comfrey**. I also had a close view of a **Comma butterfly** which had a deeper than usual orange colour and thought this was one of the *Hutchinsonii* form but I find that one of the distinctive features of that form is that it has a lighter and brighter colour tone

Later in the day I visited **St Faith's Churchyard** as I have been asked to comment on the wildlife to be found there as input to a booklet about the church. When I got there I found a lady taking photos and when I asked if she too was involved in the project I was told that she was investigating something called the '**Dewhurst garden**' and went on to tell me that during the 1939-45 war a father and son called Dewhurst were both doctors in Havant and during the 'blitz' on Portsmouth they had set up the equivalent of a field hospital in this churchyard to treat victims fleeing from Portsmouth. After the war this had been commemorated by the planting of a garden and the installation of a bench seat which is still there though the 'garden' has disappeared

My own discovery was of the striking reddish leaves on a youngish tree on the western edge of the churchyard which turns out to be a **Red Oak** - I have seen the tree often enough but have not seen the autumn colour of its leaves before.

## Mon 8 Oct

### New Lane and Denvilles - 2 Mulleins and Apple of Peru

By 4pm the dull damp morning had given way to a dry but still overcast afternoon, encouraging me to get some fresh air with an hour's walk up New Lane, over the railway and back through Denvilles.

The only interest in the New Lane cemetery was a small **Tit flock** causing me to look up and see yet another of the invading **Jays** flopping its way north. A little further north the allotments still had a show of **Weasel's Snout (Lesser Snapdragon)** and also something that I had seen there in previous years but not this year until now - a species of **Fumitory** which I had in the past thought was Common Ramping Fumitory but which today looked as if it had suffered a severe dose of weedkiller causing it to defy identification.

Moving on up New Lane I next came to a large patch of **Glistening Inkcap fungus** on and around a tree stump before I turned off into Stanbridge Road heading for the footbridge over the railway but before I reached that I had two surprises, both Mulleins. First was a couple of plants of **Greater Mullein** still in flower then, looking down from the slope up to the bridge, a cluster of **Dark Mullein** plants in full flower.

Nothing much after that until I was in Fourth Avenue where I peered through the slats of a garden fence to see a garden rubbish heap on which was growing something that I had seen there several years ago - a big plant of **Apple of Peru** with one large blue flower still on show. Altogether a well spent hour intended to give me nothing but a little exercise and fresh air.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 1 - 7 (WEEK 40 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Red-throated were seen in north Kent, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall this week with a peak count of just three at Christchurch Harbour but more are on their way as a Netherlands site had 32 on Oct 4. One Black-throated was seen off Seaford Head in Sussex on Oct 4 and one was seen off the Exe estuary on Oct 3 but 5 or 6 were in the North Sea. Great Northern were seen as singles in Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and the Channel Isles with the most easterly being at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 4 and 5

**Shearwaters:** Single Cory's and Great were in the Land's End area but there were much larger numbers of Sooty (more than 326 off Start Point in Devon on Oct 2) and Balearic (82 off Start Point that day)

**Storm Petrel:** One seen in the Scillies on Sep 28 and one in the Netherlands on Oct 5.

**Great White Egret:** Up to 50 seem to have been on the move in the Netherlands on Sep 30 with perhaps 76 there on Oct 2 but over here the only reports were of the Blashford ringed regular (downstream at Bickerley Common on Oct 4) and of 2 still in the Kent Stour valley on Oct 2.

**Spoonbill:** 65 were counted at a Netherlands site on Oct 4 when 10 flew over Dungeness. Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour had more than 12 on Oct 2 and one was on the Lymington shore on three days this week while one was seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 1 and 5

**Bewick's Swan:** First report that I have seen this autumn is of four in Belgium on Sep 30

**Whooper Swan:** A total of 9 were at two Yorkshire sites on Oct 4

**Geese:** 415 Pink Foot were at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire on Oct 4 (with another group of 8 in the Scillies) and just 10 Bean Geese were at a Netherlands site on Oct 2

**Dark-bellied Brent:** On Sep 29 I counted just over 80 in the south of Langstone Harbour but the distance and the way the birds appeared and disappeared as they rose and fell with the waves led me to estimate that there were at least 100 there which remains the highest count for an English site so far (despite reports of 75 in Langstone Harbour on Oct 1 and 80 from the north Kent coast on Sep 27). Oct 5 brought the first 1000+ report (1042) from the Netherland and I expect next week to bring much higher counts from English sites

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Just three reports this week - 2 in Christchurch Harbour on Oct 1, 3 in the Channel Isles on Oct 5 when one 'lost' bird flew over Dungeness

**Garganey:** One was still in Poole Harbour on Oct 3 and two were still at the Blashford Lakes on Oct 4

**Goldeneye:** What seems to be the first to reach southern England this autumn was a single at Radipole (Weymouth) on Oct 2

**Red-beasted Merganser:** The first five were reported in the Netherlands on Sep 29 followed by a flock of 101 there on Oct 5 when 2 were seen at Dungeness

**Goosander:** A report of 5 at the Blashford Lakes on Oct 4 was presumably of locally bred birds

**Honey Buzzard:** Two flew out from Portland on Sep 29 (when one was seen near Arundel in Sussex) and one was over west Cornwall on Sep 30. Last report so far is of one over the Netherlands on Oct 4

**Sparrowhawk:** One Netherlands site reported 25 over on Sep 30 when three other nearby sites reported counts bringing the potential total to 45

**Osprey:** Just two reports this week, both of single birds seen on Oct 1 over Dorset and Sussex

**Kestrel:** On Oct 4 Folkestone reported two arriving in off the sea

**Hobby:** Still to be seen this week in the Scillies, Cornwall, Dorset, Hampshire and East Kent where one was seen on Oct 6 (another was hunting dragonflies at Badminston Common in Hampshire on Oct 6)

**Corncrake:** On Oct 1 one was photographed walking along the village street of Malborough (near Kingsbridge in south Devon) - see <http://www.devonbirds.org/images/cache/f39217a4cddc4c49f0d5d950f42aa16e.jpg>

**Dotterel:** Singles in Cornwall and the Scillies up to Oct 3 (at least)

**Golden Plover:** Numbers on the south coast increasing with 250 at Rye Harbour on Oct 6, 131 at Newtown Harbour (Isle of Wight) on Oct 5 when 200 were seen in Gloucestershire

**Purple Sandpiper:** None reported yet in southern England but one was at a Netherlands site on Sep 14 and maybe the same bird there again at a different site on Oct 4

**Jack Snipe:** Singles seen this week at Titchfield Haven, Christchurch Harbour and in the Scillies

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The young bird still at Lodmoor

**Woodcock:** Birds on the move seen at Portland and Durlston

**Grey Phalarope:** One was at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5 while earlier in the week there had been reports from Cornwall, the Scillies and Suffolk

**Red-necked Phalarope:** To have a very close look at this less common species go to the Slimbridge website ( <http://www.wwt.org.uk/visit/slimbridge/wildlife/latest-sightings/> ) and watch the YouTube video currently on the top of their sightings page

**Little Gull:** Currently it is well worth watching out for these anywhere along the south coast as the numbers on passage increase - Flamborough Head in Yorkshire reported 1011 there on Oct 1 with 41 seen on Sep 30 and 103 on Oct 3

**Great Blackback Gull:** A site in the Texel area of the Netherlands reported up to 1799 birds there on Oct 4

**Lesser Blackback:** A different site in the Netherlands had 1166 on Sep 29

**Terns:** This week's reports include a **late juvenile Little Tern** seen in Pagham Harbour on Oct 5. No more than **4 Common Terns** were reported together at Southampton Water on Sep 30 and Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5. **Single Black Terns** were at Dungeness on Sep 30 and Oct 3 (with 3 still in the Netherlands on Oct 4). Also in the Netherlands a **single White-winged Black Tern** was seen on Oct 5

**Auks:** After a report of **88 Guillemots** of the French north coast last week Start Point in Devon had **77 Razorbill** on Oct 2

**Turtle Dove:** Four reports this week with the last being one near Titchfield Haven on Oct 4

**Swift:** Five reports this week with up to three birds in the Stoke on Trent area between Oct 1 and 3. Last report is of 2 birds in Yorkshire on Oct 4

**Wryneck:** Six reports including one at Newhaven on Oct 2 and one near Lands End in Cornwall on Oct 4

**Woodlark:** Counts of 69, 77 and 95 from sites in Belgium and Germany suggest that some will be arriving here for the winter and a single bird over the Farnborough airfield on Oct 2, another at Climping on the Sussex coast on Oct 4 plus a report of one bird (among three) in full song at Woolbeding Common near Midhurst could mean that the singing bird was venting his annoyance at the arrival of intruders

**Skylark:** These too are probably starting to arrive from the continent - on Oct 1 a Belgian site had 144 and on Oct 4 reports of 16 at Sandwich Bay, 12 moving west along the north Kent coast and several singing at Seaford Head near Beachy Head. By Oct 5 Soar in south Devon reported more than 300.

**Sand Martin:** These are now few and far between - on Oct 1 there were 40 at Weir Wood reservoir in north Kent but the only reports since then are of 8 at Durlston on Oct 2 but only 1 there on Oct 4

**Swallow:** Plenty of these still with us - 2400 over Durlston on Oct 2 and 1200 over Durlston on Oct 4. I had at least 20 over Havant Thicket on Oct 6.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** A group of 7 over the Penzance area of Cornwall on Oct 5 and 6 with a single over south Devon (South Milton Ley) on Oct 6

**House Martin:** 3420 counted over the Farnborough airfield in north Hampshire on Oct 2 and 2000 in the Hampshire Avon Valley on Oct 5 (when 2250 were reported at Christchurch Harbour). Locally on Oct 1 Tony Tupper told me that the birds which had used his nest boxes here in Havant through the summer had ceased to use them as night roosts after Sep 28 after which he has seen no birds.

**Richard's Pipit:** One was reported at St Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight) on Oct 5 while others have been seen at Sandwich Bay and in Cornwall

**Blyth's Pipit:** One at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 29 seems to have been the first in England this autumn

**Tree Pipit:** Still passing over the south coast in ones and twos up to Oct 5 at least

**Rock Pipit:** One was back on the Titchfield Haven shore on Oct 3 suggesting that others will soon be back at places where they do not breed

**Yellow Wagtail:** Still to be seen in October at Christchurch Harbour, Lymington shore, Hook near Warsash and Dungeness (200 there on Oct 4)

**Common Redstart:** Latest sighting so far was one at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Oct 6 after sightings at Titchfield and Gosport on Oct 5 and 4

**Whinchat:** One seen at Christchurch on Oct 5 was the latest so far

**Stonechat:** I have in the past assumed that the birds we see along the south coast in winter have come south from breeding in Britain but a count of 12 at Sandwich Bay on Oct 4 suggests that some have come over from the continent

**Wheatear:** Still 75 at Portland on Oct 4 shows that we have not seen the last

**Ring Ouzel:** Seven reports this week include one on the Isle of Wight on Oct 5 when two were in the New Forest. One was heard at Durlston on Oct 6

**Blackbird:** A total of 70 were at near continent sites where they were 'remarkable' and an indication that some have flown over here came from John Goodspeed who found 8 in his small garden on Portsdown on Oct 2

**Fieldfare:** One in Lancashire on Oct 1 was the fourth to reach Britain since the first arrived on the Sussex coast on Sep 16 (the other two were at Dungeness and in Dorset confirming that many of the birds we see in the south of England have come north from France, not south as might be assumed)

**Song Thrush:** These too are starting to come to us from the south starting with 12 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 30 - this week 6 arrived at Dungeness on Oct 4

**Redwing:** Birds reported in Yorkshire and Cumbria on Sep 27 and 28 may well have come across the North Sea (or south from Scotland) but birds seen (or heard) this week at Christchurch and Durlston (and those heard over Hove/Brighton on the night of Sep 29) had probably come across the Channel

**Mistle Thrush:** 28 seen by the R Itchen near Eastleigh on Oct 3 and 30 seen in south Devon on Oct 4 (with another 4 at Folkestone that day) may well have come across the Channel

**Grasshopper Warbler:** After recent sightings in the Scillies and in south Devon the latest was at Ringstead Bay near Weymouth on Oct 5

**Sedge Warbler:** Latest so far was one at Portland on Oct 4

**Reed Warbler:** Still being seen in very small numbers with the latest being two at Dungeness on Oct 5

**Barred Warbler:** Among more expected sightings in the Scillies and Cornwall one at Dungeness on Sep 29 was the first there since 1996

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Latest so far were three at Seaford Head (near Beachy Head) on Oct 4

**Common Whitethroat:** Numbers are now diminishing but singles were seen at five south coast sites this week (last at Durlston on Oct 6)

**Garden Warbler:** Just two reports this week with the last being at Woolmer Pond near Alton on Oct 6

**Blackcap:** More than 50 seen at Climping near Worthing on Oct 4 when 77 were counted on the Sussex coast at Seaford Head and 15 at Dungeness (plus 4 at Gosport)

**Greenish Warbler:** RBA reported one in Kent on Sep 29 and Oct 1 - I think this was one bird at Cliffe on the Thames estuary north of Rochester

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** Many of these now in the west country (Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and the Scillies)

**Chiffchaff:** Plenty still at southeast coast sites with a peak of 300 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5

**Goldcrest:** Peak count also at Christchurch on Oct 5 with 150 birds

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Seen this week at Pagham Harbour, Eastleigh and Portland

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** One on the Scillies on Oct 3 and one at Berry Head in Devon on Oct 5

**Pied Flycatcher:** At least one in the Scillies up to Oct 3

**Red Backed Shrike:** One at Portland from Sep 28 to Oct 4 and another at the Lizard in Cornwall from Sep 29 to Oct 4

**Great Grey Shrike:** The only report from the British Isles was of 2 at unnamed sites on Sep 25. Since then singles have been reported in the Netherlands on Oct 1 and 2

**Jay:** The invasion of continental birds started with & at Sandwich Bay on Sep 18 since when I have picked up 33 reports from UK sites including the arrival of more than 270 at Cley in Norfolk on Oct 4, 213 over Southampton Water also on Oct 4 (after 150 there on Oct 3), 82 in the Newhaven area on Oct 4, well over 76 in Dorset that day with counts of 54 at Folkestone and the same number at Reculver on the north Kent coast, etc down to one seen over my Havant garden on Oct 6

**House Sparrow:** A flock of more than 20 was in the Warblington Farm hedges bounding recently harvested wheat crops on Oct 1 but by Oct 5 many were back in a Havant town hedgerow where their chatter can be heard all year round other than the brief harvest time period when they move out into the country and the town falls silent. This year they left the town around Aug 9 when at least one was still visiting my garden while a flock was already in the hedge near Nutbourne Bay

**Chaffinch:** These started to pour into southern England from around Sep 27 and on Sep 30 there were around 10,000 gathered in the Netherlands for the cross Channel invasion (the total of reports from 22 sites over there that day was 49,340). By Oct 4 a Welsh site was reporting a flock of 1221 and Durlston had a count of 520.

**Brambling:** These have been arriving in southern England in small numbers since Sep 27 when one was seen at Folkestone and on Oct 4 Dungeness had 28 birds - latest report is of 2 at Durlston on Oct 6

**Greenfinch:** The last year or so seems to have seen a very significant fall in numbers of this species so a count of more than 50 at Climping (nr Worthing) on Aug 11 was eye catching. The only significant records I have for September were two from Belgium (counts of 53 and 79) so it is good to see that on Oct 4 Durlston had 15 and on Oct 5 a report from the Chandlers Ford area near Eastleigh was of 16 birds

**Goldfinch:** These have not suffered the same population collapse and on Oct 5 Spurn Head in Yorkshire recorded 3443 while on Oct 4 Thorpeness in Suffolk had 1140, Durlstn had 600 and Portland had 130 in a smaple 50 minute count

**Siskin:** Reported by 8 southern sites this week with counts varying from 14 to 275

**Linnet:** Plenty of these around with a peak count of 1180 at Durlston on Oct 2

**Lapland and Snow Bunting:** Nowhere with more than single birds of either species

**Vagrants:** A few of the reports on the RBA website which caught my eye included a **Myrtle Warbler** in Ireland. This is a small American species which is very similar to Audobon's Warbler (jointly the two are called Yellow-rumped Warblers) and only 20 have been recorded in Britain. Even rarer was an **Eastern Kingbird (aka Tyrant Flycatcher)** which turned up (from America) on the west coast of Ireland to be the first record of its species for the Western Palearctic. Another species which reached the Scillies was a **Sykes Warbler** which should now be in India (Britain has less than 20 records)

**Naval records:** Two of the Three Amigos whose reports can be seen at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> are currently heading south on Royal Navy deployments. Steve Copsey is on the Ice Patrol vessel HMS Protector currently heading south down the west African coast on its way to the Antarctic and Mark Cutts is already in the Falklands auditing accounts of naval stores and if you are interested in the birds they are both seeing keep up to date with their blog (which will tell you how to recognize an **Imperial Shag**)

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Black Tailed Skimmer, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Willow Emerald and Common Blue Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Wall Brown:** A fresh third brood female was seen on the Sussex Downs just north of Beachy Head on Oct 5 - last previous report was a month ago on Sep 4

**Species reported this week:**

Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown and Meadow Brown

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

**Selected sightings this week:**

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** Three reports this week from Shoreham, Gosport and Portland show that the species is still active and (at Shoreham on Oct 1) was undeterred from feeding by rain. Last report was from Portland on Oct 4, probably another incoming migrant

**Earwig:** I noticed these in my garden for the first time this year on Oct 4

## PLANTS

**Pale Flax:** I have been somewhat surprised by the late dates at which this flowers at Durlston. Normally I do not expect to see it in the Havant area after mid-August but this year a report of it still flowering at Durlston on Oct 1 was topped by a personal sighting of two plants in flower on the A27 embankment above the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway along the north of Langstone Harbour

**Dwarf Gorse:** Lots of this still in flower at Havant Thicket on Oct 6

**Dwarf Spurge:** Lots seen in the Conigar Point field of the Warblington Farm on Oct 1

**Cow Parsley:** A single plant in full fresh flower beside Church Lane at Warblington on Oct 1

**Brooklime:** Re-flowering in the Lavant Stream where it runs through Havant Park in a concrete channel just north of the bus station in central Havant on Oct 2

**Betony:** A surprise find still flowering in the Havant Thicket area on Oct 6

**Lesser Skullcap:** On Oct 6 Brian Fellows found what appears to be a single example of this species (long past flowering) at Brook Meadow not far downstream from the site of a regular colony of the larger Skullcap plants. Hopefully it will show again next year to determine its species. The new find seems to have the size and leaf shape of Lesser Skullcap but the site does not have the acid soil favoured by the Lesser species and it is possible that it is a young and abnormal specimen of the plants less than 100 metres upstream

**Devils Bit Scabious:** I was surprised and the large number of plants of this species flowering at many plants in the Havant Thicket area when I was there on Oct 6

**Sneezewort:** I was also surprised to find this still flowering at two places in Havant Thicket on Oct 6

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Roe Deer:** On Oct 6 Durlston remarked on a Roe buck still having intact antlers now that his summer rut is over (Fallow are of course in the middle of theirs) but I read that Roe shed their antlers in December and (unlike other Deer species) next years set starts to grow immediately.

**Wall Lizard:** Recent reports on the Rye Harbour website show that **Grass Snakes, Slow Worms and Common Lizards** are all still to be seen but it is the Sussex Butterfly Conservation site that confirms that **Wall Lizards can still be seen on Shoreham Fort**. For a couple of photos taken by Richard Roebuck on

Sep 29 see <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/WallLizard1ShorehamBeech290912RR.jpg> and <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/WallLizard2ShorehamBeech290912RR.jpg>

**Fungi:** The fungal season seems to be getting off to a slow start but I have noted nine species and Brian Fellows has found what appears to be another unexpected **Chicken of the Woods** on a tree in Beacon Square in Emsworth. On my lawn both **Meadow and Parrot Waxcaps** have appeared along with tiny **Orange Mosscaps** (*Rickenella fibula* - was *Mycena fibula*). On grassland in Havant Thicket I found one example of **The Miller** (*Clitopilus prunulus*) with **Bell-shaped Mottlegill** (*Paneolus campanulatus*) and on the verge of Harts Farm Way near Broadmarsh I came on my first unmistakable **Sulphur Tuft** with a cluster of **what looked like Psathyrella spadiceogrisea** until I saw that its English name is the Spring Brittlestem and realised this is the wrong time of year for that! **Giant Polypore** is once again flourishing on tree stumps beside Emsworth Road in Havant (just east of Meadowlands road) and in Havant Park under the elderly Horse Chestnuts (near the toilets) which are also plastered with **Ganoderma adspersum**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 1 - 7 (WEEK 40 OF 2012)**

**Thu 4 Oct**

### **Broadmarsh, Bedhampton and new fungi in my garden**

The objective of this morning's cycle ride was to take some photos of the new Danewort colony at the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes but I took a route via Budds Farm and Broadmarsh, returning through Bedhampton which brought my October flowering plant count up to 110 including an unexpected sight of **Pale Flax** in flower on the A27 embankment above the cycleway just east of the **Danewort** (of which I found 8 plants)

Passing the Havant Amenity Tip on Harts Farm Way I found my first **Sulphur Tuft fungus** of the season and with it were some conical white capped fungi which seem to match the description of **Psathyrella spadiceogrisea** in Stephan Buzacki's Collins New Generation Guide to fungi which says that the species is common and widespread and that it appears in the autumn, but when I checked for an English name I found it was the **Spring Brittlestem** and a search on the internet shows that what I found is not the right id as it does come up in the spring and is larger than the specimens I saw. A couple of other fungi that have appeared on my garden lawn today can be more confidently named as **Meadow Waxcap and Mycena fibula**.

Getting back to the **Danewort** I managed to get a few photos from which I have selected three to confirm the id and to show the setting ...

Close view of one Danewort plant showing leaves and remains of flower/fruitleading head

Three of the Danewort plants

## General view of the setting in which these plants have appeared

On my way home I followed the paths along the east side of the A3M/A27 junction which took me to Lower Road in Bedhampton. It is a long time since I have been along this route and it was worthwhile in that it gave me **Common and Californian Poppies** in flower plus **Weld and Charlock** which were not on my October list and later I added **Hybrid Water-Speedwell and Indian Balsam** where the Portsmouth Water springs overflow into the Hermitage Stream.

The sunshine also gave me more **Migrant Hawker dragonflies** and both **Small White and Red Admiral** butterflies plus plenty of **ripe edible Blackberries** reminding me that the climate has probably warmed since the time when it was said that you should not eat Blackberries after October 1st as the Devil was supposed to urinate on them on that day.

### Mon 1 Oct

#### **Cow Parsley, Cleavers and Giant Polypore**

Despite some light rain this morning I walked to Warblington Farm and back to see what was still flowering in this new month. My count of plants still flowering was 78 species and it included **one plant of Cow Parsley in full flower** (in Church Lane at Warblington) and **one healthy plant of Groundsel with rayed flowers** ( in the field south of the Church path). A brief look in Warblington cemetery gave me **a fresh plant of Green Bristle Grass** close to the remains of the plants I found on Aug 30

The Conigar Point field had lots of **Dwarf Spurge** plus one plant of **Common Fumitory** and several of **Black Nightshade** with lots of **Field Madder**. It also had a single Skylark and one Swallow heading west.

Taking a different route home up the path along the east side of the farm and then along the A259 I found that the **Field Woundwort** plants which Brian Fellows had discovered on July 30 near the underpass below the A27 were reflowering (and I see that I also saw this in flower in one of the Warblington farm fields on Jan 14 this year).

After the underpass I found a mass of **Stone Parsley still in full flower** - I see that it could still be found in flower in early December last year (and I even have a record of finding it on Feb 20 this year though that may be a mistake). Between Southleigh Road and Meadowlands the **huge growth of Giant Polypore** which has been appearing for several years on Beech tree stumps is still flourishing this year despite the removal of the stumps.

A short walk around Havant when the sun came out around 5pm added another 13 flowering plant species **to bring my October plant list to 91 species on the first day** - among these was a very unexpected plant of **Cleavers (Goosegrass) in flower**. While I was out I am pretty sure I **heard a Grey Wagtail overhead** so I guess they are now back for the winter.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 24 - 30 (WEEK 39 OF 2012)**

## BIRDS

**Divers:** **Red-throated** have been seen at seven sites this week with a peak count of 470 at Spurn Point in Yorkshire on Sep 21 followed by 24 off the Netherlands coast on Sep 23. One was off Selsey Bill on Sep 23 and 24 with another seen from the Isle of Wight on Sep 23. **Black-throated** were seen at five of more sites but with a peak count of just 2 from Reculver on the north Kent coast on Sep 23. Four sites on the Yorkshire coast reported **Great Northern** but all were singles

**Grebes:** The autumn flock of **Great Crested** in Langstone Harbour is building with counts of 14 on Sep 17, 18 on Sep 27 and 24 on Sep 29. Single **Red-necked** were seen at Le Clipon near Calais and at Portland with two Yorkshire sites also reporting one. The first **Slavonian** of the autumn (only report so far) was off Ameland in the Netherlands on Sep 22 and one seems to have been off the French Normandie coast this week but I can't find the date

**Shearwaters:** 40 **Sooty** were off the Belgian coast on Sept 27 with plenty of smaller counts from Yorkshire to Dorset. **Balearic** counts peaked with 340 off Brittany on Sep 27 but Portland had 163 on Sep 25 and Worthing had 5 on Sep 23.

**Leach's Petrel:** Nine reports this week with a peak of 16 from the Netherlands on Sep 22

**Bittern:** After one had been seen near Romsey in Hampshire on Sep 20 one was at the Testwood Lakes in Totton near Southampton on Sep 21

**Cattle Egret:** The first report since Aug 30 (from Dungeness) is of one in the Netherlands on Sep 28

**Great White Egret:** Recent reports have been of singles at Testwood Lakes near Southampton, Lyminster shore area, and two sites in Cornwall but we may soon be seeing more as Belgium had a possible total of 65 (15 at a single site) on Sep 23

**Heron:** Some that have been further north in the summer are now retreating south giving a potential total of 152 at three Netherlands sites on Sep 23 (104 at a single site)

**Spoonbill:** Both Rye Harbour and Pett Level have reported single birds more than once this week and up to 11 have been together on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour this week but the Netherlands had 493 at a single site on Sep 22 (total of 13 sites there that day was 1633 birds)

**Mute Swan:** The flock/herd in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester was up to 143 birds on Sep 19 (I had 128 there on July 30)

**Whooper Swan:** What seems to be the first of these for the autumn was a single in Yorkshire on Sep 26

**Wild Geese:** Peak counts this week have been 41 Bean Geese in the Netherlands, 3728 Pinkfoot in Aberdeenshire, 1211 Whitefronts in the Netherlands with 3047 Greylags also in the Netherlands

**Brent Goose:** 23 reports of **Dark-bellied** show that more than 10 have got as far west as the Exe estuary in Devon and the Solent Harbours have reported peak totals of 92 in Portsmouth Harbour, 100+ in Langstone Harbour but no more than 8 in the Chchester Harbour area. The Isle of Wight has had 49 and Reculver on the north Kent coast has had up to 227. **Pale-bellied** counts have peaked with 39 in transit off the coast of County Durham and at least 15 have reached the Netherlands

**Shelduck:** The first real sign of birds returning to southern England after moulting on the north German coast came with the sight of 38 on the Emsworth shore on Sep 25

**Wigeon:** Plenty of these now around but a significant arrival on the south coast brought 408 to the north of Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 25 when Spurn Point on the Yorkshire coast also had an influx of 428 with close on 2000 Teal.

**Pintail:** One Netherlands site had 244 on Sep 28 when more than 13 had reached the Exe estuary. 60 were on the Normandie coast of France on Sep 27

**Garganey:** The last sighting I know of was made at Selsey Bill on Sep 24 where one flew east

**Shoveler:** 60 were at Rye Harbour on Sep 28 with others well distributed.

**Other Wildfowl:** One **Scaup** was off the East Lothian coast of Scotland on Sep 23, **2578 Eider** were back on the north German shore on Sep 25, **4 Long-tailed Duck** were seen in East Lothian, **one Velvet Scoter** was at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire on Sep 26, **5 Merganser** were at a Netherlands site on Sep 29 and **6 Goosander** were off Belgium on Sep 23

**Raptors:** **49 Honey Buzzards** went over a German site on Sep 25 and one was over Lyminster village near Arundel on Sep 29, a single **Marsh Harrier** was over Farlington Marshes on Sep 22 and 25 and **Merlin** are now widespread in the south of England

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** Reports of a single bird in Germany on Sep 23, Belgium on Sep 24 and Yorkshire on Sep 24 may possibly have been of the same bird but a report of two at the same site in Belgium on Sep 29 suggests that more are on their way

**Osprey:** Still ten reports this week with the last being of two over Southampton Water on Sep 27

**Hobby:** One was still in England (Dorset) on Sep 28 and a total of 15 birds were seen at five sites in Belgium on Sep 29 when at least one was in Sussex

**Quail:** One was flushed in the Scillies on Sep 24

**Crakes:** Single **Spotted Crakes** were in the Scillies and near Penzance in Cornwall this week and there has been an intriguing report from a fisherman on the Chichester Canal of brief sightings of what some have suggested is a **Baillons Crake** seen on Sep 23. Late news is of a **Spotted Crake at Farlington Marshes on Sep 30 with two Curlew Sandpipers still there.**

**Common Crane:** After just one report this autumn of 2 birds at a Netherlands site on Sep 16 this week has brought a sign that the species is on the move with a count of 150 at a German site on Sep 21 (and another of 21 birds at a different German site on Sep 23)

**Avocet:** A count of 16 in Christchurch Harbour on Sep 27 indicates that some westerly movement has started and that we may soon see parties in Langstone and Chichester Harbours - so far only 9 seem to have reached the Exe estuary

**Stone Curlew:** One seen circling over Christchurch Harbour in the rain on Sep 24 was unexpected

**Dotterel:** Six reports include singles in both Cornwall and the Scillies with just one in the Netherlands - last was seen in Cornwall on Sep 29

**Golden Plover:** Numbers starting to build up with a count of 200 on the north Kent coast (Seasalter) on Sep 28 and 75 on Dartmoor on that day when 26 were seen in Hampshire at the Bunny Meadows by the R Hamble at Warsash and 81 were at Reculver, also on the north Kent coast. In Cornwall there is an American Golden Plover on Davidstow airfield along with a Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

**Lapwing:** Still few around the Havant area but Christchurch Harbour had 1100 on Sep 21 and there were 89 in the north of Pagham Harbour on Sep 27

**Ruff:** Although there have been plenty in Kent since early August (Oare Marshes reported 20 on Aug 16 and Rye Harbour had 14 on Aug 25) I thought that one at Farlington Marshes on Sep 22 was the first there for the autumn but on checking I see that there was one there on Aug 25 (and one at Blashford lakes on Aug 26). Pagham Harbour has had several reports of singles since Aug 14.

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The Lodmoor bird at Weymouth was still there on Sep 27

**Woodcock:** An early bird was on the move at Portland on Sep 26

**Grey Phalarope:** One was seen briefly at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 28 with others in the Scillies and on the Yorkshire coast this week

**Little Gull:** Their exodus from northern breeding sites has speeded up with a report of 409 reaching Flamborough Head on the Yorkshire coast on Sep 26 and 17 on the north Kent coast on Sep 27 - one was seen in Southampton Water on Sep 26

**Great Blackback Gull:** The pair which bred at Emsworth have not been reported there since Sep 19 but on that day a flock of more than 40 were in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester and by Sep 21 a Netherlands site had a count of 1038 as they flock together in winter mode

**Terns:** Most of our summer visitors have already left us but single **Little Terns** were at Dungeness on Sep 23 and at Christchurch Harbour (with **1 Black, 112 Common** and **248 Sandwich Terns**) on Sep 24. A **single Roseate** was at Christchurch on Sep 23. Two Black Terns were still to be seen at Dungeness of Sep 27.

**Black Guillemot:** The first Tystie of the autumn was off the Netherlands on Sep 22 and at least **88 Guillemot** with a few **Razorbill** were also in the English Channel this week

**Turtle Dove:** One still in the Scillies on Sep 22 with a juvenile in a Burgess Hill (W Sussex) garden on Sep 26 and one in Cornwall on Sep 27

**Cuckoo:** One in the Scillies on Sep 21 and one still in the Netherlands on Sep 23

**Nightjar:** One still in a Birdham garden south of Chichester on Sep 27 and one in Eastbourne on Sep 25

**Swift:** Still being seen in England up to Sep 27 when one was seen in Yorkshire (one near Southampton on Sep 25)

**Hoopoe:** One reported in Cornwall on Sep 28 (fifth in the West Country since the beginning of August)

**Wryneck:** Still 14 reports this week including one in Southsea (Portsmouth) on Sep 26. Latest was in Cornwall on Sep 29

**Swallow:** Few Sand Martins this week but Swallows still going strong with 8000 over Dungeness on Sep 27 when Folkestone had 3000 and Christchurch Harbour had 2200

**House Martin:** Sep 27 saw 1000 over Folkestone, 530 over Christchurch, 500 over the Worthing area and 400 over Pagham Harbour. On Sep 25 Tony Tupper sent me a summary of the breeding success of the Martins in the six artificial nestboxes on his house by the Hermitage stream in the north of Havant. He says that five of the six boxes were used with two or three of them producing three broods of young while the rest had two broods. All the young had fledged by mid-September though up to a dozen birds were still coming back to roost in the boxes at night when he wrote. Clearly there is still a good House Martin population in England though the number that breed locally has diminished greatly

**Richard's Pipit:** One caught in nets at Sandwich Bay on Sep 29 was the first I know of in southern England other than one in the Scillies on Aug 31.

**Tawny Pipit:** More than 70 were seen at 15 sites in the Low Countries on Aug 28 but the first reported in southern England was seen flying over the Cuckmere Valley (near Beachy Head) on Sep 23

**Olive-backed Pipit:** A few of these started arriving in the Shetlands area with many other vagrants from Sep 28

**Tree Pipit:** This week brought a surge in numbers on the move with 13 at Portland on Sep 27 when Christchurch had 12 and a German site had 83

**Pechora Pipit:** One turned up on Shetland on Sep 21 to be the first for the UK this year

**Meadow Pipit:** 3481 headed south over Lancashire on Sep 22 but the peak count on our south coast this week was only 960 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 27 (when one Netherlands site had 9205)

**Red-throated Pipit:** One was in Cornwall on Sep 28 - first for the autumn in England

**Buff-bellied Pipit:** This is a fairly common species in America but an uncommon vagrant to Britain so one in the Scillies on Sep 26 was of interest

**Yellow Wagtail:** Still being seen on our south coast with recent reports including 11 in Devon on Sep 26, 19 at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 27, 20 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 28 and 6 on the South Moors at Langstone on Sep 29

**Citrine Wagtail:** One in the Scillies to Sep 26 at least

**Grey Wagtail:** These are now returning winter along our south coast and Sep 22 brought 15 to Farlington Marshes and one more to the Sinah Warren area of south Hayling. Sep 27 saw 5 at Christchurch Harbour and 4 at Dungeness but I have yet to see one back in the Havant area

**Pied Wagtail:** These have started to return to the Havant area with 3 in Emsworth Harbour on Sep 22 and 3 on the Langstone shore on Sep 24

**Waxwing:** One seen in the Netherlands on Sep 26 - first report of the autumn

**Robin:** 15 were noted in the Folkestone area on Sep 21, 44 were at a Belgian site on Sep 23 and there were many more than usual along the hedges of the Hayling Coastal when I cycled along it on Sep 29 (among them a small group apparently disputing the ownership of the bushes where they had just arrived)

**Nightingale:** One still in Belgium on Sep 27

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** First of the autumn reported from Shetland on Sep 27

**Common Redstart:** Just two reports this week, both of singles at Climping (nr Worthing) and Northney on Hayling Island with both seen on Sep 27

**Whinchat:** Quite a few still around with 15 at Portland on Sep 26, 2 at Beachy Head on Sep 27, 2 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 28 and 1 in the Titchfield area west of Gosport on Sep 29

**Stonechat:** Christchurch Harbour had a surprise influx of 50 on Sep 19 and this week the only report was of 4 at Farlington Marshes (where they have been since August)

**Wheatear:** Numbers now tailing off but there were 13 at Dungeness on Sep 27 and 4 near Titchfield Haven on that day

**Ring Ouzel:** 12 reports in this week's news including 1 at Folkestone and 2 at Beachy Head, both on Sep 27

**Blackbird:** Now starting to move to winter quarters with reports of 40 at a German site on Sep 22 and 18 flying west over Christchurch on Sep 24

**Fieldfare:** 52 were at a Netherlands site on Sep 23 and over here one was flying up the River Adur in Sussex on Sep 16 with 6 at Stoborough Heath in Dorset on Sep 21

**Song Thrush:** A German site counted 512 on Sep 24 and a small flock of 9 was seen in the New Forest on Sep 21

**Redwing:** Eight reports this week include one in Cumbria on Sep 28 and one at Durlston on Sep 29. Netherlands probably had a total of 28 on Sep 23

**Mistle Thrush:** A flock of was reported in Yorkshire on Sep 22 and one of 45 birds was at Avington on the River Itchen north of Winchester on Sep 26

**Lanceolated Warbler:** On Sep 26 two were on Fair Isle among an influx which included **Paddyfield Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Olive-backed Pipit, Little Bunting, Barred Warbler, Richard's Pipit and 27 Yellow-browed Warblers**

**Grasshopper Warbler:** Singles at four English sites this week including Christchurch and Portland

**Aquatic Warbler:** One in France on Sep 22 and one in the Scillies on Sep 26

**Sedge Warbler:** The only reports were of one in Devon on Sep 21 and one at Christchurch on Sep 26

**Marsh Warbler:** A probable sighting at Pagham (Ferry Pool) on Sep 27

**Reed Warbler:** Just four reports this week with a peak count of just five birds at Christchurch on Sep 26

**Sykes Warbler:** The first to reach Britain this year was in Shetland on Sep 28

**Booted Warbler:** One had been seen on Ronaldsay on Aug 16 but the second was not reported until Sep 26 in Norfolk

**Melodious Warbler:** The first since one in Devon n Sep 2 was in the Scillies pn Sep 26

**Barred Warbler:** One in Cornwall on Sep 25 may have flown to the Scillies were one was reported on Sep 26

**Regular Migrants:** Common and Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler were seen in small numbers and Blackcap (100+ at Portland on Sep 27)

**Arctic Warbler:** One in Northumberland on Sep 28

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** I have already mentioned that 27 arrived on Fair Isle on Sep 26 but RBA had already reported a UK total of 68 on Sep 22

**Western Bonelli's Warbler:** One on the Scillies on Sep 20 and 21 (with an unexpected Wood Warbler on Sep 21)

**Chiffchaff:** A few have been singing this week but many more have been leaving us with counts of 120 at Dungeness on Sep 27 when Portland had more than 200 - no reports of Willow Warbler this week

**Magnolia Warbler:** The second for Britain (after one in 1981) was in the Scillies (as was the first) on Sep 23

**Goldcrest:** The count of these at Christchurch Harbour was 50 on Sep 26

**Firecrest:** 16 were in Abbotsbury Gardens (Dorset) on Sep 22 with smaller number at six other English sites and a count of 45 at a French site near the Somme estuary

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Five reports from different sites with a peak count of 5 at Beesands in Devon

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** None along the south coast but one in Lincolnshire on Sep 26 was accompanied in that county by an **Arctic Warbler, a Greenish Warbler, a Red-backed Shrike, and Icterine Warbler and several Yellow-browed Warblers**

**Pied Flycatcher:** Reports this week from six sites from north Devon to Sandwich Bay (all singles - last on Sep 28)

**Isabelline Shrike:** First for the year reached Britain (Shetland) on Sep 28

**Red-backed Shrike:** Two reports from the south of England - one at Portland on Sep 28 and another in Cornwall on Sep 29

**Great Grey Shrike:** First for this autumn was reported by RBA on Sep 25 but no site was given

**Jay:** By Sep 21 the potential total on the move in the Low Countries was 2872 at 28 sites and these are now starting to appear in England with reports on Sep 27 of 5 at Dungeness and 12 at Folkestone, then on Sep 28 6 at Sandwich Bay and 58 at Reculver on the north Kent coast. Sep 29 brought 11 to Hook near Warsash and 16 to the Titchfield Haven area as they spread west over southern England

**Rose Coloured Starling:** One or more were in Cornwall and the Scillies between Sep 21 and 26 and on Sep 28 one was reported at the Hayling Oysterbeds - I was shown it still there on Sep 29 by a birder from Andover who had been watching it preening through his scope until it was put up by a Sparrowhawk and my view was of a single bird flying right to distinguish it from the rest of the Starlings going left. I was told that it was definitely a juvenile with all features including a pinkish bill where a young Starling would have a black bill.

**Chaffinch:** On Sep 25 one site in Germany reported a count of 28,706 on the move and there was a hint that these had started to reach England when 6 flew west along the north Kent coast

**Brambling:** 11 reports this week include one seen at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 27 and one at Titchfield Haven area on Sep 29. 159 were at one Netherlands site on Sep 22

**Siskin:** Twenty reports this week include sightings at eight or more sites in England including a party of 20 flying over Southsea (Portsmouth) on Sep 29 and a count of 200 at Dungeness on Sep 27

**Linnet:** Plenty of these in southern England with a count of 2000 at Steyning Round Hill (north of Worthing) on Sep 27

**Twite:** 5 had been seen in Lancashire on Sep 6 and one was reported in Jersey on Sep 29

**Lesser Redpoll:** Reports from six UK sites this week with a peak of 208 at Carnoustie in Scotland

**Arctic Redpoll:** First of the winter was seen on Unst on Sep 28

**Lapland Bunting:** RBA gave a UK Total of 107 on Sep 22. Three were at Portland on Sep 27 and singles have been reported at Durlston and Christchurch Harbour

**Snow Bunting:** At least one in the Scillies this week with 2 in Cornwall and 1 at Sandwich Bay

**Ortolland Bunting:** Singles at Christchurch Harbour, Portland and the Scillies this week

**Little Bunting:** One at Portland on Sep 27 beating one on Fetlar on Sep 28

**Reed Bunting:** Reports from at least four sites in southern England with a peak of 25 on the north Kent coast on Sep 28 - Pagham Harbour had 8 on Sep 22

**Vagrant:** Not in Britain but of local interest through Steve Copsey (of the Three Amigos) who is currently heading south to the Antarctic on the Navy's HMS Protector for Ice Patrol duties. On Sep 23 as the ship was passing the Canary Isles Steve identified a bird perched on the ship as a **Red-footed Booby** which is normally only found in the Pacific around the Galapagos Isles.

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Red-veined Darter:** This species is now colonising Britain but a sighting of one (a female) in Rewell Wood at Arundel on Sep 20 was most unexpected - did she lay any eggs there??

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Willow Emerald, Common Blue Damselfly

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Clouded Yellow:** Seen at eight sites (not including the Bournemouth colony) this week between Sep 19 (one near Titchfield Haven) and Sep 22 (Pagham North Walls area)

#### Species reported this week:

Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady (at three sites including Arundel on Sep 29), Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Small Heath

### OTHER INSECTS:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Robber Fly (*Asilus crabroniformis*):** One seen on Iping Common near Midhurst by Graeme Lyons on Sep 28

**Hornet:** A report of one visiting an Emsworth garden on Sep 22 to feed on fallen plums now that its duties of collecting meaty items to feed larva in the nest are finished for the year

**Ivy Bees (*Colletes hederæ*):** 100 of these recent colonisers of southern England were seen near Gilkicker Point (Gosport area) on Sep 19

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*):** Brian Fellows got a photo of a Queen in Emsworth on Sep 27 - to see the picture and read about the species see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> (details of the species life cycle from Bryan Pinchen and a copy of the photo at the end of the entry for Sep 28)

**Dung Beetle (*Athodius foetens*):** See <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/paradoxes.html> for a very welcome resumption of Graeme Lyons blog in which he describes a find of this beetle species (no photo that I can find) and also describes finds of the following beetle and the two spiders with which this section ends ...

**Wasp Nest Beetle (*Metoecus paradoxus*):** I assume that of the four photos which Graeme includes in his blog the first two are of the female and the last two with the orange wing cases and the more pectinate antennae are of the male.

**Speckled Bush Cricket:** One seen in the Milton area of Portsmouth on Sep 24

**Southern Oak Bush Cricket (*Meconema meridionale*):** When the first of these turned up at Dungeness on Sep 5 I wrote .. "This relative of our native Oak Bush Cricket is a recent invader (first seen around 2001) which differs from the native species in being flightless so it is a mystery as to how it reached this country and also how it reached the isolated Dungeness site where it was seen on Sep 5. One source tells me that it is a predator of the Horse Chestnut leaf mining moth (*Cameraria ohridella*), is active by night, and lives up trees. It also shares with our native species the fact that it does not stridulate but makes its presence known by rapidly stamping a foot." Now a second has been found there on Sep 15

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** One still active at Durlston on Sep 25

**Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*):** Egg sacs of this species were found at Gilkicker Point near Gosport on Sep 19

**Ero tuberculata:** For a photo and information about this spider which Graeme Lyons found in a pine tree on Ipin Common near Midhurst go to <http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/summary/s/Ero%20tuberculata> - spiders of this genus are distinguished by having tubercles (lumpy knobs) on the sides of their abdomen

**Six spot orb weaver (*Arianella displicata*):** Another unusual spider found by Graeme Lyons - for photo see <http://bugguide.net/node/view/471531>

## PLANTS

**Yellow horned Poppy:** Still a few flowering on south Hayling on Sep 29 - also **Sea Radish and Thrift**

**Purple Loosestrife:** Visiting the Langstone South Moors on Sep 24 I was able to confirm that the plants which I had seen only distantly on a previous visit were a

clump of Purple Loosestrife growing on the bank of the Langbrook stream just north of the Mill Lane houses

**Cocks Eggs:** Still some flowers (Sep 29) on the mass of plants (whose leaves are starting to turn brown) on Sinah Common

**Shaggy Soldier:** Freshly flowering in Emsworth and Southbourne on Sep 27

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hedgehogs:** Many people, unlike me, do not like Slugs and Snails but nevertheless do not take a simple precaution to reduce the number of these molluscs in their garden by following the lead of one Emsworth resident who has two small **wooden boxes in her garden specially designed as homes for Hedgehogs** - both are occupied. If you do not want to pay more than the cost of the materials go to <http://thehedgehog.co.uk/houses.htm> and scroll down to the bottom of the page for plans for a DIY house (if you have young children you can probably increase their interest in wildlife by giving it a 'dolls house' look similar to that shown in one of the drawings). **Another simple action to help these useful creatures to survive**, and one which may (or may not) improve your social life, is to contact your neighbours and promote the idea of creating a network of 'cycle routes' for Hedgehogs (bicycles not required!) by making small gaps in the bottom of the fences between properties so that the hogs can complete their nightly walks - to find out more about this go to <http://www.hedgehogstreet.org/> and to find out that the average Hedgehog takes a three mile run every night to keep healthy see <http://www.hedgies.com/health.php> which will also tell you to feed your Hedgehog Yoghurt to avoid 'Green Poops' and what to do if you come across a case of Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome.

**Common Shrew:** Richard Jones, Portsmouth City's Portsdown Hill Countryside Officer, has his office in Fort Widley but does not go out of his way to encourage wildlife to share it with him so I suspect that the **Common Shrew which he found in a Longworth trap inside the fort** was quickly re-housed out on the hillside where it can pursue the natural life illustrated in the photos to be seen at <http://www.arkive.org/common-shrew/sorex-araneus/>

**Water Vole:** The **early autumn is the best time to see Water Voles as the population is at its highest after a summer of breeding** and before winter makes them spend more time 'indoors'. To find out where to see them in the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth visit <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html> and to see a recent video of them taken there see <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/144y5j76kkxyitk/8tSHlpjzf2/Water%20Vole%20Brook%20Meadow.wmv> (I personally only got through to this video at the second attempt and then found it very spasmodic but maybe you will have better luck)

**Pointed Snail:** After fearing that the colony on the Wickor Bank seawall opposite the west end of the Thorney Island Great Deeps (in the area extending south from the fence above the inlet pipes) was on the verge of extinction (none of my visits in the past two years have found more than one or two live snails) **I was**

very pleased on Sep 27 to find more than fifty of these molluscs in the vegetation on this bank. Perhaps the autumn is the best time to see them as they have also attracted attention at the Rye Harbour nature reserve - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/9/20/pointed-snail.html> for photos (though not of the snails hanging high up on taller plant stems where they can be spotted from a distance without searching in the ground layer of vegetation). For a photo of them on such a stem see [http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/photo.asp?item=Cochlicella\\_acuta2](http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/photo.asp?item=Cochlicella_acuta2) and for a photo of them massed on a wooden post as mentioned in the RX piece and how I remember them on the wooden posts around the carpark at the IBM HQ at Portsmouth (before I retired in 1988!) see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/juan-antonio-capo/3646089213/>

**Fungi:** On Monday of this week (Sep 24) I found a bracket type fungus growing on an ornamental cherry or plum tree in a Havant garden and put photos of it on my Diary page (See <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2409> ). In my commentary I said that I could not name it but it had a top surface colour closely matching that of **Chicken of the Woods (Laetiporus sulphureus)**. I ruled out that species because all the previous finds I have made of it have looked more like balloons effusing from tree trunks, not layered bracket but a plea for help from the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group produced the answer that it was Chicken of the Woods (perhaps a less effusive example on account of being on a less virile tree). On Sep 27, after seeing the Pointed Snails on Thorney Island I cycled on through Southbourne village where, on Stein Road not far north of the railway crossing, at a road junction by some shops, I saw a large bracket fungus attached to the base of a big Holm Oak tree which was large (at least 30 cm across) and of the effusive type showing no separate layers - the flesh/pores surface was glistening white and the top surface was as hard and smooth as a turtle shell of a reddish colour. **I am pretty sure this was a Lacquered Bracket (Ganoderma lucidum was G. resinaceum)** which is said to be quite rare and which I cannot remember seeing before (my find seemed to match what Roger Phillips calls G. resinaceum which seems to have vanished from the world of mycology and not to match G. lucidum which grows on tree roost and has a long stem to bring the fruiting body above the ground surface). Later in this trip, heading into Westbourne village, I came across a big colony of **the much commoner Pleurotus cornucopiae (now called the Branching Oyster)**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 24 - 30 (WEEK 39 OF 2012)**

### **Fri 27 Sep**

#### **Fungi and Snails**

Yesterday I had a reply from the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group telling me that the mystery fungus I had found on a tree in Havant, which I said was of a colour identical to Chicken of the Woods, was **Chicken of the Woods**, and on checking the features of my find I saw that everything matched that identification.

Today I came on two more large fungi associated with trees and I think I can name both. The easiest to name was a cluster of **Pleurotus cornucopiae** which were growing at the foot of a tree which I omitted to identify growing beside the road heading east from Westbourne just north of the A27. The other was a

massive bracket on the trunk of a Holm Oak tree growing by a road junction on the west side of Stein Road in Southbourne (I think the junction was with Manor Road - the tree was on the north side of this road with some shops on the south side). The underside of this bracket was bright white and the top had a hard, shiny, reddish surface which I am pretty sure made it the uncommon **Lacquered Bracket**

These fungi were found while I was on a cycle ride which started by heading for the Thorney Little and Great Deeps. At the Little Deeps the only birds were 20 or more Coot and four Tufted Duck with one or two Little Grebes and a couple of Swans. At the Great Deeps there were even fewer birds - a cluster of a dozen Cormorants with one Great Blackback adult and a single Little Egret but it was well worth the visit as on the inside of the sea wall just south of the fence over the Great Deeps inlet pipes I had **my first good find of Pointed Snails for at least two years** - previous visits over those years had shown me no more than one or two of the snails while today **my casual count was of at least fifty**.

Before reaching Thorney Island I had seen the small cluster of **Shaggy Soldier plants** on an island in the A259 road where it passes Peter Pond (Brian Fellows found these on Sep 24), and after leaving Thorney I had turned into the narrow road called The Drive (immediately west of the garage in Southbourne) where more Shaggy Soldier was flowering.

### Mon 24 Sep

#### A fungal find after a walk to Budds Farm

This afternoon I walked down the Langbrook stream and across the South Moors on my way to Budds Farm, returning via Langstone Pond and up Wade Lane, making an interesting find of a fungus that I cannot identify as I cut through North Close on my way home.

The sunshine was offset by a very strong westerly wind but that did not stop four species of butterfly showing themselves in sheltered spots beside the Langbrook Stream (Red Admiral, Small White, Speckled Wood and Comma). Reaching the South Moors I deviated from the normal path to cross the hay field to the east where a look at the part of the stream just north of the Mill Lane houses confirmed my claim (made on my previous visit to the Moors when I looked east from the orchid field and saw a distant patch of colour by the stream) that **Purple Loosestrife** was growing there to make a new addition to the flora of the Moors area.

Reaching Budds Mound overlooking the pools I found a number of Sand Martins over the water and an increased number of Gadwall and Shoveler on it with the five cygnets already turning white.

The strong wind and high tide meant that the only shorebirds seen were five Turnstone identifying themselves by their calls as they flew towards the RSPB Islands.

The combination of high tide and approaching evening had brought something between 40 and 50 Egrets to the Langstone Millpond and a group of three Pied Wagtails (which I have hardly seen this summer) to the shore.

Heading up Wade Lane a **Buzzard** surprised me by flying up from the field to the east of the road just north of the houses near Wade Court but I had a bigger

surprise when, after going under the A27 and taking the narrow path which connects South Close to North Close, I spotted **an old bracket fungus lying on the grass** (probably brought down by the wind which had also blown most of the conkers off the Chestnut tree outside the Wade Court area stables). **Above the fallen fungus several younger, stronger and more colourful fungal brackets were still growing** on what I think was an old, dying, ornamental Plum tree.

The photos below show the colour of these brackets (I detached a small segment of the lowest bracket and took close ups of the top and underside after photographing the complete fungus in situ) and **I have so far been unable to name the fungus** from my books or the internet but I am hoping that I will get an answer from the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group to which I have sent these photos and a more detailed description (including the 20 x 13 cm size of the brackets). **Two things not revealed by the photos are the spore print which seemed to be pure white, nor the very strong sweet but (to me) unpleasant smell coming from the samples I brought home** which has persisted for a day and which can be smelt as soon as I enter the room where the samples are.

Tree with bracket fungus just above hedge top and image of the whole fungus

Sample of fungus showing topside and exposed white flesh

Sample of fungus showing underside of bracket

One other thing which I did today was to add my latest '**Havant Cemetery Wildlife Bulletin**' to the Cemetery Visits page of this website - see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and scroll down to the page for Sep 20. Two things mentioned there which may be of general interest are the photo of the **Helophilus trivittatus** hoverfly which I have just found to be a long distance migrant species and the story (may be apochryphal) of how the life prolonging powers of the **Goji Berry** (the fruit of the Duke of Argyll's Teaplant of which one grows in the **Havant Cemetery**) were discovered by someone investigating why it was the people living in a Chinese village all lived longer than expected - the conclusion was that by chance a plant of this species grew over the village well and dropped its berries into the well causing the inhabitants to unknowingly dose themselves with the berries with every drink they took.

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## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 17 - 23 (WEEK 38 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Reports this week of a party of five **Red-throated** off Pendeen in Cornwall on Sep 13, one off Dungeness on Sep 14, and ten off a Netherlands site on Sep 15 show that winter is on its way. Single **Black-throated** have been seen in the English Channel and single **Great Northern** off Cornwall and Yorkshire

**Black-browed Albatross:** One was reported as a 'probable sighting' off the Isle of Man on Sep 18. This follows three sightings around the Channel Isles in May and June and one 184 miles south west of Mizzen Head in Ireland on Feb 29

**Shearwaters:** 30 **Corys** with 5 **Great** were off the Scillies on Sep 10, 31 **Sooty** (maybe up to 60) were off the French Channel coast on Sep 18, 326 **Balearic** were off the Normandie coast on Sep 16 and **Manx** are still numerous

**Leach's Petrel:** On Sep 19 a total of 14 were seen from one Netherlands site

**Bittern:** One was in the Fishlake Meadows by the River Test just north of Romsey on Sep 20, presumably a bird looking for winter quarters. The first on the move this autumn were seen on Aug 21 at Christchurch and Reculver in north Kent on Aug 23.

**Little Bittern:** One was seen at Sevenoaks in Kent on Sep 15 - maybe a re-emergence of the bird that was Hertfordshire (Stockers Lake) from June 10 to 16 at least after one in Wales on Apr 20

**Great White Egret:** On Sep 15 a group of 3 were new in the Kent Stour Valley, on Sep 17 one seen by the Hampshire Aven at Ringwood was not the ringed regular from the Blashford Lakes and a count of 21 at a Netherlands site on Sep 19 shows that this species is currently on the move to winter quarters. On Sep 21 what may have been new birds were seen at Testwood Lakes near Southampton and over the Lymington marshes.

**Purple Heron:** Conditions on Sep 19 also roused 21 of these in Belgium

**Spoonbill:** 9 were seen at Brownsea Is in Poole Harbour on Sep 15 but the conditions on Sep 19 also roused a total of 221 seen at a Belgian site though that was beaten by a count of 493 on Sep 22 (what was probably one of these continental birds was at Pett Level (Rye Bay) on Sep 21

**Dark Bellied Brent:** No mass arrival so far. First to reach England were 5 passing Dungeness on Sep 13 when 1 was seen in north Kent (I am assuming the 4 in Chichester Harbour on Sep 12 were summering birds). The biggest flocks I have read of so far have been 21 off Normandie on Sep 15, 15 in Chichester Harbour on Sep 17, 18 in the Exe estuary on Sep 18 and 12 in Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 23 (after 8 were there on Sep 21) with no significant arrival reported from Langstone Harbour

**Pale Bellied Brent:** These started to arrive before the Dark Bellied with 12 in the Exe estuary on Sep 2 and 111 reaching the western isles of Scotland on Sep 11. The 12 from Devon plus 1 from Portland may have made up the 13 in the Channel Isles on Sep 14 and they were followed by 6 at Ferrybridge (Portland) on Sep 16 (still there on Sep 20)

**Shelduck:** 24 in Christchurch Harbour on Sep 1 were probably the first to return from moult but 7 flying west past Dungeness were more convincing returnees

**Garganey:** No reports later than Sep 20 when two juveniles were at the Blashford Lakes

**Shoveler:** Not the first to return but a count of 160 at the Blashford Lakes on Sep 22 shows that they are now back in a big way

**Wigeon:** These too have been turning up in small numbers since the end of August but a count of 120 in Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 21 marks a major return

**Scaup:** Two at Flamborough Head on Sep 20 were the first to get a mention since July

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A single summering bird has been reported several times in the Langstone area but I suspect two have been around as two were seen together on South Binness in Langstone Harbour on Sep 19

**Honey Buzzard:** One flew south over Botley Woods (north of Fareham) on Sep 17 with three others seen over the Low Countries up to Sep 20 (plus another 5 on Sep 22)

**Marsh Harrier:** 3 flew over Dungeness on Sep 15 were probably migrant arrivals and one was seen over Langstone Harbour on Sep 22 (where I am not aware of any sightings since June 27)

**Osprey:** I suspect we have not seen the last to depart but passage seems to have trailed off this week with only three reports (Pagham, R. Arun, and Abbotsbury in Dorset) The only bird I know of since Sep 15 is one in the Southampton area up to Sep 23

**Hobby:** These too are becoming scarce with the only bird reported in Hampshire this week being one in the Warsash area up to Sep 21 and one in Sussex on Sep 20

**Dotterel:** One was on the Downs north of Brighton on Sep 17 and 18

**Grey Plover:** A flock of 200 was in Langstone Harbour on Sep 16 and the number had risen to around 300 by Sep 18

**Sanderling:** A flock of 150 in the Stokes Bay area west of Gosport on Sep 18 had increased to 200+ by Sep 20

**Temmincks Stint:** One was in Christchurch Harbour on Sep 16

**Baird's Sandpiper:** A juvenile was photographed on the Lymington shore on Sep 14 and may have moved to the Scillies where one was seen on Sep 16

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** RBA reported a total of 24 in the UK on Sep 19 including birds at Lymington, Sandwich Bay (2) and Cornwall

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Two have been at Farlington Marshes this week with one at Lymington, one at the Exe estuary and another at Ferrybridge (Weymouth)

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** RBA reported a total of 9 in the UK on Sep 19 probably including one at Oare Marshes in north Kent on Sep 20

**Ruff:** One seen at Farlington Marshes on Sep 22 (first there since Aug 25)

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The Lodmoor bird was still present on Sep 21 with another in the Scillies this week

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** One still at Saltash in Cornwall on Sep 20

**Red-necked Phalarope:** One seen in the R. Ouse just north of Newhaven on Sep 18

**Iceland Gull:** One in the Scillies on Sep 18 was the first I have seen reported since the Portsmouth docks bird on July 4

**Glaucous Gull:** One off the Yorkshire coast on Sep 19 was the first I know of since the last report of the long stay Dungeness bird on June 27. As an aside I had always thought that Glaucous was the largest gull that we are likely to see but I chanced to discover this week that **Great Blackback is the largest gull in the world** - taking the maximum measurements given for each of the two species GB has the longest body length by 6 cm and the longest wingspan by 8 cm

**Common Tern:** The number coming into Langstone Harbour at dusk to night roost was only 41 on Sep 18 compared with 735 on Sep 12 and 1650 on Aug 30

**Black Tern:** The only English sighting this week seems to have been of 3 at Dungeness on Sep 20 but there were 17 seen across the Channel on Sep 22

**Turtle Dove:** No reports this week

**Cuckoo:** Just one in Belgium on Sep 20 and another on Sep 22

**Nightjar:** No reports since one in France on Sep 16

**Swift:** Two separate singles seen in the Fleet area (north Hampshire) on Sep 16 and one in the Netherlands on Sep 18

**Wryneck:** Just one report from Belgium on Sep 17 and a late sighting on the Pagham Harbour spit at Church Norton on Sep 18

**Woodlark:** One over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 19

**Sand Martin:** Last report I have is of 210 over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 19

**Swallow:** Last report of 2300 over Christchurch on Sep 19

**House Martin:** Sep 20 produced the last reports I have of 3000 over Pulborough Brooks (including some Swallows) with thousands moving over Seaford and Christchurch that day plus a count of 800 from Sandwich Bay

**Tree Pipit:** Max count from England of 9 at Christchurch on Sep 17 when 126 passed over a German site

**Meadow Pipit:** Sep 19 saw 200 over Portland, 1350 over Christchurch and 2681 over a Yorkshire site

**Water Pipit:** The first since Aug 18 were one over a Belgian site on Sep 15 and one over Fishlake Meadows (Romsey) on Sep 20

**Yellow Wagtail:** Latest reports on Sep 20 when 100+ went over Seaford and 40 were at Portland

**Grey Wagtail:** Migrants seen at three sites this week (max 12 at Christchurch on Sep 17) but of more interest was one apparently back at its winter destination on south Hayling on Sep 22

**Dunnock:** One site in Germany has reported growing numbers of presumably departing migrants this week with a peak of 110 on Sep 19

**Robin:** A count of 45 at a Belgian site on Sep 16 presumably also indicates birds moving for the winter

**Nightingale:** Just one report of a single bird at a French site on Sep 20

**Common Redstart:** The only report this week is of 2 at Christchurch on Sep 19

**Whinchat:** Just two reports this week - 4 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 18 and 4 at Christchurch on Sep 19

**Stonechat:** The only report is of a surprising influx of 50 birds at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 19

**Wheatear:** Last report is of 7 at Seaford Head on Sep 20

**Ring Ouzel:** One was briefly at Hope Gap (Beachy Head) on Sep 14 and four were at a Netherlands site on Sep 20

**Fieldfare:** What seems to have been the first to reach England was one flying up the River Adur in west Sussex on Sep 16 followed by 6 at Stoborough Heath in Dorset on Sep 21

**Song Thrush:** One seen to fly in off the sea at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 15 and 108 counted at a German site on Sep 22

**Redwing:** One at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 22 seems to be the first to reach England

**Grasshopper Warbler:** Singles at Christchurch on Sep 18 and at Portland on Sep 19

**Sedge Warbler:** A count of 46 at Sandwich Bay on Sep 15 was the fourth highest count of the autumn, the highest being 110 at Christchurch on Aug 21

**Reed Warbler:** Sandwich Bay had 18 on Sep 15, surprisingly the second highest count of the autumn for England after 24 at Sandwich on Sep 2. Also on Sep 15 a Netherlands site had 78 and this was only beaten recently by counts of 80 in Belgium on Aug 29 and 93 in Belgium on Aug 21 though it looks as if this species left early as there were counts from Belgium of 332 there on Aug 5, 107 on Aug 8 and 244 on Aug 9

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Latest and highest count was of 8 at Seaford on Sep 20

**Common Whitethroat:** Just one report of a single bird at Beachy Head on Sep 20

**Garden Warbler:** Again just two singles reported this week

**Blackcap:** A more normal set of recent reports including counts from Beachy Head of 350 on Sep 16 and 250 on Sep 20

**Chiffchaff:** Sep 16 brought 200+ to Sandwich Bay and 300 to Beachy Head

**Willow Warbler:** Very few - one was singing at Seaford on Sep 15, four were at Christchurch on Sep 19 and two were at Beachy Head on Sep 20

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** First of the autumn was at Sandwich Bay on Sep 22 and three were seen at different Netherlands sites on Sep 23

**Goldcrest:** Seven migrants at Portland on Sep 19

**Firecrest:** Ones and twos moving at several south coast sites but a French site (Baie de Somme) had 57 on Sep 17

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Very few seen - just three singles in Hants this week

**Pied Flycatcher:** Just one at Portland on Sep 18

**Nuthatch:** Several more reports of dispersing birds - on Sep 12 two birds were seen on a metal structure at the end of Berry Head in Devon, on Sep 14 one was seen out of normal habitat in the Adur valley (Beeding Brooks), on Sep 17 Laurence Holloway had one in his Bognor garden and said it was only his second garden record in 40 years, on Sep 19 another bird was seen on Berry Head and three were unusual at Christchurch Harbour

**Lesser Grey Shrike:** Second to reach the UK this winter was in Shetland on Sep 14 after one in the Scillies on Aug 22

**Jay:** The usual large autumn movement is now well under way. Movements started in Belgium on Sep 5 and the first 7 reached England at Sandwich Bay on Sep 18 followed by a flock of 11 flying west along the north Kent coast and a total of 25 passing over the Test Valley north of Romsey, both on Sep 20. Back on the continent Sep 20 saw a possible total of 1235 birds reported at 5 sites (minimum count of 162 at a single site) - on Sep 23 one Netherlands site had 370

**Jackdaw:** The first substantial count for this winter is of 170 at Southampton's Weston Shore on Sep 16

**Carrion Crow:** Also at Weston Shore on Sep 16 the Crow count (always high here) was 520

**Rose Coloured Starling:** A juvenile seen at Folkestone on Sep 20 was a new species for the area

**Chaffinch:** Just entering the winter movement process with a count of 512 at a German site

**Brambling:** By Sep 23 nine sites in the Low Countries were reporting Brambling on the move with one site having 52

**Goldfinch:** Two flocks feeding on thistles at Bignor Hill in west Sussex had a total of more than 400 birds on Sep 16

**Siskin:** Now widely reported in southern England with counts of 41 at Christchurch on Sep 17 and 63 there on Sep 19. On Sep 20 Reculver on the north Kent coast had 13 and Fleet pond in north Hampshire had 30 with 3 arriving at Portland and 23 at Dungeness

**Linnet:** Christchurch had 110 on Sep 19 while a total of 935 was reported in Germany on Sep 17

**Lesser Redpoll:** Portland reported its first two birds of the autumn on Sep 19 and one flew over Folkestone on Sep 20

**Lapland Bunting:** RBA reported a total of 23 in the UK on Sep 19 but the only southern reports I have seen have been from the Scillies

**Snow Bunting:** After last week's first two in Yorkshire one was again reported there on Sep 18

**Ortolan Bunting:** One turned up at Portland on Sep 17 - at least one more was in the Scillies

**Reed Bunting:** These joined the autumn passage this week with an influx of 15 at Reculver in north Kent on Sep 20 and Christchurch reported its first four migrants on Sep 21

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Willow Emerald:** This species is continuing to spread with the first in the Kent Stour Valley this week

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Emerald Damselfly, Willow Emerald, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly.

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Large Tortoiseshell:** One reported in the Crowborough area on Sep 15 was the 8th report for the year (six in March and April and one in July prior to this one)

**Grayling:** Two still active on Beaulieu Heath in the New Forest on Sep 15

**Gatekeeper:** Probably the last for the year at Durlston on Sep 17

**Monarch:** The individual which arrived at Portland on Sep 7 was last seen on Sep 15

#### Species reported this week:

Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Large Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Monarch

As well as the above firsts the following were of interest:

**Convolvulus Hawkmoth:** Three were in the Durlston traps on Sep 20 and one was at Winterbone Strickland (Dorset) on Sep 17

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth:** One was in the Southampton area on Sep 17

### OTHER INSECTS:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Helophilus trivittatus Hoverfly:** When I found one in a very dry situation on Sep 17 I was puzzled to read that they are normally found near water but when I found another in Havant on Sep 20 I discovered that they are migrants and thus may be found anywhere

**Hornet:** At this time of year the chore of finding food for larvae in the nest comes to an end and the previously housebound workers are free to roam the countryside on what I call 'death leave' as they are awaiting the death that will come with winter frosts. This means that more people get to see them at this time of year and this is perhaps borne out by a sighting in the Henfield area on Sep 19 and a couple of recent sightings in the north Emsworth area - interestingly the first of these was of a Hornet capturing a Wasp and carrying it off - as adult Hornets are not carnivorous while the larvae are this seems to imply a later than usual nest in that area - the second sighting of a Hornet enjoying plum juice was more typical (earlier in the season they live on flower nectar)

**Great Green Bush Cricket:** When Cliff Dean was recently leading a party of school children at Dungeness he found one of these Crickets and tried to rouse the the children's interest by getting them to handle it which he thought would be a novel experience for them but at least one child was not impressed and said that he was very used to handling them as he fed them daily to his Lizards (hopefully he was thinking of a different species)

**Common Hammock Weaver spider (*Linyphia triangularis*):** Although this is a very common species I only discovered its name this week and you can read my description of it and its web at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2209> after the bit on Slugs

**Four-spot Orb-weaver spider (*Araneus quadratus*):** I enthused about this spider in my previous Weekly Summary (Week 37) when Brian Fellows found one at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - this week he found a second one there and I suggest that anyone who did not read my entry (and follow up the links) last week goes back to do so now

## PLANTS

**Common Gorse:** This week the flowering of Gorse really got underway  
**Ivy:** This also came into flower everywhere

**Hairy Bindweed:** Maybe I have overlooked the 'candy striped' flowers of what looks very like Large Bindweed that I am now beginning to find - this week I found a new site for them at Broadmarsh and discovered more on the New Lane allotments alongside the Havant cemetery - or may be there is a genuine spread of this plant this year.

**Black Nightshade:** This plant made a belated first appearance in the Havant area this week on Sep 18

**Danewort:** My most surprising find this week was of a small colony of young Danewort plants outside the Eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes - apparently there have been recent finds of new colonies in north Hampshire but this seems to be the first in south Hampshire.

**Chinese Mugwort:** I thought that the only colony that I was aware of in the Havant area had been 'suppressed' by spread of brambles at the site where the shore path along Broadmarsh reaches the Havant to Portsmouth cycle way but on Sep 19 I found just one plant forcing its way up through the Brambles and as the species does not flower until October there is a chance that the species will survive for another year

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** These are not uncommon in the English Channel but not often seen by birders at Selsey Bill where a pod of 10 were seen on Sep 16

**Pointed Snail (*Cochlicella acuta*):** The small colony of these on the Thorney Island seawall at the west end of the Great Deepes seems to be on the verge of extinction with no reported find of more than one life snail this summer but a piece on the colony at Rye Harbour dated Sep 20 shows that they are flourishing there - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/9/20/pointed-snail.html>

**Large Black Slug (*Arion ater*):** The word Black in this name can be misleading as the body colour is variable - see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2209> for my photo of a very pale example and another photo of two brown specimens mating. To add to the confusion I looked at [http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Arion%20ater\\_group:%20Arion\\_ater](http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Arion%20ater_group:%20Arion_ater) which has photos of several colour variants and for which the text begins by saying .. "This slug belongs to a species complex that can only be differentiated by dissecting the genitalia" .. If you then go to the top of this page and select the Next Fact Sheet link you will find a set of photos representing the Red Slug variant which includes a photo of a totally jet black specimen. Selecting the Next Fact Sheet link from this you get photos of *Arion vulgaris* in which the specimens are mainly orange or pink in colour

**Medicinal Leech:** These are still used in medicine for cleaning wounds and I was amused to read a comment from a lady on whom they had been used - see <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/09/16/camber-castle/> This only mentions the Leeches in the last paragraph but this tells us that when gorged these Leeches drop off the patient and move off on the floor of the hospital ward in search of a pond. The nearest place to Havant that I have seen these creatures is in Cunigre pond in the centre of the Cams Hall estate/golf course on the east side of Fareham Creek but they can be found with less interference from golfers in several New Forest ponds - put on your wellies and walk into these ponds and you will soon have Leeches trying to draw blood from your wellies!

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 17 - 23 (WEEK 38 OF 2012)

[Sat 22 Sep](#)

Slug sex, spiders and migrant hoverflies

Walking round my garden before breakfast this morning I found **an unusually pale Arion ater slug showing its skirt** as it headed for cover under a bush and on the other side of the bush **two more of these large slugs were mating** so I delayed my breakfast in order to photograph both of these finds. My first picture shows the red skirt surrounding the body of the pale individual but by the time I had returned with the camera the slug had retracted its head so I failed to capture the two pairs of tentacles that had been outstretched when I first saw it (the upper pair end in the tiny eyes, the lower pair help it to detect its food by some sort of tasting process). Had I been later I would have found that the whole body would have contracted into a minimal 'humped lump' while it slept through the day.

Unusually pale Arion ater slug showing the red skirt around the sole of her foot  
The mating pair reveal nothing of their complex mating activity other than that **it has generated a lot of mucus and seems to have caused 'heavy breathing' in one of the individuals** (the roundish opening on the mantle - the area just behind the head - called the Pneumostome is where the slug takes in air to its primitive lung and the photo shows it to be fully open).

#### Mating pair of Arion ater slugs

From what I read **all slugs are hermaphrodites** and are equipped with both male and female organs mounted on an extrudible structure which I cannot detect in this picture but which emerges from the side of the slugs body at the head end (below and in front of the Pneumostome). During sex each individual will both transmit sperm to the other and receive it from the other causing each to develop fertile eggs which it will lay in due course. This may not be entirely correct as I also read that **slugs change their dominant sex from time to time during their life** so it may be that in any one copulation one individual is acting as the male and the other as the female (so when they next come together those roles may have been reversed but I think there is some mechanism which prevents the wasted effort that would occur if their sex life was played out as a game of 'Paper, Stone and Scissors' making it likely that the two which came together were both of the same sex at that point of time).

While in the garden this morning I made a quick check on some of the spider webs which I had come across when tidying up excess vegetation yesterday and had noticed several of what I think were the very common **Linyphia triangularis spider** which are about 5mm long (body length) and are whitish with a brown band down the centre of the abdomen - this band being sharply cut into triangles making it look like a cartoon version of a Christmas tree. For photos of this species see [http://www.eurospiders.com/Linyphia triangularis.htm](http://www.eurospiders.com/Linyphia_triangularis.htm) Whether or not I saw this species there are certainly many of the **characteristic webs which this group of Liniphyiidae spiders make** - unlike the circular orb webs which are easily spotted these webs are flat sheets of spider silk with many individual vertical strands of silk stretching up from it to whatever they can be attached to a few inches above the flat sheet - unlike the geometrically perfect structure of an orb web these semi-vertical strands form a chaotic maze designed (like the Barrage balloons of the second world war) to intercept the flight path of any small insect flying through the air space above the flat sheet and bring the insect crashing

down onto the flat sheet. The spider waits hanging upside down below the sheet until her dinner comes crashing down onto the sheet above her when she quickly moves onto the top to capture and digest the juices of her prey. For the only picture I can find showing the spider in position under her web see [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/Linyphia triangularis W 070903.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bb/Linyphia_triangularis_W_070903.jpg)

On a very different subject I have had a reply from Martin Rand, the south Hants BSBI plant recorder, to my rather sceptical report of finding **a new colony of Danewort (*Samolus ebulus*)** outside the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes (see below my diary page for Sep 19). Martin says that from my description he thinks the plants were Danewort and that (unlike my previous concept that colonies of this plant only occurred at a few special sites where their origin was lost in the mists of time when Danes were pillaging our countryside and raping our virgin maidens) some new colonies of the plant have recently been discovered in north Hampshire.

Finally a mention of something that I learnt yesterday when collecting material to go in a wildlife observations poster to be put up in the Havant cemetery (and eventually to appear on my 'Cemeteries' web page). While there I took a photo of the **hoverfly *Helophilus trivittatus*** which I mentioned in my diary for Sep 15 - at that time I was puzzled to find the species in a very dry location when I read that it is normally found in association with ponds. The new information which I read yesterday is that **this is a migrant species** so both the specimen seen on Sep 15 and the one seen yesterday may have been just resting on a journey that has brought them across the channel from Europe.

Helophilus trivittatus Hoverfly in Havant Cemetery

**Wed 19 Sep**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Farlington Marshes and a possible new site for Danewort**

This morning I drove to Broadmarsh and walked around Farlington Marshes, seeing a good selection of birds, plants and insects with the high spot being the discovery of what (until proved otherwise) seems to be **a new colony of Danewort (*Sambucus ebulus*)** growing beside the cycle track just outside the eastern entrance to the nature reserve.

I am very familiar with the Danewort that grows by the Hayling Billy trail in Havant (at the eastern end of Grove Road) and I am also familiar with the eastern entrance to the marshes so I am pretty sure that the half dozen plants I saw there today are new (they are now about 1 metre tall and have flowers and some fruit so I feel I would have noticed them had they been there last winter when they would not have been hidden among the other vegetation) . They have all the features of the Danewort in Havant (structure, leaves, flowers and fruit) but are smaller in all respects (the leaves were only 14cm long compared to the 30 cm of a typical leaf on the Havant plants).

Another plant discovery made before I left Broadmarsh (among brambles growing near the gate from Broadmarsh onto the cycleway) was yet **another example of**

**Hairy Bindweed** with its pink candy striped flowers (very similar to Large Bindweed) with their ridged/winged and somewhat hairy pedicels (flower stalks).

Another significant change to the flora along the cycle way was the presence of **flowers on several Gorse bushes**.

Around the Marshes Swallows and Sand Martins were prominent, as were overflying Meadow Pipits and Yellow Wagtails, but my most notable bird sight was of the **Wigeon** and **Grey Plover** now back. At the main Lake I think I saw **a couple of Curlew Sandpiper** which another birder was trying to put me onto but the rarest bird I saw was a lone Canada Goose (presumably injured and so unable to fly off with the flock it must have belonged to). The best sighting that I was confident of was **a Merganser out on South Binness** but when I pointed this out to other birders they repaid me by pointing out that there was a second Merganser close to it - I definitely saw two separate birds but unlike the first bird which remained sitting up and preening the second bird managed to disappear immediately after it had shown itself.

Walking across the grass north of the stream which feeds the lake I passed several **Small Heath butterflies** and along the eastern seawall in the midday warmth I added a single **Common Blue** as well as several **Small Whites** and **Red Admirals**. Also on the eastern wall were several **Common Darters** and **Migrant Hawkers** culminating with two Migrant Hawker perched within inches of each other and not disturbed by my passing within a foot of them.

**Tue 18 Sep**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

### **First flowers on Black Nightshade**

On my way to the shops this morning I came across several plants of **Black Nightshade** in flower - something I have been expecting for some time (I usually find this in August).

A less pleasant sight was a **Hedgehog road casualty** corpse. Later in the day I came across another in a different part of Havant - most likely these were youngsters sensing the lower temperature at night and making an effort to feed up in advance of winter hibernation

A news item which I came across by chance on the internet was a very recent find of a **new bat species for Britain**. This was a **Geoffroy's Bat (*Myotis emarginatus*)** discovered last week at a National Trust site somewhere in West Sussex where a previous 'new for Britain' bat was found in Apr 2010 (that was the **Alcathoe Bat (*Myotis alcathoe*)**)

In the evening I went to Langstone to see the **Egrets coming in to roost**. I arrived 50 minutes before sunset and at that time I could only see ten already in the trees and six of these were juveniles (including what I took to be twins - two perched side by side as close to each other as they could get). By the time of sunset the count had only increased to 19, not including several birds which had flown over the pond, circled and then moved on as if they were new to the area and had decided this did not look a good place to spend the night. I abandoned my vigil

ten minutes after sunset when the count was only 28 - there has clearly been a change of mood among these birds.

## [Mon 17 Sep](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Arrival of migrant Brent Geese

While putting together my Weekly Summary yesterday I had seen news of a flock of **21 Dark-bellied Brent off the French Normandie coast** last Saturday (Sep 15) and this convinced me that they should be in the Solent harbours very soon (at that time the Dungeness web site had not been updated for a few days so I was unaware that 5 migrants had flown west past Dungeness on Sep 13) so this morning I drove to south Hayling for a look at the Stockers Lake area (south of Thorney Island) of Chichester Harbour. At first I could only see three Brent off the Tournerbury golf course, and I assumed these were part of the summering flock of 13 birds, but when I looked towards the Black Point area (south of where I was near the Mengham Sailing Club) I could see **a flock of 15 birds**. My assumption that these were the migrants I was expecting was re-inforced when a passer by told me he had seen them flying just before I arrived, making it much more likely that they had only just arrived.

I then drove to the Saltmarsh Lane seawall overlooking the south of Langstone Harbour to see if any more had arrived there but when I got there I found the water was empty of birds other than two Swans, 14 Great Crested Grebes and a distant line of gulls. Writing this on the evening of Sep 18 I see that a group of 8 Brent were off the Farlington Marshes seawall this afternoon (18th) and while that is more than the six summering birds previously seen in this harbour I would guess that two more have appeared there and that these were not migrants.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 10 - 16 (WEEK 37 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** All three 'common' species were in the southern part of the North Sea this week for the first time since the spring - just two Red-throated off Schleswig-Holstein in Germany and single of both Black-throated and Great Northern were seen off the Yorkshire coast. The most recent news is of a single Red-throated at Dungeness on Sep 14

**Shearwaters:** Single Sooty Shearwaters were seen off Kent and Dorset but there were many more off Cornwall with peaks of 72 Sooty, 2 Great and 9 Corys. Devon did best with Manx (1312 off Start Point) and Balearic (282 also off Start Point)

**Petrels:** Just one report of 10 Storm Petrels from the Scillies plus a couple of Leach's off Cap Gris-nez though RBA gave a UK total of 69 of these on Sep 12 (I think the majority of these were passage birds seen off the western Isles of Scotland)

**Purple Heron:** Another surge of these leaving the Netherlands to winter in Africa gave a count of 89 at one Netherlands site on Sep 13

**White Stork:** These too continue to leave the low countries with a peak count of 32 at a Belgian site on Sep 12

**Spoonbill:** Dorset had at least 7 in Poole Harbour on Sep 13 but Belgium had at least 209 at one site on that day (probably as many as 246 in total at three sites)

**Pink-foot Goose:** On Sep 12 Spurn Point in Yorkshire recorded 849 while Lancashire had 331 near Southport on Sep 8

**Brent Goose:** What was probably a single fore-runner of our returning birds was in the Netherlands on Sep 10 and the first to reach our south coast were probably four seen flying west past the mouth of Southampton Water on Sep 14 (these may have arrived on Sep 12 when four were seen in Chichester Harbour though those are more likely to have been from the 13 summering birds known to have been in that harbour). **For me the clincher that migrants had started to arrive came on Sep 15 when 21 Brent were seen off the coast of Normandie and 6 were seen off Jersey.**

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Following the small flock of 12 which reached the Exe estuary on Sep 2 a more substantial arrival of 122 birds was reported from the outer Hebrides on Sep 11

**Wigeon:** On Sep 12 the number in Christchurch Harbour was 48 and on Sep 13 a flock of 25 flew west past Worthing/Goring

**Teal:** On Sep 10 Spurn Pt in Yorkshire recorded 2599 presumably newly arrived Teal (these have been arriving since the start of August)

**Pintail:** There were 8 in Pagham Harbour on Sep 13 (these have been arriving since the start of September)

**Garganey:** These may now have left us - last reports I have were of five at Rye Harbour on Sep 9 and two at Christchurch Harbour on Sep 10

**Honey Buzzard:** The last I have heard of in England was one over East Sussex on Sep 8 but two or three were over Belgium on Sep 13

**Red-footed Falcon:** The bird that was at Chichester from Sep 6 was last seen on Sep 11 but one was in the Netherlands on Sep 12 and 14

**Spotted Crake:** The bird at Marazion (Penzance) from Sep 5 was last reported on Sep 12 but others were in Devon (Axe estuary) and the Scillies on Sep 9

**Baillon's Crake:** The bird which arrived at Rainham Marshes in London on Sep 7 was still there on Sep 13

**Dotterel:** Singles were seen in Belgium on Sep 8 and the Netherlands on Sep 9 when another was in the Scillies

**Lapwing:** I did not see my first returning bird (just one at Northney Marina) until Sep 12 and I have the impression that there are fewer present along the south coast than is usual for the time of year

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** Although RBA reported a total of 32 in the UK on Sep 9 the only ones I know of on the south coast have been singles at Sandwich, Dungeness and Hayle in north Cornwall

**Purple Sandpiper:** The only reports I have seen since the last from Southsea Castle on May 6 have been from Devon, Cornwall and the Scillies and these all dried up by July 28 so the sighting of one in the Netherlands on Sep 14 marks the return of the species to our area.

**Jack Snipe:** Another autumn first is of one in Dorset - the first since one was at Sandwich Bay on Apr 18

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The young bird was still at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 15. Mark Cutts (of the Three Amigos) managed to get a pretty good photo of it on Sep 12 (see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/09/12/short-billed-dowitcher-again/> )

**Green Sandpiper:** Of local interest it would seem that Havant already has its winter residents back. On Aug 30 I heard two flying over the Nore Barn site (west end of the Emsworth shore) and this week two were heard over the Lower Grove Road area and there was another report from somewhere in central Havant on Sep 12. In recent years one or more of these birds seem to have spent their time making a daily circuit of several sites which include the Lymbourne Stream cressbed, the pony field north of Langstone pond (when that field floods), the Southmoors area and the Hermitage Stream just upstream from Barncroft Road and sometimes including the Lavant stream near the New Lane/Bartons Road junction.

**Common Tern:** Passage birds passing Hayling Island in the evening usually stop off for the night in the south of Langstone Harbour and Tim Lawman makes regular counts of the number entering the harbour at dusk. This year he already had a count of 750 on Aug 26 and this reached a peak of 1650 on Aug 30 but had dropped back to 735 on Sep 12

**Black Tern:** On Aug 31 there were at least 493 (probably 603) passing through the Straits of Dover on the French side but I have seen no double figure counts since then (other than one of 35 birds at Ouistreham on the Normandie coast on Sep 12). We have probably not seen the last of them yet as there was one at Dungeness on Sep 14 with other reports from different sites on each of the three preceding days.

#### **Recent unusual sightings:**

Hoopoe - 1 in north Devon on Sep 9

Citrine Wagtail - 2 in Scilly on Sep 8 (but doubts expressed over Hampshire inland sighting on Sep 4)

Fieldfare (4), Song Thrush (5) and Redwing (2) in Netherlands on Sep 12  
Nuthatch - reports of birds in unexpected coastal sites this week at Whinchelsea, Beachy Head and Christchurch  
Coal Tit - 16 at Christchurch on Sep 12 (around 500 moving in the Netherlands this week)  
Red Backed Shrike - one at Wembury (Plymouth) from Sep 5 to 9 (at least)  
Jay - large numbers moving in the low countries this week (up to 1286 reported on Sep 8 and 1065 in Belgium on Sep 16)  
Red-eyed Vireo - first for the year in Shetland on Sep 12  
Siskin - Flock of 100 in Yorkshire on Sep 9, 6 at Portland on Sep 11 and 63 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Tree Sparrow - a flock of 12 to 15 seen at the Pevensey Levels on Sep 15  
Lapland Bunting - 27 reported in UK on Sep 9 and 20 on Sep 12  
Snow Bunting - first report since May 4 is of 2 at Spurn Pt on Sep 13

**Departing migrants:** Still with us this week were (with selected locations, counts, and latest dates) ...

Turtle Dove - 2 at Oare Marshes in Kent on Sep 13  
Cuckoo - 1 at Pagham Harbour on Sep 11  
Nightjar - 1 at Pagham Harbour on Sep 13 (showed aggression to Squirell)  
Swift - 1 at Folkestone on Sep 12  
Wryneck - Singles at Pagham Harbour and Lymington on Sep 13  
Sand Martin - 100 at Rye Harbour on Sep 13  
Swallow - 800 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
House Martin - 1000 at Christchurch on Sep 13 and 10,000 over Sandwich Bay on Sep 16  
Tree Pipit - 25 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Meadow Pipit - 170 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Yellow Wagtail - 60+ at Rye Harbour on Sep 13 (150 at Farlington Marshes on Sep 11)  
Grey Wagtail - 14 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Common Redstart - 3 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Whinchat - 12 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Wheatear - 100 at Portland on Sep 12 and 27 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Ring Ouzel - 3 in Lancashire on Sep 13 and one at Hope Gap (Beachy Head) on Sep 14  
Grasshopper Warbler - 2 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Sedge Warbler - 17 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Reed Warbler - 2 at Portland on Sep 8 (still no big numbers)  
Lesser Whitethroat - 1 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Common Whitethroat - 43 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Garden Warbler - 1 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Blackcap - 71 at Christchurch on Sep 12 and 8 there on Sep 13. Beachy Head had its first good count of 350 on Sep 16  
Wood Warbler - 1 at Portland on Sep 9  
Chiffchaff - 118 at Christchurch on Sep 13 and 300 at Beachy Head on Sep 16  
Willow Warbler - 9 at Christchurch on Sep 13  
Goldcrest - 70 at Christchurch on Sep 12  
Firecrest - 2 at Christchurch on Sep 13

Spotted Flycatcher - 4 at Northney on Hayling Is on Sep 12 and 1 at Pagham on Sep 13

Pied Flycatcher - 1 at Northney on Hayling Is on Sep 8

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**White-legged Damselfly:** Two reported on Sep 11 (River Ise in Nothants) may have been mis-identified - the last previous report I have was dated May 29 and they are said to fly no later than mid-August

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Four Spotted Chaser, Ruddy Darter, Common Darter, Emerald Damselfly, Small Emerald Damselfly, Willow Emerald (Essex), White-legged Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly, Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly and Azure Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** Four reports this week bring my total for the year to just 33 - hardly a good year for them

**Large Tortoiseshell:** One reported in the Crowborough area of East Sussex on Sep 15

**Red Admiral:** Plenty of these currently flying but an assembly of more than 1000 in an old Plum orchard at Ticehurst near Hastings on Sep 12 and 13 was exceptional

**Grayling:** Just one reported this week from Yatley Common in north Hampshire on Sep 8

**Gatekeeper:** Also just one on Bonchurch Down (IoW) also on Sep 8

**Monarch:** The presumed trans-Atlantic migrant which arrived at Portland on Sep 7 was still being seen on Sep 15

#### **Species reported this week:**

Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Purple Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Large Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Monarch

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Robber Fly (*Asilus crabroniformis*):** One at Shoreham Mill Hill on Sep 11 is the only report I have seen for this year

**Helophilus pendulus Hoverfly:** I was lucky enough to get a good photo of one on a Field Rose flower on Sep 15 and in the course of identifying it I learnt that they are normally found close to water - mine was far from water on high ground near West Marden. For my photo see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#1509>

**Common Wasp:** On Sep 10 an entry on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation web site said .. "Is it just a local thing or has anyone else noticed a distinct lack of wasps this year? Our garden here in Bracklesham is completely wasp-less, even around the wine ropes which I've been leaving out for the Red Admirals to enjoy. (Derek Lee)" A reply on Sep 12 read .. "In response to Derek Lee's posting. In the spring wasps were relatively plentiful. However in my Pest Control occupation, this year was probably the worst in living memory for calls to deal with wasps nests. Compared with 2011 we estimate there has been a 98% reduction in requests over the season. Although nests may have started it is likely that the heavy rains prevented feeding (due to the absence of other prey insects, low temperatures etc.) and the development of new workers. It is also likely that those nests which started in the ground or were built in more open situations such as bushes were effectively drowned out with the persistent water logging at the crucial time of development of new workers. To a lesser extent, it may also be possible that due to the rain some nests may have been overlooked as both activity was down and people spent less time outside especially during the summer holidays. However things do go in cycles and I am sure wasps will bounce back in future seasons as they have done many times before. (Richard Roebuck)"

**Four-spot orb-weaver spider (Araneus quadratus):** This is one of my favourite spiders which I used to find quite frequently when I worked at the IBM Portsmouth HQ site but have not seen for some time so I was pleased to see that Brian Fellows had come across one at the Emsworth Brook Meadow site. Although they are relatively large and spin their orb webs in eye-catching places the spider normally creates a retreat in which to hide on the perimeter of the web, rather than waiting for prey in the centre of the web, and thus usually escapes attention. When they emerge they are unmistakable on account of their size (body can be 17mm long), round shape, and the four spots that are present on the top of the abdomen (for a good photo see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thekrankis/4956569167/in/photostream/> - this page also describes the 'nutty taste' of the species in a bizarre spider eating event) The only webpage that I have found showing the colour variation found in this species is <http://www.nicksspiders.com/nicksspiders/araneusquadratus.htm> - this also includes a picture of a male (as with most spider species he is tiny in comparison to the female). Finally, for a description of the construction of the orb web and its strength (easily supporting the spider which can weigh 4,500 times as much as the weight of the web) see <http://www.bumblebee.org/invertebrates/Araneae5.htm>

## PLANTS

**Bush Vetch:** This was one of few surprise finds this week, just one or two roadside plants found flowering between Forestside and West Marden on Sep 15

**Goats Rue:** Another plant which I was surprised to find still flowering at North Common on Hayling on Sep 12

**Field Rose:** Also still flourishing in a hedgerow between Forestside and West Marden on Sep 15

**Ivy:** One of just two genuine 'first flowers' found this week (the other being Butchers Broom) in the West Marden and Forestside areas on Sep 15

**Dwarf Spurge:** I first found one or two plants of this on Aug 30 in the Conigar Point field of Warblington Farm very soon after the wheat had been harvested, by Sep 10 it was much more plentiful

**Hairy Bindweed:** I had been very surprised to find this flowering in part of the Havant cemetery on Aug 20 and was very pleased to find another plant flowering in a different area of the cemetery this week

**Verbascum macrocarpum:** Just one of the five plants which I had found at North Common on Hayling on July 20 was still flowering on Sep 12 by which time it had grown to around 7ft tall and had its lower stem thickly covered with large seed pods already splitting open and hopefully about to generate a substantial colony of this plant here.

**Bellflowers:** Many plants of Clustered Bellflower were still to be seen on Nore Down near West Marden on Sep 15 along with a small number of Nettle-leaved Bellflower.

**Scabious:** Also to be found on Nore Down were good numbers of Devils Bit Scabious with both Small and Field Scabious present and still flowering

**Autumn Hawkbit:** Sep 15 was the first date on which I noticed this in flower though it has probably been out for a couple of months

**Butchers Broom:** This had its first flowers on show at a Hayling Island site on Sep 12

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Leopard Slug:** On Sep 11 I found a Leopard (or Great Grey) Slug (*Limax maximus*) eating breadcrumbs from a saucer on my garden bird table. For photos, more detail and links to descriptions of the species and its unique mid-air love making see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#1109> - it would seem that that individual was then eaten by a Magpie but later in the week, when renewing the water put out for the birds in a plastic dish on the ground below the bird table I was pleased to see another smaller slug of the same species nestling in the cool damp soil under the water dish.

**Portuguese Man-of-War:** Two of these were encountered on the water around the Scillies on Aug 30. I first saw a mention of them being found there in week 35 and recommended

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/portuguese-man-of->

[war/](#) as a good place to learn about them. They are not simple jellyfish but are a colony of different organisms which come together for their mutual benefit as do several other life-forms such as Corals and Slime-moulds. I was reminded that we humans are a similar colony of co-operating cells by the Radio 4 'In our time' programme broadcast at 9am on Sep 13 (and available for a week from that date on BBC iPlayer at

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01mk8vh/In\\_Our\\_Time\\_The\\_Cell/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01mk8vh/In_Our_Time_The_Cell/) ) which told me that nine tenths of all the cells in our bodies are bacteria having a life of their own.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 10 - 16 (WEEK 37 OF 2012)**

**Sat 15 Sep**

### **First flowers on Ivy**

Today's sunshine took me to Forestside and West Marden in search of late flowers, rewarding me with the **first open Ivy flowers** and both **Clustered** and **Ivy Leaved Bellflowers** plus unexpected **Field Roses** and **Bush Vetch**.

I parked at the northernmost entrance to Stansted Forest near Forestside Church and started off east through the Larch plantation which later in the winter may be crowded with Tits, Siskin and maybe Crossbills but today was silent - the best it could offer today was a Great Spotted Woodpecker, Long-tailed and Blue Tits, and several Blackbirds. Underfoot it had **Corn Mint**, **Yellow Pimpernel**, **Common Figwort** and regulars such as **Wavy Bittercress** and **Water Pepper**.

Turning north over the open fields I had good views of a Buzzard high in the blue sky but the interest again was underfoot with 36 arable weed species (including the first **Autumn Hawkbit** which I have consciously noticed) before reaching Oldhouse Lane. Turning east and downhill along this narrow road I was surprised to find a good show of fresh **Field Rose** flowers in the hedge.

Nearing the bottom of the hill, just after passing the entrance of Cabragh House on my right (the OS map still shows this isolated house under the intriguing name of Big Busto House), I turned left (north) again to reach Nore Down where **Field Scabious**, **Small Scabious**, **Devils Bit Scabious**, **Clustered** and **Nettle Leaved Bellflower** were all found among a mass of **Marjoram**, **Eyebright**, **Milkwort** and the occasional plant of **Bladder Campion**, **Wild Thyme** and the like. After the sunshine and rich flora of the open down returning to the dark, tree shaded footpath at the foot of the slope seemed dull but it was here that I found and photographed my first open **Ivy flowers** of the autumn - later, in Forestside village, I found a hedge where Ivy was flowering in full sunshine and attracting a variety of insects.

First Ivy flower of the Autumn

More Ivy flowers in the shade at Nore Down

Continuing through woodland to West Marden village I joined another footpath taking me back through the top of the woodland and across a field edge to rejoin Oldhouse Lane. In the wood on this leg of the walk I heard Nuthatch to add to the Bullfinch heard near Nore Down and near the Lane I had a surprise addition to my flower list with a few late flowers on **Bush Vetch** while the hedge of the lane

had more Field Roses on one of which I photographed a **Helophilus pendulus** Hoverfly but could not name the species in my other photo of the roses.

### A group of Field Roses with unknown fly species

Helophilus pendulus hoverfly on Field Rose in Oldhouse Lane  
I returned to the car along the main West Marden to Rowlands Castle road seeing nothing new but a quick tot up of my notepad list at the end showed that I had come across 79 flowering plant species but only 15 bird species and just 4 butterflies.

### Wed 12 Sep

#### **First flowers on Butchers Broom**

This morning I cycled round north Hayling with the target of checking **Butchers Broom** for its first flowers. Last winter's flowering season ended for me on Apr 30 and last autumn I saw the first flowers as early as Aug 5 but early September is, I think, more normal. I have looked at a few bushes recently with no success but today I found three flowers open on one bush (where the path from the Hayling Coastal Path pillbox meets the West Lane bends) and saw many flower buds as yet unopen.

Another thing I was looking for (with no expectation of seeing them) was **Brent Geese** - last autumn the first were seen passing Kent on Sep 15 and there were 23 in Langstone Harbour on Sep 16. Today, with a strong wind whipping up waves on Langstone Harbour, the only birds I saw at the Oysterbeds were a flock of 100+ Oystercatchers, 10 Egrets, 8 Turnstone and 1 Heron plus a very few Black-headed Gulls. There was little room left for birds on the nesting islands as a considerable growth of vegetation has shot up (no doubt stimulated by the mass of bird droppings after the recent attempted breeding season).

I am pretty sure this will not be a problem for birds trying to nest there next spring but I wonder how many will think it worth trying. The final summary of this year's breeding success was in my email inbox today (forwarded from the Hayling Coastal Conservation Group who had received it from the RSPB Warden, Chris Cockburn). It says that, in the harbour as a whole, less than 50 **Little Terns** attempted to nest but none of their young fledged, 92 pairs of **Common Tern** produced 23 fledged young, 46 pairs of **Sandwich Tern** produced no young, 3682 **Black-headed** gull nests produced 142 fledged young, 58 pairs of **Med Gull** produced 2 young and 1 pair of **Lesser Blackbacks** produced no young. With such a dismal result I think that as their 'warden' Chris Cockburn needs to put a brave face on his presentation of the outcome which he does by starting his report with the words .. "**The gull and tern breeding season has finally ended on a high note** with the majority of the re-nesting birds at the Hayling Oysterbeds successfully fledging youngsters" Chris told me earlier this summer that he is retiring from the RSPB this September and perhaps that is another reason for wanting to go out on a note of success.

Arriving at North Common I was cheered by seeing what I thought was my first **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly of the year (in fact I did see one at the end of March

so it was my second) and with it were a fresh **Red Admiral** and a **Comma**, many **Green Veined Whites** (these are not migratory and represent a colony based here) and a couple of **Large Whites** and a **Migrant Hawker** dragonfly. These were mainly in the flower rich area near the entrance (west of the main path) where **Goats Rue** was still flowering and at the northern end of which (where you rejoin the main path) there was an excellent crop of native blackberries (not the large berried Himalayan invader species). Among the sea of dead Teazels to the east of the path just one of the 'new to Britain' **Verbascum macrocarpa Mulleins** was still in flower and demonstrating its intention to stay here partly by a huge crop of extra-large ripe seed pods (macrocarpa mean 'big seeds') and partly by standing seven feet tall, well above my 6 ft 3 inches.

Among the few birds in the marina area was a single **Lapwing**, my first of the autumn, and a couple of noisy **Whimbrel** that had been disturbed by dogs. Not far away, over the Northney rookery, **Rooks** were also noisily remonstrating at a lone **Buzzard** circling high over the trees.

**Tue 11 Sep**

### **Leopard Slug on Bird Table**

When putting out breadcrumbs for the birds this morning I found a Slug already enjoying yesterday's left overs on the bird table where I try to reserve food for 'my Robin' (and to exclude the Wood Pigeons) by hanging old cycle tyres over the 'way in'. I am used to seeing lots of Slugs on the lawn each morning but these all seem to be variants of the big black **Arion ater** (for the range of variation in colour that this species shows see

<http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Arion%20ater%20group:%20Arion%20rufus> ) but the one on the bird table was clearly different and was easy to name as a **Leopard Slug** (for pics and info see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax\\_maximus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax_maximus) ) but as it was only around 5cm long I assume it was a youngster (adults are from 10 to 20cm long). I don't think any other slug has the colour pattern shown in my photo and further confirmation of its id came from its ability to climb onto the bird table where I have never seen a Slug in the past - Leopard Slugs are regular tree climbers and this is a necessary feature of their life style as they only mate when hanging from a tree branch using their 'extra-strong' slime as a rope. This story has a sad ending as, after putting the slug back on the bird table with more bread, a couple of Magpies arrived in the garden and one of these has recently learnt that it can get food off the bird table despite the cycle tyres - when I next looked the slug was nowhere to be seen...

The bird table on which the Leopard Slug was found

Leopard Slug eating its breakfast from a saucer taken from the bird table

### **Possible Cornfield Knotgrass at Warblington**

Yesterday afternoon I visited Warblington to have another look at the Conigar Point field, taking the quickest route via the Church Path from the Church to a point midway across the big field which currently has a Sweetcorn crop. At this point there is an ungated gap in the hedge through which I crossed the field south

of the path (recently harvested of its wheat) to enter the Conigar Point field though another ungated gap in the hedge.

At the point where I left the Church Path I noticed, in the tractor ruts at my feet, what seemed to be a very small version of Knotgrass but which struck me as being not just a downtrodden colony of Knotgrass but possibly the rare **Cornfield Knotgrass** which I have never come across before. The things which struck me as pointing to this were firstly the very small overall size of the plants, secondly the reddish brown colour coming from the sheaths of the flowers, and thirdly the fact that none of the leaves were more than 2mm across. One factor that makes it unlikely to be Cornfield Knotgrass is that this is not chalky soil but I am not sure if that is an essential requirement. Another visit and further investigation is required.

On my way across the first field I noticed some self-sown wheat which already had well formed ears of corn but the grass which both I and Brian Fellows thought might also be wheat around the edge of the Conigar Point field looked much as it did on my last visit, having a long, 'soft', pointed inflorescence now showing tiny white anthers. Beside it, where it could be seen in Brian's photo, was some very tall Italian Ryegrass also now dangling anthers in the wind. More arable weeds could be found in this field, including much more Dwarf Spurge, but no new species.

Coming back along the shore brought me to the old cemetery where I had previously remarked on a single Cockspur Thorn tree - looking more carefully this time I saw that there were four trees, not just one, and the shape of the leaves (with 'cuneate' bases - merging into the leaf stalk in a V shape) plus the hairs on the leaf stalks meant they were **Broad-leaved Cockspur Thorns**

Yesterday morning I took a quick walk to the Havant cemetery where I found nothing new until I had left by the gate taking me on to New Lane and as I was walking south down the outside of the cemetery wall I noticed another plant of the **Hairy Bindweed** with its pink candy striped flowers.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 3 - 9 (WEEK 36 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Black-necked Diver:** The first of these to be reported in our southern latitudes since June was off the Netherlands on Sep 7. **Great Northern** were also seen off both Devon and Cornwall but these have been seen sporadically through the summer.

**Shag:** Other than the youngster seen tied to a buoy (by a fishing line which it had swallowed) in the entrance to Langstone Harbour on July 13 one seen off the nearby Eastney shore on Sep 4 was the first to be reported there since April but it is likely to be some time yet before one or more take up regular winter quarters in the harbour entrance

**Little Egret:** An evening roost count at Langstone Pond on Sep 6 found 106 birds compared to the 76 seen on Aug 17. Last year my peak count of 198 was on Sep 14.

**Great White Egret:** I reported last week that the bird which was colour-ringed in France and which has been returning to the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood during the non-breeding season of each year since 2003 had returned this year on Sep 1. It was still there on Sep 8 but is not easily seen.

**Pink-foot Geese:** The first mention of this species that I have noticed since March came on Sep 5 when 7 were seen on the Carnoustie coast of Scotland - shortly after the first Wildfowlers appeared on the north Kent coast to mark the **start of the wild-fowling season on Sep 1**

**Barnacle Geese:** A flock of 144 were seen on the Yorkshire coast on Sep 3

**Pale Bellied Brent Geese:** The Portland website reported one back very early at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Sep 2 and this made me wonder if it had been hiding away somewhere in the west country through the summer but when I subsequently saw that a flock of 12 had arrived at Exmouth that same day it helped to confirm that these were genuine returning migrants (presumably having failed to breed)

**Returning wildfowl:** On Sep 1 there were 83 **Wigeon** at Christchurch Harbour and 30+ in Pagham Harbour with 20 at Pulborough Brooks on Sep 4. **Pintail** are now being reported from several sites including 5 at Exmouth on Sep 2 when Christchurch had 3 - Farlington Marshes had 3 on Sep 5. Also on Sep 5 I noticed the first **Shoveler** (at least 5) at Budds Farm pools in Havant

**Garganey:** Singles were still to be seen at four sites in Hampshire and Dorset this week

**Honey Buzzard:** Nothing here to match the passage of 729 of these from France to the north coast of Spain on Sep 5 but one did fly over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 3 and another over the Downs north of Brighton on Sep 5 with two seen in Belgium on Sep 7

**Montagu's Harrier:** One seen in the Avon Causeway area south of Ringwood on Sep 4 and another was hunting a stubble field above Storrington in the Pulborough area on Sep 6

**Sparrowhawk:** These are now in migrant mood with 9 over Dungeness on Sep 4

**Red-footed Falcon:** One gave close views to many birders at the Chichester Lakes from Sep 6 to Sep 8 at least as it caught dragonflies over the small Nunnery Lake (across the main path from Ivy Lake)

**Merlin:** These started to return to the south coast very early with one in the Cuckmere Valley on Aug 1. Since then there have been at least a dozen reports from Sussex and Dorset but Hampshire had to wait until Sep 7 when one visited Farlington Marshes

**Hobby:** Reports are now thinning out but one was seen at Rye Harbour on Sep 8

**Avocet:** The Dorset bird news reported 30+ at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Sep 4 but then reported **1000 there on Sep 6** - that sort of number is expected there in the winter but if this is not an error there must have been an impressive arrival of the birds this week. Last year there were 1200 in Poole Harbour on Feb 2 but the first substantial autumn count was of 600+ on Nov 22

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** There has been a substantial influx of these from America this week with the RBA News reporting a total of 16 in the UK on Sep 5. Two had been seen on the Lymington marshes on Sep 3 and one was reported at Farlington Marshes on Sep 6

**Ruff:** Singles were at Pulborough Brooks and at the Sidlesham Ferry pool of Pagham Harbour both on Sep 4

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** One reported to be at the Testwood Lakes at Totton on the west side of Southampton Water. It seems to have been seen by a single observer for a short time. Although around five turn up in Britain each year the last to be seen in Hampshire was at Titchfield Haven in October 2005 and stayed for five days. In 2007 one was in Poole Harbour on Aug 20 and in 2008 one was in Pagham Harbour in April. In 2009 one was in the Scillies in August and one was back in the Scillies in August 2010. In 2011 I picked up 25 reports, mainly from Cornwall and the Scillies from mid September to mid November and this year we have again had sightings in the west country in Jan, Feb, Mar and April with one at Saltash in Cornwall on Sep 6 which might have flown on here. A request for further information about the Testwood bird has not elicited any positive support for it being a Yellowlegs.

**Short-billed Dowitcher:** The second ever to be seen in Britain (the first was in 1999) became the 402nd species on Lee Evans British Isles tick list for this year when he saw it at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Sep 5. The bird is a juvenile and has been present from Sep 3 to Sep 8 (at least). There seems to have been some initial confusion with the more common Long-billed Dowitcher (one of which is currently to be seen in Gloucestershire) but it now seems that the only Dowitcher seen at Lodmoor this week was the rare one.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Few young have been hatched in Iceland this year but one of them was in Emsworth Harbour this week allowing Brian Fellows to study its plumage which has a pale 'cinnamon' breast, a pale brown mantle and wings strongly flecked with black, and a plain white belly and vent area. Back in July Pete Potts reported on his annual trip to ring Black-tailed Godwits in Iceland with the statement: "Iceland has had a good summer with little rain and plenty of sunshine which has helped the breeding season in some areas, it was certainly a much better season than 2011. However, in some core areas very few pairs were found with chicks, no fledged chicks and no flocks were seen on fields suggesting an early departure.

**Ring-billed Gull:** The last report of one at Gosport was on Mar 17 and the first I have heard of since then is one in Ireland on Sep 5. Last year one was back at

Christchurch Harbour as early as Aug 3 but the Gosport bird did not turn up until Oct 23.

**Little Owl:** One was seen on the seaward side of the Dungeness power station on Sep 6 reminding me that when Dave Billett was warden of Farlington Marshes Little Owls would sometimes turn up at the Farlington Point and that he concluded they were young dispersing birds whose random route had brought them to the sea which they were reluctant to cross but they were equally reluctant to retrace their flight path and try a different direction.

**Short-eared Owl:** Reports this week from north Kent, Folkestone and Seaford suggest that these are starting to move south for the winter as are the first

**Meadow Pipits**

**Departing migrants:** Still being seen this week were Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Swift, Wryneck, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Nightingale, Common Redstart, Whinchat, Wheatear, Ring Ouzel, Grasshopper Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Wood Warbler, Chiff Chaff (only just starting to appear as migrants), Willow Warbler (autumn song heard on Sep 6), Goldcrest and Firecrest (both just starting to migrate), Spotted Flycatcher (flock of 100+ in south Devon on Sep 5), and Pied Flycatcher.

**Citrine Wagtail:** A juvenile was seen in the grounds of Hinton Ampner House (near Cheriton in mid Hants) on Sep 4

**Grey, Pied and White Wagtails:** Although not long distance migrants these are now moving from summer to winter quarters (by Sep 6 there was already a flock of 114 **Pied Wagtail** roosting in the Eastleigh Lakeside area, and Wembury Point near Plymouth had a flock of 150 **White Wagtails** on Sep 5).

**Black Redstart:** One seen in a demolition area in the grounds of St Mary's Hospital in Portsmouth on Sep 2 may have been one of the first to reach its winter quarters

**Cetti's Warbler:** These normally 'loud mouthed' birds have been quiet for some time but reports of their song resumed on Sep 2

**Coal Tit:** More than 600 appeared to be on the move in the Netherlands on each of Sep 4 and 5.

**Red-backed Shrike:** Juveniles were at The Lizard, in the Plymouth area and near Brighton this week

**Jay:** Starting to move on the continent with up to 159 at four Belgian sites on Sep 7

**Spanish Sparrow:** One has been found with House Sparrows at Landguard in Suffolk

**Goldfinch:** The first large autumn flock (50+) was seen in south Devon on Sep 1

**Twite:** Five seen near Bolton in Lancs on Sep 6 seem to be the first moving south for winter

**Lapland Bunting:** On Sep 5 RBA reported a total of 10 in the UK

**Ortoland Bunting:** It seems that at least two were in Dorset on Sep 4 and 5

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

No new species this week

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Common Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Southern Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Gold Ringed, Keeled Skimmer, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red Veined Darter, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, Emerald Damsel, Southern Emerald Damsel, Willow Emerald Damsel, Small Red-eyed Damsel, Small Red Damsel, Blue Tailed Damsel, Scarce Blue Tailed Damsel, Common Blue Damsel, Southern Damsel

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Long Tailed Blue:** This is a rare migrant to Britain and one seen in a garden at Sway (near New Milton in Hampshire) on Sep 3 may have been the first in Hampshire since 2006. The last that I am aware of in southern England was at Portland on Sep 8 in 2010

**Red Admiral:** A mass invasion on Sep 4 and 5 brought 100 fresh specimens to the Brighton area on Sep 4 and 120 to Portland on Sep 5 (Portland also had 25 Painted Ladies that day)

**Small Tortoiseshell:** On Sep 4 one appeared in a garden at Southbourne (near Emsworth) in which the normally large areas of orange on its upper wings was replaced by white. This has been confirmed by experts to be an example of the rare lutea aberration - the photo can be seen at <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/butterfly/vanessid%20images/TabpallidaSouthbourne040912AWingrove.jpg>

**Camberwell Beauty:** One seen in Cornwall on Sep 2 seems to have been the third for this year after one found at Lee on sea (nr Gosport) on Jan 7 and one in Sussex on Mar 22

**Monarch:** One of these trans-Atlantic migrants was seen on Portland on Sep 7 and has remained around a favoured Buddleia bush until at least the afternoon of Sep 9. Three excellent photos are available: for the underside see [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp\\_monarch\\_5\\_070912\\_500.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp_monarch_5_070912_500.jpg) for the upper side see [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp\\_monarch\\_6\\_070912\\_500.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp_monarch_6_070912_500.jpg) and

for a size comparison with a Red Admiral see

[http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp\\_monarch\\_7\\_070912\\_500.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp_monarch_7_070912_500.jpg)

### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Long Tailed Blue, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Camberwell Beauty, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Monarch

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Pine Hawkmoth caterpillar:** For my own encounter with one on the pavement outside my home in Havant, plus photos from UKLEPS, go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#0809>

**Lesser Stag Beetle:** One at Folkestone on Sep 3 was only the third that I know of this year (and I see that I also only have three records of the bigger Stag Beetles this year)

**Southern Oak Bush Cricket (*Mecenoma meridionale*):** This relative of our native Oak Bush Cricket is a recent invader (first seen around 2001) which differs from the native species in being flightless so it is a mystery as to how it reached this country and also how it reached the isolated Dungeness site where it was seen on Sep 5. One source tells me that it is a predator of the Horse Chestnut leaf mining moth (*Cameraria ohridella*), is active by night, and lives up trees. It also shares with our native species the fact that it does not stridulate but makes its presence known by rapidly stamping a foot

**Oak Bush Cricket (*Meconema thalassinum*):** Also making its debut on this website today with a report of it at Durlston on Sep 6 this species is fully winged and often flies to lighted windows at night but is one of the last to emerge each summer.

## **PLANTS**

**Fragrant Virgin's Bower (*Clematis flammula*):** This is a popular garden flower which Brian Fellows found thriving in the wild on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on Aug 31. For Brian's photo of the flowers which were growing in shrubbery lining the public path running south from Ferry Road past the entrance to the Golf Club and down the eastern fence of the club grounds see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-001-clematis-flammula-hli-31.08.12.jpg>

**Common Gorse:** This ceased to flower after June 20 this year and the first flowers of the new season that will keep it flowering through the winter until next

summer were seen by me beside the Hayling Coastal Path on Sep 3. I only found flowers on one bush which looked old and had one dead branch and this imminence of death had probably caused it to flower earlier than usual in the hope of leaving some progeny before it died.

**Tree Lupin:** I was surprised to find quite a few fresh flowers in the Sinah Common area near Gunner Point on Sep 3

**Bladder Senna:** The long established bush growing on the east side of The Kench on south Hayling had a great show of both flowers and its distinctive translucent bladder seedpods on Sep 3. For my photos go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#0309>

**Prickly Lettuce:** In Brian Fellows diary entry for Sep 5 this week he mentions (in connection with a visit to the 'InterBridges site') that the ecologist showing him round this industrial development site pointed out the difference in leaf shape that can occur between different plants of this species. This sent me to check on Stace's Flora to see if the species had recognised sub-species or varieties but Stace merely attributes the variations to natural plasticity and has a plate showing the variety of leaf forms that can be found in all five Lettuce species

**Narrow-leaved Water Plantain:** The Hants Flora distribution map for this rare species shows just two clusters of sites within the county, one in the extreme north east and the other in the extreme south west with no hint that it can be found at Emsworth in the south east. Nevertheless Brian Fellows has found it growing for some years in two parts of the Westbrook Stream and this week has found it in a new site (a culvert under the rail line just west of the rail station) north of those he already knows. I am not sure if there is a direct flow of water from this culvert into the Westbrook stream but if these sites are connected, and seeds have been carried downstream, then the new site he has found must be the ancestor of those already known - continuing this thought the question arises as to whether there are further sites further 'up stream'

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Yellow-necked Mouse:** While putting out bread crumbs for the birds first thing on the morning of Sep 5 I found a dead but otherwise seemingly intact mouse in the middle of the lawn and noted its sandy (orangey) fur and the band of the same colour around its neck and across its breast. The colour of the fur would be enough to distinguish it from either Wood or House Mouse, both of which are greyer, but the confirmation that it was a **Yellow-necked Mouse** came from the band of fur (of the same sandy colour) running round its neck and across the breast - in both other species the underside fur is of an unbroken white. Presumably it had been caught by a well-fed domestic cat which preferred its food to come out of a tin and not to include inedible fur - I'm pretty sure that any wild mammal or owl predator would not have abandoned this substantial meal.

**Water Vole:** There have now been **179 reported sightings of Voles** this year in the River Ems at Emsworth Brook Meadow, the first being on Jan 12 but regular sightings began on Feb 12 and continued until July 6 followed by a gap in reports until this week when an adult with one or more juveniles were seen on Sep 6.

There is no reason to suppose that the voles were not present and active during the past couple of months and I would guess that the absence of reports is the result of factors such as the abundance of bankside vegetation (more cover for the animals and no need to make long trips to find food) plus the human holiday season taking the observers away from Brook Meadow. For anyone who enjoys seeing these 'cuddly' animals there is a wealth of excellent photos on the web page recording the Brook Meadow colony - see <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles-2012.html> and for those who want to see the creatures for themselves the Brook Meadow website has a map showing where to look. I have not seen an estimate of the number of voles present at this site but I read that each adult female can produce up to 5 litters, each of 5 to 8 young, in the breeding season which lasts from March to October (and young females born before July can produce a litter before the end of the year). Luckily the most serious threat to Vole populations, the Mink, has not been detected at or near Brook Meadow but Foxes, Weasels, and Cats do occur as do Pike in the river and probably Kestrels and Tawny Owls.

**Basking Sharks and Sunfish:** This week has brought an increase in sightings of both off Cornwall - on Aug 31 there were **8 Basking Sharks** off Pendeen and on Sep 3 St Ives had **5 Sunfish**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 3 - 9 (WEEK 36 OF 2012)**

### **Sat 8 Sep**

#### **Why did the caterpillar cross the road?**

As I crossed the road outside my house this morning on my way to Waitrose I found a man with two young children watching a caterpillar racing along the pavement. The man went to pick it up to move it to a place of safety but was deterred by the violent whole body twitching which the caterpillar made as soon as it was touched. At this point I joined them and produced my paper shopping list, gently urged the caterpillar on to it, and transported it to an area of rough grass where I hoped that the caterpillar might be able to bury itself in the soil in order to pupate (the only likely reason for a caterpillar to be crossing a road by day is that it is looking for somewhere to pupate and though I did not know what sort of place this species might be seeking I thought this area with soil, grass, weeds and shrubs might do)

I had already noted that the caterpillar was around 6cm long, had a black curved 'horn' on the rear of its body, had a strange 'two part' head section, was of an overall greyish green colour with various marks which did not form a regular pattern other than a broken white line along its 'flanks' (roughly the line of the spiracles through which it breathes).

Identifying caterpillars is rarely easy, one of the difficulties being that individuals of the same species can change considerably in size during their short lives and can also differ from one another in their colour - hence the two photos illustrating the same species.

My starting point was the horn which I thought probably indicated that it was a Hawk Moth. Secondly I had the length which I estimated to be 6cm, and coupled with its behaviour (seeking a pupation site) that suggested it was full grown. Thirdly I had its overall colour and the broken white line down the side. With these

factors in mind I turned to my Caterpillar book (Collins Field Guide to Caterpillars) and went through the colour plates and the associated text which gives details of the life cycle and size.

The only likely candidate found was **Pine Hawkmoth** which seemed unlikely for a town street but there are a couple of Scots Pine trees nearby (in The East Pallant) and my book told me that this species pupates in the autumn. For confirmation I went online to <http://www.ukleps.org/morphology.html> and selected the link to the Main Index of Species in which I scrolled down to Pine Hawkmoth and under that species I worked through photos of the development of the species from Egg to Final Instar Larvae and it is the photos of these that I have copied here. Scrolling down to the end of the page on this species we find the size of the final instar caterpillar given as 70 to 80 mm so my guess at the size (6cm) may well have been 1cm out.

Two examples of final instar Pine Hawkmoth caterpillars from UKLEPS I am not claiming to be right but these photos show the horn, the broken white line, the general colouration (brownish grey specimen) and the 'two part head' and make me feel reasonably happy that I have the right species (if in an unlikely place).

### Thu 6 Sep

#### Egret roost count at Langstone

I went to Langstone pond a good hour before sunset with the tide almost at its lowest point but despite this opportunity for fishing there were already 40 Egrets in the trees around the pond. By the time I left, five or six minutes after sunset, my count was up to **106** and there was still enough light for others to arrive.

### Wed 5 Sep

#### Shovelers back at Budds Farm and illegal immigrants vanish

This afternoon I cycled to Budds Farm where the water was filling with returning wildfowl and the air was alive with departing hirundines, mainly **Sand Martins** and **Swallows** but with at least one **House Martin**. On the water **Shoveler** were newly back and **Teal** were more numerous than they have been for several months. The **Swan family** still had their five cygnets and the **Egrets** had increased to six, at least during the high tide period which had brought in fifty or more **Redshank**.

Down on the beach a bright orange hutchinsonii **Comma** added itself to the many **Red Admirals** and **Small Whites** to be seen everywhere (I think I saw a **Holly Blue** in my garden before coming out).

After Budds Farm I went to Broadmarsh where a few of the **Hairy Vetchling** flowers could still be seen but the verges of the cycleway below the A27 had been mown so there was little of interest there other than the bright yellowy-orange berries on the **Sea Buckthorn**. One thing that I was expecting to see here (on the seaward side of the track where the shore path from Broadmarsh meets the cycleway) was **Chinese Mugwort** which has had an established colony here for at least ten years. This does not flower until October but the stems should be well grown by now yet I could not see any - all seem to have been swamped by the

growth of Brambles and I fear may have to be deleted from the local flora (the only other colony I know of was lost to the construction of the massive A27/A3M/Harts Farm Way interchange)

Heading back through that interchange area I saw that a lot of healthy **Cockspur grass** had come up late enough to avoid de-capitation in the recent clearance of roadside vegetation and on the north side of Harts Farm Way **Creeping Yellow Cress** was still flowering on the edge of the old playing fields (close to where soil is being dumped, possibly as a deterrent to invasion by travellers vehicles?)

Other plants noted at various points during my trip were a healthy colony of **Japanese Knotweed** in full flower, a late resurgence of flowers on some **Stone Parsley**, and a lot of fresh flowers on **Elder** bushes in several places.

### Mon 3 Sep

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **First Gorse flowers and Senna Bladders on Hayling**

A glorious autumn afternoon saw me cycling down the Hayling Billy rail line from near Havant station to the end of the line at West Town on Hayling before making a circuit of the Sinah area and returning by the same route.

The thing I was hoping to see, as I have done in several recent years, was the **first Gorse flowers** after their summer holiday which started on June 20, since when I have only seen the flowers of Dwarf Gorse and that only in Havant Thicket, but my first notes were of the shore birds using the Oysterbeds nest island as a roost to sit out a high spring tide. Nothing out of the ordinary but it was nice to see a good number of Ringed Plover with Oystercatchers and Dunlin plus several Common Terns still here. Further south in the harbour were a dozen Great Crested Grebe but the gulls had all deserted the water to feed in the West Lane fields which were being ploughed.

South of the Oysterbeds I had my first sight of **Pepper Saxifrage** for the year but I had to wait until the West Lane fields area before seeing the **Gorse** - plenty of flowers, but only on one bush whose flowering had been brought on early by the fear of death (half the bush had been killed off and nearly all plants respond to impending doom by speeding up their reproductive cycle in the hope of leaving fresh young plants to replace them)

At Saltmarsh Lane I diverted to the seawall to see how the **Slender Hares Ear** had fared and saw there had been a good show of plants but all had now ceased flowering.

Nothing more of note until the Kench where I was pleasantly surprised to find the **Bladder Senna bush** which grows close to the track half way down the east side had a good show of both flowers and seed bladders of which I took a few photos.

General view of the bush taken from the track

A view of both flowers and seed bladders against the blue sky

Close up of a flower taken on an earlier visit

Round on the Gunner Point shore finding several of the **Tree Lupins** still in flower was another surprise (together with three Wheatears and a few Linnets) and later I passed a good display of **Pale Toadflax** with some out of place **Californian Poppies** (and a few 'in place' **Yellow Horned Poppies**). Before leaving Sinah Common I noted both **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** and **Cock's Eggs** in flower, and on the way back up the Coastal Path I added both fresh **Honeysuckle** and **Vervain** to my list

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 27 - SEP 2 (WEEK 35 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Black-necked Grebe:** The first report for this autumn was of three at a Netherlands site on Aug 13 and this week two were seen on the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Aug 26 followed by two at the Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough in Sussex on Aug 29

**Shearwaters:** Strong winds have brought unusually large numbers of seabirds to our shores in the past week starting with a count of **11 Cory's** off the Scillies on Aug 25 and **15 Sooty** off Berry Head in Devon on Aug 29. Portland had **200 Manx** on Aug 29 and on Aug 31 the first **Mediterranean Shearwater (Puffinus yelkouan)** of the year was in British waters (off Whitburn on our northeast coast). Counts of **Balearic Shearwater** peaked at 83 off Berry Head in Devon on Aug 29 (when Jersey had 344 of them) and on Aug 27 Co Clare in Ireland recorded the third **North Atlantic Little Shearwater (Puffinis baroli)** of the year

**Storm Petrel:** Still up to 32 being seen from Lands End area on Aug 29

**Cattle Egret:** One made a brief appearance at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Aug 27 and on Aug 30 one tried to fly south from Dungeness but was blown back by the head wind.

**Great White Egret:** Bob Chapman reports from the Blashford Lakes that 'old faithful' returned there on Sep 1. This is the bird that was first seen at Blashford on 21 Aug 2003 wearing a French colour ring and has returned to Blashford annually for a good part of each year (outside the breeding season). This is now its tenth year of residence!

**Grey Heron:** We don't see much migration among the Herons resident in Britain but those feeding nearer the Arctic in summer are forced to retreat before the winter and on Aug 31 one Netherlands site logged 91 (with a potential total of 152 at four sites there)

**Purple Heron:** The number present at one Netherlands site suddenly shot up to 333 on Aug 31 (with a potential total of 517 from four sites fairly close to each other so double counting was possible). A look at <http://www.argos-system.org/web/en/55-news.php?item=183> will tell you that this sort of mass migration from the Netherlands to west Africa is not unusual but that there is

concern about the declining population in the Netherlands - until the 1970s around 1000 pairs nested in the Netherlands.

**Glossy Ibis:** The bird which was a regular sight in the Pagham north fields from June 19 to July 20 may have been lurking there unseen while moulting - that is conjecture but one was seen again there on Aug 26

**Canada Goose hybrids:** On Aug 26 a Canada Goose was seen in the Pagham north fields paired with a Barnacle Goose and leading four unusually marked hybrid young - if these young survive they may pose an id problem in the coming months.

**Brent Goose:** There is no evidence of migrant return so far but, following the report of four flying west off Worthing on Aug 20, a single bird has turned up unexpectedly at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Aug 31

**Mass return of wildfowl on Sep 1:** The Christchurch Harbour website ( <http://www.chog.org.uk/Pages/Sightings.htm> ) recorded an unusual passage of returning wildfowl in its entry for Sept 1. Totals passing over the harbour that morning were 29 Pintail, 14 Shoveler, 64 Wigeon, 71 Teal, 24 Shelduck and 14 Gadwall, all west.

**Garganey:** Several are still here - on Aug 31 there were 2 at Rye Harbour and on Aug 30 the Oare Marshes in north Kent had 8. Sandwich Bay still had 2 on Aug 30 and Pulborough Brooks had 1 on Aug 27 when the Kent Stour Valley probably had 6. The last report from Lymington was on Aug 25 and Alresford Pond near Winchester last had 1 on Aug 20

**Shoveler:** The Blashford Lakes near Ringwood suddenly had 77 on Aug 28 (after an arrival of 262 at a Netherlands site on Aug 20)

**Red Breasted Merganser:** The summering female from Langstone Harbour was still at Northney on Hayling Island on Aug 31

**Honey Buzzard:** 551 arrived at a north German site near the Danish border on Aug 28 as they left Scandinavia. On Aug 26 a total of 1243 of them were logged leaving France for Spain via the Bay of Biscay. In England Aug 28 brought one over Sandwich Bay and another over Morden Bog in Dorset (west of Poole Harbour). Another had been seen in Dorset near Lulworth on Aug 26 and one was in the Kent Stour Valley on Aug 25. Latest report is of one drifting over Eastbourne on Sep 2.

**Montagu's Harrier:** 18 left France for Spain on Aug 26 when one was in the Romney Marshes area east of Rye Bay (staying there till Aug 28) and a juvenile flew west over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 31

**Osprey:** Still being seen at 12 sites in southern England this week

**Merlin:** Newly returned birds seen at 5 sites in southern England this week

**Hobby:** Only three reports from southern England seen by me this week - the last from an Alresford garden in Aug 29. Numbers may be thinning out but some should be with us at least till the start of October.

**Kentish Plover:** A juvenile was seen at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight on Aug 31

**Golden Plover:** More than 100 were at Rye Harbour on Aug 26 and 200+ were on the north Kent mares (Oare) on Aug 27 with 10 in Pagham Harbour on Aug 26 shortly after sightings of 8 at Lymington and 14 on Pilsey sands (Thorney Island)

**Skuas:** On Aug 27 Berry Head in Devon recorded **6 Poms, 134 Arctic, 12 Long-tailed and 65 Bonxies**. Although such numbers were not logged at intervening points along the south coast a record of 130 Arctic passing Dungeness indicates that all of them probably came through the Channel

**Sabines Gull:** One which made a more leisurely, coast hugging, passage through the Channel was seen at Dungeness on Aug 27, at Milford near Lymington on Aug 29 and at Portland on Aug 30

**Terns:** The number using the entrance to Langstone Harbour as a night roost as they pass down the Channel seems to have declined this year with a peak count of 1650 Common on Aug 30 when they were joined by 1 Roseate and 1 Black. Maybe there were more in the Channel on Aug 31 when Le Clipon near Calais had a count of 493 Black (with a possible total of 603 at four neighbouring French sites).

**Auks:** These are now starting to appear in the Channel with 3 Guillemot and 1 Razorbill off Portland on Aug 27. Of course these may just be local birds from e.g. Durlston (where several hundred families left the cliffs with their young at the end of June)

**Departing summer visitors:** Still with us this week were Turtle Dove, Cuckoo juveniles, Nightjar, Swift, Wryneck, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail (max 200 at Dungeness), Common Redstart, Whinchat, Wheatear (max 200 at Portland), Grasshopper Warbler, Aquatic Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Wood Warbler (1 in the Scillies), (Chiffchaff - not yet departing in any numbers), Willow Warbler, Spotted and Pied Flycatcher. Of current local interest the **first Wryneck to be seen at Farlington Marshes arrived on Sept 1**. One bird which I thought had already left is **Quail** but on Sep 1 one was put up from long grass at Rusper, some 4 miles north of Horsham.

**White Wagtail:** The first autumn passage bird had been seen at Portland on Aug 23 and this week one was in the Sussex Cuckmere valley on Aug 27 and two were at Portland on Aug 31

**Robin:** It's probably too early for Continental birds to be coming here for the winter so I guess that a 'flock' of 25 at Portland on Aug 31 were British juveniles dispersing.

**Fieldfare:** These only appeared on Trektellen on one day this week (Aug 28) when up to 24 birds were seen at 6 Netherlands sites (10 of them at a single site where there had only been one on Aug 21)

**Firecrest:** An encouraging local sighting was made on Aug 31 when a male Firecrest was seen in pines within 100 metres east of the Texaco garage at Langstone Bridge

**Red-backed Shrike:** One was in the Scillies on Aug 25 and another was in the Beachy Head area on Aug 31

**Woodchat Shrike:** The bird which has been at Weymouth (Bridging Camp by The Fleet) since Aug 18 was still there on Aug 31

**Raven:** The population in the south of England continues to grow with 21 flying over Christchurch Harbour on Aug 29. This year there were at least 105 in the Martin Down area south of Salisbury on May 13 and last year a sighting of more than 70 in Devon led a local farmer to say that up to 400 had been there in recent years (of course this may have included other Corvids). In 2010 a roost near Cerne Abbas in Dorset held 102 birds on Dec 5 increasing to 147 on Dec 31

**Tree Sparrow:** The normal winter influx has already started with sightings of up to 60 birds at Dungeness on Aug 26, 28 and 30

**Yellow Hammer:** Nowadays an exciting rarity in the Langstone area (though still breeding on Portsdown) three were seen on the Langstone South Moors on Aug 24 - even more exciting on the South Moors were **10 Yellow Wagtails** seen there on Aug 31

**Vagrants:** Two rarities reported by RBA on Aug 30 were a **Black Skimmer** (a first for the Western Palearctic) seen off Co Mayo in Ireland and a less rare **north american subspecies of Black Tern** (thought to be a separate species but still named *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*) was seen on Merseyside

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Southern Migrant Hawker:** One in Essex on Aug 28 was only the fourth report of the year - the first was of two insects seen on July 15. All sightings have been in Essex.

**Lesser Emperor:** One seen egg-laying at Badminton Common in the New Forest on Aug 26

**Red Veined Darter:** Several newly emerging at Badminton Common on Aug 26

**Willow Emerald Damselfly:** Sightings this week in Essex, Kent and Bedfordshire (a first for this county)

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Southern Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Lesser Emperor, Black Tailed Skimmer, Ruddy Darter, Red Veined Darter, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Emerald Damselfly, Willow Emerald Damselfly, Red Eyed Damselfly, Small Red Eyed Damselfly, Blue Tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly.

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** A very small influx this week with just two sightings at Durlston and Pett Level (nr Rye)

**Adonis Blue:** A good show in Sussex this week with counts of 124 on Malling Down (Lewes) and 201 at Mill Hill (Shoreham) both on Aug 28

**Painted Lady:** Sightings at seven sites this week with a peak of 4 at Durlston

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Good counts (for this year) of 15 together on the Isle of Wight on Aug 28 and 18 at Steyning Round Hill (Worthing) on the same day

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Small Heath

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Colourful Caterpillars:** Both **Grey Dagger** (*Acronicta psi* - see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Acronicta\\_psi\\_caterpillar.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Acronicta_psi_caterpillar.jpg) ) and **Dark Dagger** (*Acronicta tridens* - see <http://www.leps.it/images/Noctuidae/InLeNoAcTrL0001.jpg> ) larvae got into the news this week.

**Western Conifer Seed Bug (*Leptoglossus occidentalis*):** This impressive invader from America has been arriving in this country each autumn (not directly but flying across the Channel after arriving earlier in Italy in cargoes of timber) and the first to be reported of this year's batch of 'illegal immigrants' was seen at Dungeness on Aug 28. To become familiar with it see [http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/leptoglossus\\_occidentalis.htm](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/leptoglossus_occidentalis.htm)

!

### **PLANTS**

**Dwarf Spurge:** My first sight of this for this year came on Aug 30 in the Warblington Farm field nearest to Conigar Point. The field has just been harvested and a good selection of arable weeds can be expected there if it is not re-sown too soon. My photo of the plant can be seen at <http://ralph-hollins.net/DwarfSpurge.jpg>

**Narrow-leaved Michaelmas Daisy:** This is not an uncommon variant of the regular Michaelmas Daisy that is now starting to flower and can be distinguished

by smaller, paler (almost whitish) flowers as well as by narrower leaves. My find was made on Portdown on Aug 31

**Green Bristle Grass:** I found a small patch of this growing on a grave in the old Warblington cemetery on Aug 30 and you can see my diary entry and photos at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#3008>

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fox:** When visiting the Warblington cemetery extension on Aug 30 I was intrigued to see a cluster of pigeon feathers on the close mown grass of an as yet unused area near the natural burial area but when I reached the area I found a large hole in the grass near the centre of the feathers and was left with the impression that a Fox had made the hole and had been using it as sleeping quarters. **As is the way with Foxes this one had been bringing his supper home with him on more than one evening.** In the past, when carrying out a bird survey on the Warblington Farm fields, I have more than once found the entrance to Fox earths littered with extremely smelly remains of Cuttlefish (still with most of the flesh on the 'bones') which the Foxes have found on the beach and carried back to act as 'air fresheners' for their homes.

**Newts out of water:** After the breeding season spent in ponds newts will often travel far overland and find snug crevices in which to hide away when not foraging and in which to spend their winter hibernation. This week I learnt of an unusual hideout used by a Common Newt on Alan Parker's organic allotment in the Hastings area - **the Newt was found several inches underground inside a Potato which had been hollowed out by Slugs.** See Alan's piece on the Rye Bay website at <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/8/28/allotment-wildlife.html> which has a photo of a Grass Snake and at least two Slow-Worms enjoying the luxury accomodation afforded by his allotment dung heap.

**Portugese Man-of-War:** This seems to have been a good year for Jellyfish in the waters around Britain but it was not until this week that I saw the first report of a Portugese Man-of-War off the Scillies - if you are as ignorant of these creatures as I was (they are not Jellyfish) learn all about them at <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/portuguese-man-of-war/>

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 27 - SEP 2 (WEEK 35 OF 2012)

### Thu 30 Aug

#### **Green Bristle Grass in Warblington cemetery**

This afternoon I walked to Warblington to see if the wheat had been harvested in the Conigar Point field which usually produces a selection of wild flowers in the autumn but before I got there I had a look round the old and new cemeteries.

Entering the old cemetery by the gate at the southern end of Church Lane the first thing I noticed was a **Cockspur Thorn tree** on my right with its liberal show of large hawthorn-like berries and non-hawthorn-like leaves. I have only recently become aware of these small trees and have not yet mastered the differences in presence or absence of thorns and the presence or absence of hairs on various

parts which distinguish the various hybrids which are widely planted - next time I go I will pay more attention to detail!

I followed the route of the public path that leads to the shore but stopped where the first path (after the chicane) on the left leads back to the cemetery building. A few yards along this cross path a grave on the southern side had a small display of **Green Bristle Grass** which I have not seen here for several years (it once flourished nearby on the west side of the public path where it was more visible). This is an eye-catching grass and is marked in the Hampshire Flora as a 'very rare casual' (i.e. it does not have established colonies but pops up for a year or two where the wind happens to blow its seed) - Stace's more recent Flora of the British Isles says that it is 'frequent in southern England' so perhaps not so rare!

Green Bristle Grass plant stem and enlarged view of its seed-head (panicle)

Green Bristle Grass plants in situ on grave

While photographing the grass I also took a picture of some **Grey Field Speedwell** sharing the same grave - its flowers were not fully open but you can see their deeper blue and much smaller size in comparison to the **Common Field Speedwell** whose plants otherwise look very similar.

Grey Field Speedwell plants with a couple of half-open flowers

In the new cemetery extension the main plot where wildflower seeds are sown has been cleared back to bare earth but the plants covering the natural burial area have been left and here the blue of **Chicory** flowers is dominant though showing signs of end of season ageing! Walking back to the cemetery entrance I went to investigate **a patch where the close mown grass was littered with Wood Pigeon feathers** - when I got there I found they surrounded the entrance to a large hole in the ground and indicated that one or more Foxes had been enjoying pigeon pie before settling down to sleep underground.

Continuing east to the Nore Barn wood and round the farm shore I had a look in the field behind Conigar Point where the wheat crop has now been harvested. The ground has not been exposed for long enough to bring up the expected crop of arable weeds for which this field has a good reputation but I did find one plant of the uncommon **Dwarf Spurge** and while photographing that I took a picture of the common **Black Bindweed** which, despite its long climbing stems and Bindweed-like leaves is a member of the dock family and does not have the trumpet-like flowers of the Bindweeds.

Dwarf Spurge plant

Black Bindweed flowers and leaves

**Tue 28 Aug**

**Fiddle Dock in Havant Park**

Back on July 31 I found several plants alongside the Tennis Courts in Havant Park which I said reminded me of **Fiddle Dock** seen in the past in the grass of the

Westgate Fields in Chichester but at that time there was no sign of the distinctive 'waisted' (Fiddle Shaped) basal leaves that give the plant its name and I attempted (but failed) to identify it as a Goosefoot species by reference to its flower buds. Today I was passing the same area and decided to bring one plant home to have another go at naming it and in the process of pulling up as complete a specimen as possible I dragged the basal leaves out of the grass which had been hiding them and so discovered that it was Fiddle Dock after all. When the temporary closure of that corner of the Park (for rebuilding of the ramp carrying the footpath connecting the Park to the Rail Station southern forecourt) is over you will be able to see the plants which I left in situ!

#### Fiddle Dock plant from Havant Park

Also seen this morning were the **Soapwort** plants which I thought had been 'suppressed' by bramble growth on the grass embankment of Park Road (east side just north of the rail bridge) - one or two of the 'Bouncing Bett' variety have managed to struggle through the competition.

Seen yesterday (but already showing signs of age) was a mass of **Giant Polypore** fungus making its annual appearance on an old tree stump beside the Emsworth Road just east of the Meadowlands junction

### **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 20 - 26 (WEEK 34 OF 2012)**

#### **BIRDS**

**Great Northern Diver:** One in near summer plumage was off the Scillies on Aug 17 and another sighting was off Durlston in Dorset on Aug 23. No other reports of divers this week.

**Red-necked Grebe:** On Aug 18 one was off Flamborough Head in Yorkshire, maybe it was one of two seen off the Netherlands on Aug 19, possibly then heading west to be seen off the north French Coast near Calais on Aug 22

**Black-necked Grebe:** One was off the Netherlands on Aug 21 (possibly one of three seen in that area on Aug 13)

**Fea's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae*):** One of these small 'gadfly' Petrels, which breed in the Cape Verde/Maderias area and of which there are only around 3,000 birds in the world, was seen off Land's End (Porthgwarra) on Aug 24. This was a second for the British Isles this year after one seen off Ireland (County Cork) on July 16

**Balearic Shearwater:** A maximum of 5 (off Christchurch Harbour on Aug 22) was reported from the British mainland but 238 were off the Channel Isles that day

**Storm Petrel:** Up to 80 were seen by boat trips around the Scillies during the week and 20 were off Devon on Aug 21 and one was seen from Milford in Hampshire on Aug 25

**Bittern:** One seen at Lodmoor(Weymouth) on July 10 may have been attempting to breed there but two reports this week show that Bitterns are already moving to winter quarters (or maybe juveniles that have been shown the door by their parents). On Aug 21 one was seen to fly off from Christchurch Harbour (where there have been no reports since February) but then to return as if looking for a better site to settle in but not finding it. On Aug 23 one was found at Reculver on the north Kent coast where it was the first for the year (maybe a youngster from the nearby Stour Valley)

**Little Egret:** A high tide roost count of 53 birds was made on Aug 19 at the MoD Defence Munitions site on the north west shore of Portsmouth Harbour showing that the Egrets are still using this site which is where the first breeding in Britain probably occurred but was not officially recorded - officially the first breeding was at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour in 1996 but the official Heronry census counter for the Grey Herons at the Portsmouth MoD site that year (allowed to visit the site under armed guard) failed to spot the Egret nest which was known to people working on the site who were forbidden by the oath of secrecy about what was to be seen on the site from passing on their information.

**Great White Egret:** In addition to the pair which have bred successfully in Somerset this year a few vagrant birds visit Britain in most months and this month one was seen at Folkestone on Aug 23 (it was almost certainly this bird which was seen in the Kent Stour valley on Aug 24). Up to 12 were known to be present on the near continent on Aug 24

**Purple Heron:** A juvenile was in the Kent Stour valley from Aug 19 to 24 at least

**White Stork:** A group of four birds flew in over Portland on May 23 and seem to have been roaming southern England since then. They seem to have parted with one of their number from June 21 to 25 when three of them settled briefly near Bognor in Sussex and three continued to roam up to July 18 but after July 22 they may well have joined up again to become a group of 4 at Wet Moor in Somerset before flying off again into the unknown on Aug 23. On the near continent Storks continue to depart in small numbers, unlike the count of 736 seen at Roc de Conilhac - Gruissan on the French Riviera on Aug 12

**Glossy Ibis:** One was seen at the Pagham North Walls on Aug 26 where there were regular sightings up to July 20. The only sightings I know of since then have been at Farlington Marshes on Aug 11 and at the Barnham Levels near Arundel on Aug 14.

**Spoonbill:** Four were still at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Aug 18 with a fifth bird elsewhere in the harbour

**Brent Goose:** Last week we reported sightings of summering birds in both Langstone and Chichester Harbours and this week we have a more unusual report of four Brent seen flying west over the sea off Goring (near Worthing) on

Aug 20. They are unlikely to have come all the way from the northern breeding grounds but could be birds that have been summering in Kent or Sussex (or even on the continent) and which think that the best way of renewing contact with their 'tribe' is to return to last winters site and wait for their friends and relations to rejoin them there.

**Teal:** On Aug 21 there were more than 200 at Pulborough Brooks

**Garganey:** The Lymington area bird as not been reported since Aug 19 (when a second bird turned up, perhaps encouraging both to set off south) and the only Hampshire sighting this week was at Alresford Pond on Aug 20. Surprisingly with all the activity of the Bird Fair around Rutland Water Mark Cutts (one of our local 'Amigos') managed to see a Garganey, a Black Tern and a Little Stint while he was there on Aug 18/19

**Shoveler:** The first mass arrival of 262 birds was recorded on Aug 20 but in the Netherlands - locally just 2 were new at the Drayton lake east of Chichester on Aug 21 (perhaps part of the same 'return flight'?)

**Honey Buzzard:** These two were on the move in a big way with at least 26 seen in the Netherlands on Aug 18 and 30 in Germany on Aug 24. Over here at least one unexpectedly overflew Cornwall on Aug 20 with singles seen on Aug 22 over the Isle of Wight and over a pub at Berwick near Eastbourne with another over the Downs near Lewes on Aug 23

**Sparrowhawk:** Back in April 60 Sparrowhawks flew north over a Netherlands site on Apr 18 followed by 52 at a different site on Apr 25 and these migrants are now starting to return with a report of 15 passing over Dungeness on Aug 23

**Osprey:** Single birds were reported at 13 different sites in southern England this week

**Red-footed Falcon:** A single observer reported seeing one taking dragonflies over Ivy Lake at Chichester this week. I see that my last report of this species was dated June 11 when one was killed by a Sparrowhawk in Derbyshire

**Hobby:** These seem to be starting to head south but the only report of a 'flock' was of four seen over Sandwich bay on Aug 22

**Spotted Crane:** RBA reported a total of 3 in the UK on Aug 18 and two on Aug 23 - one of these was probably at Christchurch Harbour where one seems to have been present from Aug 18 to 24. The only other southern bird was at Farlington Marshes on Aug 18 & 19 only

**Dotterel:** According to the RBA service there were two in the UK on Aug 19 and 3 on Aug 21 but the only located reports that I know of were of one over Folkestone on Aug 20 and one over Sandwich on that same day. On Aug 25 Trektellen reported a total of 24 birds at two sites (including 15 birds in Belgium)

**Ruff:** One has been on the Lymington shore from Aug 9 to 23 at least with two there on Aug 22 & 23. One was at the Blashford Lakes on Aug 21, when another appeared at Pagham Harbour, and on Aug 24 one was at Farlington Marshes. Aug 25 brought news of 14 at Rye Harbour but I am not sure if these were a flock

of new arrivals or just a count of the birds that had been there for some time (there were around 20 on the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Aug 16)

**Woodcock:** The first signs of autumn movement come from a bird ringing station in the Netherlands which seems to have netted single birds on Aug 12 & 20 with two birds on Aug 16

**Wood Sandpiper:** We seem to have had more of these than usual in southern England this month with reports from 8 different sites this week including a reported count of 12 on the Lymington shore on Aug 19 (with a more definite 6 there on Aug 22). Elsewhere this week there have been 3 on the Exe estuary, 3 at Lodmoor (Weymouth), 5 at Rye Harbour and singles at Pagham Harbour and Sandwich Bay

**Common Sandpiper:** Sandwich Bay achieved a count of 127 on Aug 20 (I think this was from a boat trip along the River Stour)

**Black Tern:** Dungeness recorded 55 passing on Aug 21 and the first autumn sightings of singles over Langstone Harbour and Ivy Lake at Chichester were reported

**White-winged Black Tern:** Two of these, plus one Black Tern, were among the birds coming to roost in Langstone Harbour on the evening of Aug 24

**Cuckoo:** Eight reports this week indicate the daily departures of young birds this week

**Little Owl:** Following a BBC Radio programme on the species Barry Yates (warden of Rye Harbour) has expressed his personal opinion that these birds are cute little creatures which live off beetles and worms - he has experienced them killing and eating the chicks of Little Tern and Skylark plus Storm Petrel (presumably the Petrels were taken by owls on islands where the Petrels nest)

**Short-eared Owl:** One was reported several times at Farlington Marshes in the second half of July with no further reports until Aug 14 when one was seen at Reculver on the north Kent coast and another at the Thornham marshes on Thorney Island. There had been sightings at both locations back in June so maybe the owls have been lurking there through the summer?

**Nightjar:** None reported in England since Aug 16 when one was near Romsey and the only two reports this week come from a French site on the coast of the Bay of Biscay near the Spanish border

**Swift:** Sightings are still being reported almost daily though one near Basingstoke on Aug 26 was said to be the latest the observer had ever seen there. The last major fly past by these departing birds came on Aug 19 when 100 were over Christchurch Harbour, 48 over Southampton and 18 over Titchfield Common

**Kingfisher:** The first was back at Farlington Marshes on Aug 23 when ringers at Reculver on the north Kent coast also logged their first of the year. Not sure if these were juveniles but one netted at Sandwich Bay on Aug 24 was (distinguished by the white tip to its bill and the lack of orange colour on its legs)

**Wryneck:** I have seen 22 reports this week and RBA has put out UK totals of 9 birds on Aug 23 and 7 on Aug 24. Locally they have been seen at Calshot on Southampton Water and Luccombe Down on the Isle of Wight but not so far at Farlington Marshes.

**Sand Martin:** 100 flew over Dungeness on Aug 24 and locally six were over the Langstone South Moors on Aug 24 with 12 seen there on Aug 25

**Swallow:** The night roost at Thurlestone Bay in south Devon had more than 4000 birds on Aug 20

**House Martin:** 400 went over Sandwich Bay on Aug 21 when 42 were over the Eastleigh Lakes. On Aug 25 there were 10 over the Langstone South Moors with 1421 over a single site in the Netherlands

**Tree Pipit:** On Aug 23 there were 20 at Christchurch Harbour and 26 at Durlston

**Yellow Wagtail:** Dungeness had 38 departing birds on Aug 21 and 80 on Aug 23 while Rye Harbour had more than 200 on Aug 24 when Dungeness had another 75. On Aug 23 even Farlington Marshes was allowed to see 5.

**White Wagtail:** Portland recorded its first two autumn birds on Aug 23 (the only earlier report was of one at Lymington on Aug 8)

**Common Redstart:** The highest count of departing migrants this week was 13 at Cissbury Ring in Sussex on Aug 24

**Whinchat:** More than 24 reports including one on the Langstone South Moors on Aug 24 & 25 but the highest count was of 8 at Sandwich Bay on Aug 21

**Wheatear:** Max 50 at Portland on Aug 22 and locally 2 on the Langstone South Moors on Aug 24

**Fieldfare:** Approaching winter birds were seen at five Netherlands sites this week with a max of 25 birds on Aug 18

**Mistle Thrush:** A flock of 30 was at Acres Down in the New Forest on Aug 23

**Grasshopper Warbler:** A total of 42 birds were seen in the Netherlands on Aug 24

**Aquatic Warbler:** Seen at six sites during the week

**Sedge Warbler:** 100 were on Portland on Aug 20 and 110 at Christchurch Harbour on Aug 21

**Reed Warbler:** Max of three birds seen in England this week and a max of 93 at a Belgian site on Aug 21

**Melodious Warbler:** One was at Beachy Head on Aug 20

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Max of 21 at Seaford on Aug 19

**Common Whitethroat:** Max of 38 at Seaford on Aug 19

**Garden Warbler:** Max of 3 at Christchurch on Aug 21

**Blackcap:** Max of 25 at Christchurch on Aug 21

**Willow Warbler:** Max of 52 at Dungeness on Aug 21

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Max of 15 at Cissbury Ring north of Worthing on Aug 24

**Pied Flycatcher:** Max of 15 at Portland on Aug 20

**Lesser Grey Shrike:** In addition to one or two Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes the first Lesser Grey Shrike turned up in the Scillies on Aug 22

**Goldfinch:** The first flock to reach the 100 mark was seen in the Lymington area on Aug 22

**Linnet:** The first autumn flock of 200 birds was seen in the Worthing area (Steyning) on Aug 18

**Lapland Bunting:** The first to be seen in England this autumn was in the Sheffield area of Yorkshire on Aug 23

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Lesser Emperor:** There have now been seven reports of this migrant so far this summer but a sighting of a pair egg-laying at Eastbourne on Aug 23 was significant (there has been previous breeding in Cornwall only)

**Red-veined Darter:** Although migrants of this species appear and breed each year this is not yet a fully established resident in England so evidence of 26 emerging in Berkshire and more than 22 seen at Badminton Common near Calshot in Hampshire this week were significant

**Willow Emerald Damselfly:** Singles seen in Suffolk and Norfolk this week

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Common Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Lesser Emperor, Gold Ringed, Black-tailed Skimmer, Keeled Skimmer, Four spotted chaser, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, Emerald Damselfly, Scarce Emerald Damselfly, Willow Emerald Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly, Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Small Red Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly,

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Dingy Skipper:** Two reports of second brood insects seen at Malling Down near Lewes this week

**Swallowtail:** A single report of one being seen for four days in a Hampshire garden suggests that it was bred and released there rather than flying in from the continent (or, even less likely, from the Fens)

**Clouded Yellow:** I have only seen 18 reports for the year so far so not a good migrant year but the sightings have included one in Havant Thicket on July 24 and another on Thorney Island on Aug 20

**Brown Hairstreak:** Twelve reported sightings this year since the first on Aug 5. In Hampshire the only reports have come from Shipton Bellinger near Andover (but included a count of 17 on Aug 10) while they seem to have been seen in at least five different areas of Sussex with at least seven seen at the Steyning Rifle Range site on Aug 23

**Adonis Blue:** The second generation has been doing well in Sussex with 210 seen on Malling Down (Lewes) and 121 at Mill Hill (Shoreham) both on Aug 21

**Painted Lady:** This species has been faring better than Clouded Yellow with 59 reports that I know of since March this year but none of these reports has been of more than three insects.

**Marbled White:** Reports from all sites other than Durlston ceased after Aug 15 but Durlston was still reporting them as numerous up to Aug 25 (on Aug 23 the rangers diary said there were still hundreds there)

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Purple Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath.

#### **OTHER INSECTS:**

##### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Volucella zonaria hoverfly:** For an impressive closeup taken by Cliff Dean on a visit to Norfolk on Aug 21 see

<http://rxbirdwalks.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/p1060270.jpg>

**Volucella pelluscens:** The first report of this slightly smaller and less colorful species came from Stockbridge Down in Hampshire on Aug 18

**Mottled Grasshopper:** For a photo taken at Rye Harbour on Aug 24 illustrating the camouflage of this insect see [http://rx-](http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/rxtodaymottled%20grasshopperDSC02574.JPG)

[wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/rxtodaymottled%20grasshopperDSC02574.JPG](http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/rxtodaymottled%20grasshopperDSC02574.JPG)  
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**Stripe-winged Grasshopper:** See

<http://www.insectopia.co.uk/Grasshoppers/grasshoppers%20and%20crickets.htm>

for a photo of this insect reported at Durlston on Aug 24 along with Speckled Bush Cricket, Long-winged Conehead, Great Green Bush Cricket and Dark Bush Cricket

## PLANTS

**Allseed (*Radiola linoides*):** I recently saw some Many-seeded Goosefoot and mentally confused the name of that common plant with this rare one which I have only seen once in the past on the edge of a New Forest pond. Luckily Graeme Lyons has recently seen the real thing on Chailey Common near Haywards Heath, allowing me to see his photo of it at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/johnny-allseed.html> For a photo of the even rarer Four-leaved Allseed see

<http://www.arkive.org/four-leaved-allseed/polycarpon-tetraphyllum/#text=Facts> but you are only likely to come across this in counties west of Dorset

**Green Amaranth:** I had my first sight of this for the year on Aug 20 at a site where it appears annually in Havant in a very stunted form (growing from pavement cracks in Juniper Square)

**Marsh Willowherb:** Brian Fellows has recently been successful in finding this in the Fishbourne Church marshy fields near Chichester and it has also come out at Dungeness where it was thought to be extinct. A photo of the Dungeness plant can be seen at <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/marsh%20willowherb.jpg>

**Purple Loosestrife:** This seems to be vanishing from the Havant area but I believe I have found a flourishing colony of it growing by the Langbrook Stream on the far side of the South Moors 'hay field' where I saw a patch of the right colour distantly from the 'orchid field' on Aug 20.

**Ivy:** Flowers are now close to opening at a couple of places in Havant

**Hairy Bindweed:** After finding plants with some characteristics of this species recently on Portsdown I found several showing all the features (pink candy striping on the flowers, hair on both flower and leaf stalks, and winged flower stems) in Havant Cemetery on Aug 20

**Devil's bit Scabious:** This has maintained a tenuous hold on the Langstone South Moors orchid field for years but it seemed to be doing better than usual when I was there on Aug 20

**Michaelmas Daisy:** Brian Fellows tells us the first flowers were open on garden escape flowers by the Westbrook Stream in Emsworth on Aug 22

**Saw wort:** Several years ago this could be found growing by the Hayling Coastal Path but it has long vanished from that site (thanks to Rabbits) and I know of no

local site for it in the Havant area but on Aug 24 Graeme Lyons found the species flowering on Chailey Common near Haywards Heath and you can see his photos at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/the-saw-in-red-house.html> It has also been reported at Durlston this summer.

**Least Duckweed:** Yet another invasive species clogging up our waters - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/8/21/pity-lesser-duckweed.html>

**Cockspur Grass:** A mass starting to push up through pavement cracks in The Twittens road in Havant this week

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Chinese Water Deer:** Cliff Dean had his first encounter with the species, a brief glimpse of a female and her young seen when visiting Strumpshaw Fen in Norfolk. You can find Cliff's brief mention of their existence in his blog entry at <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/a-bad-decision-and-a-good-one/> sandwiched between some dramatic photos of *Volucella zonaria* hoverflies and a photo of a padlock apparently abandoned by its owner after attaching it to a metal railing in the centre of the small town of Wroxham - below this photo the words **Lucchetti d'Amore** appear in red (in his blog such entries in red are hyperlinks and if you click this one it will take you to an entry in his blog written when he was in Venice and came on hundreds of these symbols of eternal love between modern youths). If you want to know why I am hooked on Cliff Dean's blog see his latest entry at <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/08/26/nosy/> and see if you share my pleasure in sharing his pleasure in the unexpected (and some of his thoughts on 'the way we live now' as expressed in his comment on sterile lawns). Until reading this latest entry I had never thought that the reason for tall chimney stacks on old buildings was to carry any sparks well above and away from the thick thatch that was once piled high on those rooves.

**Hedghogs:** I have only seen three Hedghogs this year - one was a small young one desperately searching for food in the grass of a Hayling Island roadside on Jan 23 (that one was almost certainly not going to survive the winter); the second was a corpse seen in May beside a Havant footpath well away from a road, indicating that road deaths are not the only threat to the survival of the species in this country; and the third was a dusk sighting of a large and seemingly healthy individual in my own garden on Aug 1. If the species is to survive in southern England it needs help from humans, not just the Hedgehog Hospitals to which you can take injured, sick or orphaned young, but practical help with their day-to-day living. Putting out the right food for them; making small gaps in garden fences to allow them to roam freely; and providing them with winter hibernation homes and springtime nurseries for their young are all things we can do and one person already doing this in the Emsworth area (no doubt there are others I do not know of) gets a mention in Brian Fellows website this week - see his Aug 24 entry in <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> and scroll down to the heading 'Hedghogs' (under 'Caroline's News')

**Hare:** These can still be found in open country but have almost vanished from the coastal fringe around Havant so it was good to see that one could still be seen on Thorney Island last week

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 20 - 26 (WEEK 34 OF 2012)**

**Mon 20 Aug**

### **Two good finds in Havant cemetery**

A walk round the small section of the cemetery belonging to the Havant United Reformed Church, which had become neglected and overgrown in recent years, not only showed me that The Conservation Volunteers (who have now taken over the habitat management of the site) have cleared narrow paths which allow access to the whole area without destruction of the majority of the long grass areas, but also showed me that two lovely **Wasp Spiders (Argiope bruennichi)** are enjoying the habitat. Even better, these paths led me around the site by a new route along which I discovered several plants of **Calystegia pulchra (Hairy Bindweed)** which I have never seen in the Havant area before - unlike the plants which I found on Portsdown last Tuesday the plants here did have the characteristics demanded by Stace's Flora (hairy flower and leaf stalks plus wings to the flower stalks).

Also seen here in the hot sunshine were both **Meadow Brown** and **Gatekeeper** butterflies and **several species of Hoverfly**, one of which had the distinctive black and yellow lengthwise striping on its thorax, coupled with crosswise black and yellow banding of its abdomen showing it was a *Helophilus* species. While trying to get a close look at these insects I had a close encounter with my first **Harvestman** of the year.

Elsewhere in the cemetery there was evidence of departing summer migrant birds - just a couple of over-flying **House Martins** and the ticking calls of a **Blackcap** in some Ivy before it emerged and flew into the trees

Another sign of the time seen on the way to the cemetery was the first expanded Ivy buds.

In the afternoon I took a longer walk to Langstone South Moors where **Devils Bit Scabious** was starting to flower in the 'orchid field' from which I looked back to the Langbrook stream, now two fields away, and saw a 'purple patch' which I am pretty sure must have been **Purple Loosestrife** which would be new to this area.

There was nothing new on the Budds Farm pools and as I walked home along the shore I could only see one plant of **Slender Hare's Ear** though it was now in flower. Nearing home I went through Juniper Square where half a dozen tiny plants of **Green Amaranth** had recently come up through the pavement cracks where I have seen them in recent years. Finally, back at home after dark, I was treated to my fourth concert of quavering calls from a **Tawny Owl** (probably this year's youngster now seeking his own territory) in the Billy Line trees at the end of my garden

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 6 - 12 (WEEK 32 OF 2012)**

**BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** We have all heard of seabirds dying as a result of getting involved with fishing tackle (and, further from home, of the giant floating island of plastic which has built up in the Pacific ocean), and from time to time anti-litter campaigns focus on the way in which some Postmen discard the rubber bands used to separate mail during the delivery process, but this week the Postmen seem to have been targetting the Great Crested Grebe. See <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/bridled-grebe.jpg> - the photo was taken by Barry Yates at Rye Harbour on Aug 12

**Shearwaters:** This has been a week for seeing Shearwaters off the Cornish and Devon coasts. **Cory's Shearwater** had not been reported in UK waters until July 12 when one was logged in the Scillies but the maximum count in the following week was no more than 4. After that there were no more reports until Aug 2 and on Aug 3 the Scillies reported 120 of them and Cornwall saw 115 off Lands End (presumably the same birds). The same pattern is true of **Great Shearwater** sightings - four singles seen between July 2 and 17 with 22 seen off Lands End on Aug 3. A few of both species are probably still around. Sooty Shearwater is more widely and frequently seen with sightings off northern Britain as early as May 14 with several in June but no more than 3 were seen together until July 15 when Cornwall recorded 13 at Pendeen before there were 29 off Lands End on Aug 3. This week a 'feeding frenzy' of more than 1000 **Manx Shearwaters** has been seen off south Devon and 'Aug 3 effect' on **Balearics** brought a report of 760 from the Channel Isles

**Storm Petrels:** Plenty of these still around off the West Country with a peak count of 250 from one boat trip around the Scillies on July 30

**Little Bittern:** One was in Wales in April and another spent most of June in the London Lee valley (before it was seized with Olympic White Water canoeing fever causing the latest report to come from the quieter French countryside (one at the Lac de Marcenay on Aug 7

**Night Heron:** The bird which has been in the Lymington area since at least June 2 was still there on June 11

**Little Egret:** It would seem that these have 'gone out of fashion' among birders with no one bothering to make an official count of the Langstone Pond birds during the 2011 breeding season and with Rye Harbour (which reported ten more or less monthly roost counts during 2011) only publishing its second for this year during the week (18 on Feb 2 and at least 49 on Aug 10). It is inevitable that we cannot record (or digest) all that is known about every species but it is interesting to 'a dedicated follower of fashion' to observe what's 'U' and what is 'non-U' (do you remember that controversy?). One bit of information that I (as an Egret enthusiast) would like to know more about is the casual remark from the Scillies that the presence of 10 Egrets on the Islands on Aug 3 'marks the start of their return to the Islands' .. last year they remarked on a count of 14 there on Sep 1 as the 'usual autumn influx' and I am wondering if, like human birders, the Egrets have a season in which they 'go birdwatching' in the Scillies (no doubt this phenomenon is just part of the post-breeding dispersal of this species)

**White Stork:** The number already leaving northern Europe is gradually increasing day by day - 36 on Aug 4, 37 on Aug 6 and 44 on Aug 10

**Glossy Ibis:** I suspect I have ignored reports of these from the continent but I see that the presence of one in the Netherlands on Aug 7 is the first to go into my database from a continental site following 146 from the UK so far this year. Perhaps one of the reasons it caught my eye was that it co-occurred with the first report of a **Sacred Ibis** for the year (in the Netherlands on Aug 10) - none of those so far in the UK

**Mute Swan:** The small moult flock at the Broadmarsh Slipway here in Havant which numbered just 18 on July 26 and grown to 21 on Aug 6. The only large moult flock that I am aware of remains the one in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester which had 128 on July 30.

**Teal:** 44 were back at Pulborough Brooks on Aug 7 and 20 were in Pagham Harbour on Aug 9 (with 102 at Ousistreham in Normandy on Aug 7)

**Shoveler:** More than a dozen were back at the Exe estuary in Devon on July 30 but across the Channel in France Ousistreham had 37 on Aug 7 and a Netherlands site had **106 Pochard** on Aug 4

**Goosander:** Another manifestation of autumn wildfowl was seen on Aug 7 when a flock of 8 juvenile Goosanders appeared in Christchurch Harbour (now doubt recently fledged from nests not far up the Hampshire Avon or the Dorset Stour)

**Honey Buzzard:** These are now being seen on the move almost daily on the continent with a peak of 10 seen together (and maybe 23 in total) reported on Aug 5

**Montagu's Harrier:** One lucky birder saw one flying south 'fast and low' over Broomy Plain in the New Forest on Aug 9 - he was certainly luckier than the birder who, many years ago, was killed on the Cranborne road in Dorset when foolishly walking line abreast across the narrow country road at dusk after visiting a Montagu's nesting site in the Sixpenny Handley area - I was not present on that occasion but had been there a couple of days earlier and often thought about it subsequently when leading nature walks - for some reason when people are in a group pursuing their own interest they entirely lose their normal sense of being part of a community in which they have to look after their own safety, and respect the rights of others, (as can be witnessed in the way twitchers will break through hedges or trample down crops, or in the antipathy between birders and dog-walkers). I was reminded of this recently when a rare bird turned up in an open cast mining area and Lee Evans had to remind twitchers that it was both an offence and dangerous to hitch a lift across country on an industrial motor-driven belt installed for moving the extracted minerals.

**Osprey:** These will be moving over the south coast for some time yet (last year the final sighting was not until Dec 2 at Kingsbridge in Devon) and they can currently be expected at Thorney Island, Titchfield Haven, the Lymington shore and the Cuckmere valley in Sussex with chance sightings possible almost

anywhere (one was over Basingstoke on Aug 5 and another over Cheriton at the head of the River Itchen on Aug 4)

**Merlin:** The first back on the south coast was seen in the Cuckmere valley on Aug 1 and this week one was at West Wittering (mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Aug 8 with another in the Rye Bay area (at Winchelsea) on Aug 9

**Hobby:** My last record of one last year came from Fleet in Hampshire on Oct 28 but many are already heading south - locally one flew over Northney on Hayling Island on Aug 5 and Dorset reported 6 different birds at 4 sites on Aug 10

**Quail:** Although these are still being reported in the Netherlands up to Aug 10 the last report from southern England (the Downs north of Worthing) was on Aug 2

**Spotted Crane:** There were reports of spring passage through the UK in May and June but the autumn passage which we expect seems to have started on Aug 11 with a young bird seen near Penzance in Cornwall

**Coot:** Autumn dispersal seems to have started this week - I found the only numerous bird on the Budds Farm pools here in Havant was Coot when I was there on Aug 6 and somewhere on the internet this week I saw another reference to their return to winter quarters (I thought it came from Cliff Dean who is well known for his love (?) of this species when he has to count them at Pett Level but I cannot pin the blame on him)

**Dotterel:** Another bird that is maybe now starting to leave us - more than 20 reports of spring passage ceased on May 26 and now, on Aug 5, we have the first sighting of the species on its way south (but still in the western Isles)

**Golden Plover:** These have already reached the south coast and Rye Harbour already has a daytime roosting flock of 28 birds (the species feeds by night and sleeps by day). The Rye count was made on Aug 8 when a Trektellen count of 76 birds came from a Netherlands site.

**Lapwing:** These started to return from breeding some time ago (100 were back at Rye Harbour by June 17, 85 were at Sidlesham Ferry pool on July 20 and 438 were logged at a Netherlands site on Aug 9) but I have yet to see one on my local Langstone shore, however a flock of 10 has been in the Northney marina area just across the water since Aug 2

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One has been seen on the Hampshire Solent shore at the traditional undisclosed site where it was seen on Aug 9

**Curlew Sandpiper:** One or two have been regularly seen on the Lymington shore since July 23 and two were there on Aug 11 with other recent sightings at Rye Harbour and the Oare Marshes in north Kent

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** One which had been visiting Britain spent its last night at Portland, clocking in there on the evening of Aug 9 before flying off west at dawn on Aug 10

**Wood Sandpiper:** These have been providing interest at five sites this week with Pulborough Brooks and the Lymington shore being the best bets for a casual sighting but the peak count of 5 was at the Exminster Marshes in Devon on Aug 7

**Skuas:** In addition to Pom. Arctic and Great a couple of **Long-tailed** showed up this week - one came into Christchurch Harbour on July 29 and the other was seen in Aug 3 near Lands End

**Sabine's Gull:** One or more adults have given rise to nine sightings around England since June 30 with the most recent sighting probably the work of two birds. One was seen between Aug 2 and 5 in the Scillies, Devon and Cornwall, the other at Rye Harbour and Dungeness on Aug 4 and 5

**Bonaparte's Gull:** One was seen around Princes Lake in Eastbourne on Aug 4, 5 and 6

**Great Black-backed Gull:** The pair which nested for the first time on a raft in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth this year, and were first seen there on Apr 22, were not to be seen there after Aug 2 when they seem to have moved away with their two young (a third chick had succumbed, maybe to cold and rain, on June 8). Despite their murderous reputation they were only once seen making a violent attack on other birds (driving off a pair of Herring Gulls that may have had thoughts of sharing the nest site on May 15) though they did try to dissuade humans from using the paths on either side of the pond for a brief period (I think when the eggs were being laid). Surprisingly they seemed happy to let Coots and Cormorants share the raft.

**Common Terns:** I am not au fait with the current breeding status of gulls and terns in Sussex and I had the impression that when the Black Headed Gulls finally gave up their attempts to nest on Stakes Island in Chichester Harbour and moved en masse to the Langstone Harbour islands in 1997 the Common Terns had also abandoned the site but when I walked round Cobnor Point this week the noise and activity on the island seemed to indicate that some Common Terns had bred there this year and I see from the 2010 Sussex Bird Report that there was still some attempted breeding up to that year - I have the impression that it is the Chichester Lakes site which the Common Terns have abandoned, not Stakes Island. For those not familiar with the history of Stakes Island my version of that story is that the gulls made the move to Langstone after many years of failed breeding caused by the nests being washed away by high tides despite many years of winter work parties under the direction of Joan Edom shoveling shingle to maintain a nesting area above the high watermark - I see from Anne de Potier's contribution to the SOS 50th anniversary Newsletter that she had been involved in this work as far back as 1979.

**Tawny Owl:** The Olympics have brought much excitement to the nation but not nearly as much pleasure as I received last night (Aug 10) from hearing through my open window, well after dark, the quavering calls of a Tawny Owl coming from the trees lining the Billy Trail rail line at the bottom of my garden. In the 1970s the Owls were regularly heard from late summer through the winter but this was the first time I have heard one from the house in more than 30 years (though they have been heard by other less than half a mile away - south of the A27 - within the last few years)

**Departing Migrants:** Time is short today as a result of the Olympics but the following species have been on the move this week: Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Nightjar, Swift, Sand Martin, Swallow, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Nightingale, Common Redstart, Whinchat, Wheatear, Grasshopper Warbler, Aquatic Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Wood Warbler, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher.

**Nightjar:** Something that seems to happen to someone each autumn is that they wake up to find a Nightjar sitting on their garden fence, happily sleeping in the believe that their cryptic plumage makes them invisible. This year on Aug 10 it was a birder living in the Durrington area of Worthing who found one on his garden shed roof.

**Common Swift:** These won't be with us much longer but on Aug 9 around 500 were seen to leave at Portland and 700+ were seen that day over the Penzance area of Cornwall. We also had an **Alpine Swift** in Norfolk on Aug 6

**Sand Martin:** Dungeness saw 330 leaving on Aug 4 (after 200 on Aug 1 and 50 on Aug 2) and Christchurch Harbour had a night roost of 700 departing birds on Aug 6 with several hundred leaving from Portland on Aug 8

**Swallow:** The only roost reported this week was of a paltry 250 birds at Thurlestone Bay (South Devon) on Aug 4

**Yellow Wagtail:** The first hint of any mass departure came on Aug 11 when Rye Harbour reported a flock of 80 birds

**Wheatear:** The first autumn bird to be seen on Thorney Island was not there until Aug 6 but elsewhere the tempo increased with 30 birds in the Cuckmere valley on Aug 8 and 30 more seen at Portland on Aug 9

**Aquatic Warbler:** This week saw the first mention of this autumn visitor - three reports from the continent followed by one bird in south Devon on Aug 10

**Melodious Warbler:** The first autumn vagrant for Britain was at Portland on Aug 9

**Wood Warbler:** Reports from Sandwich Bay, Portland and Christchurch Harbour

**Willow Warbler:** First count of more than 100 at Beachy Head on July 28 increasing to 225 at Christchurch on Aug 9

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Migrant Hawker:** Sightings have become widespread this week (including two in my Havant garden)

#### Species reported this week:

Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly and Azure Damselfly

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Brown Hairstreak:** Aug 5 brought first of the year reports from the Adur valley in Sussex and Shipton Bellinger near Andover in Hampshire

**Chalkhill Blue:** Something has clearly caused a massive increase in the number of these emerging this year. See below the list of this week's species for a couple of paragraphs taken from the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website in which two eminent authorities on Sussex butterflies (Neil Hulme and Michael Blencowe) express their opinions of the size and cause of this year's extravaganza.

**Adonis Blue:** The summer brood began to emerge on Aug 5 at Durlston and on Aug 9 in Sussex

**Purple Emperor:** I commented last week on the apparent increase in the numbers of places where these butterflies could be seen but I must add one serendipitous sighting in our local area - on Aug 9 Barry Collins (the Chichester Harbour warden for Thorney Island) went to look over the roadside fence of the Brickkiln Pond on the southern fringe of Stansted Forest and was rewarded with a male Emperor actually landing on his head. This is a typically 'unknown site' to many who worship the Emperor but I have heard of the butterflies being seen there for many years going back to when John Rowe was the Forester and Michael Prior had not appeared on the scene. More recently you may recall some sightings at Stansted last year with one sighting near the chapel on July 16 but the most impressive report relates to 27 July 2010 when Michael Blencowe wrote .. "Tuesday was a big day for me! As many of you know I have never seen a Purple Emperor before. Of course I've had many opportunities to join Neil on one of his walks but I always wanted to find my own and, as I've told many people, I hoped that one day one would land right in front of me. On Tuesday 27th July

2010 that's exactly what happened. Not just one - but two Purple Emperors came tumbling out of the sky right front of me! The unfortunate thing was, however, that I was travelling at 45mph at the time, driving down a road adjacent to Stansted Forest. I glimpsed two large butterflies as they fell fighting from above. Before I could slam on the brakes they were sucked under the car! As I gazed into the rear view mirror I saw one fly off apparently unharmed. The other was flat on the road but righted itself - and I swear I saw it dust itself off - and that's when I saw that unmistakable profile. It too took flight and was gone. Unbelievable! We put the hazard lights on and leapt from the car and stared up into the canopy at the amazing sight above. We were directly below a Master Tree with three Emperors soaring, fighting and attacking the odd passing bird. Next day Neil joined us and a fourth, a female, was located. Neil explained that the previous day I had almost killed a male and female - female Emperors have been known to tumble from the sky to evade the advances of a male. It could have ended tragically for all three of us - but luckily we all lived to tell the tale - and mine is of my first Purple Emperor; seen in my rear view mirror."

### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Large Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Hairstreak, Purple Hairstreak, White Letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, White Admiral, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Ringlet

### **Chalkhill Blue explosion (copied from the Aug 3 entries on the Sussex BC website)**

**Neil Hulme writes:** Michael Blencowe and Mike Mullis have now completed their much more exhaustive survey of the entire Friston Gallops grassland area, much of which is improving as the result of a change in the cutting regime, following discussions between the Forestry Commission and Butterfly Conservation. Their total figure of **820,000 Chalkhill Blues** does not surprise me, and I suspected that the number just at the northern end of the site might be in the order of half a million, but initially didn't want to venture such a figure without some corroborative evidence.

In such a poor year for most butterflies, why are we seeing such an abundance of Chalkhill Blues? I suspect that the ultimate size of the potentially largest colonies is often limited by the availability of suitable food-plants, with droughting and competition for resources being a common scenario in most summers. This year we are all-too-aware of the conditions that will have led to **exceptionally lush growth of the horseshoe vetch**, for once capable of supporting a veritable army of Chalkhill Blue caterpillars.

Of related interest, in the last week or so we have had reports of Chalkhill Blue males well off the Downs, at Hailsham Country Park, Horam and Coggins Mill near Mayfield.

**Mike Mullis writes:** So how many Chalkhill Blue butterflies were there on the day? Estimates are always going to be highly speculative but there are certainly a phenomenal number up there at the moment. Neil H. came up with a conservative count of 200,000+ on his Thursday visit but yesterday's search covered a bigger area and who am I to doubt Michael's frantic use of the calculator back at his patio table, based on our joint-estimates of m2 densities over various paced-out grassland zones across the whole area. His final figure on the day was 800,000+ with well over 200+ mating pairs but the peak total for this colony will be very difficult to accurately calculate and there may be losses after any torrential downpours. So if the sun comes out this week-end, feel free to start counting again \_.. but do tread carefully! I agree with Neil that the most likely reason for these incredible numbers is the dire wet spring/summer of 2012 so every cloud has at least had a silver - or rather chalkhill blue \_ lining on the Downs of East Sussex. This year's abnormal rainfall has undoubtedly produced an abundance of leafy Horseshoe Vetch growth so the larval survival rates have been considerably higher than normal when the plants presumably get rapidly stripped of foliage in dryer years. It will be interesting to see if the imminent emergence of Adonis Blues bears this theory out

**Michael Blencowe sums up:** Yesterday Neil Hulme contacted me to say that numbers at the north end of the Gallops were exceptional and today, armed with a tape measure, I walked up to Gallops and joined Neil & Eric Hulme and Mike Mullis to witness this spectacle. There were incredible numbers of Chalkhill Blues up there however, as we reached The Gallops the heavens opened in typical summer 2012 style and we ended up getting a right good soaking. Despite this we still saw thousands of Chalkhill Blues and it was clear that 2012 was going to be a really special year at this site. After we dried off Mike and I decided to survey the entire site and estimate the numbers of Chalkhill Blue present here. The weather conditions were breezy and overcast and most of the butterflies only flew when they were approached. The site is around 250,000 metres square and we walked up and down it (twice) estimating the number of Chalkhill Blues in a number of compartments. Chalkhill Blues were present in all areas of the site - in most years they are concentrated at the north and south ends. There are now pockets of great Chalkhill Blue habitat across the site where the butterflies averaged around 5 per square metre. However at their usual favoured site (on the slopes above Butchershole Bottom car park) they have reached plague proportions! I have never seen so many butterflies in my life; at one point there was a blizzard of Blue all around me, I had to raise my arm over my face to get through! I estimated 15 per square metre in one corner of this area! When we returned home we did the maths and our rough calculations estimated that there are **827,897 Chalkhill Blues at Friston Gallops** - and this I think is an underestimate! There must be well over a million butterflies spread across this site.

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Hoverflies:** The following species found at Rye Harbour this week can be seen on the RX website by visiting both <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/8/11/hemp-agrimony.html> and <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/8/10/castle-water-hide.html> The first entry features the eye-catching **Volucella zonaria** hoverfly (fairly common for a

species that relies on the small pools of water that occur in natural cavities in old trees to provide the life support system for raising its young) and the second entry has photos of a Barn Owl and a text which mentions three more hoverflies - *Helophilus trivittatus*, *Eristalis sepulchralis* and *Eristalis arbustorum*. Sam Smith has included a photo of *Helophilus trivittatus*, for *Eristalis sepulchralis* see <http://micropics.org.uk/Syrphidae/Eristalis/sepulchralis/eristalis%20sepulchralis.htm> and for *Eristalis arbustorum* see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/eristalis-arbustorum>

**Glow-worm:** On Aug 9 three were still glowing on the old 'Downslink' track in the Adur valley near Henfield

**Prickly Stick Insect:** This 5 inch long insect from New Zealand was a surprise find on Aug 6 hiding in a garden conifer tree at Brixham in South Devon. This item caught my eye as at the start of last winter an end of season check on Beach Huts on Hayling Island discovered a lonely Indian Stick Insect left abandoned in one of the huts and at that time I learnt that various species of these Stick Insects have now adapted to life in the south of England and that some Cornish gardens have a large and thriving population (often unknown to the owners of the property!)

**Bee Killer (*Philanthus triangulum*):** This species gets its first mention for the year after a sighting at Rye Harbour on Aug 6. These insects do kill bees and carry their bodies off to feed their young and can be found on Hayling and Thorney Islands among other south coast sites with sandy soil in which the adult insects dig holes in which to lay their eggs before stuffing the hole with a tasty bee as food for the larva. For more info see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beewolf>

## PLANTS

**Indian Balsam:** Although this may be an invasive alien which many people would like to see removed from Britain I still enjoy my first sight of this colourful plant each year and this week I not only saw it in a regular spot (Chidham village) but found that it had spread upstream in the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton to dominate the point where the overflow from the Portsmouth Water Company enters the stream.

**Marsh Mallow:** I found this flourishing at Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour on Aug 9 and co-ocidentally learnt during the week that the plant has its own moth species (2363 Marsh Mallow Moth *Hydraecia osseola*)

**Dwarf Gorse:** As I remarked in my Diary entry for Aug 10 this is the only Gorse species currently in flower giving you a chance (if you visit Havant Thicket) to learn to distinguish it from the Common Gorse that will soon resume flowering after its short summer break

**Caucasian Stonecrop:** This started to flower this week in the Havant New Lane cemetery where it was originally planted but which would be difficult to eradicate now

**Ivy:** Just a sign of the times was the very first hint of flower buds developing on Ivy this week

**Tamarisk:** Another sign of the passing seasons was the opening of new flowers on the shoreline Tamarisks around the local harbours

**Small toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*):** Brian Fellows made the first find of this plant for the year on Aug 8 on waste ground adjacent to Emsworth Rail Station. Graeme Lyons found it in Sussex last year but I have not seen it myself since 2007

**Lesser skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*):** I did manage to find this again in Havant Thicket this week but had some difficulty in accessing the site which is 'off the beaten track' - see my diary for Aug 10

**Devils' Bit Scabious:** This also started to flower this week and was found in Havant Thicket on Aug 10

**Goldenrod:** The wild species, not the Canadian garden species, had started to flower in Havant Thicket on Aug 10

**Early Goldenrod (*Solidago gigantea*):** This garden escape seemed to be well established at Nutbourne Farm Lane when I first noticed it last year and was flourishing there on Aug 9 (see my Diary page for details)

**Common Waterplantain:** Although this has probably been flowering for some time I did not see it until this week

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Sea life:** Last week we discovered that the Seawatch-Sw project had been wound up after the 2011 summer season but warm water and the holiday season nevertheless continue to bring those with an interest in sea-life into contact with the undersea fauna, especially of the south west peninsula of the British Isles, and this week I have seen the first report for the year of a **Pilot Whale** in the Scilly Isles area which also reported **Hawksbill Turtle** as well as the **Leatherbacks**. **Sunfish** and **Blue Sharks** were also present while four **Basking Sharks** were seen together off Porthgwarra at Lands End

**Froglings, Slugs and Adders:** For those staying at home here in southern England one unusual creature had its photo taken two metres up a tree in Havant Thicket - this was a **Great Grey (or Leopard) Slug** which can grow to 8 ins (20 cm) long and can vary in colour from pure white (exceptional) to various dark spotted pale colours as in the current photo to be seen at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-020-leopard-slug-hav-th-04.08.12.jpg>

If you want to see one Havant Thicket may be a good place to look as that is where I had my only encounter with this creature (on 30 Aug 2008) but it was on the ground! For more info see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax\\_maximus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limax_maximus) Two much commoner creatures reported this week have been **baby Frogs** which are now leaving their ponds and

may be encountered anywhere, and a **Black Adder** seen near Friston Forest in the Eastbourne area (Botley Woods near Fareham was in the past said to be a good place for them) - they are just a colour variant of the normal Adder. One memory which I have concerning Frogs leaving their birth ponds may be worth bearing in mind if global warming brings hotter summers in the future - a well cared for wildlife pond in a Hayling garden was surrounded by a wide stretch of brick paving which the emerging froglets took some time to cross before they could hide in the garden flowers, but one summer their emergence co-incided with a heat wave with the result that every last froglet died before it could reach the shade.

**Fungi:** Still no great excitement - this week just two **Blackening Waxcaps** pushed up through my garden lawn but did not like what they saw and went back below ground (more likely some surface dweller liked the look of them and ate them)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 6 - 12 (WEEK 32 OF 2012)**

**Fri 10 Aug**

### **Lesser Skullcap and Devils-bit Scabious in Havant Thicket**

This morning I headed for Havant Thicket to add these two plants to my flower list but before I came across them I am pretty sure that I had brief 'fly-bys' by both **Southern Hawker and Migrant Hawker dragonflies**. I also found **Dwarf Gorse** in full flower in several places and reflected that this is a good time for anyone unfamiliar with this species to see it before the **Common Gorse** resumes flowering (last year I found an early single flower on Aug 24 and general flowering started in mid-September).

Isolated plants of **Lesser Skullcap** can be found in several places in Havant Thicket and I have in the past found it at one spot in Stansted Forest but the site I visited this morning is the only place where it can be found en masse in the Havant area. This site is along the banks of a small stream where the ground is heavily shaded by trees with the result that there is virtually no ground flora except where the stream has created small gaps in the tree cover allowing sufficient light for this small plant to survive. For anyone wishing to find the plants the map reference is approx SU 717-103 but to get there first head for the major dip in the main vehicle track coming west from the Castle Road entrance - the dip is at SU 717-104 and is where the stream crosses under the main track. You will find it difficult to follow the stream south from this point so continue west along the track for about 100 metres to find a moderately well used path entering the wood and heading south-east towards the stream. When you reach the stream work down its banks looking for the colony of plants shown in my first photo, then search around for the one or two plants with flowers among the mass of leafy plants and you will hopefully find a few with one or two flowers as shown in my second photo.

General view of Skullcap site

Lesser Skullcap flowers

**Devils-bit Scabious** is much easier to find but there seem to be fewer flowers than in past years. Of the three places where I found it today the best place to look is at SU 718-101 at the southern end of a broad track just before it reaches the Gipsies Plain.

Other newly flowering plants are the **Goldenrod** lining the eastern boundary track at around SU 718-108 and with it were several fresh **Hieracium plants** while among the mass of **Ling Heather and Cross-leaved Heath** flowering in the Horsefoot Hill (northern) section of the woodland both **Purple Moorgrass** and **Tufted Hairgrass** were just starting to flower

**Thu 9 Aug**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **My annual pilgrimage to the Marsh Mallow**

For some years I have taken a long walk at this time of year from Nutbourne around Cobnor Point to see the **Marsh Mallow flowers** growing under the shoreline oak wood just west of Cobnor Point and today I made this pilgrimage but before starting I had a look at the circle of Golden Rod plants growing on the north side of Farm Lane which I have now convinced myself are **Early Golden Rod (Solidago gigantea)** which I have never seen anywhere else. The first photo below was taken with my back to the gate into the 'wild' field which you pass as you enter the path to the Nutbourne Bay shore and should enable you to locate the large circle of golden flowers which come out earlier than the common **Canadian Goldenrod**, do not stand tall like the common species, and prove their identity by the almost complete absence of hairs on stem or leaves. While in the grassy area north of Farm Lane I found 30 other plants in flower including **Wetted Thistle** but not the **Narrow-leaved Ragwort** that I normally see here (and which was still visible on July 5 but has now disappeared in the luxuriant growth but which will no doubt re-appear next year).

General view of Early Goldenrod site

Closer view of Early Goldenrod site

Close view of Early Goldenrod site

Heading down the path to the shore I saw a sign of approaching autumn in the **first glimpse of Ivy flower buds (still tiny)** and near the shore I saw what I am pretty sure was my first **Common Darter dragonfly** of the year typically resting on the bare ground before flying off at my approach.

Very few birds to be seen in the bay but before I reached the point where the 'new' path leaves the south east corner of the bay my flower list was up to 65 species and I had seen **Gatekeeper, Small and Green-veined White butterflies** and the bushes between the east side of the bay and the large field of wheat were crammed with **House Sparrows on their annual holiday** enjoying what they can of the grain harvest,

The long grassy 'new path' added **Meadow Brown, Common Blue and Large White butterflies plus a single Emperor Dragonfly** patrolling a substantial area of

water in the ditch beside the path. Also present were **many small red darter dragonflies** (plus two or three mating pairs) which looked substantially smaller than the first 'Common Darter' I had seen. I managed to get a photo of one and it seemed to add weight to **my feeling that these were Ruddy Darters** - I think the photo shows the waisted and club tailed body of a Ruddy Darter and has the two black dashes on the final segments of the abdomen which I have seen in some photos of Ruddy Darter but not Common Darter (though it is not listed as a diagnostic). Against the view that these were Ruddy Darters my photo does not show the strong red colour of Ruddy (more the orange red of Common) although the smaller size is generally true of Ruddy...

One Darter which I saw - Common or Ruddy?

Another feature of this path was the large number of **Linnets** seen along it and as we neared the Oak Wood the shore came into view and added a **family of Shelduck** plus lots of Black Headed Gulls, a couple of overflying Cormorants and Oystercatchers with many Curlew in the marine vegetation. Beyond them were a lot of **Common Terns** which looked as if they had been breeding on Stakes Island and I could hear a few Sandwich Terns in that area.

Returning to the shore the **Marsh Mallow seemed to be flourishing** - I saw clusters of plants both north and south of the normal area they inhabit (which is the length of the woodland) and I just took one typical photo of one stand of the plants. While in the Cobnor area I added both Red Admiral and Speckled Wood to the butterfly list and the plant list increased to 85 including **fresh flowers on Tamarisk**

A section of the Marsh Mallow flowers

Now heading north along the Bosham channel I added **Common Sandpiper** to the birds and by the time I got back to Nutbourne Bay the flower list was up to 106 species including late flowering **Dyer's Greenweed and my first sight of Pepper Saxifrage** with **Peacock and Holly Blue** added to the butterflies and a **male Black-tailed Skimmer** to the Dragonflies. As a bonus I had a good view of a **Helophilus species hoverfly** with the characteristic longitudinal black lining on its thorax and latitudinal black pattern on its abdomen.

Altogether an interesting and enjoyable walk of around six miles which I managed to totter round in just under five hours without collapsing!

**Wed 8 Aug**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

**Bartons Road playing fields**

As the clouds dispersed and the sun came out this evening I made a short cycle trip to the north end of New Lane and on across Bartons Road to have a look at the Lavant Stream where it runs between the playing fields and the railway.

The New Lane roadside on the way north gave me **Wild Radish** which I have not seen in flower for some time (in fact this seems to be my first for the year!). The stream also gave me another first in the shape of **Water-plantain** (the common variety, not the Narrow Leaved rarity of Emsworth's Westbrook stream!). Also seen here were **Sneezewort, Red Campion, Ragged Robin and Betony**.

Sadly my bike had a puncture requiring me to walk home but that brought its own reward in helping me to spot some **Fumitory** scrambling up the roadside vegetation. As I thought this might be Ramping Fumitory I brought home a specimen and on checking this I found the flowers were just over 1cm long, making it Common Ramping rather than Common Fumitory, but I also saw that the sepals were toothed all round their edges suggesting strongly (with other features) that this was **Tall Ramping Fumitory (F. bastardii)** but as this is listed in the Hants Flora as 'very rare' and I have never seen it before I am reluctant to claim it (especially as I very much doubt that I could find its site again!)

**Mon 6 Aug**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Budds Farm and Broadmarsh**

This morning I cycled west to Budds Farm and then followed the coast to the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes where I turned to come back along the cycleway before crossing Harts Farm Way and the abandoned Broadmarsh playing fields to cross the A27 and complete my trip via the Bedhampton Water Works.

The Langbrook Stream added **Stream Water Crowfoot, Water Figwort and Meadowsweet** to my month list and also gave me a substantial snack of the large blackberries that are now becoming ripe. Southmoor Lane gave me **Knotted Hedge Parsley** (though I had to look hard for it - I fear there will be none here next year) before I reached the 'waste ground' just north of Penner Road - this is always worth checking and today it gave me a single plant of **Moth Mullein**.

The Budds Farm pools had little of interest - the only birds present in any numbers were **Coot** and the **Swan family** almost escaped my attention though one parent and three cygnets did emerge from the thick bankside vegetation before I left. Heading along the shore towards the Hermitage stream mouth I counted **21 Swans** and then following the Brockhampton Stream I heard (but did not see) a **Kingfisher**.

The dusty roadside of Harts Farm Way opposite the Amenity Centre still had its **Annual Beard Grass** but it was not easy to spot, unlike the large clump of **Shasta Daisies** on the roadside just west of the Hermitage stream. Up on the 'mountain' **Hairy Vetchling** was still easy to find (in the grassy bay north of the path running along the north side of the mountain top).

Reaching the cycleway at the foot of the A27 embankment I was pleased to see a few **Pyramidal Orchids** still flowering while new additions were **Water Mint** (in very dry surroundings) and a mass of **Blue Fleabane** which had totally replaced the Yellow-wort which had been dominant here on my last visit. Still present was plenty of **Narrow-leaved Birdsfoot Trefoil (Lotus glaber)**.

Coming back along the cycleway I rode past the entrance to Broadmarsh and continued along the section beside the A27 sliproad where I came on my first **Dark Mullein** before crossing Harts Farm Way (**White Melilot** growing at the crossing point) to see that the **Creeping Yellow-cress** was still flourishing on the edge of the old playing fields. A surprise at the far side of the area was the blue of

two flowers of **Chicory** flowering at ground level from plants that had been cut down.

In the Bedhampton Springs area **Vervain** was inevitably flowering near the Mill Pool and there was already some black fruit on the **Mulberry Tree** overhanging the footpath from within the Water Company land. At the point where the springs overflow into the stream I found much new growth of **Himalayan Balsam** as well as the expected **Brooklime** and **Hybrid Water Speedwell**.

A short evening ride to add **Weasel's Snout** to my month list included a visit to the Eastern Road cemetery where **Caucasian Stonecrop** is now flowering.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 30 - AUG 5 (WEEK 31 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** It seems only a couple of weeks ago that the TV News was showing us pictures of water reservoirs within a few inches of reaching the 'Empty' mark and Graeme Lyons was complaining of the heat, when trying to carry out a plant survey on the Amberley Wild Brooks, using the phrase .. "the only shade out there was that cast by the horseflies" yet by Aug 2 a survey of the birds breeding on Bewl Water near Crowborough in Sussex spoke of the unusually high water level supporting 84 breeding pairs of Great Crested Grebe with 66 of those pairs still sitting.

**Balearic Shearwater:** It seems very few years ago that I was first made aware of this species through the setting up in 2007 (I think mainly due to Russell Wynn of the National Oceanographic Centre at Southampton) of the Seawatch SW project whose aim (copied from their website at <http://www.seawatch-sw.org/> ) was .. "to better understand the distribution and behaviour of migratory marine megafauna, both for scientific and conservation purposes. The priority is the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater"... Checking the BTO Birdfacts page I see that the species is still classed as Critically Endangered (likely to become extinct within 50 years) and is so rare that the BTO does not have a photo of one of the birds, but going to the Seawatch SW site I see that that project has now been wound up after getting sufficient volunteers to look for the birds, find there are lots of them, and so save them from extinction. Not only did they get a photo of the species but on 3 Sep 2011 they counted more than 2000 of them flying past Gwennap Head near Lands End in Cornwall. My review of the status of the species today was triggered by a Trektellen report of 760 of the birds seen off Jersey on Aug 3 this year after a count of 24 off Berry Head in Devon on Aug 1

**Night Heron:** It seems that the bird which was present on the Lymington shore from June 2 to 19 has re-appeared there, being seen on Aug 3 and 4

**Little Egret:** Langstone Pond is a year round centre for Little Egrets but their number varies greatly from month to month. The beginning of August marks the change from use of the pond as a breeding site (this year around 24 nests were occupied and it is probable that at least that number of juveniles were raised) to a transition camp for up to 200 birds (last year the highest evening roost count was

198 with an all time high in the past of 228). Good numbers remain until winter makes fishing in the harbours difficult (not just through strong winds and low temperatures but more importantly by reducing the time available for fishing as the period when the tide is too high for fishing becomes a significant portion of the reduced daylight hours) when the birds move inland or head south. By mid-February thoughts of breeding bring them back and by mid-April most of the nests will have been built though egg-laying probably does not occur until the weather suggests that conditions will provide enough food for the young. When the eggs (up to six) are laid they require three weeks incubation and when they hatch the birds remain in the nest for four weeks and then remain around the nests (dependent on their parents for food) for about another four weeks. One final fact about the Langstone Pond site is that it seems to be the only place in the UK where Egrets nest without the previous existence of a Grey Heron nest site. This week on Aug 3 I made the first evening count of birds coming in to roost and although I did not stay until it was too dark to see the birds I counted a total of 75 birds

**Spoonbill:** A single bird has been at Lodmoor (Weymouth) from July 22 to Aug 2 - although it was not reported as a juvenile at first I assume it has been a post breeding dispersal bird.

**Mute Swan:** Last week I commented on the absence of reports of summer moult flocks of Swans so on July 30 I went to the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester and found the expected (but unreported) flock of at least 128 birds

**Returning Wildfowl:** Although a few birds of most of the species that we see in the winter months have stayed to breed it is now several months since most of us have seen Wigeon, Teal, or Shoveler but there have been sightings during the past ten days of **Wigeon** (singles at Pagham, Exmouth and Christchurch), **Gadwall** (3 at Christchurch and 75 at a Netherlands site), **Teal** (up to 7 at Sidlesham Ferry and others at Pulborough and Christchurch), **Pintail** (one female at Titchfield Haven), **Shoveler** (12+ at Exmouth, 14 at Pagham inc 2 juvs, 5 at Pulborough), **Pochard** (1 at Thorney Little Deeps on July 22), **Eider** (one in Chichester Harbour on Aug 3), **Red-breasted Merganser** (one off Northney in Chichester Hbr from July 23 to Aug 2) and there are still a few departing **Garganey** to be seen at Exmouth, Wadebridge in Cornwall, Brownsea Island in Poole Hbr and one passing at Sandwich Bay

**Honey Buzzard:** Signs that these are already heading south come from reports of ten birds in total at four sites in the Netherlands on Aug 1

**Osprey:** Two present on Thorney Island on Aug 2 and others this week at Titchfield Haven and at the Arlington Reservoir in the Cuckmere valley (where one appeared to be a juvenile learning how to fish)

**Merlin:** One seen at the Pannell valley near Rye Bay on May 25 was said to be the latest to depart from Sussex this century and now one seen at the mouth of the Cuckmere river near Seaford is the joint earliest to return this century (equalling the early date of one seen on 1 Aug 2009)

**Quail:** One has been heard on the Downs north of Worthing up to Aug 2 and one was at the Lizard in Cornwall on Jul 27 (one other report from the Netherlands on Aug 2)

**Spotted Crake:** Reports of up to 2 in the Netherlands on Aug 2 and 4

**Baillons Crake:** Lee Evans tells us that there was a mini-invasion of these during June with up to 9 birds in the UK (none on the south coast)

**Black-winged Pratincole:** The first to reach Britain since 1996 was on Lewis (western isles) on Aug 2 according to RBA

**Sanderling:** 300 were on the Pilsey sands in Chichester Harbour on Aug 2

**Little Stint:** One has been on the Lymington shore since July 25 and on Aug 1 there may have been 3 there - on Aug 2 one was also seen on Thorney Island

**White-rumped Sandpiper:** One was reported on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on July 31

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One seen on the Lymington shore on July 29 and July 30 with others in Cornwall on July 30 and Aug 2

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Several now passing through with reports from Lodmoor (Weymouth), Lymington, Pagham Harbour, Christchurch Harbour and Wadebridge in Cornwall with 5 at a Netherlands site on Aug 1

**Dunlin:** These are now widespread but a count of 4000 at Thorney Island on Aug 2 was remarkable

**Buff Breasted Sandpiper:** It is quite a few years since I saw one on the Hayling Island Golf Course but I still take an interest in reports of the species and this week one was in Cheshire at Frodsham on July 30

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** One was at Slimbridge on the Severn estuary from July 26 to 30 at least

**Whimbrel:** Plenty of passage birds around at the moment with a flock of 40 on Thorney Island on Aug 2 (95 at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire on July 31)

**Long-tailed Skua:** In a year in which other Skua species (Arctic, Pom and Great) have all been seen in every month so far a clear sighting of a Long-tailed actually within Christchurch Harbour on July 29 was a good record - only the sixth that I have picked up for Britain this year and the first for the south coast.

**Sabine's Gull:** One seen off Rye Harbour on Aug 4 was only the third for south east England this year after one at Sandwich Bay on Jan 31 and one at Folkestone on June 30. The only others that I know of have been off the Scillies

and South Devon in July, at Flamborough Head on July 31 and off south Devon on Aug 2

**Little Tern:** It sounds as if the population of some distant breeding colony making a mass exodus from Britain happened to pass through Chichester Harbour on Aug 2 when a flock of 23 were seen from Thorney Island and a family group of three were seen across the water at Ella Nore (parent feeding two young)

**Cuckoo:** Singles (presumably juvs) seen at Fleet Pond on July 29 and at Sandwich Bay on Aug 1

**Short-eared Owl:** It now looks as if one may have stayed at Farlington Marshes through the summer, managing to evade being reported for long periods. Dates on which one has been reported there have been May 3, 6, 7, June 10, 15, 27, July 16, 24, 26 and 31. Some of the gaps between sightings might be accounted for if the bird moved to and from Thorney Island where it would be more likely to escape detection - dates for reports from Thorney Island were May 2, 17, and June 12 none of which conflict with Farlington reports. It is equally feasible that the reports from both sites represented a string of different birds moving north from the continent and pausing for a day or two on our south coast.

**Bee eater:** One was reportedly heard but never seen at Titchfield Haven on July 29

**Departing summer visitors:** The violent changes in our weather and the continuing decline in the availability of insect food has caused many birds to head south early though it may still have the effect of lengthening the 'departure window' if the weather improves and some birds stay on for a second or third attempt at nesting. Some **Swifts** seem to have been leaving for a long time (though we must remember that they do not breed in the first two years of their life and so are free to head south when they feel like it). **Kingfishers** are now starting to appear on the coast (some of them may be juveniles, others adults frustrated by floods). **Sand Martins** started to appear at Portland as early as June 25 but a more determined movement has been seen at Dungeness this week with 200 resting before their channel crossing on Aug 1 (when 135 flew south over Christchurch) and another 50 there on Aug 2. On July 29 there was a night roost of 100 departing **Swallows** at Thurlstone Bay in south Devon and on July 31 Farlington Marshes had a similar roost of 600. Very few **Yellow Wagtails** have been reported but there have been small parties at several south coast sites while **Grey Wagtails** seem to have started moving to winter sites (one was seen in the canalised Hermitage Stream near Bedhampton station in Havant on July 31) but one in Guestling Wood near the River Rother in East Sussex was heard singing on Aug 1 as if thinking of a second attempt at breeding. **Nightingales** have been seen at Beachy Head and Dungeness (with flocks of 21 and 35 passage birds already reported in the Netherlands). Single **Redstarts** have appeared at the coast in both Dorset and Hampshire while there have been 13 reports of **Whinchat** since the first autumn bird was seen on the Sussex Downs on July 22. No mass movement of **Wheatears** yet but singles have been seen this week at Portland, Pagham Harbour, Farlington Marshes, Christchurch and Pulborough.

The first **Grasshopper Warbler** was back at Durlston on July 20 since when others have been seen at Pagham, Portland, Christchurch, south Devon and Beachy Head. **Sedge and Reed Warblers** continue to move south with **Lesser Whitethroats and Garden Warblers** newly appearing on the coast this week. On Aug 3 we were told that 70% of the **Blackcaps** recently ringed at Beachy Head were adults indicating a poor breeding season. Also now heading south, in addition to the **Willow Warblers and Chiff Chaffs**, have been several **Spotted and at least one Pied Flycatcher**.

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Common Hawker:** Although these are normally on the wing from late June the first report of them that I have picked up was dated July 26 (though there were more than 100 flying at the Welsh site reporting them)

**Southern Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes barbarus*):** First report from Cliffe Pools RSPB site on the peninsula north of Rochester in Kent on Aug 1

**Willow Emerald Damselfly:** More than 15 were seen at Reculver on the north Kent coast on Aug 3. This species was rare in Britain until 2009 when it began to invade south east England. This year, after one odd report from south Wales on June 20, the first report was of 5 at Felixstowe on July 23 with one at Reculver on July 24 before the current sighting

#### **Species reported this week:**

I have not noted all the species reported this week but the records are there for all to see on the British Dragonfly Society Latest Sightings page at <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/latest-sightings>

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Chalkhill Blue:** Reports seem to indicate that this has been a very good year for the species with large numbers at all usual sites and 'unbelievable numbers' at Butchershole Bottom (north of Friston Forest in the Eastbourne area) - one observer had the following to say (on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website) about a visit to this site .. "Following the recent report, I popped down to Butchershole at Friston Forest this morning. I have heard of such things before, but nothing could have prepared me for my first experience of quite an extraordinary sight. Literally thousands of Chalkhill Blues many in very good condition . A quite extraordinary sight of butterflies sat all over the ground warming up in the overcast conditions. When there were small gusts of wind the air was full of clouds of butterflies just like leaves whipped up by a breeze. I and several other people were absolutely amazed at the profusion of Chalkhills. I counted near on 40 males on one piece of dog pooh" (Who said dog walkers were a nuisance?)

**Purple Emperor:** Reports this year show that this butterfly is much more widespread than we are led to believe by the tradition that they can only be seen by going to a small number of hallowed sites where the butterflies will only show themselves if you take them an offering of stinking rotten Asian shrimp paste. I am not in the least questioning the fact that they congregate round special 'master trees' for breeding purposes but it does seem that there are more of these than has been recognised in the past and also that these strong flyers do not hesitate to use their wings to explore the country at times when they are not on breeding duty. So far this summer I have seen sightings reported from 17 separate sites (i.e. including the Straits Enclosure and Goose Green, etc all within one Alice Holt Forest site) which include unexpected places such as the King Street in Emsworth (where a female landed on the tarmac to permit close inspection on Aug 4) and a small garden at Nyewood (south of Rogate in the Petersfield/Midhurst area), Wiston Village north of Worthing and the Chineham area of Basingstoke. They have also been seen in untypical habitat at Graffham Down near Midhurst and Pitt Down near Winchester while several reports have come from sites near to Havant (Havant Thicket, Southleigh Forest, Creech Woods near Denmead and Huntbourn Wood west of Portsdown) and others from Botley Woods and Rownhams Wood in the Southampton area.

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Large Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Purple Hairstreak, White Letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Holly Blue, White Admiral, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Ringlet

#### **OTHER INSECTS:**

##### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Great Green Bush cricket:** Adults started to appear on Aug 1 when I found four females on Portsdown and they also appeared at Durlston

**Grey Bush Cricket (*Platycleis albopunctata*):** This gets its first mention for the year from Durlston on Aug 1. For a photo see [http://www.naturspaziergang.de/Heuschrecken/Platycleis\\_albopunctata.htm](http://www.naturspaziergang.de/Heuschrecken/Platycleis_albopunctata.htm) and click on the photo to get a frighteningly large full screen version but do not expect to learn from it how to separate several very similar species

**Fen Raft Spider (*Dolomedes plantarius*):** A rarity seen by Graeme Lyons at the Pevensy Levels on Aug 1 and so rare that it has its own website - see <http://www.dolomedes.org.uk/> and if you want to know even more see <http://srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/Notes%20on/s/Dolomedes%20plantarius>

**Wasp spider (*Argiope bruennichi*):** I reported my own first encounter with this lovely creature last week but this week it gets a mention from Durlston but under their private name for it - Tiger spider

## PLANTS

**Mare's Tail:** My first sight of this for the year came at Fishbourne Mill Pond near Chichester on July 30 though the plants were too far out in the water to tell if they were flowering. The only other local site that I know of for this plant is Aldsworth Pond north of Emsworth but there is now so much tree growth round the pond that it is difficult to see them.

**Dittander:** Lots of this flowering beside the Fishbourne Channel on July 30.

**Tall Tutsan (*Hypericum x inodorum*):** I came across this for the first time in my life when in the base of the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit at Portsmouth on Aug 1 and I noticed large yellow flowers packed with long prominent stamens struggling to show themselves above the bramble bush in which they were growing. For a photo see [http://www.aphotoflora.com/af\\_hypericum\\_x\\_inodorum\\_tall\\_tutsan.html](http://www.aphotoflora.com/af_hypericum_x_inodorum_tall_tutsan.html)

**Horse Chestnut:** A sign of approaching autumn was the first fallen Conker under a Horse Chestnut tree seen on Aug 2

**Corn Parsley:** My first sighting of this in flower was in the Fishbourne meadows near Chichester on July 30

**Russian Vine:** My first sight of this common garden escape in flower came on Aug 2

**Rock Sea Lavender:** This uncommon plant which is marked as extinct in the Hants Flora was reported flowering at Durlston on July 31

**Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*):** This plant, which requires a site with a mixture of salt and fresh water and occurs at several places on the Hampshire coast, was abundant in the marshy SSSI field of the Warblington Farm when I was there on Aug 2

**Blue Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* ssp. *foemina*):** I had never seen this in my life before I came on two specimens growing on the top of Portsdown near Fort Southwick on Aug 1 - you can see my photo at <http://ralph-hollins.net/BluePimp.jpg>

**Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*):** I have been saddened by the failure of Round-leaved Fluellen to appear this year at a previously reliable site in the Warblington Cemetery but as I was walking home from the cemetery on Aug 2 I was surprised and delighted to find a mass of Sharp-leaved Fluellen in full flower beside the main road into Havant from Emsworth. It had replaced a Broom bush

recently removed from a council planting of Rose of Sharon and Fuchsia bushes at the junction of the Emsworth road with Meadowlands.

**Blue Water Speedwell:** When I was visiting the Fishbourne Meadows on July 30 I saw a plant of what I am pretty sure (by the small number of flowers in each raceme) was the pure species growing in the stream nearest to Fishbourne village

**Gipsywort:** First flowers seen on plants at Langstone Mill Pond on Aug 3

**Field Woundwort:** First plants found by Brian Fellows on July 30 in the gutter of the cycleway entering the A27 underpass (close to the A259/A27 interchange) from the Emsworth side. From their location it seems likely that these plants were an unintentional benefit from the dumping earlier this year of road building materials just uphill of where the plants were found allowing seeds brought with the materials to be washed down into the gutter by recent rain.

**Clustered Bellflower:** First flowers this year found on Portsdown on Aug 1

**Common Ragwort:** Arguments for and against the practice of pulling Ragwort (balancing possible harm to horses against benefit to insects) are well put in a webpage which I read about on the RX website - see <http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/campaigns/Ragwort>

**Marsh Ragwort:** My first sight of this came rather belatedly in the Fishbourne Meadows on July 30

**Canadian Fleabane:** First flowering noticed in Havant on Aug 1

**Tansy:** First plants seen in full flower were on Portsdown on Aug 1

**Dwarf Thistle:** My first find of plants in flower was on Portsdown on Aug 1 (Carline Thistle also seen but not in flower)

**Lesser Burdock:** First flowers seen at Fishbourne on July 30

**Saw Wort:** First flowering at Durlston on July 31

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Sika Deer:** One seen at Durlston on Aug 2 was evidence of their continuing spread. Although there is a large and well established population in the Arne area on the shore of Poole Harbour they had not been seen in the Swanage area until quite recently

**Hedghog:** To see one lumbering up my garden path on the evening on Aug 1 was a pleasant surprise. I have very occasionally found their droppings in my garden this is the first sighting that I can recall.

**Grey Squirrel:** The carpet of chewed unripe Hazel nuts on my lawn makes me wonder how a species that shows so little care in looking after its own food resources can continue to thrive

**Sunfish and Basking Shark:** July 30 bought one of each to the waters off Cornwall and Devon respectively

**Goose Barnacles:** On Aug 2 a wooden pallet washed up on the shore at Dungeness was covered with these molluscs. For a general view of the colony on its pallet see

<http://www.dungenessbirdobs.org.uk/images/Goose%20Barnacles%201%20020812%205393.jpg> and for a close up of the 'filters' which they extend to catch food particles from the water see

<http://www.dungenessbirdobs.org.uk/images/Goose%20Barnacles%203%20020812%205379.jpg> Before consulting Wikipedia I was aware of the ancient belief that Barnacle Geese hatched, not from eggs but from these Barnacles which grew on a mythical Barnacle Tree but I had forgotten that .."Since barnacle geese were thought to be "neither flesh, nor born of flesh", they were allowed to be eaten on days when eating meat was forbidden by religion."

**Bait digging with Hoovers:** Those of us who live around the Solent Harbours are very familiar with the sight of bait diggers using forks or spades to collect marine worms from the harbour mud at low tide but until today I had never heard of hoovers being used to suck up the worms. All I now know about the practice comes from Cliff Dean's blog describing his experiences in the Rye Bay area - see <http://rxbirdwalks.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/p1060076.jpg> for Cliff's photo of one of these 'luggers' at work (the question of where the power comes from remains unanswered) but for a never failing source of interest add <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/> to your Favourites

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 30 - AUG 5 (WEEK 31 OF 2012)**

### **Fri 3 Aug**

#### **First autumn Egret roost count at Langstone**

With the tide low and the weather fine for the sunset period I cycled down to Langstone pond an hour before sunset to see if the autumn build up of the number of Egrets using it as a night roost had started. **My count was 75 birds** so it looks as if we are now at the start of the autumn build up which gave me a peak of 198 birds last year on Sep 14 and an all time high of 228 in the past.

At the start of the year, when most Egrets have moved inland to escape the winter winds and few hours when they can feed in the harbours (the short daylight hours are often dramatically reduced by high tide periods) the number of resident Egrets at the pond falls to around half a dozen - I had no count of more than seven birds until the last week of February. March sees the start of a return by the adults intending to breed at the pond and the 'resident population' increases to two or three dozen birds - by Mar 23 eight nests were visible and an evening roost count on Mar 24 gave me a total of 70 birds showing that the pond had become a 'clearing station' to determine who was going to breed here - maybe

some birds were meeting with a view to pairing, others were paired and 'house hunting', others were non-breeding youngsters learning what it was all about... By mid April I could see 23 nests though it was not clear if all were occupied and it seems unlikely that any birds laid eggs as soon as the nests were built as the time from laying to the young fledging is supposedly only 7 weeks, so eggs laid in mid April should have resulted in young seen out of the nest ('branching' if not yet flying away from the nest) by early June whereas I did not see a youngster out of its nest until June 24 (though I noted at the time that some nests seemed to be already empty by then - maybe the eggs had not hatched, maybe some young were lying doggo in the nests (at least one seemingly empty nest exploded into revealing two hungry juveniles when the parents appeared with food), or maybe some had completed their period in the nest without ever being seen on the very few occasions that anyone was there to watch them).

Now, at the start of August, my inability to make any precise statement about the breeding behaviour/success of the Egrets is once more emphasised by the discovery of a further nest which had escaped my notice throughout the previous five months - there it was, a large structure of sticks with a bird in it (couldn't see if it was an adult or juvenile) and a great cascade of white dropping splashes below it. This reminded me that on July 1 I had seen two adults with large sticks in their bills as if intending to build new nests - the only thing certain about Little Egrets is that their behaviour will never follow a predictable pattern

At least one certain fact was recorded last night - the first flowering of **Gipsywort** plants at the pond edge!

## Thu 2 Aug

### Sharp-leaved Fluellen is a bonus at the end of a walk to Warblington

This morning I took a short walk around Havant to add a few species to my August wildflower list starting with the **Sticky Groundsel** at the junction of East Street and Bellair Road. As this is the only site which I know of for this plant in Havant town this year I was disheartened to find that most of the plants had been killed with weed killer but luckily several plants had escaped death by hiding within the wooden fencing around an electricity transformer.

Continuing my walk down the Billy Trail I ticked **Danewort, Russian Comfrey, Lesser Water Parsnip and Japanese Honeysuckle** before turning onto the footpath running north to the town centre from the Royal Oak at Langstone. This path gave me **Least Yellow Sorrel** and the Bosmere School area gave me **Small Flowered Cranesbill** while Juniper Square added **Yellow Flowered Strawberry**.

After lunch I set out on a longer walk to Warblington and around the periphery of the farm fields. First notable observation was of the **first conker lying on the ground** under a tree overhanging the footbridge over the A27 and the next tick on my list was of **Golden Samphire** on the sea wall east of Pook Lane. In the cemetery I again **failed to find Round--leaved Fluellen** (for years a cert here) but I did see both **Wall and Grey Field Speedwell**.

Next I had a look at the marshy SSSI field east of the cemetery where **Marsh Bedstraw and Square-stalked St John's Wort** were found along with **Water Mint, Tufted Forget-me-not, Lesser Spearwort and some late flowers on Ragged Robin**. In the wetland near the sea there was a mass of **Brookweed** still in flower along

with Wild Celery and what was either Corky-fruited or Parsley Water Dropwort. Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) was abundant but I saw no flowers (similarly I had earlier seen leaves but no flowers of Creeping Jenny) but I did find the first flowers on Cord Grass (*Spartina*).

Nothing much else of note on the east side of the farm or along the Havant Road north of the farm until I came to the A27 underpass area and saw the mass of Field Woundwort (found recently by Brian Fellows) on the north side gutter of the cycleway where it starts to slope down to go under the road. This position strongly suggested to me that the plants had arrived here as seeds with the great mass of road mending material temporarily dumped earlier this year 'uphill' of where the plants are, allowing rain to wash them down into the gutter where they can now be found.

I imagined there would be nothing else to excite me along the road into Havant but halfway along it, on the west side of the junction with the road called Meadowlands, I had the best find of the outing. I had paused to check the differences between the mass of 'Rose of Sharon' flowers planted here and the Tall Tutsan I had found yesterday and was walking on homeward past the mass of flowering Fuchsia shrubs when I looked down at the bare ground beyond the Fuchsias (where a Broom bush has been recently removed) and found that this bare ground was now covered with lots of Sharp-leaved Fluellen, all in flower.

Wed 1 Aug

### Blue Pimpernel, Tall Tutsan and four Great Green Bush Crickets on Portsdown

I decided to start the month with a look at plants on Portsdown and drove to the unofficial layby immediately west of Fort Southwick for a circuit of Portchester Common and the Paulsgrove Chalkpit. Everywhere I went the number and variety of flowering plants was overwhelming and among them were two which I had never seen before - the Blue Pimpernel (photo below) and a large hybrid Tutsan which turned out to be Tall Tutsan (*Hypericum x inodorum*) - the latter was forcing its way up through a bramble bush in the base of the Chalkpit while the former was growing among tall grass and other plants lining the path just below the road (outside the SSSI fence) just east of the driving test centre at Fort Southwick.

One of the two Blue Pimpernel flowers

You can see the flower of Tall Tutsan at

[http://www.aphotoflora.com/af\\_hypericum\\_x\\_inodorum\\_tall\\_tutsan.html](http://www.aphotoflora.com/af_hypericum_x_inodorum_tall_tutsan.html)

As well as 106 species of flowering plants I saw 11 species of butterfly including hundreds of Chalkhill Blues plus Small and Common Blue, Brimstone and Comma plus all three Whites, Small Skipper, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown. More unusual for me I came across four female Great Green Bush Crickets plus one Dark Bush Cricket. Birds were fewer but I did see five Swifts heading south just above my head as I parked the car on the hilltop and did hear Yellowhammer song but little else.

One of the most numerous plants today was Wild Parsnip (I love the smell of it) but more exciting were the Harebells and a couple of Clustered Bellflowers (new

for the year on my list) and the **Basil Thyme and Rockrose** that were still flowering as was **Bastard Toadflax** (becoming easier to spot as its leaves turn yellower with age) - also still flowering were a few Pyramidal orchids. Seen but not yet with open flowers were **Carline Thistle and Ploughman's Spikenard**, and looked for but not see were **Autumn Gentian and Autumn Ladies Tresses** though I had no difficulty in finding **Tansy** in flower (smelt before seen!)

Back at home in the evening I had one further surprise - an adult **Hedgehog** lumbering up the garden path. I cannot recall ever seeing one here in the 55 years that I have lived here but it is very welcome and I may well see it again as the lawn is littered with slugs large and small

## Tue 31 July

### Puzzling Goosefoot in Havant Park

A short walk into Havant found two things worth a mention - one was the development of the **bracket fungi** on the big old Horse Chestnut tree that is nearest the loos in Havant Park (some are at the early stage at which they might be mistaken for a 'white slug' frozen to the tree trunk), the other was a collection of **strange plants growing from the grass** between the peripheral path and the tennis courts.

These plants, although they did not look in any way like Fiddle Dock, reminded me of finding those docks (with their distinctively shaped leaves) as I walked across the grass of the Westgate Fields in Chichester from the Westgate Leisure Centre carpark to the West Street shops (that was several years ago). Perhaps with that in mind my first thought was that these plants were perhaps young **Curled Docks which had suffered from regular mowing** and the zig-zag shape of their stems, growing up at 45 degrees to the vertical, with many long (5cm) strap like leaves with crimped edges growing alternately up the stem and having flower bearing stems growing from their axils, supported this idea, especially as the flower bearing shoots also had many similar, but progressively smaller, crimped leaves growing from them. On these side stems each leaf axil had a whorl of three to five spherical 'flower buds', each around 1mm in diameter. The only other things that I could see at this stage were that the sinuous main stem was deeply grooved with some six deep grooves and that the lowest leaf on the sample that I brought home was 8cm long by up to 2 cm broad (still having a slightly crimped edge) and had a 2cm long leaf stem. This and the other leaves all had a mat of appressed, looped hairs covering them but only detectable with the microscope. There was no red colour anywhere on the plant to vary the universal green colouring

When I got round to examining the specimen under the microscope the flower buds were beginning to open and I could see this was no dock but was **apparently a Goosefoot** (all flowers similar) and I am now waiting for them to open more fully in the hopes of getting further inspiration. From what I have seen so far I cannot find a match with anything in my books ...

## Mon 30 July

### 128 Swans plus Dittander and Corn Parsley at Fishbourne

When writing yesterday's Weekly Summary I commented on the absence of recent reports of the **large flocks of Swans** that used to occur at various points in the Solent Harbours during the summer moult period, so today one of my targets was to find if the Fishbourne Channel flock still occurred - while there I could also check up on one or two special plants.

Arriving in Fishbourne I parked in Mill Close for a look at the pond in which a large colony of **Mare's Tail** grows giving me my first tick for the day (the only other place that I know where this grows is Aldsworth Pond where the growth of trees around the roadside pond edge makes it increasingly difficult to see anything growing in the middle of the water).

Moving on to the Fishbourne Meadows I immediately came on **Square Stalked St John's Wort** in the damp soil quickly followed by **Marsh Ragwort**. Heading south I crossed the stream and entered the first meadow from which I could see the channel which had plenty of Swans, but before going to count them I had a look at the **Amphibious Bistort** around my feet - usually I find one or two of the plants here are actually in flower but today they were as dull and uninteresting as they are in most places that the plants can be found so I walked on towards the water and had no difficulty in finding a mass of **Dittander** flowering at the fenceline. I understand that Dittander does not occur in Hampshire but there is plenty to be seen here (and where the Lavant stream enters the channel).

I now turned my attention to the **Swans and my best count of them was 128** though there were probably a few more hidden behind mudbanks and vegetation. With them today were several noisy **Whimbrel** and both **Greater and Lesser Blackback gulls** - a single **Common Sandpiper** was also present.

After crossing the first small stream I took the long route to the Lavant, following the sea wall along two sides of a triangle and along this seawall I found several plants of **Corn Parsley** in flower plus my first **Hoary Ragwort** with its green tipped bracts. Just before the Lavant I had another first - flowers on **Lesser Burdock**.

On the way back I headed for Fishbourne Church to have a look at the part of the meadows which stretch towards it and in which the remains of Marsh Orchids could be seen. This route brought me alongside the stream which I had crossed when first entering the meadows and just before crossing it via a different bridge I saw what I am pretty sure from the small number of flowers in each inflorescence was **Blue Water Speedwell**. One final tick when I was back at the car was **Lesser Hawkbit** growing among the close mown roadside grass - it certainly had at least one hair growing near the base of its flower stem.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 23 - 29 (WEEK 30 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Great Northern Diver:** This is not a species normally expected in the English Channel in July but one was off Portland on July 25 (and probably the same one off Durlston on July 26)

**Storm Petrel:** Another unexpected bird for high summer - on July 21 four were seen off Dorset in Lyme Bay and on July 23 there were 24 off the Lands End area

while the night of July 24 saw 32 off them trapped (presumably tape lured) at The Lizard

**Mute Swan:** Summer moult flocks are now building up but the numbers are much smaller than in past years. In Langstone Harbour where I can remember counting over 100 in the Broadmarsh area there were just 18 on July 26; off Emsworth Mill Pond where you could expect 200 there seems to be no flock this year and recent reports from the north of the Bosham Channel and from the Fishbourne Channel do not mention the species. The only area currently commenting on Swan numbers is Southampton where there are at least 85 on the Itchen

**Garganey:** On July 23 there were said to be at least 7, maybe more, on the Pulborough Brooks

**Pochard:** One unexpected report this week was of a Pochard on the Thorney Little Deeps, presumably just an isolated passage bird heading west following the four which arrived at Blashford last week and the group of 15 which were seen at a Netherlands site on July 24

**Eider:** These are perhaps heading our way in large numbers - a count of 1022 of them at a German site on July 22

**Velvet Scoter:** Already off the English east coast were three of these seen at Scarborough on July 26

**Goldeneye:** Another oddity seen on July 23 was a single Goldeneye off Portland

**Red Breasted Merganser:** The summering bird that was in Langstone Harbour on July 17 seems to have moved east under Langstone Bridge to be seen off Northney marina area on July 23 and 26

**Honey Buzzard:** These seem to be heading south already - six of seven reports since July 20 are of more than one bird (all of them over the near continent)

**Red Kite:** One bird which was hatched and tagged in Hampshire in 2010 first flew north to the Chilterns, then east to Kent and is now to be seen on the Sussex Downs south of Pulborough

**Quail:** The only site reporting any this week is Cissbury Ring area north of Worthing (three reported on July 26)

**Golden Plover:** One summer plumaged bird was at Christchurch Harbour on July 23 and 24 and a flock of more than 40 were back on the Oare Marshes in north Kent on July 26

**Grey Plover:** The first specific mention of returning summer plumaged birds on the south coast come from the Lymington shore where 2 of 5 birds were in full black and silver on July 22

**Knot:** Six summer plumaged Red Knot were reported at Pagham Harbour back on June 2 - they may not even have left us at that date but by July 22 there were reports of red birds at both Lymington and Christchurch Harbour

**Sanderling:** Although some of these may not have left us this summer the WeBS count of 218 on the Pilsey Sands (Chichester Harbour) on July 23 must show that they have started to return.

**Little Stint:** One has been back on the Lymington shore since July 25

**Curlew Sandpiper:** One of these has also been back at Lymington since July 23 (with four of them at the Oare Marshes in Kent on July 25)

**Purple Sandpiper:** Two were unexpectedly on the Devon shore at Brixham on July 24 (one there on July 26) and I suspect that these may have been forced to return early from Scandinavia where summer snowfall has prevented many birds from nesting.

**Dunlin:** Looking for evidence of an early return of other small waders I see that this year's July WeBS count on Thorney Island was higher last year (102) than this year when only 68 were recorded (I know that individual statistics can be meaningless)

**Terek Sandpiper:** An adult bird was seen briefly feeding on the banks of the River Adur (just south of the Tollbridge near Shoreham) on the evening of July 24 by Chris Corrigan. The only others to confirm the sighting before the bird flew off were Paul and Bridget James. As far as I know this is the only record of the species in the UK this year and the first since one in Northumberland in July 2011.

**Common Sandpiper:** These have been seen in many places since return passage started in mid-June. Christchurch Harbour had 22 of them on July 8 but Sandwich Bay had an impressive count of 106 on July 22 (I see that on the outward passage one Netherlands site had 117 on May 18)

**Turnstone:** It was suggested that the presence of 20 on the Devon shore at Brixham on July 26 may have been the result of heavy late snow in Scandinavia preventing the birds from nesting there this year but I also see that 15 birds seen on the shore of Southampton Water on July 22 included 3 which had been colour ringed by Pete Potts in Iceland (though the year in which they were ringed was not stated)

**Common Gull:** These are now trickling back to the Channel shores - three were at the mouth of Southampton Water on July 15 and two were at Fishbourne (IoW) on July 20 while an enthusiastic report of a pair back at the Arlington Rervoir in Sussex on July 24 said .."a pair of common gulls, gorgeous with their yellow bills (pic attached), the male even singing a while!" Music, you might say, is in the ear of the listener!

**Little Tern:** A final report on breeding attempts at Weymouth (Ferrybridge) can be summed up by saying that "all nests failed including six retries" (not for want of trying on the part of volunteers who, among other things, kept the local Kestrels so stuffed with food that they never thought of having tern chick on their menu).

**Black Tern:** Return passage seems to have been underway since June 28 and it stepped up a notch this week with a flock of six being seen at Reculver on the north Kent shore on July 27

**Cuckoo:** The only reports this week have been of juveniles

**Short-eared Owl:** One may have been at Farlington Marshes from July 16 to 26 and (presumably a different bird) was hunting the Selsey West Fields on July 21

**Wryneck:** After the first report of a returning bird in Norfolk on July 10 we have one this week from northern France - they should be turning up on the south coast soon...

**Sand Martin:** Departing migrants have already been seen at Portland this week, along with Swallows, Yellow Wagtails, Wheatears, Grasshopper Warblers, Sedge, Reed and Willow Warblers

**Nightingale:** First report of a migrant at Whitbread Hollow (Beachy Head) came on July 22 (a juvenile was at Dungeness on July 15)

**Common Redstart:** Two were at Christchurch Harbour on July 26 (about ten days after the first were seen there)

**Whinchat:** Following the bird seen at Havant Thicket last week one was at Newlands Farm south of Fareham on July 23 and others this week have been on the Downs in Sussex and the Isle of Wight

**Fieldfare:** The first reached the Netherlands on July 24 with three at the same site on July 27

**Mistle Thrush:** Two more reports of summer flocks - 25+ in the Cuckmere valley on July 23 and 9 at an IoW site near Newport on July 26

**Wood Warbler:** Two reports of departing migrants - one from Belgium on July 23 and one from Christchurch Harbour on July 26

**Red-back Shrike:** One was seen by several people in the Cheriton area near the sources of the R Itchen on July 26

**House Sparrow:** A personal observation is that the few which have nested in houses near mine in Havant set off on their summer holidays with their children this week and have now become what I call Corn Sparrows

**Escapees:** Probably in this category, but conceivably a vagrant, was a **Marbled Duck** seen in the Hartley Witney area of north Hampshire (near Fleet) on July 21. After writing this I checked the internet and found that the BTO 'Status in the UK' for the species is 'Doesn't Occur'

## **INSECTS**

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Migrant Hawker:** The first report for this year is of 2 or 3 seen at Hampton Wick Pond near Kingston on Thames on the morning of July 24

**Lesser Emperor:** First report came on July 22 from Folkestone followed by a second sighting at Dungeness on July 25. If you are not familiar with this species, which has been visiting Britain since 1996, see <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/species/lesser-emperor>

**Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Brown Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Emperor Dragonfly, Lesser Emperor Dragonfly, Gold Ringed Dragonfly, Hairy Dragonfly (late), Downy Emerald, Black Tailed Skimmer, Keeled Skimmer, Broad Bodied Chaser, Four Spotted Chaser, Scarce Chaser (near Southampton), Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red Veined Darter, Common Darter, Beautiful Demoiselle (but no reports of Banded Demoiselle), Emerald Damselfly, Scarce Emerald Damselfly, Willow Emerald, Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Blue Tailed Damselfly, Scarce Blue Tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Northern Damselfly,

**Butterflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Silver Spotted Skipper:** First of the year seen on July 22 at Beachy Head

**Clouded Yellow:** Very few reports (less than 20) so far this year since the first at Portland on Mar 29 but this week brought one to Lewes, one to Durlston and one on a special mission to visit me in the Staunton Country Park at Havant on July 24

**Large Tortoiseshell:** After six reports between Mar 10 and Apr 2 (including one seen by Brian Fellows in Havant), there have been no more until July 22 when one was seen speeding north through the New Forest.

**Wall Brown:** After just 33 reports of the spring brood between Apr 2 and June 13 the first of the second brood was reported at Durlston on July 27

**Grayling:** These have at last been seen in Hampshire (Browdown on July 20 and New Forest on July 22) and in Sussex (Windover Hill near Eastbourne on July 22)

**Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper, Large Skipper, Wood White (second brood), Clouded Yellow, Brimstone. Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Purple Hairstreak, White Letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, White Admiral, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Large Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Grayling, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Ringlet

[\(Skip to Other Insects\)](#)

**OTHER INSECTS:**

**Selected sightings this week:**

**Leptogaster cylindrica (Robber fly):** On July 23 Chris Bailey at Rye Harbour had the long awaited pleasure of watching a spider being eaten by a fly. For the full story with pictures see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/7/22/a-reversal-of-fortunes.html> and for more colourful insect pictures from Rye Harbour see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/7/22/metallic-eyes.html>

**Ichneumon in a Portsdown Kitchen:** On July 24 John Goodspeed had an unexpected visitor in his kitchen which he thinks was the Ichneumon *Lissonota senosa* of which you can see a photo at

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c6/Lissonota.setosa.-.lindsey.jpg>

**Stag Beetle:** Only the third report for the year so far to my knowledge has been of one in an Emsworth garden on July 22 - see

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-025-stag-beetle-garden-CF-24.07.12.jpg>

**Rose Chafer:** First report of the summer comes from Durlston though that individual was not photographed - another can be seen at

[http://www.nhm.ac.uk/resources-rx/images/1049/centonia-aurata-03\\_52490\\_1.jpg](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/resources-rx/images/1049/centonia-aurata-03_52490_1.jpg)

**Glow-worms:** More than 80 were seen by John Goodspeed in Havant Thicket on July 24

**Crab Spider:** A pure white crab spider was not well disguised as a predator lurking on a flowerhead of Black Knapweed (seen on Portsdown on July 24) and this set me to wonder how long it takes for these spiders to change colour so as to merge with their background. I do not have a scientific answer to this question but I gather that, unlike some underwater creatures such as Cuttlefish and Octopus which can adapt to match a varied background almost instantaneously (I understand that their skin is covered with many cells, each of a different colour, and that each cell can be turned on or off by the animals nervous system) the colour adaption system used by the Crab Spiders requires several days to become effective and operates by the secretion of pigments from glands in their bodies (and this offers a very limited range of possible colours) - see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misumena\\_vatia#Color\\_change](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misumena_vatia#Color_change)

**Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruenicchi*):** I came on the first of these for this summer in Havant on July 28 - see my diary page for July 28 at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm>

## **PLANTS**

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Creeping Yellow Cress:** First flowers found at Broadmarsh (old playing fields) on July 26

**Proliferous Pink:** A good show of more than 50 flowering plants on Hayling Island (Sinah Common) on July 25. See my diary entry for that day at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm>

**Dyers Greenweed:** Flowering at the Saltmarsh Lane shore (west Hayling) on July 25 where I do not remember seeing it in past years

**Dwarf Gorse:** First flowers for the year in Havant Thicket on July 24

**Hairy Vetchling:** Still flowering on the Broadmarsh mountain on July 26 after removal of the horses which I thought might eliminate this rarity.

**Wild Angelica:** First flowers seen at Emsworth Brook Meadow on July 26

**Slender Hare's Ear:** A good show of plants at Hayling's Saltmarsh Lane shore on July 25 though no flowers yet

**Sea Holly:** In flower at Black Point on Hayling on July 25

**Rock Sea Lavender:** Reported as flowering at Durlston on July 27

**Yellow Loosestrife:** Lots flowering in the Thicket Lawn area south west of the Leigh Park Gardens Lake in Havant on July 24 but a check of the calyces of the

plants growing by the northeast entrance to Hammonds Land Coppice (also within the Staunton Country Park area) show they are Dotted Loosestrife.

**Autumn Gentian:** Reported as in flower at Durlston on July 27

**Skullcap:** First three plants flowering by the Lumley Stream at Emsworth on July 27

**Betony:** First flowers seen at Havant Thicket on July 24

**Bugloss:** First seen growing from wildflower seed at Warblington Cemetery on June 16 but not seen in a more natural setting at Black Point on Hayling until July 25

**Danewort:** First flowers at the Havant site on July 24

**Ploughman's Spikenard:** Reported as flowering at Durlston on July 27 - almost certainly out on Portsdown by then

**Golden Samphire:** First general flowering at Langstone Harbour (Broadmarsh) on July 26

**Sea Aster:** First flowers seen on Thorney Island on July 27

**Guernsey Fleabane:** Flowering in Havant by July 23 (Canadian Fleabane also out)

**Sneezewort:** Newly flowering at several places in Havant Thicket on July 24

**Annual Beard Grass:** Although I do not normally record grasses I did take note of what appeared to be a large colony of this growing as a casual along the dusty roadside of Harts Farm Way across that road from the Havant Amenity Tip on July 27 (many of the plants already dead)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

[\(Skip to Endweek\)](#)

**Boxing Hares:** On July 21 a birder on the Sussex Downs remarked on a pair of Hares 'boxing' out of season.

**Leatherback Turtles:** The first of the summer had been seen from a boat off Cornwall on July 4 and on July 25 two more were seen there.

**Pointed Snails:** For ten years or more I have been trying to get naturalists to take an interest in the small colony of Pointed Snails to be found on the Thorney Island seawall at the west end of the Great Deeps and this week it seems that one person on the Wildlife Trust Wednesday evening walk did so - but only to raise a doubt in my mind as to my identification of the species! **Pointed Snails** (*Cochlicella acuta*) are uncommon (not great rarities) and occur in isolated colonies around the south and west coasts of England, usually being found in dry places such as sand dunes. Following the reclamation of the north of Portsmouth Harbour to build the M27 into Portsmouth I became familiar with a colony which found its shoreline habitat turned into part of the IBM carpark and in hot summers the tiny snails could be found in their hundreds on the low wooden posts along the boundary between the tarmac and the surrounding 'waste land' - they climbed the posts to cool off in any slight breeze blowing over the ground on which (out of the breeze and exposed to the sun) the molluscs were in danger of frying in their shells. At other sites such as the Thorney seawall, where there are no posts, the snails climb plant stems, though when the vegetation at ground level is dense enough to provide shade from the sun's heat there is no need to leave the ground where the snails can escape detection. The best way to find them here (which I do not recommend) would be to take a stout rake and clear the living plants, and the accumulated detritus below them, away to leave a patch of bare dry earth - a

careful search of the 'arisings' should reveal all stages of the snails life history, growing each year from tiny eggs to molluscs carrying shells which eventually complete 9 steeply conical whorls and reach a height of 15mm, and in addition to the living creatures there will be many more empty shells of their forebears.

My 'mollusc bible' is a Shire Natural History book by A A Wardhaugh devoted to 'Land Snails of the British Isles' describing 47 species, but only one of them from the Genus Cochlicella. Whoever made this week's find tried to identify it using Google and this is where the doubt arose in my mind as a second Cochlicella species (*C. barbara*) exists. In fact there could be even more confusion for the first three suggestions returned by Google in response to 'Pointed Snail' are 1) a link to the Wikipedia page describing *Cochlicella acuta*, 2) a link to an Australian website describing both *C. acuta* and *Cochlicella barbara* (Small Pointed Snail) which is a problem causing species in Australia but which can be found in south west of the British Isles, and 3) a link to 'runescape.wikia.com' which seems to be a popular computer game in which .. "The bruise blue snelm (pointed) is an item required for a level 2/3 clue (medium and hard) which caused this item's price to reach over 3k each. **One pointed blue snail in Mort Myre Swamp** is often found north-west/east of the Fairy ring." My opinion is that (a) The Thorney snail is *C. acuta* and that (b) Wardhaugh's approach to identification of snails by measuring the height and width of an adult snail's shell and counting the number of whorls in the shell is a good start to getting the name right. As always I am grateful for the new knowledge this observation has added to my store of wisdom.

**Armed Bullhead (*Agonus cataphractus*):** This small fish (also called a **Pogge** or a **Hook Nose**) is another creature newly brought to my attention this week by Cliff Dean who has been taking advantage of the hot weather to go Shrimping in the shallow water of Rye Bay/Hastings (see <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/07/26/low-tide-high-tide/> ) If you are puzzled by Cliff's surprise that many people rush into the sea barefoot you should see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weever> and learn to beware of the **Lesser Weever** which is common around our shores and which buries itself in the sand waiting for you to tread on the very poisonous spines which project up from its back (see <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1300878/Dozens-swimmers-poisoned-weever-fish-warm-weather-leads-population-explosion-British-waters.html> for a dramatic account of the danger to humans)

**Rays, Tope and Cuckoo Wrasse:** The Durlston Rangers Diary entries for July 24 and 26 describe more sea monsters confronting the fearless holiday maker during their annual encounter with the sea. **Undulate, Cuckoo and Thornback Rays** are currently being caught off Swanage. Also being seen are **Tope** (our version of the Great White Shark), and **Cuckoo Wrasse** (a fish species in which the males turn blue with excitement in the spring causing Cornish fishermen to name them after the bluebells in the woods). For a photo of a **Cuckoo Ray** see [http://www.oceaneyephoto.com/photo\\_411461.html](http://www.oceaneyephoto.com/photo_411461.html)

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 23 - 29 (WEEK 30 OF 2012)**

**Sat 28 July**

## First Golden Orb spider of high summer

Still recovering from a very late night watching the opening of the Olympic Games (with the unforgettable 'Moths on Bicycles'), and from the disappointment of Britains' failure to win Gold in the Men's Cycle Race, I took a late afternoon stroll around Havant.

My first notable find was the first flowering of **Burnet Saxifrage** in the 'wild flower' area of Havant Cemetery which had begun to flower on Portsdown on July 9 and was out in this cemetery en masse from early May last year - such are the vagaries of weather, seed germination and micro-ecology.

Having one tick spurred me to try my luck in the most unkempt part of this cemetery which is just starting to recover (thanks to the Conservation Volunteers once known as the BTCV) from years of neglect. Masses of bramble and overgrown shrubbery have been cleared but the paths which had been opened up have disappeared under exuberant growth of grasses which is ideal for my target species here - the lovely **Argiope bruenicchi** which I call the Golden Orb spider but which is popularly known as the Wasp Spider despite being totally inoffensive to humans (though not to Grasshoppers).

This spider inhabits long grass and places its web across small gaps in the grass 'forest' where the Grasshoppers are forced to 'hop' without seeing the web which will catch them. For some reason best known to the spiders it seems to want to warn the insects of the presence of this web by weaving many additional bands of silk to form a visible zigzag pattern upwards from the ground below the centre of the web to the central point where the female spider normally rests (unlike most orbweb weaving species in which the female lurks out of sight under some form of cover (natural or constructed) at the rim of the web, sensing the arrival of prey by the vibrations they cause to the web which are more violent and random than the gentle, rhythmic 'ringing of the door bell' which a sex-hungry visiting male spider must master if he is not to be consumed as prey).

**This zigzag structure is known as a 'stabilimentum'** and clearly serves some purpose in strengthening the web's ability to resist destruction when it is hit by a large flying grasshopper but as far as I am concerned it is an excellent indicator of the presence of the spider. The vibrations from my footfalls as I approach the web usually make the spider 'disappear' (she drops from the web to the ground below where she is difficult to spot) but the zigzag of the web is a 'dead giveaway'!

Today, knowing that this part of the cemetery is a good place to find this spider, I walked in along one of the recently cleared paths, then branched off into the tall grass. My very first step moved the grass aside and revealed my target and I was able to retreat without harming her or her web!

Two other points of interest in this walk concerned **colour aberration in flowers** and the **impact of climate change of flowering seasons**. The first point was raised when in Havant Bus Station where, for several years, a tiny plot of unconcreted land in the corner west of the station building has produced a summer long flowering of **Hedgerow Cranesbill in which all the flowers are white**. Maybe the genetic modification was caused by a fuel spill or exposure to diesel fumes but it is now firmly established here (and maybe will be spread by the buses or their

passengers inadvertently carrying seeds). When on Hayling beach recently I found tiny plants of Dove's Foot Cranesbill that had all white flowers (an effect of salt or of diesel pollution carried by ocean currents!!). Before trying to establish a connection between white flowers and dirty black diesel I was reminded this week by Brian Fellows of the long established susceptibility of both Creeping and Marsh Thistles to a white-flower gene.

The ability of climate change to influence flowering seasons is more obvious. Many years ago when working at the IBM HQ in Portsmouth I became aware of a few Hawthorn trees which, like the famous Glastonbury Thorn, flowered around Christmas, well ahead of their fellows, and since then I have learnt to keep an eye out for particular Hazel and Goat Willow Trees which also blossom a month or more earlier than others around them. One theory to account for this was that the trees had been planted by local councils which had found they could save money by purchasing the saplings from continental sources to the south of our latitude and that **these trees had biological clocks set to expect spring earlier than the norm for British latitudes...**

Today's observation was that the '**Giant Herb Robert**' growing on an alley wall off East St in Havant (and thought to be a species native to the Canary Islands) has clearly now reached the end of its flowering season which started before Christmas last year.

### [Fri 27 July](#)

#### **Spiny Restharrow and Skullcap in the Emsworth area**

Having seen **Slender Hare's Ear** well developed on Hayling during Wednesday's outing I thought I would check on the Thorney Island site this afternoon so I put on a brave face before cycling through the Traveller's Camp occupying the A27 underpass area of the Havant to Emsworth main road - with great relief I found that the Travellers had left, and what's more there was no rubbish left. There were vehicle ruts in the roadside grass, but no serious damage to the site (in fact the ruts might have the effect of 'ploughing' the soil and cause new plants to germinate). At the slip-road end of the site there was already one addition to the plant list, though the plants had put up leaves before the Travellers arrived, and this was **Upright Hedge Parsley**, now in flower.

On Thorney Island I failed to find either **Slender Hare's Ear** or **Pointed Snails**, but I did find my first **Sea Aster flowers** and recognized the **Spiny Restharrow** plants for what they were.

On the way home I made a detour up Lumley Lane and was rewarded with **fresh flowers on three Skullcap plants** growing on the brickwork of the stream wall outside cottage number 3.

### [Thu 26 July](#)

#### **Rare grass at Harts Farm Way Amenity Tip**

After yesterday's exhausting outing I stayed at home until the cool of the evening when I cycled to Broadmarsh in search of my first **Creeping Yellow Cress** flowers which I had no difficulty in finding after riding west along Hart's Farm Way to the point at which it reaches the complex A27/A3M interchange. Stopping here I used the pedestrian crossing route to get to the old Broadmarsh playing fields, finding

lots of the Yellow Cress flowering on my left, not much more than a yard back from the road edge.

From here I cycled back along Harts Farm Way to the entrance to the Amenity Tip where I crossed road to the cycleway on the south side of the road. Crossing at this point brings you to the closed vehicle entrance to a compound marked 'Conroys' and here, on the south side of the cycle track starting from the Conroy's entrance and running east almost to the Electricity Substation, was **a mass of an unusual grass** (photos below).

Some of the putative Annual Beard Grass plants in situ on very dry ground

Single stem of ?Annual Beard Grass? measuring 35 cm long

Close view of flowering panicle (5 cm long)

When I got home I realised this grass (of which I had brought home a sample stem) **could not be a form of Bristle Grass** (my initial thought) as the books say that all species of Bristle Grass have a ring of hairs around the stem where the leaf blade diverges from the stem and this had a more normal membranous narrow, pointed ligule about 3 mm long.

This ligule exactly matched the size and shape of the ligule illustrated in C E Hubbard's "Grasses" for **Annual Beard Grass**, a rare plant of the saltmarshes which I have never found before and at the moment I am thinking that that is what I have found (though waiting for the botanists to tell me I am wrong!)

Before coming home I visited the top of the Broadmarsh 'mountain' to see that at least some plants of the **Hairy Vetchling** have survived the horse grazing and are still flowering. Also, when passing the entrance to the Langstone Technology Park's north carpark, I had a look for the '**Mount Etna Ragwort**' plants of which there had been a couple of dozen when I was last here. Today I could only see one (but with no signs of the area having been mown so I assume someone thought they were 'saving the planet' by manually pulling up the plants) so I pulled that up to make another, probably vain, attempt to 'press and preserve it' for expert examination (I am preserving lots of seed from my previous attempt at pressing when I left the plant too long before pressing and it was rigid before I could press it!)

**Wed 25 July**

**A good day out on Hayling**

Today I spent five hours in hot sunshine plant hunting on Hayling Island during which my forearms changed colour from pale white to bright red. The three main sites which I visited each had their prizes - on the Saltmarsh Lane shore I found a good show of **Slender Hare's Ear** (full grown but with no sign of flowers yet) and a colony of **Dyer's Greenweed** which I don't recall having found here before; on the Sinah shore south of the Golf Course I managed to find **Little Robin** in flower and saw **Six Belted Clearwing moths** being attracted to pheromones; best of all, just east of the Beachlands Skatepark, I found a colony of at least **50 Proliferous Pink**

plants in flower; and finally I visited the Black Point Sailing Club and saw a mass of **Sea Holly** in flower.

Reaching the Saltmarsh Lane area I turned right from the Coastal Path along the track to the sea wall, stopping where the track narrows and curves to slope up onto the seawall. Walking back some 15 paces from this final bend to the last of the broad, rutted sections of track which were still showing signs of heavy rain with water in the ruts, I found the ruts were fringed with the distinctively shaped **Fern Grass** whose latin name (*Catapodium rigidum*) describes the ungrasslike rigidity of its fernlike inflorescence. Turning from the central rut to the higher ground on the inside edge of the track here I found among the taller, untrodden grasses, the unmistakable wiry shapes of **Slender Hare's Ear plants** - no sign of flowers yet but there should soon be a good show on the plants here. Across the track on the 'marsh' side there were plenty of unmissable yellow flowers on **Dyer's Greenweed** and there was even one touch of yellow on the seawall from a late flowering specimen of the **Bastard Cabbage** which, a few weeks ago, clothed the whole of this seawall with yellow.

Reaching the Ferry Road along the north of the Golf Course I stopped to double check an unexpected late flowering plant of **Wintercress** (out of the corner of my eye I had thought it might be Creeping Yellow Cress which I have not yet seen). In this area I watched a Buzzard soaring over Sinah Warren and a Jay disappearing into trees from which I heard the song of Robin, Blackcap and Whitethroat plus some churring which might just have been from a Dartford Warbler.

Reaching the sandy grassland south of the Golf Course I kept on the southern most grass track, stopping to park my bike against a red lifebuoy container when I thought I was in the area where a recent survey by the Hayling Coastal Conservation Group had found **Little Robin**. Using the 'lifebuoy' as a focus I set out on a circuit of the areas of bare shingle surrounded by other vegetation which looked like possible sites for Little Robin and as I walked I kept an eye on a man 'behaving strangely' on the more grassy areas - he would stand still for several minutes, intently watching something on the ground at his feet, then walking 20 yards or so to repeat the process. When we eventually met up there was mutual recognition as this was John Phillips, who with George Else is one of the two nationally recognised insect experts living in Northney on Hayling. John was doing something which I have often heard of but never seen in practice, **using chemical pheromones to attract and catch Clearwing Moths, in this case Six-belted Clearwings** which are illustrated and described at <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1550> (if you just put 'Clearwing' into the search panel at the head of each UK Moths website page you will see that there are 10 Clearwing species to be found in Britain). Having bought a bottle of the chemical pheromone from a lepidopterist shop John put a drop of it on a rag attached to the top of a short wooden peg which he stuck in the ground to support the rag (giving off the scent that would naturally be given off by a fertile female Clearwing) and then waited for a male Clearwing to show up - he got at least two today.

After a long chat I offered to show John the site where **Nottingham Catchfly** grows near the Golf Course fence (apparently this plant is the food plant of an uncommon moth which John may wish to track down in the future) and as I walked back to collect my bike what should I find but two plants of the elusive **Little Robin**, each having flowers showing the bright yellow pollen on their anthers which is a strong proof of the plant's identity. Back with John we walked north over the grass and I was able to show John another of the botanic curiosities of this area - a healthy growth of **Polypody Fern** growing, not from the damp branches of a woodland Oak but straight up from the dry sand under the grass here

Moving east past the Inn on the Beach and the Beachlands Skatepark I stopped in the grass parking bay on the north side of the Beachlands road. Here, starting from the metal pole supporting the Pay and Display and the No Fires notices, I walked north towards the young Holm Oak which is slightly right of the two *Macrocarpa* trees which frame the view of the reddish tiles on the wall of the west most house along the south side of Seafront Road. Three paces before being stopped by a wall of sand my route brought me to some longer grass containing many yellow Cats Ear flowers and a close view of the patch showed me that it also contained **around 50 tiny pink flowers (each approx 5mm across) standing almost as tall as the Cats Ear on wire thin stalks**. At the top of each stalk there could be a single flower or a cluster of up to three but with only one currently in flower. These are the rare **Proliferous Pink** flowers which were only discovered within the past 20 years (and were at first thought to be another colony of the equally rare **Childing Pinks** that can be found on the Sussex coast) and their rarity can be measured by the fact that Stace's Flora only knows of them at two sites - one in Bedfordshire and the other in Norfolk. Having no ability to control the focussing of my camera on small objects such as these flowers I can only apologise for the photos below and hope they give you an impression which, with my text, enables you to see the flowers and enjoy a focussed image!

General view of patch of grass containing Cats Ear and Proliferous Pink flowers

Out of focus close-ups of two Proliferous Pink flower heads

Several Proliferous Pink flowerheads

Next stop was at the Black Point Sailing Club where the only plant showing among the mass of parked cars was a good show of **Sea Holly** already in flower

**Tue 24 July**

**Staunton Country Park in the sunshine**

This morning I took a stroll from the Havant Thicket carpark to the grassland (marked on my map as 'Thicket Lawn') southwest of Leigh Park Gardens Lake. I set out across the Gipsies Plain (today totally devoid of animals and looking like an inland sea of waving grass full of wild flowers and alive with butterflies), went through Hammonds Land Coppice to Leigh Park Gardens and the lake, then out onto the grassland south of the lake before returning through the woodland north of the lake and on up the Long Avenue to the southern fringe of Havant Thicket.

## Sneezewort flowers and leaves - see below

Before reaching the Gipsies Plain I came across my first **Sneezewort** and took a couple of snaps to show that its leaves and flowers are easily distinguished from the Yarrow for which the plant could be mistaken at a casual glance. Among the many flowers seen along the 'orchid ditch' track as I turned south towards the woodland were my first **Betony** (later seen in three or four other places) and my first **Red Bartsia**. After climbing the metal gate onto the track leading in to Hammonds Land Coppice I enjoyed the **Marsh Woundwort** which John Goodspeed had seen on July 12 and then crossed the track to confirm that the **Yellow Loosestrife** growing there was the wild species (and not the garden **Dotted Loosestrife**). To distinguish between the two you have to look at the calyx under the flower - in Dotted Loosestrife this is all green, in Yellow Loosestrife the green has a clear orange edge. To my surprise the plants here were Dotted but there was plenty of the Yellow form when I reached the Thicket Lawn (photo of the calyx taken there is inserted below).

## Orange fringed calyx of Yellow Loosestrife

I had hoped to see **Silver Washed Fritillaries** in Hammonds Land Coppice but had to wait till later (in the Long Avenue) to see just one - however I had a less expected sighting of a glorious **Clouded Yellow** here to bring my butterfly species count for the morning to 10 (nothing else unexpected but the list did include my personal first **Ringlets**). One other unexpected sighting in the woodland near the lake was a very young **Slow-worm** and in the Leigh Park Gardens I was surprised by the continuous song of a single Song Thrush.

After the muddy track under the trees of the Long Avenue I was glad to reach the dry ground along the southern fringe of Havant Thicket and here I came on just two tiny bushes of flowering **Dwarf Gorse** that I had hoped to see today and I will end with a photo to prove the find.

## Ground hugging first flowers of Dwarf Gorse

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 9 - 15 (WEEK 28 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Shearwaters:** Singles of the **Great Shearwater** which was first reported last week off the Scillies and Devon had by July 13 reached the Yorkshire coast at Flamborough Head and a single **Sooty Shearwater** was off Whitburn in Co Durham on July 10. **Manx Shearwaters** are currently numerous off Portland though the 400 seen there on July 12 is nothing compared to the 10,000+ off north Cornwall on June 8 or the storm driven 3000 off Start Point in south Devon on July 2 (14 of these came as far east as Sandy Point on Hayling Island on July 11). **Balearic Shearwater** numbers off Portland also reached a high of around 30 birds seen on both July 8 and 9

**Storm Petrels:** These are still present in the English Channel but in decreasing numbers (10+ seen from a boat off south Devon on July 7) and late news from the Scillies is that a two more **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were seen on July 2 following the first on June 13

**Gannets:** It seems that larger than usual numbers of these have been rushing up and down the Channel for several months but I have not recorded the numbers as I was unable to associate them with any regular annual pattern but maybe these reports are telling us that the Gannets are struggling to find sufficient fish in the normal areas and what we are seeing is a pattern of hungry birds desperately seeking new fishing grounds (though it could equally be that Gannets are thriving and there are now too many for the normal fishing grounds to sustain).

**Cormorant:** A report of 1332 gathered at one Netherlands site on July 10 is also unusual for the time of year - counts of up to 1500 birds are not unusual in winter months but not high summer - are they too hungry or have they failed to breed?

**Shag:** One bird whose troubles were all too obvious to J J Goodridge when he was at Eastney near the Langstone Harbour entrance on July 13 was a young Shag which had swallowed a fishing line whose end was still attached to something underwater, effectively chaining the Shag to a small area around the buoy on which the bird was perched - when it attempted to fly off it was soon brought up short as the line reached its limiting length. See the photos illustrating this at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/thefinancialbirder/2012/07/13/abundant-wildlife-around-eastney-harbour-entrance/> I recall a similar tragedy when I was working at the IBM Portsmouth HQ and saw a Herring Gull fly to the IBM Lake trailing an empty plastic bag after the bird had put its foot through the handle of the bag while feeding on the rubbish tip just across the M27. While the bag was empty the bird could still fly, though with extra drag, but as soon as it had landed on the lake the bag filled with water, the weight of which prevented the bird from taking off again and gradually dragged the bird underwater as its strength ebbed with its desperate struggles.

**Bittern:** One, sometime two, Bitterns were reported at Lodmoor (Weymouth) from Jan 26 to Mar 30 this year and now there is a report of just one there on July 10 - I wonder if there is a mate and young lurking in the reeds?

**Great White Egret:** On July 5 one was seen in Cornwall, on July 11 one was reported somewhere in Cheshire, and on July 14 another was seen flying west over Portsmouth Dockyard

**Glossy Ibis:** The two birds which arrived in fields north of Pagham Harbour on May 6 seem to have split up - just one of them has been seen at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool on at least four occasions since June 19, most recently on July 9, 10 and 14

**Tufted Duck:** These seem to breed later than other ducks and although they have been seen in pairs since April the first report of ducklings that I have seen is dated July 12 at Woolmer Pond in east Hampshire

**Peregrine:** What were thought to be the female and three of the four juveniles from Chichester cathedral were seen at Pagham Harbour on July 12. The female caught and ate a Wood Pigeon, giving a few scraps to one of the juveniles but apparently ignoring the other two.

**Quail:** This week's news is of just one at the Pevensey Levels near Eastbourne, one at Sandwich Bay and at least three on the downs south of Pulborough

**Corncrake:** One was heard at Prussia Cove near Penzance in Cornwall on July 7 reminding me of the July day in the mid 1980s when I was given the intact corpse of a Corncrake which had killed itself by flying into a power line not far west of St Mary's Church in south Hayling and been found in a field of cabbages. After showing it to a group of birders I was leading at Pagham Harbour it was given to the Hampshire County Museum Service and is still, I think, one of the exhibits in the county collection (after being stuffed!)

**Golden Plover:** The last of these moving north in spring were seen on May 20 at both Portland and Worthing. This week seems to have brought the first returning birds heading south - a group of six in Belgium on July 8. Also on July 8 a long distance traveller turned up in the Kent Stour valley where it was only seen by one observer but confidently enough described to be accepted by the average birder as a **Pacific Golden Plover** (a species which, with the **American Golden Plover** which more commonly reaches Britain as a vagrant, was until recently lumped under the general name of **Lesser Golden Plover**).

You can judge the reliability of the report from the following account which appeared in the July 8 entry on

<http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/Julysightings2012.htm> - in it Martyn Wilson said .. "While dodging the rain today I was returning to the Water Meadows after sheltering at the Tower hide and stopping at Paddy's Bench to scan for Waders I came across a fully summer plumaged adult Lesser Golden Plover on the far side at 7.50am. It was very black from the face to the undertail with a slim white border between the black body and the head/mantle and back/wing colouration stopping halfway along the line of the wing. A lapwing chased it off and it flew towards me landing on the nearest wet edge and, in doing so showed the diagnostic greyish brown underwing markings. Another Lapwing didn't seem to like it and chased it again this time making fly over and out of sight towards the Marsh hide where it's long legs could be seen trailing just beyond the tail. Sadly, because of the rain, my camera was tucked away in my bag on my back with its rain cover on so, no pictures but I believe it to be a Pacific Golden Plover. There was no further sign of it by midday even with the help of half a dozen other birders looking."

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The large number of early returning waders, and the variety of species, has been unusual enough to secure a slot in the BBC News this week. Some indication of the local impact of this can be gauged from a couple of random examples - first the unusually large number of **Black-tailed Godwits** seen around the mouth of the rivers at Christchurch in Dorset with 125 there on July 12 and 149 on July 14, second the early arrival of **Whimbrel** with six seen heading west over Sandy Point on Hayling on July 11. Another example that is not local

comes from RBA which reported a total of 35 **Wood Sandpipers** spread across 7 counties on July 6

**Mediterranean Gull:** Following on last weeks news of where some of the failed breeders have gone there is a report this week from Barry Collins of 250 seen on July 11 hawking for insects over Lucerne fields on the south of Thorney Island and July 12 brought a report of 12 at the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester.

**Black-headed Gull:** When I visited the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 12 the only report of fledged juveniles which I had then seen came from Christchurch Harbour where the first young bird had flown in on July 8 so I was expecting to see a good number of young birds still around their nests at the Oysterbeds but in fact could only see two in a cursory scan. Since then I have seen that several young birds flew up from the Oysterbeds on July 9 when threatened by an overflying Buzzard, and also on July 9 the first juvenile flew into Thurlstone Bay in south Devon, but my overall impression is that, despite the large number of adults which took over every available nest site at the Oysterbeds, very few fledged young have resulted.

**Terns:** On July 2 the Rye Harbour website told us that 600 pairs of **Sandwich Tern** had attempted to nest there but the adults had not been able to find enough food to feed their young (I think because of the rough seas made fishing difficult) and by July 11 the news from Portland was of 79 **Common Terns** already heading determinedly west showing that they had abandoned thoughts of breeding . Also from Portland there was news of a promising start to the **Little Tern** breeding season at Ferrybridge where last year's round the clock guard of the nests had prevented predation by all but one Hedgehog which had slipped in under the radar and eaten a few eggs. This year cold and wet weather meant that 35 of 50 eggs laid did not hatch and only 9 chicks had fledged while 6 pair were re-laying eggs.

**Black Tern:** The eastward spring movement seems to have ceased on June 14 and the return passage to have started on July 7 when one was seen at the Oare Marshes in North Kent followed by a couple seen on the French Normandy coast on July 8 when one also appeared at Farlington Marshes. Also on July 8 a single **White-winged Black Tern** arrived at Lodmoor (Weymouth) where it stayed till at least July 10

**Cuckoo:** One adult was still to be heard calling at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on July 12 and I see that if you want to follow the attempts by the BTO to track Cuckoo migration you can do so at <http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking>

**Pallid Swift:** One was watched for 2 minutes on July 12 hawking over the river at Titchfield Haven. The distinctive features noted were its broad rough edged wing, slow flight and wing flaps.

**Wryneck:** What seems to be the first southward bound Wryneck for the year was at Minsmere in Norfolk on July 10

**Sand Martin:** Seemingly another species already leaving us, though the only evidence so far is a report of three birds seen at Portland Bill on July 10 and lumped in their report for the day as part of "a mixed bag of early migrants/dispersing youngsters".

**Common Redstart:** On July 3 Sandwich Bay caught their first autumn passage bird (a juvenile) on its way south and on July 8 a pair of early migrants were seen on the Isle of Wight.

**Whinchat:** The first reported on the south coast this autumn was by the R. Stour near Lewes on July 12

**Willow Warbler:** Christchurch Harbour reported their first departing migrant on July 14 - Portland had already reported a bird heading south on June 25 and Sandwich Bay had seen their first autumn bird on July 6

**Chough:** The Cornwall Birding Website ( <http://www.cornwall-birding.co.uk/> ) has news this week of a good year for Chough breeding in the county - 5 nest with a total of 18 fledged young - and an address for news of this species at [www.cornishchoughs.org](http://www.cornishchoughs.org) (this site is difficult to navigate but when you apparently reach the end of the only page if you run your mouse over the seemingly meaningless jumble of characters at the right side of the page they become tags which will take you to various different news items (some of these can also be accessed by tabs at the head of each page)

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Common Darter:** A report from a Norfolk garden on July 6 reads: ... "24 Common Darters emerged from a Norwich garden wildlife pond in the pouring rain! It had rained heavily overnight and during the morning, but despite the persistent rain 24 Common Darters had emerged! Several had been effected by the constant rain, and when the weather improved in the afternoon some could not fly away because their wings had stuck together! I managed to help some of them by separating their wings and they all managed to fly away!"

#### **Species reported this week:**

Norfolk Hawker, Broad Bodied Chaser, Common Darter, Small Red-eyed Damselfly,

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Orange Tip:** The last regular report of this species for which I have a record is dated June 13 but this week a second hand report of one seen in the Henfield area of Sussex on July 8 was posted.

**Chalkhill Blue:** The first and so far only report of this species comes from the area north of Friston Forest near Eastbourne on July 11

**Meadow Brown:** Everyone has at some time seen tiny red mites/ticks on the bodies of these butterflies but I read this week in the Three Amigos blog (a piece dated July 8 by Mark Cutts about a visit to Portsdown in search of butterflies) that .. "on one of the last butterflies I saw, a heavily damaged Meadow Brown, I could see that some small red ticks were attached to its body. Steve Copsey has reported on these previously. They are **Tromidium breei** and studies have shown that they have no adverse effects on their host species." One reason why they are not lethal to the butterflies is that they do not attach themselves permanently to the butterfly - they wait on a flowerhead until a butterfly lands there, get onto its body and take a drink of its blood, then leave the butterfly when it next lands.

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Large Skipper, Wood White, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Purple Hairstreak, White Letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Holly Blue, White Admiral, Purple Emperor, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Ringlet.

#### **OTHER INSECTS:**

##### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Chrysops caecutiens:** This **Horse Fly** has a taste for human blood and was knocked to the ground by a colleague of Graeme Lyons when discovered to be drinking his blood, allowing Graeme to capture it (on July 6 in the Ambersham area of West Sussex) and take the photo which can be seen at

[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-jTG0ld3H9bA/T\\_ayqONzT6I/AAAAAAAAADCE/oPGyBglRe44/s400/pyranaeus+019.JPG](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-jTG0ld3H9bA/T_ayqONzT6I/AAAAAAAAADCE/oPGyBglRe44/s400/pyranaeus+019.JPG)

**Lejops vittatus:** This is an **uncommon hoverfly species** only found in association with Sea Club Rush with which it was found and photographed at Rye Harbour on July 14. For the photo see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/rxlejopsDsc01867.jpg>

**Tachina Grossa:** Two specimens of this **giant Horse Fly** were seen at Dungeness on July 9 and you can discover the horrors of this 2 cm long hairy fly at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tachina\\_grossa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tachina_grossa)

**Hornet:** Surprisingly the first two reports of these have only appeared this week - one was seen in Botley Woods north of Fareham on July 1 and the other at Dungeness on July 9. For an excellent site telling you all you ever wanted to know about **European Hornets** go to <http://www.vespa-crabro.de/hornets.htm> (this does not cover **Oriental Hornet species** which can be twice the size of the European species but you can learn about the **Japanese Giant Hornet** at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vespa\\_mandarinia\\_japonica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vespa_mandarinia_japonica)

## Beetle species in this week's news:

**Heath Dumble Dor (*Trypocopris pyraeneus*):** Seen by Graeme Lyons on Iping Common near Midhurst on July 5 - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/natural-history-burn-out.html> and skip down to the photo of the beetle and the account of how Graeme batted this monster to the ground with his bare hand in order to discover its identity.

**Platydracus fulvipes ( a Rove Beetle):** This is pictured and described by Graeme Lyons in the same blog entry as the Dor beetle above

**Leptura 6-guttata (a Long Horn Flower Beetle):** This is the name used by Richard Jones to name a beetle he found on July 8 near Fort Cumberland in the Eastney area of Portsmouth and until writing this summary on July 15 I had not been able to find a photo of the species but now have one at [http://www.anitamadelin.com/?attachment\\_id=156](http://www.anitamadelin.com/?attachment_id=156) and another at [http://www.flickr.com/photos/gails\\_pictures/5951110782/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/gails_pictures/5951110782/)

**Cymindis axillaris (Ground Beetle):** The photo of this notable species, found at Rye Harbour (Castle Water) on July 10, is tucked in at the end of an entry about spiders (scroll down and you will find it at <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/7/10/ticking-along.html> )

**Black Belly Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus semisulcatus*):** For a photo of a very large diving beetle found by chance not in a pond but on the lawn of a garden in the Hastings area see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/7/12/sedlescombe-beetles.html> - this entry also has a photo of a very small **Mallow leaf beetle (*Podagrica fuscicornis*)** found in the same garden.

**Bloodsucker Soldier Beetle (*Rhagonycha fulva*):** These have just started to appear on the flower umbels of plants such as Hogweed and the first to report them was Brian Fellows on his Emsworth Community website - see his picture of them on Hogweed in Brook Meadow at Emsworth, taken on July 13, at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-037-soldier-beetles-bm13.07.12.jpg>

**Longhorn Beetle (*Strangalia maculata*):** First report of this common species comes from the Straits Inclosure Woodland (part of Alice Holt Forest near Farnham) courtesy of the Hants Butterfly Conservation website - taken on June 30, see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chorusinthedawn/7474394002/in/photostream>

**Speckled Bush-Cricket (*Leptophyes punctatissima*):** First report comes from Mark Cutts who found one on Portsdown on July 8 and photographed it to appear

in the Three Amigos Blog. To see it got to <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/07/11/portsdown-hill-in-search-of-blues/> and scroll down to find the Cricket well camouflaged among Kidney Vetch

**Great Green Bush Cricket (*Tettigonia viridissima*):** It is many years since I last saw one of these but I did come across a not-fully-grown one on Portsdown on July 9. Hopefully I will come across a fully developed one later in the summer and get a photo! On that same outing I also came across several **Dark Bush Crickets**.

**Roesels Bush Cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*):** Richard Jones encountered several of these in the area around Fort Cumberland when he was in the Eastney area of Portsmouth on July 8 - for a photo go to <http://www.martinparrsnaturepics.com/page3.htm> and scroll down to the last but one line of images, then click the photo of the cricket in the left hand column. The fierce looking 'weapon' on her tail end shows she is a female and will use this to pierce a plant stem before using it as an extension to her body down which she will roll her eggs into the safety of the plant stem.

**Slender-horned Leatherbug (*Ceraleptus lividus*):** Found near Portland Bill on July 10 this strange looking bug was the first to be seen on Portland and only the fourth for Dorset - for photos of this individual see [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp\\_slender\\_horned\\_leatherbug\\_a\\_100712\\_45\\_0.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp_slender_horned_leatherbug_a_100712_45_0.jpg) and [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp\\_slender\\_horned\\_leatherbug\\_b\\_100712\\_50\\_0.jpg](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/wp_slender_horned_leatherbug_b_100712_50_0.jpg) Contrary to my expectation this is not a recent invader of Britain but is a scarce resident of dry habitats in southern England. For more info and photos see [http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/ceraleptus\\_lividus.html](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/ceraleptus_lividus.html)

**Harvestman species:** The first of these insects belonging to the Order Opiliones, and not directly related to Spiders, was found at Durlston on July 14. There are 27 species to be found in northwest Europe and you can see a typical example at <http://www.arkive.org/harvestman/leibunum-rotundum/>

## PLANTS

**Sickle Medick:** A single plant, thought to be the only example of this species in Hampshire, has been flowering for ten years or so beside a slip road taking northbound traffic from the Portsdown Hill Road to join the northbound London Road over the hill. In recent years there have been fears that the plant might be eliminated by roadside grass cutting but there was a healthy growth in full flower when I saw it for the first time this year on July 9

**Large Flowered Evening Primrose:** The first flowers of this were seen on July 9 in both Emsworth and on Portsdown Hill

**Upright Hedge Parsley:** The first find of this in flower this year was made on Portsdown on July 9

**Burnet Saxifrage:** Another first flowering for the year found on Portsdown on July 9

**Black Bindweed:** Another first for the year found in an arable field on Portsdown on July 9

**Blue Water Speedwell:** The genuine version of this plant, not the common hybrid, was flowering in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on July 13

**Red Bartsia:** First flowering reported at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on July 13 (a day earlier than Durlston reported its first!!)

**Basil Thyme:** A good show of this on Portchester Common (Portsdown Hill) for its debut on July 9

**Marsh Woundwort:** First flowering for the year in Emsworth on July 9

**Spotted Hawkweed (*Hieracium maculatum*):** First flowers seen on Portsdown on July 9

**Danewort (*Sambucus ebulus*):** First flowers of this, seen at the colony by the Hayling Billy trail where it passes the end of Grove Road in Havant, on the evening of July 15 (too late for inclusion in my normal system for recording species in my standard sequence, hence its appearance at the end of the list)

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Dolphins:** Bottlenosed Dolphins are a regular feature of English Channel waters (last year they were reported in each month of the year though mainly from March to October with numbers ranging from 3 or 4 up to 40). This week a pod of 35 were off Jersey in the Channel Isles on July 12 but the report which caught my attention was of 6 **White-beaked Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*)** in the North Sea off Whitburn in Co Durham. This species is not often reported in the English Channel but it is a common species in our latitude and is most numerous in the eastern North Atlantic, being found from the east of the USA to the Baltic. The animals range from 7 to 10 feet long and are described as social and acrobatic. The dorsal fin is hook shaped with the point bent backward. You can watch a video of them at <http://www.arkive.org/white-beaked-dolphin/lagenorhynchus-albirostris/video-00.html> and that source tells us that the 'beak' (or snout) is by no means always white - it is usually a mixture of shades of black and white and can be all black. To see the shape of the dorsal fin and the beak go to <http://www.arkive.org/white-beaked-dolphin/lagenorhynchus-albirostris/image-A14608.html> though this photo has some strange reflections and the impression of the parts below water should be ignored!

**Fungi:** These are at last beginning to respond to the plentiful rain and mild temperature. Walking down Portsdown Hill past the QA Hospital on July 13 I noticed several species though I did not examine them or take specimens - one was the size of a small field mushroom but had a dark brown cap with distinctive radial splits revealing white flesh suggesting to me the common ***Tricholomopsis platyphylla*** while another tall and stout specimen with all its parts whitish in colour reminded me of the **Clouded Agarics** that normally appear later in the summer. Richard Jones, the Portsdown Hill warden for Portsmouth City, has also been

impressed by the show of fungi around his base in Fort Widley. He does not claim to be an expert on fungi but says that 'by the main path south of the Fort' there is a large display of what he believes to be **Hygrocybe persistens (Persistent Waxcap)** which I have not come across before but which is very similar to the common **Blackening Waxcap** but which, unlike that, does not rapidly turn colour from yellow to black but 'persists' in its yellow colour - see [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Hygrocybe\\_persistens\\_qtl1.jpg](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Hygrocybe_persistens_qtl1.jpg) and also (for a comparison with Blackening Waxcap) see <http://www.first-nature.com/fungi/hygrocybe-conica.php> Richard has also found a bright red waxcap which I guess is the **Scarlet Hood** that you can see at <http://www.first-nature.com/fungi/hygrocybe-coccinea.php>

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 9 - 15 (WEEK 28 OF 2012)**

**Thu 12 July**

### **Nottingham Catchfly flourishing on Sinah Common**

With the rain not scheduled to start until after lunch I set off early for Hayling Island (and got home just before the rain around 1:30 pm). Nothing special in the way of first flowerings (though I did see my first **Sand Spurrey, Rough Clover, Pale Toadflax** and **Cocks Eggs**) but there was a real feeling that summer is here in the abundance of plant growth and the variety of flower colour, not to mention the sight of young Swallows perching on the Sinah Golf Gorse fence and my almost treading on a very newly fledged Meadow Pipit on the shingle.

At the Oysterbeds I half expected to see several juvenile Black-headed Gulls about to fly off on their own (the first juvenile was flying at Rye Harbour as early as June 14) but only saw a couple and they were still in need of food from their parents. What did surprise me was that a small ghetto of more than 20 Common Terns had forced a clearing in the previously 'wall to wall' coverage of Black-headed Gull nests and looked as if they might produce some late offspring.

Nothing much of special interest until I reached the Gorse on the north side of the Sinah Golf Course. Here I cycled to the west most of the wooden pathside seats (just before you are forced to re-emerge onto the Ferry Road), propped my bike against the seat, and walked back to the previous wooden seat - in this fairly short stretch I found more than a dozen tiny pinkish flowers of **Sand Spurrey** which could be distinguished, in the absence of obvious Cranesbill leaves, from the similar sized and coloured **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** flowers by a quick look at their stems - Cranesbill flowers are supported by leafless petioles and stems, the Spurreys by stems densely clothed with whorls of tiny swordlike, upward pointing leaves.

Reaching the Kench I took some photos of the **Bladder Senna bush** in flower half way along the eastern side and then returned to the Ferry Road, passing the patch of **Bell Heather** in the Golf Course before stopping to check out some **Evening Primrose flowers** having recently been reminded that the commonest species round here is not 'Common' but 'Large Flowered' and noticing that these roadside plants were much smaller than others which I have seen. A quick look at

the flowers showed me that the female styles protruded much further than the male stamens which is only true of the Large Flowered species - I could also see that the reason for the small size of the plants was that the original single tall plants stems had been cut down, forcing the plants to put up a number of shorter stems in order to bear the flowers. While looking at this obvious flower I noticed a much less obvious one nestling in the grass of the sandy roadside soil - the tiny white flowers of **Rough Clover**, the first I have seen this year. A small wild rose bush growing nearby in the Golf Course fenceline had flowers of a pink tinge that suggested **Sweetbriar** and the smell of apples from the crushed leaves confirmed this.

Overall view of the Bladder Senna bush

Closer view of the flowers and leaves

Close up of a flower

The grassland south of the golf course near the Pill Box still had a few yellow flower spikes on the Tree Lupins and a good show of the less prominent, ground hugging, Sea Bindweed flowers mixed with the blue pom-poms of Sheep's Bit but the most eye-catching flowers today were the mass of Rose Campion (*Lychnis coronaria*). After photographing these I walked to the small area where Nottingham Catchfly flowers very inconspicuously and was pleased to see the best crop of flowers that I can recall seeing here over the years.

General view of one Rose Campion clump with the Pillbox in the background

Closer view of Rose Campion flowers

General view of Nottingham Catchfly flowers - not easy to spot in the grass

Closer view of Nottingham Catchfly flowers (including a couple of Sheep's Bit) Before leaving this shore area I walked out onto the shingle in the hope of finding Little Robin (which has severely declined in number here over the years) but was unsuccessful though I nearly trod on a newly fledged Meadow Pipit which could only flutter away over the shingle while its parent uttered alarm calls (later, to prove all was well, I heard it singing as it parachuted over the area while a Skylark sang from above). Also here, when I returned to the 'beaten track' I disturbed several young Swallow - the first I have seen this year - from their perches on the Golf Course fence.

Heading east towards the toilet block north of the Inn on the Beach, I stopped at the south east corner of the mini-golf course to photograph the Pale Toadflax which has just started to open its flowers under the gorsebushes for this year's show. While doing this I found members of the **Hayling Coastal Conservation Group**, a local group associated with the national Conservation Volunteers (new name of BTCV), who were carrying out a survey of how well an area near the Toilets, which had in the past been used for car parking, was recovering to natural habitat. I was not aware of this new group and if there is anyone else wishing to promote the flourishing of natural wildlife habitat, and to join in

activities on the second Thursday and/or fourth Saturday of each month, they have only to make themselves know by email to haylingccg@virginmedia.com (or contact [www.facebook.com/HaylingCoastal](http://www.facebook.com/HaylingCoastal)) to receive an enthusiastic welcome plus free tea and biscuits during their work sessions.

Pale Toadflax flowers lurking under a gorse bush

The rain was now threatening but before heading home I took a couple more photos of the unusual plants called **Cocks Eggs** (getting this name from the white, egg shaped flowers and being members of the Nightshade family) and which have just started to flower this year - they have been flourishing for many years on the common immediately south of Staunton Avenue (along the fence line of the westmost house on the south side of the Seaside Road).

Cock's Eggs showing the round white 'egglike' flowers

General view of a section of the Cock's Eggs colony

Back in Langstone I made a quick check of the **Egret nests** at Langstone Pond and found well grown youngsters still in or near six of the nests

**Mon 9 July**

**Sickle Medick, Basil Thyme and Upright Hedge Parsley on Portsdown**

A two-part walk on Portsdown today gave me 111 flowering plant species and my first **Great Green Bush Cricket** (albeit not full grown) with lots of **Marbled White** butterflies.

I started from the carpark east of the London Road where a little **Sainfoin** was still in flower with plenty of **Squinancywort** that was new to my list though it has been flowering for a couple of weeks. Before crossing the southbound sliproad I enjoyed a tall stand of **Evening Primroses** (but failed to check for red hairs or stamen/style length!) and as I crossed the road a **Buzzard** was seen over the Candy Pit trees. On the slope down to the London Road I found a cluster of Hieracia ('difficult to name' yellow daisies though these had the black spotted leaves of **Spotted Hawkweed - Hieracium maculatum**).

Crossing the bridge over the London road I noticed that Tansy flowers were getting near showing their yellow colour, but when I reached the northbound sliproad I was very pleased to see a good show of **Sickle Medick** flowering next to the road salt bin (painted a matching yellow!). Returning to the carpark I found a less exciting first for the year **Burnet Saxifrage**.

My next stop was at the unofficial parking area immediately west of Fort Southwick from which I set off towards Portchester Common but very soon found a mass of **Upright Hedge Parsley**, the last of the three Cow Parsley look-alikes. Pushing on through dense untrodden vegetation south of the hilltop barley field a slight movement of the greenery close to me gave me a sight I have not seen for several years - a **Great Green Bush Cricket** (not a full grown monster but still in a league of its own among the other Orthoptera now filling the grass and shrubs).

Reaching the top gate into Portchester Common I turned uphill to walk west along the highest section where I had no difficulty in finding my main target - the lovely **Basil Thyme** which seems to be having a good year (normally I only find it sparsely scattered, growing from bare earth around the edges of scrapes made by Rabbits, but today it was widespread and competing with the many other plants in the downland turf - after finding it in the top section I found more, plus my first flowering **Marjoram**, as I moved downhill towards the lower gate by which I left the common.

Heading east down to the foot of the hill below the Driving Test centre there were lots more Marbled Whites and a few Meadow Brown but the only other butterfly seen was a single **Small Skipper** (revealing its identity in flight by its bright orange colour). Another insect of which I found several here was **Dark Bush Cricket** before the next burst of bright colour from the **Rock Rose** colony. Another bright colour well distributed in this area was that of the **Musk Thistles**.

Reaching the electricity pylon where my path turned uphill again I did not expect any new finds on the way up but about half way through the climb I spotted **Yellow-wort** (a member of the Gentian family) and realised I had not got it on my list - not a significant addition on its own but as I paused to write GTYW on my pad I found I was looking at some tiny white star-shaped flowers with a distinctive yellow-green foliage and so was able to add the more significant SWBT (for Sandalwood family, **Bastard Toadflax**) which I had not previously found in this section of the hill (immediately west of the Paulsgrove Chalkpit (Richard Jones' Compartment 2). That was my last notable find of this trip.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 2 - 8 (WEEK 27 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Great Crested Grebe:** On July 2 there were still 184 (including 66 breeding pairs) of these on Bewl Water near Crowborough but by July 6 three were on the sea off Christchurch Harbour and half a dozen were on the water of Langstone Harbour as they start their autumn dispersal.

**Slavonian Grebe:** One was in the Exe estuary area of south Devon on June 30 but I think this individual has stayed there through the spring

**Black-necked Grebe:** Devon also has had one of these in partial summer plumage in Thurlestone Bay (southern tip of the county) for over a week

**Great Shearwater:** The first to be seen this year was off Start Point in Devon on July 2, earlier than usual. These do not normally appear in the central or eastern parts of the English Channel but are not uncommon passage birds around the south-west counties. See [http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Great\\_Shearwater](http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Great_Shearwater) or the RSPB fact sheet at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/g/greatshearwater/index.aspx> and

a rather poor and very noisy video of one in flight at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe2eu43UyMU>

**Balearic Shearwater:** These have been seen off Portland on five days this week with a max count of 15 on July 1

**Storm Petrel:** More than 20 were off south Devon on July 4 with smaller numbers on several days

**Night Heron:** RBA had a report of one in Surrey on July 1 ...

**Squacco Heron:** ... and also one of these in Norfolk on June 30

**Little Egret:** Passing Langstone Pond at low tide on July 6 when there were no adult birds present I could see at least four nests were still occupied with well grown juveniles (two in one of the nests) which will probably fledge within the next week

**Purple Heron:** One was present in the Kent Stour valley lakes for at least three days from June 29

**White Stork:** The three birds that have been roaming round West Sussex since June 22 were last reported over the Kingley Vale/Stoughton area on June 30

**Glossy Ibis:** Two birds were reported in the Pagham Harbour north walls area from May 6 to 28 (after which one was seen at Farlington Marshes from June 5 to 16) and now one was back at Pagham on June 30

**Mute Swan:** Last week I reported a summer moult flock on the River Itchen in the Bitterne area of Southampton had grown to 37 birds by June 27 and this week on July 6 the number was up to 52

**Shelduck:** When I visited the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps on July 5 I could only see 9 Shelduck on the water but, with the tide having just reached its high point, Redshank and Oystercatchers were flying in low to roost on the banks of the Deeps and high above them were several waves of larger birds (around 70 in total) which appeared to be all Shelduck heading east. As they did not land in my view I am not sure if they were also driven by the tide (no reason why they should be) or were already on their summer flight to moult off the German coast (see <http://www.birdsofbritain.co.uk/bird-guide/shelduck.asp> )

**Wigeon:** A single drake stayed on at the Oare Marshes in north Kent when the majority of our wintering birds left to breed elsewhere but on July 5 it was joined by four newcomers which appear to be the first post-breeding arrivals. Small numbers of **Teal**, **Pintail** and **Shoveler** also seem to have arrived in England this week while over in the Netherlands on July 3 there were 'remarkable' reports of **53 Pochard** and **81 Tufted Duck** all at one site. On July 4 there was also a single newly arrived **Long-tailed Duck** at Spurn Point in Yorkshire while July 5 saw the arrival of **4 Goldeneye** and **12 Red-breasted Merganser** in the Netherlands

**Marsh Harrier:** The sight of a newly fledged juvenile flying at Rye Harbour on July 6 was probably no great surprise with several pairs breeding nearby in Kent

but I was surprised to see a report of a single bird (age not stated) over Langstone Harbour on June 27 (I have not heard of one there since Apr 2)

**Osprey:** Reports of one at Fowey on the south coast of Cornwall on July 4 and 5 could be the first sign of this species starting to head south after failing to breed

**Merlin:** The Havant Wildlife Group feel confident that they saw a Merlin (as well as more than one Hobby) chasing Swallows at Thursley when they were there on July 7 which would make this the first Merlin to return to the south this 'autumn'. Last year the first returning bird was reported on July 25 with the main return starting on Aug 14

**Grey Partridge:** A local sighting on July 6 of a pair with four or five tiny chicks is good news indicating successful breeding in the wild but they were seen in a location where the survival of the young is doubtful. Those who know the 'Wickor Bank' sea wall running south past the west end of the Little and Great Deeps on Thorney Island will know that it is a well used dog-walking route, and for at least 400 metres of it any flightless bird is trapped in a narrow strip of land bounded by the sea on the west and the canal joining the two Deeps on the east. Unfortunately the adult Partridge had led their flightless young into this section and when the family was accidentally disturbed by Richard Somerscocks the adults flew to safety over the canal but had to leave their young on the seawall track where any dogs (Richard did not have any) would have had no trouble in catching them - we hope the family survived.

**Quail:** Reports this week from Cissbury Ring on the Downs above Worthing, from Martin Down south of Salisbury, from Burpham village near Arundel, and surprisingly from the disused but not yet built on Daedalus airfield at Lee on the Solent west of Gosport

**Ruff:** Three reports of birds (presumably on post-breeding return passage) - one of 11 birds at a Netherlands site on July 3, one of a single at a different Netherlands site on July 5, and one of two birds at the Oare Marshes in north Kent, also on July 5. Other wader species now returning from breeding, but often difficult to distinguish from non-breeding birds that have remained in southern England, include **Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank and Greenshank**

**Green Sandpiper:** Plenty of these now on passage with a peak total this week of 48 birds at 3 Netherlands sites on July 5

**Wood Sandpiper:** One seen at Sandwich Bay on July 5 and a report of 11 at a Netherlands site on July 5 (these were among the 48 Green Sandpiper and I have recently seen some controversy suggesting that 'spotty' juvenile Green Sands can be misidentified as Wood Sands).

**Common Sandpiper:** These seem to have started to return on June 21 and this week migrants have been seen at eight sites with a peak count of 15 at

Christchurch Harbour on July 4 (and my first single at the Thorney Great Deeps on July 5)

**Red-necked Phalarope:** RBA reported one in Suffolk on July 2 which seems to have been the ninth returning female to touch down in Britain after abandoning her offspring to the care of males

**Med Gull:** On June 13 a flock of 176 were seen over Thorney Island causing me to speculate on what these gulls get up to when their breeding season is washed out and they have time on their hands (or wings). Further wandering flocks were seen in north Kent (76 birds over Reculver on June 25) and near Chichester (75+ birds in the Fishbourne area on June 27) and now Peter Gammage has found a flock of 151 (with other gulls) in fields north of Hambledon in the Meon Valley on July 7

**Little Gull:** If you have ever wondered where all those Little Gulls go at the end of their passage through the English Channel it seems we have sent the Navy to find out - our special reporter Steve Copsey has been sent to the Baltic on HMS York and is currently sending us daily reports on the bird life seen while on a joint exercise with the Russian Navy. Go to <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> and scroll down past the contributions of the other two Amigos (Mark Cutts and Tony Tindale, both currently confined to the Portsmouth area) to read the various contributions from Steve concerning Little Gulls, Golden Orioles and breeding Fieldfares to be seen with their young in the city parks.

**Sabines Gull:** An unexpected bird in the English Channel at this time of year, one has been seen off Folkestone on June 30 and south Devon on July 4

**Herring Gull:** While I know of at least one pair that have raised young in Havant this year (two chicks from a nest in Brockhampton Lane) and have seen other pairs seemingly prospecting rooves in Beechworth and Grove Roads I have wondered where the birds would locate a nest on these steeply sloping rooves. This week Brian Fellows has found the answer when he visited a house in Selangor Ave at Emsworth where another pair have also raised two young - their nest is wedged behind the chimney stack (see his photo in the July 3 page of his diary at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ). Brian's Diary also features another pair of gulls which have nested in Emsworth for the first time this year - a pair of **Great Blackbacks** which have raised two young on a raft in the Slipper Mill Pond.

**Iceland Gull:** At one time **Iceland and Glaucous Gulls** were only seen in southern England during winter months but last year **Glaucous became a year round feature at Dungeness** and this year there have only been five weeks when I have not recorded a report of Iceland Gull somewhere on the south coast. This week an Iceland Gull was seen in Portsmouth Dockyard on July 4 and one was there on June 4 with one at the Blashford Lakes on Apr 24 and the last of a series of sightings at Broadmarsh/Budds Farm and Portsmouth Docks was noted on Mar 31. Another was in the Newhaven area throughout April, and May has had a series of sightings starting in Cornwall then moving through Devon to Dungeness. This change to permanent residence on the south coast, affecting arctic bird

species, seems to have started with the Glaucous Gull that was at Dungeness throughout last year - perhaps they think its not worth going back north if global warming means there will be no snow or ice there when they arrive, on top of which our human depletion of fish stocks means that the birds can be more certain of a food supply from us humans and our rubbish if they stay down south.

**Gull-billed Tern:** One made a one day visit to Lodmoor (Weymouth) on June 29

**Roseate Tern:** Two were at Lodmoor on July 4 after one had been at Rye Harbour on July 3 and 4

**Cuckoo:** An adult was still to be seen at Christchurch Harbour on July 5

**Short-eared Owl:** One was at Farlington Marshes on June 27 and one was hunting the Lymington marshes on July 5

**Bee Eater:** Just one this week in Cornwall on July 5

**House Martin:** A report of a flock of 80 over the River Itchen just south of Winchester on July 4 made me reflect that the species is being made to look more numerous than normal because the lack of insect food has caused the birds to abandon nesting (which spreads them more widely across the country) and come together in big flocks where there is some hope of finding a meal.

**Mistle Thrush:** At the start of this year I was coming to think that Mistle Thrushes were birds of the past but having a pair apparently once more nesting here in the Wade Court area at Langstone and recently hearing of several small post-breeding flocks I feel that all is not lost (just 8 at Eastleigh on May 25, then 14 in the Findon valley at Worthing on June 17, increasing to around 30 in one field at Warninglid near Crawley on June 26 and now 20 on Badminton Common on the edge of the New Forest on July 2)

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** One reported at St Just in Cornwall on July 6 seems to me to be either a very out-of-season bird or a case of mistaken identity

**Willow Warbler:** Definite signs of these summer visitors already starting to depart. Last week we reported the first departing bird had been seen at Portland, then on June 30 a flock of 32 birds was seen at a Netherlands migration site and now on July 6 Sandwich Bay had its first bird heading south.

**Golden Oriole:** Also presumably now heading south one of these was in north Kent on June 24, another heard singing and calling at Bosham near Chichester on June 27 and two at a Netherlands site on June 30

**Raven:** If you go to

[http://www.sos.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_jobline4&Itemid=10&task=view&id=19132](http://www.sos.org.uk/index.php?option=com_jobline4&Itemid=10&task=view&id=19132) you will see a photo of a pair of Ravens taken by Alan Kitson in the Cuckmere valley on July 7 showing a distinct brown tinge to the head and neck plumage of both birds which are said to be adults. I seem to recall hearing of a

brown plumaged corvid (maybe a Jackdaw?) in Sussex sometime in the past but cannot at the moment remember where, when or even what species but what I do know is that there is a species called Brown-necked Raven listed in Collins Bird Guide but unless these two have been blown north by recent winds bringing Saharan sand to Britain that species is strictly limited to desert areas. I suspect the answer to the question of the birds identity lies in the fact that Collins also tells us normal Ravens can occasionally show this variation in the neck feathers.

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*):** This species is normally restricted to six widely separated areas of Britain (and one in southern Ireland) and the Havant area lies midway between its two south coast areas, one around the New Forest and the other stretching east from mid-Sussex into Kent and north to the Thames Valley. The species normally flies from early May to early July and being near the end of its flight period (and in a period of strong winds) may help to account for why a female was photographed in the Hollybank Woods (just north of Emsworth) on June 30

**Black Darter:** First report for the year from Surrey on July 1

**Ruddy Darter:** First report from Rye Harbour on or before June 29

**Red Veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombei*):** This is a frequent migrant which has not yet established any permanent colonies in Britain but a report on July 5 of an invasion of at least 15 individuals at a Norfolk site shows it is having another go this year.

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Downy Emerald, Black Darter, Ruddy Darter, Red-veined Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Azure Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Gatekeeper:** Last year the first was seen on June 2 but this year I had not heard of any when I saw my own first in Havant on July 4 (with others seen elsewhere on July 5). Nationally I see the first was seen on June 19 this year (the Butterfly Conservation national list of first sightings can be seen at [http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/text/853/first\\_sightings\\_2012.html](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/text/853/first_sightings_2012.html) - maybe I will have to add this site for my weekly trawl for news).

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Silver Studded Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, White Admiral, Red Admiral, Painted Lady (just two seen at Arundel on June 30), Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed

Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Ringlet

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Volucella zonaria Hoverfly:** First of these large Hoverflies seen at Durlston on July 6. If you are not familiar with this impressive species have a look at <http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/archive/showphoto.php?photo=138410> (scroll down to the main photo)

**Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*):** This species only arrived in England in 2001 and is now widespread and fairly common throughout the British Isles but not many people will have seen a pair of them mating as happened in Emsworth on July 5 where it was photographed by Brian Fellows' son and subsequently shown on Brian's website - see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-043-bumblebees-mating-05.07.12.jpg> For more info or to contribute sightings to a national survey go to <http://www.bwars.com/index.php?q=content/bombus-hypnorum-mapping-project> To be confident of identifying the species note that it is the only British species with the combination of an orange coloured thorax, a black abdomen and a white tail

**Beetles at Rye Harbour:** Two unusual small beetles seen at Rye Harbour this week have appeared on the Rye Bay website - the first on the old format website, the second on the new format. On June 27 the old site featured a rare beetle (*Dibolia cynoglossi*) which feeds on the rare plant Red Hemp Nettle (the name suggests it might also feed on Hounds Tongue) - for this one see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/23/rare-plant-rarer-beetle/> - and on July 3 the new format showed a small weevil that feeds on Viper's Bugloss - see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/7/3/a-weevil-by-another-name.html> Note that in this entry Barry Yates says that this Weevil is under consideration for introduction to Australia to save that continent from Patterson's Curse which is the name the Australians have given to a plant (*Purple Viper's Bugloss* or *Echium plantagineum* - not our common Vipers Bugloss) that has spread out of control over the continent and poisons cattle and horses which eat it. It seems that long ago a family called Patterson became homesick for the garden plants they had left behind in Europe and imported some which unintentionally escaped.... (The alternative name of Calamity Jane may refer to the homesick wife of this family)

**Glow-worm:** Last week we had the first report of these 'glowing' on the Isle of Wight on June 23. This week we have the second report that I have seen - it comes from Rye Harbour on July 3

## **PLANTS**

**Travellers Joy or Old Man's Beard:** I saw the first flowers on this at Marlpit Lane near Funtington on July 5

**Rough Poppy (*Papaver hybridum*):** John Goodspeed reported this in flower on Portsdown on June 27

**Tutsan:** First flowers in Havant on July 2

**Hollyhock:** First garden escapes were flowering in Emsworth on July 5

**Long stalked Cranesbill (*Geranium columbinum*):** Until last year I was only aware of one site for this in our local area (north of Rowlands Castle in the fields of Old Idsworth Farm along the south side of Huckswood Lane) but last year I heard of another site among the gravel pits east of Marlpit Lane where Peter Raby had found the species. My attempt to find the species there last year failed but further help from John Norton helped me to find the site this year and you can read my account of where they are in my diary page for July 5.

**Strawberry Clover:** This will soon be widespread but I found the first plants in flower at the south end of Langstone Bridge on July 6

**Bush Vetch:** Last year I found this in flower before April was out but this year I still have not seen it and the first report for the year comes from Durlston on July 5

**Meadow Sweet:** First flowers seen by the Langbrook stream in Havant on July 2

**Dropwort:** Found flowering on Portsdown on June 27

**Enchanter's Nightshade:** First flowers in Havant on July 2

**Fool's Parsley:** First flowers in Havant on July 3

**Pepper Saxifrage:** First flowers reported at Durlston on July 7

**Fools water cress (*Apium nodiflorum*):** First flowers seen in the Langbrook stream at Havant on July 2

**Water Dock:** This extra large species of Dock was flowering in Langstone Pond on July 2

**Redshank:** First flowers seen in Havant on July 3

**Lax-flowered Sea Lavender:** First flowers at Langstone on July 2 (I seem to have failed to record the first flowering of Common Sea Lavender which I feel sure is also in flower)

**Creeping Jenny:** This plant grows wild in my garden and was in full flower (perhaps encouraged by the rain) by July 2 so I guess it will also be flowering in the Warblington Farm Marsh (SSSI) field east of the cemetery

**Vervain:** This was seen in flower both at the Bridge Road carpark site in Emsworth and along the ERA track on north Thorney Island, both on July 5

**Deadly Nightshade:** This downland speciality was first seen in flower on July 6 by John Goodspeed at the Hawkley Warren site north of Petersfield

**Dark Mullein:** Also a first find for John Goodspeed on July 2 at North Common open space on Hayling Island

**Moth Mullein:** A couple of plants flowering at the Marlpit Lane sandpits on July 5. Last year I found several plants of this growing less than half a mile east of this site - also found last year in Prinsted (Market Garden site), and beside the Ferry Road on Hayling so it appears this is becoming common in the wider Havant area

**Brooklime:** First flowers for the year seen in the concrete stream channel along the southern edge of Havant Park on July 3

**Common Cow-wheat:** Seen flowering at Cowes on the loW by Brian Fellows on July 2, reminding me that I used to find this each year in the unmade section of Prospect Lane on the north side of Whichers Gate Road in Rowlands Castle but nowadays I do not know of any site for it in the Havant area

**Marjoram:** Durlston was the first site to report the flowering of this on July 6

**Wood Sage:** I first found this in flower on July 5 but am pretty sure it will have been seen by others well before that date

**Round-headed Rampion:** Another first flowering recorded by John Goodspeed at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley on July 4

**Common Valerian:** Also first reported by John Goodspeed as flowering on the lower slopes of Portsdown below the Viewpoint Carpark on June 27

**Field Scabious:** First report from Durlston on July 5

**Narrow-leaved Ragwort:** Flowering beside Farm Lane at Nutbourne in Sussex on July 5 (I gather that there are two motorway verge patches of this invader now established in Hampshire by the M3 near Eastleigh and on the M27 near Hedge End).

**Golden Samphire:** Already flowering at Oare Marshes in north Kent on July 5

**Shaggy Soldier:** Flowering on July 6 on the Emsworth roadside where it was first found last summer (on, I think, Aug 29)

**Common Cudweed:** Found on June 27 flowering on the Portsdown 'Top Field' by John Goodspeed

**Wetted Thistle:** A mass of this in flower at Marlpit Lane on July 5

**Cotton Thistle:** The giant plant growing in a garden on the north side of Westbourne Road where it passes over the River Ems was starting to flower on July 4

**Prickly Lettuce:** Starting to flower on July 3

**Fragrant Orchid:** First report of flowering by John Goodspeed at Old Winchester Hill on July 4

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Leatherback Turtle:** The first report for this year was one seen on July 4 from a boat off Penzance in Cornwall

**Common Thresher Shark (*Alopias vulpinus*):** Thresher Sharks have a very elongated top tail fin with which they stun prey fish using a 'threshing' movement (this fin can also be dangerous to sub-aqua divers) This is the only species which we are likely to see and only one or two turn up each summer but they are impressive creatures (up to 32 foot long). For a video of one threshing its tail as seen from a fishing boat off Devon in Aug 2011 see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-14375548> The first to be reported this year was off south Devon on July 3

**Cuttlefish bone:** The first which I have seen on the Chichester Harbour shore had been washed up on July 3 but I suspect these bones have been coming ashore for some time as a massive wreck of them washed up on Cornish beaches in mid-May (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-13451208> ). Trying to find confirmation of the time of year when they breed and subsequently die I came on <http://www.pznw.co.uk/marine/cuttlefish.html> which showed me what their eggs look like (a bunch of withered black grapes) and also made me aware that three species are involved. Don't be misled by the title of this website into thinking it is based in Poland - Pznw seems to be an old Cornish name for Penzance!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 2 - 8 (WEEK 27 OF 2012)**

### **Thu 5 July**

#### **Long-stalked Cranesbill and other good finds**

With the sun shining warmly and the wind light I cycled east to Nutbourne, then north via Hambrook over the A27 to Marlpit Lane from which I came home along the Funtington Road and then through north Emsworth. New plants for the year were **Long-stalked Cranesbill**, **Moth Mullein**, **Wetted Thistle**, **Vervain**, **Old Man's Beard** and **Wild Basil** plus a couple already seen by others but new to me (**Rosebay Willowherb** and **Wood Sage**). I also had a couple of personal insect firsts (**Marbled White** butterfly, **Southern Hawker** dragonfly and a mating pair of what I think were **Black-tailed Skimmers**) and my first **Common Sandpiper** of the autumn.

First stop was on the Thorney 'Wickor Bank' sea wall by the Little and Great Deeps, the latter being where I saw the Common Sandpiper among many

Redshank and Oystercatcher flying in for refuge from the top of the spring tide. Also flying in high (and with their backs to me) were some bulky birds which I could not at first identify until a few changed direction enough for me to see white on their breasts and wings and to realise they were **Shelduck** - at least 70 heading for the far end of the Deeps in addition to nine already on the water near me. On the Little Deeps I only saw Mallard and Coot but as I cycled on down to the Great Deeps I passed the Southern Hawker and my first Marbled White plus Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Large and Small White. On the bank at the Great Deeps I found just **one young Pointed Snail** (had the weather been hotter and the vegetation thinner I would no doubt have seen more).

One spike of flowering **Vervain** confronted me as soon as I got onto the ERA track heading east - near it was a lone **Pyramidal orchid** and back on the Wickor Bank I had noted a single plant of **Prickly Lettuce** already in flower.

At Farm Lane in Nutbourne the **Narrow-leaved Ragwort** was flowering as it has for several years - to find it head west along Farm Lane past the track to the shore and look in the edge of the dense vegetation on the north side of the road - you should see the bright yellow flowers among the brambles shortly before you reach the point where the 'Ham Brook' stream runs under Farm Lane into the 'Conservation Area' field. I brought back a small sample to contrast the almost linear leaves of this species with the complex pattern of what I am calling the 'Mount Etna Ragwort' that is growing this year in Havant at the western entrance to the north carpark of the Langstone Technology Park.

Contrasting leaves of 'Mount Etna'(left) and Narrow-leaved Ragwort (right)

Nothing of much significance until I reached the waste land (old pits) east of Marlpit Lane where I started off along the main track leading east from the northern vehicle gate (close to the footpath entrance), immediately finding myself among a mass of **Wetted Thistles, Vipers Bugloss, Common Comfrey** and many other plants which were already on my list (though I did stop here to add the **Wetted Thistle** and the **Old Man's Beard** which I had found in flower for the first time on the hedge lining the west side of Marlpit Lane before entering the site).

I had brought my bike into the site with me to keep it safe but soon began to have difficulties with the wet, slippery clay soil on which I was often in danger of slipping into deep pools that were all along the tracks, and before I left the site I had to remove a great mass of sticky mud from the wheel arches and brakes where it accumulated until the wheel would not even turn!

My own route was longer than it need have been and I would recommend any one heading for the area where the **Long-stalked Cranesbill** grows to turn off the broad easterly track at the first opportunity onto an equally broad track heading south and then uphill in a long left hand curve. When this track ceases to go uphill look ahead and to your right for the first of a line of fence posts supporting a barbed wire fence (they may not be easy to spot among the vegetation) running east away from you, and south of which I had been told to look for the Cranesbill which is where I found my first plant.

This plant had a single flower stem 3cm long and while trying to position the flower for a photo it came off in my hand, hence the separation of the photos of plant and flower! Next to what I thought might be the only plant I would find I came on two plants of **Moth Mullein** (and managed to photograph the flowers of this in my shade but leaving the background to the flowers in full sunlight!). Also in this area I found **Rosebay Willowherb, Wood Sage and Wild Basil** while a Buzzard glided by against the background trees. Later I found the Cranesbill flowers in at least four places so it is well worth searching around.

Detached flower of Long-stalked Cranesbill with its 3cm long stem

Flowerless plant of Long-stalked Cranesbill

Bad photo of upper stem and better photo of lower stem of Moth Mullein plant  
Many thanks to Peter Raby and John Norton for their directions to the site

**Wed 4 July**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **First Gatekeeper butterfly**

A short walk around Havant this morning found lots of **Mousear Hawkweed** flowering on the South Street frontage of St Faith's churchyard (along with **Green Field Speedwell**) and later, in the garden of the single house on the west side of Havant Park, I found lots more **Borage** among a mass of wild flowers presumably sown by Havant Borough.

In the afternoon, during a break in the rain, I cycled to the far side of Emsworth, up Lumley Lane to Westbourne and back via Southleigh Road. A brief stop at the 'Emsworth Wayside' side east of the Warblington underpass found **Common Centaury** coming into flower but more excitingly my **first Gatekeeper butterfly of the year**. Last year these were being reported from the beginning of June but I have not seen them reported anywhere so far this year.

Coming out of Westbourne I passed the first flowers on the huge **Cotton Thistle** in a garden on the north side of Westbourne Road just after the road turns west and crosses the River Ems (the river is not visible from the road)

**Tue 3 July**

First the correction - **I did not find Corn Spurrey yesterday, it was Lesser Stitchwort** but found in an unusual situation and apparently having no stem leaves. I looked at my specimen under a microscope and carefully noted details including the presence of 5 deeply cut petals, 10 stamens and 3 stigmas, then checked with, but did not act on, Stace who clearly says that Spurreys have five 'entire', not split, petals; 5 to 10 stamens; and 5 stigmas.

Today I walked north to the New Lane allotments and added the **Weasels Snout** and, in the cemetery, **Duke of Argyle's Teaplant** to my July list, en route passing my first **Redshank** flowers for the year, and came back via Havant Park where I confirmed that plants seen last week, but only from across the busy road passing the Bus Station, were **Borage**, and while there I found both **Brooklime** and

**Greater Willowherb** flowering in the concrete channel of the Lavant stream before it becomes (in my book) the Langbrook on the west side of Park Road.

Two other species that got a tick on my year list (both ticks were of dubious integrity!) were **Prickly Lettuce** - among a cluster of plants having flower buds one had I think been sprayed with weed killer, turning most of its leaves yellow and forcing it into early flowering before it died an early death. The other plant was **Caucasian Stonecrop** which was starting to flower in an obvious garden situation but as I have the species on my 'wild flower' list through its established presence on a cemetery grave where it does not appear to have been tended for more than 20 years, I recorded that the flowering period for the species has arrived. Another species of which I found half a dozen plants in flower for the first time since February was **Fool's Parsley** - I see Brian Fellows found the species in bud at Emsworth yesterday

**Mon 2 July**

### **A wet walk discovers eight new flowering plants**

Despite the continuous light rain the advent of a new month got me out for a walk to Langstone during which I came across eight newly flowering plants for the year, the best and most appropriate of which was **Meadow Sweet** beside the Langbrook Stream. Also newly flowering in the stream was **Fool's Water Cress** with its small clusters of flowers shyly hiding in the stem joints. Another wetland plant was the massive **Water Dock** growing in Langstone Pond and near it, just below the seawall, **Lax Sea Lavender** was flowering (beside it was the first washed up **Cuttlefish bone** of the summer). Another significant newcomer seen in Havant was **Enchanter's Nightshade** (not a Nightshade but a member of the Willowherb family of which my garden had this year's first flowering **Short-fruited Willowherb** - the first specimen of which had been found last week in Brook Meadow at Emsworth).

An unexpected find in disturbed soil by the eastbound approach road to the Langstone roundabout was **Corn Spurrey** and near it **Common Orache** was starting to flower. An uninteresting first flower in Havant was **Greater Plantain** and a surprise find in Juniper Square was red strawberry fruit on the Yellow-flowered Strawberries. Returning to the Billy Trail from Wade Court Road at the end of my walk I found white flower umbels (no flowers yet open) on the Danewort and among the trees here a Spindle was bearing a good crop of fruit though still green in colour.

Wren and Dunnock (but not Robin) were still singing as were Blackbird and Song Thrush plus the inevitable Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove with Reed Warbler at Langstone Pond. At Grove Road I noticed Royal Fern (definitely planted!) was flowering and that **Herring Gulls** were claiming possession of house rooves and at Langstone, with the tide high, there were some 30 **Egrets** roosting in the trees with at least four nests still occupied. Coming up Wade Lane I found a cluster of toadstools on the earth bank of the sunken section of the lane - they were past their best and I could not be sure of their identity but thought they were **Agaricus bitorquis**.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 25 - JULY 1 (WEEK 26 OF 2012)**

## BIRDS

**Black-browed Albatross:** There have been at least three recent sightings of an immature bird in the Channel Islands area - on May 15 it was near Guernsey, on June 17 it was near Alderney and on June 22 it was some 20 nautical miles north west of Alderney. This bird is said to be immature (i.e. less than 7 years old) so it is unlikely to be the bird which spent at least 40 years in the north Atlantic (with no mate or company of its own species) between 1967 and 2007 - see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/3292859/Albatross-looking-for-love-on-the-rocks.html> (written in 2007) for details of this bird which may or may not be still alive. Since then one was seen in July 2009 off Lands End area of Cornwall by the Seawatch SW group and in July 2010 the same group added a new species to the British list with a **Yellow-nosed Albatross**.

**Balearic Shearwater:** Numbers increasing in the Channel with 11 reports this week including a single seen off Sandy Point on Hayling on June 29 (when two were seen off Milford at the other end of the Hampshire coastline) and up to 9 off Portland on June 24 (when there were 16 off Brittany on the French coast)

**Storm Petrel:** A pelagic boat trip around the Scillies recorded 10 birds on June 20 while two were seen off Sandy Point on Hayling on June 24

**Little Egret:** First juvenile seen out of its nest at Langstone Pond on June 24 and an hour's scan of the nests with Hazel Rouse on June 26 saw 10 juveniles (including 2 out of the nest) and found several nests apparently abandoned (so some families may have already left the area). We also saw a couple of adults with large sticks in their bills as if thinking of making new nests.

**White Stork:** A group of three were in the Lidsey Sewage Works area between Chichester and Bognor - first spotted from a Chichester to Bognor train at 6pm on June 20 they stayed in the area until June 28 giving many birders a chance to see them (though some get rather wet wading through floods). One birder who saw them was Tony Tindale from Fareham and you can see his photo of two of the Storks in company with Grey Herons, showing the size difference, see - <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/06/016trim.jpg> The three Lidsey birds may have flown east to the Cuckmere valley near Beachy Head on June 25 and probably flew north over Pulborough Brooks on June 28. Most recent sighting of them was over the Kingley Vale area northwest of Chichester at midday on June 30

**Glossy Ibis:** At least one of the birds that have been in the fields north of Pagham Harbour was still there on June 30

**Mute Swan:** A summer moult flock is now building up in the Bitterne Riverside Park on the Itchen in Southampton (37 birds there on June 27) and other flocks can be expected at the Broadmarsh slipway in Havant, in Emsworth Harbour and in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester among other regular sites

**Shelduck:** Flocks of 350 and 173 at two Netherlands sites suggest that the summer moult flocks are already building there

**Kestrel:** A couple of dramatic pictures of a female Kestrel caught 'red clawed' taking Black-headed Gull chicks can be seen at <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/6/29/kestrel-v-black-headed-gull.html>

This is one of the first entries to appear on the new version of the RX (Rye Bay) website which went live this week. I suggest that anyone with an interest in wildlife news from this prolific source takes a note of the new address ( <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/> ) and also of the old address with its mine of info built up over recent years ( <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/> - the new website does not seem to have a link back to the old archives though no doubt that will soon be corrected)

**Quail:** One has been 'singing' from the grassland of the old Daedalus airfield at Lee on the Solent from June 29 to July 1 at least

**Spotted Crake:** One of the first birds to be reported in the UK this autumn was seen in Cambridgeshire on June 26 (RBA had reported one earlier sighting back on May 3)

**Great Bustard:** The scheme to re-introduce Bustards to the UK started work in 2006 and the first chicks were hatched in nests on Salisbury Plain within the past couple of years. Each winter one or more of the birds have flown away from Salisbury Plain but so far they have returned there for the spring breeding season. Up to 2011 none of the birds had flown further than the English south coast (mainly Dorset but also Hampshire and I think Somerset) but last autumn one of the birds flew the Channel and spent six months in a French (Normandy) village lucerne field from which it has just returned to Salisbury Plain - see <http://greatbustard.org/great-bustards/2012/06/5530/>

**Lapwing:** I have not yet heard of any post breeding birds on the Langstone shore but on June 27 more than 57 (including many juveniles) were at the Pagham Harbour Ferry Pool.

**Snipe:** Most birders are keen to hear and to report **roding Woodcock** and **churring Nightjars** but we get very few mentions of **drumming Snipe**. I fear this is because there are few breeding Snipe left in southern England but it may just be that it is 'not the done thing' to be enthusiastic about a sound which can best be compared to the brief bleating of a goat. For me this sound (if I ever heard it nowadays) would evoke strong memories of being alone in the New Forest as a teenager in the late 1940s when one of my tasks during summer holidays was to take the goats, which we kept as our wartime milk supply, into the open Forest heathland and chain them out to browse during the day and then bring them in at dusk (if they had not 'slipped their moorings' or managed to hang themselves by their chains - goats will be goats!). On calm summer evenings the drumming of snipe and the bleating of goats blended into a unique 'country music'. The reason for this uncalled for personal reminiscence is that, **on June 25, a birder in the Shatterford area of the New Forest (north side of Beaulieu Road station) heard this special combination of Snipe, Nightjar and Woodcock (no Goats but maybe a Marsh Frog or two?)**

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Living in Hampshire I tend to think of the Icelandic race/subspecies (*Limosa limosa islandica*) of this bird as being the major component of the world population of this species but I am aware that there is also a 'European' race which confusingly breeds in eastern England and this week signs that post breeding birds are returning to Kent (123 at the Oare Marshes on June 27) and may have even reached Pagham Harbour (5 seen at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool on June 27 though these could equally be part of a large mobile non-breeding population which spends the summer on our south coast or even early returnees from Iceland). These speculations about the origin of the currently reported birds spurred me to search for info on the patterns of movement of the two main races and my first port of call (Wikipedia) seemed to have a more reliable than usual account of the species (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-tailed Godwit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-tailed_Godwit) ). This added several new factors to my knowledge of the species ...

There is a third race of the species (*L. limosa melanuroides* - the Asian Black-tailed Godwit)

Although wintering birds from Mongolia fly south through South-east Asia to Australia and even Tasmania and others from the European population can be found in a broad belt across Africa from Senegal to Somalia (see the world map in the Wikipedia article) they all breed in the northern hemisphere with one population in Iceland, another in Mongolia, and the majority spread out across northern Europe from Eastern England to central Russia.

Young birds of all races fly south to winter with their parents but do not return to the breeding grounds until two winters have elapsed. Although the English name of Godwit is supposed to derive from 'Good to eat' nowadays (in Europe) the birds are only shot for the table in France where up to 8,000 birds may be shot annually (not sure if that is still true)

BTO Bird Facts tells us that the species became extinct as a breeding species in Britain in 1885 but breeding resumed in East Anglia in 1952 and by 2009 we had a breeding population of 67 pairs

**Green Sandpiper:** Autumn passage seems to have started on June 19 when 3 were seen at Pagham (with one at Fleet Pond on June 20) and since June 22 there have been sightings on the Rivers Itchen and Test, Pulborough Brooks, Pagham Harbour, Weir Wood reservoir and the Kent Stour valley

**Common Sandpiper:** Also now on passage with a 'first of autumn' at the Blashford Lakes on June 23 when one was also seen at Hayle in Cornwall. Since then reports have come from Weir Wood, Fishbourne Channel near Chichester, Christchurch Harbour and Pulborough Brooks.

**Red-necked Phalarope:** One seen in Gloucestershire on June 26 and one in Belgium on June 19 could mark the start of return passage for the females (seven earlier reports between May 2 and June 6 are thought to be late spring passage)

**Grey Phalarope:** One in Scotland on June 24 may have been 'returning' (one in the Netherlands on May 12 was probably 'outgoing')

**Med Gull:** Very few have been seen or heard in the Havant/Hayling area since mid-May when a few were in the Hayling Oysterbeds area but failed to breed and vanished before the end of the month. Also in mid-May 55 pairs were reported at Rye Harbour but there has been little subsequent news of them there (or at Titchfield Haven where 91 present on Mar 31 had dwindled to 10 on May 19). The few recent reports seem to show that the birds have formed wandering flocks (e.g. 33 over Seaford on June 8, 176 over Thorney Island on June 13, 20 over Christchurch Harbour on June 20, 76 over Reculver in north Kent on June 25 and 75+ over the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on June 27). On June 24 I was surprised to see one among the Black-headed Gulls on the Langstone shore.

**Black Tern:** These were being reported in ones and twos along our south coast almost daily up to June 14 but this was followed by a gap until June 28 when 2 were seen in the Netherlands and I guess they may be the first of the returnees

**White-winged Black Tern:** Two have been in the news this week starting with a report on June 25 of one bird in Kent and another in Surrey. On June 27 one was seen in Wiltshire and on June 28 one was in Somerset - the direction suggests these too were failed breeders

**Guillemot:** At Durlston on June 27 at least one had leapt from the ledge where it hatched to join its parent on the sea. Young were also seen leaving their nest ledges at Portland on that same day

**Cuckoo:** Several adults still here and calling up to June 28 when one was heard at Pulborough Brooks

**Short-eared Owl:** One still in north Kent on June 21 and another at Wyke Down near Sixpenny Handley in Dorset on June 22

**Yellow-Wagtail:** The first southward bound bird seen at Christchurch Harbour on July 1

**Nightingale:** Still singing at Pulborough Brooks on June 28

**Blue-throat:** One, maybe two, in the Netherlands on June 28. Of the two reports one was of a Blue-throat, the other of a White-spotted Blue-throat and I took the opportunity to check if these are different species. Birdguides tells me that there is just one species but that ... "The blue throat of a male is, of course, diagnostic. In summer, Scandinavian males have a red patch in the blue throat but in birds from elsewhere in Europe this patch is white. In females, the throat is mostly white, with no blue at all, but enclosed by a dark, blotchy band across the breast."

**Mistle Thrush:** Up to 30 birds were seen in a field by the A23 west of Haywards Heath on June 26

**Wheatear:** The first juvenile was seen in the Folkestone area on June 25 but it was uncertain if it was a local bird (hatched in Kent) or the first autumn migrant

**Willow Warbler:** On June 25 Portland had the first departing migrant of the autumn

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Also on June 25 Portland reported the first three departing Flycatchers.

**Golden Oriole:** One reported to have been seen and heard at Bosham on June 27

**Starling:** On June 28 the first large autumn flocks were seen in the Netherlands - one of 18671 birds, the other of 8753

**Escapes:** A colourful Red Bishop was seen at Portland on June 21 - see [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-Mm49Banlvhl/T-Y0bvwVLcl/AAAAAAAAAXI/BiwDwbG0kg4/s1600/DSC\\_0638.JPG](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-Mm49Banlvhl/T-Y0bvwVLcl/AAAAAAAAAXI/BiwDwbG0kg4/s1600/DSC_0638.JPG) and [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-uHWkBQnccAQ/T-Y0aJqePNI/AAAAAAAAAXE/ODvseWPB3-E/s1600/DSC\\_0632.JPG](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-uHWkBQnccAQ/T-Y0aJqePNI/AAAAAAAAAXE/ODvseWPB3-E/s1600/DSC_0632.JPG)

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Southern Hawker:** First of year seen on the loW on June 25 with another in Suffolk on June 26

**Common Darter:** A very early specimen had been reported in Devon on May 29 but a general emergence started on June 28 in Norfolk, at Rye Harbour on June 29 and in Suffolk on June 30

**Ruddy Darter:** First of year seen at Rye Harbour on June 29

**Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*):** This has been on the wing since May 2 in its stronghold areas (one in east Sussex, another in the New Forest and Dorset) but it is not normally seen in the Havant area so the sighting of a female in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth on June 30 was a bit of good luck for Richard Somerscocks whose photo can be seen on Brian Fellows website <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> or directly at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-049-downy-emerald-hbw-RS-30.06.12.jpg>

**Willow Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes viridis*):** See <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/species/willow-emerald-damselfly> for photos and info about this species which only started to appear regularly in the UK in 2009. Until this year it had only been seen in Suffolk, Essex and Kent but on June 20 this year the first to be reported here was a female seen in Glamorgan!

#### **Species reported this week:**

Southern Hawker, Gold Ringed Dragonfly, Black Tailed Skimmer, Common Darter, Ruddy Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Downy Emerald, Willow Emerald, Azure Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Essex Skipper:** First of year seen in the Brighton area on June 25

**Lulworth Skipper:** First of year seen on Portland on June 23

**Swallowtail:** First of the British race seen in Norfolk on June 26

**Purple Hairstreak:** First report from Pulborough on June 22

**Large Blue:** Seen at Collard Hill in Somerset on June 23

**White Admiral:** First seen in Harewood Forest near Andover on June 24

**Marbled White:** It is not uncommon, at the end of their season (late August) to find wind blown individuals in places where they are not normally resident but I was surprised to see that a couple of fresh specimens had been photographed in the Lumley area of Emsworth (just outside Brook Meadow) where I do not recall hearing of them in past years (though I do expect to see them at a site no more than 1 km to the north). Checking with Jeremy Thomas' RSNC guide to Butterflies I see that he says they like areas of 'tall, unimproved grassland' but will happily breed in one field and ignore another which he thinks is due to the presence (seemingly essential for the caterpillars diet) or absence of Red Fescue in the grass mix.

**Ringlet:** The first of these had been seen in West Sussex on June 17 and they were seen near Andover on June 22 but this week has brought the first local sightings at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 30

#### **Species reported this week:**

Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Lulworth Skipper, Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Swallowtail, Wood White, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Purple Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Large Blue, White Admiral, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Marbled White, Meeadow Brown, Small Heath, Ringlet.

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**A green-eyed solitary bee (*Anthophora bimaculata*):** For Chris Bentley's photo of an unusual bee found at Rye Harbour on June 28 see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/sightings/2012/6/28/anthophora-bimaculata.html>

**Uncommon Beetles:** Recent finds at Rye Harbour have included ...

*Dibiloa cynoglossi*, an endangered Flea Beetle, see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/23/rare-plant-rarer-beetle/>

*Limobius mixtus*, a weevil whose only known location in the UK seems to be Rye Harbour, see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/27/rare-weevil/#more-15772>

**Scorpion Fly:** For an impressive photo of a strange looking insect which is not, I think, a great rarity (I have seen it on the Warblington Farm fields at this time of year in the past) see <http://rx-wildlife.squarespace.com/storage/newrxscorpionflyP1010108.jpg>

**Glow-worm:** First report of two glowing females comes on June 23 from Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight - just a simple entry of this fact amongst Derek Hale's Bird News at <http://iowbirds.awardspace.com/IOW.htm>

## PLANTS

**Hairy Buttercup:** These can be difficult to distinguish from the very common *Bulbous Buttercup* without uprooting a specimen to check for a bulbous like swelling of the base of the stem where it enters the ground but this week Brian Fellows did this to a specimen growing in a damp area of the Emsworth Recreation Ground which had slightly paler flowers than those of *Bulbous Buttercups*. The absence of any swelling of the stem base confirmed that Brian had found a *Hairy Buttercup*, giving me the first definite report of the species in flower for the year

**Perforate St John's Wort:** First flowers open on this very common species on June 25

**Square-stemmed St John's Wort:** This wetland species was flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 27

**Tufted Vetch:** Early flowering specimens had been seen on June 6 at Durlston and June 7 at Chichester but general flowering started this week from June 25

**Ribbed Melilot:** First flowers seen on June 25

**White Melilot:** First flowers of this summer were also seen on June 25

**Small Melilot (*Melilotus indicus* or *indica*!):** On June 25 I visited a colony of this plant which John Norton had made me aware of when he photographed it on May 30. My own photos and a description of the site can be seen in my diary page for June 25

**Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil (Lotus blaber):** Also seen on June 25 with photos on my diary page

**Goat's Rue:** First flowers also seen on my June 25 trip

**Fragrant Agrimony:** The established plants at North Common on Hayling had just started to flower on June 26

**Hoary Willowherb:** First flowering reported by Brian Fellows in Emsworth on June 26

**Short-fruited Willowherb:** First flowers found by Brian Fellows in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth on June 20

**Rosebay Willowherb:** First flowers found on Portsdown by John Goodspeed on June 19

**Wild Celery:** First flowers seen in roadside ditches on north Hayling on June 26

**Creeping Jenny:** Garden escape plants flowering in my garden on June 28 suggests that the wild plants which grow in the Warblington Farm marsh SSSI should now be in flower

**Common Centaury:** First flowers seen beside the cycleway in the Broadmash-Farlington Marshes area on June 25

**Red Bartsia:** First flowers reported at Durlston on June 25

**Black Horehound:** First flowers in Havant on June 25

**Wood Sage:** First flowers reported at Durlston on June 26

**Borage:** Flowers found by John Goodspeed 'somewhere between Emsworth and Westbourne' on June 27

**Venus Looking Glass:** Flowers seen on Portsdown by John Goodspeed on June 19 in the 'top field' which extends west from the hilltop roundabout (probably very close to the point at which you step out of the carpark into the field which is where I saw it last year)

**Hedge Bedstraw:** First flowers also on Portsdown on June 23

**Ladies Bedstraw:** First flowers in Warblington cemetery on June 24

**Squinancywort:** Also no doubt now flowering on Portsdown - first report from Durlston on June 26

**Small Scabious:** Flowering by the Farlington Marshes approach road - first seen by John Norton on June 19

**Bristly Oxtongue:** First flowers seen on June 25

**Narrow-leaved Water Plantain:** Plants flowering in the Westbrook Stream at Emsworth on June 26

**Frog Orchid:** First reported flower at Martin Down on June 23

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Snails:** On June 24 Durlston reported both **Round-mouthed** and **Wrinkled Snails**.

**Round-mouthed** is one of very few land snails which retains the habit of breathing through gills immersed in water from the days when it was a marine mollusc. Living nowadays in dry, usually chalky, habitat it has to take special precautions to retain an internal water supply - to do this it spends the daylight hours underground to reduce evaporation (burrowing into loose chalky soil) and, more importantly, it has developed a watertight 'bath plug' with which it seals the round mouth of its shell, pulling the plug into place as the final step of retracting its body into its shell. That sounds simple but in fact requires a complicated bodily contortion, unique to this species, which can be seen in a series of photos at

<http://snailstales.blogspot.co.uk/2006/05/how-pomatias-elegans-comes-out-of-its.html> For a better illustration of the species see [http://www.flickr.com/photos/woody\\_pics/556603749/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/woody_pics/556603749/)

For pictures and info on the **Wrinkled Snail** see <http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Candidula%20intersecta>

**Three Banded Slug:** This uncommon slug (*Lehmannia valentiana*) was a first for Portland when found there on June 27. See

<http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Lehmannia> valentiana for more detail. For a website which describes the species as 'A very invasive species conquering the world' go to <http://www.gardensafari.net/english/snails.htm> and scroll down to the section on Slugs where this is the fourth species described

**Fungi:** Recent rain and warm air should have brought us an outburst of fungi but so far the only species I have noticed have been a couple of large old Horse Mushrooms and, on my lawn, a cluster of Blackening Waxcaps - if you are not familiar with this fairly common summer species see <http://www.first-nature.com/fungi/hygrocybe-conica.php>

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 25 - JULY 1 (WEEK 26 OF 2012)

### Tue 26 June

#### Juvenile Egrets and Fragrant Agrimony

This afternoon Hazel Rouse made her second visit to Langstone Pond as part of the BTO Heronry survey (which covers Egrets) and, while I think she would not claim any certainty with her assessment of the number of young that the 20+ Egret nests have produced, we were both pretty certain that three or four of the

nests each had one or two young still in them a few other nests were now empty but we also saw two individual 'fledged' young away from their nests and parents. We also agreed that it is difficult to distinguish adults from juveniles at the nests unless you get a clear view of either their bills or legs - in most cases there is no clear distinction between the colour or the fluffiness of adult and juvenile plumage. Another point that we both noticed was that, despite the fact that the nests appear to be almost flat platforms of sticks and the juveniles are now roughly the same size as the adults, when the adults leave a nest in which we had been watching them interacting with two juveniles those juveniles lie quietly in the bottom of the nest making it appear that the nest is empty. One other bit of behaviour that we both noticed on a couple of occasions was an adult carrying a stick in its bill as if to build a new nest - does that imply that some nests have failed and that parents are thinking of having another go? (That seems unlikely). As we were there at a high tide period there was also a good 'roost' of adults probably not involved in the nests, giving the impression that the usual autumn build up of birds roosting here is already under way with both breeders and non-breeders from other sites arriving to join the residents and their young. After watching the Egrets for the best part of an hour I rode on over Langstone Bridge to visit North Common on Hayling.

Before reaching the Common I ticked three new flowers for the year - **Hedge Bedstraw** by the bridge, **Sea Lavender** on the Northney Bridge saltings, and **Wild Celery** in the roadside ditches after passing the Hotel entrance. Also on the bridge I noticed that, in the area under the railings where all vegetation had earlier in the season been sprayed with weedkiller, young plants are starting to grow back, giving me hope that the plant of **Dwarf Mallow** which I saw flowering there on Aug 19 last year may re-appear and may actually benefit from elimination of other competing growth.

Reaching North Common I was surprised to see no hint of the **Goat's Rue** which normally grows there but I did see and photograph the two large and healthy **Fragrant Agrimony** plants which have appeared there annually since at least 2005. Although it is too early to check the distinctive way in which the spines of the burrs (seed capsules) turn back on themselves I had a good sniff of the fragrance which comes from the young leaves.

Fragrant Agrimony plant leaves

Fragrant Agrimony plant first flowers

Finally something I noticed in my garden on Sunday morning but forgot to mention - the appearance of the first **Blackening Waxcap** toadstool in my lawn.

**Mon 25 June**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

**Around the north west of Langstone Harbour**

This morning, in warm sunshine, I cycled from Havant to Great Salterns Quay halfway down the west shore of Langstone Harbour where my target was the colony of **Small Melilot** seen by John Norton on May 30 but apparently known there since 2000. I had no difficulty in finding the Melilot but passed many other

interesting plants as I cycled along the continuous cycleway from Havant to this site.

In Havant the 'Etna Ragwort' had fully opened its first flowers and across the road from the recycling site there was a selection of different coloured cultivars of Opium Poppy (perhaps from seed blown across the road from garden waste?) and amongst them lots of Sun Spurge, but the main interest began when I reached the section of cycleway below the A27.

Here the cluster of 20 or more Bee Orchids seen on May 28 had shrunk to a couple of miserable specimens but had been replaced by the best part of 200 Pyramidal orchids and my first Common Centaury with lots of Yellow Wort. Less conspicuous, but catching my eye, was what seemed to be a weedy specimen of Bird's Foot Trefoil but which, on close inspection, turned out to be my first Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil of the year - the photo below shows the wiry stems, thin leaves, reduced number of flowers and (if you look carefully) the convergent sepal points on the top of the flower - which in this picture is pointing downward to show this feature in the photo.

#### Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil

Passing the Farlington Marshes 'slip field' (the one before reaching the underpass to the north part of the reserve) I came on my first Goats Rue - a massive cluster of plants on the road bank with a subsidiary plant in the field.

#### Goats Rue flowers

The approach road to the reserve had a plethora of flowers including Musk Mallow, Pale Flax, Common Poppies, Small Scabious and Scentless Mayweed but the one I was looking for was the Fodder Vetch which John Norton found here last week (June 19).

I may have found it - quite a big patch in a vegetated area on the south side of the approach road about half along it - but blundered in three respects - first in not preparing my self to be aware of the salient features, secondly in expecting it would be clearly different from Tufted Vetch, and thirdly in not collecting a specimen to check out at home so I have to assume that what I saw was an exuberant patch of Tufted Vetch.

Heading on beside the busy Eastern Road into Portsmouth I turned into the car entrance to the Great Salterns area and immediately found the Small Melilot site in a bare gravel patch running south from the point at which vehicles turn north into the parking area. My photo including a ruler shows the very small size of these plant which could not be confused with the common Ribbed or Tall Melilot.

#### Small Melilot at Great Salterns

Heading homeward I ticked off my first Bristly Oxtongue for the year and back in Havant (outside the Park Road South exit from Bosmere school) the regular colony of Black Horehound was out for the first time.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 18 - 24 (WEEK 25 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Balearic Shearwater:** None were reported in the Channel area between early January and mid-April and up to June 9 the birds were only seen in ones and twos. June 9 saw 19 off Britany, increasing to 55 on June 12. This week brought a report of 362 in the Finistere area and 5 off Portland on June 17

**Storm Petrel:** A few have been in the Channel since Apr 13 with 21 seen from Berry Head in Devon on Apr 30 and small groups have been seen since then (peak of 117 off Pendeen in Cornwall on June 8 and 50 seen from a boat off Selsey on June 11). The only report this week has been on June 20 from Portland where one was tape lured and ringed.

**Night Heron:** The reclusive bird in the Lymington (Pennington) area has not been reported since June 21

**Squacco Heron:** A bird seen in the Seaford area on June 21 has not been seen again

**Great White Egret:** One at Pulborough Brooks on June 19 was a similar one day wonder

**White Stork:** A group of four seen at Hazelbury Bryan on Dorset on June 17 may have flown east towards the Bognor area where a group of three were first spotted on June 21 at Lidsey from a train going from Chichester to Bognor. They were still in the same wetland area on June 22 but had moved a little over a kilometre east. They were still in the area on the morning of the June 23 but then flew north to be in the area west of the A29 (the report saying that they were 'flying west of the A29' does not tell us the direction of their flight, merely that they were in an area west of the A29!)

**Glossy Ibis:** The bird at Farlington Marshes has not been reported since June 16 and may have moved to Pagham Harbour where one was seen at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool on June 19

**Pochard:** Still no summer reports from Hampshire but at least 9 were on New Lake (Chichester) on June 18 when 3 more were on the nearby Drayton pit lake

**Goldeneye:** An unexpected summer report of one near Abbotsbury in Dorset on June 20

**Red-breasted Merganser:** It is not unusual for an odd bird to remain in the Solent area during the summer but news of a female flying southwest over Titchfield Haven on June 21 was unusual (presumably it was moving to a place where it felt safe during its imminent flightless eclipse period, but where?). This reminded me of the previous unusual sighting of a pair on the River Hamble (Bunny Meadows area) on May 17 - a late date for passage suggesting a first ever attempt at breeding here (unlikely, but Goosanders regularly breed in the south)

**Honey Buzzard:** After a report of one flying south over the north Kent coast on June 16 one was seen flying southwest over Dungeness on June 19 suggesting the start of autumn passage.

**Osprey:** One was fishing in Quarr Pond (just west of Ryde on the north coast of the Isle of Wight) on June 21. This is the first report of one on the IoW that I have picked up this year and maybe also suggests the start of a southward movement (maybe supported by the presence of two more Ospreys at the Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex on June 20 and 21)

**Lapwing:** Post breeding flocks are now starting to build up and the birds will soon be re-appearing along the coast. On June 17 there was a flock of 100 at Rye Harbour but a count of just 20 birds at Christchurch Harbour on June 18 was more typical.

**Spotted Redshank:** One was still present on the north Kent coast at the Oare marshes on June 20 in full summer plumage

**Green Sandpiper:** These are definitely in 'return passage' mode with a total of 32 birds at two sites in the Netherlands on June 21. Over here three birds were at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool (Pagham Harbour) on June 19 and one turned up at Fleet Pond in north Hampshire on June 20 while one had got to Wadebridge in Cornwall by June 21

**Common Sandpiper:** One was an unexpected sight at Titchfield Haven on June 21 and the first autumn bird was at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on June 23

**Pomarine Skua:** Four of these were even more unexpected at Titchfield Haven on June 21 (though three had been seen at Portland on June 17)

**Arctic Skua:** On June 16 six were off south Devon and another five off Portland

**Great Skua:** June 16 also brought single Bonxies to south Devon and Portland

**Black-headed Gull:** The first juvenile to be seen away from its nest site was one in the Thorney Channel off the east end of the Thorney Great Deeps

**Herring Gull:** Last year I was told that a pair were nesting on a roof in Brockhampton Lane here in Havant and this year I am told that a pair has two chicks in that area. Although a single nest is not statistically significant it is not the only sign of Herring Gulls taking over the rooftops of Havant and other human habitations all along the south coast - a pair once more demonstrated their right of ownership to the roof of the house over the road from mine during this week and several times recently I have heard their inimitable chuckling from unseen birds in the area. I wonder how long it will be before cars start crashing into each other in our streets as they swerve to avoid flightless juveniles which have left their nests to take over the streets as they do at this time of year in Old Portsmouth?

**Little Tern:** More than 20 were still to be seen at the mouth of Pagham Harbour (where some are hopefully nesting on the shingle spit) on June 21 - a similar number have been in that area since May 1

**Cuckoo:** What are presumably departing adults have been seen at a dozen sites this week, among them two birds were seen at the Brook Meadow site in Emsworth as well as one at a more usual site on Thorney Island

**Little Swift:** A 'possible' sighting at the Lizard in Cornwall on June 17 would have been the first in southern England this year if the report was correct.

**Bee Eater:** A group of five were seen near the Sussex coast on June 17 (north of Bexhill) and 18 (in the Seaford area). On June 23 one was seen flying over a field of poppies on the Sussex Downs north of Eastbourne with a bee in its bill (enjoying life more than the mudlarks at the loW festival?)

**Hoopoe:** After a flurry of sightings between mid-March and late May there have been no reports until June 19 when one was in a Devon garden near Axminster.

**House Martin:** There seems to be no great shortage of these birds but many of them seem to have failed to nest this year and the weather (or rather its effect on the birds ability to collect enough insects to support themselves and their young) seems to be the most likely cause. None seem to be nesting around my house in east Havant, none could be found on Stansted House last week, and now Brian Fellows has heard from someone living in Funtington (between Havant and Chichester) that the birds which normally nest there were back as usual and repaired their nests for use but then abandoned them in mid-May. These birds may well now be trying to find enough food to support their own needs in places such as the Budds Farm sewage works in Havant and a report this week of 300 Martins at Slapton in south Devon on June 17 suggests this is a widespread problem.

**Mistle Thrush:** A loose flock of 14 birds seen in the Findon area north of Worthing on June 17 suggests that they may have had more success with their breeding and are now free to roam with their youngsters

**Red-backed Shrike:** A 'singing male' was found in Devon on June 12 and another was in Norfolk on June 19

**Woodchat Shrike:** One was in Suffolk on June 19 and 20

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Yellow Spotted White Faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*):** On June 16 a dragonfly similar to a White Faced Darter but having a prominent yellow spot on segment 8 of the 10 segments forming its abdomen - see photo at [http://www.sprott.net/science/biologie/insekten/libellen/bilder/Leucorrhinia\\_pectoralis2.jpg](http://www.sprott.net/science/biologie/insekten/libellen/bilder/Leucorrhinia_pectoralis2.jpg) - was photographed at Dunwich in Suffolk and (since there is no reference to the species in the UK Species listed in <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/uk-species> ) I assume it is a first for Britain. Searching for this species I incidentally discovered another species which is listed among the UK species but which I had not previously heard of called the **Wandering**

**Glider or Globe Skimmer (*Pantala flavescens*)** which is an occasional migrant to our shores, last seen in Kent in 1989.

**Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*):** First for the year in Cumbria on June 18  
**Scarce Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes dryas*):** First for the year in Essex on June 18

**Species reported this week:**

Gold Ringed Dragonfly, Black Tailed Skimmer, Keeled Skimmer, Four Spotted Chaser, Yellow Spotted White Faced Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Emerald Damselfly and Scarce Emerald Damselfly

**Butterflies:**

**Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** No doubt several have gone unreported at the Southbourne undercliff site in Bournemouth where the species has been resident (i.e. overwintering) since 1998-9 but there have been few reports of migrants so far - Portland on Mar 29, Isle of Wight on Apr 21, Devon on May 1, Portland on May 8, Isle of Wight on May 11, and Portland on May 11-13, May 28-29, and now June 18-19

**White Hairstreak:** First of year at the IBM Portsmouth site on June 17

**White Admiral:** First of year at the Park Corner Heath site near Eastbourne on June 20

**Painted Lady:** I have seen 28 reports of this migrant so far this year, six of them in the past week. On June 17 singles were seen at North Common on Hayling Island, on the Isle of Wight, and three were at Mill Hill at Shoreham. On June 20 singles were at Martin Down and Magdalen Hill Down, both in Hampshire, with two at the Oare Marshes in north Kent

**Dark Green Fritillary:** The first was reported last week (June 13 at Friston near Eastbourne) and this week saw one in Hampshire (Broughton Down near Stockbridge on June 17, with a possible second on Stockbridge Down on June 20)

**Silver Washed Fritillary:** First of year at Rewell Wood near Arundel on June 17 (three seen) with one in Hampshire on June 20 at Martin Down

**Marbled White:** An early first was seen at Brighton on June 9 but this week reports came from Hampshire (Portsdown on June 17 and 19, and Magdalen Hill Down on June 20), Sussex (Friston Forest on June 17) and Dorset (Durlston on June 20)

**Ringlet:** First on June 17 in the Lancing (Worthing) area

**Species reported this week:**

Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Hairstreak, White Hairstreak, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, White Admiral, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Silver Washed Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Ringlet

Other Insects:

### Selected sightings this week:

**Long-horned General (*Stratiomys longicornis*):** This rare **Soldier Fly** was photographed at Rye Harbour on June 20 and you can see the picture and Chris Bentley's account of it at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/20/when-is-a-bee-not-a-bee/>

**Beetles:** Species in this week's news included

**Broscus cephalotes** (a 2cm long ground beetle with fierce looking jaws which it uses for mole-like tunnelling in the earth - see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/19/jaws-3/> )

**Clanoptilus marginellus** (a 9mm long Malachite beetle - see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/21/15759/> - Malachite beetles are so named for the shiny metallic sheen of their distinctively shaped elytra but while malachite is a green mineral the beetles come in various colours including scarlet)

**Unspecified Longhorn Beetle** - see the entry for June 20 in my Diary at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm> for a photo of a beetle which landed on my car windscreen when it was parked at Havant Thicket

**Garden Chafer (*Phyllopertha horticola*):** At least 100 of these were seen at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on June 17 - see <http://www.thewcg.org.uk/scarabaeidae/0409.htm> for photo and info

## PLANTS

**Slender St John's wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*):** Just starting to flower in Havant Thicket on June 20

**Trailing St John's wort (*Hypericum humifusum*):** A single flower of what I have concluded must have been this species stared up at me from the grassland of the Gipsies Plain (south of Havant Thicket) on June 29 - at the time I was puzzled by what the flower might be as I have not come across this species outside woodland in the past

**Rose Campion (*Lychnis coronaria*):** This lovely flower was just starting to appear on the Sinah Common grassland south of the Hayling Golf Course when I was there on June 18

**Nottingham catchfly (*Silene nutans*):** Much less easy to spot but this was also in flower on Sinah Common on June 18

**Musk Mallow:** First flower seen beside the Hayling Coastal Path on June 18

**Dyer's Greenweed:** This had first been seen in flower on Thorney Island on June 14 and was out in profusion in the 'field with a pond in it' beside the Hayling Coastal Path a little south of the Oysterbeds on June 18

**Common Gorse:** I thought this had ceased to flower everywhere a couple of weeks ago but I found two bushes still bearing a few flowers at Havant Thicket on June 20

**Tree Lupin:** The bright yellow flowers of this, which were not out when I visited Hayling's Sinah Common on May 16, were to be seen on every bush when I was there on June 18

**Hare's Foot Clover:** Also flowering widely on Sinah Common by June 18

**Hairy vetchling (*Lathyrus hirsutus*):** First flowers seen on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' here in Havant on June 21 (though I fear the population of this plant at this, its only Hampshire site, may be threatened by the current use of horses to graze this public open space)

**Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil:** My first find of this in flower was at Havant Thicket on June 20

**Bladder Senna:** Flowering at the Kench on June 18

**Field Rose:** First noticed in flower on June 18 and 20 on Hayling and at Havant Thicket

**Burnet Rose:** Several bushes flowering at the southern end of the Gipsies Plain 'orchid ditch' at Havant Thicket on June 20

**Biting Stonecrop:** First flowers seen on Hayling on June 18

**Marsh Willowherb:** In the past I have had great difficulty in identifying this species and have come to the conclusion that it does not occur in the Havant area but a photo of a plant found by Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow on June 20, together with the results of a detailed examination of the plant by Brian, all seemed to confirm its identity as Marsh Willowherb but John Norton has raised some questions about it (mainly based on the soil in which it was found) which leave the id unresolved. The Hants Flora (although it shows one site in the east side of Hayling Island) tells us that the species is widely found in Hampshire but only in acid soils (so only common in the New Forest and north east Hampshire) but adds a note that hybrids of *Epilobium* species have been found in unexpected places.

**Rosebay Willowherb:** I am not aware of any plants yet in flower but I did see some growing beside the Hayling Coastal Path on June 20 clearly showing the

distinctive colour of the flowers through unopen buds so I suspect it will be found in flower before my next weekly summary

**Wild Carrot:** Starting to flower this week from June 18

**Bell Heather:** In flower on south Hayling on June 18

**Yellow Loosestrife:** In full flower on June 20 at a regular site just outside the north east exit from Hammonds Land Coppice in the Staunton Country Park (Havant Thicket)

**Sea Bindweed:** Plenty of flowers seen in the sandy grassland south of the Hayling Golf Course on June 18

**Great Mullein:** First flowers open on a self sown plant in central Havant on June 20

**Water Figwort:** First flowering reported at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 21

**Buddleia:** First flowers on the omnipresent Butterfly Bush seen in Havant on June 18

**Sticky Groundsel:** First flowers seen on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on June 18 when searching unsuccessfully for remains of the Proliferous Pink plants which should have flowered by this date

**Blue Fleabane:** First flowers seen on a plant in the Langstone Sailing Club grounds on June 18

**Hemp Agrimony:** Not yet in flower but colour showing in the buds of plants at Havant Thicket on June 20

**Marsh Thistle:** First flowers seen at Havant Thicket on June 20

**Milk Thistle:** At least five plants in flower at the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 18

**Perennial or Corn Sowthistle:** Flowering beside the A27 at Havant on June 21

**Twayblade orchid:** First mention of this in flower comes from Durlston on June 17

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Bottle-nosed Dolphin:** 25 seen off Jersey in the Channel Islands on June 21

**Sika Deer:** A reported sighting of one at Soar (near the southern tip of Devon) on June 18 was thought to be very unusual for the area. I am aware of Sika in the New Forest and in Dorset but not in Devon. In searching for info I came across this statement .... "The majority of Sika deer in the UK are found in Scotland and

Ireland, however, there are also small numbers in the south of England, such as the New Forest, as well the Lake District and parts of Lancashire. Sika were first introduced from the Far East into Britain in 1860. Several subspecies, including Chinese, Japanese, Formosan and Manchurian were introduced into parks but the only free living form in Britain is the Japanese Sika. It is possible that almost if not all English and Scottish and some Irish living Sika are descendants from only one stag and three hinds introduced to Viscount Powerscourt's deer park at Enniskerry, Eire in 1860." .... I also found the following estimates of deer populations in the UK .... "Red 350,000+; Roe 800,000+; Fallow around 200,000; Muntjac 150,000+; Sika 35,000; Chinese Water Deer >10,000" .... A number of other **considerations concerning the impact of deer on the environment and on human health** are discussed in <http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/news/uk-deer009.html#cr>

**Fish:** The Durlston Rangers daily diary (accessed by the Durlston Today tab at <http://durlston.co.uk/> ) on June 17 listed many fish species now being reported by local fishermen and scuba divers who are seeing **Scorpion Fish, Tompot Blenny, Shanny, Dragonet and Goldsinny**. The fishermen are now catching **Pollack plus Brill, Garfish, Gurnard, Dogfish, Bass, Starry Smoothhound, Plaice, Ballan Wrasse, Corkwing Wrasse, Cuckoo Wrasse, Mackerel and Black Bream**. Also present in the sea around Durlston are **Undulate Ray and Cuckoo Ray**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 18 - 24 (WEEK 25 OF 2012)**

### **Wed 20 June**

#### **A sunny walk round Havant Thicket**

This morning I drove to Havant Thicket and enjoyed a clockwise circuit of the Gipsies Plain, the Deerslaughter Plain and the 'Yellow Brick Road' (my name for the main vehicle track).

My first surprise was to find a large flock of sheep and another of Longhorn cattle grazing the Gipsies plain - it seems that now the horses have been evicted stock from the Staunton Country Park has replaced them giving the area a more 'old fashioned look' and reminding me of the sort of countryside I grew up in during the 1930s.

First area of botanic interest was what I call the 'orchid ditch' running south from the east-west main track across the open plain to the track running along the south of the plain, meeting it where it enters Hammonds Land Coppice. In the past I have found up to 200 **Common Spotted Orchids** here - today there were still 50 but there was still plenty of other interest including **Field and Burnet Roses, Yellow Loosestrife, Marsh Bedstraw**, etc

Back on the east-west track I came to a large patch of **Heath Speedwell** (which seems to be having a good year) and near it a single tiny yellow star shaped flower on a wiry stemmed plant hidden in the short grass - at the time I couldn't name it but thought I was just having a 'senior moment' and that the name would soon come to mind. Back at home the only plant of similar size, habit, colour seems to be **Trailing St John's Wort** though I have never before come across that in open grassland, nor recorded it as the first Hypericum species of the year (later in this walk I found **H. pulchrum - Slender SJW** - usually the first to show) just starting to flower.

Crossing through the long avenue of trees I emerged into the Deerslaughter side just as a **Buzzard** was approaching the trees from the west and I watched it settle into a favourite treetop perch. The grassland this side added **Meadow Browns** and **Small Heaths** to the **Common Blue** seen earlier though I had to wait till I was on the Yellow Brick Road for a lovely trio of male **Brimstones**, my first **Large Skipper**, a **Holly Blue** and the omnipresent **Red Admiral**.

I checked the Willow lined stream north of the main avenue for flowers on the mass of **Marsh Pennywort** that grows there but as usual failed to see any.

In the Havant Thicket woodland trackside flowers included my first **Greater Birds-foot Trefoil** and a new showing of **Grass Vetchling** plus the first hint of colour in the flower buds on **Hemp Agrimony**. From the trees I heard the lovely song of a **Willow Warbler**, the piping of a **Bullfinch** and the more mundane song of a **Coal Tit**.

Back at the car I was about to drive off when I noticed a passenger on the windscreen - a **Longhorn beetle** which I have not yet been able to name despite searching the internet. Superficially it looks a bit like a Wasp Beetle but has a much reduced pattern on its elytra and they are channelled into grooves. It was very happy for me to move it from the windscreen onto the bark of a nearby tree

The Longhorn beetle found on my car windscreen

Back in Havant the first flower was open on a self sown roadside **Greater Mullein** plant

**Mon 18 June**

**Hayling Island gives me twelve new flowers for the year**

This morning a walk to the shops gave me the first flowering **Buddleia bush** and a **Potato plant flowering in the town centre** (behind the Robin Hood pub)

After lunch I got on my bike and cycled to Gunner Point on south Hayling adding 12 new for the year wild flowers, the first being **Blue Fleabane** in the Langstone Sailing Club land at the north end of Langstone Bridge.

In the Oysterbeds area I saw some half dozen well grown **Black-headed Gull chicks** not yet ready to fly off on their own, and on the earth-mound at least five **Milk Thistle** plants were newly in flower but there was no sign of flowers on the Goats Rue in the carpark area.

Not far south on the Stoke Bay seawall the first **Musk Mallow** was in full flower and **Rosebay Willowherb** was showing the colour of its flowers though none of them were yet open. Just past the bay, by the pond on the landward side of the track, a mass of **Dyers Greenweed** was in flower (John Goodspeed had been the first to see this on Thorney Island on June 14)

Nothing more in the way of flowers till I reached Sinah Common on which **Bell Heather** was in flower, and at the Kench the **Bladder Senna** was in flower. Also on the shore of the Kench the first of many flowering bushes of **Tree Lupin** were in full flower while the roundabout near the Ferry Inn gave me **Hare's Foot Clover** in flower.

After rounding the sand dunes to reach the Pill Box by the Golf Course fence I began to see the start of a mass of **Sheepsbit** (I have never seen so much of this turning the sandy soil into a lookalike for the Bluebell wood!). The Green-winged orchids are now over but near the centre of their empire I had no difficulty in finding **Nottingham Catchfly** in flower (probably less than 20 stems so less than previous years). Here and elsewhere more than usual of the lovely **Rose** **Campion** flowers were starting to open. Also in this area I saw plenty of the **Sea Bindweed** that I was hoping for.

In the area south of Staunton Avenue I failed to find any of the Proliferous Pink plants but I did find my first **Sticky Groundsel** flowers

Cycling back up the Coastal Path I realised that many of the Wild Rose bushes I was passing had pure white flowers and it eventually occurred to me that they were probably the first **Field Roses** of the year though I do not get a chance to check one out.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 11 - 17 (WEEK 24 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Few sightings this week - just two **Red-throated** off Yorkshire on June 14, four **Great Northern** off Devon on June 9 plus one hanging around the Portland area from June 9 to 14

**Red-necked Grebe:** One off the Netherlands on June 13 was the first report since May 18 when one (possibly the same 'summering' bird) was also off the Netherlands

**Sooty Shearwater:** Single birds seen in the Scillies on June 11 and off Brittany on June 12. Plenty of Manx around.

**Balearic Shearwater:** June 12 brought a report of 55 off Brittany and June 15 saw 3 off Portland and 1 off Christchurch

**Wilson's Storm Petrel:** First report for the year from the Scillies on June 13

**European Storm Petrel:** More than 20 in the Scillies on June 4 and 30+ there on June 6. More stormy weather brought sightings of 76+ off Dawlish Warren in Devon on June 9 when around 15 were seen from Christchurch Harbour, 9 from Portland and 1 from Hurst Beach at Lymington. June 10 brought 29 to Prawle Point in south Devon and 20 to the Scillies; June 11 saw an estimated 50 off Selsey Bill and one June 13 there were still 6 off Berry Head in south Devon and 5 in the Scillies

**Little Bittern:** One spent at least four days (June 10 to 13) at Stockers Lake in Hertfordshire (not the first for the year - one had been in Pembrokeshire on Apr 20). As the name Stockers Lake is strongly associated in my mind with the area

of Chichester Harbour between the south of Thorney Island the harbour mouth I thought I would find out where the Stockers Lake of this sighting can be found - it is a large flooded gravel pit in the Colne Valley near Rickmansworth, just east of the M25 about halfway between the M40 and M1

**Night Heron:** One has been hiding in an oak tree above a fishing pond near Lower Pennington Lane in the Lymington area from June 2 to 16 (with a gap in sightings from June 5 to 11) and the reward for birders who travel to see it is the view to be seen in Tony Tindale's photo at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/06/014trim.jpg> (note that there is only one spot from which this excellent view can be obtained and you must first oust the birder currently holding that position before you have a chance of seeing the bird that is in the centre of Tony's photo - honest it is!)

**Cattle Egret:** If you are still looking for the bird that was in the Thorney Island/Warblington area in Jan and Feb this year you may still be in with a chance - RBA report a sighting in Kent on June 12

**Great White Egret:** One has been in the Brading Marshes area of the Isle of Wight since June 3 but may have been joined by another as one was seen flying west between Chichester and Bognor Regis that day (though there was still only one at Brading on June 16)

**Glossy Ibis:** The bird which has been at Farlington Marshes since June 5 was still there on June 16

**Shelduck:** On June 14 all four adults which have been at Budds Farm in Havant since Apr 21 were to be seen as two pairs out on the water but with no ducklings - I guess this means both pairs have failed to breed.

**Gadwall:** Also at Budds Farm pools on June 14 at least one female Gadwall had a single duckling in tow

**Pochard:** A few pairs breed in Hampshire (the 2010 HBR shows breeding by 7 pairs at five sites) but the only announcement of successful breeding that I have seen this year is of one pair at the Pett Level pools where Pete Rouse saw new hatched young on June 9 - in reporting this news Cliff Dean remarked that it was surprising that Pochards were only known to breed at two sites in Sussex (Pett and the WWT reserve at Arundel) while around 20 pairs regularly bred at the Dungeness RSPB reserve on the other side of Rye Bay.

**Kestrel:** John Goodspeed tells us that two broods of young have successfully fledged this week on Portsdown - one at Fort Widley, the other at Fort Nelson.

**Red-footed Falcon:** RBA indicate that one was killed by a Sparrowhawk in Derbyshire on June 11

**Peregrine:** John Goodspeed reports that the pair nesting at the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit on Portsdown have three young this year

**Greater Sand Plover:** RBA tell us that the first to be seen in the UK this year was at the pleasantly named Stinky Bay on Benbecula on June 8. Mention of Sand Plover brings back personal memories of 14 Aug 1997 when Alistair Martin and I were at Church Norton (Pagham Harbour) and may have been the first to see a Lesser Sand plover in Britain - we had good views of this unusual bird but had to beat a hasty retreat to avoid being crushed to death by the crowd of frantic twitchers who descended on the site (and wrongly identified the bird as a Greater Sand Plover - the correct id was only established from photos some time later and elevated the bird to the status of a first for Britain from that of Greater Sand Plover which had been known in Britain since the first was seen, also in West Sussex, back in 1978!)

**Curlew:** Portland reported the first birds returning from distant breeding areas on June 11

**Green Sandpiper:** Also maybe a sign of autumn passage starting is a report of 8 Green Sandpipers at a Netherlands site on June 13

**Skuas:** Spring passage of these is normally over by the end of May but the channel storms of this week have brought all three species to our coasts in small but above average numbers. On June 9 Chesil Cove on Portland had 5 Poms, and on June 15 Portland logged 5 Arctic and 5 Great Skuas and there were smaller numbers elsewhere on other days - I was surprised to see that West Bexington on the Fleet near Abbotsbury had recorded 2 Poms on June 15

**Med Gulls:** Some time ago it became apparent that Black-headed Gulls had ousted most of the Med Gulls as well as the Terns from the Hayling Oysterbeds and this week a report from Chris Cockburn, the Langstone Harbour RSPB warden, says that unusually high tides have washed out the majority of all seabird nests on the islands and this 'forced homelessness' is no doubt part of the reason for the presence of 176 Med Gulls over Thorney Island (where they neither breed nor feed nowadays) on June 13. Chris Cockburn says that .. "Official (BODC) Portsmouth tide-gauge records from Jan 1991 show that there has not been a similar prolonged period of very high flooding tides during the breeding season (Apr-Jul). There were flooding tides (> 5.0 m ACD) in 1995 & 2002 (mid-May) and 2009 & 2010 (mid-Jul) - but none of these were as high as or prolonged as the current ones and their timing was less damaging for productivity." I am getting the impression that, just as the Black-headed Gulls which once nested on Stakes Island in Chichester Harbour all moved to the Langstone Harbour islands during the period 1994 to 1997, the Med Gulls (whose first nest in the British Isles was at the Beaulieu estuary in Hampshire in 1968 and which have in recent years become a dominant feature of seabird breeding in Langstone Harbour) are now transferring their allegiance to Rye Harbour and points east). For those with shorter memories than mine I have looked up the Sussex Bird Reports for 1994 (when a count on May 12 found 1226 Black-headed nests on Stakes Island but later in the month all but 20 of these nests had been washed out by the tides) and 1997 (when no birds nested on Stakes Island but all had moved to Langstone Harbour) and this surge of nostalgia also led me to root out a more recent

publication - the 200th SOS Newsletter for Spring 2012 (celebrating the 50th anniversary of the SOS) in which Anne de Potier recalls the strenuous but in the end vain efforts to build up Stakes Island and preserve it as a breeding colony for Terns - the article includes a photograph of volunteers at work in 1980)

**Cuckoo:** Four reports this week reflect the fact that, with no need to stay and care for their young, adult Cuckoos have already finished their breeding season in this country and are on their way south. On June 11 the bird which was fitted with a satellite tracking device and given the name 'Chris' (I have often wondered how Chris Packham feels about being thought of as a Cuckoo) turned up in Belgium having already left us. On June 13 one Cuckoo was seen on the shingle spit at the mouth of Pagham Harbour, perhaps having set off on its southward journey but having second thoughts on seeing the winds and stormy seas ahead. On June 14 four Cuckoos were seen together near the shore in Eastbourne and reported with the comment that they were late in leaving us. On June 15 one was still to be seen and heard on Thorney Island

**Short-eared Owl:** It is not unusual for one or two of these to stay the summer at coastal sites where they have wintered but this summer it seems that this habit is becoming the norm with owls still being seen this week at Farlington Marshes, Thorney Island, Pagham Harbour, Lymington marshes and Tintagel in Cornwall!

**Nightjar:** These have already settled down to breed at most of their regular sites but June 13 brought a report of a very late arrival when one was seen to fly in off the sea at Thurlestone Bay in south Devon

**Bee Eater:** Two more arrivals this week - two were seen over the Filsham reedbed near the coast just west of Hastings on June 9 and on June 14 a party of four were on the West Sussex coast at Climping

**House Martin:** Although there seem to be plenty around in southern England (with a good crowd of them trying to feed over the Budds Farm pools in Havant) I see that when Laurence Holloway made an annual trip on June 15 from Bognor to count the nests on Stansted House near Rowlands Castle he found no nests at all for the first time. Here in Havant, although none nest nowadays on houses close to mine, I usually have what I assume to be local breeders feeding over the trees lining the old rail line at the back of my garden (last year I first saw them on May 20 and they were regular from June 6) - so far this year I have seen none bar a couple of individuals making a bee line for Budds Farm

**Robin:** On June 16 I nearly ran over a fledgling Robin while cycling and at home I have until this week seen an adult Robin collecting food in my garden from sunrise to sunset but this week I have not seen him but have heard his laid back autumn song indicating that he has done his best to keep the species going and is now taking a well earned rest while still making his presence known in order to maintain his claim to his feeding territory.

**Common Redstart:** A female trapped at Portland on June 15 was already on her way south but still showed a bare breast (breeding patch) indicating that she was a failed breeder (had she remained to care for her young the feathers would have regrown before she thought of leaving us)

**River Warbler:** One on Fair Isle on June 11 gave the twitchers a reminder that they will soon get more chances for new ticks as autumn passage gets under way.

**Marsh Warbler:** No further news of the bird on the River Avon near Ringwood, nor of the one at Yew Hill near Winchester (both last reported on June 9), but I see that one which had been present since the end of May at Folkestone in Kent was still there and singing on June 10 (I have not been able to access bird news from Folkestone for some time as my anti-virus software blocked me, saying that the site was a dangerous one, but it seems that the danger has now been removed!)

**Crossbill:** These seem to be well into autumn roaming mode with several reports of large flocks on the move - last week RBA remarked that movements were being reported in nine counties and this week a flock of more than 30 passed through Nigel Jones garden near Romsey on their way west.

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*):** First of the year seen in Norfolk on June 10

**Beautiful Demoiselle:** On May 23 I was surprised to see my first for the year roosting high on Portsdown Hill at Fareham Common, far from any fast running stream which is their favoured habitat (not garden ponds) and on June 14 another was seen further east on Portsdown above the QA Hospital in Cosham. I can only assume that these both came from the Wallington River at the northern foot of Portsdown and were swept over the hill by northerly winds - I hope they get back!

**Small Red Damselfly (*Ceriagrion tenellum*):** First for the year seen on June 9 at the Crockford Stream in the New Forest

**Northern Damselfly (*Coenagrion hastulatum*):** First for the year at Speyside in Scotland on June 10

### Species reported this week:

Brown Hawker, Emperor, Downy Emerald, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Beautiful Demoiselle, Large Red Damselfly, Small Red Damselfly, Northern Damselfly

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**White-letter Hairstreak:** First of the year seen at the Portsmouth IBM site on June 17

**Silver Studded Blue:** First of the year seen at Iping Common near Midhurst on June 10

**Painted Lady:** No mass invasion but I have now seen 21 reports from coastal sites since the first appeared in south Devon on Mar 25, nine of them being in June

**Dark Green Fritillary:** First of the year seen at Friston Forest near Eastbourne on June 13

**Marbled White:** First of the year seen near Brighton on June 9 with the second seen on Portsdown on June 17

**Meadow Brown:** The first had been seen last week in Sussex on June 9 (with another near Gosport that day) but no more were seen until June 13

### **Species reported this week:**

Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Silver Studded Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Heath

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Crane Flies:** Several species are now on the wing but on June 10 Richard Roebuck came across one near Henfield in Sussex which I was not aware of and which puts your average 'Daddy Long Legs' in the shade. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ctenophora\\_pectinicornis\\_bl.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ctenophora_pectinicornis_bl.jpg) for an equally impressive photo of the species. For more photos and info see <http://www.eakringbirds.com/eakringbirds4/insectinfocusctenophorapectinicornis.htm> Although I cannot find a definitive statement I think it likely that the species is new to Britain within the past few years as I can find no pre-2010 records in this country, nevertheless it is now widespread with records from Nottinghamshire and Devon as well as Sussex

**Stinking Sexton Beetle (*Nicrophorus vespillo*):** See Graeme Lyons blog entry at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/flesh-eating-beetle-mistakes-my-old-bag.html> for a photo and an account of his encounter with this species on June 13

**Stag Beetle:** First of the year was a male seen near Henfield in Sussex on June 15

**Oedemera nobilis Flower Beetle:** This fairly common bright green flower beetle is generally known as the 'Thigh Beetle' on account of the greatly swollen thighs on its back legs but what is less commonly known is that this characteristic only applies to males - the females, as we would expect, have slender thighs. For

Brian Fellows photo of a male (first of this year seen on June 15) see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-060-thigh-beetle-warb-ws-15.06.12.jpg> and for a standard photo of a female see [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-9nbAoRs4OsA/TiGzjKZCrfl/AAAAAAAAASfk/dnCwAmrJRjI/s640/beetle\\_oedemera\\_nobilis\\_female\\_27.5.2011.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-9nbAoRs4OsA/TiGzjKZCrfl/AAAAAAAAASfk/dnCwAmrJRjI/s640/beetle_oedemera_nobilis_female_27.5.2011.jpg)

**Araneus alsine (the Strawberry Spider):** I am familiar with two of the more colourful and relatively common Araneus orb web spiders of late summer (The 'Garden Cross Spider' A. diadematus and its relative A. quadratus which can come in a range of bright colours) but I was not aware of A. alsine until Graeme Lyons found one at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough on June 14 and featured it in his blog for that day - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/strawberry-with-fangs.html> in which you will see his photo showing the close resemblance between the spider and a ripe strawberry

## PLANTS

**Corn Cockle:** This was newly in flower on June 16 among the profusion of 'wild flowers' sown by Havant Borough Council at the Warblington Cemetary extension

**Thyme-leaved Sandwort:** Although by no means a first for the year I have overlooked recording this on previous visits to Portsdown but found it in profusion on June 13 when searching for Bastard Toadflax with which the Sandwort has some vague similarities

**Bastard Toadflax:** This had been reported from the downs above Brighton on May 27 but was not reported on Portsdown until June 12 (found by John Goodspeed) and then seen by myself on June 13

**Dyer's Greenweed:** Another first found by John Goodspeed on June 14 at the extreme east end of Thornham Lane on Thorney Island

**Fodder Vetch:** This has its only known Hampshire site in the Paulsgrove Chalkpit on Portsdown where it was 'discovered' in 2006 and has re-appeared there annually since, being seen by John Goodspeed there this year on June 12. The plant is fairly similar to Tufted Vetch and you can find a good photo of it, taken by Peter Raby in 2006, among a series of his photos to be seen at <http://www.surfbirds.com/gallery/search2.php?species=&photographer=&location=&country=Hampshire&start=161> When I visited the site on June 13 I misidentified the plants as Tufted Vetch though I thought at the time that the flower 'spikes' were unusually large.

**Meadow Vetchling:** First of the year was found on June 8 by the Havant Wildlife Group when they visited Portsdown

**Yellow Vetchling (Lathyrus aphaca):** I know of more sites for this in the Portsmouth area from which the plant has vanished than the one site where it could be seen up to last year - this site was beside the steep path down into Paulsgrove chalkpit at its west end and I found plants flowering there on June 13

(John Goodspeed beat me to it on June 12) but when I was there I also found two further colonies of the plant spaced out along the floor of the Chalk Pit.

**Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea:** This was flowering for the first time this year in Havant on June 12

**Lucerne:** Several clumps were newly in flower at the Paulsgrove chalkpit when I was there on June 13

**Sweet Briar:** I found my first of year flowers at a new site beside the Hayling Billy trail in Havant on June 12, confirming the id by the smell of apples from the crushed leaves.

**Agrimony:** First flowers of the year seen on Portsdown on June 13

**Common Lime:** Many trees dangling their flowers in Havant from June 12 onward

**Wild Parsnip:** First report of this in flower from Durlston on June 12

**Pepper Saxifrage:** Also first flowering at Durlston on June 16

**Cranberry:** First flowers reported by Graeme Lyons at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough on June 14

**Dotted Loosestrife:** This garden flower first seen on June 12 in Havant so the wild Yellow Loosestrife may now be flowering on the Gipsies Plain south of Havant Thicket

**Field Bindweed:** I saw just one flower out on May 29 but it was not until this week that the species started to flower everywhere

**Straw Foxglove (*Digitalis lutea*):** First flowers for the year seen at the Nelson Lane site north of the M27 above Portchester on June 13

**Lesser Snapdragon/Weasels Snout (*Misopates orontium*):** First flowers for the year were out at the New Lane allotments in Havant on June 12

**Field Cow-wheat:** The plants on the M27 motorway bank above Portchester had just started to flower on June 13

**Eyebright:** This too had opened its first flowers on Portsdown on June 13

**Self Heal:** This common weed started to flower on June 13

**Ivy Broomrape:** I had seen the established colony of this (in the Red Barn estate south of the M27 at Portchester) back on May 30 but on June 13 I was surprised to see a 'new to me' colony of some 20 spikes looking healthy beside Nelson Lane north of the M27 in the same general area.

**Sticky Groundsel:** This seems to have been eradicated from several locations in Havant where I have seen it in recent years so I was pleased to find a colony of plants (not yet in flower) around the perimeter of the Bellair Road Bowls Club parking area here in Havant on June 12

**Corn Marigold:** Just starting to flower on June 16 among the wild flowers sown by Havant Borough Council at the Warblington Cemetery extension

**Spear Thistle:** First flower for the year seen in Havant on June 12

**Musk Thistle:** First flower seen on Portsdown on June 13

**Greater Knapweed:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 13

**Smooth Hawksbeard:** One flower (first of the year) seen in Warblington Cemetery on June 16 nearly two months after Beaked Hawksbeard started to flower on Apr 26

**Hawkweed Oxtongue:** Another first flower seen in Havant this week on June 12

**Black Bryony:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on June 13

**Heath Spotted Orchid:** Flowering in the New Forest on June 9 (minimal proof of this can be seen at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/06/09/heath-spotted-orchid-appreciation-society/> )

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Stoat:** Cliff Dean comments in his blog ( <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/> ) for June 13 on his pleasure in seeing a family of these, on his home patch around the Pett levels on the shore of Rye Bay, rushing around so fast that he could not get a decent photo of them - you can see his efforts at <http://rxbirdwalks.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/p1050337.jpg> and <http://rxbirdwalks.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/p1050335.jpg>

**Minke Whale:** One was seen from a boat well out in the English Channel off south Devon on June 13

**Muntjac Deer:** These are very rarely seen on Portland Island but this week one was seen in the Southwell school grounds on June 13 and later (June 15) left a slot (its footprint) in the Observatory garden

**Sunfish:** Last week I said that one seen off south Devon on June 7 was the first for the year in our southern waters but this week the Scillies Birding site has been updated and includes a sighting of three of these unusual fish on June 4 with another single sighting on June 11. As I said last week .. "If you are not familiar with this species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean\\_sunfish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean_sunfish) and learn to admire a fish which can grow to weigh 1,000 Kilograms on a diet of Jellyfish"

**Common Starfish:** With recent storms churning up the sea it is not unexpected that there has been a wreck of Starfish on the Rye Harbour shore - see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/10/every-cloud/>

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 11 - 17 (WEEK 24 OF 2012)**

### **Wed 13 June**

#### **Eyebright, Yellow-wort and Musk Thistle on Portsdown**

Last Saturday the Havant Wildlife Group had a long walk on Portsdown during which they found **Yellow-wort** and **Meadow Vetchling** in flower and also on Saturday the first **Meadow Brown** and **Marbled White** butterflies were seen in Sussex giving me hopes of seeing all these and more on Portsdown today.

I parked in the first layby on James Callaghan Drive west of the hilltop roundabout and walked west along the top of the south face of the hill to the west end of the Chalk Pit, then came back via the base of the chalk pit before returning to the hill top and returning to car by different paths. My flowering plant count today was 80 species, among which were **Meadow Vetchling** and **Yellow-wort** plus **Bastard Toadflax** (first seen at Brighton on May 27) and the first flowers I am aware of on **Musk Thistle**, **Lucerne**, **Black Bryony**, **Greater Knapweed** and **Eyebright**. Other species new to me this year were **Yellow Vetchling** (*Lathyrus aphaca*), **Pyramidal Orchid**, **Tufted Vetch**, and **Thyme-leaved Sandwort** (abundant).

Only three butterfly species were seen (**Common Blue**, **Small Blue** and **Red Admiral**) - no **Marbled White** but I did later see my first **Meadow Brown** of the year at Skew Road above Portchester. Before moving there I chanced to see a **Dark Bush Cricket nymph** with a **Grasshopper nymph**.

At Skew Road the **Field Cow-wheat** was just coming into flower (many plants had rich purple plumes but only one showed the gold flecks which come with full flowering). Across the road on the Nelson Lane side the first **Straw Foxgloves** (*Digitalis lutea*) had just started to flower and across Nelson Lane from them on the motorway side there was a new to me colony of what seemed to be the **yellow form Ivy Broomrape** that grows south of the motorway in the Red Barn estate.

### **Tue 12 June**

#### **Sweetbriar and Weasels Snout flowering in Havant**

After yesterdays torrential downpour this morning was dull but relatively dry and windless allowing me to spend an hour walking round Havant, starting with a visit to Havant's only **Cork Oak tree** which dominates a garden in Pine Grove which you get to from the Emsworth Road via Bellair and Oaklands Road (turn right off Oaklands Road and it is on your left). Now full grown the tree has a magnificent 'cork' bark and is well worth a look and if you enjoy unusual trees you can combine a visit to this one with a tour round Connaught and Montgomery Roads before rejoining Bellair Road, en route seeing a tall and healthy **Ginkgo** in Connaught Rd, an elderly **Strawberry Tree** (in Montgomery Rd) and a **Locust Tree** (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) as you turn back into Bellair Rd. In an Oaklands Rd garden my first **Dotted Loosestrife** was in flower

As I entered Bellair from Emsworth Road I had a look at the parking area next to the Bowls Club and found several plants of **Sticky Groundsel** (not yet in flower but still a first for the year)

From Montgomery Rd I clambered down onto the Billy Trail and turned right towards New Lane but just before emerging onto it I sniffed the crushed leaves of a new wild rose bush and the smell of apples confirmed this was my first flowering **Sweet Briar** of the year. Before reaching the New Lane cemetery I saw my first **Spear thistle** flower of the year but the recently mown cemetery had nothing new to offer so I continued up New Lane to the allotments where both **Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea** and **Weasels Snout (Misopates orontium) aka Lesser Snapdragon** were in flower.

On my way home I popped into the railway carpark by the disused signal box and added **Hawkweed Oxtongue** to my new flowers for the year. While there I spotted another **Cordyline palm** flowering in an adjacent garden. My total of flowering species this morning was 63

Back at home I had an email from Martin Rand, the south Hants plant recorder, concerning the plant which I had found last Thursday and thought was Narrow-leaved Ragwort. From the photos I sent Martin thinks it may be the even more uncommon **Senecio squalidus subsp. chrysanthemifolius** - a relative of Oxford Ragwort which originates from the slopes of Mount Etna and of which there is only one known example in Britain. I now have to collect a specimen for expert determination.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 4 - 10 (WEEK 23 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** All four species that normally get a mention here in winter months were still to be seen this week. Admittedly the only **Red-throated** was off the Yorkshire coast on June 4 and a single **White-billed** was in Orkney on June 3 but nevertheless Devon had four **Great Northern** at Exmouth on June 8 along with a single **Black-throated**

**Shearwaters:** Storm force winds brought a good selection into coastal waters this week including three separate **Sooty Shearwaters** off Portland in Dorset, Berry Head in Devon and Pendeen in Cornwall. **Manx Shearwaters** are of course present in western waters in large numbers during their breeding season - on June 8 watchers at Pendeen in Cornwall estimated there were more than 10,000 seeking food offshore there but more than 300 had flown into the English Channel to be seen from Portland that day (or night). **Balearic Shearwaters** are now being seen in increasing numbers with two getting as far east as Splash Point near Beachy Head on June 9 (when 21 were seen across the Channel off Brittany). More exciting than these were two sightings of what were assumed to be **North Atlantic Little Shearwaters** (aka **Barolo or Micronesian Shearwaters**) off Berry Head in south Devon on June 7 and Pendeen (north end of the Lands End promontory) on June 8 (if you are not familiar with this species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barolo\\_Shearwater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barolo_Shearwater) )

**Storm Petrel:** The storm winds inevitably drove many of these from the open Atlantic onto our shores (but made it difficult to spot them!). June 8 brought peak counts of around 30 at Portland, 5 at Exmouth and more than 117 at Pendeen with around 50 off the Welsh coast on June 9 when one was seen at Selsey

**Night Heron:** One provided a good tick for Hampshire birders when it sat in a tree on the Lymington marshes from June 2 to 4. This species has given me 26 reports so far this year - up to four were in Devon and Cornwall from Mar 12 to Apr 15 after which one was in the Pulborough area from May 17 to 23 (with a farewell appearance at Pagham Harbour on May 23). Whether the Lymington bird was part of the same family party (?) is unknown

**Squacco Heron:** One of these was in Somerset from May 2 to 11 since when one has been at Dungeness on May 30 before this week's sighting of one at The Lizard in Cornwall on June 9

**Great White Egret:** In addition to the pair said to be breeding in Somerset a single bird was in the Bembridge area of the Isle of Wight from June 3 to 8 at least

**Purple Heron:** A first summer bird was seen briefly at the Church Norton Severals (mouth of Pagham Harbour) on June 4, flying off to the east so maybe the bird which was at Dungeness from June 5 to 7

**Glossy Ibis:** I am not sure how many are currently in the UK (three were in Wales - Pembrokeshire - on June 6) but local interest has focussed on one at Lymington on June 2 and another (maybe the same) in the Farlington Marshes Lake from June 5 to 10 at least. You can see this bird filmed by Peter Raby on June 10 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyZEffvM8Wc&feature=youtu.be>

**Black Kite:** Another seen over the M27 near Ower (just west of Southampton) on June 8. At least 15 sightings have been reported in England this year starting with one over London on Mar 30 and including reports from Hampshire, Cornwall, Kent, Isle of Wight and Dorset

**Hen Harrier:** A late sighting of one over Martin Down (south of Salisbury) on June 9 (could this have been a Montagu's?)

**Peregrine:** When Brian Fellows was there on June 7 he was told that two of the four chicks in the Chichester Cathedral nest had started to fly but were still based at the nest

**Quail:** Reports from four sites in four counties (Hampshire, Sussex, Dorset and Kent) this week with a peak count of 6 birds at Martin Down in Hampshire on June 3

**Baillons Crane:** The bird which arrived in Anglesey on May 22 was still there on June 4

**Black-winged Stilt:** Two birds have been at Lymington marshes from June 2 to 9 (at least) At first one was thought to be a juvenile because of speckled markings on its head but this has since been accepted as normal for an adult female

**Avocet:** Four birds were seen at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool (Pagham Harbour) on June 6 - this is the first news of them in that area but they could well be birds whose nesting attempts elsewhere have failed and which may make a second attempt at Pagham. Some are reported to be doing just that at Rye Harbour. Still no news from Titchfield Haven although the official website for the reserve says that it is a breeding ground for Avocets

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** When I was at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 24 I had a distant view of at least 20 medium sized brown plumaged waders on the shingle bar across the mouth of Stoke Lake (immediately south of the Oysterbeds) but could not be sure of their identity. This week the local RSPB Warden (Chris Cockburn) has put out a bulletin of news about the birds breeding (or attempting to!) in Langstone Harbour in which he mentions that the **regular summer flock of Bar-tailed Godwits** has taken to spending the high tide period on this shingle bar and this fits with my sighting.

**Skuas:** As with Shearwaters the gale force winds this week have brought many Skuas closer to our shores than is normal at this time of year. Ten sightings of **Pomarine** include a peak count of 12 at Chesil Cove (Portland) on June 8; four **Arctic** were off Berry Head in Devon on June 7 with another four at Portland on June 8; the first **Long-tailed** to be seen off southern England was off Falmouth on June 7; and 55 **Great Skuas** were off Pendeen in Cornwall on June 8.

**Great Blackback Gull:** The pair which have been attracting attention as first time nesters on a raft in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth hatched three chicks on May 29 but sadly one chick died on June 8 (of unknown cause - probably exposure to rain and gale force wind coupled with lack of food during a period when the weather gave the parents difficulty in foraging). See <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/08/a-tad-blowy/> to get an idea of what Black-headed gull chicks had to put up with at Rye Harbour in the same conditions. You can see the two surviving Great Blackback chicks at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-064-great-bb-gull-2-chicks-08.06.12.jpg>

**Black Tern:** In addition to sightings at Dungeness, Reculver (north Kent) and Dawlish Warren in Devon this week one was over the Farlington Marshes Lake early on June 10

**Puffin:** Tony Tindale (one of the Three Amigos) was on the Farne Islands this week and has some excellent photos of Puffins (including one with its white breast plumage all streaked with mud after it had been doing some burrowing to improve its nest tunnel (see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/06/07/the-farne-islands-1000s-of-puffin-on-staple-island/> ) On the same trip Tony visited Inner Farne island and you can follow his walk to the toilet there while being fiercely attacked by Arctic Terns (see

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/06/08/the-farne-islands-100s-of-arctic-tern-on-inner-farne-island/> )

**Short-eared Owl:** Still present this week at Reculver (north Kent), Lodmoor (Weymouth), and Church Norton (Pagham Harbour)

**Swift:** Hundreds of (presumably) non-breeding birds were still coming in off the sea this week - on June 4 around 900 came in over the Seven Sisters cliffs west of Beachy Head in 45 minutes and an estimated 700 arrived over Splash Point (a few miles further west) in four separate waves. These birds must have been confused to find the stormy weather all over southern England - I was certainly surprised to see two of the birds over my garden on the morning of June 7 flying under the low cloud (normally Swifts use their speed to evade summer storms, flying a hundred miles or more to areas outside the influence of the storm and staying away from their nests until the storm has passed - their chicks have the ability to go into a state of suspended animation and survived for a couple of days without food)

**Roller:** One has been in Yorkshire from June 1 to 7 and was seen by Tony Tindale on June 4 (after his visit to the Farne Islands). Tony's photos are not close ups but give you an impression of this colourful bird - see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/06/04/european-roller-at-aldbrough-east-yorkshire/>

**House Martin:** More than 600 were over the Blashford Lakes on June 4 and more than 50 were over the Budds Farm pools in Havant on June 8

**Nightingale:** These have normally stopped singing before the end of May but this year at least one was still singing at Pulborough Brooks on June 5

**Black Redstart:** These regularly nest in central London but this year Kris Gillam from the Isle of Wight heard one singing near Tower Bridge (a first for him) as a result of visiting the area to watch the Jubilee Celebrations for the person he calls 'the madge'.

**Marsh Warbler:** On June 6 RBA reported 6 separate birds present in the UK, one of them being the bird that has been singing in the Harbridge/Ibsley area of the River Avon north of Ringwood from June 5 to 9 (at least). In addition to the six birds reported to the RBA what was probably another was heard by David Thelwell at the Yew Hill butterfly reserve near Winchester on June 9

**Great Reed Warbler:** After one at Weston-super-Mare on May 19-21 and another at Radipole (Weymouth) from May 22 to 24 this week has brought another to The Lizard in Cornwall from June 3 to 6

**Bearded Tit:** The first report of fledged young for this year comes from Christchurch Harbour on June 6

**Crossbill:** These early breeders are already in 'autumn mode' with flocks on the move in nine separate counties according to the RBA news service on June 5

**Bullfinch:** Throughout this and the preceding year birders have been reporting increased numbers of this species (on 31 Jan 2011 a flock of 12 at Pulborough Brooks was the first report to catch my eye as unusual) and this theme was still active this week with a sighting of a pair in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden (where he has not seen the species since July 2008). Although the countryside in which Bullfinches could be seen might channel wandering birds down the Ems valley and into the Brook Meadow area they would still be just over 300 metres from Brian's garden and separated from it by many tightly packed houses with little in the way of garden so it is surprising that they were in his garden - my guess is that (a) they had not bred or were failed breeders (hence the early date for them to be wandering) and (b) they were desperately searching for food as a result of the current weather

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Norfolk Hawker (*Aeshna isosceles*):** First of the year seen on June 2

**Irish Damselfly (*Coenagrion lunulatum*):** First of the year in Co Antrim on June 4. Dan Powell's Guide to the Dragonflies of Great Britain has a very useful chart comparing the features of all the male blue Damselflies listing the features to be seen in segments 2,3,8 and 9 of each species - as this appears on the facing page to that showing details of the Irish Damselfly (which I normally have no cause to look at!) this weeks news has brought it to my attention for the first time

#### **Species reported this week:**

Emperor Dragonfly, Norfolk Hawker, Hairy Dragonfly, Club Tailed Dragonfly, Black Tailed Skimmer, Keeled Skimmer, Broad Bodied Chaser, Four Spotted Chaser, Scarce Chaser, Red Veined Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, Red-eyed Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Blue Tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Variable Damselfly, Irish Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Large Skipper:** First of the year seen at 'The Comp' at the east end of the South Downs north of Eastbourne on June 3. So far the only two other reports have been from the 'High and Over' viewpoint near The Comp on June 6 and from Brook Meadow in Emsworth on June 8.

#### **Species reported this week:**

Large Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Small Pearl-bordered

Fritillary, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath

## **OTHER INSECTS:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Phryganea grandis:** Caddis Flies come in several species of differing sizes. To see the biggest you are likely to come across in Britain see

<http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/06/06/phryganea-grandis/>

**Slender-footed Robberfly (Leptarthrus brevirostris):** Graeme Lyons found one of these at Pyecombe Hill near the southern end of the A23 near Brighton and you can see his photo and blog entry at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/hunchback-of-wolstonbury-hill.html> but don't miss seeing another photo of this Robberfly jewelled with dew at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/heathmcdonald/5768257447/>

**Volucella bombylans hoverfly:** First report of this species for the year comes from Thanet in Kent on June 4. If you are not familiar with the species see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volucella\\_bombylans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volucella_bombylans)

**Amblyteles armatorius Ichneumon:** Another first for the year from Thanet on June 4. For photo and info see <http://www.uknature.co.uk/A.armatorius-info.html>

**Pogonocherus hispidulus:** A not very attractive name and a not very attractive look to this small beetle which achieved fame by becoming the 4,000th new species to be found and recognized by Graeme Lyons (thus achieving his target to qualify as a 'proper pan-species lister'). Read all about it at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/i-made-it-to-4000-species.html> Later on June 2 and also in Rewell Wood near Arundel

Graeme found a more respectable **Lesser Stag Beetle** and a number of **Wasp Beetles (Clytus arietis)**

**Grasshoppers:** The Durlston Diary for June 9 tells us that mature Grasshoppers are now becoming prominent there as well as many of their nymphs

## **PLANTS**

**Yellow horned Poppy:** First flowers that I am aware of were seen at Rye Harbour on June 3

**Narrow-leaved Pepperwort:** This has for some years grown in paving block cracks in the northwest quadrant of the Langstone Roundabout where you enter Havant from the A27. I cannot see any plants there this year but on June 8 I found two freshly flowering healthy plants only a short distance west in disturbed ground where new crash barriers have been installed beside the slip road approaching the roundabout

**Sea Clover:** On June 4 I accompanied John Norton and Eric Clement to several sites in the Havant area and among the finds were a substantial colony of Sea Clover on the west side of the seawall of the south east most field of Warblington

Farm growing on the well drained top section of the bank on either side of the channel through which the stream flows out into the harbour south of Nore Barn woodland. Previously, on May 30, John had found this clover in flower near the Great Salterns Quay beside the Eastern Road into Portsmouth.

**Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*):** Also on June 4 John Norton found a single plant of this rare clover near the Warblington underpass below the A27 where the species has been found each year since 2007

**Tufted Vetch:** First report of this in flower came from Durlston on June 4 (Brian Fellows also found it in Chichester on June 7)

**Yellow vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*):** First and only report of this in flower so far comes from Durlston on June 6

**Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*):** First seen by the Havant Wildlife Group on Portsdown on June 9. The group also found many **Pyramidal Orchids** in flower - the first I am aware of

**Small Melilot:** John Norton found a colony of this plant on May 30 in a gravel depression inside the Langstone Harbour west seawall just south of the Great Salterns Quay. I think this is currently the only site for it in SU 70

**Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*):** First report of flowering from Pulborough Brooks on June 5

**White Bryony:** First flowering at Nore Barn (Emsworth) on June 4

**Knotted Hedge Parsley:** First flowers seen at Southmoor Lane in Havant on June 8

**Knotgrass:** First flowering seen in Havant on June 5

**Common Figwort:** I found this for the first time this year beside Southmoor Lane in Havant (on the boundary between the Havant Borough offices and the Southern Electric carpark). As these plants had both seeds and flowers at a date when I have not come across the species anywhere else I am wondering if the plants might be hybrids or an unusual Figwort species.

**Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*):** A photo taken by Cliff Dean at Ashburnham Place near Hastings on June 4 shows one plant flowering there.

**Brooklime:** Flowering at the Langstone South Moors on June 8

**Hedge Woundwort:** This started to flower on June 7, seen both by Brian Fellows in Chichester and myself by the Hayling Billy Trail in Havant

**Self Heal:** Also found flowering for the first time at Langstone South Moors on June 8

**Water Forget-me-not:** First flowers seen on June 4 at Brook Meadow in Emsworth

**Tufted Forget-me-not:** This smaller plant of watery sites was in flower at the Langstone South Moors on June 8

**Green Hounds Tongue (*Cynoglossum germanicum*):** One of several rare plants seen by Graeme Lyons at Box Hill in Surrey on June 5 - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/north-of-wall.html> in which Graeme has photos of various species found in Surrey that day - including **Greater Yellow Rattle and Cut-leaved Germander** (neither yet in flower ) and both **Ground Pine and Green Hounds Tongue** (both in flower)

**Sea Plantain:** Flowering at Nore Barn on June 4

**Common Marsh Bedstraw:** Flowering on the Langstone South Moors on June 8

**Wall Bedstraw (?):** A single specimen of a small Bedstraw Plant which might have been of this species was found beside the cycleway section north of the Langstone Technology Park on June 8

**Narrow-leaved Ragwort:** Possibly a first for Hampshire and certainly new to the Havant area was growing in a roadside ornamental flowerbed (planted with Cotoneaster but also supporting a good show of Thistles and other 'weeds') on the north side of Brookside Road at Havant (Brockhampton) where the road meets the gates leading into the carpark on the north west side of the Langstone Technology Plant. For photos see my Diary entry for June 8

**Marsh Thistle:** First flowering plants seen at the Langstone South Moors on June 8

**Creeping Thistle:** Another first seen growing by the Narrow-leaved Ragwort on June 8

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Common Frog:** Good news from Fareham - in the Three Amigos blog ( <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/06/08/common-frogs-in-the-garden/> ) Steve Copsey tells us that he still has **at least 30 adult Frogs** around his garden pond with lots of tadpoles still to leave the pond. Here in Havant (and I think across the UK ) the Frog population has been more than decimated by the viral disease known as 'Red Leg' which has been present for the best part of 20 years despite all attempts to eradicate it ( see [http://www.froglife.org/disease/frog\\_mortality\\_project.htm](http://www.froglife.org/disease/frog_mortality_project.htm) ). Congratulations to Steve for providing a virus free haven and for the superb photo of a healthy frog in fancy dress ( <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/06/Common-Frog-2a-Garden-5-June-2012.jpg> )

**Roman Snail:** In the past I have found extra large Snail Shells of a rich brown colour on Portsdown and wondered if these were Roman Snails only to be assured that the nearest site at which I might still find those was in Surrey. This

week Graeme Lyons was in Surrey and found living examples ready for eating (thankfully he refrained) - see

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/north-of-wall.html> Graeme does include a link to Steve Gales blog in his entry but if you want to go straight to the photo which attracted Graeme to contact Steve see <http://northdownsandbeyond.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/roman-snail-porn.html>

**Sun Fish:** First mention of this extraordinary creature (which swims around disguised as a large dinner plate balancing on its rim) comes from the Devon Birding blog after a birder saw one off Berry Head on June 7. If you are not familiar with this species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean\\_sunfish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocean_sunfish) and learn to admire a fish which **can grow to weigh 1,000 Kilograms on a diet of Jellyfish**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 4 - 10 (WEEK 23 OF 2012)**

### **Fri 8 June**

#### **A new plant for the Havant area**

The wind today precluded cycling so I walked to the Langstone South Moors to check on the **Southern Marsh Orchids**, going via Southmoor Lane to first check on the **Knotted Hedge Parsley** but not expecting anything else of much interest.

In fact I found nine newly flowering plants for the year, one of them being something I have not previously found in the Havant area - **Narrow Leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*)** - and the Marsh Orchids were in excellent condition and high numbers.

Passing the northwest quadrant of the Langstone roundabout I looked for, but did not see, the plants of **Narrow-leaved Pepperwort** that have flowered in the roadside pavement in recent years but they are still present in a new location alongside the slip-road approaching the roundabout from the east bound A27 (where the soil has been disturbed this year in the course of installing extended crash barriers alongside the road - I found two flowering plants here)

Nothing more until I had walked under the A27 beside the Langbrook stream and then turned west along the cycleway running parallel to the A27 - somewhere here I spotted a small plant of a Bedstraw in flower and collected it to identify when I got home but foolishly I did not note where I found it as my tentative id is **Wall Bedstraw** which would be a good find (I have only seen this at Farlington Marshes where Geoff Farwell found it a few years back) - until I have re-found it and had another look I am not claiming this as any more than a possible id.

Emerging from the cycleway into Brookside Road I stopped to record my first **Creeping Thistle** flowers for the year after spotting it in the flowerbeds (planted with some low growing Cotoneaster) close to the entrance to one of the Langstone Technology Park carparks. Running my eye round the other weeds in this flowerbed I saw one was a Ragwort just starting to flower but this was clearly not the Common Ragwort that is the only species I have seen flowering so far - the leaves (see photo below) showed it to be **Narrow Leaved Ragwort** which I have only previously seen at Nutbourne Farm Lane in Sussex, making this find possibly a first for the Havant area (SU70 10km square)

## Narrow-leaved Ragwort flowers (wilting after being 'collected')

### Distinctive leaf of Narrow-leaved Ragwort

Walking on south down Southmoor Lane I stopped around halfway down outside Lewmar Marine where a single wooden telegraph pole (nowadays unused - supporting no wires!) marks the end of a short section of narrow grass bank, backed by a wooden fence. At the foot of this fence **Knotted Hedge Parsley** has grown for many years and could be seen again today with the first flowers of the current year. A little further south, at the foot of the last of several sign boards marking entrances to Lewmar sites, I found more of these plants where I have not seen them before.

My next find came at the point where the Havant Borough offices give way to the Southen Electric carpark. Here several plants of what I assumed to be **Common Figwort** were in flower (and clearly had been for some time as many flowers had been replaced by fruit). The fact that I have not seen Figwort in flower elsewhere until now (while these plants have been out for some time) coupled with the 'speckled' look to the flowers, made me wonder if this was some uncommon Figwort species but it does not seem to fit the three candidates listed by Stace.

At Budds Farm the **Swans** still had their six cygnets and the only **Shelduck** to be seen were just two adults. **Canada Geese** had increased to five and the other usual suspects were present but the unusual feature today was the presence of many **House Martins** and a few **Swifts** trawling for insects over the water (the only **Swallows** were doing the same over the grass of the South Moors). The Swifts reminded me that yesterday, as the rain eased but the low cloud and strong wind made the presence of Swifts unlikely, two flew over my garden and another was seen over it first thing this morning - normally Swifts take advantage of their speed and understanding of aerial currents to leave a storm area and fly to somewhere with better weather even if it is several hundred miles from their nest area (the chicks are able to go into a sort of suspended animation and survive even if the parents do not come back with food for a couple of days).

On the South Moors there was a **better than usual display of Southern Marsh orchids** - I even found one near the field entrance gate outside the boundary marked by the drainage channel around the south-west quadrant of the 'orchid field'. In the central stream running down the east side of the orchid field my first **Brooklime** was in flower as was **Tufted Forget-me-not** further down that stream while in among the orchids I found **Common Marsh Bedstraw and Self-Heal**

Nothing else of significance on the way home (no apparent change in the Egret nests at Langstone Pond).

### Mon 4 June

#### The ongoing Egret mystery plus some good flower finds

The rain gave us a day off today and that gave John Norton and Eric Clement a chance to cast their expert botanist eyes on the Emsworth area with Brian Fellows and myself as less expert guides to the sites.

That occupied the afternoon but in the morning **I visited Langstone Pond to check on the Egret nests where the lack of action has been puzzling me**. Reflecting on

the story of this year's breeding attempt so far for yesterday's weekly summary I realised that there should be some positive sign of young in the nests by now yet I have not detected anything beyond two glimpses of adults standing in their nests and poking about in the bottom of their nests in a way which might indicate that they had heard noise coming from the eggs and were wondering what was going on.

My notes show that nest building had started by Mar 29 when 8 nests were visible with numbers increasing to 18 nests on Apr 2 and an estimated 23 nests on Apr 13. By May 5 at least 12 of these nests seemed to have parents sitting so I assume some eggs had been laid by then, and the information that I have tells me that incubation takes 21 to 25 days, so some chicks should have hatched between May 25 and 30, and from then on parents should have been bringing food to the nests (with bursts of unusual activity visible each time they flew in and glimpses of nestlings visible and maybe audible when the hungry chicks were waiting for their next feed).

Up to now, including this morning, I have seen no such signs of chicks having hatched but before assuming bad news I must emphasise that I have no evidence as to when any eggs were laid, and also that everything I know of these Egrets is that their behaviour is always in some way unexpected. One unexpected feature is that this Langstone Pond colony is different from all the other nesting colonies that I know of in that the Egrets have nested here for several years but there has never been a Heronry here (all the literature says that Egrets always nest among other Herons in an established Heronry). Another feature of this colony is that the first nests were all in trees overhanging the Lymbourne stream but, after some of the nests moved last year to trees on the islands in the pond, all the nests this year are on those islands - that is probably a function of the growth of the island trees which offer more protection from disturbance and predation and which now have more branch-space for the nests.

Assuming all is well we will be able to watch the ongoing spectacle of young in the nests for four weeks after they hatch before they leave the nests, and the period over which there are young in the nests can, as with Grey Herons, be staggered over several months. To ensure the survival of as many chicks as possible the adults do not all nest concurrently - some pairs may lay their eggs in March or even earlier while others do not lay until three months later in May. Even within one nest up to six eggs can be laid, one each day, over a week with incubation starting when the first egg is laid so the young also hatch on different days over a period of about a week.

For anyone unfamiliar with Langstone Pond **the best place from which to see the nests is near the bridge over the Lymbourne stream** - come past the Royal Oak pub and over this bridge, then stop by the wire-mesh covered window before you come to the wooden fence and door/gate leading into the Mill property. You should be able to see up to 20 nests from here though there are some three other nests only visible from near the Interpretation Board near the other duck feeding point on the seawall.

The afternoon outing started when John Norton picked me up from home and we drove towards Emsworth under the A27 junction but stopped in the access road to the first houses you come to on the north side of the A259 (where it straightens

out after the enforced curve necessitated by the construction of the new road underpass and its links to the A27). Walking back along the old pre-A27 road which now leads only to a pedestrian/cycle underpass we followed the old road surface to where it ends in a fence guarding the new A27 sliproad and close to this fence, in ground that seems to have turned from grass to baked desert in the hot period of this spring, John Norton found just one plant of the rare **Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*)** which has been seen here each spring since 2007 (at least) when I found plants scattered over a patch measuring 5 x 1 metre. John may also have found a new plant for this site - several specimens growing at the foot of the fence line but as yet showing no flowers or even buds to confirm that the leaves were those of **Knotted Hedge Parsley**.

We then drove on to meet Brian Fellows in the Emsworth Bridge Road carpark which has one of his more successful 'Emsworth Waysides' wildflower collections among which I added two personal 'firsts for the year' with flowering **Sulphur Cinquefoil** and **Wall Lettuce**. We then walked to Brook Meadow where I was reminded that correct identification of Fumitories requires close scrutiny of the flowers (what I at first thought was **Common Ramping Fumitory** because of its exuberant growth and tendency to climb other plants was just **Common Fumitory!**)

Following the path round the north of the Meadow, below the railway, Eric Clement issued dire warnings that the growth of **Himalayan Giant bramble bushes** should be severely controlled before they spread over the whole meadow! Walking south through the northern meadow Brian showed us the ten **Southern Marsh orchids** now in flower (the number of plants is increasing each year after a couple were introduced a few years ago) and before we reached the exit to Lumley Road John pleased Brian by adding a new species to the meadow list - the small and delicate **Slender Spike Rush (*Eleocharis uniglumis*)**.

Walking back from Brook Meadow to Bridge Road John spotted two unexpected grasses in the pavement of Victoria Road - the **Fern Grass (*Catapodium rigidum*)** and **Water Bent** (a name which I could only find in my 1984 edition of C E Hubbard's Grasses and which he called *Agrostis semiverticillata* but which now appears in Stace's Flora as ***Polypogon semiverticillatus*** though still called Water Bent by him)

Next we went to Nore Barn and spent some time in the south-east meadow of Warblington Farm where we found a good showing of **Sea Clover** on the meadow facing bank of the seawall on either side of the point where the eastern stream of the farm runs out into the 'Nore Barn channel' of the harbour. While in the Nore Barn area I added **White Bryony**, **Sea Plantain** and **Sea Arrowgrass** to my personal 'first flowering' list

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 28 - JUNE 3 (WEEK 22 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Still a few sightings off the south coast though the only reports of **Red-Throated** came from the Yorkshire coast. One **Black-Throated** was seen at Selsey on May 26 with other singles at Christchurch and Portland on May 27. The only **Great Northern** was reported off Portland on May 29

**Sooty Shearwater:** One seen off the Yorkshire coast on June 1 was the third I know of this year (one in Jan off Flamborough Head and one on May 14 off the Butt of Lewis in the western isles)

**Night Heron:** One turned up on the Lymington shore on June 2. A group of 4 were seen in Devon on Mar 13 and there were numerous sightings of singles in Devon and Cornwall between Mar 12 and Apr 15. Since then one was in the Pulborough area from May 17 to 23, probably this bird was in the Pagham Harbour north fields on May 23

**Squacco Heron:** One was at Dungeness on May 30 after one was in Somerset from May 2 to 11. Another single was in the Netherlands on May 27 (maybe en route to Dungeness?)

**Little Egret:** The first nests were seen at Langstone Pond on Mar 29 and there were estimated to be 23 nests there on Apr 13 but I could see no sign of any young having hatched when I was last there on June 1 (just one of the adults was standing up and poking at something in the nest, all the other adults were sitting patiently). Incubation is supposed to take no more than 22 days so eggs laid on May 13 should have hatched by June 3. The nests seemed to be ready for egg laying on Apr 13 so once again the Little Egrets are behaving unpredictably! The best account of their nesting behaviour I have come across is in a paper by the RSPB Southend Group ( <http://www.southendrspb.co.uk/egrets.htm> ) which says .."In the UK, Little Egrets nest among Grey herons. The nest is a typical heron nest a platform of sticks high in a tree or a bush. Even though egrets nest colonially, they do defend the immediate area around the nest. The female lays a clutch of 2-6 eggs, one a day, and starts to incubate as the first egg is laid. The chicks hatch over several days about three weeks later. The chicks start to climb on branches around the nest before they fledge at four weeks old.. They will spend a further month in their parents' care while they learn to feed themselves and perfect their flying skills." As far as I know Langstone is the only site at which Egrets nest independently (there has never been a Herony there). Next time I go there I will look more closely at some of the nests where the 'sitting adult' seems to have a downy plumage and could be an already well grown juvenile.

**Great White Egret:** According to Chris Packham on the Springwatch TV programme this week a pair is nesting in Somerset this year.

**Glossy Ibis:** Two arrived in the Pagham North Walls area on May 6 and at least one of them has been regularly seen there up to May 30 at least. Another single bird has probably been in the Exmister Marsh area by the R Exe since May 21 while two more were in the Rye area (Pannell Farm) on May 25. Locally one was seen at the Farlington Marshes 'Deeps' on May 28 and may have moved to the Lymington shore where it was seen on June 2

**Spoonbill:** One was seen on the Lymington shore on May 28 and another roving bird (in full breeding plumage) turned up at Dungeness on May 26 when only three of the Poole Harbour flock were seen

**Brent Geese:** 13 summering birds have been seen in Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on May 24 and 29 and a single was at Newtown Harbour (IoW) on June 1

**Shelduck:** Ducklings are now appearing in various breeding areas but when I was at the Havant Budds Farm Pools on May 28 no ducklings were on show but I saw a fierce dispute between what I assume were the males of the two pairs assumed to be nesting there.

**Honey Buzzard:** These have been arriving since Apr 21 and I have now seen more than 40 reports, the latest being a flock of 40 over the Netherlands on May 28 when a single flew north over the Hastings area. The latest so far was one over Dungeness on May 29

**Black Kite:** 16 have been seen over southern England since Mar 30. Three reports this week have come from Poole in Dorset on May 28, from Cornwall on May 31 and (possible only) from Four Marks near Alton in Hampshire on June 1

**Red Kite:** Since May 22 there have been several 'mass movements' of Red Kites starting with an estimated 25 birds over Dorset on that day when another 9 seemed to come in off the sea over Brighton. May 24 saw an influx over Kent and May 25 and 26 brought a total of around 29 birds over west Cornwall before 30 birds were seen to fly east over Crowhurst rail station (near Hastings) on May 29. There is no hard evidence of birds invading southern England from the continent (though I get the distinct impression that a good number have done so when I read the many reports of birds seen heading north in coastal areas with no equivalent reports of birds previously flying south to the coast) and it seems that expert opinion is that these movements are just the normal wanderings of young birds that are not yet tied to breeding territories.

**Montagu's Harrier:** Reports this week have come from Portland, Seaview (IoW), Durlston and Cornwall

**Osprey:** A late arrival came in off the sea at Portland on May 26 and birds were fishing at both Arlington and Weir Wood reservoirs in Kent during the week but there has been a shortage of the normal records of spring birds pausing at Thorney Island this year (just four reports since the first on Apr 30 compared to 8 reports - all in April - in 2009). On May 29 I was at the Thornham Marshes and had a look at the massive man-made Osprey nest on one of the old airfield landing lights - hopefully it will eventually attract interest from a pair.

**Merlin:** One in the Pannell valley near Rye on May 25 was the latest in Sussex since 1999 (and the only one reported in southern England this week though one was still in the Netherlands on May 27)

**Quail:** Reports from four sites this week with a peak count of 6 at Martin Down on June 1

**Baillons Crane:** The bird which has been on Anglesey since May 22 was still there on June 1

**Corncrake:** One was at The Lizard in Cornwall on May 5 but the only reports since then have been of one at a Netherlands site on May 20 and 27

**Black-winged Stilt:** This seems to have been an exceptional spring for these birds with 35 reports since the beginning of April. They have now been seen this year at 12 sites, apparently not staying anywhere though the latest report of a female and juvenile at Lymington on June 2 makes me wonder if the report of a pair at Leighton Moss in Lancashire on Apr 20 hides the fact that they stayed there and nested.

**Avocet:** Predation by Fox or Badger of nests at Rye Harbour, despite protective fencing, means that several pairs there are now laying second clutches.

**Spotted Redshank:** Three birds in summer plumage were seen at Pagham Harbour north walls on May 26, one was at Oare Marshes in north Kent on May 28 and another was at Newquay in Cornwall on May 29

**Greenshank:** These have also been later than usual in departing with a flock of 19 at Pagham north walls on May 26 (and 7 still there on May 27). Two were still at Christchurch Harbour on May 28 (with one still there on June 1)

**Great Blackback Gull:** A possible indication of an increase in the number of breeding pairs on the south coast comes from Emsworth where a pair has bred for the first time on a floating raft in the Slipper Mill pond. Eggs started to hatch in this nest on May 29 and three chicks were seen on June 1

**Kittiwake:** On May 28 Bob Edgar wrote .. "I went to count the colony at Newhaven today but all the nests are deserted. This colony was established as the first breeders in Sussex in 1976 and once numbered 1200+ pairs." Then on June 1 Sandie Field wrote .. "I was concerned about the Kittiwake report (colony deserted at Newhaven) so I took myself down to Seaford today. I am pleased to report that to my untrained eye there looks to be loads of "nesting" Kittiwakes." These reports refer to two separate colonies and the 2010 Sussex Bird Report indicated that the Newhaven colony (on Telscombe Cliffs) had 45 occupied nests whereas the Seaford Head cliffs (viewed from Splash Point) had 830 nests and so Sandie's report does not preclude that there has also been a significant drop in nest numbers there as well as at Newhaven.

**Woodpigeon:** According to Chris Packham on the Springwatch TV programme the RSPB are proposing to measure the success of our attempts to support birdlife in our gardens by the biomass they represent (i.e. if you were able to catch and weigh every bird seen in your garden then the garden having the greatest total weight of birds would be the one that was most successful in supporting bird life). As the majority of birds that come into my garden for food that I put out (mainly bread crumbs with some cheap bird seed in the winter) are Woodpigeons, which weigh in even more heavily than usual after stuffing the

equivalent of a slice of bread down their gullets, I will probably qualify for an RSPB Medal 'for services to increasing biodiversity' (assuming that biomass becomes accepted as the measure of biodiversity)

**Nightjar:** Following last week's news that some Nightjars were back in Havant Thicket I am pleased to see that four were found in the West Walk woodland near Wickham in the Meon Valley on May 29

**Bee-eater:** These were seen at six southern sites this week stretching from the Thanet area of east Kent to Cornwall and the Scillies with intermediate sightings at Durlston in Dorset, Rogate near Midhurst in Sussex plus Dungeness and Weir Wood reservoir.

**Roller:** One had been seen on the Devon coast (Teignmouth) on May 1 and now June 1 brings a second report from Yorkshire

**Yellow Wagtail:** These have long ceased to be regular breeding birds along much of the south coast and their demise was highlighted by Pat Bonham on June 1 when, in a ten mile walk over the Guldeford Marsh area east of Rye, he only found 2 breeding pairs plus 6 apparently unpaired males

**Black Redstart:** A pair has nested on the cliffs at Durlston and on June 1 they had three new hatched nestlings

**Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*):** On May 29 the sixth recorded in Britain was trapped at Hartlepool

**Wood Warbler:** Singing males have been heard at half a dozen sites in east Hampshire where they were once regular breeders but have not been seen for several years

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Gold Ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*):** First seen in both Hampshire and the Highlands on May 27

**Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*):** First seen in Hampshire on May 27

**Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonsolombei*):** First seen on May 27 in Hampshire

**Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*):** First of year in Devon on May 29

**Scarce Blue Tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilo*):** First of year in Gloucestershire on May 25

**Southern Damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*):** First in Hampshire on May 27

#### **Species reported this week:**

Gold Ringed Dragonfly, Hairy Dragonfly, Downy Emerald, Keeled Skimmer, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Red-veined Darter, Common Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, White-legged Damselfly, Red Eyed

Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Blue Tailed Damselfly, Scarce Blue Tailed Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Southern Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*):** Just one report of a sighting near Newton Abbot in Devon on May 30 - possibly a migrant, possibly an escape from local breeding?

**Clouded Yellow:** Sightings at Portland on May 28 and 29 may have been one or two migrants

**Painted Lady:** Six reports between May 27 and June 1 from Bishops Waltham (Hants), Berry Head (south Devon), Seaview (IoW), Portland, and Friston nr Estbourne,

#### **Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Comma, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath.

### **OTHER INSECTS:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Froghopper species (*Cercopis vulnerata*):** First report was on May 19 but Cuckoo Spit did not become abundant until May 29

**Short-haired bumble-bee (*Bombus subterraneus*):** On May 28 51 females imported from Sweden were released at Dungeness as a re-introduction to Britain of an extinct species

**Cockchafer:** First report from south Devon on May 20 and then from Durlston on May 29

### **PLANTS**

**Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba*):** First flowering at Durlston on May 31

**Black Mustard:** On May 4 many plants were flowering on the seawall of Emsworth Marina but it was not until I returned there in May 29 that I saw the addressed seed pods confirming the identity of the plants

**Horse Radish:** First flowers seen at Southmoor Lane in Havant on May 28

**Weld:** Plants were seen in Emsworth on May 22 but I am not sure if they were in flower by then - they definitely were by May 28

**White Rockrose (*Helianthemum apenninum*):** This plant is restricted to two sites, one in North Somerset, the other in South Devon and the latter had plants in flower on May 27 at Berry Head

**Turkish Tutsan (*Hypericum xylosteifolium*):** Plants that were once part of an informal garden beside a moored wooden sailing ship in the Brockhampton Stream in Havant still persist and were flowering on May 28 many years after the vessel was swept out to sea and destroyed.

**Greater Sea Spurrey:** First flowers seen by me on May 29 at the Thornham Marshes on Thorney Island

**Bastard Toadflax:** First report of this in flower comes from Whitehawk Hill at Brighton on May 27

**Spanish Broom:** This has probably been in flower for some time but the first time I was aware of it was at Emsworth marina on May 29

**Rest Harrow:** First flowers seen in Portsdown on May 30

**Hop Trefoil:** First flowers seen on May 29 on the Thorney sea wall (west end of Deeps)

**Smooth Tare:** Started to flower generally from May 28

**Grass Vetchling:** First report of flowering from north Hayling on May 26

**Sea Pea:** Flowering at Rye Harbour on May 29 (only Hampshire site seems to be around Hurst Castle near Lymington and it may not have been found there since 1993).

**Sainfoin:** Plants were in bud on Portsdown on Apr 30 but I did not see them in flower until May 30 when there was a great display below the carpark to the east of the old A3 London Road (near The George pub)+

**Entire leaved Cotoneaster (*C. integrifolius*):** There was a great display of what I think is this species (because of its big flowers not in clusters) on the slopes of the old A3 cutting south of the Portsdown Hill Road bridge on May 30

**Sulphur Cinquefoil:** Flowering in Emsworth (Bridge Road) on June 1

**White Stonecrop:** Flowering in Emsworth on May 26

**Biting Stonecrop:** Flowering at Hayling North Common on June 1

**Corky Fruited Water Dropwort:** Flowering on the Thorney Island seawall near the Little Deeps on May 29

**Yellow Pimpernel:** First report of this in flower comes from Stansted Forest on May 31

**Wild Privet:** First flowers seen on North Hayling on June 1

**Field Bindweed:** First flower (just one) seen on the Thorney Seawall area on May 29

**Large Bindweed:** First flowers seen in Havant on June 2

**Common Toadflax:** First flowers seen on June 1 at North Common on Hayling

**Purple Toadflax:** Both Purple and Pink forms flowering from May 28

**Wild Thyme:** The first that I am aware of was out on May 30 at Portsdown

**Alkanet (*Anchusa officinalis*):** First flowers seen on May 28 in Southmoor Lane at Havant

**Ivy Broomrape:** The yellow (form *monochroma*) plants were pushing up strongly at the Portchester Redd Barn estate on May 30 (see my diary for that date)

**Common Broomrape:** First report from Kent on May 28 with local plants seen on Portsdown on May 30

**Clove-scented Broomrape (*Orobanche caryophyllacea*):** Flowering in the Thanet area of Kent on May 28

**Hoary Plantain:** Starting to flower on Portsdown on May 30

**Honeysuckle:** Coming into general flowering on June 1

**Common Ragwort:** First flowers seen on north Hayling on June 1

**Slender Thistle:** Starting to flower in the Southmoor Lane area of Havant on May 28

**Black Knapweed:** Flowering in the Broadmarsh area of Havant on May 28

**Goatsbeard:** First flowers not reported until May 26 (Salsify was out on May 7 and is much more abundant than Goatsbeard this year)

**Wall Lettuce:** First flowers in Emsworth on June 1

**Rosy Garlic:** Flowering at Boadmarsh west carpark on May 28 and on Portsdown on May 30

**Stinking Iris:** First flowers seen on June 2 (yellow flowered form in Havant cemetery)

**Turkish Iris (*I. orientalis*):** Flowering on June 1 at the old seawall of the long disused boating lake of Hayling North Common Holiday camp

**New Zealand Cabbage Palm (*Cordyline australis*):** Flowering in a Havant garden on June 1

**Orchid species:** See [http://www.planetthanet.org/avian\\_news\\_May\\_2012.htm](http://www.planetthanet.org/avian_news_May_2012.htm) (May 28 entry) for an account of a ten hour chase around East Kent which managed to record 20 species of orchid (not all in flower)

**Bee Orchid:** Locally around 20 plants were flowering beside the Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes cycleway on May 28 and more were seen on Portsdown on May 30

**Common Spotted Orchid:** These started to flower locally on May 30

**Southern Marsh Orchid:** I had found one plant starting to open its flowers at Langstone South Moors on May 19 but the first report of general flowering came from Emsworth Brook Meadow on May 27

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Muntjac deer:** A sighting of one on Portland Island on May 29 was thought to be only the third record for the Island

**Pointed Snail (*Cochlicella acuta*):** The colony on the seawall bank opposite the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps is still surviving - I saw 23 live shells hanging from the vegetation in the hot sunshine when I was there on May 29

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 28 - JUNE 3 (WEEK 22 OF 2012)**

### **Wed 30 May**

#### **A great show of wild flowers on Portsdown**

This morning I drove to Portsdown and looked at two areas, both rich in wild flowers, starting at the carpark just east of the old A3 London Road. Here, within 50 metres of the carpark, was a massive display of **Sainfoin** of which I photographed one of dozens of clusters nestling in the long grass purposefully left uncut for the flowers and insects to flourish. Sadly my photo fails to capture the rich colour of the flowers but it may encourage you to go and see them for yourself and to enjoy the view across Fareham to Southampton Water shown in the second photo.

From this uncut grass below the carpark I walked in the general direction of the road bridge carrying the Hill Road west past The George pub and before reaching the slip road taking traffic from the Hill Road to join the southbound London Road I found more delights in long grass surrounding the tall trees of Colyers Pit. From a distance you can see a large bush of **Broom** covered with yellow flowers but as

you approach this be sure to keep an eye on the long grass for hiding in it are several clusters of **Rosy Garlic** plants and around the foot of the Broom there is more colour from **Hedgerow Cranesbill** flowers. Just beyond the long grass area I took the photo (below) of **Hoary Plantain** in bud and in flower - my nose could not detect any scent but at night this plant is said to be very attractive to moths.

### Hoary Plantains in bud and in flower

Carrying on uphill across the slip road the first thing I saw on the far side (overhanging the kerb stones) was a patch of **Restharrow** already flowering and in the close mown grass along the edge of the road was a magnificent show of **Wild Thyme**. Continuing through this area of unmown grass I began to come on lots of **Fairy Flax** (later there will be lots of **Squinancywort** here). Beyond the tarmac footpath you can look down the steep slope to the London Road and currently this slope is covered in the white flowers of a **ground hugging Cotoneaster species** among which I spotted just three measly specimens of **Common Spotted Orchid** (this orchid does not seem to like the weather this year!) Also here was a cluster of **Common Broomrape** plants to add to my first flower list.

Walking over the bridge I had a look at the grassland between the London Road and the slip road on its west side which had as its main interest a cluster of 13 freshly flowering **Bee Orchids** at its southern tip close to the slip road.

From here I went back to the car and drove to Skew Road which connects James Callaghan Drive (the road taking you past Fort Southwick) with Hill Road running down into Portchester. I parked on the large open space before Skew Road reaches the bridge over the M27 and had a look over the motorway fence to assure myself that many plants of **Field Cowwheat** are once again growing here though as yet they have none of the Purple and Gold that they will eventually show.

Next I walked over the Motorway bridge on its west side and at the south end climbed over a crash barrier onto a broad tarmac path running around the housing of the Red Barn estate. After a time this path makes a left turn and heads downhill into the previously hidden housing and my target came into sight right at this bend (see the photos below). This is **Ivy Broomrape** and is only just starting to push up - in a week or so there should be many more plants on both sides of the footpath. These plants were discovered here in 2005 and have been seen yearly since then - they are unusual in having such a bright yellow colour which is I think known as 'var monochroma'.

### Two clusters of Ivy Broomrape plants just pushing up

Going back over the bridge I turned left into Nelson Lane which I see has a new designation as a County Council roadside wildflower site - today, while it had plenty of flowers there was nothing to add to my list other than the smell of what I

guessed was dead Fox (later I found the corpse of one Fox cub but I think there were others)

[Tue 29 May](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### Corky-fruited Water Dropwort and Pointed Snails

Another sunny morning saw me cycling east via Emsworth to Thorney Island, Prinsted and Nutbourne returning by an inland route through Southbourne and Westbourne. Birding highspots were the sight of a **phantom Osprey on a massive real nest** and **real House Martins building real nests**. The hot weather gave me an expected sight of more than 20 **Pointed Snails** hanging from low vegetation at the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps and an unexpected addition to that sight was to have a **Mother Shipton moth** perch briefly among them.

First stop was on the east side of the A27 underpass where I was pleased to find that the grass had been recently cut in the area where rare **Clustered Clover** has appeared in several years since 2007 (but can only survive if the grass is kept very short). The 2007 find was made on May 29 and last year the clover was in flower on May 20 but there was no sign of it today - perhaps because the grass had not been cut for some time until (I think) yesterday.

Taking the route through Brook Meadow I diverted up Lumley Road to look for early signs of **Skullcap** in the stream passing the cottages south of the railway and did see one plant though last year the flowers were not seen until June 29.

From Slipper Road I could not get a decent view of the **Great Blackback gull's raft nest** but I could see the sitting bird's head with open beak in the heat and did see it stand up as if disturbed by a chick or hatching egg (after writing this Brian Fellows latest maternity ward bulletin tells me that the eggs did hatch this morning).

Before going on to Thorney Island I turned north along the **marina seawall** and can recommend this diversion to anyone interested in wildflowers - the path is currently right up to Chelsea standards with the main components being a mass of yellow **Black Mustard** flowers offset with many small pink stars of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** with patches of white from Elder and White Dead Nettle. On other parts of the seawall near the boat entrances vivid patches of yellow are created by **Spanish Broom**.

The sound of a **Cuckoo** was continuous while I was in the area of the Little Deeps but there was little other bird song other than the chuntering of **Reed Warblers** and sound of **Skylarks** to the south. Having stopped to listen to the birds I noticed that many flowerheads of **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort** had recently appeared on the seawall and a close look at these also found the blue flowers of **Smooth Tare** which has only just joined the white flowers of **Hairy Tare**. One other eye-catcher on the Wickor Bank half-way to the Great Deeps was a magnificent bush of **Japanese Rose (Rosa rugosa)** in fresh flower.

Reaching the Great Deepes I saw the **Pointed Snails** - if you are not familiar with this uncommon species see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochlicella\\_acuta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochlicella_acuta) though the top picture at <http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Cochlicella%20spp>. gives a better idea of how you are likely see them hanging from plant stems and leaves pointing downwards (at other times of year you may only see empty shells lying on the ground). The concentrated mass of live shells shown in the first article did occur on wooden posts around the edge of the western carpark at the IBM North Harbour site when I was there in the 1980s. Several **Small Heath** butterflies were seen here but I did not see a **Common Blue** until I reached the Thornham Marshes. I have already mentioned the **Mother Shipton moth** but not the 20 or more **Shelduck** and while here I also added two more first flowering plants to my list - **Hop Trefoil** and **Field Bindweed**.

Heading east down Thornham Lane the first item of interest was in the northern hedgerow just before reaching the cluster of commercial and residential sites - another cluster of **Rough Chervil** plants. My next stop was at the eastern seawall (where the stile giving access to the path leading south has been removed) and here the low ground, until recently under water, now has a great show of **Greater Sea Spurrey** in flower. Crossing this still damp ground I went through the line of Hawthorns to see if the **Dyer's Greenweed** plants on the far side were yet in flower - which they were not but many plants promise a good show soon!

From this point I had a distant but unobstructed view of the old airfield landing lights, one of which has been turned into a '**ready made**' **Osprey nest** in the hope of attracting a pair to nest. A telescope would be needed to get a proper view of the nest but through my binoculars I got an image (presumably the result of one or more of the large wood 'branches' used to build the nest) of a white head and brown back of a sitting Osprey!

At Prinsted I searched the east wall of the harbour area for the a plant (**Water Chickweed**) I have found here and nowhere else every year from 2007 to 2011 - no sign of it today, but when I got home I found that the dates for previous years were all in late July! Similarly when I reached Farm Lane at Nutbourne I could not see the **Narrow-leaved Ragwort** expected there but again previous finds have been in July or later. To make up for these failures I went to the western of the two streams which cross Farm Lane and here I was not disappointed by the brilliant beauty of a **Beautiful Demoiselle** (later I saw another on the canalised section of the River Ems flowing south from Westbourne Church)

Reaching the A259 I only went a short distance west before turning north up Infields Lane and here, at a Barn Conversion residence just north of the railway. I was delighted to see a couple of **House Martins** apparently nest building under the eaves - shortly afterwards a noisy party of five **Swifts** shot overhead.

Nothing new on my way home though I did vary my route to take in the **Wild Clary** at Christopher Way in Emsworth which is flourishing despite having had a collection of building workers huts and materials dumped on it until recently.

**Mon 28 May**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## **Bee Orchids, Heath Speedwell and other surprises**

Having read that **Grass Vetchling** was out on Hayling last Saturday when the Havant Wildlife Group visited North Common I set course this morning for the Broadmarsh 'mountain' where the Grass Vetchling should be out with the possible bonus of Hairy Vetchling.

In my garden before setting out both **Purple Toadflax** and **Broad-leaved Willowherb** were newly flowering and before getting far I saw my first **Magpie family** out with their newly fledged young. Southmoor Lane brought the first new plant with **Bugloss (*Anchusa arvensis*)** flowering by the roadside (I usually only see this at the Hayling Island Black Point Sailing club) and before reaching the south end of the road I had added **Horse Radish** and **Slender Thistle** to my first flowers.

At Budds Farm Pools I found the **Swans** had six, not just five, cygnets but the **Shelduck** had no young on show though a fight between what I assumed to be the two males may have been provoked by a defensive feeling towards young about to emerge. The presence of a single **Canada Goose** suggested that we have not escaped without a nestful of goslings to add to their population. Both **Cuckoo** and **Cetti's Warbler** were singing and my first **Weld flowers** on the mound.

Heading along the shore from the Mound to the Hermitage Stream mouth I noticed a bush of **Bittersweet Nightshade** flourishing on a sole diet of shingle - presumably the '**var marinum**'

Following the path up the Brockhampton Stream I found the flowers of **Turkish Tutsan** still flowering where a house boat had been moored many years ago (by the 'bridge to nowhere')

On the Broadmarsh 'mountain' I was greeted by a **Small Copper** butterfly but **no Meadow Brown** (last year the first were seen on May 19 and I had seen seven reports by this date). I soon found **Grass Vetchling** and also my first **Smooth Tare** (with its bigger, bluer flowers than the Hairy Tare which has been out for some time) but **no sign of the Hairy Vetchling** with its very distinctive leaves that I might well have spotted even if I was too early for the flowers - last year I did not see it until June 9 when masses were in flower (my earliest date is June 7 in 2008)

Coming down from the mound I soon found plenty of **Hemlock** in flower and at the west carpark there was a good show of **Salsify** as well as **Rosy Garlic** but the big surprise came when I reached the cycleway below the A27. Roughly opposite the point at which a stream flows under the cycleway into the harbour more than **20 Bee Orchids** were coming into flower - several with their first flowers open. After photographing these I cycled on towards Farlington Marshes and found not only **Brown Knapweed** but also some six large clusters of **Heath Speedwell** in full flower - something I do not recall seeing here before (my main local site for it has always been the western path edges in the Hollybank Woods). Just one more personal new flower seen before I left this cycleway - **Pale Flax**.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 21 - 27 (WEEK 21 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** Their winter season with us is now effectively over but one or two still managed to get noticed like the **Great Northern** in full summer plumage which was seen flying north over a house in the centre of Dartmoor on May 20 (one was still on the sea at Selsey on May 25)

**Slavonian Grebe:** One in summer plumage in the Exmouth area of Devon on May 21 was probably intending to stay there for the summer

**Storm Petrel:** Despite the dramatic change in the weather from winter to summer the ringers on Portland Bill still managed to tape lure one of these into their nets on the night of May 22

**Night Heron:** One made an over night stay at Waltham Brooks (Pulborough) on May 17 and probably stayed on in that area as one was seen at Pulborough Brooks on the evening of May 23. What must have been a different bird was heard and seen in the fields north of Pagham Harbour, also on May 23

**Cattle Egret:** One flew west over West Bexington (near Abbotsbury in Dorset) on May 24 and was probably the bird which arrived at Yelland (on the Taw estuary near Barnstable) on May 25

**Great White Egret:** One arrived at Thurlstone (south Devon) on May 24 and was still there next day

**White Stork:** A party of four spent four days (May 23 to 26) touring the south coast of Dorset and Devon from Portland to the Kingsbridge area

**Glossy Ibis:** One of the pair which have been in the Pagham north walls area since May 6 was still there on May 26 but another was a new comer in the Pannell Farm area of Rye Bay on May 25

**Spoonbill:** Four were still in the Poole Harbour area this week and a young bird was still at the Walmsley Sanctuary (Wadebridge) in Cornwall but the pair seen early in the week at Lymington and Christchurch were not there at the end of the week.

**Brent Goose:** It seems a long time since we last saw big flocks of Brent but I see that a flock of 5256 were still in the Netherlands on May 23

**Shelduck:** Families of young have been appearing since May 15 (6 ducklings at Sidlesham) and this week 2 adults were shepherding more than 20 ducklings at a north Devon site but I have not yet heard any young in the Solent harbours

**Honey Buzzard:** On May 22 Graeme Lyons had a good view of one over the Sussex Wildlife Trust Butcherlands farm near Midhurst and on May 23 Laurence Holloway watched one come in over his home at Bognor. Also on May 23 there were 9 together over one Netherlands site

**Black Kite:** On May 19 one, seemingly arriving from the continent, was over Freshwater in the Isle of Wight and next day another came in off the sea in Cornwall while another was seen over Whitcombe (near Dorchester) in Dorset on May 25

**Red Kite:** Recent reports suggest that our British Kite population is being swelled by waves of continental immigrants. On May 13 a group of 9 Kites over the Porthgwarra (Lands End) area seemed to be part of an influx with many other sightings in Cornwall. On May 22 there was a similar surge of reports from both Sussex and Dorset of birds seen heading north from the coast but not seen previously coming south - of course there is no clear 'proof of origin' but with game rearing landowners having recently obtained government support for measures to control the number of Buzzards which are said to be having a harmful effect on their ability to make money from shooting Pheasants I wonder how long it will be before Red Kites will only be allowed to live in cages? See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-18183204>

**Quail:** No evidence yet that this is to be a 'Quail year' but birds have been heard this week in the Rodmell area near Lewes, at 'The Burgh' where the Arun cuts through the Sussex Downs north of Arundel, at Martin Down south of Salisbury, at Horton in Dorset (west of Ringwood), and in the Scillies

**Baillon's Crake:** One has been heard 'singing' in Anglesey on May 23 and 24 and again on May 26

**Black-winged Stilt:** I have now seen 28 reports of these (mainly in southern England) since Apr 6 when one was on the Isle Of Wight (near Newport). This week one was at the Gaia Trust's Home Farm Marsh Reserve in North Devon and other sightings have been at Lodmoor and Abbotsbury in Dorset and at the Paxton Pits on the Beds/Cambs border near Bedford

**Avocet:** The first report of chicks having hatched came from Rye Harbour on May 12 with others seen at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on May 19 but so far I have not heard of any at Titchfield Haven.

**Cream-coloured Courser:** One in Herefordshire from May 20 to 24 made a good day trip for the twitchers

**Dotterel:** On May 20 it seems there were at least 12 somewhere in the British Isles, one of them being heard on the Worthing seafront

**Great Blackback Gull:** For many years **Herring and Lesser Blackback Gulls** have been extending the area of their rooftop nesting to new towns along the south coast and this year **Great Blackbacks** have joined in the takeover of rooves in the

Portsmouth area. In the Burrfields area of Portsea Island (near Hilsea rail station) the first chicks were seen at factory roof nests on May 24 and there is every expectation that other chicks will soon appear on a raft nest in the Emsworth Slipper Mill Pond (best estimate is that at least one will hatch on May 28). This is almost certainly not the only Great Blackback nest in the Havant area as I now expect to see an adult commuting between the town and Langstone Harbour whenever I visit Budds Farm, and on May 24 I was surprised to see six adults on the harbour shore at the mouth of the Langbrook stream

**Common Tern:** When at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 24 I noticed two Common Terns looking as if they were sitting on nests on the southern fringe of the area occupied by the Black-headed Gull nests

**White-winged Black Tern:** One was seen in the Scillies on May 18 and two spent May 26 fishing in the Stodmarsh area of the Kent Stour Valley

**Barn Owl:** Photographers may like to take a look at [http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/images/IMG\\_0532.Barn-Owl.450.SS.19.5.12.jpg](http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/images/IMG_0532.Barn-Owl.450.SS.19.5.12.jpg) and admire the luck of the photographer who took this shot

**Nightjar:** Birds are now present, churring and wing-clapping, at most regular sites including Havant Thicket (though the display was subdued when John Goodspeed was there on May 22)

**House Martin:** Of local interest six birds were seen collecting mud for nest building at the Bidbury Mead recreation ground in the Bedhampton area of Havant on May 25

**Wheatear:** I think very few, if any, Hampshire birders think of Wheatears as birds which breed in the south of England so it is good to see that an adult could be seen with two fledglings on the Seven Sisters clifftops near Beachy Head on May 23. Even in that part of Sussex I suspect that few can recall the days when it was regular practice to catch bags full of Wheatears for sale in towns like Eastbourne (as Wheatears nest underground in Rabbit burrows and the like you catch them by propping a stone above a likely burrow entrance, wait for the Wheatear to enter, then pull the string attached to the prop holding up the stone.)

**Marsh Tit:** I was asked during the week by an orchid 'hunter' who had been to see a Military Orchid in (I think) Berkshire whether a Tit they had seen regularly entering a nest built in the hollow metal tube of a footpath 'finger post' was more likely to be a **Marsh or Willow Tit** to which my answer was Marsh as these take advantage of ready made nest sites while Willow Tits excavate their own nests from rotten wood. I see that this theory still gets support as on May 19 a Marsh Tit nest was found in the Broadwater Forest area near Crowborough in a Dormouse nest box.

**Golden Oriole:** I see that I have now collected 51 reports of these birds since Apr 13 (when a male arrived at Seaford Head in Sussex). This relatively large number

is mainly the result of my having cast my net wider this year, collecting many of the records from Devon, Cornwall and the Scillies (up to 11 were present in the Scillies on May 3, and at least one dead individual was brought in by a cat there!). Nevertheless Sandy Point on Hayling still recorded one on May 25 and one flew over Portland on May 24 while one was at Reculver in north Kent on May 21

**Red-backed Shrike:** Five reports since May 4 have come from Cornwall, Northumberland, The Scillies and north Kent (Oare Marshes and the Stour Valley)

**Woodchat Shrike:** Twenty three reports since Apr 30, again mainly from Devon, Cornwall and the Scillies, but Hampshire had one briefly at Lymington on May 12 and 13 and one was at Martin Down on May 20 and 21 with another reported at Portland on May 23

## INSECTS

### Dragonflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Emperor:** First reported in Cornwall on May 19

**Brilliant Emerald (*Somatochlora metallica*):** First in Berkshire on May 25

**Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*):** First at Burton Mill Pond in Sussex on May 21

**White-faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia dubia*):** First in Staffordshire on May 26

**Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*):** First in Essex on May 22 (and a male settled on Portsdown far from water on May 23)

**White Legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*):** First in Gloucestershire on May 24

#### Species reported this week:

Emperor dragonfly, Hairy dragonfly, Downy Emerald, Brilliant Emerald, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Scarce Chaser, White-faced Darter, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, White Legged Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Variable Damselfly

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary:** First in Bentley Wood near Stockbridge on May 25

**Marsh Fritillary:** First at Martin Down on May 22

#### Species reported this week:

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Painted Lady (probable migrants near Lewes and Eastbourne on May 21 and 22), Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Marsh Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath.

## PLANTS

**Hairy rock cress (*Arabis hirsuta*):** First flowers out on May 23 when I visited Portsdown

**Weld (*Reseda lutea*):** First found flowering in Emsworth on May 22

**Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*):** Just starting to flower on Portsdown on May 23

**Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*):** First flowers seen on Portsdown on May 23

**Bladder Campion (*Silene vulgaris*):** Flowering at Langstone on May 24

**Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*):** First flowers found in Havant on May 21

**Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*):** This was flowering in January but the first flowers seen since Feb 1 were found on May 25

**Least Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*):** First flowers found in Langstone (Southbrook Road) on May 24

**Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*):** Starting to flower in the south-eastmost field of Warblington Farm on May 25

**Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulnerata*):** Although reported flowering at Durlston on Apr 29 I did not see any in flower until May 23 on Portsdown

**Broad-leaved Willowherb:** First flowers seen in Havant on May 25

**American Willowherb:** First flowers found in my Havant garden on May 26

**Square-stemmed Willowherb:** Flowering in Havant on May 25

**Caper Spurge:** Garden escape plants flowering in Havant on May 21

**Rough Chervil:** This successor to Cow Parsley was starting to flower in the Havant area on May 24

**Hemlock:** First flowers starting to open on May 24

**Ground Elder:** This burst into flower on May 25

**Sanicle:** Flowering on Portsdown on May 23 (though I thought I had seen it earlier!)

**Early Gentian:** Durlston reports more than usual of this flowering by May 23 but none yet seen on Portsdown

**Foxglove:** First flowers open on May 25

**Viper's Bugloss:** First flowers seen in Emsworth on May 25

**Common Gromwell:** A single floret open on Portsdown on May 23

**Corn Chamomile look-alike (*Anthemis austriaca*):** The massive wildflower seed sowing in the Warblington Cemetery extension had started to flower on May 24

**Cornflower:** This was also starting to flower on May 24 in this wildflower seed sown area

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Rockpool fish:** On May 20 Graeme Lyons went rockpooling on the beach at Saltdean (Brighton) and his blog made me aware of some of the wonders of the (not so) deep water. Among the creatures you can see and read about on his blog at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/klingsons-off-starboard-bow.html> are **Long-spined Sea Scorpion (*Taurulus bubalis*)** - which is related to the oddly named "**Fatherlasher**" or **Short spined Sea Scorpion (*Myoxocephalus scorpius*)**, the **Five-bearded Rockling (*Ciliata mustela*)**, **Corkwing Wrasse (*Crenilabrus melops*)** and the **Small-headed Clingfish (*Apletodon dentatus*)** whose fins have evolved into suckers.

**Grey Mullet:** A large shoal of these has been in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth this week and, while I am not interested in trying to catch them, I was interested to learn that they are not easy to catch as they spurn the baits which attract other fish - their idea of a good meal is a mouthful of mud or slimy algae, both of which are difficult to attach to a fish hook. I learnt this from [http://www.anglersnet.co.uk/sea-fishing-articles/mullet\\_basics.html](http://www.anglersnet.co.uk/sea-fishing-articles/mullet_basics.html) Another web article ( <http://www.gofishing.co.uk/Sea-Angler/Section/how-to/Sea-Fishing-Advice/Fish-Species/British-Sea-Fish-Species/Thick-Lipped-Grey-Mullet/> ) tells me that the reason they turn up in our coastal waters at this time of year is that they come to spawn in shallow, cool water in the spring and then hang around but we may not see them for much longer as the English Channel is already at the southern limit of water they deem to be cool enough for spawning.

**Fungi:** The only species worth a mention this week grows in acidic bog water, stands no more than 4 cm high and looks like a tiny, bright yellow, ice lolly on a white stick of a stem. It is called the **Bog Beacon (*Mitrella paludosa*)** and I have seen it in the past in the New Forest but the current find by Graeme Lyons was in Rowland Wood near Hailsham/Eastbourne and you can see Graeme's photos of it at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/bog-lollies.html>

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 21 - 27 (WEEK 21 OF 2012)

### Fri 25 May

#### First Willowherbs, Foxgloves, and Ground Elder

This morning I walked via Pook Lane and along the shore to Nore Barn and back through Warblington Farm passing both **Square-stemmed** and **Broad-leaved Willowherb** in flower for the first time and coming on clear proof that **Rough**

**Chervil** is now taking over from Cow Parsley. With the latter I found my first **Scented Mayweed** with its smaller flowers than Scentless and with a hollow 'receptacle'. Coming back thorough Warblington Farm I heard a **Cuckoo** and then saw it flying east from the Watercress Beds where a **Cetti's Warbler** was singing. Beside the main road back into Havant **Foxgloves** were opening their first flowers and in Havant I saw the first flowers on **Ground Elder** as a group of **House Martins** could be heard passing over.

Although **Common Mallow** was flowering in January today seems to be the first on which it has resumed general flowering.

### Thu 24 May

#### **The Langstone Swan family is safe and Hemlock is starting to flower**

This morning I cycled to the north end of the old rail bridge embankment, then over Langstone Bridge to the Oyster beds and on to North Common before coming home.

On the way out I diverted through the 'new' Langstone housing to find the **Least Yellow Oxalis** was at last in flower. I then continued on Southbrook Road to its junction with the main Hayling Road where wildflower seed has been sown to cover an area of road edge recently dug up - the resulting plants included several of the **aromatic Corn Chamomile substitutes (Anthemis austriaca)**.

Following the old rail track on the far side of the main road to the point where the mouth of the Langbrook stream comes into sight I was pleased to see the local **Swan pair with all six of their surviving cygnets** but I was surprised to see them 'surrounded' by **six hefty Great Blackback Gulls** (I noticed that the male Swan kept between the gulls and his cygnets!).

Also seen on the old railbridge embankment were my first **Bladder Campion flowers** and **Hemlock** just coming into flower

At the Oysterbeds two Common Terns seemed to be on nests at the very southern end of the islands and **Dog Roses** were starting to appear around the area. Heading towards the carpark the **maritime version of Bittersweet Nightshade** was flowering in the shingle and a few **Milk Thistle leaves** could be seen at the southern end of the earth mound behind the lagoon.

Reaching North Common I found the hay field had been cut, attracting **Swallows** and **Black-headed Gulls** to the disturbed insects - more gulls were hawking for insects at several other places this morning. No new flowers at North Common but as I was cycling there I passed a very fresh looking plant of 'Cow Parsley' in a ditch and noticed that it had a wholly purple hairy stem making it a good candidate for the first **Rough Chervil** of the year.

### Wed 23 May

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Dusk at the Langstone Egrettry**

I spent most of the day at home recovering from yesterday's walk but in the evening I cycled to Langstone to see how the nesting Egrets were getting on. When I arrived the Reed Warbler was singing and there seemed to at least one parent Egret at each nest so I did not expect many more to arrive as dusk

approached but I did see eleven birds fly in before I left - no doubt there will be more action when the young begin to hatch and demand food.

**Tue 22 May**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Rockrose, Small Blue and Beautiful Demoiselle on Portsdown**

I spent three hours on Portsdown Hill today in glorious hot sunshine seeing six species of butterfly, including my first **Small and Common Blues** plus a resplendent **Beautiful Demoiselle** far from water, and four new flowering plants (**Rockrose**, **Hairy Rockcress** (*Arabia hirsuta*), **Fairy Flax** and **Kidney Vetch** plus an almost certain find of **Horseshow Vetch** - though I omitted to check the leaves and relied on the circular shape of the flower head). No hint of the **Early Gentian** that I had hoped for though I partly made up for that by having the only singing **Yellowhammer** of the day performing at the spot where the Gentian should have been.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 14 - 20 (WEEK 20 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** **Red-throated** only get one report from the English south coast this week (one at Christchurch on May 19) but **Black-throated** were seen at Portland and Falmouth as well as Christchurch (still no more than 2) making **Great Northern** the most frequently seen with ten reports and a count of four at Marazion (near Penzance) on May 18

**Red-necked Grebe:** Just one reported off the Netherlands on May 19

**Sooty Shearwater:** One had been reported off Flamborough Head on Jan 5 but the real 'first of the year' was off the Butt of Lewis in the western Isles on May 14

**Leach's Storm Petrel:** There had also been sightings of this in the first week of January but the species is only now making its real first appearance with sightings off the Butt of Lewis on May 14 and Spurn Head on May 15

**Night Heron:** One put in an unexpected appearance at Waltham Brooks (Pulborough) on the evening of May 17 but disappeared next day!

**White Stork:** Up to three 'lost birds' were wandering around southern England this week with sightings over Pulborough Brooks, East Grinstead (near Crawley), and Stockbridge in the Hampshire Test valley.

**Glossy Ibis:** At least one (of the two which arrived at the Pagham North Walls on May 6) was still there on May 19

**Spoonbill:** One or two have been seen this week in north Cornwall, the Scillies, Exminster marsh in Devon and on Brownsea Island (Poole Harbour in Dorset)

**Mute Swan:** The pair on the Budds Farm pools in Havant had five new cygnets on May 19 but I fear that some disaster has overtaken the Langstone Pond family which hatched seven cygnets on May 2 and was seen on May 5 taking normal precautions against Fox predation by taking the youngsters off the pond onto the open waters of the harbour. They normally spend the first couple of months in the mouth of the Langbrook stream to the west of Langstone Bridge and I expected to see them there on May 19 but only saw two adults on the harbour off the South Moors shore (I think these were unrelated non-breeding birds). Reaching Langstone village shore there was still no sign of the family but off the pond seawall there was a single Swan (seemingly a female) behaving in an agitated fashion. When first seen she was paddling fast with wings half raised as if heading to drive off an intruder (though no other Swan was in the area). She then returned to the pond sluice gate area and, in the shallow water, stood up and flapped her wings while 'yapping' (making dog like sounds which I have not heard before). Interestingly this yapping was also heard from a different female earlier this week in the Milton Lakes area of Southsea where this year's cygnets mistook an adult (thought to be one of last year's young still in the area - normally the breeding adults would have driven off last year's young before settling to raise a new family). When the mother Swan saw her cygnets following this other adult she also became vocal to call them back to her.

**Greylag Goose:** Among the 'remarkable' sightings recorded on the Trektellen website on May 18 was a report of 1985 Greylags in the Netherlands (1667 at one site and 318 at another) - I have no idea if such a gathering at this time of year is as unusual as it seemed to me, maybe it is just an earlier than usual moult gathering after an earlier than usual breeding season?

**Pale-bellied Brent:** Another report which strikes me as unusual is of 10 Pale-bellied Brent on the Lymington shore on May 14. I have the impression that the normal northward passage of these birds from the French west coast, where they have been wintering, over Devon and Cornwall and then up the west coast of England has for some reason shifted east this spring bringing more birds over the Portland area of Dorset and that a few of these birds have suffered a further eastward shift in their route which has changed their northward heading into an eastward one.

**Shelduck:** The first six ducklings of the year were seen on the Sidlesham Ferry Pool (Pagham Harbour) on May 15. No ducklings yet at Budds Farm pools here in Havant on May 19 where what I assume was the male of one pair was sitting patiently alone on the concrete wall and the other pair made a brief appearance on the water together as if the male had been joined by the female (who was seen having a 'wash and brush up' during a brief escape from egg sitting duty)

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A pair seen on the River Hamble near Warsash on May 17 were presumably very late passage birds. Birds of Hampshire remarks on an increase in the number breeding in Britain and the BTO Factsheet says that 2150 pairs bred in Britain in the 1988 to 91 period but I think these were probably all in Scotland

**Honey Buzzard:** Sightings were reported this week in Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Kent and Hampshire (including one flying north over Havant on May 12) but these birds are not necessarily intending to spend the summer in the British Isles - they may well be off-course birds heading for Scandinavia (back in the autumn of 2000 large numbers of returning birds were windblown across south east England and, e.g., 62 flew over Beachy Head on Sep 30 giving a total of 120 over that site in eight days)

**Hobby:** Arrivals probably peaked this week with a count of more than 39 together over the Stodmarsh area of the Kent Stour Valley on May 19. At least one was seen flying north over Havant on May 16

**Quail:** One was reported in Cornwall on May 11 and that was followed by five more reports between May 15 and 19 from Sandwich Bay in Kent to the Scillies, including one in the Lewes area of Sussex and another at Tarrant Rushton in Dorset

**Coot:** These 'too numerous' (?) birds are now increasing their numbers with babies seen at Emsworth Slipper Mill Pond, Langstone Pond, and the Budds Farm pools this week

**Dotterel:** RBA News for May 12 included a count of 20 Dotterel without a site being named (so I assume this to be a UK total of reported birds). A similar report on May 15 gave a count of 11

**Curlew Sandpiper:** One was on the Lymington shore on May 19 after reports of 2 at a Netherlands site and one in Belgium

**Wood Sandpiper:** Two were on the Lymington shore on May 12 and two were in the Scillies on May 17 followed by a report of 11 in the Netherlands on May 19

**Common Sandpiper:** These normally turn up in ones and twos but on May 18 one Netherlands site reported 117

**Red-necked Phalarope:** After a report of one in Wales (Powys) on May 2 another has been seen in Gloucestershire on May 16

**Pomarine Skua:** This week saw a peak in their spring passage through the Western Isles of Scotland with counts of up to 600 on May 13 and 635 on May 14. On the south coast things were more usual with 2 passing Portland on May 16 and 3 passing Selsey on May 17

**Long-tailed Skua:** 550 went through the Western Isles on May 13

**Med Gull:** These seem to have changed their habits this year with a max count of just 4 at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 19 and a comment that 10 at Titchfield Haven on that day was a 'low number'. On May 18 Rye Harbour reported the presence of 55 breeding pairs (perhaps slightly less than the 130+ individuals reported there on Apr 30 last year)

**Black-headed Gull:** Chicks started to hatch at Rye Harbour on May 10 but there have been no reports of young at the Hayling Oysterbeds (and distant views of the Langstone Harbour islands have shown no increase in aerial activity which would be expected when the adults start feeding young)

**Little Tern:** On May 19 Chris Slade was at the Hayling Oysterbeds and says that one pair of Little Terns have nested (though he does not say that he saw them or the nest - maybe he heard a confused report of the one pair of Sandwich Terns which were said to have nested there) but his version would tie in with my sighting of one adult fishing in the northernmost pool on May 2 but lack of further reports of any birds in Langstone Harbour makes it likely that no others will nest there this year.

In Pagham Harbour the highest figure I have seen is a count of 31 birds there on May 10 so I doubt if more than 20 pairs will nest (probably many fewer) and at Rye Harbour the highest figure reported was 16 birds on May 7 with the comment on May 13 that windy weather was making it very difficult to catch any fish using their technique of high hovering and plunging when the water surface was churned up by the wind.

**Black Tern:** Although there have been a couple of inland sightings at the Blashford Lakes and one at Pulborough Brooks a sighting of one at Fleet Pond on May 18 was unusual

**Turtle Dove:** Although it seems that a few have returned to established sites such as Martin Down and Noar Hill it seems unlikely that this summer will bring any news to indicate a change to the pattern of declining numbers breeding in southern England. This decline has for long been associated with the shooting of birds passing over Malta but this week I saw what I believe to be a well informed comment that, while that shooting is to be deprecated, the birds which arrive to breed in Britain do not fly here via Malta but use a different route via the western Mediterranean.

**Cuckoo:** During the past week birds have been heard repeatedly calling around both Langstone Pond and Budds Farm pools while the first report of the bubbling call (which I understand is made by females after egg-laying) came from the Blashford Lakes on May 17. When I passed Langstone Pond on May 19 at least one Reed Warbler was singing but there was no sign of new reed growth replacing the dead reeds from last year and I think the Reed Warblers will not build their nests and become targets for Cuckoos until the new reeds are full grown.

**Little Owl:** I think the normal hunting technique used by these owls is to watch for and plunge on beetles and worms from low perches or even to hunt for them on the ground but I am pretty sure that they do not like to get their plumage wet moving about among wet grass on the ground so it is interesting to hear that one was seen on May 15 hovering some 25 feet up to search the ground below for prey. The observer reporting this added that he had seen this technique used only once before and that too was in rain.

**Long-eared Owl:** These are fairly common on the Isle of Wight where they replace Tawny Owls and this week the presence of young in one Parkhurst Forest nest was revealed by the strange squeaky calls of the young (said to resemble the noise made by a bicycle with a very rusty chain). Quite a few years back I remember hearing reports of this noise heard on the slopes of Portsdown above Portchester, and later hearing of a Long-eared corpse found on the coast road through Portchester. More recently several of these owls have been discovered as summer residents on the Downs above Brighton though I think this colony is now diminishing.

**Short-eared Owl:** Another eleven reports this week from sites in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and Dorset with the latest sighting being of two at the Pagham Harbour North Walls on May 19 after one on Thorney Island on May 18

**Nightjar:** There have been at least a dozen visual sightings of these since the first was reported at Portland on May 4 and this week we have the first report of one heard churring at 4:30 am on May 13 by a Dawn Chorus party at Woods Mill in the Arun valley

**Swift:** May 14 brought a gathering of 300 over the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood and on the continent one Belgian site had 7665 on May 18 so there are plenty of birds now 'house hunting' in southern England but coming up against a great shortage of suitable accommodation. I saw one party of eight birds circling and screaming over my garden at 9am on May 18 but their brief presence gives me little hope that any will nest here this year - these birds think nothing of travelling several hundred miles in a day and the eight birds I saw could have been searching an area covering several counties and possibly several countries with the channel being no obstacle.

**Bee Eater:** May 19 brought reports of one bird heading north over Beachy Head and another doing the same over Newhaven. May 17 brought one over the Isle of Wight and then Hayling Island. Earlier in May others were seen over Wales and Cornwall with one heard at the Lower Test Marshes (Southampton) on May 5

**Woodpeckers:** I recently saw photos of a Great Spotted Woodpecker enlarging the entrance hole to a Tit nest box so that it could eat the baby tits or feed them to its own young so I have much admiration for the bravery of two Dorset ringers at the Longham Lakes (Bournemouth) who held up (in their bare hands) both a Great Spot and a Green to be photographed ( see <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-J6tVusSZ0SQ/T7a2UHD0wPI/AAAAAAAAAOY/Jmbd7N-x7hY/s400/GRSWO-&amp;GREWO-RogermPeart.jpg> ) without suffering injury from either beak or claw.

**Sand Martin:** Some 50 nest holes are already occupied at Christchurch Harbour

**Red-rumped Swallow:** On May 11 the RBA News reported a significant influx of these into Britain with at least 37 birds reported up to that date and this week there have been more reports from the Scillies (at least six present), Helston in

Cornwall, Pegwell Bay and Dungeness in Kent, Spurn Head in Yorkshire. The image below was taken by R.Mawer and appeared in the Isles of Scilly website.

Red Rumped Swallow photo taken by R Mawer

**House Martin:** A late influx of these brought a report of more than 2000 over the Blashford Lakes on May 15

**Meadow Pipit:** At least one pair seems to be nesting on the Langstone South Moors with the male making song flights when I passed on May 19

**Nightingale:** A report of five different birds singing at the local Marlpit Lane site near Funtington on May 11 was confirmed by another visit on May 13 when all five were still singing

**Goldcrest:** A search of the Elvetham Estate at Hartley Witney near Fleet in north Hampshire on May 13 found 20 nests and a total of 82 birds present

**Firecrest:** Of local interest May 16 brought news of one singing on the south west fringe of Chichester (where the East Broyle housing estate meets the Brnady Hole Copse area)

**Long-tailed Tit:** First report of a family party numbering more than 20 birds came from the Church Norton area (Pagham Harbour) on May 15

**Nuthatch:** A bird heard and seen in trees along Wade Court Road in Havant back on Mar 21 seems to have stayed there to be heard again on May 16 and another bird seems to have settled in the Brook Meadow area at Emsworth with sightings there on Jan 31, Mar 14 and May 17

**Golden Oriole:** This week has brought another 13 reports (including three from the Netherlands) with four birds present on the Scillies on May 17

**Red-backed Shrike:** A male in the Scillies on May 17 was the fifth report of the year though the others were in Cornwall, Northumberland, Co Cork in Ireland and Belgium (on Apr 30)

**Woodchat Shrike:** One has been in the Scillies from May 8 to 17, another near Wembury (Plymouth area of south Devon) from May 13 to 15, and another in the Lands End area from May 13 to 19. One at Keyhaven in the Lymington area was only seen on May 12 and 13

**Raven:** On May 13 pig fields near Martin Down (south of Salisbury) held 105 Ravens

**Starling:** Flocks of noisy juveniles are now out seeking their own food

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

### Notable sightings this week:

**Black Tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*):** First seen in Devon on May 16

**Emperor:** First seen in Cornwall on May 19

### Species reported this week:

Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*), Black Tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*), Beautiful Demoiselle, Banded Demoiselle, Azure Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Variable Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly, Blue tailed Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Broad-bodied Chaser, Four-spot Chaser, Hairy Dragonfly, and Club-tailed Dragonfly

### Butterflies:

#### Notable sightings this week:

**Small Blue:** A sighting of two in the Paulsgrove Chalkpit on Portsdown on May 13 was the seventh report for the year (first seen on Isle of Wight on Apr 16 after a reported sighting there on Mar 30)

**Glanville Fritillary :** First of the year at Wheelers Bay (Ventnor, IoW) on May 11

#### Species reported this week:

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow (presumed migrants at Ventnor and Portland), Brimstone, Large- Small- and Green-Veined White, Orange-tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Pearly Bordered Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath.

### Other Insects:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Froghopper (*Cercopis vulnerata*):** First sightings at Durlston on May 19 plus finds of their 'Cuckoo Spit'

**Beetles seen by Graeme Lyons:** See entries for May 13, 15, 16 and 17 at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> for photos and details of a **Rosemary leaf beetle (*Chrysolina americana*)**, the rare Saproxylic (deadwood) beetle ***Colydium elongatum*** which has a mixed diet of wood and smaller beetles of similar species, a probable ***Ampedus cinnabarinus***, a really tiny **Small Heather Weevil *Micrelus ericae***, and another Weevil ***Aulacobaris picicornis***

**Uncommon spiders:** On May 18 Graeme Lyons spotted a rare Crab Spider (***Philodromus aureolus***) on the ceiling inside his house (see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/space-invader.html> ) and on May 19 Chris Bentley found his first females of the eye-catching and rare jumping spider ***Pellenes tripunctatus*** at Rye Harbour (see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/05/19/ooH-its-the-ladies/> )

## PLANTS

**Common ramping fumitory (*Fumaria muralis*):** My first find of this year was made under gorse on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on May 16

**Annual wall rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*):** Another first for the year in Havant on May 14

**Dame's violet (*Hesperis matronalis*):** Newly in flower at the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 16

**Sea kale (*Crambe maritima*):** Newly flowering on shingle south of the Hayling Oysterbeds on May 16

**Bastard Cabbage (*Rapistrum rugosum*):** Lots of this in full flower on the Hayling western seawall on May 16 - for details and photos see my diary entry for that day

**Field mouse ear (*Cerastium arvense*):** Although not uncommon in inland Hampshire it is absent from the south east of the county although there is an old record of it from the Hayling Sinah Sand Dunes in 1950. As it is a large plant the size of Greater Stitchwort and forms large mats it is very unlikely to have been overlooked there in recent years but it is also very similar to the 'Snow in Summer' (*Cerastium tomentosum*) which grows on your left just before the blind bend leading to the harbour entrance carpark and next time I am there I intend to give that a closer look to make sure I have not misidentified it! The reason for this entry is that the plant was found this week on Beachy Head and you can see photos with Graeme Lyones blog entry at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/stitched-up-like-mouse-ear.html>

**Upright chickweed (*Moenchia erecta*):** Another of Graeme Lyons finds when at Cowdray (nr Midhurst) on May 13. See the second part of <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/saproxylic-weasel.html>

**Sea sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*):** One flower of this soon to be common shore plant was open when I was at south Hayling on May 16

**Lesser sea spurrey (*Spergularia marina*):** Although the first few flowers were to be seen a month ago this has only just become a very common sight along the harbour and seaside

**Round leaved cranesbill (*Geranium rotundifolium*):** I made my first find of this on Hayling on May 16

**White Clover:** First flowers seen in Havant on May 19

**Spring Vetch:** Although I had found this in the sandy soil of Sinah Common back on May 2 it was to be found in much larger numbers on May 16

**Cockspur Thorn:** On May 14 I noticed one of these trees for the first time in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery in full blossom and with its distinctive large fruits and leaves at the northern end of the eastern wall

**Dog Rose:** First flowers of the summer near Budds Farm in Havant on May 19

**Japanese Rose (*Rosa rugosa*):** Bushes in full flower along the South Moors seawall on May 19

**English Stonecrop:** Just starting to flower on the Sinah Common shore on May 16 along with **Mossy Stonecrop**

**Hogweed:** Although last year's plants persisted well into this year I came on my first 'new season' plant on May 19

**Early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*):** This had started to flower at Durlston on May 18 so may well be found at the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit site on Portsdown in the near future

**Yellow Rattle:** Flowering on Sinah Common (Hayling) on May 16

**Hounds Tongue:** Flowering at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on May 16

**Russian Comfrey:** First flowers seen in the Emsworth Brook Meadow area on May 12

**Slender Thistle:** Many full grown plants (none yet in flower) around the south end of Southmoor Lane near Budds Farm in Havant on May 19

**Cats Ear:** One plant flowering in Havant on May 19

**Hairy Garlic:** Brian Fellows found this in flower at Emsworth (near Lillywhite's Garage) on May 15 but when I checked the Langstone Mill Lane it seemed that the plant there had been selectively eliminated

**Southern Marsh Orchid:** Among the first half dozen clusters of leaves newly present on the Langstone South Moors one small plant with hardly any leaves had put its energies in to raising a flower spike with several coloured and nearly open flowers on May 19

**Hare's Foot Grass:** Although I do not normally record grasses I was very impressed by the way this elegant plant seemed to have extended its range when I was at Sinah Common on May 16 (with some plants on the flower-rich roundabout near the Ferry Inn where I have never seen them before)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Brighton seashore:** On Monday of this week (May 14) Graeme Lyons was on the shore at Saltdean adding more species to his list (now rapidly approaching his target of 4,000). You can read his blog for this outing at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/snakelocks-and-shipworms.html> but for quick reference the species mentioned included **Sea-anemones** (**Snakelocks Anemones *Anemonia viridis*, Strawberry Anemone *Actinia fragacea*, and *Sagartia troglodytes***), **Molluscs** (**Flat Top Shell *Gibbula umbilicalis* and Grey Top Shell *Gibbula cineraria***), a **Sponge** (**Breadcrumb**

**Sponge *Halichondria panicea***, **Seaweeds** (Sugar Kelp *Saccharina latissima*, Japweed- now renamed Wireweed *Sargassum muticum*, and Toothed Wrack *Fucus serratus*) and **Fish** (Blenny and a dead **Garfish *Belone belone***). Graeme's final photo is of the case of a **Great Shipworm *Teredo navalis*** ensconced in a crevice of a piece of driftwood - this rightly belongs among the molluscs.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 14 - 20 (WEEK 20 OF 2012)**

**Sat 19 May**

### **First Dog Rose and Southern Marsh Orchid**

A walk to Langstone South Moors and Budds Farm recorded 80 flowering plants, of which five were first of the year or current season, and five butterflies including my first Small Heath.

First of the new flowers was **White Clover**, found in Juniper Square where I also found the first **Catsear**. Not new for the year, but enjoying its first major outburst of flowers, was a mass of **Yellow flowered Strawberry** at the site by the Langbrook stream immediately south of the old IBM approach road and further down the stream I encountered Speckled Wood and Orange-tip butterflies. A little further down stream a bush of **Japanese Rose (*Rosa rugosa*)** was starting to flower and this had its status as newly flowering when I reached the South Moors seawall and found several bushes covered with flowers. Leaving the area alongside gardens and going through the first kissing gate I came on a huge plant of **Hogweed** in full flower - this had been found sporadically up to mid March but not since so deserves note as first of the season.

On the South Moors a flock of more than 50 young Starlings was noisily seeking food as I entered the 'orchid field' to look for leaves to mark the presence of orchid plants - I only saw less than a dozen plants but among them was **one Southern Marsh orchid which had a fully expanded flower** head though none of the flowers was yet open. **Yellow Iris** were flowering everywhere and there were still a few clumps of **Marsh Marigold** in flower while the black cones of **Marsh Horsetail** were to be seen in increasing numbers.

Reaching Southmoor Lane I heard a **Cuckoo** whose calls continued all the time I was within earshot and another noteworthy find here were the many plants (not yet flowering) of **Slender Thistle**. Turning up the slope towards the viewing point above the pools I found the first **Dog Roses** and took the poor photo below to confirm the find.

### First Dog Roses near Budds Farm

On the pools the **Swans had five new cygnets** on the water and I think **two pairs of Shelduck** are probably sitting on eggs - at the west end a single bird sitting patiently on the concrete wall suggested that he had a hidden mate and in the eastern pools a pair of birds were feeding and having a 'wash' suggesting that the female was having a brief time off nest duty. One species that pleased me by its absence was Canada Goose, and one that I heard but did not see was **Cetti's Warbler**.

Another pleasing sound was that of **Meadow Pipit song** as I reached the seawall - I think there were at least two pairs though I only saw one 'parachuting'. Also seen on the seawall was a single **Small Heath butterfly** and on the sea with the tide high were a **pair of Swans with no cygnets** making me wonder if I would see the Langstone Pond pair with their seven cygnets which hatched on May 2 and were seen leaving the pond for the safety of the harbour waters on May 5 (I assumed they were heading for the mouth of the Langbrook Stream as they have done in several recent years)

Walking up the Langbrook stream I saw many **Swallows** skimming its surface but **no Swans** and when I reached Langstone Pond (where the **Egrets were still sitting** with no sign of having hatched young) **the only Swan that I saw was an agitated female** on the harbour water - at first she was swimming fairly fast with wings half erect as if chasing off a rival but she then returned to a point near the pond sluice gate, stood up in shallow water, flapped her wings and was unexpectedly vocal (I read recently that a female at the Milton Lakes in Southsea used her voice to call back her young cygnets when they headed off following a non-breeding adult thought to be one of the breeding female's last year brood). I hope all this does not mean there has been a disaster to the Langstone family....

Just one more note on the way home - a single **Red Admiral butterfly**.

One observation from my garden yesterday was of **8 Swifts screaming overhead** at twice roof-top height

**Wed 16 May**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Dames Violet, Bastard Cabbage and Round-leaved Cranesbill**

A forecast of a sunny day tempted me to cycle to south Hayling and the section down the Billy Trail south of the Havant Bypass showed a major clearance of trackside bramble giving me a clear view of the **Common Comfrey** plants on the left just after emerging from the underpass and promising new plant discoveries in the large area now able to see the light of day.

Across the main road the 'Southmere' field was a delightful reminder of what hayfields should look like at this time of year - buttercups everywhere! Heading south I found the **Greater Celandine** plant still flowering on the left just before the harbour water came into view and when over the bridge I saw my first **Common Tern** over the northern most of the Oysterbed pools. At the nesting islands the Black-headed Gulls had no visible chicks but several of the adult birds made sure that a **Kestrel** which attempted to hover over the islands did not stay. While here I took a few photos of the **Dames Violet plants** which are now in flower but I don't seem to have an image of the single 'violet coloured' plant among the many white flowered.

General view of Dames Violet plants

Closer view of a Dames Violet plant

South of the Oysterbeds a single **Salsify** plant was in flower as were several of the **Sea Kale** plants on the shingle. Further south, passing the Saltmarsh Lane

marsh, I saw that the seawall was covered with a mass of yellow brassica flowers so I diverted there to check that the plants were the **Bastard Cabbage** that has been increasing its foothold there in recent years. My photos hopefully give an impression of the mass of yellow that caught my eye in the first place and also show the '**Chianti bottle**' shaped seed pods that identify the plant. The seaward end of the track leading to the seawall also had a good show of **Lesser Sea Spurrey** and **Subterranean Clover**.

General view of Bastard Cabbages in flower on Saltmarsh Lane seawall

Closer view of Bastard Cabbage plants

Distinctive sea pods of Bastard Cabbage

At the Kench I rode out to the **Bladder Senna** bush but found no hint of flowers though I did notice that two young bushes are growing at the foot of the very ancient looking stem of the original. While there I heard the 'tittering' of an unseen **Whimbrel** and noticed that **Sea Radish** is now in flower.

At the roundabout near the Ferry Inn several plants of **Hares-tail Grass** were new and a close look at the ground showed that as well as the remnants of the **Early Forget-me-not** there is now a mass of even tinier blue flowers on **Wall Speedwell**. Alongside the harbour entrance carpark **Tree Lupin** bushes had many flower buds but none yet open.

Leaving the carpark for the track leading to the sailing club I found **Round-leaved Cranesbill** in full flower and among the sand dunes (and everywhere in the orchid area) the minute flowers of **Spring Vetch** caught my eye - you have to look closely to see them! Easier to spot was the **Yellow Rattle** that is now in flower.

A couple of **Skylarks** sang briefly over the area south of the golf course and from further out on the bare shingle I twice heard the call of a **Ringed Plover** which will have a nest somewhere there.

In the area south of Staunton Avenue I noticed **Common Ramping Fumitory** clambering up and flowering among the gorse and saw one open flower on **Sea Sandwort** before setting off for home - the only notes from this homeward journey were, first, while passing the Oysterbeds I heard two **Med Gulls** calling overhead (maybe they haven't abandoned the area!) and , second, back in Wade Court Road I heard a **Nuthatch** in the same trees where I had heard and seen one on Mar 21 but not since!

**Mon 14 May**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

**Around Havant**

The only new spring flower seen in a walk around Havant this morning was **Creeping Cinquefoil** found in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery where I also found what seemed to be **aberrant Cuckooflower** - a cluster of plants looking like Cuckooflower and in typical habitat but having 'double petalled' flowers. Another find here was a **Cockspur Thorn** tree in flower and retaining some of its large fruits from last year. Very nearly in flower was **Bittersweet Nightshade** and looking

over the wall to the spoil heap of the adjacent allotment I saw a plant of **Russian Comfrey** in flower.

Wandering on via Crossways I passed garden escape **Pot Marigolds** in flower and heard a lot of excited chatter from Starlings over the nearby houses causing me to look up and see a **Sparrowhawk** battling with the fairly strong wind.

Turning south down the Petersfield Road I noted a clump of **Small Flowered Cranesbill** in the roadside grass where **Danish Scurvygrass** was still in flower

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 7 - 13 (WEEK 19 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Max count of 5 **Red-throated** off Selsey on May 7 with **Black-throated** again the most numerous (35 passing Dungeness on May 7) and **Great Northern** still enjoying a holiday off Devon (max 8 off Berry Head on May 10)

**Black-necked Grebe:** Three of these giving good value as they parade in breeding plumage at the Blashford Lakes up to May 6 - probably the same three that have been seen there intermittently since Mar 4

**Squacco Heron:** The bird which arrived in Somerset on May 2 was still there on May 11

**Cattle Egret:** One spent a little more than a day at Christchurch Harbour (May 5/6) and it or another was seen at Cuckmere Haven in Sussex on May 9

**White Stork:** A group of 5 which toured southern England last weekend (May 4 - 6) flew over the ASDA store in Bedhampton (Havant) on May 4. Two birds were seen at Kings Somborne in the Test valley on May 8 and a single was at Pulborough Brooks on May 11 (maybe the same bird was over Ashdown Forest area on May 13)

**Glossy Ibis:** Two have been showing at the Pagham North Walls from May 6 to 12 but may now have left. (If you are interested in **White Ibis** follow Tony Tindale of Fareham on a visit to his brother in Perth, Australia - see the May 12 entry on <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> )

**Mandarin Duck:** A pair had 10 ducklings with them at the Weir Wood reservoir site near Crowborough on May 6 (sadly no details or photos of them leaving their tree nest without parachutes)

**Honey Buzzard:** Sightings reported in southern England this week are of one at Titchfield Haven on May 4; one over the Isle of Wight (Rookley) on May 5; singles in off the sea at Christchurch Harbour on May 7, 8 and 11; and one over a Bedhampton garden in Havant on May 12

**Black Kite:** On May 5 one flew north up the Avon valley over Ibsley (north of Ringwood) and on May 6 one arrived at The Lizard in Cornwall. On May 7 nine were seen over the Netherlands and on May 9 there were sightings over the New Forest and the Andover area.

**Marsh Harrier:** Nothing unusual here in England but on May 7 a Belgian site had 53 and on May 8 a Netherlands site had 40

**Hen Harrier:** Still being seen in southern England including one over south Hayling on May 7 (when a Netherlands site had 26)

**Osprey:** May 5 brought one over Ivy Lake at Chichester and on May 6 two were in the Pilsey area of Thorney Island with another over the Hamble River on May 7. May 8 brought another Thorney Island sighting and another over the R Adur at Shoreham. On May 9 one was at Weir Wood in Sussex; May 11 brought sightings at Arundel and Romsey; May 12 brought five reports from Thorney Island, Southsea, Weir Wood, Prinsted and Peacehaven.

**Hobby:** By May 12 the biggest flock had risen to 21 at the Exe estuary (one of these seems to have been so tired and hungry that it fell to the ground and was taken into care and fed after which it recovered enough to be released - no apparent injury). That was just one of 16 reports I picked up during the week.

**Quail:** First report of a migrant reaching England was of one in Cornwall on May 11 - another first migrant in Cornwall was a **Corncrake** (heard only) at the Lizard on May 5

**Avocet:** First report of a pair with chicks came from Rye Harbour on May 12

**Kentish Plover:** One was at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on May 2 and 3; another was at Rye Harbour from May 3 to 6; and a male and female were at Marazion near Penzance on May 11

**Dotterel:** A party of 10 were at a Netherlands site on May 10

**Lapwing:** One bird with two surviving chicks was at Hook/Warsash on May 11 when I was surprised to see two pairs of adults (no chicks seen) at the Gipsies Plain site south of Havant Thicket. In recent years a few pairs have continued to breed here, probably feeding on insects attracted to the droppings of many ponies. On Mar 22 this year I found two Lapwing here but no Ponies were present and there were still none on May 11

**Little Stint:** Three were at Rye Harbour on May 5 and five were in Pagham Harbour on May 8 with one at Christchurch Harbour on May 9

**Temminck's Stint:** One was at Fort Victoria, Isle of Wight, on May 4 and then at Rye Harbour on May 5 and 6

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** One at the Exe estuary in Devon on May 9

**Curlew Sandpiper:** An unexpected crop of spring sightings - two were at Rye Harbour on May 5 and on May 6 one was at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour and three were on the Pilsbury sands (Thorney Island) with 5 on the Pevensy Levels. May 7 saw one in Devon (Exe estuary) and another in Poole Harbour while May 8 brought one to Pagham Harbour.

**Purple Sandpiper:** On May 6 14 were at Lyme Regis and 3 at Southsea Castle

**Wood Sandpiper:** One was on the Lymington shore from May 6 to 11 (at least)

**Pomarine Skua:** Peak count for the week was of 18 passing Dungeness of May 7

**Arctic Skua:** 14 were off Portland on May 7

**Great Skua:** May 7 brought 12 past Selsey

**Black-headed Gull:** 1039 nests were counted on the islands at the Hayling Oysterbeds this week leaving little room for other species (just one Sandwich Tern nest but no Med Gulls or Little Terns this year). The first chicks to hatch were at Rye Harbour on May 12.

**Great Blackback gull:** A pair have nested on a raft in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth this year and Brian Fellows calculates that their young may hatch around May 22

**Little Tern:** No definite news of nesting anywhere so far - last year virtually every chick in Langstone Harbour was taken by a fox on the RSPB islands (and I don't think the Oysterbeds had any success), Rye Harbour reported zero productivity from the nests there and the only places where there may have been some success were Pagham Harbour and the Weymouth area where day and night human guards kept predators away (just one Hedgehog escaped detection and took a few eggs). There is nothing to indicate better success this year though there were 31 adults in Pagham Harbour on May 10 and 268 adults flew past Dungeness on May 4, maybe hoping to do better at East Anglian sites

**Turtle Dove:** New arrivals were reported in all the south coast counties this week and the Trektellen site told me that May 11 had brought 21 birds to the Hunstanton Cliffs in Norfolk. Locally May 11 saw two birds at the Marlpit Lane site near Funtington, one on the top of Butser Hill near Petersfield and one came in off the sea at Sandy Point on Hayling

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** These are uncommon in the west country so one seen at Portland on May 8 and possibly the same bird seen in south Devon on May 12 were noteworthy.

**Cuckoo:** On May 5 Barry Yates suggests (on the Rye Bay website - see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/05/05/cuckoos/> ) that the main reason for the decline in Cuckoo numbers here in Britain is lack of food. He says that he has not noticed

a decline in numbers at Rye Harbour where there is a good supply of the hairy caterpillars (in particular those of **Brown-tail** and **Pale Grass Eggar** moths) but he is aware of a national decline in moth numbers

**Short-eared Owl:** These winter visitors are still passing through south of England sites with reports this week from Farlington Marshes, Pagham Harbour, Lymington marshes and several other sites

**Nightjar:** The first reports this year were from Portland and Selsey, both on May 4, and there have been seven more sightings this week though none have yet been heard to churr.

**Swift:** The first report mentioning birds 'screaming over the rooftops' came from the Woolston area of Southampton on May 12 and with reports of more than 1000 birds over the Longham Lakes at Bournemouth on May 10 (and 2508 at Scolt Head in Norfolk on May 11) they should now be getting down to breeding.

**Bee Eater:** One was reported to have been heard (but not seen) at the Lower Test Marshes near Southampton on May 5 and there was another heard only report from The Lizard in Cornwall on May 7 but support for their arrival in northern parts comes in a report of at least four seen in the Netherlands on May 7 followed by a report of two at a different Netherlands site on May 8 and of one in Wales (Pembrokeshire) on May 10

**Hoopoe:** One was seen at the Waitrose store at Storrington (south of Pulborough) on May 4 when another was on the Dorset coast near Swanage (and may have been the bird seen at Lulworth next day). Another report comes from the Exmouth area of Devon on May 9

**Wryneck:** One has been in the Scillies from May 4 to 6 and another arrived at Dungeness on May 5 when another was reported in the Netherlands

**Short-toed Lark:** One in the Scillies on May 4

**Crested Lark:** One at Dungeness on May 7

**Red-rumped Swallow:** In addition to a plentiful supply of normal Swallows this week has brought eleven reports of the rarer species from the Scillies, Dungeness, Helston in Cornwall and the Thanet area of Kent. Those are the reports which I happen to have picked up but on May 11 the RBA website told us that 7 new birds had been reported in the UK that day bringing the spring total of sightings to 37 so far.

**House Martin:** As I write this I have just had an email from Tony Tupper to say that there are now eight birds around the nestboxes on his house by the Hermitage Stream flowing through the Havant area and this reflects a recent general increase in numbers - 500 were seen at Titchfield Haven on May 5, more than 200 were at Pulborough Brooks on May 6, and 2641 were at Scolt Head in Norfolk on May 10. This is good news but must still be seen in the perspective of

the overall decline of wildlife which I have seen during my lifetime - not only the loss of habitat but the disappearance of many species from our gardens and streets. When I moved into my present house back in 1967 at least 4 pairs of House Martins nested under its eaves and several pairs of Swifts arrived back at long established nest sites in rooftops of my and several other houses in the road - what's more they arrived on May 1 and left on July 31. This year no Swifts have been seen over the road and I do not expect any to nest here - House Martins may eventually appear in the sky visible from my garden as they feed on insects over the trees that line the old railway at the end of my garden but so far I have only seen them over Thorney Island, not over Havant town centre. I agree with what Barry Yates says about Cuckoos - the decline is mainly about lack of insect food, especially enough to feed the young in the nest. During the week I visited a website ( <http://westfieldwildlife.wordpress.com/2012/05/09/house-martin-nests/> ) showing modern highrise flats in Turkey still having two or more House Martin nests on each one of the hundreds of windows - the reason they were there was that a plentiful supply of insects was still available within a few minutes flying time from the buildings.

**Yellow Wagtail:** Again the same sad story - how many will nest on Farlington Marshes this year compared to the number which did so in the 1980s (Birds of Hampshire gives a figure of 12 to 15 pairs there each year but the 2010 Hampshire Bird Report gives the status of Yellow Wagtail as "Formerly a summer visitor and common passage migrant now rare in summer...")

**Nightingale:** It will be interesting to see what this year's survey shows - maybe the fact that there is a survey has produced more reports of the birds than we would had seen without it but at least most of us living in rural areas can still be sure of hearing at least one singing within ten miles of their home

**Fieldfare:** A flock of 37 was still to be seen in the Netherlands on May 6 (and just one in Belgium on May 7)

**Redwing:** Two at Dungeness on May 4

**Subalpine Warbler:** One turned up at Portland on May 9

**Garden Warbler:** Portland reported the arrival of 200 on May 4 and this gave me some confidence in thinking that I had heard my first at Havant Thicket on May 11 (in the dense scrubby trees north of the Gipsies Plain and just west of the carpark area - one was also recorded at Sandy Point on Hayling that day)

**Wood Warbler:** As well as being back in the New Forest these have been heard at a number of unexpected sites this week - two at Buchan Country Park (Crawley), two at Christchurch Harbour, one in the Scillies and one at Church Norton (Pagham Harbour) plus Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Another species with more reports than I would expect including 5 at Sinah Common on Hayling on May 4 and 20 at Portland on May 9 followed by 15 there on the next day

**Golden Oriole:** Another good crop of 13 reports this week ending with one trapped at Portland on May 11 and photographed in the hand (with the comment that this species objects to being handled!). On May 7 there were 4 together on the Scillies and the same day brought a count of 14 from one Netherlands site and a single bird at Church Norton.

**Red-backed Shrike:** The first two birds in mainland England this year were at The Lizard in Cornwall on May 4

**Woodchat Shrike:** Singles had been reported in Cornwall and the Scillies from Apr 30 to May 8 but on May 12 one was in the Keyhaven area near Lymington

**Rose Coloured Starling:** One was in Selsey village from May 6 to 11 at least

**May Bird Races:** I'm glad the practice of early May 'Bird Racing' has not died out - success requires a combination of Formula One driving skills, planning and execution to match those of the SAS, and an intimate knowledge of bird recognition plus the ability to remain good friends after a day of tension. This year I have only seen results from two teams - the 'Oven Readies' (Steve Keen, Mark Halligan and Steve Piggott) scored an admirable 143 species while Nigel Matthews and Andy Browne (with some help from Pete Durnell) managed to tick off 113 during a day on foot only.

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Club Tailed Dragonfly (first of the year in Warwickshire on May 8)**

**Four Spotted Chaser (first of the year in Somerset on May 8)**

#### **Species reported this week:**

Hairy Dragonfly (at Thorney Little Deeps), Club Tailed Dragonfly, Four Spotted Chaser, Large Red Damselfly,

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Wood White (first of the year at Botany Bay near Chiddingfold in Surrey)**

**Clouded Yellow (not first of the year but first to emerge at the resident colony in Bournemouth on May 8)**

**Adonis Blue (first of the year at Mill Hill, Shoreham on May 11)**

#### **Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Adonis Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Peacock, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**St Marks Fly:** Brian Fellows took a photo on May 8 of a pair mating at Emsworth showing the differences between the sexes - see

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-089-st-marks-flies-mating-08.05.12.jpg>

**Beetle species:** On May 8 Graeme Lyons found *Demetrias imperialis* and a *Box Bug* at Woods Mill (Henfield) and on May 12 he found an *Adonis Ladybird* and *Philorhizus vectensis*. Pictures and text can be found at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/>

**An eye-catching spider:** Another of Graeme Lyons finds (at Rye Harbour on May 8) was the jumping spider *Pellenes tripunctatus* which can be seen at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/isnt-this-most-amazing-spider.html> - well worth a look even if you don't like spiders (Graeme thinks it worth five separate close up pictures and I agree)

## PLANTS

**Adder's Tongue Fern:** This was mentioned in the Durlston news for Apr 26 and gets a further mention on the Planet Thanet website on May 9 to remind me that I still haven't been to look for it at Hilsea Lines in Portsmouth or in the 'slip field' at Farlington Marshes (note that the seawall path there is undergoing vital repairs so it is impossible to make the usual circuit but there is nothing to stop you visiting the slip field close to the eastern entrance or to stop you exploring the large area north of the A27)

**Celery Leaved Buttercup:** Flowering in the Warblington SSSI field on May 7

**Lesser Spearwort:** Newly in flower at Havant Thicket on May 11

**Early Wintercress (*Barbarea intermedia*):** Seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on May 6 and along the seawall at Broadmarsh between the slipway and the Harts Farm Way bridge on May 10

**Small-flowered Cranesbill:** On May 7 I found the first flowers since Jan 12 on the roundabout outside Bosmere School in Havant (South Street)

**Subterranean Clover:** On May 7 I found a good show of this near the seawall in the Warblington Farm SSSI (the marshy field east of the cemetery)

**Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*):** Two flowering plants found in Havant Thicket on May 11 - for details and photos see my diary page for that day

**Greater Birds Foot Trefoil:** First mention of this for the year comes from Durlston on May 9

**Silverweed:** First flowers seen by me in Havant Thicket on May 11

**Wild Celery:** Plants were well grown but not yet flowering in the Warblington SSSI on May 7

**Rhododendron ponticum:** First flowers opening in Havant Thicket on May 11

**Sea Milkwort (Glaux maritima):** Newly in flower at the Warblington SSSI on May 7

**Wild Clary:** Brian Fellows found this starting to flower in the roadside grass of Christopher Way in Emsworth on May 11

**Pineappleweed:** First find of this in flower at Warblington on May 7

**Salsify:** One plant flowering on May 7 alongside Emworth Road in Havant

**Lily of the Valley:** The large colony of wild plants in Havant Thicket was in full flower on May 11 (for photos and location details see my Diary page for that day)

**Rosy Garlic:** A good show of plants just starting to flower in the ditch around the small west carpark at Broadmarsh on May 10

**Yellow Iris:** First flowers seen on May 5 at Budds Farm Pools and more seen in the Eastern Stream of Warblington Farm on May 7

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Beaver:** Until this week I was under the impression that the only Beavers in the UK were those hidden away in Scotland to help the BBC keep up their ratings by boosting the number of viewers of 'Season Watch' (will we have an extra programme this year named Jubilee Watch?). Then on May 7 a photo (taken by Mark Chidwick - see [http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/images/IMG\\_2356.JPG](http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/images/IMG_2356.JPG)) appeared on the Kent Stour Valley webpage of one swimming in the lake at Stodmarsh to the east of Canterbury along with the comment that the animal .. "presumably originated from the release scheme at Ham Fen" Further investigation at <http://kingsdownkent.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/beavers-at-ham-fen.html> showed that Beavers had been introduced to Kent in 2011 and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsdown,\\_Kent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsdown,_Kent) tells us that Kingsdown is a village (main attraction is the Black Pig butchers shop) on the East Kent coast south of Deal - the purpose of the introduction was to keep the waterways of 'Kent's fenland' open. Re-introductions into England go back to at least 2005 when they were released in Gloucestershire (see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/gloucestershire/4380276.stm> which includes the interesting comment .. "Speaking at the release, land owner Jeremy Paxton said: "We now just need to leave them alone and let them get on with a bit of breeding." In 2011 another BBC article ( <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/13445166> ) included the fact that .. "In England, beavers are limited to private collections and enclosed conservation projects run by groups including Devon Wildlife Trust, Cotswold Water Park and the WWT Martin Mere reserve. Wales is also now set to host beavers after an absence of 900 years in an ambitious project that aims to restore the wild indigenous woodland of the past."

**Seals on Thorney Island:** On May 8 Barry Collins saw .. "Three Grey Seals and 13 Harbour Seals hauled up on the mudflats at low tide this morning off the

southern end of Thorney Island." Grey Seal sightings are becoming more frequent along the central south coast but I think this is the first time I have heard of them joining the established Common Seal colony on Thorney.

**Baby Deer:** Driving east on May 8 along the Emsworth Common Road, on the uphill slope just after crossing the county boundary which follows the stream through the woods, I saw the corpse of a baby deer beside the road where the Fallow Deer regularly cross to reach the relative safety of Longcopse Hill. As I associate this spot with Fallow Deer I assumed this was one of their fawns (Roe Deer have kids, Fallow have fawns) but a little inconclusive investigation found that both species give birth in May/June and that Roe kids all have the white spotted light brown colour which the corpse had whereas Fallow fawns come in four varieties - leaving out the melanistic (black) and leucistic (white) variants the fawns can be either white spotted on light brown like the Roe (these are called 'menil' deer) or darker brown with less obvious white spots ('Common'). Another distinction when they become adult is that the Common have black around the white tail patch and have a black stripe down the tail while Menil do not have any black in the tail area (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fallow\\_Deer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fallow_Deer) ).

I am still not certain which species I saw but, while I associate this area with Fallow, I think they do not normally give birth until June whereas Durlston reported the first Roe kid on May 4 (the rangers who write the daily reports on that website have to keep up an appearance of omniscience which is not easy to achieve and I see the kid was described as a fawn! - a more forgivable error than I assume occurred last month when what I assume to have been Yellow Wagtails feeding around the feet of cattle were said to have been Yellowhammers)

**Water Shrew:** On May 3 one of the regular contributors to the Brook Meadow website saw what was assumed to be a Water Shrew swim across the River Ems. Brian Fellows commented that he knows of only one definite report of this species seen at Brook Meadow back in 2008 though experienced Water Vole surveyors who have visited the site have reported 'signs of the presence of Water Shrews' I am interested in this as I too have only encountered the species once in my life (years ago I found a dead specimen on the edge of Aldsworth Pond) but I have read that, while they are not common, they are widespread and can be found well away from water (not sure how true this is) and they have some unusual features. Not only are they large and aggressive (for shrews!) but they have a bold black and white contrast to their upper and lower fur, have venomous saliva, and are quite vocal when they encounter others of their own species. A good account of the species can be found at [http://www.mammal.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=216&Itemid=248](http://www.mammal.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=216&Itemid=248) Another web entry at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/262.shtml> gives more detail and warns you not to handle a live one as the venomous saliva can leave a burning pain which can last for a few days if you are bitten.

**Natterjack Toad:** We featured this species last week but I can't resist pointing you to another photo taken by Joe Murphy at Christchurch Harbour - this time of one with a St Mark's Fly sitting on its nose - see

<http://www.chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2012/May%202012/Natterjack%20.jpg>

**Massive slug (*Limax cinereoniger*):** One seen in Rewell Wood near Arundel on May 5 - for details of the species which can grow to 30 cm long and has the sole of its foot divided (like Gaul) into three parts see

<http://idtools.org/id/mollusc/factsheet.php?name=Limax%20cinereoniger> and <http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/species.asp?ID=107>

**Basking Shark:** After reports from the Dorset coast on Apr 7 and 30 the first report from Cornwall (off St Just) is of more than two seen on May 5

**Fungi:** A few more seen this week with large **Parasol Mushrooms** at Broadmarsh (Havant) on May 10. Also seen there were my first **Shaggy Inkcaps** and more **St George's Mushrooms** plus **Fairy Ring Champignons**. In Havant Thicket on May 11 I added a big cluster of fresh **Brick Tuft (*Hypholoma lateritium*)**

### **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 7 - 13 (WEEK 19 OF 2012)**

#### **Fri 11 May**

##### **Wild Lily of the Valley in Havant Thicket**

No rain today but Havant Thicket was very wet underfoot for a couple of hours stroll in warm sunshine. From the carpark I walked south to the Gipsies Plain which seemed strangely deserted with no ponies in sight though there was a good showing of Corvids and among them I saw **two pairs of Lapwing** in the southern fields (no sign of any chicks).

From the main east-west track I turned south onto the track which comes out near the entrance to Hammonds Land Coppice and runs alongside what I still call the 'orchid ditch' in memory of past years when around 200 Common Spotted Orchids would flower here in late May and June but today there were no leaves to be seen though the first **Lesser Spearwort** flowers were out and there was a great show of **Bugle** and a big cluster of **St George's Mushrooms**.

Before getting here I had passed my first **Rhododendron** and **Silverweed flowers** and back on the main track I watched **Large White** and **Orange Tip butterflies** (later adding **Speckled Wood**) and had close views of several **Linnets**.

Reaching the trees of the Long Avenue I followed the path through them onto the rough grass to their west where I turned north to get back into the Thicket proper where the north-south path marking the boundary between Havant Borough and East Hants meets what I call the 'Yellow Brick Road' running west from the Horndean road vehicle entrance to the Thicket at SU 712103.

On the north east side of this track junction I was delighted to find two examples of a plant which I have in the past seen on the south side of the junction and found a mass of on Blendworth Common to the west of the Thicket but which I was not expecting to see today. I took two photos which appear below of these specimens of **Bitter Vetchling (*Lathyrus linifolius*)**

First of the Bitter Vetchling plants

## Second of the Bitter Vetchling plants

Nothing more of special interest until I reached the site of the plants which were my main reason for coming here today and which rewarded me with the best show I can recall. These are the wild version of **Lily of the Valley** and the photos below show they are thriving and flowering well (the cluster photographed is only one of several here). To find them follow the eastern peripheral track north from the vehicle entrance almost opposite Castle Road until you come to the first main track branching off to the left. Do not follow that but continue north for what I measured today as 140 of my paces until you are under the only Beech Tree branch to reach out over the track from a tree on the right and here you will find the first cluster of plants on your left. (Map ref SU 718108). Further clusters of the plants can be found further north on the left (west) side of the track

## One cluster of the Lily of the Valley plants

### Closer view showing the flowers

### Thu 10 May

#### Broadmarsh in the rain

The rain eased after lunch and I loaded up the car with rubbish for the local tip which is on Harts Farm Way close to Broadmarsh so after getting rid of the rubbish I drove over to the Broadmarsh slipway for a short walk.

The tide was at its highest and the wind was strong, making substantial waves and bringing renewed rain - by the time I got home my trousers were soaked through! My first reward for this soaking came at the shore carpark where **Rosy Garlic** was starting to flower and near it was a cluster of **hybrid Campion** flowers - some pale pink among a majority of whitish.

Walking back along the northern edge of the grassland I remembered that, as I drove in, I had noticed some large mushrooms on the west bank of the slipway approach road and I now headed for where I had seen them. What I found were my first **Parasol mushrooms** of the season and near them were the remains of **Shaggy Ink Caps**, a troop of **Marasmius oreades (Fairy Ring Mushrooms)**, and a couple of unidentified species to add to two which I had found growing on my lawn on Monday - the rain has at last brought the expected fungal outburst!

Up on the 'mountain' east of the slipway approach road I was expecting to see a crop of **Salsify** (last year I found an estimated 300 plants flowering here on May 12 and I had seen some flowering in Havant on Monday) but there was no sign of them nor of the **Hairy Vetchling** (though I was not expecting that - first flowers last year were seen on June 9). I hope that the grazing ponies chained out here this year will not eliminate the floral diversity...

Coming down the east side of the mountain to the path beside the Hermitage Stream I found a good show of **Early Wintercress (Barbarea intermedia)** with its pinnate leaves. Normally this is the first species I come across but this year I found the common **Winter Cress (B. vulgaris)** flowering on Apr 30 and the first of the Early species was not seen until May 6 when Brian Fellows found it in Emsworth.

[Mon 7 May](#)

## Warblington Marsh

The late afternoon weather suggested a local walk without rain and I decided to have a look at the wet SSSI field of Warblington Farm where I found a lot of **Subterranean Clover** in flower along with the first **Sea Milkwort** and **Celery leaved Buttercup**. At least one **Reed Warbler** was singing in the Reed Bed and two male **Reed Buntings** were singing at each other across the marsh.

By the footpath around the south of the church, near the entrance to the cemetery extension, were several **Chamomile like plants** with buds but no open flowers and I have been unable to decide what they are - when I collected a small sample I found they were pleasantly aromatic and I wonder if they might be Sicilian Chamomile from seed introduced into the 'natural burial' area of the cemetery but I will need a second visit when they are in flower.

At the east end of the farm, in the stream running along the edge of Nore Barn woodland, **Yellow Iris** was beginning to flower and after walking north up what I call the 'Selangor Avenue footpath' I crossed the A259 to find a new garden escape flowering at the foot of the wooden fence which confronts you after using the road crossing point - this was a plant I know well from the Sinah Common area of South Hayling and is called '**Snow in Summer**' (**Cerastium tomentosum**).

Walking back into Havant I came on another first for the year flower near Meadowland road - **Salsify** (the purple flowered relative of Goatsbeard which I have not come across yet this year). A little further on, passing the entrance to the Conservative Club, I heard **Goldcrest song** to make up for missing the **Cuckoo** at Langstone Pond (as I passed the pond at the start of my walk I was asked if Cuckoos would lay eggs in the Egret nests as the Cuckoo had been heard at the pond just before I arrived - my answer was no, the Cuckoo would be more interested in Reed Warblers)

Delays in getting round to writing this entry means that I have news to add from Tuesday when I saw my first **Holly Blue** in the garden and found my first **St George's Mushroom** in Havant roadside grass

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 30 - MAY 6 (WEEK 18 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** This week **Red-throated** were in the minority with only five reports and a max count of 3 passing Selsey on Apr 30. **Black-throated** were much more numerous with twelve reports and a max count of 13 passing Dungeness on May 1 (17 off a Netherlands site on May 2). **Great Northern** seem to have been less frequent with only nine reports but stormy weather off the south Devon coast on Apr 30 brought an unexpected count of 23 birds (Selsey had 7 that day). The week also brought reports of **two White-billed** off the Scottish coast

**Grebes:** Three **Red-necked** were still in Netherlands waters on Apr 29. Just one **Slavonian** was also seen in the Netherlands on Apr 29 with what I thought was the last **Black-necked** off France near the Somme estuary but on May 5 three of them turned up on the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood, remaining until May 6 at least.

**Storm Petrel:** The rough weather at the end of April brought a report of 21 off Berry Head in Devon with one seen as far east as Hurst Beach at the west end of the Solent

**Squacco Heron:** The first report of this species for the year comes from Somerset where one was seen on May 2 (still there on May 4)

**Cattle Egret:** One remained at Wadebridge in Cornwall (at least up to May 2) and another (maybe the bird seen on the Pevensey Levels on Apr 28, after being in Norfolk on Apr 25) turned up at Lodmoor, Weymouth, on May 1.

**Great White Egret:** One was at the Lewes Brooks on Apr 30 and May 1

**White Stork:** A group of up to 44 arrived in the Netherlands on Apr 30 and maybe some of them crossed the channel to account for a group of 5 which did a wide tour of southern England this week appearing at Fontwell in Sussex and Portland in Dorset among other places - there was also an unconfirmed report of one by the River Test at Stockbridge.

**Glossy Ibis:** The single bird remained at Lodmoor in Dorset until May 2 at least. On the evening of May 4 one arrived at Pagham Harbour and joined the Herons and Egrets roosting near the North Wall, being seen there again in May 5 and being joined by a second bird on May 6

**Spoonbill:** The group of five were still at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Apr 28 but this week they may have split up with reports of 2 at Christchurch Harbour and 2 at Middlebere in Poole Harbour. More may be on the way as Apr 29 brought a report of 26 on the French north coast (Somme estuary) increasing to 31 at Sangatte (Calais) on May 1

**Mute Swan:** On May 2 the Langstone Mill Pond pair had 7 healthy cygnets out of the nest and on May 5 they had taken advantage of the high tide to take the cygnets across the seawall to drop into the harbour water (I saw them at the subsequent low tide in the outfall of the Lymbourne stream which feeds the pond and on the evidence of past years they can be expected to go west under Langstone Bridge to settle in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream.

Other local birds were still on their nests though the high tides very nearly washed out the Emsworth Peter Pond nest and will have got close to that on the bank of the 'island' between the two entrances to Emsworth marina.

At the Thorney Little Deeps the Swan was determinedly settled on the tiny island (hardly big enough to support the nest) when I was there on May 4. I have no info on the two other local nest sites - one in the Northney marina basin and the other on Fowley Island in the harbour south of Emsworth.

**Brent Geese:** Any Dark-bellied birds seen from now on are almost certainly intending to stay here for the summer but on May 1 another wave of Pale-bellied birds moved north through Dorset and Devon (130 seen from Portland and 150+ seen at the mouth of the Exe in Devon)

**Shelduck:** Two birds seen at the Budds Farm pools on May 5, standing patiently well away from each other, were probably the males of two pairs which by now have females nesting in old rabbit burrows

**Red-breasted Merganser:** A few late birds have been flying east this week with the latest reports being of 4 passing Dungeness and maybe the same 4 seen at Sandwich Bay on May 2 (three went past Selsey Bill on May 1)

**Honey Buzzard:** There are probably several now in southern England but their presence is being kept quiet in the interests of their hoped for nesting success. News from the continent included sightings of up to 9 birds in the Netherlands on Apr 30 with further reports of one or two in Belgium on May 1 and 3

**Common Buzzard:** Those intending to breed in the arctic are still waiting for the Lemmings and other prey species to have a chance to produce their first young so a report of 50 Buzzards at one Belgian site on Apr 30 may well have been of passage birds

**Osprey:** Apr 30 brought the first report (that I know of) of an Osprey pausing to eat a fish in the Pilsey area of Thorney Island

**Red-footed Falcon:** First to be reported as far north as the Netherlands was there on Apr 30

**Merlin:** At least two were still in the Netherlands on May 1

**Hobby:** Highest count of a migrant 'flock' so far is of 21 at a Netherlands site on Apr 29

**Peregrine:** May 1 brought an unusual report from Havant where an experienced observer saw what was probably an inexperienced falcon (last year's bird) attempt to take a domestic pigeon from the roof of his house. The Peregrine was a young male (so I should have referred to it as a tiercel - falcon is properly reserved for the larger female) and failed to kill the pigeon because the Peregrine was forced to strike obliquely from above where the Pigeon's closed wings formed a thick 'flak jacket' and a vertical stoop which might have broken the Pigeon's neck would have resulted in the Peregrine hitting the roof with a fatal impact! In last week's summary I wrote of a similar failed attempt to kill when a Peregrine attempted to take a Gadwall from the water of the River Exe and in this week's case I suspect the reason for the attempt to kill, in circumstances where the Peregrine must have known it was unlikely to succeed, were the same - the desperate need to find food for newly hatched young.

**Quail:** First migrants had reached the Netherlands on Apr 29 (one Quail that day increasing to three on Apr 30)

**Spotted Crane:** Another migrant 'first arrival' in Britain was reported in the RBA news for May 3 without a location, though it is unlikely to remain here to breed

**Common Crane:** One flew over Fleet Pond in north Hampshire on May 5

**Black-winged Stilt:** One or more birds seem to have been on a whistle stop tour of Britain since Mar 30 and that tour might have ended on May 2 when one bird landed on the roadside at a roundabout in Christchurch in Dorset. A further sighting on May 3 at Paxton Pits near Bedford was probably of a different bird!

**Black-winged Pratincole:** Another traveller of this species was in Flintshire (Wales) on May 4

**Kentish Plover:** On Apr 29 a flock of 17 were on the French coast at the Somme estuary and maybe one of these was seen at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on May 2 and maybe another arrived at Rye Harbour on May 3 staying there until at least May 5 when it had been joined by both a **Temminck's Stint** and a **Curlew Sandpiper**.

**Dotterel:** On May 4 the RBA news including one of 15 Dotterels somewhere in the Surrey area of London

**Lapwing:** First report of newly hatched chicks came from the Arundel wetlands reserve on Apr 28. More were seen at Rye Harbour on May 1 desperately searching for their own food in the rain without the protection of adult feathers.

**Knot:** I thought most of these had already left us but a surge of passage birds on May 3 brought 168 to Rye Harbour and 321 to Cap Gris-Nez across the Channel

**Curlew Sandpiper:** Reports of one at Brownsea Island on Apr 19 and Apr 28 have now been backed up by reports from Belgium on Apr 30 with another on the French north coast on May 2 (and one at Christchurch Harbour on May 3)

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Hopefully the Icelandic birds which visit our south coast in the winter (and leave a substantial number of young non-breeding birds with us through the summer) are having a good breeding season in Iceland without last year's volcanic dust but the continental race birds which breed in East Anglia are (in common with Redshank, Lapwing and Snipe) suffering very significant loss of eggs and young as their nesting areas (particularly around The Wash) have been submerged under the flood water of our 'drought'.

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** This week seems to have seen the peak of their up-Channel passage. On May 1 723 were reported at one Netherlands site (with 105 passing Portland that day). On May 2 Portland had 160 passing and on May 3 Cap Gris-Nez reported a total of 673 while Rye Harbour had 230 and Selsey had 116

**Whimbrel:** Passage seems to be tailing off though on May 1 there was a high tide roost of 112 on Peewit Island in Portsmouth Harbour

**Wood Sandpiper:** Reports from the Netherlands were of up to 7 there on Apr 29 followed by 4 on Apr 30 and another 4 on May 1. The first to be seen on English soil was at Pennington (Lymington) on May 6

**Red Necked Phalarope:** The first to get a mention this year was in Wales (Powys) on May 2

**Pomarine Skua:** There seem to be more than usual on the English coast this spring - 7 at Dungeness on Apr 29 became 22 there on Apr 30 (when Sandy Point on Hayling saw 4). May 1 brought 12 to Dungeness (plus 9 off Portland)

**Arctic Skua:** Selsey Bill saw 50 flying east on Apr 30 and May 1 brought a report of 21 passing Portland

**Long-tailed Skua:** Singles were seen on the Suffolk coast on Apr 29 and at Spurn Point on May 2

**Great Skua:** Numbers down this week with a max of just 15 (at Selsey on Apr 30)

**Roseate Tern:** Titchfield Haven had its first of the year on May 1 (three previous UK sightings starting on Apr 14 when one flew past Selsey)

**Little Tern:** On May 4 Dungeness recorded 268 flying east and on Apr 30 Sandy Point had 30 around the entrance to Chichester Harbour but so far the only bird that I am aware has been near the potential nesting islands in Langstone Harbour was a lone bird fishing in the northmost pool of the Oysterbeds at high tide on May 2. Up to 17 were in Pagham Harbour on May 1 and 12 were at Rye Harbour on May 3

**Turtle Dove:** Excluding a couple of March sightings (which may have been wintering birds) single Turtle Doves started to arrive on Apr 13 with a major arrival which brought 20 birds to the Netherlands on Apr 30 followed by four reaching the Dorset coast on May 1 and this small stream of arrivals continued on May 2 with three more, including one heard purring in trees along Marlpit Lane near Funtington. Sadly none came back to the Thorney Little Deeps area that day and none were heard in the trees beside the Hayling Coastal path (where they were heard annually until 2001 but not since) as I rode down it.

**Little Owl:** May 4 brought a report that one was back 'at the usual site' near the Hayling Oysterbeds - I think the area to look for it is around the only farm gate on the east side of the Coastal Path north of the 'North Hayling Halt' carpark just south of the Oysterbeds

**Nightjar:** First reports for the year came from Selsey and Portland on May 4 so they should soon be back at nesting sites but are likely to remain silent and invisible until the weather improves!

**Swift:** On Apr 29 more than 8,000 were seen on the north coast of France and since then there have been widespread reports from southern England including one of 100 birds over the Budds Farm sewage works in Havant on May 2 (when Pulborough Brooks reported more than 500 but so far there is little indication of them settling down to nest

**Alpine Swift:** Singles reported in Suffolk on Apr 28, in Essex on Apr 29, Devon on Apr 30 and north Wales on May 4

**Roller:** Apr 1 brought a confident report of one at Teignmouth in Devon

**Hoopoe:** This week one has been in the Weymouth Littlesea area and another at Pendeen in Cornwall. Nearer home one was in the Waitrose carpark at Storrington, not far south of Pulborough, on May 4

**House Martin:** Numbers have started to increase starting with a report of 5855 at the Somme estuary in northern France on Apr 29 and they are now back at nest sites in several places.

**Yellow Wagtail:** I have now recorded 53 reports of them for this year but an indication of how 'thin on the ground' they are nowadays is that the highest count anywhere has so far been just 34 at Reculver on the north Kent coast on May 4

**Fieldfare:** Following the late sighting of two in an Emsworth garden on Apr 22 I have seen three later reports with the last being of one at Folkestone on May 3

**Melodious Warbler:** One was singing at Dungeness on May 1 (when an Icterine Warbler was reported to be in the Bournemouth area)

**Wood Warbler:** These have vanished from many once regular sites in recent years but are not yet extinct and I have picked up 16 reports of them so far this year - five of them from places where they will hopefully breed

**Spotted Flycatcher:** The first for the year was at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 27 followed by one near Fort Widley on Portsdown on May 1 when they were seen at seven sites from Dungeness to Start Point in Devon

**Golden Oriole:** After an isolated first arrival at Seaford in Sussex on Apr 13 there have been 10 more sightings between Apr 29 and May 3 - the latter date brought a report of 11 birds in the Scillies. One which was seen at Reculver on the north Kent coast in Apr 30 was captured on camera and can be seen at <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/images/golor0412amarc.jpg>

**Red-backed Shrike:** First report for the year came from Belgium on Apr 30 and the only other report so far is of one in Ireland (Co Cork) on May 2. There have been no reports of **Great Grey Shrike** since Apr 30 (Netherlands) but a **Woodchat Shrike** has been in Cornwall (at St Just) from Apr 30 to May 2

**Snow Bunting:** A very late bird was still at Reculver in north Kent on May 4

**Ortolan Bunting:** The first in Britain this year was at Dungeness on Apr 30

**Little Bunting:** Two were in Devon from Mar 19 to Apr 13 and another was trapped at Sandwich Bay on Apr 30 (where a **Calandra Lark** was also seen)

**Reed Bunting:** One was again singing at Langstone Pond on the evening of May 5 where it has been heard sporadically since Mar 24

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenia*):** First flying in Wiltshire on Apr 30

**Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*)** First reported in Wiltshire on Apr 30

**Common Blue Damsel (*Enallagma cyathigerum*):** First of year in Wiltshire on Apr 30

#### **Species reported this week:**

Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenia*), Broad Bodied Chaser, Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle, Large Red Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Common Blue Damsel, Azure Damselfly, Variable Damselfly

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** Probable migrant at Berry Head in south Devon on May 1

**Painted Lady:** Reports from Eastbourne, Brighton and the Isle of Wight, all on Apr 30 and May 1, indicate migrants

#### **Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Heath.

### **Other Insects:**

**Rhingia campestris hoverfly:** First report from Rye Harbour on May 1

**Epistrophe eligans hoverfly:** First report from Rye Harbour on Apr 30

**Marpissa muscosa jumping spider:** See

<http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/05/01/after-the-deluge/> for the report of this Epistrophe eligans.

## **PLANTS**

**Marsh Marigold:** The plants in the Langstone South Moors 'orchid field' were at their best on May 5 with at least 60 plants in flower, some having well over 20 blossoms

**Common Poppy:** A single flower in an arable field on Portsdown seen on Apr 30 was the first of the year that I know of

**Greater Celandine:** First to be seen flowering was by the Billy Trail in Havant on May 2

**Wild Cabbage:** This is a native plant on seaside cliffs and was reported to be in flower at Durlston on Apr 24. The Hampshire Flora says that it is rare in this county but has been found on the man made chalk cliffs of Paulsgrove Chalk Pit (Portsdown Hill) so when walking through the base of the pit on Apr 30 I looked up and eventually found what might be these plants in flower near the very top of these inaccessible cliffs. I could not get near enough to see any detail but the chances are that these are successors to the plants found here in 1978 by Francis Rose and in 1984 by Paul Bowman - my mapref of SU 6384 0659 (110 metres from the east end of the south facing cliff) is apparently within 100 yards of the previous finds.

**Black Mustard:** Although I did not check their identity properly I think that a mass of plants coming into flower on the seawall of Emsworth Marina on May 4 were this species (which has been found here in previous years) despite the early date.

**Winter Cress (*Barbarea vulgaris*):** This had started to flower on Portsdown on Apr 30

**Sea Radish:** Plants just starting to flower in the Sinah Common area of south Hayling on May 2

**Dames Violet:** The colony growing between the north end of the 'earth mound overlooking the Hayling Oysterbeds lagoon' and the nearby Coastal Path were in bud on May 2 and should soon be in flower

**Smith's Pepperwort:** Found flowering on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on May 2

**Swine Cress:** Found flowering in Emsworth by Brian Fellows on Apr 30

**Shepherd's cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*):** Just one plant flowering on Sinah Common on May 2

**White Campion:** Flowering in various places since Apr 30 (a little later than Red Campion)

**Ragged Robin:** Two plants were in flower at the Langstone South Moors wet 'orchid field' on May 5

**Snow in Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*):** This garden escape had started to flower beside the Ferry Road on south Hayling on May 2

**Tree Mallow:** One was in flower on the side of Slipper Mill Road at Emsworth on May 4

**'Greater Herb Robert':** This is my name for the possible *Geranium reuteri* growing on top of a wall along an alleyway going south from East St in Havant which I found flowering at the start of this year. After a couple of months pause it had started to flower again on May 3

**Cut-leaved Cranesbill:** I found the first flower in Havant on May 5

**Hedgerow Cranesbill:** I also found the first flower of this in Emsworth on May 4

**Laburnum:** Started to flower on Apr 30

**Spring Vetch:** First flowers found in the Sinah Sand Dunes (south Hayling) on May 4

**Bird's Foot Trefoil:** Reported flowering at Durlston on Apr 24 and found on Portsdown on Apr 30

**Kidney Vetch:** Reported flowering at Durlston on Apr 29

**Sainfoin:** Flower buds close to opening on Portsdown on Apr 30

**Bird Cherry:** I saw the long white racemes of flowers hanging from a tree in Emsworth on May 4

**Bur Chervil:** Flowering on south Hayling on May 2

**Scarlet Pimpernel:** Although I saw a single flower back on Apr 5 it was not until May 5 that I found the first plant in full flower

**Wall Speedwell:** First flowers seen at south Hayling on May 2

**Wild Clary:** Reported flowering at Durlston on May 1 and will hopefully appear again in the Emsworth Christopher Way roadside around May 19 when it was found last year.

**Common Comfrey:** First flowers found at Brook Meadow in Emsworth by Brian Fellows on May 2

**Ribwort Plantain:** Started to flower locally on Apr 30

**Buck's Horn Plantain:** Started to flower on Hayling on May 2

**Cleavers or Goosegrass:** Started to flower on May 4

**Woodruff:** Probably now flowering in woodland - garden version flowering in Havant on May 5

**Rough Hawkbit:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on Apr 30

**Solomon's Seal:** Probably flowering in woodland - garden plants flowering on May 4

**Ramsons or Wild Garlic:** Flowering in the Hambrook area on May 4

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Natterjack Toad:** I have always assumed that these were fairly small brownish green creatures only distinguished by a yellow line down the centre of the back but a photo on the Christchurch Harbour website makes them appear to have a peacock blue colour to the distended throat when croaking - see <http://www.chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2012/May%202012/Natterjack.jpg>

**Basking Shark:** After a very early first sighting this year (off Durlston on Apr 7) there has been a second report of one heading west off Portland on Apr 30 (maybe the same precocious creature coming back after visiting the North Sea??)

**Fungi:** Despite all the rain there has been no outburst of fungi and I have only two reports for the week (both seen by myself) On Friday evening (May 4) I noticed a cluster of six large but old specimens of **Horse Mushroom** in the roadside grass of Southleigh road close to its junction with Horndean Road. On Saturday May 5 I came on a **small cluster of medium sized fungi** at the Langstone South Moors (growing on soil under the young trees planted on either side of the 'new' gravel path connecting the Moors proper to Southmoor Lane. I have not been able to name them but they had smoothly domed caps (biggest 6cm across) coloured a creamy yellow with a dark periphery where the dark brown gills showed through the thin flesh at the edge of the cap. These gills were crowded and adnate (fully joined to the whitish stem which was fairly straight, measured roughly 60 by 8 mm, and had no obvious features such as a ring)

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 30 - MAY 6 (WEEK 18 OF 2012)

### Fri 4 May

#### Thorney, Nutbourne, Marlpit Lane and Aldsworth

This morning I cycled a circuit east of Havant and in three and a half hours added six birds, eleven flowers and one fungus to my personal yearlist.

I set off via Brook Meadow at Emsworth where, close to the southern entrance, I found the purple flowers of **Common Comfrey** which Brian Fellows had seen on May 2. Crossing the main road I then found my first **Tree Mallow** flower outside one of the houses in Slipper Mill Road (the plants which used to grow on the edge of the pond seem to have been eliminated in the cause of 'gardening' that side of the road though the plants near the entrance to the marina survive). While here I watched one of the **nesting Great Blackbacks** having a wash while its mate sat on the nest.

Before leaving the marina for the Thorney Deepes I rode north up the marina seawall, finding my first **Hedgerow Cranesbill** flowers among the great mass of what I assumed to be the **Black Mustard** which I have found growing here in past years though I did not check its features as I should have done as this is my first for the year. Also seen here (but not counted) are the **pretty pink cultivars of**

**Tamarisk** which are widely planted by roadsides, etc, but which I have never been able to name. From the northern end of this seawall I had a good view of a **Swan sitting** tightly on the island between the two boat entrances to the marina.

Reaching the immense reed beds north of the Little Deeps I was stopped in my tracks by a **calling Cuckoo** which has been heard here by others since Apr 17 though it was my first. It was some time before I got going again as the air and the reeds/scrub were full of birds. **Swallows** predominated and it was not long before I noticed a **Swift** and then added my first **Sand and House Martins**. In the hedge a **Whitethroat** was singing and from a small tree not far into the reeds came the monotonous song of a **Reed Bunting** with several much more interesting **Sedge Warblers** in song plus a couple of **Cetti's** (no Reed Warblers here but there was a **Lesser Whitethroat** near the NRA track)

Moving down to the end of the Little Deeps I found the **Swan sitting tight on her very little island** (no Canada Geese here). Over the fields to the south **Skylarks were singing** but I did not go on down the track to the Great Deeps but instead retraced my path back to the NRA track where I turned east.

Nothing more of significance until the seawall from Prinsted to Nutbourne where **8 Wheatears** (my first!) hopped from rock to rock along the sea defences. Turning north to Farm Lane I added another flower in the hedgerow - a cluster of **Cleavers/Goosegrass** was covered with tiny white flowers.

From the A259 I turned north along Priors Leaze Lane to Hambrook where I passed my first flowering **Solomons Seal** in a garden and a patch of garden escape **Creeping Comfrey** elsewhere in the village. After the Hairspring Watercress Beds (nothing more interesting than one Moorhen and one Mallard) I joined the main road going north over the busy A27 and on the north side of the bridge over the A27 I was surprised to see both **Solomons Seal and Lungwort** at the roadside - both had been planted in the soil disturbed by the installation of new crash barriers. Still on the hill I began to find my first genuinely wild **Ramsons (Wild Garlic)** and at the top of the hill, where I turned west into the road leading to Woodmancote, I found what seemed to be genuine self sown **Lungwort**.

Next place of interest was Marlpit Lane where I dutifully added **Nightingale song** (only one) to my list before joining the busy Funtington road back towards Aldsworth where wild **Yellow Archangel** was flowering in the roadside.

At Aldsworth Pond I had the pleasure of adding **Canada Goose** to my daylist and was then surprised to hear **Reed Warbler**.

Heading for home via Westbourne, Long Copse Lane and Southleigh Road I passed my first **Bird Cherry** tree in flower and after crossing the Horndean Road I found a cluster of large **Horse Mushrooms** in the roadside grass of Southleigh Road immediately west of Horndean Road.

Back in Denvilles I remembered that last time I rode along Fourth Avenue I had seen something of interest in a small garden at the bend in the road close to the house numbered 31 - I spotted the garden and saw a rather uninteresting small tree in it but it was not until sometime later that I remembered what was of interest -

on the last occasion I saw it there were no leaves on the tree but it did have the strange white flowers looking like handkerchiefs which picked it out as a **Dove Tree (*Davidia involucrata*)** and gives it status as the only specimen of the species that I know of in Havant now that the old tree at Shawford House (off Wade Court Road) has been chopped down.

I did not venture far in yesterday's chill and damp but on my way home from voting I checked the '**Greater Herb Robert**' (possibly ***Geranium reuteri***) on the wall of an alley south of East Street and was delighted to find it had several large and colourful flowers now open.

**Wed 2 May**

**West Hayling**

This morning I had a rewarding cycle ride to south Hayling and back, seeing **my first Little Tern, a Swift, seven tiny cygnets on Langstone Pond, and eleven newly flowering plants.**

Before reaching Langstone Bridge on the way south I had found an unexpected plant of **Greater Celandine** in flower plus my first **Pendulous Sedge**, and as soon as I reached the Hayling part of the old Billy Track proper I found I was looking at my first **Little Tern** fishing close to me in the north-east pool of the Oysterbeds area - this was the only one I saw as there were none near the nesting islands in the lagoon (nor were there any Med Gulls, just lots of Black-headed, several carrying lumps of seaweed to their nests)

All the way down the coastal path I heard Whitethroats in the hedges (with two or three Lesser Whitethroats) and every few minutes a small bunch of Swallows would zip past on their way north. Also heading north at high speed was something I have never seen here before - a white pony at full gallop with the girl on its back not quite panicking but repeatedly saying 'Slow Down' which had no effect on the horse! I now realise how difficult it must have been to face a determined cavalry charge in pre-mechanised wars.

Reaching the south Hayling Ferry Road I found another botanic first in the roadside grass when I stopped at the road junction - a mass of tiny flowered **Wall Speedwell**, and (after watching a small party of **Whimbrel** in the Kench) as I turned into the Ferry carpark I found **Snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*)** had started to flower. The stretch alongside the harbour entrance gave me my first **Sea Radish, Bur Chervil and Spring beauty** with the tiny **Spring Vetch** flowering on the remains of a sand dune among the Tamarisks. On the shingle there is now a mass of Sea Kale plants but none were in flower (some had tightly closed flowerheads).

Along the south of the Golf Course there were hundreds of the **Green Winged Orchids now flowering** but no sign of flowers on the Lupins. Yellow Rattle was not yet in flower but one plant of Bird's Foot Trefoil was out and over the Golf Course a **Meadow Pipit was making parachute song flights.**

Coming out into the area east of the Golf Course Thrift was widespread and nearing the public toilets I found three more 'first flowers'. One was the **Shepherd's Cress** I had expected on my last visit, another was the **Smith's Pepperwort** which is widespread here and the third was **Buckshorn Plantain** that

we will soon see in many places. Linnets were as expected singing from the Gorse here but no sign of a Dartford Warbler - to make up for that **a single Swift shot overhead**.

Nothing new on the way home until I reached the Oysterbeds when I had a look for the colony of Dame's Violet plants that grow between the north end of the 'earth mound' overlooking the lagoon and the old rail track - no flowers yet but clearance of bramble where they grow has allowed the colony to increase and it will not be long before the plants (which are full grown) will have their white and violet flowers.

At Langstone Pond I had three surprises - the **Swan pair had seven healthy looking cygnets** out of the nest, the first **Reed Warblers were back and singing**, and **four pairs of Tufted Duck** were on the water

**Mon 30 Apr**

### **A long walk on Portsdown**

This morning I drove to the hilltop carpark just east of the London Road and the George Pub and walked west to the far end of the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit and back. Birds, butterflies, wild flowers and various small creatures all got on my list with the highlights being **lots of Whitethroats and several Lesser Whitethroats, eight butterfly species and several newly flowering plants (Wintercress, Annual Wall-rocket, Rough Hawkbit, Sanicle, Wild Mignonette, and Common Poppy) plus a mass of St Marks Flies**.

Near the car park **Sainfoin** had flower buds as did **Salad Burnet** and I soon heard the first of **many Whitethroats in song**. After crossing the London Road I came on the first of several colonies of **Slender Speedwell** and crossing to the north side of Portsdown Hill Road before getting to the main Viewpoint Carpark I took the path on the north side of the road which I have not used before and where this passes under trees I was surprised to find a small cluster of **Moschatel leaves** (no flowers) and around these trees were a mass of **St Marks Flies**.

Nearing the north side of Fort Widley I had unexpected **Willow Warbler song** to add to that of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps. On the path behind the Fort I had to avoid treading on a **Fox Moth caterpillar** urgently seeking somewhere to pupate - these overwinter as caterpillars and do more feeding in the spring but they are supposed to pupate in March or April and to emerge as moths in May so this one is leaving it late. Emerging from the path round the Fort I found that cattle were in the field behind the carpark on the far side of Mill Lane but they had left my first **Common Poppy** among the stems of the Rape whose leaves they had been enjoying.

Continuing west to the hilltop roundabout I went through the small carpark there to enter the field between it and the Quinetic research establishment and in this field I not only had my first **Field Pansies** (which have been out for a good three weeks) but also found the first **Wintercress (*Barbarea vulgaris*)** in flower plus some **Field Forget-me-not**.

In the area above the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit I saw my first **Birds-foot Trefoil** and **Annual Wall Rocket** plus **Sanicle** with Black Bryony already showing flower buds. Here I also heard the first of at least three **Lessser Whitethroats** in song

In the bottom of the chalkpit the midday sun had brought out many butterflies and I listed **Orange Tip, Large and Small White, Brimstone, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral and Speckled Wood**. While in the bottom of the pit I scanned the cliffs above me to see if I could spot **Wild Cabbage** growing on the chalk - the Durlston website had reported this in flower a few days ago and when writing my weekly summary yesterday I checked the Hants Flora to see if this plant of sea cliffs grows in mainland Hampshire as well as the Isle of Wight. The Flora entry said that Francis Rose had found it on the chalk of the Paulsgrove Pit in 1978 and I have no idea if it has been seen since but I saw a dozen large Brassica plants high on the bare chalk only 110 metres from the east end of the pit and I have sent a note of this to Martin Rand and Richard Jones (as warden of Portsdown Hill) so I may hear more (though I have no certainty that the plants I saw were Wild Cabbage though their broad leaves and yellow flowers made them a possible candidate)

After leaving the pit the strong south east wind deterred me from climbing the hill face so I kept to the lowest path (along the back of the housing) for as long as possible and in so doing came across my first **White Campion** in flower. When very nearly back to the car I saw my first **Laburnum tree in flower**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 23 - 29 (WEEK 17 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Five **Red-throated** were seen at Selsey on Apr 27 and smaller numbers of this species were reported every day this week from sites along the south coast while larger numbers of **Black-throated** were still with us (Dungeness reported 29 passing on Apr 25 and 16 on Apr 26). **Great Northern** were also widespread with a peak count of 8 off Looe in Cornwall on Apr 25 and 5 at Selsey on Apr 28. A surprising recent report was of a single **White-billed Diver** off Cap Gris-nez on Apr 22

**Grebes:** A single **Red-necked** was seen at Portland (Chesil Cove) on Apr 26 but the only other sighting I know of was of one **Slavonian** at a Netherlands site on Apr 22.

**Shearwaters:** More than 2000 **Manx** were off Berry Head in south Devon on Apr 25 and 19 of them got as far east as Dungeness on Apr 23 but only one **Balearic** gets a mention this week (also off Berry Head on Apr 25)

**Cattle Egret:** One long stayer was still at Wadebridge in Cornwall on Apr 27 and RBA reported one in Norfolk on Apr 25 (maybe the one which had been in Essex ten days earlier). Apr 28 brought news of one in breeding plumage at the Pevensy Levels but there was no mention of a mate!

**White Stork:** Several birds had strayed into British airspace this week. On Apr 23 a party of six were over Conwy in Wales with another over Wool in Dorset that

day. By Apr 26 the party of six seem to have reset their Satnavs and were heading east over Oxfordshire.

**Spoonbill:** Two have been in the Scillies through the week with another five settled on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour but a few are on the move - two over Dungeness on Apr 22 and one over Christchurch Harbour on Apr 27

**Canada Goose:** Last week I reported that Greylags already had goslings but I could not find the reference to Canada Geese having already hatched young - I have now refound the photo of a pair with four young on Cliff Dean's website which Cliff posted on Apr 19

**Pale Bellied Brent:** Their passage north through the west country seems to have reached its peak this week (after all the Dark Bellied have left us on their more gently eastward passage, unlike the long flight over the unsympathetic ocean which the Pale-bellied have to make). On Apr 25 Portland reported 52 and 61 were seen in Devon (49 from Beer near Seaton and 12 at Exmouth). On Apr 26 more than 110 were seen in Dorset, presumably going north through the Weymouth area (30 over Weymouth Bay and 80+ at West Bexington near Abbotsbury)

**Mallard:** These seem to breed at any time in the year. In 2011 there were reports of 8 ducklings at Wakehurst Place near Crawley on Nov 6 and of slightly older ducklings on the Chichester Canal on Nov 7. The earliest to hatch last year were seen at Pulborough on Apr 5 with more here in the Staunton Country Park on Apr 7 but this year some were seen near Warash on Mar 1 with others at Alton on Mar 3 and a big family of 16 was reported in south Devon on Mar 27. This week young have been seen at Langstone Pond and on the Thorney Great Deeps

**King Eider:** At least one has been off north east Scotland from early January to the end of March but I was surprised to see that one was off the Wash (seen from Lincolnshire) on Apr 21 - maybe its thinking of joining the few Eiders which spend the summer on our south coast?

**Bufflehead:** A female or young bird was at Helston in Cornwall from Oct 29 until Mar 3 and was seen once more at Redruth on Mar 4. Now a similar bird has appeared in Lincolnshire on Apr 27

**Honey Buzzard:** First report for this year (of 2 birds) came from Weir Wood in north Sussex on Apr 21 and this week brings a second report on Apr 27 of a single bird seen perched in a pine tree at Breamore by the Hampshire Avon just north of Fordingbridge

**Red Kite:** If you happen to own a very small dog you might like to read a story in the Maidenhead Advertiser of how such a dog nearly became dinner for a Kite - see <http://www.maidenhead-advertiser.co.uk/News/Areas/Maidenhead/Red-kite-tried-to-snatch-my-dog-25042012.htm> No doubt someone in the booming pet accessory business is already designing a re-inforced dog jacket with built in radar to trigger a smokescreen aerosol in response to any aerial attack

**Common Buzzard:** One Sussex birder this week voiced his pleasure that his garden (which suffered much rabbit damage in pre-Buzzard days) was now free

of such damage. Sadly another Sussex birder reported that he had not detected any diminution in the number of rabbits in recent years despite the skies being full of Buzzards.

**Merlin:** This week has not brought an end to Merlin sightings here in the south - five were seen in Belgium on Apr 28 and singles were seen at Portland and Rye Harbour on Apr 27

**Hobby:** These have been arriving since early March but it is only now that we are beginning to see the first signs of them arriving in flocks - 8 were seen in the Stour valley on Apr 27

**Peregrine:** All four eggs in the Chichester Cathedral nest had hatched by Apr 25 and it may have been a similar urgent need to find food for young that caused a Peregrine to stoop on a Gadwall in the River Exe. The falcon kept hold of the duck and was seen to 'swim ashore' with it (using its wings as oars) but when the observer got to the place where the birds had come ashore all that could be seen was a pile of feathers with no blood or other evidence of a kill - I suspect the Gadwall was not seriously injured by the initial strike and by the time they reached the shore the Peregrine was so exhausted that the Gadwall had no trouble in making its escape

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** This week has probably seen the peak of their passage with 243 passing Dungeness on Apr 23 and 116 off Worthing on Apr 25 but an indication that we have not seen the last of them came with 1958 passing Cap Gris-nez across the Channel on Apr 28 (looking back to last year I see the peak at Dungeness was on May 1 with a count of 5475)

**Whimbrel:** These are now being seen in moderate numbers all along the south coast and in inland fields but the peak counts have been at the Exe estuary with 320 there on Apr 22 and an estimated 1000 on Apr 25, reverting to around 300 on Apr 27

**Spotted Redshank:** It seems a long time since we had the regular bird at Nore Barn (Emsworth) - it was last seen on Mar 9 - but this week there were still singles at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 23, at Lymington on Apr 24, and three were still on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Apr 27. On Apr 28 the combined count from six Netherlands sites was 53, maybe indicative of a last minute race back to their breeding sites where the females will each lay eggs in several nests, leaving several males to raise the young while they (the females) enjoy a summer holiday.

**Wood Sandpiper:** Another species leaving their spring passage to the last minute. I have not seen any reports from English sites yet (and maybe we won't see any until they are on their way back) but there have been four reports from the near continent since the first two or three birds were in Belgium on Apr 15 (the other three reports were all on singles in the Netherlands and Germany)

**Skuas:** The passage of Poms is hotting up with six seen from Orcombe Point near Exmouth on Apr 25 but at least three were seen in Hampshire that day (at Milford) and maybe the same three at Selsey. Apr 26 brought five to Splash Point

at Seaford. **Arctics** were seen daily at many sites with a peak count of 48 at Dungeness on Apr 26 and Dungeness also had the highest count of **Bonxies** with 137 on Apr 25. Splash Point had 100 on Apr 26 while Apr 25 brought 78 past Worthing, 75 to Berry Head in south Devon, 72 to Selsey (a site record) and 64 to Milford in Hampshire.

**Little Gull:** Their passage mainly follows the continental coast with 3669 seen at one Netherlands site on Apr 22 and 2338 at another on Apr 24 but Dungeness had 125 on Apr 25 (and Ivy Lake in Chichester had just one on Apr 26)

**Roseate Tern:** The first I know of this year was at Selsey on Apr 14 with one seen at Dungeness on Apr 23 and another inland in Bedfordshire on Apr 27

**Black Tern:** Two were seen at Sandy Point on Hayling on Apr 23 and ten were seen at Milford on Apr 25 (with 11 at Dungeness)

**Cuckoo:** One or two local birds turned up this week with two at the Thorney Island Little Deeps on Apr 21 (after one there on Apr 17) and one was heard in the Langstone area early on Apr 23. Apr 27 brought one to the Wade Lane area of Langstone which seems to have stayed on to be heard on Warblington Farm that same day

**Short-eared Owl:** Still being seen daily as they continue to move north. On Apr 23 one was in the rough grass of the Eames Farm field north of the Thorney Great Deep and on Apr 24 five were together at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight. Apr 25 saw one at the Exe estuary and Apr 26 brought a report from Belgium while Apr 27 brought reports from the Adur levels and Pagham Harbour in Sussex plus Portland in Dorset and on Apr 28 one was on the Lymington marshes.

**Swift:** On Apr 25 there were 1014 over a single Netherlands site, Apr 26 saw 100+ at the Exe estuary in Devon and Apr 27 brought 200 to the Kent Stour valley (and 28 to the IBM lake in Portsmouth). On Apr 28 Cliff Dean's blog carried a link to <http://www.swift-conservation.org/news.htm> It's well worth a scan of all 39 news articles on this web page - make sure you don't miss the piece about the New Forest District Council's attempt to keep their New Milton housing estate clear of House Martin droppings by lining the roof edges of the houses with rows of downward pointing six inch spikes (designed to be mounted pointing upward to deter urban pigeons which are a problem elsewhere). These are **likely to skewer any Swifts flying up into the eaves at high speed to check their nest sites**. The news is not all bad - there is a real 'win win' project by Cambridge City Council to provide both Swift and Bat nest boxes in a modern art structure that should attract interest from anyone who sees it without the structure having any obvious sign of being anything to do with wildlife conservation. If you share Cliff Dean's sense of humour don't miss another part of his Apr 28 Blog entry at <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/> in which he suggests some more names to match the genuine new 'English names' for moths such as .. "Nag's Head Hawk, Blotted Copybook, Rubicund Rustic, The Inconvenient, Tortured Genius, Deptford Arches, Duke of Earl, Stinking Bishop, Innocent Bystander, Foxy Lady, The Unsubstantiated, Little Bleeder, Bayswater Beauty, The Inconceivable, Bloody Mary, Spotted Dick, Radical Cleric and Wounds of Christ."

**Hoopoe:** One was briefly in the Fairlight area of Hastings on Apr 25

**House Martin:** A major arrival of hirundines on Apr 27 triggered a one hour sample count at Christchurch Harbour giving a result of 125 House Martins, 160 Sand Martins and 300 Swallows. This influx was not restricted to Dorset as I had an email later that day from Tony Tupper who lives near the Hermitage Stream running through Leigh Park here in Havant and who has had House Martins nesting in home made nest boxes on his house for the past 8 years - the email said that the first four birds had just arrived back and were checking out the nest boxes.

**Tawny Pipit:** The first of these less common visitors for the year was over Dungeness on Apr 26

**Whinchat:** The first to reach Hampshire was on Badminton Common near Clashot on Apr 27. So far I am only aware of eight birds reaching England with the first at Portland on Apr 14

**Fieldfare:** It seems that the report of two Redwings in an Emsworth garden on Apr 22 was a case of mistaken identity and they were actually Fieldfares. Whichever they were they did not achieve the status of last for the winter - for Redwings that currently goes to one seen on the Scillies on Apr 23 while the last Fieldfare so far is awarded to a couple of Fieldfare that were still in France (the Sangatte area of Calais) on Apr 25

**Sedge Warbler:** One was at last back at the Thorney Little Deeps on Apr 21 (first for the year was at Lymington on Apr 7 and one was at the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth on Apr 8)

**Reed Warbler:** Still none on Thorney Island though the first was at Radipole (Weymouth) on Apr 2 and one was at the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth on Apr 8

**Common Whitethroat:** An influx on Apr 27 brought one to Brook Meadow in Emsworth and another to a Langstone garden, almost a month after the first few reached Britain.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** The first and so far only report for this year is of one at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 27

**Raven:** A count of 52 flying over Martin Down (south of Salisbury) on Apr 28 was further confirmation of the large numbers of this species currently resident in southern England. Back on Mar 11 there was a sighting of 21 together over Beachy Head in Sussex and December of last year brought counts of a winter roost in the Cerne Abbas area of Dorset (7 miles north of Dorchester so within 30 miles of the Hampshire border) - 102 were seen heading there on Dec 5 and 147 on Dec 31. Further west in Devon a birder looking for a Black Kite at Kennerleigh (12 miles northwest of Exeter) saw 70 Raven on July 30 of 2011 and was told by the local farmer that up to 400 had been seen there though I suspect this figure included a lot of Crows)

**Goldfinch:** Four fledglings, now out of their nest, were being fed by their parents in an Emsworth garden on Apr 23

**Siskin:** Also on Apr 23 an adult was feeding two fledglings in the New Forest

**Snow Bunting:** One was seen in Jersey on Apr 27 and another was photographed on the north Kent coast at Reculver on Apr 28 (18 days later than the previous 'latest' there )

**Ortolan Bunting:** None in England but the species gets its first mention in continental reports on Apr 27 with one seen in Netherlands followed by three in Begium next day

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*):** First for the year in Cornwall on Apr 24

**Blue Tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*):** First for the year in Somerset on Apr 24

**Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*):** First sighting (6) in Somerset on Apr 24

**Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*):** First sighting (10+) in Somerset on Apr 24

**Variable Damselfly (*Coenagrion pulchellum*):** First of the year in Somerset on Apr 24

#### **Species reported this week:**

List as above with none of last week's three species reported

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Clouded Yellow:** After a report of a probable migrant at Portland on Mar 29 another probable migrant was reported at St Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, on Apr 21

**Small Blue:** This had been reported on the Isle of Wight on Apr 16 and was seen again at the same site (Afton Down near Freshwater) on Apr 23 when at least one was also seen on Portland

**Pearl Bordered Fritillary:** In addition to sightings at Rewell Wood near Arundel and Abbots Wood near Eastbourne where the species had emerged last week there were good numbers seen this week in Houghton Forest south of Pulborough.

#### **Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown, Small Heath

### **Other Insects:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Short-haired bumble-bee (*Bombus subterraneus*):** On Apr 26 the Rye Bay website had a link to <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/apr/26/extinct-bumblebee-uk-release> which describes how bumblebee queens will be brought from Sweden to Kent this summer to re-introduce the species

**Firebug (*Pyrrhocoris apterus*) and Weevil (*Liparus coronatus*):** See Graeme Lyons blog entry for Apr 24 at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/creatures-of-shadow-and-flame.html> to discover a colourful insect living beside the A27 at Worthing

**Green Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela campestris*):** First seen this year on Apr 26 in Rewell Wood near Arundel - see the Apr 26 entry at <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings.html> for a photo of this relatively common heathland ground beetle which apparently holds the record for being the fastest running beetle

## **PLANTS**

**Adders Tongue Fern:** First report comes from Durlston on Apr 26 - it should soon be showing on the south side of the Hilsea Ramparts east of Peronne Road in Portsmouth and also in the extreme northeast field (south of the A27) at Farlington Marshes

**Garden Aquilegia:** In flower at Langstone village on Apr 25

**Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*):** Seen at Durlston on Apr 24 and according to the Hants Flora it was found by Francis Rose on the chalk cliff of the Paulsgrove Chalkpit on Portsdown in 1978 but I am not aware of it being found there since

**Wavy Bittercress:** Normally seen in wet puddles in woodland rides I was surprised to find a substantial colony growing on my front lawn when I cut the grass after heavy rain on Apr 27

**Red Campion:** First flowers seen in Havant Eastern Road Cemetery on Apr 25 but now starting to flower widely

**Spring beauty (*Claytonia perfoliata*):** Found in the Hook area of Warsash on Apr 21 by the Havant Wildlife Group - presumably in flower. It should now be out under Tamarisks on Hayling's Sinah Common sand dunes.

**Dove's Foot Cranesbill:** First flowers seen in Havant on Apr 23

**Hairy Tare:** The first white flowers of this were out in Havant on Apr 25

**Bird's Foot Trefoil:** Not yet reported in the Havant area but out at Durlston on Apr 24

**Horseshoe Vetch:** Also in flower at Durlston on Apr 24

**Yellow-flowered Strawberry:** The first flowers to be seen at the Havant Juniper Square site since Jan 2 were out on Apr 25

**Salad Burnet:** First seen in flower at Durlston on Apr 24

**Common Nettle:** First catkin like flowers seen in Havant on Apr 25

**Holly:** First flowers seen in Havant on Apr 25

**Portland Spurge:** Reported flowering at Durlston on Apr 26

**Duke of Argyll's Teapant:** The plant in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery was covered in flowers on Apr 23

**Germander Speedwell:** My first sight of its flowers in Havant on Apr 23 though it had been reported out at Durlston on Apr 9

**Ox-eye Daisy:** The first mass flowering on the A27 south facing embankment in Havant seen on Apr 25

**Perennial Cornflower (*Centaurea montana*):** First flowers open in my garden (where the plants grow as weeds) were out on Apr 27

**Nipplewort:** First flowers since Jan 14 were out in Havant on Apr 25

**Beaked Hawksbeard:** First flower seen in Havant on Apr 26

**Early Purple Orchid:** 80 flowering spikes seen at the Longcopse site (Hollybank Woods at Emsworth) by John Goodspeed on Apr 24

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fox cubs:** These usually start to appear above ground in mid-April but the first report of them that I have seen is dated Apr 24 when Dr David Tinling mentions seeing two in his Gosport garden

**Marsh Frog:** While checking out the Planet Thanet website for news from north east Kent I came across this excellent photo of a Marsh Frog taken by the person who runs the site but prefers to be known merely as 'Gadget'. See the photo, taken on Apr 22 by the River Stour in the Minster area, at <http://www.planetthanet.org/images/2012%20folder/April%202012/April%2023rd%202012/Marsh%20Frog%2022nd%20April%202012%20Minster%20Marshes%20Thanet%20a.jpg> Here in Hampshire I think the only place you are likely to see and hear these 'beauties' is in the Shatterford area of the New Forest to the west of Beaulieu Road Station

**Snails:** Wet weather always helps snail hunters to find their prey but heavy rain after dry weather is especially useful when looking for the **Round-mouthed Snail (*Pomatias elegans*)** which gets a mention on the Durlston website this week. This species burrows into loose soil (preferably chalk) to hide when not forced out to

seek food or a mate. It does this not so much to escape predation (which most snail species are able to do just by hiding under a log or similar cover) but because it has been foolish enough in the course of its evolution to retain a breathing system that was fine when it was a marine species but is difficult to hold onto in a dry land environment. Most snails have adapted to life on land by becoming air-breathing and now have the equivalent of lungs but the Round-mouthed still retains gills which only work in water and thus it needs to retain a substantial amount of water within its shell - two ways in which it does this are (a) to have a thick round 'bath-plug' on the sole of its foot to seal the entrance to its round-mouthed shell whenever it is not forced to stick its head out, and (b) to burrow into the ground in order to insulate its shell from the heat of the sun and the drying effect of the wind, only coming out at night. Heavy rain will of course wash these creatures out of the loose chalky soil and while healthy live specimens will quickly burrow back the rain will leave the empty shells of dead snails exposed to your view. Another species mentioned on the Durlston website is the **Rounded Snail (*Discus rotundatus*)**, a much commoner species - for a quick introduction to it see <http://www.joyofplants.com/wildlife/search.php?o=121> which I am interested to see mentions as its predators Magpie and Slow-worm. With Magpies now on full time hunt for food for their newly hatched young I have been watching one searching the long grass around the edges of my lawn and have in the past seen a Magpie dash into the grass and come out with a Slow-worm in its bill but I did not then know that the Slow-worm might well have one of these snails in its gullet giving the Magpie chicks a two for one offer and teaching them the principles of the food chain.

**Brook Lamprey:** On April 22 a party led by Dr Patrick Roper in the Brede High Woods by the River Rother in East Sussex came across one of these and took photos, one of which can be seen at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/04/22/brook-lamprey/> That entry on the RX website also has a link to a Radio 4 programme broadcast on Apr 19 and still available on the BBC iPlayer - if you have 30 minutes to spare go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/b01g60ft> and learn more about Lampreys but be aware that the Brook Lamprey is a different species from the River Lamprey described in the first part of this broadcast (Brook Lampreys stay in the small streams throughout their lives, River Lampreys spend much of their lives out at sea, only returning to breed - this final part of their lifecycle involves ceasing to feed, losing their digestive system and acquiring sexual organs which they did not have until this stage of their lives)

**Pike:** In my summary for last week I wrote about Eels after guessing that a photo taken on Apr 19 in the River Ems (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-105-eel-zz-river-C-bm-MP-19.04.12.jpg>) was of part of the back of an Eel but the picture has since been identified as of a Pike

**Fungus:** A fresh specimen of Dryad's Saddle gets a mention on the Durlston website this week

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 23 - 29 (WEEK 17 OF 2012)**

**[Thu 26 Apr](#)**

## **Another new flower after more rain**

Just one new flower seen today on the way to the shops - **Beaked Hawksbeard**. The specimen that I saw did not look like that species (which is normally a fairly bushy plant with strongly lobed broad leaves) so I brought a specimen home and still could not find any match for its small entire leaves widely separated by stretches of bare stalk (and with no hint of orange under the petals). Later in the day I went back for a second look and when I arrived at the spot the parked car which had obscured the bulk of the plant had departed allowing me to see that it was Beaked Hawksbeard but looking very different from its neighbours which had not yet started to flower - I think my specimen was suffering from petrol poisoning!

**Wed 25 Apr**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## **More flowers after more rain**

Another brief walk after the rain this evening added a few more first flowers to my list.

Where the road slopes down from the Arts Centre to the East Street carpark **Hairy Tare** had started to flower and coming back over the Langstone roundabout bridge I saw my first large display of **Ox-eye Daisies** at the southern foot of the A27 fly-over embankment (with my first sight of **Nettles** in flower on the south side of the sliproad)

In Juniper Square the **Yellow-flowered Strawberries** were at last in flower and nearby I was surprised to see **Nipplewort** in flower and my last item was male flowers on **Holly** in a Grove Road garden.

Earlier in the walk I had seen another garden escape first - **Aquilegia** in flower - and had also seen my first garden form of **Yellow Archangel** (which Brian Fellows had seen at the southern entrance to the Hollybank Woods on Apr 11)

**Mon 23 Apr**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

## **A few flowers after lots of rain**

The much needed rain persisted until late afternoon giving me a short time to enjoy the very fresh air with a walk to the Eastern Road Cemetery here in Havant where I saw my **first Red Campion and Germander Speedwell flowers** plus an unexpectedly effusive show of flowers on the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant**.

On my way home via Prince George Street I found several large plants of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** newly in flower. These plants were of the large form which I have in the past thought might be **Round-leaved Cranesbill** so I brought a sample home to check, learning that these must be **Dove's Foot as the petals measured only 6mm where Round-leaved has petals at least 10mm long.**

**Wildlife diary and news for Apr 16 - 22 (Week 16 of 2012)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

**[Sun 22 Apr](#)**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Summary of past week's news**

My latest weekly summary of reports is now available by clicking [Weekly Summary](#) here

**[Fri 20 Apr](#)**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Thunder, Hail and bad photography**

The forecast for this morning was for sunshine and no rain but as soon as I got the car out the sky clouded over though it remained bright and dry until I got to my first destination - Pyle Lane, a right turn off the Rowlands Castle to Horndean road just north of the Havant Thicket/Holt woodland. My target here was **Goldilocks buttercup** which grows on the roadside at the bottom of the winding dip in the lane between the Horndean road and Pyle Farm.

The buttercups were there and were flowering but the extremely thin segments of the leaves and the small flowers which drop their petals very soon after opening them make the plants difficult to spot and even more difficult for an unskilled 'point and snap' photographer to capture on film. In the picture below there are at least three plants and you will probably pick out some yellow petals on one of them near the bottom of the photo but you should ignore that and look further up and a little to the right to find an unopen flower bud suspended above a typical whorl of three very thin leaves below which is another whorl of slightly larger leaves, equally widely spaced around the stem.

Goldilocks Buttercups (see text above)

Also seen along the banks of this lane were Barren Strawberry, Common Dog Violet, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Butchers Broom and Ivy-leaved Speedwell.

After passing the dip in the road I took the stile on the south side and followed the footpath into the Holt Wood. This path takes you through the centre of the wood to come out, after crossing the Rowlands Castle Golf Course, in Links Lane but the wood on either side of it is private and new signs on either side now remind you that you should not deviate to enjoy the great display of Bluebells or the birds and butterflies which I have found here in past years (when I did have access permission from the pheasant rearers who own the sporting rights). Ignoring these signs I did turn off the path to visit the extreme north west corner of the wood which has in the past had a display of several hundred **Early Purple Orchids**.

At first I could not see any orchids but eventually I picked out the leaves of at least 50 plants though none were yet in flower. One bonus here was my first sight of **Bugle in flower** along with **Willow Warbler song**.

Walking back to the car it began to rain but that **spurred a Mistle Thrush into full song**. Driving back through Rowlands Castle the rain became heavier and turned to heavy hail and thunder but south of the village the roads were dry and so I continued to my second destination at Marlpit Lane near Funtington. Here Brian Fellows heard two **Nightingales** on Apr 17 but today I heard nothing better than **Blackcap song**. I did have one bonus in finding **Three Veined Sandwort** in flower and I brought a specimen home - photo below. The photo is another very poor effort but the lower leaf on the left does show the distinctive 'three veins' and the tiny flower shows how much shorter than the sepals the petals are. Another first flower was **Whitebeam**.

Three Veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*)

**Mon 16 Apr**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Hayling and Portsdown in the sunshine**

Bright sun from a clear blue sky with a very light wind persisted all day allowing me to cycle to Sinah Common on Hayling in the morning and to take a walk around the Fort Southwick area of Portsdown in the afternoon.

In the morning not a single Brent Goose or other winter visitor was seen but Blackcap song and the calls of Chiffchaffs were omnipresent and I saw my first Swallow and may have heard Whitethroat song (distant and not repeated so not recorded). More than 50 summering Black-tailed Godwits were in Texaco Bay to greet me when I arrived on Hayling while single pairs of Shelduck were seen at the Oysterbeds and the Kench. Gull noise at the Oysterbeds was relatively subdued until a passing dog walked threw a whole loaf of bread into the lagoon whereupon every single gull rose into the air and descended on it. While there I did not hear a single Med Gull and a cursory scan of the islands only picked out one - I doubt they have given up the intention to nest there and feed on the the chicks of other gulls and terns but that strategy requires them to give the other gulls a headstart on nesting so that the Black-headed gull chicks start to hatch before the Med Gulls have had to sit and starve for too long - another factor influencing their absence today may be that fields are currently being ploughed within flying distance.

I did better with the flowers. The **Tartarian Honeysuckle** (photos below) was in full flower at the junction of Ferry Road with the service road leading to the Sinah Common 'gun emplacement' and the anglers access to the gravel pit lake, and on the nearby heath **Sheeps Sorrel and Mossy Stonecrop** had given a red tinge to the bare ground where Gorse has been cleared. South of the Golf Course **Thrift (Sea Pink)** had started to flower as had **Sea Campion** and under the Tamarisk among the sand dunes I found **Spring Beauty** already in bud. At least **200 spikes**

of **Green Winged Orchid** were in flower and while looking for Shepherd's Cress (none found) south of the mini Golf Course near the Inn on the Beach I found **one orchid spike flowering in a new to me location roughly 1 km east of the main site**. Everywhere **Sweet Vernal Grass** was in flower while the leaves of Sea Kale (no flowers) covered the shingle.

Tartarian Honeysuckle bush in flower on Sinah Common (Hayling)

Closeup of Tartarian Honeysuckle flowers

On Portsdown the remnants of a crop **White Mustard** (whose leaves had puzzled me when I found them on Mar 26) now had seed pods to further confirm the id of the plant - the basal area of the pod containing the seeds is uniquely covered with short bristly hairs and beyond is a hairless, flattened, beak at least 1cm long. My first **Crosswort** flowers were soon found (John Goodspeed found them flowering on the hill last week though I have yet to see any in the 'lowlands'). Both **Wild Mignonette** and **Salad Burnet** had flower buds and there were tiny **Cowslip** flowers everywhere (including **one with deep red rather than yellow petals** - Stace says 'rarely reddish' for the colour of native plants)

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## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 16 - 22 (WEEK 16 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Although numbers continue to drop Apr 18 saw 6 **Red-throated** pass Splash Point at Seaford with another passing Portland and one more off Seaton in Devon. Apr 18 also brought 22 **Black-throated** past Dungeness and on Apr 20 there were 5 **Great Northern** off Selsey.

**Manx Shearwater:** Numbers of these are increasing with more than 250 off Portland on Apr 19

**Balearic Shearwater:** Four were seen from Milford (west of Lymington) on Apr 18 and there were two more sightings of singles during the week.

**Cory's Shearwater:** First report for the year comes from Selsey where one was seen on Apr 21

**Storm Petrel:** Now being seen further east in the Channel one was seen in mid Channel south of Selsey in Apr 20

**Little Bittern:** First report for the year was of one in Wales (Pembrokeshire) on Apr 20

**White Stork:** At least two strayed over to our side of the Channel this week and there is late news of one landing on the lawn of a house in Waterlooville on Apr 7

**Glossy Ibis:** At least one has been in the Weymouth area since Feb 14 and one may have been lurking at the Bembridge RSPB reserve on the Isle of Wight since Jan 29 (though there were no reports from the Island between Feb 4 and Mar 15). The latest reports from Bembridge were on Apr 8 and 14.

**Greylag Goose:** A pair in Kent had seven goslings by Apr 18

**Canada Goose:** Last week I commented that the island in the Thorney Little Deepes on which a pair of Swans had built a nest looked to be too small to support the nest and this week I hear that they have abandoned it and that a pair of Canada Geese have attempted to use the nest but they too have now abandoned.

**Brent Goose:** A late flock of 31 flew east past Splash Point at Seaford on Apr 18 but it seems that the departure of our winter visitors is now effectively over

**Pale-bellied Brent:** These birds which breed in Svalbard, Greenland and Canada are still on passage and flocks of up to 150 have been seen on the Devon and Dorset coasts this week

**Egyptian Goose:** At least three pairs have been seen with young this week - on Apr 14 a pair had 7 goslings at the Petersfield Heath Pond, on Apr 15 there were 6 goslings at Fleet Pond and on Apr 17 a pair had 5 goslings in the Hailsham/Eastbourne area

**Red Breasted Merganser:** A single bird flying east past Selsey on Apr 15 is the last I know of.

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** What may have been the final final appearance of the Arun valley bird came from the Sussex Downs on Apr 16 when the bird was seen flying north

**Peregrine:** The Chichester cathedral pair were sitting on Apr 15

**Honey Buzzard:** First report for the year is of two birds seen over Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough on Apr 21

**Black-winged Stilt:** One of at least three birds which have been moving rapidly around England recently was at Abbotsbury in Dorset from Apr 12 to 17

**Dotterel:** Two were back in Scotland (Fife) on Apr 16 but a group of five were still in the Netherlands on Apr 19 so there is still a chance of seeing one in southern England - the place to look for them is traditionally 'a bean field in May'

**Golden Plover:** A flock of 37 were at Danebury Hill near Stockbridge (Hampshire Test valley) on Apr 17

**Curlew Sandpiper:** First for the year (other than one found dead on a beach in the Thanet area of Kent on Feb 7) was at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on Apr 19

**Purple Sandpiper:** Still passing along the south coast with sightings at Southsea Castle of 10 on Apr 18 and 2 on Apr 21

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** Spring passage is now underway - Christchurch Harbour had 32 on Apr 16 and by Apr 19 there were more than 60 in the Devon Exe estuary

**Whimbrel:** These too are now moving in force with 101 at the Exe estuary on Apr 18, 33 at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 20, 62 at Falmouth (Cornwall) on that day and 106+ at Topsham in Devon on Apr 21

**Wood Sandpiper:** First report for the year is of two seen in Belgium on Apr 15

**Common Sandpiper:** These are now arriving as obvious migrants with counts of 13 at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 19 and 8 at the Longham Lakes (north of Bournemouth) on Apr 20 (when two were at Sidesham Ferry Pool)

**Arctic Skua:** Strong winds on Apr 18 brought 65 past Splash Point in Sussex

**Great Skua:** A count of 288 passing Dungeness on Apr 18 was unprecedented (previous highest day total was 95)

**Little Gull:** With their spring passage up channel well under way many sites have enjoyed their smart breeding plumage (jet black head, scarlet legs, white plumage with a strong flush of pink on the underparts). Splash Point had the highest count of 30 on our side of the Channel (Apr 18) but one Netherlands site had 2116 on Apr 14.

**Whiskered Tern:** Just one report of one in the Netherlands on Apr 20

**Black Tern:** 118 were seen at a Netherlands site on Apr 19 and there was a possible sighting of one at Stokes Bay (Gosport) on Apr 17 which would have been the first for the English coast

**Turtle Dove:** These are now starting to arrive - after one at Christchurch on Apr 13 and another at Cissbury Ring on the west Sussex Downs on Apr 17 East Sussex had its first with one heard purring in the Beckley Woods area north of Hastings on Apr 19

**Cuckoo:** The first local bird was on Thorney Island on Apr 17 and two were photographed there together (on power lines over the Little Deeps) on Apr 21

**Tawny Owl:** A newly fledged bird was seen near the Woods Mill HQ of the Sussex Wildlife Trust on Apr 17

**Short-eared Owl:** These are still moving north through southern England. On Apr 21 three were seen at The Burgh on the South Downs south of Pulborough with two others presumably just in after crossing the channel seen at Gosport and Sandwich Bay

**Swift:** I already have 17 reports of these starting with one at Portland on Mar 29 and including a massive count of 73 at a Netherlands site on Apr 13. This week one reached Portsmouth (Milton Common) on Apr 17 and on Apr 21 three were at the Milton site with another six over Budds Farm sewage works in Havant.

**Hoopoe:** This week one was in south west Hampshire (Barton on sea) on Apr 19 and 20 while one which arrived at Sandwich Bay in Kent on Apr 17 was still there (and had turned into two birds!) on Apr 21

**Wryneck:** None in southern England this week as far as I know but one had got as far north as Orkney by Apr 21

**Swallow:** A big arrival last week (137 seen to fly north over Portland in just 30 mins on Apr 13 was indicative of the rate of arrival) brought 100 to the Heath Pond at Petersfield on Apr 14. This week 710 flew north over the French Normandie coast on Apr 19 when 110 were seen at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex (with 50 House Martins) and on Apr 20 there were 70 at Titchfield Haven

**Meadow Pipit:** 13,090 were heading north over a Netherlands site on Apr 18

**Nightingale:** These have been arriving in southern England since Apr 3 and two birds were back at our local regular site (Marlpit Lane near Funtington, west of Chichester) by Apr 17

**Whinchat:** The first to reach southern England was at Portland on Apr 14 with another (maybe the same) at Hartland Moor in Dorset on Apr 15 and another new arrival was at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 20

**Fieldfare:** Probably the last to be seen in southern England were 5 at Hoe Gate (near Hambledon in the Meon valley) on Apr 16 after 2 were seen in Thanet (Kent) on Apr 14

**Redwing:** The last I know of were in Thanet (Kent) on Apr 15

**Grasshopper Warbler:** It is uncommon to see one in full song with no vegetation obscuring the view so a photo taken at Reculver (north Kent) by Marc Heath is worth a look - see

[http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/images/grawa411marc\\_000.JPG](http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/images/grawa411marc_000.JPG)

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Excluding what was probably a wintering bird in a Cornish garden seen on March 3 the first arrival in southern England was at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Apr 8. Since then song was heard at Rye Harbour on Apr 14 and at Farlington Marshes on Apr 19 but other than one sighting at Durlston on Apr 20

and one of three birds at Rye Harbour I am not aware of any significant influx - they should be with us soon!

**Common Whitethroat:** I have only picked up 23 reports so far and none seem to have reached the Havant area yet but I see that on Apr 22 there were four more reports on the Hampshire Birding site which have not yet been added to my database so if it stops raining next week we might all be able to tick the species

**Garden Warbler:** The first for the year was at Warsash on Mar 29 but so far I am only aware of ten more reports since then

**Wood Warbler:** These are thin on the ground nowadays but one was heard singing in the New Forest on Apr 19 and another was singing that day in Devon (Yarner Wood)

**Great Grey Shrike:** What may well be the last reports for the winter were made on Apr 16 when one was still in Hampshire (near Fordingbridge) with others in Suffolk and Lancashire.

**Tree Sparrow:** A reminder that there is still a small colony in the Pevensey Levels area near Eastbourne came on Apr 14 when 4 birds were seen there. I think that none breed in Hampshire nowadays.

**Reed Bunting:** Of local interest Martin Hampton has heard one singing at Langstone Pond on three days this April implying that I was not imagining that I heard one there on Mar 24!

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

I see from the News section of the British Dragonfly Society website (<http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/latest-sightings>) that the Dragonfly season started as early as Mar 25 with the emergence of the first **Large Red Damselflies** in Cornwall, since when that species has been seen Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire and Sussex (Thorney Island)

First report of **Hairy Dragonfly** came from Somerset on Apr 13 and the first **Broad-bodied Chaser** was seen at Portland on Apr 16

#### **Species reported this week:**

Large Red Damselfly, Hairy Dragonfly and Broad-bodied Chaser

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Small Blue:** I thought a report of one on the Isle of Wight on Apr 16 was the first for the year but see the two were seen at the same place (Afton Down near Freshwater) on Mar 30

**Small Tortoiseshell:** No adult sightings were reported this week but there was proof that the early and widespread emergence (44 reports between Jan 6 and Apr 6) had done their work in an entry for Apr 19 on the Sussex Butterfly

Conservation website reporting the finding of more than **180 Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars** in a lane at Eastbourne by a girl on her way home from school.

**Pearl Bordered Fritillary:** First seen in Rewell Wood near Arundel on Apr 16 followed by others in Abbots Wood near Hailsham/Eastbourne on Apr 20

**Wall Brown:** One had already been seen near Eastbourne on Apr 2 but this week brought further sightings on the Isle of Wight (Afton Down at Freshwater on Apr 15 and Bonchurch Down at Ventnor on Apr 20)

**Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Peacock, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown

**Moths:**

**Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

**Species recorded for the first time this year/season:**

**50 Stigmella aurella** found in Dorset on Apr 14 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1496>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0050.php>

**227 Skin Moth Monopis laevigella** seen at Ventnor (Isle of Wight) on Apr 19 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1093>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0227.php>

**900 Pancalia schwarzeella** seen at Shoreham (Mill Hill) on Apr 16 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5706>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0900.php>

**1342 Eudonia angustea** seen at Ventnor (Isle of Wight) on Apr 19 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5073>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1342.php>

**1906 Brimstone Moth Opisthograptis luteolata** seen by day in Dorset on Apr 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=14>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1906.php>

**2011 Pale Prominent Pterostoma palpina** seen in Dorset on Apr 13 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3160>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2011.php>

2092 Shuttle-shaped Dart *Agrotis puta* seen in Dorset on Apr 19 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5348>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2092.php>

2160 Bright-line Brown-eye *Lacanobia oleracea* seen in Dorset on Apr 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=47>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2160.php>

2441 Silver Y *Autographa gamma* seen on downs in East Sussex on Apr 20 (not first but of interest as a **migrant**) - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1134>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2441.php>

**Moth larvae.** On Apr 15 larvae of **Endothenia gentianaena** were found in **Teasel seed heads** in Thanet (Kent) along with **leaf mines** of **Phyllonorycter messaniella** on Holm Oak and larvae of **Metzneria aestivella** in **Carline Thistle seed heads** (the latter were also found at Mill Hill Shoreham on Apr 17)

On Apr 17 several young caterpillars of **Pale Grass Eggar** moths were found at Rye Harbour and can be seen at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/rxeggar.jpg>

On Apr 19 the sporangia of **Harts Tongue Fern** in the Thanet area of Kent were found to have larvae of **Psychoides filicivora** and **Psychoides filicivora** feeding on them

#### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Beetles:** Once again Graeme Lyons has found a couple of Beetles which I have never heard of - one is probably *Phyllotreta nigripes* and the other is the **Belladonna Flea Beetle (*Epitrix atropae*)**. To find out more about them see his blog entries at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/outside-my-comfort-zonemy-garden.html> and

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/not-so-deadly-nightshade.html> respectively. The first of these entries also has a photo of the

**Metzneria aestivella moth larva** in a Carline Thistle seed head which has been mentioned above under moth larvae. Another beetle in the news this week is the **Darkling Beetle (*Helops caeruleus*)** which was found at Rye Harbour (see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/04/17/some-spring-insects/> )

**Harvestman (*Megabunus diadema*):** I do not expect to see Harvestman species until summer but there is more than one species which can be found in the spring and a fascinating species with its eyes mounted in an armoured turret on top of its head was found by Gordon Jarvis in the Peasmarsh area north of Hastings on Apr 16 - see it at <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/04/16/15491/>

#### **PLANTS**

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Goldilocks Buttercup:** This was flowering in Pyle Lane near Horndean on Apr 19 and you can see a photo in my diary entry for that day

**Sea Campion:** The first flowers of this that I have seen this year were out on the Sinah Common shore on Apr 16

**Three veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*):** First flower seen at Marlpit Lane near Funtington on Apr 19. A poor photo is included with my diary entry for that day

**Spring beauty (*Claytonia perfoliata*):** Unopen flower buds could be seen under the Tamarisks near Gunner Point on Hayling on Apr 16 and a lot was found (presumably in flower) by the Havant Wildlife Group when they visited Hook/Warsash on Apr 21.

**Whitebeam:** My first sight of this in flower came on Apr 19 when I visited Marlpit Lane near Funtington

**Wood Avens:** Brian Fellows was the first to find this in flower at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Apr 20

**Mossy Stonecrop:** This was another first flowering when I visited Sinah Common on Hayling on Apr 16

**Sheep Sorrel:** Several people have seen this newly flowering this week since Apr 16

**Thrift/Sea Pink:** Newly flowering on Hayling near Gunner Point on Apr 16

**Bugle:** Newly flowering in the Pyle Lane area near Horndean on Apr 19

**Ramsons/Wild Garlic:** First report of flowering from Durlston on Apr 16

**Early Purple Orchids:** These seem to be late in flowering this year but some have been seen in Hampshire (at Lowtons Copse north of Clanfield on Apr 21 and at some indeterminate earlier date at Durlston in Dorset). While in the Clanfield area on Apr 21 John Goodspeed also found a **new site for Toothwort** on the western edge of Blagdons Copse (close to Lowtons Copse where this parasite on Hazel was found flowering back on Mar 15)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

[\(Skip to Endweek\)](#)

**Eel:** On Apr 19 Brian Fellows published in the Emsworth Wildlife website a photo taken in Brook Meadow of what was described as 'a fish' in the River Ems. (See the photo taken by Malcolm Phillips at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-105-eel-zz-river-C-bm-MP-19.04.12.jpg> ) The fish is thought to be an Eel, not uncommon in the River Ems,

and this made me wonder if the Eel might be on its way downstream en route to the Sargasso sea and in checking on this thought I found that this would be unlikely as the peak time for such departures is in the autumn. I also found that the number of Eels (though still vast) is in catastrophic decline, causing the Environment Agency to ban the catching of them during the period that they are en route to their breeding grounds (supposedly somewhere in the Sargasso Sea though, unlike the source of the Nile, the exact location remains a mystery). If you want to learn more about this fascinating subject go to

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6acbbc1e-3588-11df-963f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1slBjpmOq> which has a lengthy but very readable article on the subject.

**Cordyceps fungi:** I have long been aware that there is an uncommon fungus called **Cordyceps militaris (or the Scarlet Caterpillarclub)** and have in the past even found it in Havant Thicket but it was not until reading Graeme Lyons fascinating blog ( <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> ) that I became aware that the Cordyceps genus is omnipresent worldwide with hundreds of species each directed at the control of an individual insect species,

making sure that they do not take over the world for themselves, and that the technique they employ is far more gruesome than anything which the most evil human could devise. To discover what I found out go to <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/where-is-my-mind.html> in which Graeme describes being shown *Cordyceps gracilis* (the species charged with protecting the world against the tiny Common Swift moth) and be sure to view the video in which David Attenborough describes the modus operandi of another Cordyceps as part of the BBC Planet Earth series. After this sobering experience you will understand the meaning of the strange poem with which Graeme's piece started.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 16 - 22 (WEEK 16 OF 2012)

[Fri 20 Apr](#)

### Thunder, Hail and bad photography

The forecast for this morning was for sunshine and no rain but as soon as I got the car out the sky clouded over though it remained bright and dry until I got to my first destination - Pyle Lane, a right turn off the Rowlands Castle to Horndean road just north of the Havant Thicket/Holt woodland. My target here was *Goldilocks buttercup* which grows on the roadside at the bottom of the winding dip in the lane between the Horndean road and Pyle Farm.

The buttercups were there and were flowering but the extremely thin segments of the leaves and the small flowers which drop their petals very soon after opening them make the plants difficult to spot and even more difficult for an unskilled 'point and snap' photographer to capture on film. In the picture below there are at least three plants and you will probably pick out some yellow petals on one of them near the bottom of the photo but you should ignore that and look further up and a little to the right to find an unopen flower bud suspended above a typical whorl of three very thin leaves below which is another whorl of slightly larger leaves, equally widely spaced around the stem.

Goldilocks Buttercups (see text above)

Also seen along the banks of this lane were Barren Strawberry, Common Dog Violet, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Butchers Broom and Ivy-leaved Speedwell.

After passing the dip in the road I took the stile on the south side and followed the footpath into the Holt Wood. This path takes you through the centre of the wood to come out, after crossing the Rowlands Castle Golf Course, in Links Lane but the wood on either side of it is private and new signs on either side now remind you that you should not deviate to enjoy the great display of Bluebells or the birds and butterflies which I have found here in past years (when I did have access permission from the pheasant rearers who own the sporting rights). Ignoring these signs I did turn off the path to visit the extreme north west corner of the wood which has in the past had a display of several hundred *Early Purple Orchids*.

At first I could not see any orchids but eventually I picked out the leaves of at least 50 plants though none were yet in flower. One bonus here was my first sight of **Bugle in flower** along with **Willow Warbler song**.

Walking back to the car it began to rain but that **spurred a Mistle Thrush into full song**. Driving back through Rowlands Castle the rain became heavier and turned to heavy hail and thunder but south of the village the roads were dry and so I continued to my second destination at Marlpit Lane near Funtington. Here Brian Fellows heard two **Nightingales** on Apr 17 but today I heard nothing better than **Blackcap song**. I did have one bonus in finding **Three Veined Sandwort** in flower and I brought a specimen home - photo below. The photo is another very poor effort but the lower leaf on the left does show the distinctive 'three veins' and the tiny flower shows how much shorter than the sepals the petals are. Another first flower was **Whitebeam**.

Three Veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*)

**Mon 16 Apr**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Hayling and Portsdown in the sunshine**

Bright sun from a clear blue sky with a very light wind persisted all day allowing me to cycle to Sinah Common on Hayling in the morning and to take a walk around the Fort Southwick area of Portsdown in the afternoon.

In the morning not a single Brent Goose or other winter visitor was seen but Blackcap song and the calls of Chiffchaffs were omnipresent and I saw my first Swallow and may have heard Whitethroat song (distant and not repeated so not recorded). More than 50 summering Black-tailed Godwits were in Texaco Bay to greet me when I arrived on Hayling while single pairs of Shelduck were seen at the Oysterbeds and the Kench. Gull noise at the Oysterbeds was relatively subdued until a passing dog walked threw a whole loaf of bread into the lagoon whereupon every single gull rose into the air and descended on it. While there I did not hear a single Med Gull and a cursory scan of the islands only picked out one - I doubt they have given up the intention to nest there and feed on the chicks of other gulls and terns but that strategy requires them to give the other gulls a headstart on nesting so that the Black-headed gull chicks start to hatch before the Med Gulls have had to sit and starve for too long - another factor influencing their absence today may be that fields are currently being ploughed within flying distance.

I did better with the flowers. The **Tartarian Honeysuckle** (photos below) was in full flower at the junction of Ferry Road with the service road leading to the Sinah Common 'gun emplacement' and the anglers access to the gravel pit lake, and on the nearby heath **Sheeps Sorrel and Mossy Stonecrop** had given a red tinge to the bare ground where Gorse has been cleared. South of the Golf Course **Thrift (Sea Pink)** had started to flower as had **Sea Champion** and under the Tamarisk among the sand dunes I found **Spring Beauty** already in bud. At least **200 spikes of Green Winged Orchid** were in flower and while looking for Shepherd's Cress (none found) south of the mini Golf Course near the Inn on the Beach I found **one orchid spike flowering in a new to me location roughly 1 km east of the main site**.

Everywhere **Sweet Vernal Grass** was in flower while the leaves of Sea Kale (no flowers) covered the shingle.

Tartarian Honeysuckle bush in flower on Sinah Common (Hayling)

Closeup of Tartarian Honeysuckle flowers

On Portsdown the remnants of a crop **White Mustard** (whose leaves had puzzled me when I found them on Mar 26) now had seed pods to further confirm the id of the plant - the basal area of the pod containing the seeds is uniquely covered with short bristly hairs and beyond is a hairless, flattened, beak at least 1cm long. My first **Crosswort** flowers were soon found (John Goodspeed found them flowering on the hill last week though I have yet to see any in the 'lowlands'). Both **Wild Mignonette** and **Salad Burnet** had flower buds and there were tiny **Cowslip** flowers everywhere (including **one with deep red rather than yellow petals** - Stace says 'rarely reddish' for the colour of native plants)

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 9 - 15 (WEEK 15 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** Single **Red-throated** were still to be seen off Selsey and south Devon on Apr 13 and there had been as many as 65 off the French Normandie coast on Apr 8. Surprisingly there were 10 **Black-throated** off St Austell bay in Cornwall as late as Apr 13 when 3 were seen passing Dungeness. **Great Northern** were represented by 4 at Selsey on Apr 13 when another 4 were still off Cornwall. **White-billed** were seen off the Western Isles (2 on Apr 9) and off east Scotland (1 off Aberdeen on Apr 9)

**Grebes:** Two **Red-necked** were with the divers off St Austell Bay on Apr 13 and 8 (maybe 9) were off the Netherlands on the same day. A distant grebe off Splash Point in Sussex may have been either **Slavonian** or **Black-necked** but there were definite reports of two **Slavonian** off the Netherlands on Apr 13 and three **Black-necked** at a different Netherlands site on Apr 12

**Manx Shearwater:** Plenty of these now in the Channel with 2000+ off Portland on Apr 9 (when 5 were off Sandy Point on Hayling) and 1 was as far east as Dungeness on Apr 11

**Balearic Shearwater:** The first to be reported since January was off Portland on Apr 8

**Storm Petrel:** First to be reported this year (2 birds) were seen by a boat fishing off south Devon on Apr 13

**Bittern:** As no one has yet invented an accurate Bittern Boom locator birders in Kent are being asked by Natural England to note their own position whenever they hear a boom and also to note the direction from which the sound comes and how loud it is (as an indication of the distance). For full details go to

<http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/bitternsurvey.htm> - I will not be surprised if in future years the Kent Stour valley has its own fleet of barrage balloons, each equipped with technology to relieve the birders of this onerous task) - will this be followed by harrowing accounts of the number of birds killed by flying into the mooring wires of the balloons?

**Cattle Egret:** Seven reports this week include six from Dorset and Cornwall plus one from the Hayling Oysterbeds on Apr 11 - the bird here was identified when it flew past the observer at close range.

**Little Egret:** A further check on the birds at Langstone Mill Pond on Apr 13 gave a total of 23 nests though there could have been one or two more or less as a result of some nests being hidden in ivy and others being double counted by mistake when viewing the nest island from two different viewpoints.

**Purple Heron:** At least one was still being seen in Devon up to Apr 10 when the last sighting was of one flying high east (followed by a new report of one in Begium next day)

**Glossy Ibis:** On Apr 11 RBA News carried a total of 5 reports from English sites and at least one was still at Radipole in Dorset on Apr 12 but the two birds seen on the Lyminster shore on Apr 7 have not been reported since (and may include the bird which turned up at Brading Marshes (Isle of Wight) on Apr 8)

**Spoonbill:** Eleven reports this week come from nine different sites and suggest a fluid population. Two or three birds may be based in the Poole Harbour area but a sighting of two birds in the Warsash area on Apr 11 were probably (as with several other reports) of birds on the move

**Mute Swan:** Attempts at nesting by pairs at Peter Pond in Emsworth and the Little Deeps on Thorney Island seem likely to fail - although at least one egg had been laid at Peter Pond the nest seemed to have been submerged by a high tide and the island chosen as a nest site at the Little Deeps looks to be too small to support the nest (any eggs laid are likely to roll off into the water). I think Swans have to serve a long apprenticeship before being able to move up a ladder of increasingly good nest sites until they reach sites where their chances of success break even.

**Brent Goose:** On Apr 10 a flock of 35 was seen at Southampton Water and then at Selsey as they moved east and on Apr 13 there were still 20 birds at Christchurch Harbour but we are now reaching the stage at which sightings are more likely to be of birds staying for the summer than of late migrants (5 birds in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on Apr 12 are likely to stay)

**Green Winged Teal:** The bird that was at Farlington Marshes from Feb 23 to Mar 30 has not been seen there since but one has appeared on the 'Posbrook flood' at the north end of Titchfield Haven from Apr 7 to 14

**Garganey:** Several have probably now settled down to nest in southern England but a new pair was seen to fly in off the sea at Exmouth in Devon on Apr 14

**Ring-necked Duck:** The longstaying bird at Par (near St Austell in Cornwall) has not been seen since Apr 11 and I see that one flew east past Dungeness on Apr 12

**Long-tailed Duck:** Two were still at Dungeness RSPB on Apr 12

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Sightings are becoming rare and a group of ten in Chichester Harbour off Langstone on Apr 13 may be the last I see until autumn

**Hen Harrier:** One was still in southern England (Cuckmere Haven in Sussex) on Apr 11 and four were at a Netherlands site on Apr 14

**Montagu's Harrier:** Two sightings in Cornwall - a male was reported at St Ives on Apr 6 and a ringtail at the same place on Apr 10

**Goshawk:** Two were reported to have entered this country from the south via Bognor where the Borders Agency was unable to detain them on Apr 13. Interestingly the same observer had seen two very similar birds at the same place on Apr 3

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird was reported as still present on Apr 10 and 14

**Osprey:** No news yet of any interest in the nest which has been prepared for them on the Thornham Marshes landing lights but Hampshire had one arrival at Milford on sea (west of Lymington) on Apr 9 and another on Apr 11 which came in off the sea at Lymington and was probably the bird seen later that day at the Blashford Lakes. Another came in over Pagham Harbour on Apr 10

**Merlin:** Still passing on their way north - Christchurch Harbour had one on Apr 9 and two on Apr 11 when one was at Rye Harbour. At the end of the week one was over Selsey on Apr 12 and another over Pagham Harbour on Apr 13

**Hobby:** Three new arrivals in Dorset on Apr 12 and one in Kent (Folkestone) on Apr 13 - it won't be long now before they start to arrive in small flocks of 20 or more but we must wait for the dragonflies to start to emerge before that happens (last year there was a report of 45 in the Kent Stour valley on May 13 preceded by 12 there on May 8. A group of 5 came in at Sandy Point on Hayling on May 1 and 7 were seen together in Dorset on Apr 28)

**Black-winged Stilt:** Two or more of these seem to have been moving around in southern England recently. One had been reported in Ireland (Co Wexford) on Mar 30 but I'm pretty sure it was a different bird which headed north over the Isle of Wight on Apr 6 to be reported in Somerset on Apr 10, then at Abbotsbury in

Dorset on Apr 12 and 13. On Apr 12 Lee Evans told us of one in Oxfordshire which I assume to be a different bird

**Dotterel:** Other than one wintering with a flock of Golden Plover that was seen at Dungeness from Jan 25 to 30 the first migrant to reach England was one at Rye Harbour on Apr 11

**Purple Sandpiper:** Four were at Southsea Castle from Apr 6 to 8 but they were not the last as 28 were at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 9 with 5 there on Apr 13

**Snipe:** First report of drumming came from the Ashdown Forest on Apr 8. This unusual sound was fairly common in the New Forest when I was young but I get the impression that it is very uncommon now - looking back to last year I can only find one report of drumming (Kent Stour Valley on June 1) among the data I recorded and in 2008 the only reports are of one or more 'displaying' at Woolmer Pond in east Hampshire on Apr 13 and two birds drumming near Burley in the New Forest on Apr 4. In 2007 the only report mentioning drumming came from the New Forest on Mar 17 (also in that year reports indicated that Snipe were still to be found breeding on the outskirts of Chichester - Clay Lane area near Bishop Luffa school). 2006 also has just one note of drumming (Kent Stour Valley on Apr 5) as has my 2005 list (Adur levels in Sussex on May 15) and the same is true for 2004 (New Forest on Apr 2 with a further note on Apr 13 of 'no drumming' at the Vyne near Basingstoke as if it was a surprise not to hear one of at least 16 birds there). The first sign of the 'old days' comes in 2003 when drumming was heard at five different New Forest sites. No reports in 2002 but in 2001 drumming was heard in the New Forest on May 15 and at Fleet Pond on May 21. Ten years earlier when Birds of Hampshire was published in 1991 the drainage of meadows was already causing a notable decline in the Hampshire breeding population ...

**Whimbrel:** Fifteen reports this week as passage hots up. Biggest count was of 85 at one Netherlands site on Apr 8 when Christchurch Harbour had 17. Since then two birds were at Northney (Hayling) on Apr 10 and a flock of six was over the Exminster Marshes in Devon on Apr 13. Apr 14 saw two birds (probably the same two) reported at Hill Head and Stokes Bay (Gosport)

**Spotted Redshank:** Lymington still had 5 birds on Apr 12 when singles were at Christchurch Harbour and in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester

**Common Sandpiper:** Migrant arrivals have brought 13 reports this week with a maximum count of 3 at the Blashford Lakes on Apr 14

**Arctic Skua:** Now being seen daily along the south coast with a peak count of 18 on the French Normandie coast on Apr 10 (and 5 at Dungeness on Apr 12)

**Great Skua:** Also a daily sight with 12 at Dungeness on Apr 9 and 16 at Seaford on Apr 10

**Little Gull:** Numbers now increasing - peaks of only 15 at Dungeness on Apr 13 but 2116 at a Netherlands site on Apr 14

**Roseate Tern:** First for the year at Selsey on Apr 14

**Arctic Tern:** First report for the year came surprisingly from Latvia on Apr 7 and Netherlands on Apr 12

**Little Tern:** First reports came from the Netherlands on Mar 26 and 30 followed by a gap until Apr 10 when 3 were seen at Paghham Harbour. Apr 11 brought 6 to the Lymington shore and Apr 12 brought 2 to the Chirchester Harbour entrance (and later to Selsey). Apr 13 saw 6 at Selsey and Apr 13 brought three reports (1 at Exmouth in Devon, 2 at Stokes Bay Gosport, and 10 on the Lymington shore)

**Black Tern:** Four reached the Netherlands on Apr 13 and one more was reported there on Apr 14

**Turtle Dove:** What were probably wintering birds were in a Dorset garden (Mar 15) and beside the Centurion's Way cycle track at Chichester on Mar 21. The first migrant arrival seems to have been at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 13

**Cuckoo:** Eleven reports this week come from sites at Sandwich Bay in Kent to Christchurch Harbour in Dorset giving a total of 29 reports since the first on Mar 17

**Short-eared Owl:** Still moving north through southern England - most surprising of 11 reports this week was of 12 birds flushed out of the saltings at Newtown Harbour (IoW) by the tide on Apr 10. Last that know of came in off the sea at Exmouth in Devon on Apr 14

**Swift:** One was seen at Portland as early as Mar 29 and I now have 11 reports including one of 73 birds over a Netherlands site on Apr 13 followed by another of 25 birds there on Apr 14. Four reports of birds in southern England this week come from Portland on Apr 10, Christchurch Harbour on Apr 11, Cornwall on Apr 12 and Rye Harbour on Apr 14

**Hoopoe:** One was in the Bishops Dyke area of the New Forest on Apr 10 and 11 - it may have then moved to Christchurch Harbour where one was seen on Apr 13

**Wryneck:** One had reached the Scillies as early as Mar 25 but the first in southern England was in a garden at Bodiam (near Hastings) on Apr 9. The only other report was from the Netherlands on Apr 13

**Swallow:** A major arrival of hirundines started on Apr 12 with 40 Swallows at Dungeness, 75 at Christchurch Harbour and 80+ at Thurlstone Bay in South Devon. Apr 13 saw 2000+ Swallows passing over Lundy and 50+ over Westhampnett Lake at Chichester - also that day Portland counted 137 in one 30 minute period, 72 at Christchurch Harbour, 56 at Andover, 38 at Selsey and 36 at Sinah Common on Hayling, etc.

**House Martin:** Apr 13 brought 14 to Christchurch Harbour and Apr 14 saw more than 30 at Hook/Warsash

**Yellow Wagtail:** The number of reports was up to 17 this week but none was of more than 11 birds (local reports of 2 in fields south of Fareham on Apr 8 and one over the Highland Road cemetery in Southsea on Apr 14)

**Nightingale:** Song heard on Apr 9, 11, 12 and 13 - maybe it's worth a trip to our local site at Marlpit Lane near Funtington in West Sussex? (Three were singing there on Apr 25 last year)

**Whinchat:** One was reported in Germany on Apr 8 but the first to reach England was at Portland on Apr 14

**Fieldfare:** A late flock of 102 birds was at Sandwich Bay on Apr 9 and 10 were at Fleet in Hampshire on Apr 12

**Redwing:** 257 were at a Netherlands site on Apr 9 but the last that I know of was just 1 at Durlston on Apr 11

**Sedge Warbler:** One was singing at Arundel back on Mar 30 and another reached the Milton Lakes in Southsea on Apr 8 but none seem to have reached the Thorney Island Deeps yet

**Reed Warbler:** One was at Radipole on Apr 2 and there have been 13 subsequent reports including the Southsea Milton Lakes on Apr 8 but none so far in the Langstone/Thorney area

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Only two reports of migrant arrivals in England so far - one at Lodmoor on Apr 8 and one singing at Rye Harbour on Apr 14

**Common Whitethroat:** Lee Evans knew of one arrival by Mar 24 but the first I saw reported was at Christchurch on Apr 2 since when there have been at least 16 reports with song heard since Apr 12

**Wood Warbler:** The first and only report is from Yarner Wood in Devon on Apr 10

**Willow Warbler:** Although the first reached England on Mar 14 and 15 this week saw a major widespread arrival with more than 1000 at Portland on Apr 12 and 20 in the Highland Road Cemetery in Southsea among many other sites. The arrival continued on Apr 13 to give 100 on Sinah Common (south Hayling) and 85 at Beachy Head with single birds heard singing elsewhere by most birders who were out that day

**Pied Flycatcher:** One among at least 11 arrivals this week was on Sinah Common (south Hayling) on Apr 13

**Golden Oriole:** A male was seen briefly at Seaford on the Sussex coast on Apr 13

**Siskin:** Early nesting brought an adult with two fledglings to feeders at Salehurst (north of Hastings) on Apr 12

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Dingy Skipper:** First for the year at Shoreham Mill Hill on Apr 6

**Duke of Burgundy:** First two seen at Noar Hill on Apr 13 (the second of these was happily perched on a ladies nose)

**Small Heath:** First of the year at Shoreham Mill Hill on Apr 6

Local sightings at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown on Apr 13 were Green Hairstreak, Small Copper and Speckled Wood

#### **Species reported this week:**

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Holly Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Small Heath

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Caddis Fly species:** One at Durlston on Apr 8 but species not named

**St Marks Fly:** An early sighting on Portsdown on Apr 11

**Scaeva pyrastris hoverfly:** An early report from Thanet in Kent on Apr 6

**Chequered Hoverfly (*Melanostoma scalare*):** Also seen in Thanet on Apr 6

**Early Mining Bee (*Andrena haemorrhoa*):** First report from Thanet on Apr 6

**Chrysolina banksi:** This beetle was found on Thorney Island by Graeme Lyons on Apr 9 - to learn about the beetle go to

<http://wildlifeonwheels.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/leaf-beetle-chrysolina-banksi.html>

but to follow Graeme's train of thought to the graffiti artist Banksy see Graeme's blog at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> (and for those who overlook this entry I have included what I learnt from Graeme in my Other Wildlife section). A visit to Graeme's blog will also introduce you to a couple of other beetles which he came across at Graffham Down near Midhurst on Apr 13

**Common Groundhopper (*Tetrix undulata*):** Most people are aware of the presence of several species of Grasshopper in their local environment but few are aware of the Groundhoppers which are widespread and not uncommon (I was introduced to them by Bob Chapman when he was warden of Farlington Marshes and commented on finding them there). The Common Groundhopper was seen at

Peasmarsh near Hastings and got a mention (with photo) on the Rye Bay website on Apr 14 but for more info and photos see

<http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/common-groundhopper-0> and to put them in context among the other Grasshoppers and Crickets that you may come across see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/taxonomy/term/19476>

**Evarcha arcuata jumping spider:** The first of the tiny, big eyed, jumping spiders (*Salticus scenicus*) that will patrol the wall of my house around the kitchen window during the summer was on the kitchen window sill this week but to extend your knowledge of this group of spider to a heathland specialist species see Graeme Lyons blog for Apr 13 or visit

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evarcha\\_arcuata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evarcha_arcuata) which has an attractive photo of a male. Graeme's blog mentions several other spider and beetle species which I have not mentioned here

## PLANTS

**Garlic Mustard:** Brian Fellows was the first to find this in flower on one of his Emsworth Waysides on Apr 10 - very soon it will be seen everywhere

**Pale Flax:** I was surprised to read that this was already starting to flower at Durlston on Apr 9

**Field Pansy:** John Goodspeed found the first of these flowers on Portsdown on Apr 11

**White Campion:** First flowers seen in Emsworth on Apr 9

**Lesser Sea Spurrey:** First flowers on the Langstone sea wall on Apr 13

**Subterranean Clover:** Very early flowers found by John Norton on Apr 4 in an unexpected location (the grass around the carpark at the Bedhampton ASDA store in Havant

**Common Sorrel:** First flowers found in Emsworth by Brian Fellows on Apr 12

**Pittosporum tenuifolium:** Not a wild flower but each year I am impressed by the powerful scent which comes from the small black flowers of this tree - this week the scent stopped me in my tracks as I was walking home with a load of shopping on the pavement on the opposite side of the road from the tree.

**Germander Speedwell:** Reported as in flower at Durlston on Apr 9

**Yellow Archangel:** Escaped plants of the garden version of this lovely flower were out at the southern entrance to Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Apr 11

**Crosswort:** First flowers found on Portsdown by John Goodspeed on Apr 11

**Field Madder:** First flowers seen in Emsworth on Apr 12

**Lily of the Valley:** Not yet in flower but newly found in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth this week as a result of scrub clearance allowing light to return to the heathland on which this woodland grows. A similar patch of this native species can be seen in Havant Thicket at approx SU 716108 on the west side of the peripheral track

**Ramsons (Wild Garlic):** Already flowering at Durlston on Apr 13

**Early Purple orchid:** Already flowering at Durlston on Apr 11

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Otter:** On Apr 9 Joe Stockwell was photographing Swallows and other spring migrants at Rooksbury Mill in Andover when two Otters (which I guess he has never seen before here on his home patch) appeared in the water. At this time of year these were probably young Otters seeking their own territories for the first time.

**Weasel:** Also on Apr 9 the Rye Bay website had a photo of two Weasels battling with each other but Barry Yates was uncertain whether this was a dispute between two males or the equivalent of a female Hare 'boxing' an over-attentive male.

A more unexpected Weasel photo was taken at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - I don't remember hearing of any previous Weasel sightings there though the site must provide a good hunting ground for these predators - and the animal seen was unusual in having a very dark brown coat. As it was seen on the river bank there was concern that it might discover one of the 'above water' Water Vole tunnels that gave access to a breeding chamber but the page about Water Voles on the Wild about Britain website does not mention Weasels as predators (it says .. "Cats, foxes, weasels, pike, birds of prey and adders are among the predators seeking water voles. Mink are the most serious threat to Water Vole populations, due to their ability to hunt underwater, foiling the Water Vole's main course of evasion from threats."). I was surprised that Weasels did not get a mention - the Environment Agency page does include them, listing .. "They have many predators including weasels, stoat, polecat, mink and fox, kestrel, buzzard, harrier, heron, barn owl and short-eared owl." All sources agree that Mink, because of their ability to enter Water Vole burrows under water, are the most serious threat to these Voles. While searching for info on this subject I learnt (from that eminently reliable source, Wikipedia) that .. "There are also indications that the water vole is increasing in numbers in UK areas where the European otter has made a return. The otter is a predator of the American Mink."

**Grey Seal:** On Apr 11 one was reported at the Newtown Harbour site on the north coast of the Isle of Wight

**Hedgehog:** It is not unusual to hear of the owners of neat suburban gardens being woken from their sleep by persistent grunting noises coming from their lawn which turn out to come from mating Hedgehogs trying to solve the problem of how to get together when the female insists on wearing a very spiky nightdress.

My impression was that mating did not normally take place until May and when I tried to confirm this the first report that I found was of a date in mid-June (see <http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/forums/mammal-forums/13780-hedgehogs-mating.html> ). The report which sparked off this enquiry came from an Emsworth garden where a female Hedgehog had been provided with board and lodging (a wooden box to sleep in and tins of 'Spike's Dinner' for meals) over the past winter. During the past week her peaceful winter holiday from the cares of life was rudely interrupted by the intrusion of a male (much larger than the female) who chased her round her box for so long that in the morning the grass had been worn down to bare earth (I recall seeing a similar ring of bare earth round a tree where pair of Roe deer had run a multi-lap Grand Prix circular race)

**Green Lizard:** A sighting was reported from the Shoreham area on Apr 6 and if you are not familiar with this eye-catching species in the British countryside have a look at <http://www.uksafari.com/greenlizards.htm> A much fuller account of the history of introductions of the species to the British Isles can be found at <http://my.opera.com/Ukwildlife/blog/green-lizard-lacerta-viridis-l-bilineata-in-britain> An interesting sidelight brought up by a Google search concerns the construction in Brighton of houses made of old bottles and tyres - the houses are called 'Earthships' and the site where they are built is called 'The Lizard' - see <http://www.findaproperty.com/displaystory.aspx?edid=00&salerent=0&storyid=20249>

**Basking Shark:** First sighting that I am aware of for this year came from Durlston on Dorset on Apr 7

**Banksy's Beetle:** Beetles would normally be in my Insect News but not when they are the subject of a painting in the American Museum of Natural History by the graffiti artist known as Banksy. I was made aware of the painting (see copy below) by Graeme Lyons through his ever-fascinating blog at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> when he mentioned it in connection with his find of a beetle called *Chrysolina banksi* on Apr 9. True to his personal mode of operation Banksy placed his painting in the museum without permission and it took two days before it was discovered by the authorities! For more about Banksy visit his own website at <http://www.banksy.co.uk/> and click the four informal links on the home page

Copy of Banksy's picture of a Beetle named **Withus oragainstus** in the American Museum of Natural History

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 9 - 15 (WEEK 15 OF 2012)

**Fri 13 Apr**

### **Counting Egret nests plus more flowers**

Before meeting Hazel Rouse for the first official count of the Egret nests at Langstone Pond I had a look at the Langstone village shore from the Royal Oak. Nothing of interest in the birds on view but along the foot of the wall around the pub garden I had my first sight of **Lesser Sea Spurrey** in flower.

At the pond we took some time to decide that there were **almost certainly 23 active Egret nests** after looking at the trees in which the Egrets are nesting from both sides of the island on which the trees grow. The two factors creating our difficulty in arriving at a total were firstly the thick covering of Ivy on at least one tree (were there birds nesting hidden within the Ivy?) and secondly the difficulty caused by the different perspective when looking at the island from two viewpoints on opposite sides of the island (how many of the nests that we could see from the second viewpoint had already been counted from the first viewpoint?)

There was no sign of the pair of Tufted Ducks which had been present on the pond last week and no sound of the Reed Bunting which I heard there on the evening of Mar 24, nor of any Reed, Sedge or Cetti's Warblers, but there were still ten Mergansers out in the harbour.

On my way home I went via the A27 underpass on the Havant to Emsworth cycle route to look for the Speedwell which Brian Fellows had found and photographed there yesterday. Brian had thought it was **Wall Speedwell** but when I saw his photograph I was fairly sure it was **Grey Field Speedwell** and when I saw it this morning I was further convinced of this by the ground hugging habit of the plant and by its relatively thick stems. **Wall Speedwell** does have similar tiny all blue flowers but also has very thin erect stems (and if you touch the plant as Brian is doing in his photo my experience is that this inevitably cause the flowers to fall off!)

A photo of **Grey Field Speedwell** showing the same thick, hairy stems as the plant in Brian's photo can be seen at [http://www.ukwildflowers.com/Web\\_pages/veronica\\_polita\\_grey\\_field\\_speedwell.htm](http://www.ukwildflowers.com/Web_pages/veronica_polita_grey_field_speedwell.htm) (the flowers in this photo are not as deep blue as those at this site but others are - I selected this example to show the thick hairy stems). The thinner, erect, less hairy stems of **Wall Speedwell** can be seen at [http://www.hlasek.com/veronica\\_arvensis\\_aa7164.html](http://www.hlasek.com/veronica_arvensis_aa7164.html)

While at this site I found my first **Bulbous Buttercup** in flower (Brian had found this out as early as Apr 3)

### **Thu 12 Apr**

#### **Catching up on Easter**

Easter activities have meant that I have not had time to compile a Diary entry for ten days so here is a brief catch up on the few things of interest that I have observed in that time.

On Apr 5 Eric Clement and John Norton came over from Gosport to compare the urban flora of Havant with that of Gosport in connection with a book on the Gosport flora which John is preparing. John surprised me with the news that he had yesterday (Apr 4) been in the ASDA carpark near the A3M in Bedhampton and had found **Subterranean Clover** growing there already in flower

Before setting out on our tour John asked if I had come to a conclusion about the id of the plants found on Portsdown which I had guessed were a *Sisymbrium* (Rocket) species and I was able to say that I had - when the flowers were fully open they showed a unique feature in that the calyx became separate from the

rest of the flower and this identified them as **White Mustard (*Sinapis alba*)** which is sometimes sown as a crop on poor soil (such as that on the top of Portsdown) to be ploughed back into the soil as a fertiliser and the features of the plant thus combined with a likely reason for it being found where it was.

Our first stop was in the Pallant carpark where the few plants of **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** (see my photos with the Mar 26 entry below) were in full flower (John tells me he cannot find this in Gosport) We then had a look at the '**Large Herb Robert**' plant on the alley wall south of East Street and Eric told me he could not be sure of the precise species but that it was certainly a Geranium species originating in the Canary Isles but probably arriving via a British horticultural firm which would have modified it for the British garden market. While we can be sure that no one bought it to plant on this wall we can be almost as certain that the seeds were not wind or bird carried from the Canaries but from a local garden.

Moving on to the Homewell spring John and Eric were pleased with finds of Duckweed and Moss but I was disappointed to be told that the mass of Water Crowfoot growing in this extremely pure chalk filtered water was the normal **Ranunculus penicillatus** looking 'different' in the confined space and lacking the stream current that normally pulls it out. A brief look in the St Faith's churchyard revealed both **Grey Field Speedwell (*Veronica polita*)** and **Thyme-leaved Speedwell (*V. serpyllifolia*)** in flower and while still in the town centre we found **Scarlet Pimpernel** in flower.

Next we set out south beside the Langbrook Stream stopping where we crossed the road into Langstone Technology Park for a look round the edges of the carpark where a mass of close mown Storks Bill in the grass was determined to be **Musk Storksbill** (something that I have in the past suspected of being in the area but not had the confidence to name in its mown state beside the main road to Hayling). Another addition to my local knowledge came when John and Eric started muttering about **Stellaria pallida (Lesser Chickweed)** which I had not realised could be found in the Havant area.

Continuing south we found nothing of special interest until we came to the **female Butterbur site** where the plants were at their best and John took the photos below.

John Norton's photo of part of the Female Butterbur site by the Langbrook Stream

John Norton's close-up of female Butterbur flowers

On the South Moors I came on my first **Creeping Buttercup** flowers for the year and in Mill Lane we looked at the locally unique patch of **Rustyback Fern** growing on the wall of the West Mill garden and then at the **Hairy Garlic** plant growing on the north side of the lane not far west of the road leading to Harbourside beside which (on the south side) was a colony of Early Dog and Sweet Violets which were new to me. Also here I thought I had found my first **Prickly (Rough) Sowthistle** flowers of the year until the experts pointed out that neither the prickliness of the leaves nor the crowding of the flowers into compact heads indicate Prickly rather than Smooth Sowthistle - the only feature to be used in separating the species is the shape of the auricles (ignoring any spikes growing

from them) - you can only name the plant as Prickly if the auricle 'blades' are rounded and pressed to the stem so these plants with pointed auricles were **Smooth Sowthistles**.

Passing the Royal Oak pub on our way to have a look at the Little Egret nests John and Eric spent some time debating the identity of a grass growing from a crack in the stonework of the paving but concluded it was nothing rare.

Reaching the Billy Trail we did not head straight home but took a round about route via Southbrook Road where John enjoyed comparing the roadside verge grasses, mosses and lichens with those found in Gosport. Eventually crossing the A27 by the Langstone Roundabout footbridge we looked down on the first **Honesty (Lunaria annua)** flowers of the year by the roadside.

On Apr 6 a short local walk found the first **Horse Chestnut flowers** open and a selfsown Red Currant in flower.

Nothing more until today (Apr 12) when garden Lilac flowers started to open and I found **Field Madder** in flower for the first time as I headed towards the Brookfield hotel in Emsworth where I had a look at the mass of **Neapolitan Garlic** which Brian Fellows had found back on Mar 30 (see his diary entry for Mar 30 at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> which has a much better photo of the flower head than mine though my spelling of Neapolitan agrees more with that in the flower books!)

Neapolitan Garlic site outside the garden hedge and alongside the pavement of the busy A259

Neapolitan Garlic flowerhead (for a clear photo see Brian Fellows' website) Continuing to the Thorney Little Deeps I saw the Swan nest on a very small island (will the eggs roll off into the water?) and heard Meadow Pipit song from the Eames Farm fields before seeing 14 Shelduck around the Great Deeps.

Coming home via Brook Meadow and Horndean Road, then Southleigh Road, I found lots of **Garlic Mustard** in flower as I approached Southleigh Farm but did not find the expected Crosswort flowers among the Greater Stitchwort near Locks Farm. Back in Denvilles I had a bonus while coming along Fourth Avenue where I noticed a young '**Pocket Handkerchief** or **Dove (Davidia involuocrata)** tree flowering in a garden to make up for the loss of the old tree in Shawfield Road (off Wade Court Road) which used to be my only site for this unusual species

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 2 - 8 (WEEK 14 OF 2012)**

Those who share my interest in the broader aspects of wildlife and the quirks of their fellow enthusiasts may be as amused as I was to see a couple of blogs to which Cliff Dean drew my attention during this week. Have a look at

<http://bandwellfumblefinch.blogspot.co.uk/> and <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/04/03/moth-news/>

## **BIRDS**

**Divers:** A couple of **Red-throated** were still to be seen heading east at Selsey on Apr 6 and 124 had been seen passing Cap de la Hague in Normandie on Apr 2.

Single **Black-throated** were reported daily through the week with the last seen in Jersey on Apr 5 after others had been seen at Christchurch, Lymington and Bexhill on the preceding three days (maybe all sightings of the same bird heading slowly east). Only one report of **Great Northern** this week - 9 seen at Selsey on Apr 6

**Grebes:** Very few of the wintering birds still here - one **Red-Necked** hanging on in Portland Harbour until at least Apr 5 and one **Slavonian** off Titchfield Haven on Apr 1

**Manx Shearwater:** None had been seen in the Channel until Mar 19 but by Mar 31 there were 41 off Prawle in Devon and on Apr 4 Portland reported 60

**Bittern:** Booming now heard regularly at Dungeness RSPB and a 'beginner' can sometimes be heard at Rye Harbour (Castle Water)

**Little Egret:** 18 occupied nests could be seen at Langstone Pond on Apr 2

**Purple Heron:** One was still to be seen at Budleigh Salterton in Devon on Apr 4 and a group of 3 had been at a Netherlands site on Apr 3

**White Stork:** One seen attacking a Red Kite somewhere in Sussex on Apr 3

**Glossy Ibis:** Two have been at Radipole (Weymouth) since Feb 29 and were still there on Apr 5. Others have been seen this week in Essex and as far north as the Western Isles of Scotland with others in Cleveland and Ireland (Co Cork)

**Brent Goose:** 138 were still passing Splash Point at Seaford on Apr 5 but very few are now left with us still intending to fly east. Typical of those that are left is one which flew inland to the Ardingly reservoir on Apr 4 - lost and lonely.

**Egyptian Geese:** When Birds of Hampshire was written in 1992 this species was classed as 'a very scarce visitor' with a very small colony established in Berkshire and a bigger one in Norfolk. Last October 174 of these geese were seen on the Hampshire/Berkshire border and this year there were 10 together at the Blashford Lakes in January with groups of half a dozen seen in Sussex (Petworth) and Dorset during February. By the end of March I already had 22 reports of the species from Hants, Dorset and Sussex and on Apr 1 two birds (maybe a pair seeking a breeding site?) flew south low over the Gipsies Plain at Rowlands Castle.

**Shelduck:** As the winter coastal flocks break up one or two pairs usually appear on the Budds Farm pools at Havant and try to breed there. This year there were 9 birds there on Apr 2 and it will be interesting to see how many stay there. Few find undisturbed breeding sites along the harbour shores and the majority of those that attempt to breed in south east Hants nowadays seem to do so at places five or more miles inland where the parents may find a safe site (perhaps under a fallen tree) but which gives that ducklings a five mile plus walk back to the harbours (crossing busy roads and a railway) before they can find the food they need.

**Tufted Duck:** On Apr 1 the number at the Blashford Lakes was given as 595 (maybe prior to a mass passage flight to breeding sites?) and on Apr 5 a pair had appeared on Langstone Mill Pond where they are not normally seen.

**Honey Buzzard:** The first and so far only report of one that I have seen came from Laurence Holloway seen over his Aldwick (Bognor) home on Apr 3 and until some other reports come in I will wonder if the bird was mis-identified

**Pallid Harrier:** Another 'first and only' report for the year was of a male over Slimbridge, also on Apr 3

**Osprey:** 32 reports so far this year with the first over Weir Wood reservoir in Sussex on Mar 9. No others until one reached the Devon coast on Mar 21 after which reports came in almost daily with one being seen on Mar 25 heading north over the Fishery Lake (south east Hayling) and probably about to overfly Thorney Island. On Apr 4 one was seen following the Hamble River north over Sarisbury Green

**Merlin:** The only report for this week is of a late bird heading north over Portland on Apr 4

**Hobby:** As with Osprey the first report was on Mar 9 from the New Milton area of Hampshire with no more sightings until March 23. April 4 brought the tally of reports up to 12 with separate sightings at Thurlstone Bay in Devon and Falmouth in Cornwall after one had been in the New Forest on Apr 3

**Crane:** The 'off course' bird that had been seen near Exeter in Devon on Apr 1 was seen again there on Apr 2

**Purple Sandpiper:** Just two April reports - on Apr 1 Christchurch Harbour had 22 and on Apr 6 Southsea Castle had 7

**Whimbrel:** Passage now warming up with eight reports this week including a flock of 12 seen in Belgium on Apr 5 (Dungeness had 4 on Apr 3)

**Spotted Redshank:** Still 8 on the Lymington Marshes on Mar 31 and 2 there on Apr 4

**Common Sandpiper:** No indication of migrant arrivals yet - the only April reports are of singles at the Arlington Reservoir in Sussex on Apr 2 and the Lower Test Marshes on Apr 5

**Turnstone:** Reports of 45 in Southampton Water (Weston shore) on Apr 1, 20+ on the Broadmarsh Shore at Havant on Apr 2 and 150+ at Bexhill on Apr 4 indicate a bunching up and easterly passage of these birds

**Pomarine Skua:** One passing Dungeness on Apr 1 was noted as early though there had been 21 previous reports (mainly from Europe) spaced out since Jan 1 (when one was at Selsey)

**Common Tern:** The first migrant was seen at the Longham Lakes (Bournemouth area of Dorset) on Mar 17 but we had to wait until Mar 25 for a more substantial arrival with 2 seen at Portland and 4 at a Netherlands site where the number increased to 24 on Mar 27. Five were seen at Dungeness on Mar 29 when one was at Ivy Lake in Chichester followed by one at Fleet Pond in north Hampshire on Mar 30. Latest arrival was one at Southsea Castle on Apr 6

**Cuckoo:** I am aware of 17 reports since the first was seen at Weymouth on Mar 17 - so far the nearest to Havant has been one at Ella Nore (near West Wittering) on Apr 5

**Short-eared Owl:** What may be the last of the many which have wintered in the south were seen this week. One passing through after wintering on the continent was seen at Sandy Point on Hayling on Apr 3 while the last that I know of were seen on Apr 4 at Pagham Harbour and Waltham Brooks near Pulborough.

**Common Swift:** Following the sighting of one over Portland on Mar 29 another has been seen over the Netherlands on Apr 2

**Bee Eater:** The first for the year in the British Isles was in Yorkshire on Apr 2

**Hoopoe:** The 24th report for this year came from Cliddesden near Basingstoke on Apr 1 followed by what seem to be reports of four different birds in Devon and Cornwall this week

**House Martin:** I have now seen at least 24 reports of these including sightings this week of 10 over Eastleigh sewage farm on Apr 5

**Yellow Wagtail:** Just three reports this week, all from Kent. On Apr 3 one was at the Oare Marshes (Faversham) and three were at Dungeness, and on Apr 4 one was in the Stour Valley (first for the year was near Arundel on Mar 11)

**Nightingale:** Two had been reported at Calshot (mouth of Southampton Water) on Feb 7 but I suspect this was based on mis-identified song - interestingly one was reported again in that same area as singing on Apr 3 when another report came from the Kent Stour valley (the accepted earliest Hampshire record was on Apr 3 in 1975)

**Fieldfare:** On Apr 1 a German site reported 2052 heading north and a small party of 96 were on Gander Down near Winchester on Mar 31 but this week 3 seen on Apr 5 near Fawley power station on Southampton Water was the biggest flock.

**Redwing:** Just 7 at Portland on Apr 3 (and 350 in the Netherlands on Apr 4)

**Grasshopper Warbler:** First for the year was in Dorset (Winspit) on Mar 28 followed by three more individuals in Dorset and then one near New Milton in Hants on Apr 5

**Sedge Warbler:** The first was at Rye Harbour on Mar 27 with 11 others in Kent, Sussex, Isle of Wight and Dorset before the first in Hants (Milton Common in Portsmouth) on Apr 4

**Reed Warbler:** So far the only report I am aware of was of one at Radipole (Weymouth) on Apr 2

**Common Whitethroat:** Lee Evans was aware that some had arrived by Mar 24 but the only report I know of from a south coast site was of one at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 2

**Garden Warbler:** Four reports so far - first was at Warsash Common on Mar 29 with another not far away in the Fareham area on Mar 30. Apr 1 brought one to Dorset and on Apr 4 one was singing in Sussex at the Arundel Wildfowl reserve.

**Iberian Chiffchaff:** A good report from Hartley Witney in north Hants on Apr 6 - still there at dawn on Apr 7

**Pied Flycatcher:** The first was a female in Devon on Mar 28 followed by at least four at Portland on Mar 31. On Apr 7 two were seen in Hampshire - one at Farlington Marshes and another near the Eastleigh sewage works.

**Marsh Tit:** First report of one singing came from the Botley Woods near Fareham on Apr 2

**Willow Tit:** A photograph of one probably taken near the Hookheath Nature Reserve (north foot of Portsdown) on Apr 1 appeared that day on Brian Fellows website ( <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) and on Apr 3 two birds were in the Whitchurch area by the A34 north of Winchester

**Linnet:** Unlike other passerines which have mostly ceased to live in large winter flocks and have changed to breeding mode Linnets are still roaming the country in flocks with 221 at Sandwich Bay on Mar 29 and 325 at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 30. On Apr 5 a flock of 232 was still to be seen but up in Yorkshire. Here on the south coast they are by now generally on territory.

**Twite:** A group of five were still to be seen in the Thanet area of Kent on Apr 4

**Hawfinch:** The small flock which has been at Eastleigh Lakes since Feb 24 still had at least 6 birds on Apr 5 though they have not been reported since then

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Large Tortoiseshell:** Apr 2 brought a third sighting at Walters Copse, Newtown on the Isle of Wight (previous sightings there on Mar 27 and Mar 30) which is somewhat odd for a butterfly famed for its tendency to roam - could it suggest that these three are different individuals but all the offspring of a migrant arriving here last year which are now emerging over a short period before flying off into oblivion (maybe the insect seen in Havant on Mar 30 was the one which had emerged on the Isle of Wight on Mar 27). To add weight to this theory that we are now seeing the offspring of last year's migrants there have also been two sightings in the Scillies on Mar 10 and Apr 1.

**Wall Brown:** One was seen on the East Sussex Downs on Apr 2, around a month before expected

### **Species reported this week:**

Grizzled Skipper, Brimstone, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Large Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Wall Brown

### **Other Insects:**

**Spiders:** See Graeme Lyons blog ( <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/my-housemate-simoni.html> ) to learn that the Daddy-long-legs (*Pholcus phalangioides*) spider, which can be found somewhere in most houses, has a smaller transatlantic cousin which has arrived in this country with wine imported from the USA

## **PLANTS**

**Field Horsetails:** Just starting to push up - first seen in Emsworth on Apr 1

**Creeping Buttercup:** First flowers seen on the Langstone South Moors on Apr 5

**Bulbous Buttercup:** First flowers seen in Emsworth on Apr 3

**Yellow Corydalis:** First flowers of the spring seen in Havant on Apr 2

**Hedge Mustard:** This was still flowering in early January and on Apr 2 I found fresh spring flowers

**Honesty (*Lunaria annua*):** Fresh flowers at several places in Havant from Apr 5

**Herb Robert:** Spring flowering first seen in Emsworth on Apr 1

**Red Clover:** First flowers seen since Feb 1 were out on Portsdown Hill on Apr 4

**Spring Vetch:** I could not find this when I was last on the Hayling sand dunes but Graeme Lyons found it flowering in East Anglia on Apr 1

**Hawthorn:** The first fully open flowers for this year were out on Apr 2 in the Havant East Street carpark on the old rail track

**Red Currant:** Flowers out on a self sown plant in the Havant cemetery on Apr 6

**Pellitory of the Wall:** First new spring flowers seen at Bidbury Mead in Bedhampton (Havant) on Apr 2

**Field Maple:** Flowering in the Warblington area on Apr 2

**Norway Maple:** First flowers seen on Mar 31 in the Chalton area north of Rowlands Castle

**Horse Chestnut:** First open flowers seen at the Havant Cemetery on Apr 6

**Silver Birch:** Catkins open at Bidbury Mead, Bedhampton on Apr 2

**Ash:** Flowers first noted in Havant on Apr 2. On Apr 5 I noted a male and female tree growing together on the roundabout outside Bosmere School at the end of South Street in Havant

**Basford Willow (*Salix alba var vitellina* x *Salix*):** Flowering at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Apr 2

**Hemlock:** First flowers seen on the Marina seawall at Emsworth on Apr 5

**Scarlet Pimpernell:** First flowers for the year seen on Apr 5

**Ivy-leaved Toadflax:** First flowers since January seen on Apr 5

**Thyme-leaved Speedwell:** One plant starting to flower in Havant on Apr 5

**Grey Field Speedwell:** First flowers since January seen in Havant on Apr 5

**Red Valerian:** Fresh spring flowers opening on Apr 5

**Corn Salad (*Valerianella*) species:** Starting to flower in Emsworth on Apr 1 and in Havant on Apr 4. Although the commonest species used to be *V. locusta* I am told by Eric Clement that *V. carinata* is now the commonest species in south Hampshire so it is worth checking the fruit when that is available. *Carinata* fruits as wide as they are thick and much longer than they are wide and have a deep groove. *Locusta* fruits are twice as thick as wide and scarcely longer than thick with only a shallow groove.

**Moshachatel:** First flowers found in the Chalton area north of Rowlands Castle on Mar 31

**Smooth Sow Thistle:** First flowers seen on Apr 5 and I am again indebted to Eric Clement for correcting my way of distinguishing Smooth from Prickly - the only

factor to use is the shape of the auricles (are they pointed or rounded ignoring and backward pointing teeth on the auricles which may make them look pointed)

**Meadow Foxtail grass:** This had started to flower in Emsworth on Apr 3

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Otter:** This week Devon Birding News has an account of how a birder found the corpse of an Otter which had seemingly been killed by dogs (presumably of the sort uncontrolled by dog walkers, not Otter Hounds) and subsequent entries tell you how to report any such incidents to the Environment Agency

**Grass Snake:** Only three reports of these that I have seen this year (all since mid March) compared to more than 20 reports of Adders (starting on Jan 8). Not sure what this tells us ...

**Bullhead breeding:** The Brook Meadow conservation group at Emsworth were working on Apr 1 and an old cider can on the bottom of the River Ems looked as if it should be removed but when a hand reached down to retrieve it a tiny fish dashed out of the open end of the can and when the can was out of the water it was seen to have a pile of orangey-yellow eggs in an indentation at the other end of the can. See the entry for Apr 4 in Brian Fellows website ( <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) which has the original photo of the can plus my input suggesting that the fish species was a Bullhead (aka Miller's Thumb) and pointing people to a video of the 'nesting habits' of this species including a shot of eggs which look very similar to those found in the can (video at <http://www.arkive.org/bullhead/cottus-gobio/video-09.html> )

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 2 - 8 (WEEK 14 OF 2012)**

### **Mon 2 Apr**

#### **6 Orange Tips, 18 Egret Nests and the first Hawthorn flowers**

I had not expected another full day of sunshine and light wind but managed to make the most of it with one outing to Budds Farm and Broadmarsh in the morning and another to Langstone Pond in the late afternoon.

Heading down Southmoor Lane on my bike in the morning I found **Norway Maples** opening their bright yellow blossom (which had been first reported by the Havant Wildlife Group last Saturday) and arriving at the Budds Farm viewpoint I was greeted by the **first of six male Orange Tip butterflies** that I was to see before I got home. On the water my first impression was that the winter ducks had been replaced by Black-headed Gulls which were everywhere and almost as noisy as the crowd at the Oysterbeds - in fact there were still plenty of **Tufted Duck, Mallard and Gadwall with a nesting Swan, a pair of about to nest Canada Geese and 9 Shelduck around the site plus a vocal Cetti's Warbler** hidden in the vegetation.

Moving down onto the harbour shore and heading for Broadmarsh I had difficulty in spotting any **Brent** (though I counted 30 before I left) but I did hear **Turnstones** and spotted a couple of dozen of them on the mud by the sewage outfall with a few Oystercatchers and Redshank. A flurry of activity at the seaward end of the

outfall caught my attention as what I think was a **female Goosander** took off and flew out into the harbour - I cannot swear it was a Goosander but the only colours I could see as it flew away from me were the white wing patches, an orange head with the rest of the plumage being a uniform light grey (I'm pretty sure I would have seen some darker and more varied plumage had the bird been the expected Merganser).

Beside the Brockhampton stream **Grey Poplars** were dangling fresh catkins and **Ash trees** were covered in their fuzzy flower structures but there was nothing else new in the Broadmarsh area other than a couple of Bee Flies and a passing Comma.

Heading north over the A27 I continued over the railway to Bidbury Mead where there were as yet no flowers on the Greater Celandines but one plant of the **Pellitory of the Wall** had its first flowers, as did one of **Hedge Mustard** and a **Silver Birch** was covered with fully open catkins.

Coming back into Havant via the Waterworks (where the twenty year old blot on the landscape of their private rubble dump mountain is at last being covered with soil, hopefully soon to be grassed over) I lamented the loss of Jeram's farm for which there is a new planning application (the farmhouse and yard were the first to be built over at the junction of Brockhampton Lane and Ranelagh Road, then houses replaced the meadow along the north side of that road and now I see that the allotments on the south side (and probably the pony fields south of them) are to become - subject to plan approval - a new mini-village.

This evening's outing took me down the Billy Trail (past a couple of flowering **Cow Parsley plants**) to Langstone village for a look at the pond where the nests, taking some time to build as the Egrets bring in just one stick at a time, are now much easier to see. I was surprised to count, in the island trees above the sitting Swan, a total of **18 occupied Egret nests**.

Heading east along the shore to Pook Lane a scan of the shore gave me an unexpected sight of perhaps **30 Knot** sedately feeding among what I think were **Bar-tailed Godwits** with only one Shelduck and two Teal.

Coming home along the Pook Lane 'twitchel' path more Shining Cranesbill flowers were out and back at the East Street/Billy line carpark I found the very **first fully open Hawthorn flowers**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 26 - APR 1 (WEEK 13 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** There were still 37 **Red-throated** passing Dungeness on Mar 30 with singles of **Black-throated** seen off the Isle of Wight and Splash Point at Seaford during the week with 20 passing Cap Gris-Nez on Mar 31. The biggest count of **Great Northern** was 7 at Selsey Bill on Mar 27

**Grebes:** 9 **Red-necked** were off a Netherlands site on Mar 30 (possibly as many as 22 if we add the reports from 5 Netherlands sites for that day). Two **Slavonian**

were in Hayling Bay on Mar 23 and 25 and one was still off Titchfield Haven on Mar 31. One **Black-necked** in breeding plumage was still at Eastbourne on Mar 26 but that was the only report from southern England

**Bittern:** Still reported from five south England sites this week with one at Rye Harbour attempting to boom on Mar 24

**Night Heron:** Four are probably still present in west Cornwall where the first was seen near St Just on Mar 12 but the party of four that arrived in north Devon on Mar 13 have not been reported since Mar 20.

**Cattle Egret:** The Kingston Maurward (Dorset) bird has not been reported since Mar 18. On Mar 24 Lee Evans reported one in Berkshire and another in Gloucestershire and on Mar 27 one was seen in the Exe estuary

**Little Egret:** On Mar 20 two individuals turned up at new inland sites (Weir Wood near Crowborough and Gatwick airport). By Mar 29 a minimum of 8 nests could be seen at the Langstone Pond site and two of the 27 birds present (with the tide out) were in trees on the mainland suggesting that all nest sites on the island were now taken.

**Great White Egret:** The group of six that have been at a Somerset Levels site since at least Feb 29 were still there on Mar 24

**Purple Heron:** First reports of these for the year come from the Netherlands and Belgium on Mar 26, 27 and 28

**Spoonbill:** On Mar 28 one arrived in Pagham Harbour and was still there on Mar 31 when two others turned up at the Farlington Marshes deeps. Others have been moving through the wider Havant area this week - four flew north east over Titchfield Haven on Mar 21, one was in the Warsash/Hook area on Mar 22 when three more flew east along the west Sussex coast and one was also going east off Hastings on Mar 24

**Mute Swan:** These are at last starting to nest - on Mar 28 an inexperienced pair were building a nest in the Emsworth Slipper Mill pool and on Mar 29 the female of the long established Langstone Pond pair was sitting.

**Whitefront Goose:** On Mar 27 a flock of 1680 birds was seen at a German site, presumably preparing to fly north, and on Mar 28 there may have been 2165 birds in that area

**Brent Goose:** Counts of departing birds were 919 on Mar 28, 770 on Mar 29 and 840 on Mar 30 but not all of these geese follow the coast - on Mar 28 a flock of 50 flew high north east over Chichester

**Mandarin duck:** Pairs of these tree breeding ducks are now searching for nest sites in old trees usually close to water and on Mar 24 a male was seen in a tree near the River Wallington at the north foot of Portsdown. A pair seen on that day

in the Lepe country park near the mouth of Southampton Water and on Mar 27 a pair was seen at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood

**Green-winged Teal:** The male which appears to be paired with a Common Teal was still in the Farlington Marshes area, seen at the 'Deeps' on Mar 30

**Mallard:** A female was seen with 16 tiny ducklings at a Devon site on Mar 27

**Garganey:** 15 reports this week including a pair on the Farlington Marshes 'Deeps' on Mar 30

**Black Kite:** The first report of one in southern England that I am aware of came from the London area on Mar 30

**Red Kite:** One report (out of the many seen daily everywhere) which cannot be ignored came from the Bedhampton area of Havant on Mar 29. In the air above Peter Raby's home were **one Red Kite, 2 Hobbies, 3 Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk were all interacting**. As if this was not enough there was another bird which hit the national headlines on the RBA website - an **Alpine Swift**. These birds were reported just after midday when I was heading home from a walk round the Warblington Farm area and had been attracted to look up on hearing a Buzzard call to see a group of birds interacting high over the distant Northney marina area - the distance and haze looking into the sun made it impossible to see accurately what was going on but I am certain of three Buzzards and one falcon stooping at them - I guessed it was a Peregrine but it could well have been a Hobby (the birds were slowly drifting towards Bedhampton).

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** There was one confident report of the Arun valley bird as late as Mar 29

**Osprey:** 15 reports this week with the majority coming from Dorset, Devon and Cornwall but one flew north over south Hayling on Mar 25 and one went north over the Blashford Lakes on Mar 29

**Hobby:** After isolated reports on Mar 9 and 23 there were two reports on Mar 28 from Dorset and Sussex, two on Mar 29 from Cornwall and Hampshire (the Bedhampton birds) and two more from Hampshire on Mar 31 (Romsey and Ringwood areas)

**Baillon's Crake:** One in Ireland on Mar 24 was a first for the year in the British Isles and the more unusual for being seen in spring rather than autumn

**Coot:** The first nest was in use at Emsworth on Mar 25

**Black-winged Stilt:** One in Ireland (Co Wexford) on Mar 30

**Stone Curlew:** Two more migrant arrivals this week - on Mar 23 one flew north over the Worthing area, heard calling at 21:25, and on Mar 24 one was seen on the ground at Christchurch Harbour in the early morning

**Little Ringed Plover:** 18 reports this week including Pagham Harbour and Pulborough Brooks

**Kentish Plover:** A female at Slapton Ley in south Devon on Mar 30

**Lapwing:** During a walk round Farlington Marshes on Mar 27 I saw at least 8 birds on territory though only three were displaying.

**Purple Sandpiper:** 16 were seen at Southsea Castle on Mar 30

**Ruff:** 11 reports this week including one at Farlington Marshes on Mar 31

**Woodcock:** Roding males on the heathland south of Fleet were trying to drive away the competition on Mar 25 and a late departing migrant was put up from a field of Cauliflowers in north Kent on Mar 27

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** The start of their spring passage was marked by a group of five flying east past Splash Point at Seaford on Mar 25

**Whimbrel:** Early migrants flew past Splash Point on Mar 17 and on Mar 28 the first report to mention their 'teetering' call came from the Kent Stout Valley on Mar 28

**Little Gull:** Numbers passing along the south coast are now increasing with 7 seen at Selsey Bill on Mar 23 and 10 at Dungeness on Mar 28. 2481 were at a Netherlands site on Mar 27 as they head towards the Baltic and Siberia to breed

**Iceland Gull:** The Broadmarsh area bird was still in Langstone Harbour on Mar 31 but one seen at Winchester sewage works on Mar 28 was presumably on its way north

**Common Tern:** These have been arriving since Mar 17 and 8 reports this week included 25 on the French coast on Mar 28, 5 at Dungeness on Mar 29 when one was at Chichester Ivy Lake. On Mar 30 one was inland at Fleet Pond

**Little Tern:** Just two reports both from the Netherlands (3 seen on Mar 26 and 1 on Mar 30)

**Cuckoo:** The first was reported from the Weymouth area of Dorset on Mar 17, a couple (maybe the same bird) were in the Eastbourne area on Mar 20, and a more regular string of reports began on Mar 24 when one was in Dorset and another in the New Forest. Mar 26 saw one on the Sussex Downs and Mar 27 brought two reports, maybe of the same bird, in the Worthing area. The latest news is of one at Bere Regis in Dorset on Mar 29

**Scops Owl:** One seen on the Scillies (St Mary's) on Mar 25 and again on Mar 26

**Eagle Owl:** One seen on the roof of a house in the Waterlooville area by day on Mar 29 was clearly used to humans, unlike the wild one seen in northern Norway

on Mar 22 by two of the Three Amigos (see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/03/30/royalty-eagle-owls-and-velvet-scoters-bergen-norway/> ) on their final trip on HMS Liverpool which was back in Portsmouth for its decommissioning ceremony before I saw this post. I rather suspect that the Waterlooville bird had been seen on Mar 27 on a building close to Winchester Rail Station when it was reported as a 'Long-eared Owl'.

**Short-eared Owl:** Still several around this week but no reports since Mar 29 when two were in the Pagham Harbour area a day after two were seen at Farlington Marshes

**Common Swift:** One was over Portland on Mar 29

**Alpine Swift:** One had been reported at The Lizard in Cornwall on Mar 18 and this week one was over Havant on Mar 29 before one was reported over Lundy on Mar 30

**Hoopoe:** 17 reports between Mar 24 and 29 came mainly from Cornwall but there were sightings on the Isle of Wight and at Weymouth. On Mar 28 RBA News gave a total of 11 birds in the UK

**House Martin:** Swallows and Sand Martins are now being seen regularly and widely but House Martins are still scarce with a maximum 'flock' of 5 in the Romsey area on Mar 31

**Tree Pipit:** The first arrival that I am aware of was one in the Scillies on Mar 25 with five more seen in various Dorset sites by Mar 30 when two more were on the Lymington shore

**Meadow Pipit:** Thousands are currently moving north over southern England each day and they have been heard singing since Mar 27 at Farlington Marshes and Pulborough

**Yellow Wagtail:** Just five reports so far covering sites in Sussex, Kent, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (max count only 4)

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** Just one seen in Ireland (Co Cork) on Mar 26

**Black Redstart:** Just six new reports this week but including one at the Budds Farm site in Havant on Mar 31

**Common Redstart:** First of the year arrived at Portland on Mar 28 followed by five more sightings in Dorset and one at Selsey Bill this week

**Ring Ouzel:** 16 new reports this week including one on Mar 31 at the north foot of Portsdown (Purbrook Heath area)

**Fieldfare:** Still heading north with a flock of 146 near Ropley in east Hampshire on Mar 27 and 135 in the Timsbury area of the Test valley on Mar 29

**Redwing:** Still moving north with 31 at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 30

**Grasshopper Warbler:** Just one report so far of a bird heard singing in the Dorset Winspit valley on Mar 28

**Sedge Warbler:** First arrival was singing at Rye Harbour on Mar 27 followed by reports from Kent, Dorset and the Isle of Wight (but not Hampshire so far)

**Common Whitethroat:** Mentioned as having arrived in Lee Evans bulletin on Mar 24 but I still have not seen any dates or sites on the south coast

**Garden Warbler:** I have only seen two reports, both in Hampshire. On Mar 29 one was heard and seen on Warsash Common and on Mar 30 one was heard singing in competition (and contrast) to a Blackcap somewhere in Fareham

**Willow Warbler:** Portland reported the first big arrival (at least 100) on Mar 29 and on Mar 30 one was singing in trees bordering the Hayling Billy trail in Havant where it passes Lower Grove Road (Christchurch Harbour had 220 arrive that morning). Regular full song started on Mar 25

**Firecrest:** Of local interest Martin Hampton reported on Mar 27 that a Firecrest had been singing for the past 10 days in trees bordering the Hayling Billy trail where it passes his house in Lower Grove Road and on Mar 30 he told us it was still to be heard there

**Pied Flycatcher:** First arrival ( a female) was reported on Mar 28 from the Exe estuary and on Mar 31 Portland had 4 arrivals

**Long-tailed Tit:** First report of nest building came from south Devon on Mar 17 with another from the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Mar 18 followed by a photo of a nest at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Mar 29

**Great Grey Shrike:** A bird on Ibsley Common near Ringwood was reported to be singing on Mar 24 and on looking up the habits of this species in my old P.A.D. Hollom 'Handbook' I read that its harsh alarm note .. 'may become a Magpie-like chatter'. Searching on the internet I found a blog describing song heard in Northumberland last year - there it is described as follows .. 'I never though I would hear a Shrike sing and it sounded nothing like I had imagined. First it sounded slightly like a warbler but kept adding mimicry and sounded like a wader then a bird of prey.' A longer verbal description can be found in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Grey\\_Shrike](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Grey_Shrike)

**Woodchat Shrike:** First of the year was in Ireland (Co Waterford) on Mar 24

**Jay:** One at Waltham Brooks (Pulborough) was also described as 'singing' on Mar 28

**Serin:** One which arrived on the Scillies on Mar 22 was heard singing there on Mar 25

**Hawfinch:** The saga of the Hawfinches at Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park continues with up to 5 still there on Mar 30. They were first seen there on Feb 24 and the number has varied up to a max of 12 on Mar 16 and 17

**Little Bunting:** One was caught and ringed at Thurlestone Bay in south Devon on Mar 19 and a second bird was also caught there on Mar 28

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Notable sightings this week:**

**Grizzled Skipper:** First of year at Shoreham Mill Hill on Mar 24 followed by one at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Mar 27 when three more were found at Rake Bottom on Butser Hill

**Clouded Yellow:** One nectaring on Groundsel at Portland on Mar 29. As these have at least one permanent colony in Bournemouth and are also known to hibernate in the south of England it is not possible to say if this was a migrant, an emerging resident or even one which had managed to hibernate.

**Green Hairstreak:** First of the year seen at Beacon Hill, Exton in the Meon Valley on Mar 29 with a second sighting at Magdalen Hill Down next day.

**Small Copper:** Although the first sighting was on Mar 21 it was not included in last weeks summary. Mar 21 brought a report of one in the New Forest which I at first thought was very early but on checking found that one had been found at Gosport in 2009 as early as Mar 5. This years first has been followed by a 'possible' sighting on Butser Hill on Mar 27 and a definite sighting near Lymington on Mar 28

**Small Blue:** Seen and photographed on the Isle of Wight on Mar 30

**Painted Lady:** A 'tatty' specimen seen on Mar 21 in the Rother Woods north of Hastings and one was seen at Prawle on the south Devon coast on Mar 25 - both present the same problem of origin as the Clouded Yellow

**Large Tortoiseshell:** The identity of one seen in Havant by Brian Fellows on Mar 30 has been confirmed by the presence of extra black patches at the rear of each forewing (unique to Large Tortoiseshell) as well as by the large size which immediately made Brian aware this was not a Small Tortoiseshell (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> entry for Mar 31 for a photo). The possibility that there has been a small arrival of these butterflies as migrants is suggested by two further sightings at Newtown on the Isle of Wight - one was seen by Peter Hunt on Mar 27, and when Mike Gibbons came over to the Island to see it on Mar 30 he believes that he saw a different

individual from that photographed on Mar 27. Yet another report, from the West Wellow area near Romsey on Mar 29, is more dubious as the list of butterflies in the reporter's garden included a Common Blue which must have been a Holly Blue and this throws some doubt on the reporter's ability to separate Large from Small Tortoiseshell. Further indications of migrant arrivals may be seen in moth reports of **Silver Y** and **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** (see moths below) but these are not proven.

**Camberwell Beauty:** The Mar 28 entry on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website has a photo of a Camberwell Beauty taken on Mar 22 at the Marley Common National Trust site (close to Fernhurst and Blackdown Hill) by the NT warden. This is more likely to be an escape or release of a locally bred individual rather than a migrant, but who knows?

### **Species reported this week:**

Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Small Blue, Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Large Tortoiseshell, Camberwell Beauty, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood

**Hummingbird Hawkmoth sightings** New sightings on Mar 22 in the Bitterne area of Southampton; on Mar 23 in the Totton area near Southampton, nectaring at Daffodils; on Mar 27 at Folkestone, nectaring at Flowering Currant; and on Mar 29 another seen at Folkestone

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Bee Flies:** Widespread reports of the common Bee Fly plus sightings of **Dotted Bee Fly** at Woods Mill (Henfield) on Mar 30 and at Rye Harbour on Mar 24.

**Oak Gall Wasp (*Biorhiza pallida*):** First Oak Apples seen on Warblington Farm on Mar 29 - see my diary page for an account of the complex life cycle of the gall wasps which create them

**Common Wasp:** Queens are now emerging to set up new colonies - please don't kill them as they are very unlikely to harm you and their offspring do a lot of important pest control work

**Hairy footed flower bee (*Anthophora plumipes*):** These are now active and have been reported on two websites with illustrative photos that seem to show different insects. Graeme Lyons photos at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/stalker.html> show an insect with a long downward pointing proboscis looking as rigid as that of a Bee Fly whereas the photos on the BWARS website ( [http://www.bwars.com/Anthophora\\_plumipes.htm](http://www.bwars.com/Anthophora_plumipes.htm) ) pointed to by Brian Banks entry on the RX website (see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/03/25/hairy-footed-flower-bee/> ) show no sign of a proboscis. A search through several sources of information on this species found no mention of the proboscis shown in Graeme's

picture though it is clear that this bee mainly visits plants with long tubular flower requiring a long 'drinking straw' to get at the nectar. I did eventually find a photo showing the proboscis (see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/23111015@N04/6830537362/> ) and it would seem that, despite the impression given by Graeme's photos that the proboscis is rigid (as in Bee Flies) it must in fact be retractable (like that of a butterfly)

**Oil beetle (*Meloe proscarabaeus*):** These get a mention as active at Durlston on Mar 21 and provide an excuse to point you to an excellent photo of the species at <http://theweekendbiologist.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/oil-beetles.html> As well as looking at the photo do read the text above it describing the life of the young larvae and how it hitches an air flight to the Bees nest in which it will grow up.

**More beetles, some extraordinary spiders and a huge millipede:** Just some of the things Graeme Lyons has been finding recently. Do visit <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> and try to find out more about the species he keeps finding

## PLANTS

**Great Horsetail:** The first signs of these were the fertile cones which had started to push up on path edges at Warblington Farm this week

**European Larch:** The first green leaves had appeared on a tree here in Havant by Mar 29 but with no sign of the Larch Roses still to come

**White mustard (*Sinapis alba*):** When on Portsdown on Mar 26 I parked in the unofficial parking area immediately west of Fort Southwick and was puzzled by a cluster of plants growing at the edge of the arable field beside the parking area. From the leaf shape I thought they might be a *Sisymbrium* species but when the specimen which I took home began to open its flowers I realised that this was **White Mustard** which might well have been grown on the field and then ploughed in as 'green manure' to increase the fertility of this chalky soil

**Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*):** I believe that this lovely spring flower is disappearing from our countryside as existing colonies are destroyed - if left more or less undisturbed it can survive but if the colony is cut down or ploughed up it has no means of reinstating itself by e.g. windborne seed. This happened to a large patch on the grass verge beside the Forestside Road running through Stansted Forest where it passes the 'Middle Lodge' close to the Avenue carpark and I have not seen any of these flowers so far this year whereas Brian Fellows has found it at Kingston near Lewes and in the Bridge Road carpark by his Emsworth home.

**Chalk Milkwort:** Durlston reports this starting to flower on Mar 30

**Shining Cranesbill:** First flowers seen at both ends of the Pook Lane footbridge over the A27 at Warblington on Mar 29

**Wood Sorrel:** A great show of flowers in the Longcopse Hill area of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Mar 30 were my first for the year

**Common Vetch:** First flowers seen on Portsdown on Mar 26

**Black Medick:** Last year's flowers had vanished by the end of January and I saw my first new flowers for this year on Portsdown on Mar 26

**Wild Cherry:** Flowering in the Longcopse area of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth on Mar 30

**Wild Plum:** Also in full flower in the Longcopse area on Mar 30

**Flowering Currant:** Now flowering at Folkestone so no doubt also to be found locally

**Elder:** At least one tree bearing open flowers at Farlington Marshes on Mar 27

**Ox-eye Daisy:** One flower fully open and many in bud on Portsdown on Mar 26

**Neapolitan Garlic:** One flowering plant found by Brian Fellows on Mar 30 beside the A259 main road through west Emsworth (in a ditch outside No 103 near the Brookfield Hotel)

**Wild Daffodil:** The usual display could be seen in the West Dean Woods north of Chichester on Mar 27

**Arum (Lords and Ladies):** Spathes started to open from Mar 29 onward

**Early Spider Orchid:** Starting to flower at Durlston on Mar 28

**Hairy Woodrush (*Luzula pilosa*):** Flowering in the West stoke area at the foot of Kingley Vale on Mar 27

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Fox:** Foxes are a regular sight in the meadow between Langstone Pond and Wade Court and normally look very healthy but an extremely mangy specimen was there on Mar 29

**Hare:** Birders looking for the Rough-legged Buzzard in the Arun Valley near Burpham this week reported many Hares in the fields

**Brook Lamprey:** A couple of these were seen in the R Itchen at Avington on Mar 24. If you are not familiar with these strange jawless fish have a look at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European\\_brook\\_lamprey](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European_brook_lamprey) At the moment they are probably busy moving stones on the river bed to create a spawning bed.

**Fish:** The first report of a shoal of **Grey Mullet** in the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth was dated Mar 25 and on that same day the Durlston website

commented on numbers of **Turbot, Brill, Plaice & Dabs** coming inshore after spawning slightly further out in the Channel

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 19 - 25 (WEEK 13 OF 2012)**

**Fri 30 Mar**

### **Rocket flowers but no Early Purple Orchids**

This morning I found that flowers had started to open on the sample of an unidentified Rocket (*Sisymbrium*) plant which I found on Portsdown last Monday (Mar 26) but the flowers did not give me the hoped for clue to the plant's id - Stace says the petals of **London Rocket** measure less than 5 mm while those of **False London Rocket** measure more than 5 mm and my ruler gave me a measurement of exactly 5mm. I do have one further clue as the petals were pale, not bright yellow and Stace says this indicates London Rocket (*S. irio*) which the Hants Flora says is extinct in the county! I took a couple of photos which may help to get to the bottom of this puzzle.

Sample of unidentified 'Rocket' plant showing structure, leaves and flowers

Newly opened flower of unidentified Rocket (*Sisymbrium*) plant

In the afternoon I paid another visit to the Early Purple Orchid site at the eastern end of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth to see if the orchids were starting to flower but found no indication of this. My first find here was a **Wild Cherry (Gean) tree in full flower** - this tree (on the south side of the hill-top thicket) may have been blown down in the 1987 Great Storm as I have only known it in this prostrate form with the trunk on the ground and the mass of flowers coming from what look like a row of separate trees which are the branches of the original.

Wild Cherry (Gean) tree lying on its side but flowering

Wild Cherry flowers

Moving on to the wet area I passed my first clump of **Wood Anemones** which most people will have seen by now and came to a large area covered with **Wood Sorrel** of which I did photograph a small section before coming to a **Wild Plum tree in full flower** (while here I saw a **Marsh Tit** for only the second time this year!)

Part of Wood Sorrel patch

Closer view of Wood Sorrel flowers

Wild Plum tree in flower

Closer view of Wild Plum flowers

In the wetland there were masses of **Primroses, Celandines, Common Dog Violets (including a patch of white ones), and some Wood Spurge** in full flower but I was surprised to find that the **Alpine Squill plants** which had been in bud when I was here on March 6 had disappeared. As to the orchids I could see fewer leaf

rosettes than expected and only one plant had a hint of things to come in a small flower spike sheath.

**Thu 29 Mar**

### **Oak Apple day at Warblington**

This morning I walked through 'new Langstone' to Langstone Pond, then east along the shore and through the fields to Nore Barn before coming home via the Selangor Ave path and over the Pook Lane footbridge.

I started down the alley off East Street to check on the 'Greater Herb Robert' (looking very healthy but no flower buds yet) and to hear a Goldcrest singing in the Holm Oaks which overhang the alley. The next alley, connecting Grove Road to Juniper Square, gave me the first green foliage on a Larch tree (no sign of Larch roses yet) and beside the path through the 'new Langstone' housing south of the A27 I found two Parsons indecently exposing themselves in their pulpits as the Arum lilies split the sheathes which had up to now concealed the Spadices.

At Langstone pond the female Swan was definitely sitting on her nest and I could see a minimum of eight Egret nests with 27 Egrets in view (two of them for the first time in trees lining the Lymbourne stream rather than those on the island which is nowadays the centre of the heronry). A dead Alder tree on the northern fringe of the pond area which has a couple of Great Spotted Woodpecker holes had a Great Tit entering, then leaving, one of the holes and the Pony field north of it had a really mangy Fox sitting out in the sunshine.

Just before reaching Pook Lane I watched my first Small Tortoiseshell taking the sun and from the new bench west of the lane I watched 15 Brent fly to feed on the Langstone shore where two Shelduck were still on the mud and five Mergansers were on the water.

In the old Warblington cemetery I noticed a big patch of flowering Slender Speedwell and by the 'church path' where it crosses the Warblington Farm central stream I passed the first Great Horsetail fertile cone pushing up (several more seen later by the Selangor Ave path). After the stream the big arable field looked very uninteresting but walking across it away from the public path I found a good example of the rayed form of Groundsel which has persisted here for many years.

Rayed form Grounsel flower

Rayed form Groundsel plant

After the first kissing gate I had a look at the lower branches of the Oak tree overhanging the (totally dry) pond on my left and saw two small reddish Oak Apples developing. Each of these apples is a nursery home to a number of Biorhiza pallida gall wasps though it may also provide a home to other insects, some of which are parasites on the gall wasps while others are known as 'inquilines' which just take advantage of the Oak Apple as a home without interacting with its rightful inhabitants (note that if too many inquilines try to share the gall they may starve the rightful occupants to death by devouring too much of the food which the gall supplies). In any one apple all the developing B. pallida wasps are either males or females which I would assume will meet and mate later

in the year when they emerge as winged insects though I cannot find a full account of the complex life cycle which involves a non-sexual as well as a sexual generation. My understanding is that the mated females then crawl down the trunk of the oak tree and somehow burrow down to the fine hair roots where they lay eggs that cause smaller galls on the roots - in due time non-sexual 'females' emerge to crawl up the oak tree and (without male interference!) lay eggs in the flower buds of the oak which develop into the Oak Apples from which the cycle started.

Entering Nore Barn I was puzzled when a large man blocked my path and stood looking at me as if he were the agent of a foreign (or perhaps extra-terrestrial) power who had been sent to arrest (or perhaps to 'liquidate') me. After a minute of silent confrontation I realised that I was looking at someone whom I had worked with at IBM before I retired in 1988 and whom I had not seen since and the silence was broken by a lengthy conversation as we walked round the woods and then up the Selangor Ave path with the result that there was a gap in my notes for this period though I do recall seeing **Speckled Wood butterflies**.

Back in the Warblington Fam area, walking along the main road, I noted that many young Hawthorn trees in the field hedges had well developed flower buds, and along the Church Lane to Pook Lane link road I watched **Jackdaws disputing nest holes with two pairs of Stock Doves** before hearing a Buzzard calling from high in the air to the south - it was too far away to see clearly what was going on but I had the impression that **three soaring Buzzards were being 'buzzed' by what may have been a Peregrine stooping on them from above**.

My last note is of the first **Shining Cranesbill flowers** of the year found at both the southern and northern end of the A27 footbridge.

Shining Cranesbill flower (almost hidden by Nettle)

**[Tue 27 Mar](#)**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

### **Meadow Pipit song and displaying Lapwings at Farlington Marshes**

This afternoon I walked round Farlington Marshes to see how the Lapwings were faring there after years of increasing Fox predation and I was glad to see that there were probably at least six, probably eight, territories to judge by birds on the ground (no more than three displaying birds seen). There were also plenty of singing Skylarks with **Meadow Pipit song** heard in two places. Disappointingly I did not come across any Wheatears or Yellow Wagtails.

Plenty of duck species including Pintail, Gadwall, Wigeon and Shoveler plus many Shelduck and Teal with one pair of Mergansers in the harbour over which I also heard **my first Sandwich Tern**. A good gull was a **Graellsii Lesser Blackback**. At least 300 Brent still present but hearteningly only two pairs of Canada Geese! One slightly unexpected bird was a single **Green Sandpiper** along the stream.

At the east entrance to the reserve **an Elder bush was covered with flower buds** and on the southern seawall another bush actually had flowers opening while back at the Broadmarsh carpark I found a big cluster of **Slender Speedwell in flower** (my first but Brian Fellows found it in Emworth a week ago on Mar 20).

Beside the cyclepath on my way back I also found **Common Vetch** in flower (first seen on Portsdown yesterday)

The *Sisymbrium* species which I found on Portsdown yesterday has not yet opened its flowers but I am now inclined towards it being *S. loeselli* which Stace calls False London Rocket but which I see is known across the Atlantic as **Small Tumbleweed** (which I rather like). I still have no real evidence for choosing a species!

**Mon 26 Mar**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Three new butterflies and a walk on Portsdown**

This morning I drove to Fort Southwick and took a walk on the south face of Portsdown between Portchester Common and the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit in glorious sunshine. Getting out of the car I was greeted by a **singing Yellowhammer and several Skylarks**, and on Portchester Common the short grass was liberally strewn with **Hairy Violets**, which were to be seen all over this section of the hill, but the interesting finds came in the last section of the walk - along the roadside from the top of the chalk pit past the two small roundabouts. Here I saw my first **Speckled Wood butterflies** of the year and added **Common Vetch, Black Medick, and 'new season' Oxeye Daises** (many in bud and one in full flower) to my year list. Back at the car, in an unofficial parking area, I found another cluster of plants which I did not recognise and so brought a sample home - I will have to wait at least a day before the flower buds open to be sure of the id but it seems to be **a Rocket (*Sisymbrium*) species** - possibly Tall Rocket which the Hants Flora shows to be found in the Portsmouth area

Back at home I was having lunch when **my first male Brimstone** flew across the lawn, and when I went outside I also found **my first Orange Tip** - later a Peacock also flew by.

Before mowing the lawn I took my camera to the Pallant carpark and took a couple of pictures of one of the **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** that is now starting to flower - apologies for my failings as a photographer - the flower may not show well but you can see why the leaves give it the specific name of 'tridactyla' (three fingered)

Rue-leaved Saxifrage in The Pallant carpark in Havant

Another view of Rue-leaved Saxifrage - basal leaves not much more than 1 cm across

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 19 - 25 (WEEK 12 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** **Red-throated** were still heading east past Dungeness with counts of 55 on Mar 16 and 96 on Mar 18 but this passage seems to have died out during the

latter part of the current week. One **Black-throated** and four **Great Northern** were seen at Selsey on Mar 18 but the only divers getting into the news later in the week were three **White-billed** which appeared in the Western Isles of Scotland on Mar 22

**Grebes:** Still attracting interest were single **Red-necked** off Worthing on Mar 18, in Portland Harbour on Mar 20 and on the north Kent coast (Swalecliffe) on Mar 21. Six reports of **Slavonian** but the last I know of was of 3 in Carlyon Bay (South Cornwall) on Mar 20 preceded by 4 off Climping near Worthing on Mar 19. Last reports of **Black-necked** were also on Mar 20 when one was at West Rise Marsh in Eastbourne and 3 were in the Torbay area of Devon

**Manx Shearwater:** These are presumably now returning to their breeding sites off the Welsh coast but the first report of the species that I have seen is of one at Portland Bill on Mar 19

**Night Heron:** At least one of the four birds that arrived in Devon on Mar 12 was still wandering around west Cornwall on Mar 23

**Little Egret:** First definite signs of nesting seen at Langstone Mill Pond on Mar 23 when at least three nests had pairs in them (one pair seen stabbing upwards with their bills at a bird which seemed to have lost its footing and be in danger of falling into the occupied nest). What I think was an accurate count of birds roosting at the site on the evening of Mar 24 was of 70 birds - this no doubt included some of last year's young and others not intending to nest here.

**White Stork:** These have been arriving at continental sites since Feb 5 with a max count of 39 at a Belgian site on Mar 18 so it is not surprising that one was seen in England (flying south over Redruth in Cornwall) on Mar 22

**Glossy Ibis:** On Mar 18 Lee Evans told us that there were at least 13 in the UK but this week the only ones I am aware of in southern England are two at Lodmoor (Weymouth) and two in the Kent Stour valley

**Spoonbill:** The winter flock of around 15 based in Poole Harbour has not been reported since Mar 9 but two of the birds seem to have settled at Lodmoor (Weymouth). Elsewhere reports seem to have been of birds moving around in search of somewhere to settle down, as shown in the latest report of three flying east along the Sussex coast on Mar 22. Three appeared briefly on the Lymington shore on Mar 17 and two were seen at Cuckmere Haven on Mar 19 but do not seem to have settled there and may have moved on to Rye Harbour where three were seen on Mar 20

**Mute Swan:** Still no definite reports of any having settled on nests but the female at Langstone Mill Pond was once again building up her nest on the evening of Mar 24 though not settling on it

**Brent Goose:** Counts of 6200 flying east past Dungeness on Mar 16 and 6541 off a Netherlands site on Mar 18 seem to mark the end of the main passage of these geese but no doubt the last few will still be leaving well into April - on the

evening of Mar 24 while counting Egrets at Langstone and with the tide at its very lowest I saw more than 100 Brent flying west over Langstone Bridge, probably seeking water deep enough to deter Fox predation during the night

**Mandarin Duck:** A pair were present at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 17 and on Mar 24 a male was seen (possibly seeking a treehole in which to nest) in a tree near the Wallington River flowing along the northern foot of Portsdown Hill

**Wigeon:** Around 20 were still to be seen on Mar 23 at the mouth of the Langbrook stream where it enters Langstone Harbour just west of Langstone Bridge

**Garganey:** Five were present in the Kent Stour valley at the end of last week and pairs were seen this week at Christchurch and at Lymington (possibly the same?) and maybe three were on the north Kent coast at Reculver on Mar 23

**Hen Harrier:** Still being seen in the New Forest up to Mar 20

**Rough Legged Buzzard:** The bird in the Arun valley was still present on Mar 21

**Osprey:** After the first to arrive was seen over Weir Wood reservoir in Sussex on Mar 9 the second (as far as I am aware) came in over the Devon Coast on Mar 21. No news yet from the artificial Osprey nest built last year on one of the old landing lights at the disused Thorney Island airfield!

**Little Ringed Plover:** After reported arrivals last week at Christchurch Harbour and Lodmoor (Weymouth) another wave of arrivals on Mar 22 brought further sightings at Christchurch and first arrivals at Pulborough.

**Lapwing:** In recent years these have almost ceased to breed anywhere along the south coast but from 2007 to 2011 a few pairs bred among the ponies on the rough grassland of the Gipsies Plain along the southern edge of Havant Thicket and I assume that insects attracted by the Pony droppings helped to feed them and their chicks (as well as the Rooks from the Rowlands Castle rookery) so I was concerned when visiting the area this week to find that no ponies were present (it seems that at least some of them have been moved to rough grassland, not suitable for Lapwings, to the west of the 'Long Avenue' of trees coming north from the Leigh Park Gardens lake). At first I could see no Lapwings on the old breeding site but I eventually spotted two individuals (far from each other) and now I can only hope, probably in vain, that breeding will continue here.

**Whimbrel:** Reports of two flying east past Splash Point at Seaford on Mar 17 and one on Portland Bill on Mar 19 seem to mark the start of Whimbrel spring passage

**Mediterranean Gull:** The number present around the British coast continues to grow year by year with a consequent growth in the numbers breeding at sites in Sussex and Kent where they were recently uncommon. Last year the highest number which I saw reported as breeding at Rye Harbour was 300+ but this week

Barry Yates has co-ordinated a count which shows that a minimum of 547 are already present there this year

**Laughing Gull:** This north American equivalent of our Black-headed Gull appeared in Cumbria on Mar 18 to become the 279th species on Lee Evans' list of birds seen in the British Isles this year

**Sandwich Tern:** The first migrants began moving through the English Channel around Mar 1 but there is always some delay before these new arrivals start to enter the Solent harbours and this year the first that I know of in Langstone Harbour were two seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Mar 23

**Common Tern:** The first that I know of this year was seen at Longham Lakes (northern fringe of Bournemouth) on Mar 17 and on Mar 19 the first arrival was seen in the Netherlands

**Cuckoo:** One was reported in the Weymouth area of Dorset on Mar 17 and another at Seaford in Sussex on Mar 20 (with another - maybe the same bird - at Willington (Eastbourne) that day. Hampshire had its first in the New Forest (south west of Burley) on Mar 24

**Short-eared Owl:** Still being seen on the north Kent coast on Mar 23 and on the Isle of Wight on Mar 21 (possibly also in Parkhurst Forest, which is Long-eared territory, on Mar 22)

**Alpine Swift:** One reported at The Lizard in Cornwall on Mar 18

**Hoopoe:** Although there had been January sightings in both East Anglia and Cornwall there was then a pause before three recent reports - on Mar 15 one was in Suffolk, on Mar 18 one in the Poole Harbour area and on Mar 23 one at Sennen in west Cornwall

**Shore Lark:** These are good at hiding from birders and it seems that one at Swalecliffe on the north Kent coast managed to evade detection for 17 days before it was re-discovered on Mar 20

**Sand Martin:** I have now picked up 40 reports after the first arrived in Wales on Mar 1 - the biggest flock so far was of 45+ birds in the Exe estuary area on Mar 20 (after 17 at Romsey on Mar 18)

**Swallow:** Only 20 reports of these so far with the only flock (20+) seen on the Devon coast on Mar 21

**House Martin:** Just one sighting so far from Lundy on or before Mar 23

**Meadow Pipit:** The number heading north over Portland topped 1000 on Mar 20

**Yellow Wagtail:** Following the sighting of four in the Arun valley on Mar 11 there has been just one further report of a single bird in the Kent Stour valley on Mar 18

**Waxwing:** Lee Evans tells us that a flock of four was in an ASDA carpark at Blyth in Northumberland on Mar 18

**Black Redstart:** Following my thought last week that this could be one of the years in which a lot of these breed in southern England I saw that one was heard in sub-song at Calshot on Mar 18

**Wheatear:** These continue to arrive but are beginning to cease to attract attention from birders

**Ring Ouzel:** First for the year was on the Scillies on Mar 14 followed by one in the New Forest near Ringwood on Mar 18, one on the north Kent coast on Mar 20 and another in Cornwall on Mar 21

**Fieldfare:** Last flock was of 15+ birds in the Fareham (south) area on Mar 20

**Redwing:** 147 were seen in the New Forest on Mar 17/18 and just 2 were seen on Portland on Mar 20

**Mistle Thrush:** A pair were collecting food for their young in the Weir Wood reservoir area of Sussex on Mar 19

**Willow warbler:** First definite report from Cornwall on Mar 14 followed by ten more widespread reports including one singing at Eastleigh Lakeside on Mar 19

**Long-tailed Tit:** Reports of nest building on Mar 17 and 18

**Great Grey Shrike:** Still present at 8 sites during the week including one in the Highfield area of Southampton (presumably pausing on passage) on Mar 19. One seen last week (Mar 17) in the New Forest was seen to kill a **Dartford Warbler** and one in the Linwood Bog area of the New Forest (near Ringwood) on Mar 24 was said to be singing

**Little Bunting:** One was caught and ringed at Thurlestone Bay in south Devon on Mar 19 and remained in the area until at least Mar 23

**Reed Bunting:** Of local interest the first to be reported at Langstone Pond this year was singing there at dusk on Mar 24

**Escapee:** A species of **Mynah bird** was 'singing' at Glynde near Lewes on Mar 21

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Grizzled Skipper** (first at Mill Hill, Shoreham, on Mar 24), **Brimstone**, **Large White** (second for the year at Folkestone on Mar 22 after one in Sussex on Mar 11), **Small White**, **Green-veined White** (first at Folkestone on Mar 22 then one near Henfield on Mar 23), **Orange Tip** (first in Kent on Mar 22 followed by sightings at Gosport and Henfield on Mar 23 and at Langstone Mill Pond on Mar 24), **Red Admiral**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Peacock**, **Comma** and **Speckled Wood**

### **Other Insects:**

## Selected sightings this week:

**Bee Fly (*Bombylius major*):** First seen at Rye Harbour on Mar 12 and in my Havant garden on Mar 25. I see it is also known as the Dark-edged Bee Fly and as the Greater Bee Fly

**Cheilosia grossa Hoverfly:** See <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/rxcgrossadsc08256.jpg> for a photo of one taken at Rye Harbour on Mar 19 - the accompanying text says - "This distinctive early hoverfly can be seen around the short grassy areas near the viewpoint flying low to the ground as it searches out its host plants, in this case young Spear Thistles." By host plant is meant that on which the hoverfly will lay its eggs - the larvae live within the thistle stems

**Eupeodes luniger hoverfly:** I think this may be the id of a hoverfly which I saw on a wildflower rich grass bank in the Havant area. In my diary page for Mar 22 I wrote .. "While photographing the flowers a **small hoverfly** arrived and settled for long enough for me to take in that, in addition to the six yellow 'lunules' on its abdomen the top of its thorax was pure black and the tip of its abdomen was also black (no additional yellow marks). This seems to be **Metasyrphus (or Euopedes) luniger** though the best picture I can find of that species does have a couple of additional yellow bands at the tip of its abdomen - see <http://micropics.org.uk/Syrphidae/Metasyrphus/luniger/metasyrphus%20luniger.htm> - maybe I didn't notice them!"

**Hairy footed flower bee (*Anthophora plumipes*):** Although I have been aware of this species before I had not realised until now that it had a long proboscis like that on a Bee Fly but downward pointing - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/stalker.html> for Graeme Lyons photo and description of them seen on the Sussex coast on Mar 23

**Pot Beetles:** Another discovery for which I have to thank Gordon Jarvis for his Mar 19 entry on the RX website which made me aware of a whole new group of beetles - see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/03/19/pot-beetle/> to add another 20 species of British beetles to your repertoire!

## **PLANTS**

**Eastern Rocket:** This is a local speciality of the Portsmouth area and I found my first example on Mar 23 at the Hayling Ferry beach carpark - see my diary for that day for a photo

**Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*):** Found flowering in the Lewes area on Mar 24

**Thale Cress:** The first plant I have seen this year was starting to flower in a Havant carpark on Mar 24

**Common Dog Violet:** Just two flowers found on the southern edge of Havant Thicket on Mar 24 with others found nearby on the same day by the Havant Wildlife Group

**Greater Stitchwort:** Two plants in flower in the Locks Farm area of Havant on Mar 22

**Sea Mouse Ear:** Already flowering in the Gunner Point area of Hayling Island on Mar 23

**Least Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*):** Just one flower found in Havant on Mar 19

**Broom:** One bush had started to flower in the Havant Thicket area on Mar 22

**Rue-leaved Saxifrage:** Plants just starting to flower in the Pallant car park in Havant on Mar 24

**Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage:** This was in flower in the Pett Level area (Rye Bay) on Mar 17 and hopefully can now also be found on the banks of the Pur brook between Purbrook Heath and Widley Walk (northern foot of Portsdown)

**Horse Chestnut:** The first sticky buds had opened on Mar 19 to reveal both wrinkled baby leaves and a miniature flower candle here in Havant

**Wood Spurge:** Also starting to flower in Havant Thicket on Mar 19

**Cow Parsley:** The first true spring flowers were seen on a plant in Wade Lane in Langstone on Mar 21

**Garden Forget-me-not:** Self sown plants of this were starting to flower this week

**Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*):** A garden escape which flowers each year on the Mill Lane roadside in Langstone was out on Mar 19

**Snakeshead Fritillary:** Plants almost certainly planted in the wild had started to flower at the east end of Langstone Mill Lane on Mar 19

**Spring Starflower (*Tristagma uniflorum*):** Another garden escape which flowers each spring on Sinah Common (south Hayling) opposite Staunton Avenue was doing so in Mar 23

**Green-winged Orchid:** The first three flower spikes were showing the colour of their flowers at the Sinah Common site on Mar 23 (photos on my diary page)

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Slow-worm:** First report comes from Rewell Wood near Arundel on Mar 23 (see <http://colinknight.blogspot.co.uk/> )

**Slug Porn:** If you go to <http://theweekendbiologist.blogspot.co.uk/> and Find (CTRL F) Slug Porn you will see a photo of two slugs (species probably *Arion ater*) mating and if you want to learn more about this activity between

hermaphrodite individuals see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slug> and scroll down to the section on Reproduction where you can read about 'Apophallation'

**Fungi:** Just one species getting a mention this week - **Winter Stalkball** (*Tulostoma brumale*) - See <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/03/19/not-a-bad-day/> for Chris Bentley's account of his stroll around Rye Harbour with Graeme Lyons on Mar 19 with a photo of this strange 'puffball on a stalk'

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 19 - 25 (WEEK 12 OF 2012)

### Sat 24 Mar

#### **Rue-leaved Saxifrage starting to flower and 70 Egrets roosting**

Making a detour around the edge of The Pallant carpark this morning on my way to Waitrose I found the first miniscule white blobs of flower buds on the **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** plants growing on the damp pavement along the north side of the Gazebo. With them was my first plant of **Thale cress** in an equally early stage. Another plant which I am unlikely to see for myself without an expedition to the bank of the 'Pur Brook' between Purbrook Heath and Widley Walk is **Opposite Leaved Golden Saxifrage** but this morning I saw a photo of it flowering in the Rye Bay area and so assume it should be out in this area

This evening I went to Langstone Pond at 6pm and in the next 45 minutes counted **70 Egrets arriving to roost** (including just three that were in situ when I arrived). Also seen when I arrived was the **female Swan building up her nest** which is now a massive pile but she did not settle on it. Just before leaving the site, after sunset, I heard the unexciting song of a **Reed Bunting** back at the pond for the first time this year. Another unexpected sight was a flock of well over 100 Brent flying west over Langstone Bridge, probably looking for somewhere with water to provide safety from predators in the dark (this was at the very bottom of the Spring Tide when that harbours are just about drained of water!)

As the sky darkened I watched **Jupiter and Venus** appear in the western sky and then, well below them, had the unexpected bonus of a very thin crescent **New Moon**

### Fri 23 Mar

#### **Green Winged Orchids and Eastern Rocket in flower on Hayling**

Cycling down the Billy Trail towards Hayling I made an early stop where the rail line intersects Mill Lane at Langstone - just a few yards east of the rail track I found the first **Snake's Head Fritillary flower** (planted by or in memory of George Hedley) was already out - well worth the stop!

On the harbour the tide was high and there were at least **20 Wigeon** and **5 Mergansers** near the Langbrook stream mouth though nothing else disturbed the glassy smooth water before it disappeared into the mist. Across the bridge I saw my first **Brent** of the day - barely a dozen in the Oysterbeds and I saw no more until coming across another party of a dozen off Saltmarsh Lane but there were more in the harbour - another 53 at the Kench and probably another 100 seen on my way back.

At the Oysterbeds I had the impression that **two or three pairs of Med Gulls might be on nests** but the vast majority of the gulls were still devoting their energies to standing around and shouting at their neighbours.

Nearing the Ferry Inn I noticed garden **Wallflowers** were out, reminding me that their wild cousins should soon be appearing on the walls of Portchester Castle. At the roundabout I found that **Sea Mouse-ear** had started to flower and immediately past the refreshment kiosk as you enter the public carpark I found **Eastern Rocket** in flower and managed to get a photo though not one which shows the distinctive leaf shape which suggests the business end of a medieval spear.

One of two plants of Eastern Rocket by the south wall of the Refreshment kiosk  
Beyond the carpark a white butterfly flew beside me (I think Small but in this grassland area it could well have been Green-veined though no one has reported that species yet - they are usually later than Small Whites but I see that one was out in Gosport on Mar 15 in 2009). Rounding the Gunner Point corner of the Golf Course I came on the colour of the very first **Green Winged Orchids** but after passing the Golf Course I had no luck with the hoped for Shepherd's Cress and had to make do with the song of a Linnet back on territory and perched on a Gorse bush.

The first Green Winged Orchid to show its colour with the leaves of several others

The only other orchid starting to flower so far - thousands still to come!

Leaving Sinah Common to start home along Staunton Avenue the garden escape **Spring Starflowers (Tristagma or Ipheion uniflorum)** and what I think was a Comma butterfly gave me a good send off.

Nothing more of special interest until back at Langstone Pond where, with the tide still high, the trees were decorated with a couple of dozen Egrets. This time there was no doubt that **several nests were well on the way to completion and at least three of them had two birds in the same nest. Most impressively one Egret seem to have lost its footing and was in the process of falling into an occupied nest below it and in danger of severe injury as one of the occupants of that nest repeatedly stabbed upwards with its beak.**

**Thu 22 Mar**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

**Greater Stitchwort, Common Dog Violet and a Small White**

This morning I had another look for the **Greater Stitchwort flowers** at Locks Farm in the Denvilles area of Havant, finding two in flower and as I was cycling there what can only have been a **Small White butterfly** kept pace with me for around 50 metres. While photographing the flowers a **small hoverfly** arrived and settled for long enough for me to take in that, in addition to the six yellow 'lunules' on its abdomen the top of its thorax was pure black and the tip of its abdomen was also black (no additional yellow marks). This seems to be **Metasyrphus (or Euopedes) luniger** though the best picture I can find of that species does have a couple of

additional yellow bands at the tip of its abdomen - see

<http://micropics.org.uk/Syrphidae/Metasyrphus/luniger/metasyrphus%20luniger.htm> - maybe I didn't notice them!

An out of focus shot of one Greater Stichwort flower with more buds to open later  
On my way home I went through the Havant Cemetery where, in addition to the **Early Dog Violets**. I noticed some planted **Glory of the Snow (Chionodoxa forbesii)** plants and photographed them to make up for not having my camera with me when I passed some much bigger specimens in Mill Lane at Langstone last Monday.

#### Glory of the Snow flowers in Havant Cemetery

This afternoon I went to Havant Thicket where a **Tawny Mining Bee** was investigating a patch of loose dry soil near the carpark and the Gipsies Plain grassland was populated with **Black-headed, Mediterranean and Common Gulls** with none of the expected Ponies, Corvids or the hoped for **Lapwings** which have bred here annually since 2005 (I found 8 birds here on Mar 22 last year) - maybe their apparent absence was due to the absence of the ponies (whose droppings attract flies and other insects to feed the Lapwings). By the time I completed my circuit of the area I had discovered that the ponies (or some of them) were in the rough grassland west of the Long Avenue of trees and I had found **two individual Lapwings** on the ground though not together as a pair and not apparently nesting. Also seen over the Gipsies Plain was a high flying **Sparrowhawk** and two low flying **Jays** which came from the Avenue.

In the Avenue I heard a **Nuthatch** and a **singing Mistle Thrush** but the area round the lake at the north end of the avenue had no hint of the Wood Sorrel leaves that I was looking for. Some compensation was found along the path following the north edge of the Gipsies Plain past the Austrian Pine plantation - just two early flowers of **Common Dog Violet**, one of which I photographed to show the broad, pale spur to the flower, contrasting with the narrow, pointed dark violet spur of the **Early Dog Violets** seen in the Havant Cemetery this morning. Next to these Violets was a bush of **Broom with the first flowers** I have seen this year.

#### Common Dog Violet flower showing spur

#### Broom bush with first flowers

Walking back to the car park I heard the distinctive complaining notes of several **Siskins** and was lucky enough to see one settled for long enough to prove its identity. One other thing noticed in this walk was that at least three of the many dry Molehills that I passed had large round holes in the top of the 'hill' - **was this a sign that the ground is now so dry that the Moles had abandoned their search for worms underground and had come out to try their luck on the surface?**

**Wed 21 Mar**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

**First new Cow Parsley and a blue/white mass of Violets**

Cycling down the Billy Trail at Langstone on my way to north Hayling I noticed one plant of **Cow Parsley** in bud and coming back up Wade Lane I passed a plant opening its white flowers. In between there was the expected noise of gulls at the Oysterbeds (sadly one of the Med Gulls on the nest island was trying to preen oil off its breast) while **a pair of Buzzards were displaying** over nearby woods and on North Common I photographed a magnificent **display of both blue and white Sweet Violets** after watching the activity of **35 pairs of Rooks at their nests** south of the common.

### Part of the masive show of Sweet Violets on Hayling North Common

A closer view showing the mixture of Violet and White flowers

Back on the Langstone village shore I was surprised to see a flock of perhaps 70 Brent after encountering no more than two dozen scattered around the Oysterbeds and Northney shores and at Langstone pond there were more **Egrets** than expected as the tide was still high and those guarding nest sites had been joined by others sitting out the tide.

My final observation today came as was cycling up Wade Court Road - just before reaching North Close I heard what I thought was a **Nuthatch** making a repeated single note call high in the old Grey Poplar tree and I eventually spotted the bird but saw no evidence of a nest hole or mate (I have occasionally come across Nutchatch in this area in past years but never found any sign of them being permanent residents - perhaps these are young birds that come here seeking a mate but failing to find one? Interestingly I see that Brook Meadow at Emsworth has its first resident Nuthatch - its photo appeared on Brian Fellows' website entry for Mar 20 and that bird clearly is nesting as the photo shows it with a beak full of mud that it will use to narrow the entrance to the old woodpeckers nest hole that it has taken over (unlike woodpeckers they do not excavate their nest but take over an existing hole, clear out any debris left in it and then plaster up the entrance hole to reduce it to the smaller size that suits their size)

#### [Tue 20 Mar](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **Shelduck on the move and Egrets in nesting mood**

Although the morning was dull I happened to be in Emsworth and so thought I would check out the Little and Great Deeps from the Wickor shore. The only note made at the Little Deeps was of **Coltsfoot** in flower but at the Great Deeps there were more birds including a smart **Great Blackback Gull, 9 Greenshank and around 75 Shelduck**

#### [Mon 19 Mar](#)

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### **A walk around Langstone as Horse Chestnut bud burst open**

Another sunny day took me on a walk down the Langbrook stream to Budds Farm, then east along the shore through Langstone village to Pook Lane before heading for home.

Before reaching Grove Road I had added **Least Yellow Sorrel** to my 'first flowering' list and in Juniper Square **Green Alkanet** had resumed flowering after a

winter break (since Jan 26) of less than 8 weeks. Also newly flowering here was 'Garden Forget-me-not' while Field Pennywort was still in flower where it was first seen this year on Jan 12.

Garden planted Cowslips were new along the banks of the Langbrook and at the entrance to the farm an old Ash tree was covered with knobbly 'flowers'. On the South Moors five plants of Marsh Marigold were bearing plenty of fresh flowers.

The expected duck species (Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveler, with Tufted Duck and Teal but no Pochard) were present on Budds Farm pools and both Swan and Canada Goose pairs were present but not nesting. The Black-headed and Med Gulls were joined by a pair of Herring Gulls and one each of Common and Great Blackback.

Coming back along the shore around 200 Brent were feeding up but less than 20 Wigeon were seen. On the Moors at least two Meadow Pipits gave the impression of being resident, not just passing, but no song was heard. A pleasant surprise at the west end of Mill Lane was a large cluster of Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*) in flower and at the east end of the lane the air was scented with Sweet Violets and I had my first view of two plants of Snakeshead Fritillary bearing flower buds.

At Langstone Pond five Egrets were in the nest tree wearing long breeding plumes and making strange noises though I could see no evidence of actual nests nor of the birds being paired. Below them the female Swan was not on her nest so I guess she has not started laying yet.

On the low tide mud off the pond I saw more than 30 each of Teal and Shelduck, both probably making a brief pause in a journey to where they intend to nest. Seen distantly in the air was a small flock of what I think were Bar-tailed Godwit (no Black-tailed seen today)

My final note was of a Horse Chestnut tree, seen closely from the Pook Lane bridge over the A27, which had just started to open its sticky buds and unfold its leaves - in one case holding a miniature 'flower candle' among the leaves.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 12 - 18 (WEEK 11 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** The peak passage of Red-throated moving east past Dungeness occurred on Feb 18 when 644 were reported but there were still plenty around last week on Mar 10 when 284 moved past Pett in Rye Bay in a 30 minute period. This week the maximum number reported along the south coast was just 11 going east past Splash Point (Seaford) on Mar 14. Also this week there were only three reports of Black-throated - one passing Splash Point on Mar 14, two passing Portland on Mar 16, and one at Milford near Lymington on Mar 17 - and just three reports of Great Northern with a peak count of 2 at Selsey on Mar 16

**Grebes:** No reports of large numbers of Great Crested on the sea this week but there were still 104 off Hove (Brighton) on Mar 11 at the end of last week. This

week there were still single **Red-necked** off Oare Marshes in north Kent and off Dawlish in Devon, both on Mar 13. On Mar 11 at the start of this week there were 3 **Slavonian** off Worthing and 2 at Selsey with 1 off Lymington on Mar 13 and singles off Worthing and Rye Harbour on Mar 16. The Blashford Lakes had 2 **Black-necked** (one in full summer plumage) on Mar 16 after singles had been reported at Fowey in Cornwall on Mar 12 and Dawlish in south Devon on Mar 13 - late news is of three all in summer plumage at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 18 (the species has bred in Hampshire, both inland and on the coast, in several past years)

**Bittern:** Still being reported at 8 south coast sites this week with one of the three birds at Dungeness RSPB starting to boom on Mar 12. In Hampshire the bird which turned up at Fleet Pond on Mar 9 was seen again there in Mar 12 and 14

**Night Heron:** A major surprise this week was the arrival of four Night Herons in a private garden on the north Devon coast at Woolacombe (near Ifracombe) on Mar 13 with at least two still there on Mar 15. Another bird was found at St Just (north of Lands End) on Mar 12 and it was still there on Mar 14 when a second bird was seen at Polgigga to the south of Lands End. This species may now be a regular visitor to this country - last year there were 29 reports between Apr 8 and Oct 5 from sites in the Scillies, Dorset, Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, Essex, Somerset and Hertfordshire. For photos of the birds currently in Devon go to <http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/more-woolacombe-night-heron-pics.html>

**Cattle Egret:** One has been at Kingston Maurward, by the R Frome just east of Dorchester in Dorset, from Mar 11 to Mar 16 (when it or another was seen near Wareham)

**Glossy Ibis:** Two have been in the Kent Stour valley from Mar 10 to 13 at least and two more were at Radipole (Weymouth) from Mar 11 to 16 with two more (or maybe the Kent birds) at Brading on the Isle of Wight on Mar 15

**Spoonbill:** Two have been at Lodmoor (Weymouth) from Mar 12 to 16 at least and two were in the Kent Stour valley on Mar 11 with what was probably one of them at Oare Marshes on the north Kent coast on Mar 13

**Mute Swan:** The female of the Langstone Pond pair was on her new nest on Mar 10 but may not have laid any eggs yet. Also in the Havant area one of the pair at the Budds Farm pools was investigating a new nest site on Mar 14

**Brent Goose:** A major surge of departing birds was seen on Mar 15 when 5560 flew east past Dungeness (and 4614 were seen at a Netherlands site). Another 2000 went east past Climping (Worthing) on Mar 16 (when 2162 went past Splash Point at Seaford and 1144 were seen passing Selsey). At least 50 were still in the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour on the afternoon of Mar 17.

**Brant:** One was with a flock of Brent in the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Mar 13 and 16 (with more than 150 Brent on the second day)

**Red-breasted Goose:** Last week I was puzzled as to why the RBA national news service was reporting one of these in Hampshire when there were no reports of it in the local Hampshire news but the mystery has been solved. After the bird that had been wintering on the Exe estuary in Devon was last seen there on Feb 19 a bird which I guessed to be the same one appeared on the Lymington shore on Feb 25 and 26 (starting to move east as expected before setting out on its expected passage with normal Brent). The RBA reports of a Red-breasted Goose in Hampshire then started to appear (on Mar 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 and 13) and I have now discovered that the bird was at Needs Ore at the mouth of the Beaulieu River (the private reserve owned by the Beaulieu estate). Birders can get permits to visit Needs Ore but one of the conditions imposed by these permits is that the visiting birders do not publicise their sightings - presumably this is done to avoid the problems of a mass of twitchers descending on the site should some rarity turn up there and also to keep the number of people visiting the site to a minimum at all times. What has happened in this case is that all visitors to the site kept their promise not to reveal the site but thought it safe to say that the bird was 'somewhere in Hampshire' while Lee Evans (who as far as I know had not had a pass to visit the site but had heard about the bird 'on the grapevine' ) mentioned the location in one of his regular news round-ups on the internet. As the bird has not been mentioned by RBA since Mar 13 it is almost certain that the bird has now left that site (and most probably left the country)

**Green-winged Teal:** A male has been seen at Farlington Marshes since Feb 23 and on Mar 11 it was seen from the Eastern Road bridge at the east end of the Ports Creek channel, among a small flock of 33 Teal, showing signs of being paired with a female Common Teal. Wikipedia tells me that separation of female Green-winged Teal from Common Teal is 'problematical' so it is just possible that this is a female of the Green-winged subspecies - in any case the pair should have no difficulty in breeding though their young might present birders with a problem of identification as the only easy clue to identifying a Green-winged male is the presence of a white vertical stripe on the side of the breast in front of the closed wing. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green-winged\\_Teal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green-winged_Teal) tells me that our common Teal is more or less restricted to Eurasia and that in North America the Green Winged is extremely numerous.

**Garganey:** Seen at 10 sites in southern England this week with a peak count of seven (five of them males) flying in off the sea over Hove in the Brighton area on Mar 14. Hampshire has had one sighting of a male at Keyhaven (Lymington) on Mar 11 and another of a pair there on Mar 18

**Scaup:** The report of 10 together on the moat of Fort Brockhurst in Gosport on Mar 8 was almost certainly a mistake in identifying the Tufted Ducks which are regularly seen there but there was a more confident identification of a female at the Mill Rythe inlet on the east coast of Hayling Island on Mar 11 and 12 and of a male at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 13

**Long-tailed Duck:** One which has been in the Christchurch Harbour area since Feb 12 was still there on Mar 16 but a more interesting sighting comes from two

of our intrepid Naval Amigos from the Portsmouth area who are now enjoying the cold weather just inside the Arctic Circle of northern Norway - see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/03/10/birding-around-harstadnorway/>

**Bufflehead:** The female which has been in Cornwall (mainly at Helston) from Oct 26 to Mar 4 has not been reported since but if you want to see what the species looks like go to <http://www.pbase.com/raymondjbarlow/image/94830513> and run through the excellent series of photos of the species

**Buzzard:** Although we can see impressive sights such as a group of 14 Buzzards that were displaying over Pulborough on Mar 11 these numbers are trivial compared to the numbers now heading back to northern Scandinavia after winter. Back on Mar 4 one Netherlands site recorded 94 Buzzards passing, then on Mar 11 a Belgian site reported 149 Buzzards and on Mar 15 a German site had 249.

**Rough Legged Buzzard:** The bird which has been in the Arun valley since Nov 7 was still there on Mar 15 when she was accorded the name 'Nesta' and we were told she had completed her moult into adult plumage. I wonder if this was the last sighting of her?

**Peregrine:** The Durlston pair were mating on Mar 16 but on Mar 14 the pair expected to nest in the Paulsgrove area of Portsmouth seem to have had one of last year's young playing gooseberry (sighting of two males and one female near the nest site)

**Water Rail:** The bird wintering at the Brook Meadow site in Emsworth was thought to have departed when there were no sightings of it on Mar 14 and 15 but it (or another?) was seen 'in the usual place' on Mar 16. An indication that some of these birds are already on passage was seen on Mar 14 when one was seen out in the open on the Lymington Marshes (a sign that the bird is unfamiliar with the site at which it has landed after an overnight flight but its need to feed drives it to search in places where it is unfamiliar with the available cover.)

**Common Crane:** The peak of the passage bringing birds back to the low countries may have occurred around Mar 6 when one German site reported 1262 birds and a pair which had gone astray and ended up in the Sandwich Bay area of Kent around that date waited for a week but when no others joined them they flew off south on Mar 15 in the hope of finding where they had gone wrong.

**Little Ringed Plover:** On Feb 29 Lee Evans told us that these had started to arrive but gave no place or date for the first to reach Britain and the the first arrivals for which I know these details did not turn up until this week - on Mar 14 one was at Christchurch Harbour and another at Lodmoor (Weymouth) while two more were seen in the Netherlands on Mar 16

**Purple Sandpiper:** These were still passing east along the south coast this week with 15 at Southsea Castle on Mar 15 (with 20 there on Mar 17 plus 15 again on Mar 18) and another 15 at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 16

**Woodcock:** Local birds had started roding in Eartham Woods (near the A29 Chichester to Pulborough road) at dawn on Mar 12

**Spotted Redshank:** 9 were seen on the Lymington marshes on Mar 13 but it seems that the Nore Barn bird at Emsworth has not been seen there since Mar 9

**Arctic Skua:** One seen at a German site on Mar 15 was the first I have seen reported anywhere since Jan 15 when one was seen at Spalsh Point (Seaford)

**Med Gull:** These are well known for spurning seafood and for flying inland to feed, usually on worms. This reputation has been supported this week by sightings of small flocks in inland fields not far north of Havant but also by a sighting of at least one bird joining the Black-headed Gulls eating fast food dropped by people visiting Mick's Burger Bar at the Portsdown Viewpoint carpark - the report mentioned that the Med Gulls were eating Chips but failed to confirm that they were spurning the fish that might be expected with the chips (though not I think at this Portsdown site)

**Short-eared Owl:** Wintering or passage birds were still being seen this week at nine south coast sites including one at Farlington Marshes on Mar 14

**Hoopoe:** In January there had been sightings at Lowestoft in East Anglia and at Pendeen in Cornwall but no others until Mar 15 when one was reported in Suffolk

**Sand Martin:** 19 reports this week with a peak count of 12 at Rye Harbour on Mar 17

**Swallow:** Only 5 reports all of singles except for a 'few' at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 16

**Meadow Pipit:** Passage north through England is now well under way (I even heard a hint of song from a party at the Langstone South Moors on Mar 14) but the most memorable report comes from the Devon Birding site - see <http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/lyme-bay.html> for an account of how a fishing boat out in Lyme Bay on Mar 13 rescued both a Pipit and a Redwing from drowning.

**Grey Wagtail:** Of local interest in Havant this week I not only saw the female of the pair that may be nesting on the Lymbourne stream immediately south of the Havant bypass on Mar 14 but on Mar 17, when by the Hermitage stream in the Stockheath area of Leigh Park, I was on the first footbridge north of Barncroft Way when a magnificently plumaged male flew out from under the bridge (a typical nest site) and let me watch it flycatching along the concrete banks of the stream

**Black Redstart:** Several reports of birds arriving in southern England off the sea this week - maybe they will cross the channel again to breed on the continent but

possibly a sign that we are in for one of those years when many pairs nest here (perhaps choosing sites in the Palmerston Forts around Portsmouth)

**Wheatear:** I logged 32 reports this week before giving up - one of the last was of 40 birds on Portland on Mar 16 when 4 were seen at Farlington Marshes and one at the Hayling Oysterbeds. A major surge in arrivals started on Mar 15.

**Ring Ouzel:** First of the year, a male, seen in the New Forest at Vales Moor near Ringwood and Burley on Mar 18

**Fieldfare:** No reports after Mar 15 but I am pretty sure we have not seen the last of them (and sure enough a flock of 140 was seen at Overton near Basingstoke on Mar 18 when one Redwing was seen at Eastleigh)

**Redwing:** Also not reported after Mar 16 following flocks of 165 in the New Forest on Mar 10 and 40 in the Stoneham area near Eastleigh on Mar 14. Quite a few were coming north across the Channel on Mar 13 - see <http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/lyme-bay.html> for the story of the bird rescued from drowning which we have already quoted in connection with the Meadow Pipit that was also rescued by fishermen in Lyme Bay

**Mistle Thrush:** A pair at Weir Wood reservoir in Sussex were collecting food for young in their nest on Mar 10 and the pair seen in the pony field south of Wade Court at Langstone on Mar 14 may have been doing the same.

**Paddyfield Warbler:** Still present at the Pagham North Walls on Mar 17

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** The popular bird in Worthing has not been reported since Mar 14 but the **Hume's Warbler** at Weymouth got two mentions this week on Mar 11 and 16 after not being in the news since Feb 14

**Willow Warbler:** Chiffchaffs are now singing everywhere and this week brought two possible sightings of Willow Warblers (in Cornwall on Mar 14 and at Splash Point at Seaford on Mar 15). Newly arrived birds that are not singing are difficult to separate from Chiffchaffs but two good indications to look for are wing length and tail dipping. Chiffchaffs regularly dip their tails when feeding but Willow Warblers do not - that can only be a clue, not a clincher, but the length of the closed wing is a more certain id feature. The shorter wing of the Chiffchaff does not project beyond the back end of the bird's body but the longer wing of the Willow Warbler does.

**Firecrest:** Although a good number have been here through the winter Dungeness reported their first migrant arrival on Mar 9 and there seems to have been a minor surge of reports at coastal sites this week.

**Tree Creeper:** Locally a pair have been seen on Mar 12 carrying nest material behind loose bark on a Poplar tree in Palmer's Copse at Emsworth. Palmers Copse is the narrow riverside belt of trees east of the well used carpark behind the Asda store (and at the southern end of Brook Meadow) and in the Folkestone area of Kent a **Short-toed Tree-creeper** from the continent was seen and photographed on Mar 10 - see a photo and Lee Evans comment at <http://rarebirdsainbritain.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/short-toed-treecreeper-arrives->

[as.html](#) (scroll down below Lee Evans header photo which I think is of a Zitting Cisticola). More photos can be seen by going to <http://www.freewebs.com/folkestonebirds/index.htm> and scrolling down to Mar 10 - RBA News tells us that this is the 21st record of the species in Kent and that the only other past British records are of two birds in Essex, two in Dorset and one in Yorkshire.

**Great Grey Shrike:** Still present at two regular sites this week - one was still at the New Forest Bishop's Dyke area on Mar 13 and the other at Wyke Down (SU 007 156 between Sixpenny Handley and Cranborne in Dorset) - with a third seen to catch a Lizard at Ibsley Common near Ringwood on Mar 18 when the Shatterford bird was also seen)

**Rose-coloured Starling:** The Hordle bird was still present on Mar 17

**Dark-eyed Junco:** Still present in the New Forest on Mar 11 (and the **Spanish Sparrow** was still at Calshot on Mar 13)

**Snow Bunting:** The Sandy Point birds on Hayling have not been reported since Mar 11 but one was at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 16

**Reed Bunting:** One was heard singing in Sussex as early as Feb 12 and I keep an ear open for one to announce its return to Langstone Pond though with no luck so far but I was encouraged to see that one had been heard at Mill Rythe on Hayling on Mar 11

**Vagrants:** A new species for the year was a **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** seen in Cornwall (at Botallack) on Mar 13 and 14

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Brimstone** (many throughout the week), **Large White** (just one in Sussex on Mar 11), **Small White** (appeared on Mar 12 in Dorset, Hants and Sussex), **Holly Blue** (one in Fareham on Mar 11 and one at Cowes, IoW, on Mar 15), **Red Admiral** (widespread), **Small Tortoiseshell** (13 reports this week), **Large Tortoiseshell** (one unconfirmed report from the Scillies on Mar 10), **Peacock** (widespread), **Comma** (widespread)

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

Species recorded for the first time this year/season:

**0284 Caloptilia rufipennella** found in Kent (Thanet) on Mar 12 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=902>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0284.php>

**1047 Acleris schalleriana** found in Dorset on Mar 15 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5018>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1047.php>

**1055 Acleris hyemana** found in Dorset on Mar 15 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2468>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1055.php>

**1227 Pammene giganteana** found in Kent (Thanet) on Mar 10 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5227>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1227.php>

**1984 Hummingbird Hawk-moth Macroglossum stellatarum** - flying by day at Dungeness on Mar 12, in Dorset on Mar 13 and in a Pulborough garden on Rosemary on Mar 15 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2198>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1984.php>

**2087 Turnip Moth Agrotis segetum** - found at Durlston on Mar 15 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=298>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2087.php>

### Other Insects:

**Pond Skater:** The insects which were seen on the Westbrook Stream at Emsworth between Feb 15 and Mar 1 (increasing in number to around 100 on Mar 1) then disappeared but re-appeared on Mar 6 in a different part of the stream where around 10 were seen and they then started to increase till there were 60 present on Mar 11. So far no theory as to what determines these population explosions and collapses but it is known that many of them are winged and so can fly to new sites if the environment becomes unfriendly to them

**Bee Fly (Bombylius major):** First of the year seen at Rye Harbour on Mar 12

**Tawny Mining Bee (Andrena fulva):** First seen in Staffordshire by Graeme Lyons on Mar 11

**Tree Bumblebee (Bombus hypnorum):** This species was first seen in England in 2001 but has now spread widely and one was seen by Graeme Lyons in Staffordshire on Mar 11 photos of both these Bumblebees can be seen at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/ginger-nuts.html>

**Anotylus rugosus (A species of Staphylinidae or Rove Beetles):** Another of Graeme Lyons finds, this time at Woods Mill in Sussex on Mar 14 - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/crenulate-side-margins-to-pronotum.html>

## PLANTS

**Stream Water-Crowfoot (*Ranunculus penicillatus*):** This ceased to flower around mid-October last year and the first new flowers were seen in the Langbrook stream in Havant on Mar 14

**Wood Anemone:** On Mar 15 quite a few of these were already in flower in Lowtons Copse to the north of Clanfield near Waterlooville

**Blue anemone (*Anemone apennina*):** The first flowers appeared on this garden flower in the Havant cemetery on Mar 12 - I suspect that the ancestors of these attractive flowers had been planted on a grave and then dug up and thrown away in a corner of the cemetery under the shade of a Yew tree where they have survived for a good many years, producing attractive blue flowers each spring without any human care.

**English scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*):** The first flowers of this species were seen in saltings at Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore on Mar 15

**Greater Stitchwort:** Having seen flower buds at an early stage on Mar 14 I returned to the south facing roadside site (junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads in the Denvilles area of Havant) on Mar 18 but found I would have to wait until next week before the flowers opened.

**Sticky Mouse-ear:** Flower buds seen at more than one site in the Havant area this week but no flowers fully open

**Wild Strawberry:** First flowers open on a plant growing near Nore Barn at Emsworth on Mar 15

**Ground Ivy:** First flowers seen in Mill Lane at Langstone on Mar 14 and flowering was widespread by the end of the week

**Field Forget-me-not:** First flowers seen in Havant on Mar 14 - the flowers were small enough to qualify for this wild species but the bulk of the leaves suggested that this could have been the common garden escape of the cultivated form of Wood Forget-me-not and that the flowers will become larger as they open more fully

**Early Forget-me-not:** Genuine wild flowers found near the Ferry Inn on Hayling Island on Mar 12 - see my Diary page for a photo

**Toothwort:** This parasite of Hazel was already starting to flower in Lowton's Copse (north of Clanfield in the Waterloovill area) on Mar 15

**Female Butterbur:** These scarce female plants by the Langbrook stream at Langstone were starting to flower on Mar 14

**Lords and Ladies (Arum):** First sheathed flower spikes seen on Mar 14

**Wild Bluebells:** First seen flowering in Lowtons Copse at Clanfield on Mar 15

**Field Woodrush (*Luzula campestris*):** First flowers seen on my Havant garden lawn on Mar 13

**Clematis armandii?:** What I think was this garden plant was seen on Mar 12 climbing small trees in the hedge of the Wade Court estate, covered with white flowers which I do not recall seeing anywhere before now - hence my attempt to name it.

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Dolphins:** **Bottle-nosed Dolphins** are present in the English Channel throughout the year (two swam west through Hayling Bay on Mar 9 and a pod of 8, including 2 juveniles, was seen off Worthing on Mar 11) and a **Common Dolphin** was off south Devon on Mar 14, noted as the first seen there this year and this remark sent me off to find out more about these animals. A good source of local information is <http://www.glaucus.org.uk/Cetaceaz.htm> (part of the Shoreham based British Marine Life Study Society website) and this will introduce you to all the species to be found in British water. The only species I have seen reported this year are the two just mentioned plus a **White-beaked Dolphin** seen off Sangatte (Calais) on Jan 7

**Roe Deer:** A buck seen at Durlston on Mar 13 was reported as having 'clean antlers' which I take to mean it had already thrashed the velvet off its new growing antlers. This seems an early date for that (the expected time for this is early May though I see that a buck was seen 'thrashing' at Durlston on Feb 28 in 2009 while in 2007 Durlston reported two bucks still having 'velvet dropping off' as late as Apr 15) but it might be worth keeping an eye out for signs that shrubs and small trees have been used as 'punch bags' by Roe for this purpose - a few years back damage to trees at Brook Meadow in Emsworth was the first indication that Roe were present on that site.

**Noctule Bat:** First report I have seen is of one flying at Durlston on Mar 10 - seen with several Pipistrelles.

**Toad:** On Mar 15 both Frogs and Toads were mating in a pond at the West Sussex Naturalists Trust HQ at Henfield

**Grass Snake:** A pair were seen mating on the Sussex Downs (Steyning Rifle Range) on Mar 15

**Grey Mullet:** First report of these comes from Kris Gillam on the Isle of Wight who saw a substantial shoal in Bembridge Harbour on Mar 13

**Fungi:** The only species making a fresh appearance this week was **Glistening Inkcap** of which I saw a large cluster at the roots of an old Willow on the banks of the Langbrook Stream at Langstone on Mar 14

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 12 - 18 (WEEK 11 OF 2012)**

**Thu 15 Mar**

### **A ride from Havant to Nutbourne Bay in sunshine**

Keen not to miss the warm sunshine of the last day of the current high pressure I set off on my bike as soon as the sun broke through the mist. My first objective was the Thorney Island deeps on the offchance that early Sedge Warblers or other migrants might have arrived but the only migrant birds I encountered were **two singing Chiffchaffs** in the Nore Barn wood.

Before I got there I enjoyed some spring flowers at the A27 underpass which connects Havant to Emsworth. Where the old A27 ends abruptly at right angles to the new road I added **Sticky Mouse-ear** to my flowering list, finding it growing in the thin soil overlaying the tarmac of the old road among a mass of **Common Whitlowgrass**, and while there I made a mental note of the increasing number of garden escape **Grape Hyacinth** plants which I am seeing everywhere at present - here the plants could be seen on the far side of the broken fence which separates the new from the old roads.

Continuing east to the Selangor Ave junction I crossed the main road to join the footpath to Nore Barn but before doing so I checked the variety of wild flowers growing on the north side of the main road - among them lots more Whitlowgrass and a good presence of **Danish Scurvygrass**. Nearing Nore Barn I stopped to look for (and find) my first **Wild Strawberry** flowers on the east side bank of the footpath just north of where a massive oak tree trunk juts out into the path.

Nore Barn woodland had two singing Chiffchaffs (almost certainly migrants by the persistence with which they were trying to make their presence know to prospective mates) but my main find here came on the saltings at the east end of the woodland in the shape of the first flowers on **English Scurvygrass** - see photo below.

#### English Scurvygrass on the Nore Barn saltings

Reaching Thorney Island the only birdsong heard came from Cetti's Warblers and Skylarks and I saw nothing unusual on either Little or Great Deeps, though a colourless distant silhouette on the Little Deeps could have been a female Garganey and a distant all white silhouette on the banks of the Great Deeps might have been a Great White Egret (nothing to judge its size by and it spent its time preening in a 'hunch back' posture that did not look right for a Little Egret). Several pairs of Shelduck and Teal here were assumed to be intending to breed hereabouts.

Lots of **Alexanders** were flowering along Thornham Lane and plenty of **Brent** were bathing and sunning themselves in Nutbourne Bay area where a lone **Buzzard**

was flying around searching for thermals over the land area. On the way home along the main road nothing special caught my eye but when I reached the junction with Thorney Road I turned north through the new housing in the Hermitage area and had my first look at the 'balancing pond' in which **Frogs have been spawning** - I think tiny free-swimming tadpoles were starting to emerge. (By chance I found an email awaiting my return home telling me of **Frogspawn** in at least one Langstone village garden)

Emerging beside Peter Pond I turned north to have a look at Brook Meadow where I did see a **Comma butterfly** but failed to spot both the famous Water Rail and the Tree Creepers thought to be nesting in the Palmers Road copse. Heading home along Victoria Road and Selangor Ave I could see **18 active nests in the Rookery** behind the Jubilee House flats (though I only counted those I could see while cycling by).

Although I failed to see any migrant birds I see that **the first Wheatears arrived in Hampshire today** - a female on Hayling Island and males at the Langstone South Moors and at Southsea. At least ten others had been seen in other counties (Sussex, Dorset and Devon) with a very early first at Hastings on Feb 15, then no more until Mar 6

### Wed 14 Mar

#### Four more first flowers and the first Yellow Wagtails

A walk to the Budds Farm pools this morning discovered an abrupt change in the bird life - **no Teal, Shoveler or Gadwall** which had been replaced by a **pair of Swans** (the female investigating a new nest site for this year right in front of the viewing bench) and a **pair of Canada Geese**. Some of the missing Gadwall were in the harbour at the mouth of the Langbrook stream along with a few Wigeon and perhaps 100 Brent. Over the South Moors I heard **hints of Meadow Pipit song** from half a dozen birds that I suspect were on passage north and not intending to breed here.

Before reaching the pools my walk down the Langbrook had given me three botanic firsts - the first **Stream Water Crowfoot** just south of the A27 and the first **Field Forget-me-not** near the kissing gate opposite The Mallards while the unkempt area south of the kissing gate had the first **sheathed spadices on Lords and Ladies** (plus a mass of female Butterbur flowers where I had seen the first one or two last week and a new mass of **Glistening Inkcaps** at the base of a Willow tree). Best new flower came after I had left the Moors and was in Mill Lane - the first **Ground Ivy** of the year

Passing Langstone Pond the Swan was back on her nest and in the pony field north of the pond the sight of **two Mistle Thrushes** confirmed that a pair are in residence there - north of Wade Court **one Grey Wagtail** was still in the Lymbourne stream where a pair seems to have been present since Feb 28 and as I approached the stream across the Pony fields from Wade Lane I noticed that **Hornbeam catkins** were starting to open on the tree under which you pass just before reaching the bridge over the stream (and this reminded me that **catkins were fully out on the tall old Grey Poplar** overhanging Wade Court Road opposite North Close when I passed it on Monday after my trip to Hayling).

A further outing this afternoon took me to Locks Farm (junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads) where **more Ground Ivy was flowering** but the Greater Stitchwort and Crosswort (both of which flower early here on this south facing bank) were not yet out (though I could detect developing flower buds on the Stitchwort).

Finally, for those interested in the arrival of summer migrants, I see that four **Yellow Wagtails** were seen near Arundel on Mar 11 bringing the total of species newly arrived in southern England to 10 (see my latest Weekly Summary). I also see that Hampshire had its first Swallow yesterday at Ibsley near Ringwood.

### Mon 12 Mar

#### Early Forget-me-not on Hayling

This afternoon I cycled down the Hayling Coastal Path and round Gunner Point, adding two personal 'first flowers' for the year. One was **Coltsfoot**, growing at the entrance to the little used carpark for the Oysterbeds, and the other was **Early Forget-me-not** in the short grass of the small roundabout near the Ferry Inn. A third find, made this morning in the Eastern Road cemetery, was of **Blue Anemones** (no doubt originally planted on one of the graves but surviving for many years without human care and attention in a shady corner of the cemetery where I suspect the plants were thrown away as no longer wanted). Also seen in the cemetery was a much better show of **Early Dog Violets** than last week.

For a photo of the Blue Anemones go to

[http://apps.rhs.org.uk/plantselectorimages/detail/WSY0094328\\_4376.jpg](http://apps.rhs.org.uk/plantselectorimages/detail/WSY0094328_4376.jpg)

My own photo of this afternoon's Forget-me-nots has a 20p piece in it to give the scale.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 5 - 11 (WEEK 10 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Summer Migrant Arrivals:** Details of places and dates given when we come to the species in the summary below but species already with us now include **Stone Curlew, Sandwich Tern, Swallow, Sand martin, Wheatear, Little Ringed Plover, Garganey** and most recently **Osprey** and **Hobby**

**Divers:** The biggest count of **Red-throated** moving east past Dungeness was just 62 on Mar 9 while only two southern English sites (Weston Shore on Southampton Water on Mar 4 and Slapton Ley in Devon on Mar 9) recorded single **Black-throated**. Five sites reported **Great Northern** including Selsey where 6 were seen on Mar 10

**Grebes:** Only one report of a large raft of **Great Crested** still on the sea (200 off Rye Harbour on Mar 9) while pairs were displaying at many sites (including 5 pairs at Chichester Ivy Lake). On Mar 9 single **Red-necked** were off Ferring (Worthing) and Slapton Ley in south Devon. On Mar 10 both Wembury (Plymouth) and Selsey Bill reported two **Slavonian** (as had Lymington and Pagham on Mar 8) - on Mar 10 more than 10 were on the sea off Pagham Harbour. On Mar 9 two **Black-necked** were in Hayling Bay with singles still in the Torbay area of Devon and three at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 10. Also on Mar 10 three birds on passage stopped off at Seaford Splash Point.

**Bittern:** These remain numerous this winter with sightings this week at 13 sites (though at least a couple of these were probably just temporary stop-overs on passage like the tiny pond near Edburton in West Sussex where Tony Wilson was surprised to see one twice and Fleet Pond where one seen on Mar 9 was the first for the site since Dec 2004).

**Cattle Egret:** No further sightings in the Warblington or Thorney Island areas but after a 'possible' sighting from a bus in the Cocking area near Midhurst on Feb 26 one was reliably reported by the RSPB warden at the Isle of Wight Brading Marshes on Mar 5

**Little Egret:** On Feb 24 the number roosting at Langstone Mill Pond was still at the winter level of 7 or 8 birds but on Feb 29 when I happened to pass the pond just after sunset I found more present (my best estimate was 25) so I tried to make an accurate count on the evening of Mar 10 when I saw 22 birds fly in (and found **the Mute Swan already on her nest**, suggesting that it would not be long before the Egrets would start nesting as Grey Herons have already done at their Heronries). One other thought about Little Egrets which occurred to me when writing my Diary entry for Feb 29 concerns their habit of moving away from coastal to inland sites during the winter months. Previously I had thought that the main reason for this was that it was more sheltered from winter winds at inland than at coastal sites but I now realise that the length of day plays a significant part - in the harbours high tides prevent the Egrets from fishing for several hours each day and in winter that no-fishing period can be a significant part of the daylight hours whereas at an inland site the water is either available all day (or frozen all day!)

**Grey Heron:** On Mar 9 there were 21 active nests at the Weir Wood Reservoir heronry in Sussex

**Spoonbill:** In addition to the flock of at least 14 still in Poole Harbour one settled at the Farlington Marshes Deeps from Mar 6 to 8 at least

**Mute Swan:** The female of the Langstone Pond pair was already sitting on a new nest at dusk on Mar 10 - the first sitter that I am aware of this year.

**Snow Goose:** The appearance of a flock of 31 this month first in West Sussex then shortly after in East Sussex prompted Lee Evans to say that these were almost certainly a feral population which breeds at Blenheim Park in Oxfordshire but which each spring and autumn is spurred by a confused migratory urge to go on long distance flights which have taken it in different years to Lancashire, Somerset, Sussex and Kent (and probably many more counties)

**Brent Goose:** Still plenty on the move with a flock of 200 in the Emsworth area on Mar 8 and around 400 flying in to harbour channels in the Langstone village area at dusk on Mar 10 (my guess was that they had been feeding on inland fields but came to the harbour to avoid night-time predators, or maybe gathering there ready to take off on the next stage of their journey east when the full moon rose to light their way)

**Red-breasted Goose:** After appearing on the Lymington shore on Feb 25 and 26 I have seen no more reports of this ex-Devon bird on Hants birding sources but the RBA website has put out reports of a bird in Hampshire on Mar 3,4,5, 8 and 10 - I wonder where and what status the bird has?

**Green-winged Teal:** The bird found by Jason Crook at Farlington Marshes on Feb 23 was still being reported there on Mar 9

**Mallard:** At least two broods of ducklings have been seen in Hampshire since around Mar 1

**Scaup:** A report of 5 pairs on the moat of Fort Brockhurst in Gosport was almost certainly a mis-identification of Tufted Ducks

**Long-tailed Duck:** One being reported at Christchurch Harbour up to Mar 9 is probably the one seen there regularly since Feb 12. A flock of 32 Long-tailed Duck off the arctic coast of Norway can be seen at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> and the text reminds us that their display not only involves throwiing their heads back but also giving a loud 'barking' call

**Bufflehead:** The bird which arrived at Helston in Cornwall on Oct 29 was last seen there in Mar 3 (moving to Redruth on Mar 4 before disappearing)

**Smew:** No sightings during this week but late news indicates that the one seen on the Thorney Little Deeps on Feb 29 was still around on Mar 2 when it was reported further south along the Thorney west shore to give it a claim to being the last Smew in England this winter

**Ruddy Duck:** I am pretty sure that quite a few have survived the recent cull and I see that a female was still to be found at a south Devon site on Mar 9

**Osprey:** The first for the year was seen to fly over Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex on Mar 9

**Hobby:** The first for the year was seen in the Hordle area of south west Hants on Mar 9

**Peregrine:** On Mar 9 the Chichester Cathedral male brought a food offering to the female which ate it while perched near the base of the spire. At Shoreham Power Station one bird was seen having a look at the nest box erected for them on the Power Station chimney.

**Pheasant:** For a bit birdwatching variety see the **Blue Pheasant** photo taken by Martyn Wilson at <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-7sr5UdNiqrQ/T1OOzJTSfKI/AAAAAAAAAfA/9HgLMdJ8rko/s1600/Pheasant+04-03-12+b+db1.jpg>

**Water Rail:** One has been at Brook Meadow in Emsworth since it was first spotted on Feb 15 and has been the subject of a series of photos taken by Brian

Fellows which can be seen at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

**Moorhen:** In a discussion on Hoslist about when the first Mallard ducklings of the year were seen it was mentioned as an 'aside' that a Moorhen had chicks somewhere in Buckinghamshire around Feb 15

**Common Crane:** With large number of spring passage birds moving on the near continent since Jan 31 and with a minimum of 1262 seen over one German site on Mar 6 (potential total of 3030 if the counts from 25 sites on that day are added together) it is surprising that more have not crossed the channel to appear over here but the only report I have seen is of two birds flying over the Kent Stour valley (not landing) on Mar 3

**Avocet:** Plenty of these around including a report of 18 at Titchfield Haven on Mar 3 (I suspect these are the start of the flock that will stay there and breed)

**Stone Curlew:** After the report of a first migrant heard flying over Birdham near Chichester on the night of Feb 21 there has been at least one other sighting (with photo) of one in a Devon field at Seaton Marshes on Mar 3

**Little Ringed Plover:** I have not seen the details of any sighting so far but Lee Evans was aware of an arrival somewhere in England on or before Feb 29

**Knot:** The large flock seen in the Emsworth area of Chichester Harbour from mid January and reaching a peak of 1200 birds on Feb 13 has not been reported since 50 were seen on Feb 23 but there were still 140 on the Pilsey sands for the Mar 10 WeBS count

**Purple Sandpiper:** None reported at Southsea Castle since 15 were there on Mar 1 but this week has brought new reports of 36 at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 7 and 10 at Shoreham Harbour on that same day

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** One was reported at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on at least five days between Jan 2 and Feb 2 before moving to the north end of The Fleet for a couple of sightings at Rodden Hive on Feb 3 and 4. It has not been reported since then until Mar 5 when it re-appeared at Lodmoor

**Whimbrel:** I see that the first passage birds last year were seen at Seaford Splash Point on Mar 12 supporting my thought that a party of six seen in the Netherlands on Mar 9 were this year's first passage birds

**Spotted Redshank:** The Nore Barn bird at Emsworth was still there on Mar 9 and six were still on the Lymington marshes on Mar 10 but I suspect that current good weather may encourage them to set off on their journeys earlier than usual. Last year the Nore Barn bird was last seen on Mar 19 (which I recall to be the date on which Richard Williamson always expected the Brent to leave Chichester Harbour)

**Spotted Sandpiper:** Maybe this has already left Christchurch Harbour - no reports of it since Mar 5

**Pomarine Skua:** Although I have seen 18 reports of these this winter (mainly from continental sites though singles have been seen at Selsey, Portland, Devon and Cornwall - all in January) a report of one flying east past Climping (nr Worthing) on Mar 7 could be the first sign of spring passage.

**Great Skua:** Two flew east past Dungeness on Mar 3 and one followed past Splash Point on Mar 4

**Sandwich Tern:** By Mar 9 there were 60 queuing up for nest sites at Rye Harbour

**Puffin:** A single bird arrived back at the Portland Bill Auk colony on Mar 3

**Short-eared Owl:** Still reports from five sites this week but it is pretty clear that many of these birds have now left us and at least one of this week's reports is a sighting of a bird on passage (one at Farlington Marshes on Mar 9 - no previous recent sightings there)

**Wood Lark:** Song has been heard locally this week from both the Stansted East Park and the area between West Marden and Up Marden

**Shorelark:** What was probably the last sighting of our wintering birds was in the Seasalter area of the north Kent coast on Mar 8

**Sand Martin:** First back were two in Pembrokeshire on Mar 1, followed this week by one at Radipole (Weymouth) on Mar 4, then one at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 6 and then nine at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 8

**Swallow:** Just one sighting this week - a single bird flying over the Seaford area - following what I am taking as the first normal arrival at Hastings on Mar 1

**White Wagtail:** Although these do not normally stay and breed on this side of the Channel passage birds have been appearing here since Feb 26 when the first were seen at Portland

**Waxwing:** After very few reports this winter it is worth mentioning that a party of seven were seen at a German site on Mar 8

**Black-bellied Dipper:** There is very little to distinguish our resident Dipper species from the Black-bellied form of which one was found in Yorkshire on Mar 6. If you want to know the differences go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White-throated Dipper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White-throated_Dipper)

**Wheatear:** The first was seen on the Exminster Marshes in Devon on Mar 6 with another at Portland on Mar 7 and three more at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 8, then one at Durlston on Mar 9

**Blackbird:** A pair were feeding young in a nest at Lewes on Mar 1. A leucistic bird (with bold patches of white in its plumage) was seen - not for the first time - at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Mar 9 and in my Havant garden one male, which seems to have settled here for the breeding season, felt it was being excluded from the food on my bird table by two old bicycle inner tubes which I hung over it some time back with the intention of excluding Wood Pigeons while allowing a Robin access. This week I saw the Blackbird perched on a nearby bush forming a plan - it then flew onto the roof of the bird table, seized hold of one of the inner tubes and dragged it sideways so as to leave a larger gap for it to get into the food area which it has since been visiting regularly.

**Fieldfare:** Flocks of these and Redwings have been moving through the Havant area on their way north this week - on Mar 3 one of these flocks seen in the fields between Stansted House and the Main Avenue of trees had several Mistle Thrushes in it.

**Paddyfield Warbler:** The Pagham Harbour north walls bird was still present on Mar 10

**Lesser Whitethroat:** Mar 3 brought a report of one in a private garden at Saltash on the Devon/Cornwall border. If true I guess this bird has been wintering thereabouts rather than being a very early spring migrant

**Yellow-browed Warbler:** The bird in the grounds of the PAREXELL business premises in Worthing's Upper High Street was still there on Mar 7 and for those not familiar with the bird's calls I recommend a visit to [http://www.youtube.com/v/RJVgUnfjrjg?version=3&f=user\\_uploads&c=google-webdrive-0&app=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/v/RJVgUnfjrjg?version=3&f=user_uploads&c=google-webdrive-0&app=youtube_gdata) where you can hear a recording made by Graeme Lyons and you can read his account of his visit there in his blog at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/>

**Coal Tit:** First mention of a continental bird this year comes from Christchurch Harbour on Mar 5

**Rose Coloured Starling:** These do not often turn up in adult plumage and in places that have good public access but one seen near the village Post Office at Hordle near New Milton in south west Hampshire has been showing and singing there from Mar 3 to 9 at least. To save a journey you can see photos of it taken by Tony Tindale from Fareham <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/files/2012/03/R-cS1.jpg> and read about the trip at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/2012/03/04/rose-coloured-starling-at-hordle-hants/> though I suggest you also go to <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> and see what the other two amigos have been up to in the Arctic Circle off Norway

**Hawfinch:** The Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park (i.e. the water filled holes from which gravel was dug for the construction of the M27) has had a lucky break recently with up to 10 Hawfinches being seen there from Feb 24 to Mar 9 at least.

**Cirl Bunting:** The success of the RSPB rescue/re-introduction of a Cirl Bunting population in Devon (and more recently Cornwall) has allowed many people to see these birds but this week the Devon Birding Blog (<http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.com/>) entry for Mar 9 tells us that the birds are now coming regularly to feeders in at least two private gardens.

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Brimstone, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma.** Also in this weeks butterfly news is the 'tidying up' of vegetation around the old Gilkicker Fort at Gosport prior to development of the building into expensive flats that will soon be on sale - loss of the vegetation almost certainly means **loss of a long established colony of Wall Brown butterflies** leaving the Keyhaven area as the only reliable site for the species in mainland Hampshire (though they do still appear unpredictably at several places in the county)

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at [http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

#### **Species recorded for the first time this year/season:**

**0648 White-shouldered House-moth *Endrosis sarcitrella*** found at Folkestone on Mar 8 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1865>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0648.php>

**2189 Twin-spotted Quaker *Orthosia munda*** found in Dorset on Mar 9 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1940>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2189.php>

**2243 Early Grey *Xylocampa areola*** found in Dorset on Mar 3 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6184>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2243.php>  
Also getting their first mentions for the year were two species still in their larval stages

**0377 Sallow Clearwing *Synanthedon flaviventris*** galls found on Grey Willows in Dorset on Mar 3 - for photos of the adult moth but not the galls see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=875>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0377.php>

For the second of these see the entry for Mar 3 at <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings.html> showing **the caterpillar (and its dropping) which Michael Blencowe found inside a green pepper** (intended for human consumption) when he removed the cellophane wrapping and cut open the pepper - the caterpillar had travelled inside the pepper all the way from Gambia

### Other Insects:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Pond Skater (*Gerris lacustris*):** Last week I promised to search out a reason why a population of these grew from a handful to around 100 in the Westbrook Stream at Emsworth between Feb 15 and Mar 1 only to find none there on Mar 2. I do not have a definitive answer but I have discovered what may be a major contributing factor - namely that many of these insects have wings and so could have left the stream without any harm coming to them if they sensed danger or a change in the environment that meant they would be better off elsewhere.

**Bloody Nosed Beetles:** Both the standard and the Lesser species of this beetle were seen at Durlston this week - several Lessers were on the downland on Mar 9 and a pair of the larger species were mating there on Mar 10

### **PLANTS**

**Lesser Celandine:** Brian Fellows points out something that I had not previously noticed - the variability in the number of petals on these flowers. I see that Stace describes four subspecies - two of them are distinguished by developing 'cream coloured tubers' in their leaf axils after flowering is finished and these less common 'bulbiferous' plants are further divided by the number of petals in the flowers (the normal wild bulbiferous plants have 6 to 11 petals, each no more than 5mm long, and are named *Ranunculus ficaria bulbifer*; the type developed for planting in gardens have 17 to 26 much larger petals - 4 to 12 mm long - named *R.f.ficariiformis*). The commoner non-bulbiferous plants are also divided according to the number of petals - *R.f.ficaria* has 10 to 20 petals 4-9 mm long; *R.f.chrysocephalus* (meaning 'gold headed') has 18 to 25 petals each 9 to 15mm long.

**Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis*):** The plants growing under Hazel trees on the north side of Woodlands Lane just before it plunges downhill to Walderton village on its way from Stansted Park were just starting to flower on Mar 8

**Hairy Violet:** Having read that the first of these was flowering at Durlston on the morning of Mar 10 I went to one of the places that they grow on Portsdown (roughly south of the entrance to the Fort Widley equestrian centre) and found just one plant out that same afternoon (photo on my Diary page) Nearby quite a few much darker flowered Sweet Violets were also out but I did not rely on flower colour but did ensure that the Hairy plant some patent hairs more than 1 mm long and had no 'runners' or stolons

**Lesser Chickweed:** Flowering at Durlston on Mar 9 but not known (to me) in the Havant area

**Spurge Laurel:** My first sight of this in flower along the south side of Woodlands Lane on Mar 8 (though some plants which have not been eaten by Fallow Deer may well have been flowering much earlier)

**Colts Foot:** First flowers found in the QE Country Park near Petersfield on Mar 8 with a second find on the north shore of Pagham Harbour on Mar 10

**Early Purple orchid leaves:** First leaf rosettes found at the Longcopse site (east end of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth) on Mar 6

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Fox:** Some dogs give the impression of having human intelligence and a photo on the Christchurch Harbour (CHOG) website this week, taken by Alex Hayden, gives you that feeling - see [http://www.chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/50Fox-IMG\\_0022.jpg](http://www.chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/50Fox-IMG_0022.jpg) Sadly not all have that understanding of human ways and when I was on Portsdown in the glorious sunshine on Saturday afternoon (Mar 10) I passed the corpse of a recent road casualty outside Fort Widley - one hopes it was not a vixen which had recently given birth (most cubs are born in March), leaving a litter of young to die in a nearby earth.

**Badger:** On Mar 6 Badgers at Durlston were clearing out bedding from one of their setts and when I saw this I wondered if this might be a sign that a 'bedroom was being re-decorated in anticipation of the birth of youngsters' but I see they start giving birth in January so this was probably just normal 'spring cleaning'. Also on the subject of Badgers I half-heard something on the radio this morning which I thought was a statement the Natural England were now opposed to a general Badger cull and thought it would do more harm than good (a sentiment that I agree with).

**Fallow Deer:** A bunch of around 20 Fallow Deer were seen in the Longcopse wood (east end of the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth) on Mar 4 with one of the deer having a white coat. As with the Grey Squirrels white deer have been present in very small numbers around here for as long as I can remember (and I recall a general feeling of disgust when one white adult was killed by poachers around twenty years ago)

**Hare:** The first reported sighting of females 'boxing' over-amorous males (to show them that they were not wanted) came from the West Marden/Walderton area north of the Ems valley on Mar 4

**Pipistrelle Bat:** Recent mild evenings have I think brought bats out of hibernation and I was reminded of this when watching Egrets coming to roost at Langstone Pond on the evening of Mar 10 - as dusk closed in a Pipistrelle came chasing its prey over the seawall and when cycling home up Wade Lane a little later another small bat gave me a surprise when it appeared about a foot in front of me at eye

level and barely scraped over my head at a closing speed in excess of 30  
Malcolm Phillips

**Common Lizard:** The first report of these out of hibernation came from the New Forest last week on Mar 1 and this week Brian Fellows' website had a report of more than 25 seen in a walk through the Hollybank Wood and adjacent Southleigh Forest on Mar 4

**Flatfish:** Two species mentioned in this week's news. On Mar 3 a **Flounder** was seen on the bed of the River Ems at Emsworth, having come in on the tide. This species is normally found in the sea but I read that it is the most tolerant of low salinity of all seafish (though I don't think it will wish to give up the 'freedom of the seas' to remain in the river). The second species mentioned was **Plaice** - on Mar 6 the Durlston website told us that the 'spring run' of had just started and as far as I can make out this involves the fish in coming into shallow coastal waters after spawning a little further out.

**Fungi:** Nothing as exciting as the **Scarlet Elfcups** which were mentioned in last week's summary after appearing at the Blashford Lakes and at Durlston but this week Durlston had **Jelly Ear (*Auricularia auricula-judae*)** on Elder trees and Brook Meadow at Emsworth had fresh **Turkeytail brackets (*Trametes versicolor*)**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 5 - 11 (WEEK 10 OF 2012)**

### **Sat 10 Mar**

#### **First Hairy Violet on Portsdown**

The daily ranger's report on the Durlston website this morning announced that the first **Hairy Violet** was in flower there so in this afternoon's sunshine I went to see if any were out on Portsdown and found just **one small specimen on the south facing slope below Fort Widley**. Nearby I found a fair number of **Sweet Violets** but I am happy that the photo (below) which I took is of a **Hairy Violet** as (though it is difficult to see much in the photo) I used my hand lens to assure myself that the plant did have some long hairs on it (and no runners!)

The only Hairy Violet I found on Portsdown today

Nothing much else to be seen on the water starved downland but when I had made my way east and down to reach the London Road opposite Chalk Ridge Road, and then walked uphill past the Caravan Park with its **active Rookery**, I had lots of flowering **Alexanders** on my list and several other common 'weeds'. At the point where the sliproad connects to the Portsdown Hill Road near The George I noticed lots of flowering **Whitlowgrass** along the road edges and in the central reservation of the slip road. Reaching the Hill Road I walked towards the viewpoint carpark and in so doing came on a small cluster of **Cowslips** in fresh flower.

One of two Cowslip plants found today

After tea I cycled down to Langstone Pond and counted just **22 Egrets coming in to roost** and by the time I decided that I would not wait for any further latecomers at least **one Pipistrelle bat** was flying around me while high overhead the **Venus** -

**Jupiter pair** were showing brilliantly close together and **Mars** had also become visible in the east over Emsworth

Earlier in this session I had found the **Pen Swan was already on her nest** with the Cob on the pond nearby and out in the tiny channel of water that remained at dead low water after a spring tide some **400 Brent** took refuge from nighttime predators after presumably feeding on inland fields. Near them on the mud were at least **35 Shelduck** and perhaps **30 Teal**

## Thu 8 Mar

### Green Hellebore in Woodlands Lane

As promised in my previous entry today's outing was in search of the wild **Green Hellebores** which grow in Lordington Copse (to which there is no public access nowadays) and spill out onto the side of Woodlands Lane just before it plunges downhill on its way from the Stansted East Park to Walderton. Reaching the section of the lane where it passes Lordington Copse my first stop was to check out the **Spurge Laurel** bushes which have probably been flowering for a month or more though today was my first sight of them. Continuing west I only found five plants of the **Green Hellebore** and the first four had no flowers so far so I was pleased that the fifth one had at least three fresh flowers. After seeing them I crossed the lane to its south side where a huge mass of **Lesser Periwinkle** leaves confirmed their identity with a single flower.

Continuing south from Walderton I stopped at Racton where the road forks and one branch goes off east towards Funtington. Here the River Ems normally flows under the road but this year's drought had left the riverbed completely dry and there was no hint of the **Butterbur plants** which normally flower here. For those puzzled by the good flow of water in the River Ems downstream in Brook Meadow at Emsworth (where the Butterbur is now flowering) I must explain that it has long been the practice to abstract all the water from Ems at the Pumping Station near Walderton, leaving the stream dry in the section from Walderton through Racton and past Aldsworth down to the northern edge of Westbourne where (at the place appropriately named Deepsprings) water comes up from a deep borehole to replenish the river on its course through Westbourne and Emsworth into Chichester Harbour.

On this cycle ride via the Hollybank Woods, Southleigh Forest and Stansted Park I failed to hear the **Woodlark** which I might have heard in the morning, but as I was passing through Stubbermere (approaching the Stansted Sawmill from Southleigh Forest) I did see **a silent flock of Redwing** and in several fields I noticed the yellow flower spikes of **Rape** (left over from a previous crop) were already starting to flower.

Summer migrants so far: For those like myself who like to be up to date with the latest new arrivals this is the list of those that I have heard of

**Stone Curlew:** One heard over Birdham (nr Chichester) on the night of Feb 29 and another seen on Seaton Marshes in Devon On Mar 3

**Sandwich Tern:** First three at Rye Harbour on Mar 1 with 52 at Dungeness on Mar 2. Plenty more since then.

**Sand Martin:** Two reported in Wales on Mar 2. First in Dorset on Mar 4. First in Hants (Blashford Lakes) on Mar 6 followed by 9 at Christchurch Harbour in Dorset on Mar 8

**Swallow:** Ignoring birds seen on Feb 1 and earlier, Mar 1 brought one to Hastings and Mar 8 saw one at Seaford in Sussex

**Wheatear:** First in Devon on Mar 6 then one at Portland on Mar 7, three at Christchurch Harbour on Mar 8 and one at Durlston on Mar 8

**Garganey:** A drake seen on the Dorset Stour near Blandford on Feb 20 was suspected of being an escape but a female at Arne (Poole Harbour) on Feb 27 was probably a migrant as was one in the Netherlands on Mar 3

Also arriving but impossible to identify as migrants have been many **Chiffchaffs** and possibly some **Blackcaps**

## **Tue 6 Mar**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Alpine Squill in Holybank Woods**

I first came across the delicate blue flowers of **Alpine Squill (Scilla bifolia)** on Mar 2 in 2007 when exploring the extreme south east corner of the Hollybank Woods (north of Emsworth) where a great selection of spring flowers (including a big colony of Early Purple Orchids) can be found. For photos of what the plant can look like in flower see

[http://www.ukwildflowers.com/Web\\_pages/scilla\\_bifolia\\_alpine\\_squill.htm](http://www.ukwildflowers.com/Web_pages/scilla_bifolia_alpine_squill.htm) In recent years I have found up to half a dozen plants flowering at this site before this date but today I could only see two plants, both at an early stage of flowering. Although this is a fairly common garden plant it is uncommon in the wild and I have been puzzled as to how these plants came to grow here - they are about half a mile from the Emsworth Common Road and very few people visit this site so I think we can rule out casual dumping of unwanted garden plants and my best guess is that a lover of plants had found this site and thought it could be made even more attractive by planting them here (and I would not disagree).

One of the two Alpine Squill plants in bud today

Very few other plants were in flower - the best were several clumps of **Primrose** and there was promise of things to come in a few **Early Purple orchid leaf rosettes** but the sunshine was warm enough to have brought out a butterfly (I think a **Peacock**) which flew up from the ground where it had been basking and went up and up to continue basking on a branch of a tall tree. At least seven bird species were singing, including a magnificent **Mistle Thrush**, and noisy **Nuthatches** were active with Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers both heard.

When the sun shines again after tomorrow's forecast rain I will be heading to Woodlands Lane, leading down to Walderton from the Stansted East Park, in search of the **Green Hellebore** which should now be in flower there. Hopefully I will also hear **Woodlark song** and see **Hares**, both of which featured in accounts of two walks in this general area last Saturday.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 27 - MAR 4 (WEEK 9 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Migrant Bird Arrivals:** On Feb 29 Lee Evans began his 'End of February Review' with the announcement that **Stone Curlew**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **White Wagtail** and **Wheatear** had already been seen in Britain but without giving dates and places (the first **Stone Curlew** was presumably the one heard flying over Birdham near Chichester on Feb 21). Leaving aside a couple of **Swallows** seen in Cornwall on Jan 19 and Feb 1 plus a 'possible' over the Isle of Wight on Jan 25 the first normal migrant arrival was seen in the Hastings area on Mar 1 and the first **Sand Martin** report was of two seen in Pembrokeshire that day. Mar 1 was also the day on which migrant **Sandwich Terns** reached Rye Harbour - only three of them but there was no doubt they were not wintering birds when 52 were seen at Dungeness on Mar 2. Of the non-passerines there have been two reports of **Garganey** with the first being a male seen on Feb 20 on the Dorset River Stour but regarded as 'dubious' and the second being a female in Poole Harbour near Arne on Feb 27 (a third arrival of one in the Netherlands on Mar 3 helps to show that the species is on the move). On Mar 1 Dungeness claimed a **Chiffchaff** as a migrant arrival but it is impossible to say if it was the first, and while on the subject of difficulty in deciding the arrival and departure dates of **Blackcaps** Cliff Dean's blog entry for Feb 29 has a link to a BTO ringers blog which shows that at least one of our summer birds did not head south in the autumn but was still to be seen near its nest Suffolk nest site in early December after being ringed there in May (see <http://btoringing.blogspot.com/2010/12/whats-going-on-with-wintering-blackcaps.html> )

**Divers:** Dungeness had reported 644 **Red-throated** moving east on Feb 18, dropping to 226 on Feb 20 but the highest count in the reports I have seen this week was just 22 passing Portland on Feb 26 with only 6 seen there on Feb 29. Single **Black-throated** were still present this week (one going east at Selsey on Feb 26 and one at the Weston shore in Southampton Water on Feb 29) with one seen in Southampton Water on Mar 4. A few **Great Northern** were also still around this week with as many as 4 in Weymouth Bay on Feb 29 when another was in Southampton Water and there was a last sighting of one at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 28 after it had been a regular sight there since Feb 5. Locally one was off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 25

**Grebes:** The raft of **2000 Great Crested** off Dungeness on Feb 25 dwindled to 500 on Mar 1 (when 10 were off Worthing along with **2 Red-necked** and **10 Slavonian**). Earlier in the week there had been 5 Slavonian at Selsey on Feb 26 and 3 in Portland Harbour - with another outside the harbour - on Feb 29. **Black-necked** were still to be seen at eight sites during the week with a flock of 12 off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 25 and up to four were seen at the Blashford Lakes as late as Mar 2 (the loner on West Rise Lake at Eastbourne was still there on Mar 1).

**Black-browed Albatross:** On Feb 29 one was seen in the north Atlantic 184 miles south west of the south-western tip of Ireland (Mizen Head), reviving memories of a bird about which I wrote in 2009 that it was thought to have been

blown off course in the south Atlantic some 40 years earlier and to have led a lonely life in the North Atlantic ever since - turning up at Gannet breeding colonies around Scotland ever since but never succeeding in finding a mate. He is thought to have been hatched in the early 1960s and if this is the same bird he will now be more than 50 years old with an expected lifespan of 70 years. In 2009 the BBC put out an account which you can see at

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/highlands\\_and\\_islands/6641021.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/highlands_and_islands/6641021.stm) and in July 2010 Lee Evans described a dramatic incident in the bird's life (see <http://uk400clubrarebirdalert.blogspot.com/2010/07/yellow-nosed-albatross-new-to-britain.html> ) when he was found blocking the driveway of a house in Somerset and was taken to the local Wildlife Rescue centre and later released. In 2011 he seems to have been back on his futile search for a mate, being seen in May off Ayrshire and in September heading south off Yorkshire.

**Bittern:** Still 14 reports from ten sites this week including news of two at Brading on the Isle of Wight on Feb 26 and for a bit of variety see Cliff Dean's blog describing one seen swimming when he took one of his RX Bird Walks parties to Dungeness ( <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2012/02/26/swimming-bittern/> ). Probably the most significant reports this week came from the Kent Stour Valley where on Feb 26 seven Bitterns were seen flying high east at dusk and on Feb 29 five more birds were seen doing the same at dusk - the significance being partly in the indication of winter birds leaving southern England but more in revealing the numbers that may have been lurking in the reeds were birders would have been lucky to see more than a couple of them (see <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/Februarysightings.htm> ). On Mar 3 one was seen in the reeds on the east side of Ivy Lake at Chichester and Tony Wilson had a surprise when one flew up from reeds around a tiny pond near his Edburton home below the Sussex Downs.

**Cattle Egret:** Maybe we have not seen the last of these for this winter - on Feb 26 a birder thought he had seen one take off and fly from a field in the Cocking area (near Midhurst) as the bus he was travelling on passed the field.

**Little Egret:** On Feb 24 I watched the Langstone pond roost over the sunset period but could not record more than 8 birds coming in to spend the night there - much the same number as I have seen there since the beginning of the year - but on Feb 29 when I chanced to be passing the pond at dusk I could immediately see a significant increase in numbers and an educated guess put the count at a minimum of 25 birds. Nest building should begin soon!

**Great White Egret:** On Feb 29 Lee Evans told us that a group of 8 were then to be seen together at a Somerset Levels site (with many others elsewhere in England) and on Feb 26 one was photographed back at the west end of the Thorney Great Deep where it had been regularly seen between Jan 29 and Feb 11.

**White Stork:** These have been returning to breeding sites in the Low Countries since Feb 5 but this week it seems that one had a navigational problem and was

seen on a Landfill site in Lincolnshire on Feb 29 (though it may have been a local escapee).

**Glossy Ibis:** Two have been at Radipole (Weymouth) this week and one was seen near Arne in Poole Harbour on Feb 26

**Spoonbill:** No reports of the flock in Poole Harbour this week but a couple of indications that these birds are moving to (or in search of) breeding sites came from Exminster marshes in Devon where a single bird (ringed FJ9 ) returned in full breeding plumage on Mar 2 and on Feb 29 Christchurch Harbour reported five birds flying east over that site.

**Brent Goose:** .. and still they come .. on Feb 29 a flock of 2000 dark bellied birds put in an appearance at the Brownwich Cliffs area west of Titchfield Haven while 180 headed off east past Dungeness. Smaller groups can be seen along the northern shores of the Solent Harbours as they pause during their slow move eastward. In Devon the first group of six **Pale Bellied** birds were seen at Exmouth on Mar 3, presumed to be en route from perhaps the Bay of Biscay towards our west coast before making the Atlantic crossing to northern Canada

**Red-breasted Goose:** The bird presumed to have come from Devon (last seen there on Feb 19) which arrived on the Lymington shore on Feb 25 was seen again on Feb 26 but there have been no further reports ...

**Pintail:** There seem to have been more than usual on the south coast this winter (though I cannot produce evidence for this) and there were still at least 40 on the Emsworth West Parade shore on Feb 28 with 50 at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 29, dropping to 32 there on Mar 2

**Garganey:** When one male appeared on the River Stour just south of Blandford in Dorset on Feb 20 there were doubts about it being a migrant arrival but since then a female has been seen at Arne (Poole Harbour) on Feb 27 and another has turned up at a Netherlands site on Mar 3

**Shoveler:** Peter Raby filmed 36 feeding on Baffins Pond on Mar 3 and you can watch them at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Vt1X6xzMn0> The technique used is for the birds to form a complete circle swimming around in relatively shallow water - each bird is then able to feed on what is stirred up by the feet of the bird in front of it (if the circle is not complete the leading bird loses out as no bird is stirring up food for it, and it must require either a fair amount of brain power or a lucky chance to realise this). I have seen them doing this in complete circles on more than one occasion but the birds at Baffins had not perfected the technique and were all spinning round more or less at random. Presumably this method of devouring the maximum amount of food in the shortest time is a good way of 'stoking up' prior to making a lengthy passage flight back to breeding quarters.

**Hybrid Tufted x Red Crested Pochard:** All the Aythya duck species interbreed freely but one of the more unusual products of this can be seen in a photo taken on Feb 29 at Torcross in Devon - see <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/>-

[thhpMAKEGPE/T09YPpbdXel/AAAAAAAAABfl/2oVIT4qDJq4/s1600/Red-crested%2BPochard%2Bx%2BTufted%2BDuck%2Bhybrid%2Bm%2BDSC00534.jpg](http://thhpMAKEGPE/T09YPpbdXel/AAAAAAAAABfl/2oVIT4qDJq4/s1600/Red-crested%2BPochard%2Bx%2BTufted%2BDuck%2Bhybrid%2Bm%2BDSC00534.jpg)

**Long-tailed Duck:** One has been in the Christchurch Harbour area from Feb 12 to Mar 1 at least and was even seen across Christchurch Bay on Feb 28 by birders at Chewton Bunny on the Hampshire side of the county boundary to the east of Christchurch

**Smew:** Still six reports this week including a surprise sighting of a redhead on the Thorney Little Deeps on Feb 29

**Ruddy Duck:** News of survivors of the government sponsored cull (President Assad of Syria is not alone in willfully shooting harmless residents in his country) continue to emerge. We have heard of them surviving in both East and West Sussex and this week I heard that a small group could currently be seen at a Nature Reserve in Nottinghamshire.

**White-tailed Eagle:** No further sightings of the 'Fox eating Vulture' this week and on Feb 29 Lee Evans concluded that it had returned to the continent (though I suppose that if the Fox had died of poison there is an alternative end to the story)

**Goshawk:** A pair reported to have been seen displaying in the New Forest on Mar 1

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird was still giving live shows on Mar 1

**Water Rail:** Another regular performer with a more secretive acting style was the Water Rail to be seen 'behind the dead reeds' at the northern end of Brook Meadow in Emsworth - it was still there on Mar 2

**Common Crane:** By Mar 3 at least 314 (potentially 525 if reports from five sites are added together) were moving through the Low Countries - unlike the White Stork none seem to have strayed across the Channel so far

**Purple Sandpiper:** The number stopping off at Southsea Castle as they gradually move east along the south coast varies from day to day but hit a peak of 15 on Mar 1 (Up to 12 'winter residents' had been there on three dates in Jan)

**Common Sandpiper:** One seen at Broadmarsh (Havant) on Mar 3

**Ruff:** Another example of birds stopping off on their eastward passage along the south coast came in a report on Feb 29 of two Ruff in a flooded field near the River Itchen at Bishopstoke (east of Eastleigh)

**Woodcock:** The Eastleigh Lakeside site has been lucky in attracting a wintering bird which has been seen daily from Feb 29 to Mar 3 at least. I have always been opposed to the 'sport' of shooting hungry and exhausted birds, driven from the continent by hard winter weather, as they arrive on our southern shores but it

seems that some of the exhausted birds are so weak that they are unable to participate in this sport - this thought provoked by the Mar 1 entry on the Sandwich Bay website ( <http://www.sbbot.co.uk/sightings/avian/index.asp> ) describing how four drowned Woodcock corpses were found in a short section of the tideline there, probably just a tiny fraction of those that fail to complete their journey to 'safety' here in England. On a personal note I was made aware of this winter 'sport' when ownership of the Tournerbury Woods on Hayling Island changed in the 1980s and my personal permission to explore the woods (given by the previous owner) was revoked by the new, younger, owner who wished to make money out of the 'sporting rights'.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Brian Fellows recent 'discovery' that feeding Blackwits regularly 'spurt' out jets of water during the feeding process was at first regarded as dubious by established ornithologists specialising in wading birds but is now gaining recognition and this week Brian received support from a Cheshire birder (Matt Thomas) who had also noticed this activity among birds on the River Dee estuary. See <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/x-black-tailed-godwit-spurting.htm> which has a link to Matt's blog at <http://deebirder.blogspot.com/> which is well worth checking out for its excellent bird photography and for a picture of the group recently studying waders in Portugal in which three old acquaintances of mine can be seen (Pete Potts, Anne de Potier and Ruth Croger)

**Med Gulls:** As their nesting season approaches more and more of these stylish (but carnivorous) bird are being seen and heard. On Feb 25 a count of more than 700 in Portland Harbour area set a new county record for Dorset (not sure but I think the record was for the number present in February rather than at any time in the year) and on Mar 1 I saw the first report of the gulls 'following the plough' at the east end of the South Downs (this species does not eat fish or the other items on offer around our harbours but flies inland for worms when it feels hungry - later it can add the chicks of other gull species to its meat-only diet)

**Ring-billed Gull:** The regular bird at Gosport's Walpole Park/Cockle Pond was still present on Feb 28 and, according to RBA News on Feb 26, was one of just 7 of its species currently in Britain

**Iceland Gull:** RBA News for Feb 26 gave a UK total of 193 birds (that count had been up to 332 on Feb 19) and one of the birds being seen this week was visible from the Broadmarsh slipway on the north of Langstone Harbour on most days up to Mar 2

**Sandwich Tern:** Rye Harbour claimed the first arrival of summer birds when three turned up there on Mar 1 but there was no doubt that these were not wintering birds when 52 were seen at Dungeness

**Puffin:** Not exactly a migrant but the return to Portland on Mar 3 of the first Puffin since last year was noteworthy

**Short-eared Owl:** Still to be seen at 12 sites this week but one at Farlington Marshes on Mar 2 was probably already on the move as it is the first to get a mention there since Jan 29

**Woodlark:** Of local interest I am pleased to hear that these are back at a regular site in the West Marden area (seen/heard by John Goodspeed on Mar 3)

**Swallow:** Andrew Grace saw what I am taking as the first normal migrant arrival of the year at St Leonards (Hastings) on Mar 1

**Sand Martin:** Two seen in Pembrokeshire on Mar 1 were the first I know of (RBA News)

**Grey Wagtail:** I had regular sightings of these birds in the Lymbourne Stream beside the Hayling Billy trail in Havant between Nov 19 and Dec 16 but have not seen one there since (my only local sighting in 2012 was at the Homewell spring in the town on Jan 26) so I was interested to see that two birds were back in the Lymbourne Stream on Feb 28 - hopefully they were a pair and will find a nest site nearby.

**White Wagtail:** The first to be reported in southern England this year was at Portland on Feb 26 followed by one in Cornwall on Feb 28 and one in Kent on Mar 1

**Blackbird:** Song can now be heard almost everywhere and on Mar 1 a pair were seen carrying worms to young in a nest at Lewes

**Fieldfare:** Several reports of these moving north in big flocks this week including a sighting on Mar 3 of up to 200 seen in the Ems valley are during a walk from Forestside to Lyecommon (crossing the valley south of West Marden). Also seen during the walk were a smaller number of **Redwing plus Buzzards, a Red Kite and two Grey Partridges.**

**Blackcap:** As mentioned in news of migrant arrivals there has been a single question mark placed against the accepted theory that all our breeding birds fly south each autumn while all our wintering birds come and go from Europe. At least one breeding bird ringed in Suffolk in May last year was still close to its nest site in December

**Chiffchaff:** Dungeness reported one which arrived with other migrants on Mar 1 as a 'migrant arrival' - the first to be publicly claimed as such but almost certainly not the first to fly the Channel this spring

**Nuthatch:** A pair were seen nestbuilding (?plastering up the entrance of an old woodpecker nest?) on Feb 28

**Great Grey Shrike:** Still present at four sites this week including what may be a 'new' site at Digden Bottom in the New Forest (by the Dockens Water stream between Mockbeggar and Linwood near Ringwood) where one was found on Mar 2

**Rose-coloured Starling:** A good find in Hampshire was an adult bird singing 'behind the Post Office' at Hordle close to Christchurch in Dorset on Mar 3 (on Mar 4 the bird was on a bird table in the garden of a house next to the Post Office)

**Brambling:** Around this time last spring we were seeing counts of 120 from the Romsey area and 80 at the Blashford Lake but numbers have been much lower this winter (peak counts of 86 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 28 and 40 at the QE Country Park near Petersfield on Nov 8 and around 50 there on Jan 29) and so a report of 10 at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 3 (among some 600 Chaffinch moving north) was noteworthy

**Hawfinch:** These (and **Bullfinches**) have been seen in greater than usual numbers this winter and this week a small flock (peak count of 10 on Feb 26) has been seen daily at Eastleigh Lakeside from Feb 24 to Mar 4

**Snow Bunting:** Three were still near the Hayling Island Lifeboat Station on Mar 1

**Escapees:** A single **Chiloe Wigeon** was with a flock of Wigeon in the fields north of Pagham Harbour on Mar 2. If you are not familiar with the species go to <http://www.arkive.org/chiloe-wigeon/anas-sibilatrix/image-G90050.html> and click any of the 13 images below the main picture to see that thumbnail as the main picture

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Brimstone** (11 reports), **Red Admiral** (15 reports), **Small Tortoiseshell** (9 reports), **Peacock** (5 reports), and **Comma** (6 reports) with no more sightings of Speckled Wood this week

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

#### **Species recorded for the first time this year/season**

**1342 Eudonia angustea** found in Dorset on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5073>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1342.php>

1659 Yellow Horned *Achlya flavicornis* found in Dorset on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5117>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1659.php>

1746 Shoulder-stripe *Anticlea badiata* found in Dorset on Feb 26 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5631>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1746.php>

1852 Brindled Pug *Eupithecia abbreviata* found in Dorset on Feb 27 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=698>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1852.php>

1905 Horse Chestnut *Pachycnemia hippocastanaria* found in Dorset on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=764>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1905.php>

1947 The Engrailed *Ectropis bistortata* found in Kent (Thanet) on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6352>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1947.php>

1984 Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* found in Fareham on Feb 26 (Not a first but unintentionally disturbed by Tony Tindale in his greenhouse where it had probably been hibernating) - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2198>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1984.php>

2139 Red Chestnut *Cerastis rubricosa* found in Kent (Thanet) on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2018>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2139.php>

2179 Pine Beauty *Panolis flammea* found in Dorset on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5756>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2179.php>

2241 Red Sword-grass *Xylena vetusta* found in Dorset on Feb 28 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2738>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2241.php>

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Pond Skater:** These started to appear on the water of the tiny Westbrook Stream in Emsworth on Feb 15 (normally they are first seen in March or April) when a dozen were seen. The number increased daily and by Mar 1 there were roughly 100 but on Mar 2 there were none to be seen. There seems to be no normal reason for this disappearance - the insects should remain and breed right through the summer - so there is a mystery still to be solved here. As the stream runs between houses and under a road one possibility is that they have moved to somewhere out of sight though it would be surprising for them all to move together, leaving none in what was clearly an attractive spot for a couple of weeks. Another possibility would be that they have been washed downstream by

a sudden spate due to heavy rain but there has been no such downpour and in any case you would expect a few to cling on to their favoured spot. This brings me to the possibility of 'something nasty' happening to the water which has killed them all off. Hopefully next week will bring some clue to solving this mystery.

**Wood Ant (*Formica rufa*):** First report of them out on their nests comes from the Fleet area of north Hampshire on Mar 1

**Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*):** This species which only arrived in Britain in 2001 was seen nectaring on *Lonicera fragrantissima* (Shrubby Honeysuckle) in the Northiam area near Hastings on Feb 29

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*):** On Feb 29 Brian Banks told us on the RX website that workers of this species had been active in his Northiam garden for 9 out of the last 10 weeks (presumably having survived since last year)

**Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*):** Appeared in Brian Banks Northiam garden for the first time this year during the past week

**Thick-horned Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus dimidiatus*):** This rare diving beetle appeared in Pat Bonham's moth trap in the Rye area on the night of Feb 23. For photos and more detail see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/02/26/a-rare-diving-beetle-in-rye/#more-15384> (entry for Feb 26)

**Whirligig Beetle (*Gyrinus natator*):** Active on Mar 1 in John Goodspeed's garden pond on Portsdown

**Water cricket (*Velia caprai*):** Apparently this is a relatively common inhabitant of ponds but I was unaware of it until Graeme Lyons mentioned finding it at Woods Mill (Henfield) on Feb 28 - for photo and more info see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/water-cricket>

## PLANTS

**Common Yew:** Trees in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery had clearly been shedding pollen for several days when I saw them on Mar 3

**Common Fumitory:** Flowers still to be found on 'old' plants at Budds Mound in Havant on Feb 27 and on many new plants which have only just sprung up at a development site in Havant, seen on Mar 3

**Early Dog Violet:** My first sighting of flowers for this year was on Feb 26 on wild plants which have escaped into my garden in recent years. By Mar 3 one flower was to be found in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery where there is usually a massive display each spring but it seems the recent 'tidying up' - raking up of leaves - has removed many of the plants.

**Mistletoe:** Looking out of the window while at my computer on Feb 29 I realized that I was looking at a plant of Mistletoe developing in a Rowan tree in the next door garden. The colours of the Mistletoe had previously caused it to be

overlooked as part of the yellow green lichen which also grows in the tree. Presumably the Mistletoe had been planted by Thrushes which visit the tree for its berries each autumn

**Slender Speedwell:** What I took to be a first flower of Slender Speedwell just opening in the St Faith's churchyard was seen on Mar 3.

**Butterbur:** Male plants had started to flower at Brook Meadow in Emsworth back on Feb 16 but I did not have my first sight of the female plants by the Langbrook stream at Langstone until Feb 29 when they were only just becoming visible above the surface

**Spanish Bluebell:** A single plant also growing on the banks of the Langbrook Stream already had several flowers open on Feb 29

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**The Sky at Night:** Two things which happened last night (Feb 3) prompted me to add this item which would not normally feature here. The first was the meteorite which flew south over western England and probably ended up in the Bay of Biscay - this was something I did not see and which is unlikely to recur but which is an excellent example of the excitement that even our light obscured skies can offer. The other was a personal sighting of Jupiter and Venus following the sun down in the western sky which happened to be cloud free when I looked out - a subsequent search found that March 15 is a date to put in your diary as on that night Jupiter and Venus will be 'in conjunction' looking like a single 'star' brighter than any star you have ever seen. Even if it is cloudy that night the display should be nearly as good on nights close before or after that date.

**Common Seal:** A report of 11 hauled out on the mud near Marker Point on Thorney Island on Feb 29 indicates that the size of the Chichester Harbour colony has not changed much over the last decade. The highest count I can recall was 14 but it has been more usual to hear of counts between 10 and 12 animals (occasionally including sightings of pups) - the variation in numbers is mainly accounted for by the fact that at any one time several of the Seals are away from home on fishing trips taking them into Langstone Harbour or out into the English Channel. Luckily the local population does not seem to have been affected by the disease which greatly reduced the North Sea population during the past few years. Probably the best time to see high numbers in Chichester Harbour is around June when the pups (if any) are born.

**Water Voles:** If you want to join the increasing number of people enjoying regular sightings of these animals at Brook Meadow in Emsworth go to <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles-2012.html> where you will find a map showing the sections of the River Ems where sightings occur

**Brown Hare:** First report of Hares 'boxing' comes from the West Marden area of the Ems valley where John Goodspeed saw them on Mar 3

**Frogspawn:** There has been a widespread increase in reports of Frogspawn during the past week despite the general decline in the number of Frogs during

recent years. Most encouraging was news of 'hundreds of mating frogs and spawn' in what I think is a man-made pond (created as a 'balancing pond' to balance the increased weight of many new houses built recently in the Hermitage area east of Peter Pond and Lumley Road at Emsworth). To see these Frogs take the A259 east through Emsworth and turn left into Lumley Road immediately after passing Peter Pond on your left, then turn right into Pagham Close and then left again into Sadlers Walk to find the pond alongside the road on your left where Sadlers Walk bends to the right (mapref for the pond is SU 753 055)

**Toad:** Although Toad breeding occurs a little later than Frogs the males are already present in one pond at the southern foot of Portsdown.

**Newts:** These normally return to their breeding ponds in January or earlier so it is not surprising that when John Goodspeed cleaned out the pond at his home on Portsdown this week he found adults of both **Common (Smooth)** and **Palmate Newts** present but I was surprised to read that **he also found young specimens of both species which had presumably hatched from eggs last spring but failed to complete the transition to adulthood during the year (I assume they could be recognised because they still had external gills)**. Checking their life cycle on the internet I found that the eggs are laid about now and the **tadpoles (called 'efts')** very soon look similar to the adults but have external gills which gradually shrink over a ten week period before the young newt breathes air, at which point (normally around August) it leaves the pond. However it seems it is not uncommon for the eft to stay in the pond until next spring and I guess that if this pond was in need of cleaning a low oxygen level in the water (and perhaps a shortage of the tiny animal lifeforms on which the eft feeds) will have delayed the eft's development.

**Common Lizard:** Adders have been out of hibernation for some time now but it was not until Mar 1 that I saw the first report of **Common Lizards** - three of them out in the New Forest near the Blashford Lakes

**Fungi:** Alistair Martin visited the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on Mar 3 and took this photo (below) of Scarlet Elfcup fungi he saw there and on Mar 4 the same species was found at Durlston. Note that the scientific name used by Roger Phillips (*Sarcoscypha coccinea*) has since been rejected and all specimens found in Britain are now regarded as *Sarcoscypha austriaca*.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 27 - MAR 4 (WEEK 9 OF 2012)**

### **Wed 29 Feb**

#### **First Bluebell (Spanish!) and English Elm flowers**

The job of clearing 40 years rubbish from the loft in preparation for the free installation of loft and cavity wall insulation on Friday of this week has taken much of my time and energy recently but it is now very nearly complete - nevertheless I did get out on my bike last Monday (the only real interest then was **a Kingfisher sighting on the Brockhampton Stream** on the west boundary of Budds Farm) and managed a walk this afternoon which yielded a little more interest.

Today my list started with **Field Pennycress** still flowering in Juniper Square and flowers on a single stem of **Spanish Bluebell** on the banks of the Langbrook

Stream just south of the Langstone Technology Park approach road. Further downstream the **first female Butterbur plants were just starting to push up** and out on the Moors the number of **Marsh Marigold plants** in flower had increased to four. Also in the Moors area **both Mistle Thrush and Skylark song** was heard.

Nothing special at Budds Farm pools but coming back along the shore I passed three groups each of over a dozen **Gadwall** on the sea and saw half a dozen **Little Egrets** sitting out the high tide on the land.

Leaving the Moors I spotted an open **flower on English Elm** right above the footbridge and passing Langstone Pond I found **a dramatic change in the Egret activity** compared to a visit there last Friday evening when no more than 8 birds arrived to roost. This evening I happened to pass the pond a little after sunset and reckoned that at least 25 birds were present - at least three times the number that have regarded the pond as home base during the winter months. As an aside a thought occurred to me this evening which I suspect is **a significant part of the reason why the Egrets leave the coast in winter** - I have always thought the main reason was the rather unpleasant (windy and cold) fishing conditions in the harbour but I now realise that day length is also a significant factor. Regardless of summer or winter the Egrets have to sit out the high tide periods as unsuitable for their style of fishing and of course the length of those periods does not change much with the seasons whereas day length does. This means that the number of hours during which an Egret can fish are significantly less in winter than in summer in tidal waters whereas by flying inland they can fish throughout the daylight hours with no 'high tide' time out.

One other surprise today came before I set out - looking out of the window from my computer I realised that **a clump of Mistletoe had established itself** right in front of me without my noticing it until now - the tree is an elderly **Rowan** and the reason for not noticing the Mistletoe is its **similarity in colour to a greeny-yellowish lichen** covering most of the branches!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 20 - 26 (WEEK 8 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** On Feb 18 Dungeness reported **644 Red-throated** heading east and on Feb 19 Cap Gris-nez across the Channel had what were probably an additional 629 but by Feb 25 Portland only reported 2 passing there (though there were 40 off Rye Harbour). No site had more than a single **Black-throated** (and the Southampton Water bird has not been seen since Feb 12) and by the end of the week no **Great Northern** were being reported on the south coast (three at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 5 dwindled to just one on Feb 24)

**Grebes:** A pair of Great Crested on an Eastbourne lake were displaying on Feb 15 (and doing their 'weed dance' on Feb 25) but there were still enough in winter mode to give a count of 1116 at Egmond aan Zee in the Netherlands on Feb 24 (there had been 2833 there on Feb 13) and 200 off Rye Harbour on Feb 25. One **Red-necked** was last seen in Weymouth Bay on Feb 21 and there were still at least 11 **Slavonian** off Pagham Harbour on Feb 25 (there had been an extraordinary count of more than 65 there on Feb 20). The last reports of **Black-**

**necked** that I know of were of 12 still at Feock (Falmouth) with singles at the Blashford Lakes and at Eastbourne, all on Feb 24

**Cormorant:** With many 'grey-headed' birds now to be seen it is helpful to have a reminder that this feature is not indicative of the continental (*sinensis*) subspecies. There is no absolutely sure way of separating this subspecies in the field but a photo on the Christchurch Harbour website (above the Feb 25 entry on <http://www.chog.org.uk/Pages/Sightings.htm> ) shows the best available means of picking out the continental birds (of which this is one). To find out what to look for go to <http://www.paxton-pits.org.uk/id.htm>

**Bittern:** Plenty of these still with us - reports during the week from ten sites including up to 4 birds at Hatch Pond in Poole Harbour and at least one at Titchfield Haven. For a photo of the 'best dressed Bittern' (certainly deserving an Oscar) go to the Feb 25 entry at <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Stodmarsh/Februarysightings.htm> - the accompanying text tells you that this bird maintained this posture for an hour and a half!

**Little Egret:** A group of 17 feeding together in a cressbed near Pinglestone Farm (just north of Alresford at the head of the River Itchen) on Feb 24 is probably just illustrative of where the coastal Egrets go to in the winter to escape the rigours of the normally chill winter weather on exposed coasts. Certainly a sunset visit to Langstone Pond on Feb 24 found no more than 8 birds coming to roost there (and one of those came flying in from the north rather than the harbours to the south) but it also gave a hint that these birds will soon starting to build nests as six of them arrived in pairs.

**Great White Egret:** Bob Chapman told us this week that the bird which spends much of its year at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood is currently further up the River Avon in the Fordingbridge area but if you really wanted to see one this week the place to go was a railway level crossing between Faversham and Whitstable in north Kent. To see a series of photos of this bird go to <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/February12.htm> (one showing it in flight gives an interesting comparison with a Grey Heron also in flight, making the Egret look considerably bigger)

**Grey Heron:** Birds at nests at Weir Wood reservoir in north Sussex were said to be 'seemingly egg laying' this week

**White Stork:** None in this country but three reports of up to six birds in Belgium this week are an indication of spring there (the only earlier mention of Storks from the near continent this year was of 11 birds at a site in the Ile de France area on Feb 5)

**Red-breasted Goose:** On Oct 18 last year one arrived at Christchurch Harbour with Brent Geese and stayed there for ten days before moving west via Ferrybridge and Abbotsbury to be seen on the Exminster Marshes on Nov 7, staying there (in the Darts Farm area) until Feb 19. Similar behaviour by what I think is the same bird in recent years led me to expect it to start a return journey

east this spring, moving along the coast in stages until it reached the Hampshire/Sussex border from which it could be expected to leave the country on its way to the breeding area of the Brent Geese with which it has somehow become entangled. This return journey has now started, bringing it to the Lymington marshes on Feb 25 where it was still present on Feb 26. The question now is whether it will move on to the mouth of Chichester Harbour before making its final departure. Each winter several of these geese are seen in the UK and many of them are escapes but I still believe that the current (unringed) bird which associates with migrant Brent is a genuine wild bird which has been visiting the south coast since Nov 2006 when it was seen in the Weymouth and Poole Harbour areas

**Green-winged Teal:** A male was found at Farlington Marshes by Jason Crook on Feb 23 and was still there on Feb 25

**Garganey:** A male has been on the R Stour in Dorset at Shapwick (south of Blandford), seen on Feb 20 and 22. This would be very early for a migrant arrival (they normally arrive in mid-March and Hampshire's earliest was on 2 Mar 2003) and I think the bird's tameness makes it likely to be an escape from captivity)

**Red-crested Pochard:** A female has been on the Drayton gravel-pit lake (east of Chichester) from Feb 18 to 23

**'Fudge Duck':** A Pochard x Ferruginous hybrid was seen again on the Budds Farm pools in Havant on Feb 23

**Hooded Merganser:** What is probably the prettiest plastic duck currently on offer was seen at Radipole (Weymouth) on Feb 20. It can be seen in a photo below the Feb 20 entry on <http://dorsetbirds.blogspot.com/> (also on that same page there is a photo of the **Garganey** mentioned above, looking happy in the company of Mallards). The Hooded Merganser has been hanging around Weymouth since it was found as an 'orphan waif' in a storm drain there on 7 June 2008

**Smew:** This winter's bonanza of these lovely birds is not yet over - on Feb 25 two were still at the Blashford Lakes and another was at Arlebury Lake at Arlesford near Winchester while on Feb 23 the RBA service had reports of 81 birds in the UK as a whole

**White-tailed Eagle:** In last week's summary I wrote of one being seen at Folkestone on Feb 14 and then eating a dead Fox in a field on Walland Marsh just east of Rye from which it was last seen drifting off to the north. Since then there has been another sighting at Folkestone on Feb 19 and RBA news of one in Norfolk on Feb 22 plus a possible sighting of one in the Blacklands Farm area near Basingstoke on Feb 23 (this is where last year's Hampshire bird spent 18 days from Feb 24 to Mar 13 before eventually heading east but getting 'cold feet' about crossing the North Sea when it reached to Lincolnshire coast). I hear that a new disease (hopefully not as serious as Foot and Mouth) has been killing off this year's young lambs and that on Feb 21 a birder in the Seasalter area of north Kent found three dead lambs in fields in his 'patch' - this may be bad news for farmers but it must be good news for Eagles!

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird was still to be seen at Burpham on Feb 24

**Peregrine:** After last week's report of a female back at the Chichester cathedral nest site on Feb 28 the pair were both at the nest site on Feb 19

**Water Rail:** One has been giving good views on the River Ems at Brook Meadow this week

**Common Crane:** No sightings in England but it seems that spring passage is now underway with 325 birds seen at a Belgian site on Feb 22

**Stone Curlew:** After the sighting of a wintering bird in fields southeast of Arundel on Feb 12 what seems to be a good report of the first migrant arrival comes from the Birdham area south of Chichester on Feb 21 when one was heard flying over at 10:15 pm. Earliest migrant arrival in Hampshire is recorded as 5 Feb 2006

**Knot:** The large number which have decided to feed on the mud along the Emsworth shore this winter reached a peak of at least 900 seen on Feb 20 independently by both Brian Fellows and John Goodspeed. Knot also play a prominent part in a eleven minute video of the birds of the Nore Barn area of the Emsworth shore filmed by Peter Raby and to be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXgvGdCyJpk&list=HL1329919690&feature=mh lolz> - well worth seeing!

**Purple Sandpiper:** An indication that these are now making their way east comes from looking at numbers reported recently. The biggest counts during the winter come from Cornwall and this was still the case on Feb 16 when 35 were seen at Penzance. On Feb 21 an unusually large count of 20 birds was reported from Barton on Sea at the west end of the Solent and then on Feb 24 another unexpectedly large count of 21 was made at Brighton marina - I rather suspect that these numbers will not be repeated at those sites (at least not until next winter).

**Whimbrel:** One seen on a football pitch near Gilkicker Point in the Gosport area on Feb 25 is unlikely to be an early migrant but may well be an indication that one of our south coast wintering birds is feeling the call of spring and moving to new areas in response

**Med Gull:** In recent years the call of the Med Gull has become one of the really evocative signs of spring and this year the first call that I am aware of was reported at Sandwich Bay on Feb 20 but it was in the second half of the week that the sound became widespread. I heard it myself at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 23 and described the impression it made in my Diary and since then the sound has been heard at sites all along the south coast accompanied by the sight of birds in their immaculate white and red and black breeding plumage.

**Common Gull:** Another sign of spring here on the south coast is the departure of the Common Gulls and this was marked with a report from Portland on Feb 22 of 200 Common Gulls heading east

**Iceland Gull:** On Feb 19 the RBA website gave a total of 332 of these in the UK and one of them has been seen regularly from Broadmarsh or at the Budds Farm pools this week

**Long-eared Owl:** Road kills have revealed the presence of these elusive birds in two unexpected locations this week - one was recovered from the central reservation of the Thanet Way in north Kent on Feb 23 and before that one was found at Overton in the Basingstoke area of Hampshire on Feb 21

**Short-eared Owl:** Wintering birds were still being seen at six sites this week but a sign of spring movement came with a sighting of one at Portland on Feb 25

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** February is traditionally the month in which these birds reveal their presence by their calls and on Feb 22 one was heard at Weir Wood in north Sussex, another at Paultons Park by the M27 in the Romsey area while a birder at Chandlers Ford got an unexpected garden tick when he heard one over his garden. At Pulborough Brooks the warden (Pete Hughes) heard one drumming for the first 15 minutes of his day when he arrived at 7:30am on Feb 24

**Shorelark:** The Hayling Oysterbeds bird has not been reported since Feb 14 but I like to think that a report of one seen in Belgium on Feb 17 was a 'good-bye' wave from our special bird

**Stonechat:** A report of 10 on Portland on Feb 25 probably marks a more general move of these birds from winter to breeding sites

**Paddyfield Warbler:** The bird was still present in the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour on Feb 25 but on Feb 24 it had changed its habits from searching the reeds for its food to a 'flycatching mode' in which it kept flying up to catch insects now airborne in the warm air.

**Firecrest:** The first report of this species singing came from the village of Woodlands on the edge of the New Forest east of Lyndhurst on Feb 24 (Goldcrest song was heard as early as Jan 13)

**Willow Tit:** There are probably only three places where these can still be found in Hampshire and I was very pleased to see that they were still present at one of those sites (in east Hampshire) on Feb 24

**Chough:** On Feb 23 the SOS News included a puzzling mention of a Chough having been seen in West Sussex but a later report told us that a pair of these birds had escaped from Bird World near Farnham. It seems that the male, which had been seen in a Haslemere garden, has been re-captured but the female is still on the loose.

**Crossbill:** Local sightings in the Havant area this week include one close to the main carpark by the Stansted Forest main avenue on Feb 23, a group of eight in the Creech Woods south of Denmead on Feb 25 and a single male seen in Havant Thicket that same day.

**Bullfinch:** These seem to have been unusually numerous this winter but this week's news is of just one bird heard 'singing' at Ardingly near Haywards Heath on Feb 23

**Common Yellowthroat:** This 'twitchers delight' was still to be seen in Gwent on Feb 23

**Snow Bunting:** The group of four were still to be seen near the Hayling Lifeboat Station on Feb 25 and a 'new bird' was seen on Feb 22 in the Prinsted area (by the arched wooden bridge taking the shoreline footpath north from the end of Thornham Lane to Prinsted village). An indication that winter birds are now leaving us comes in a report of a flock of 113 seen together at a Netherlands site on Feb 24

**Yellowhammer:** First report of song comes from Chailey Common near Haywards Heath on Feb 23

## INSECTS

### Butterflies:

#### Species reported this week:

**Brimstone** (at six sites all on Feb 23), **Red Admiral** (at eight sites during the week), **Small Tortoiseshell** (one in the North Foreland area of Kent on Feb 23 and another near Henfield on Feb 24), **Peacock** (just one at Folkestone on Feb 24), **Comma** (three reports from Sussex on Feb 23 including one in Stansted Forest), **Speckled Wood** (one at Portland on Feb 21 plus late news of the earliest ever seen in Hampshire from Liphook Golf Course on Feb 15)

### Moths:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

#### First sightings for the year/season reported this week were:

473 Leek Moth *Acrolepiopsis assectella* found in Dorset on Feb 23 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3332>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0473.php>

663 *Diurnea fagella* found in Dorset on Feb 23 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1945>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0663.php>

695 *Agonopterix alstromeriana* found in Dorset on Feb 24 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=754>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0695.php>

697 *Agonopterix arenella* found in Dorset on Feb 24 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5763>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0697.php>

701 *Agonopterix ocellana* found in Dorset on Feb 23 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1458>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0701.php>

1054 *Acleris cristana* found at Folkestone on Feb 25 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6435>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1054.php>

1288 Twenty-plume Moth *Alucita hexadactyla* found at Fareham on Feb 24 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=360>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1288.php>

1663 March Moth *Alsophila aescularia* found in Dorset on Feb 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1873>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1663.php>

1925 Small Brindled Beauty *Apocheima hispidaria* found in Dorset on Feb 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=879>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1925.php>

2423 Oak Nycteoline *Nycteola revayana* found in Dorset on Feb 23 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5374>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2423.php>

### **Other Insects:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Pond Skater:** Being seen in increasing numbers on the Westbrook Stream in Emsworth after their unusually early first appearance on Feb 15

**Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*):** First to emerge from hibernation was seen at Torbay in Devon Feb 19

**Honey Bee (*Apis mellifera*):** First report of these from Edburton on the Sussex Downs on Feb 23

**Great Silver Water Beetle (*Hydrophilus piceus*):** Found in the Pevensey Levels ditches on Feb 24 (see Molluscs entry under Other Wildlife - this beetle was one of Graeme Lyons finds when searching for Molluscs)

**Saucer Bug:** Also see Other Wildlife for this

## PLANTS

**Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*):** First catkins seen on the tree in Havant Park on Feb 21

**Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*):** When I found a single plant in flower in a Havant garden on Jan 24 Brian Fellows said that there was no sign on them in the Chichester Bishop's Palace garden where he has seen them in the past but he has now found a good show of them there on Feb 25

**Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*):** A single battered looking plant which seemed to have survived from last year rather than being fresh this year had a small head of flowers on it in Havant on Feb 21

**Danish scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*):** At least one roadside plant had tiny flowers here in Havant on Feb 21

**Early dog violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*):** Just one flower opening on Feb 26 on plants which have escaped from the wild and established themselves in a crack in a concrete path in my garden

**Wild Primrose:** On Feb 23 when cycling down the Hayling Coastal Path I stopped to look for these flowers in the shore copse to the west of Daw Lane but could only find the yellow tips of petals on as yet unopen flowers on one plant - I suspect other genuine wild plants in more sheltered inland sites will have been open before this date

**Lesser Periwinkle:** I had seen one extremely early flower open in Pits Copse on the edge of Stansted Forest as early as Jan 11 but two fresh flowers seen at another regular site beside Southleigh Road in the Denvilles area of Havant were open at a more usual date on Feb 20

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Wood Mouse:** Also known as Field Mouse this gentle looking creature does not annoy us by entering our houses and stealing our food though it can sometimes be seen taking a share of food we have put out to feed birds. One allowed itself to be photographed in the Nore Barn woodland on the Emsworth shore this week (see Brian Fellows diary entry for Feb 21 at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) but a different aspect of this creature's life style can be seen in a video and a photo taken by Barry Yates at Rye Harbour (see <http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/02/25/fieldmice-can-be-carnivores/#more-15371> ) which show that they are not averse to flesh eating.

**Water Vole:** Now that winter is over regular sightings in the River Ems at Emsworth have been renewed and you can follow the reports and photos of them via <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles-2012.html>

**Bats:** Also now resuming their summer lifestyle are bats and Tony Wilson reminds us of this by reporting regular evening sightings in his Edburton garden at the north foot of the Sussex Downs in the Brighton area

**Frogspawn:** An indication of the widespread decline of Common Frogs in our gardens is that the species has so far only achieved three entries in my database for this year but the third entry is of the news that the first spawn appeared in the Emsworth area on Feb 21. I mentioned this to a Langstone resident on Feb 23 to be told that in his garden spawn always appeared in a tiny 'kitchen sink' pond but this was then qualified by "but not this year"

**Molluscs:** Two items caught my attention this week. The first was seen in the 'Winter Watch' TV programme in a piece filmed on the sea shore showing jets of water shooting up several feet into the air as members of a clam-type species ejected the water which they had sucked in and filtered for any food content. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft-shell\\_clam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft-shell_clam) for an account of the lifestyle of the **Sand Gaper (*Mya arenaria*)** which may be the species involved. The other Mollusc item was Graeme Lyons account of a day 'pond dipping' in the Pevensey Levels ditches in company with Mollusc expert Martin Willing - see <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/2012/02/league-of-extraordinary-molluscs.html> which will give you a list of mollusc names to follow up. One which I had not come across before and did follow up led me to <http://www.microcosmos.nl/bugs2/ilyocoris.htm> re the common underwater predator **Saucer Bug**. If you are thinking of trying to catch one of these bugs you are advised to read how painful its bite can be for a human. If you are puzzled by the mention of a 'staphylinid workshop' at the end of Graeme's blog entry he was off to learn about the **Rove Beetles** under the guidance of Chris Bentley whose name often appears below Insect items on the Rye Bay website.

**Trout:** The first mention of these fish that I have seen this year is on Brian Fellows' diary for Feb 25 when several were seen in the River Ems - have these fish only just become large enough to catch the eye or have they been hiding elsewhere in the river and are now coming downstream with thoughts of going out to sea???

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 20 - 26 (WEEK 8 OF 2012)**

### **Thu 23 Feb**

#### **Med Gulls back at the Oysterbeds**

Really warm sunshine this afternoon saw me on my bike and heading for Hayling. The tide was still high as I crossed Langstone Bridge but the water was devoid of

birds and there was little else to note until I neared the Oysterbeds where, before the lagoon came in sight, my ears were filled with a sound that I have not heard for the best part of a year - **the uproar of hundreds of Black-headed Gulls jostling each other for space on the nesting island**. Even better, cutting through the raucous uproar, were the **quieter, penetrating calls of Med Gulls** which kept making me look up to see the bird making the call, apparently just above my head though in fact much further away, such is the ability of this call to cut through the other gulls calls.

I did eventually get a good look at one of the birds in it's 'virgin pure' plumage but Chris Cockburn (who had also been attracted here on his bike) reminded me not to be deceived by the air of innocence engendered by the white plumage, but instead to take the bird's scarlet bill as a truer symbol of it carnivorous habits, which make it **the principal predator of the Black-headed Gulls chicks**.

Moving on south to the shore copse in line with Daw Lane I thought at first that none of the many **wild Primroses** had yet felt the call of spring but I did eventually find three or four flower stems still encased in green and **just one which had started to expose the tips of yellow petals**.

The harbour water was still devoid of birds but not so the **West Lane fields in which at least 800 Brent were silently eating the tillers of wheat**, stuffing it down as fast as possible as fuel for a long flight which I guess they will be making tonight. They were still feeding nearly two hours later when I returned from the southern shore of the island (and in addition to this big flock there was another seemingly as big on the water that remained off Langstone Pond with the tide nearing its lowest).

Nothing special to note on south Hayling though the **Green-winged Orchid leaves** were longer and more numerous than last time I was here. Crossing Langstone Bridge again on the homeward trip I had a good view of a **Buzzard** making its way laboriously west over Langstone village, and coming up Wade Lane several branches of **Cherry Plum**, sheltered within the tunnel of trees, were by now in full flower whereas the section of the lane outside Wade Court now had **only two heads of Winter Heliotrope** on show as winter comes to an end.

**Tue 21 Feb**

### **A few more wildflowers**

A cycle ride yesterday to Warblington, Nore Barn and Denvilles gave me nothing that was an absolute first for the year but kept reminding me that spring had started. At Warblington the warm air told me that the **Cattle Egret** had almost certainly felt its message and departed (no sign of it that I could find) though at Nore Barn the **Spotted Redshank** had not received that message and the look of its unchanged winter plumage indicated that it might be some time before its hormones got into spring mode though one of the **Black-headed Gulls** on the shore nearby had a **seemingly complete black face-mask**.

Moving from the shore to Warblington Road I noticed my first **Three-cornered Leek/Garlic** flowering in a garden gateway but had to go close to confirm that its apparently all white flowers did have the thin green line running along the 'keel' of its petals rather than the green-tipped petals of **Summer Snowflake** which has

been quite a common sight for about a month. Further along the road there was a substantial patch of **Sweet Violets** flowering in the roadside grass.

Crossing the main road and continuing up Bridge Road I decided to ignore any goodies that might be on offer in the public carpark (one of the 'Emsworth Waysides' on account of the variety of wildlife which grow around its periphery, particularly beside the Westbrook Stream which flows along the eastern side) and this meant that I saw something on the west side of Bridge Road that I have not noticed before - **a large apple tree supporting large bunches of berried Mistletoe along all of its many branches**. The tree gave me the impression that it was the property of a commercial Mistletoe grower who for some reason had failed to sell his crop at Christmas time but Brian Fellows told me subsequently that the owner has in fact already given away many bunches to friends and neighbours and the mass still on the tree is just what remains!

My final stop on the way home was in Denvilles at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh Roads where a south facing bank on the north side of Southleigh Road immediately east of the junction is doubly attractive, partly because it is well drained and catches whatever sun there is, encouraging early appearance of wild flowers, and partly because it appears to be an ancient hedge bank that once surrounded woodland and thus has a great mass of **Lesser Periwinkle** growing in the hedge bottom. Today the first two Lesser Periwinkle flowers were open and with them was a mass of **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** while a **Chaffinch continuously repeated its song** from the branches of **a Cherry Plum tree whose flower buds were starting to open**. Before long I expect to find my first flowers of both **Greater Stitchwort** and **Crosswort** here though I may have to wait another month for these.

Today I limited my outing to a walk around Havant with the aim of finding the first **Danish Scurvygrass** which I hoped would have responded to the spreading of road salt on recent frosty nights. I did find some in flower on the west side of Petersfield Road where it passes Havant College but both the leaves and flowers were so tiny that I would recommend others not to waste time looking for it until we have had some substantial rain!

I did, however, make two unexpected discoveries that made the outing worthwhile. One was a single plant of **Garlic Mustard** with a couple of small flowerheads seen in Leigh Road. The other was to find long **catkins already hanging from the Dawn Redwood tree** in Havant Park - I noticed these from the footbridge over the railway which brings you level with the height at which the catkins grow! Later, walking in the Park, I had a further look at the new **fungal brackets growing on the dying Horse Chestnut trees** close to Market Parade. Last time I was there I thought these might be young examples of **Trametes gibbosa** but the brackets have now acquired a rich brown colour to their top surfaces suggesting they are **a species of Ganoderma**. On a root of one of the trees, before it disappears into the ground, were some large but rain-starved and shrivelled growths of **Giant Polypore** (which I have seen here looking much healthier in damper conditions last year).

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 13 - 19 (WEEK 7 OF 2012)**

## BIRDS

**Divers:** I have the impression that many **Red-throated** were already starting their spring passage this week. On Feb 6 Thorpeness in Suffolk reported a total of 1459 offshore in the North Sea and I wondered if this was the result of fish shoals in those waters and/or birds being driven south by a change in the weather but this week increasing daily movements east at Portland have been described as the start of spring passage. This is backed up by counts of 241 going east off Dungeness on Feb 15 following 146 passing there on Feb 13 when 35 were off Rye Harbour and 16 off Portland. Other diver species were more elusive this week - just 3 reports of **Black-throated** (the Southampton Water bird plus one off Sandwich and two off Torbay in Devon) and **Great Northern** were only seen at Selsey (four on Feb 12), Worthing (two on Feb 9) and Christchurch Harbour (one there from Feb 14 to 17) - later reports came from Lymington, Dawlish Warren in Devon and Oare Marshes in Kent

**Grebes:** A pair of **Great Crested** were displaying on an Eastbourne Lake on Feb 15 and others were cruising round looking for mates or nest sites (one off Emsworth on Feb 12 and 13) but others were still in winter mode (100+ at Rye Harbour on Feb 13, 2833 at a Netherlands site that day and still 2271 at the same site on Feb 16). The only **Red-necked** to be reported was in Weymouth Bay on Feb 16 and 17. Single **Slavonian Grebes** were seen on each side of Thorney Island on Feb 11 and small numbers were seen at five other sites from Worthing to Mounts Bay in Cornwall but nowhere had more than the three birds seen at each of Selsey, Portland Harbour and Mounts Bay.

**Black-necked** were still around in good numbers - ten off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 12 and 16 in Portland Harbour on Feb 13 with one at a 'new site' named as West Rise Marsh in Eastbourne (to be found in TQ 6202 but I only managed to establish that location after various Google searches came up with a 'West Rise Junior and Infant Schools' in the Langney area of the town - I do wish that people who put information on the internet would appreciate that many people who are not privy to informal local place names which do not appear on an OS Map may also wish to know the location referred to!)

**Bittern:** Reported at 11 sites this week with a peak count of four at Hatch Pond in Poole Harbour

**Cattle Egret:** The bird which disappeared from Warblington after Feb 6 was probably the one seen at Newhaven on Feb 7 but that one did not stop to chat and there were no more reports until Feb 9 when RBA News wrote of 'one in Hampshire' with no further details. Then on Feb 12 there was a definite sighting near the Thorney Little Deeps but the sighting was of a bird flying off in the direction of the Warblington Farm. I have heard nothing of the bird since then but on Feb 14 I walked to Warblington in the hope of seeing it - sadly this walk coincided with the onset of a virulent bug which struck without warning as I was crossing the field next the cemetery, causing me to become so giddy that I fell over and could not get back on my feet without the help of kind people who summoned an ambulance to take me home! (Six days later I am feeling fine and

the giddiness has gone but I still feel reluctant to venture far from the toilet facilities in my house!)

**Great White Egret:** The bird which was seen in the Thorney Great Deepes area from Jan 29 to Feb 11 has not been seen again this week

**Glossy Ibis:** 12 reports this week come from eight different sites and (as with the previous two species) indicate the restlessness which comes with spring. The places where they have been seen most regularly are Thurlestone Bay in south Devon (south west of Kingsbridge) and the Wareham/Weymouth area of Dorset (two separate birds moving around) but there has also been one at Cuckmere Haven in East Sussex, another on the Exe estuary in Devon and another in the Kent Stour valley. More locally the SOS website has an entry (dated Feb 11 but posted on Feb 17) reporting a bird photographed in a garden at Barnham (between Bognor and Arundel) on Feb 5 (on the SOS report click 'more' to see the photo)

**Brent Geese:** My records for last year show the last two reports of departing winter birds to have been dated May 5 when two flew east past Selsey and 13 moved past Splash Point (east of Brighton). The last report of more than 100 was also from Splash Point on Apr 19 when 117 were seen and Dungeness reported 169 passing on Apr 2. Also last year the first three to set off east did so on Jan 10 with a second party of three leaving on Jan 16.

This year departure started on Jan 14 but with a much more substantial party of 365 seen passing Dungeness followed by many reports of birds moving east in the next few days (e.g. 1150 east off Sandy Point on Hayling in 2 hours on Jan 15) and the loss of substantial numbers from our south coast as well as the passage of birds from e.g. the south west coast of France is bound to mean there are fewer still to come along our south coast but I will be very surprised if we are not seeing late departures passing us well into April so cries of 'have they all gone' are a bit premature when we find none on a particular shore where there was a flock only yesterday.

What we must expect from now on is the erratic pattern of sightings at any one site that results from the birds bunching into large flocks for company on their long journey - one day that flock will land in your area and you may see several hundred busily feeding (either on the shore or in fields), then for one or more days you may find none in your area until the next combination of weather and flock route brings another 'invasion' of your site. Mention of the weather brings in another factor affecting the length of stay of a passage flock at a particular site - if all is well the flock will fly each night and stop off to feed each day but bad weather can hold it in one place for several days while the more permanent barrier of winter frost can delay the birds for many days or weeks as they approach the arctic circle.

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Exe estuary bird was last reported on Feb 13 but it is also mentioned in RBA News for Feb 18

**Shelduck:** January is normally the peak month for wintering Shelduck in the Solent Harbours but this year the Jan 14 WeBS count for the Thorney Great

Deeps recorded only 58 birds while an informal count on Feb 15 recorded 107 there - it is likely that the additional birds have moved west from eastern sites in response to the recent cold snap.

**Pintail:** Unusually high counts at local sites are also most likely to be the result of hard frost in eastern England which has brought reports of 110 birds on Oare Marshes in north Kent on Feb 9, 60 birds in Christchurch Harbour on Feb 12, 54 in Emsworth Harbour on Feb 14 and 40 birds in Ashlett Creek near Fawley Power Station (on Southampton Water) on Feb 17

**Long-tailed Duck:** During January it would appear that the only birds on the south coast were either in Cornwall or at Dungeness but on Feb 12 one turned up at Christchurch Harbour and has remained there to Feb 18 at least

**Surf Scoter:** The long-term winter resident female at Dawlish Warren (Exe estuary in Devon) was still there on Feb 14 but there is a second bird (a first winter male) which was seen in the Penzance area of Jan 13 and 14 but which has not been reported again until Feb 16

**Smew:** This has been a good week for 'Smew twitchers' with 18 south coast sites reporting them though a report of 5 flying east over Birling Gap (Beachy Head) on Feb 17 is probably a sign that the bonanza is coming to an end. Peak count was of 21 at Dungeness RSPB on Feb 13 (when Rye Harbour had another 7). One at Weir Wood reservoir near Crowborough was an addition to the site's bird list. Sadly none seem to have come closer to Havant than the one on Pagham Lagoon from Feb 9 to 13

**Ruddy Duck:** At least one pair were still together at a south coast site this week

**White-tailed Eagle:** On Feb 8 two were reported at one Netherlands site and on Feb 14 one was still at the same Netherlands site but it looks as if the other flew west to be seen for a full five minutes at Folkestone that day before continuing west. No more reports until Feb 16 when it was re-discovered (maybe as a result of a farmer reporting that a Vulture was eating a dead Fox on his land) in the Walland Marsh area on the Kent/Sussex border near the A259 east of Rye. The only photos that I am aware of that were taken then were the work of Martin Casemore and can be seen on his blog at <http://ploddingbirder.blogspot.com/2012/02/eagle-has-landed-in-sussex-as-well.html> The story so far ends here with Martin's last words being .."the Eagle was high overhead thermalling before eventually moving off north."

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird has not been reported since Feb 16 and may well have left

**Peregrine:** Local news is that the female Peregrine was back at her nest site on Chichester Cathedral on Feb 18

**Grey Partridge:** Three birds, seen in the Thornham House field (in which Alpacas could be seen until last year) which lies between the house and Prinsted Bay,

were presumably exploring the possibilities of nesting there but whether they are genuine wild birds which have inherited the skills necessary to evade the attentions of Foxes (and the Stoat which was prevented from pursuing its Rabbit hunting by the Alpacas on Feb 8 last year) or are cage raised birds which managed to 'get away' when released last year there is no way of telling (my bet would be on the latter)

**Water Rail:** In my experience Water Rails are only seen in the open in two circumstances - one is during a hard frost when they are forced out of cover by the need to search for food, the other is when they are on passage between summer and winter quarters when they spend the nights flying but drop into cover during the day and as they are unfamiliar with the site where they happen to land at dawn they are often driven into the open by unexpected disturbance or the need to search for food (there is of course a third way to get them out into the open as was recently demonstrated at Pulborough Brooks - you scatter sufficient tasty food items around a patch of open ground adjacent to the thick cover in which the Rail is known to be present). Several sightings this week are probably the direct or indirect results of hard weather - on Feb 11 one was seen crossing the NRA track linking the main road on Thorney to the western sea wall, on Feb 12 one was seen in the cemetery at Crofton old church in Gosport, on Feb 14 one was seen in an open ditch in a field between Mill Rythe sea inlet and the approach road to the Mill Rythe Holiday Camp on Hayling Island, and lastly there were sightings of a bird in the River Ems at Emsworth on all three days from Feb 15 to 17.

**Stone Curlew:** A 'one day wonder' reported on the SOS website on Feb 12 was a sighting of a Stone Curlew by two birders in open fields between Angmering and Poling. I have recorded the location as TQ052046 where one of two footpaths between the two villages crosses the 'Black Ditch' mentioned in the report (but I may have picked the wrong path!). In last week's Summary I wrote of this sighting before it got into my recording system (which is what brought it up again today - and it's worth a second mention) .. A report for Feb 12 on the SOS website gives a confident account of a **Stone Curlew** watched for 10 minutes in a field at TQ 051047 near Angmering (south east of Arundel) and then seen to fly a short distance south, apparently landing in another field but not seen again there. Although Stone Curlews are among the earliest migrants to arrive (around mid-March) I would guess that this bird may have been wintering here as was assumed for the bird found in a Hayling Island stubble field on Feb 5 in 2006 which stayed there for five days. There have been Hampshire wintering records in Dec 1972 and Dec 1974 and assumed early migrant records for Feb 25 in 1938 and Feb 28 in 1960

**Ringed Plover:** Reported as 'starting to display' on Feb 17 at Reculver on the north Kent coast

**Lapwing:** Reported to be displaying on the Exminster Marshes in Devon on Feb 14

**Knot:** Numbers on the mud off Nore Barn (west end of the Emsworth shoreline) peaked at around 1200 birds on Feb 13. Normally any Knot are rarities here - this

year a few seen in the first week of Jan grew to 115 on Jan 16, then to 250 on Jan 26, 350 on Feb 3, 610 on Feb 4, 950 on Feb 9 and 1000 on Feb 11 before the peak count of 1200 on Feb 13 after which counts more or less halved (though up to 700 were there on Feb 17)

**Woodcock:** After the peak count of 67 at Sandwich Bay on Feb 8 as birds streamed out of Europe, to avoid starvation as hard frost made their food unobtainable, there were still counts of 15 at Dungeness on Feb 9 and 13 there on Feb 10. Back at Sandwich staff at the Bird Observatory were doing their best not to disturb the exhausted birds but still put up 16 on Feb 11 while on Feb 12 13 were seen at Reculver on the north Kent coast where 22 were seen on Feb 13 - many, many more are still scattered over southern England which has saved their lives.

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Brian Fellows website entry for Feb 17 (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> and scroll down) includes a set of photos of Black-tailed Godwits engaged in 'close combat'. When I first saw them I assumed the birds were mating in the same violent way that Mallards do (which regularly results in the drowning of females whose heads are forced under water for too long) but it seems that others see this as pure aggression with no sexual intent. I wonder if it is possible to determine the sex of a Godwit by its winter plumage or body structure?

**Whimbrel:** One was heard calling in the Emsworth Channel west of Thorney Island on Feb 11

**Spotted Sandpiper:** The bird which was first seen at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 1 was still there on Feb 18. Another was seen again near Plymouth where it has not been reported since Jan 14

**Grey Plover:** The first report of one showing the black of its breeding plumage comes from Chichester Harbour on Feb 14

**Med Gull:** Flocks are now building up along the south coast and Feb 8 brought a count of 440 present at Ferrybridge (Weymouth/Portland). Still to come is the first report of that magical sign of spring - the bird's 'kee-ah' call

**Little Owl:** Two reports this week of sightings in the Hayling Oysterbeds area on Feb 11 and 16 - keep your eyes open

**Woodlark:** Although there have been reports of song during the winter I think the birds now believe that spring is here. On Feb 16 four birds were present and singing at Longdown (south of the Totton to Lynhurst road on the last minor road before the New Forest starts) while on the same day song was heard in Broadwater Forest near Crowborough as a reward for conservation volunteers who had just finished restoring the bird's habitat.

**Skylark:** Also now in song generally with several reports for Feb 15 followed by one for Thorney Island on Feb 17

**Shorelark:** No reports from the Hayling Oysterbeds since Feb 14 - it may still be there but it could be that the warmth of Feb 15 told it to depart. (One was seen in Belgium on Feb 17 - our bird en route home?)

**Waxwing:** Feb 15 brought news of two birds seen in a private garden at Torquay (no further news)

**Fieldfare:** For those who have not seen these during the winter the Kent Stour Valley had a massive roost from which 7800 birds emerged on the morning of Feb 12. Best count of **Redwing** this week was from Worthing where 120 were seen on Feb 16

**Paddyfield Warbler:** Still in the Pagham North Walls area on Feb 14

**Goldcrest:** I heard my first song from trees by the Billy Trail old rail line where it runs behind my house on Feb 18

**Spanish Sparrow:** The Calshot garden bird was last reported on Feb 12

**Crossbill:** One male was in 'full and continuous song' at Petworth on Feb 16 and a flock of ten birds in the New Forest on Feb 12 were seen to be collecting nest material

**Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*):** Twitchers were trekking to Gwent in Wales on Feb 17 to see this colourful bird which is only the 8th to be recorded in Britain. See Lee Evans' blog at <http://rarebirdsainbritain.blogspot.com/> for good photos of the bird and other details

**Dark-eyed Junco:** Still to be seen at Hawkhill Inclosure off Beaulieu Heath in the New Forest on Feb 16

**Reed Bunting:** These are now returning to breeding areas and have started singing their uninspiring songs

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

The surprising news this week is that four butterfly species have all decided that, starting on Feb 15, spring is here. That day brought first sightings of **Brimstone** (one at Burghclere near Newbury, the other at Weavers Down at Longmoor near Petersfield), **Peacock** (one at Godshill on the Isle of Wight, the other on Feb 17 at Portland), **Red Admiral** (one in central Portsmouth, one in Waterlooville and a third on Feb 16 at Broadstairs in Kent), and finally Feb 16 brought a **Speckled Wood** (one flying around in Gosport to beat the previous earliest emergence in Hampshire, 9 March 1992, by a clear three weeks).

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths**

entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at [http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

### **First sightings for the year/season reported this week were:**

**1052 *Acleris umbrana*** found at Shaggs near East Lulworth in Dorset on Feb 15 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5427> but note that the Hantsmoths site has no photo of this rarity

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1052.php>

**1524 *Emmelina monodactyla*** found at Shaggs near East Lulworth in Dorset on Feb 16 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=592>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1524.php>

**1930 Oak Beauty *Biston strataria*** found at Broadway in Dorset on Feb 16 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2639>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1930.php>

**1960 Early Moth *Theria primaria*** found at Plumber near Cerne Abbas in Dorset on Feb 17 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6078>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1960.php>

**2188 Clouded Drab *Orthosia incerta*** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Feb 16 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1979>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2188.php>

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

This week Graeme Lyons has taken up the practice of '**tussocking**' which involves finding a nice thick dry tussock of grass (preferably surrounded by wet ground), cutting it at ground level, holding it upside down over a white sheet, then shaking hard to see what falls out. Such tussocks form ideal winter shelter for all sorts of 'minibeasts' (especially when surrounding wet ground forces anything living there to seek 'high and dry' ground) and the practice has enabled him to increase his 'all species' lifetime tick list substantially. (Even if you are not a specialist but are trying to interest children or amateur wildlife groups in all the things they are missing when they walk through the sort of habitat in which grass tussocks grow this sport is clearly a winner - getting the children to see how many different creatures they can catch before they disappear off the white sheet would clearly get their attention and interest and there is no need to be able to name the species - just to point out the different groups - Spiders, Beetles, Caterpillars, Bugs, etc - and the variation in appearance between the members of each group should be enough to get the children thinking about how we differentiate species and why those differences occur). For details of some of Graeme's finds see his blog at <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/>

**Lesser Bloody-nosed Beetle:** First sighting of these for the year came from Durlston on Feb 16 - I suspect they could not be found on Portsdown on a warm day

**Pond Skater:** Another very early sign of spring was the discovery on Feb 15 by Brian Fellows of a dozen **Pond Skaters** already active on the surface of the Westbrook Stream which runs past his Emsworth garden. Normally these would not be seen until the end of March at the earliest

## PLANTS

**Cherry Plum:** First flowers were at last open on trees at the south end of Southmoor Lane in Havant on Feb 13

**Ivy-leaved Speedwell:** Another first flower found in Havant on Feb 13

**Butterbur:** Already in flower at Emsworth (Brook Meadow) on Feb 16 about a week earlier than last year

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Water Vole:** Although these do not hibernate they spend the winter months mainly in the shelter of their burrows, only emerging occasionally and briefly to collect vegetable matter to chew while they ponder the mysteries of life, the universe and all that. In past years they did not emerge from this monastic mode of life until late March or April but on Feb 15 Brian Fellows listed several recent sightings of them in the R Ems at Brook Meadow including one incident which he himself saw in which two Voles engaged in a prolonged fight from which the one contestant, which he saw closely, emerged with torn and blood-stained fur. Those unfamiliar with Water Voles might assume the animals fighting were males but this species is very matriarchal and a senior female holds a territory which stretches for around 130 yards of the riverbank, marking her boundary with latrines. During the winter she will share her burrow with both her own daughters from the previous year and sometimes with unrelated males but as soon as spring arrives all the lodgers are sent away (by force if necessary) and the dominant female then starts to raise the first of up to five litters (each of 3 to 7 pups) for which she needs the services of a male who plays no other part in family life (males have their own territories which can stretch for 130 yards, overlapping those of two or three females). The current fighting observed at Brook Meadow is presumably part of the 'end of winter house clearance' but may include an element of a senior daughter trying to oust her mother and to take over the running of the 'family business' - it is unlikely that a male was involved.

**Hare:** Another early sign of spring was seen in the Arun river valley area near Burpham, also on Feb 15, when birders seeking the **Rough Legged Buzzard** saw six Hares active in the fields.

**Frogspawn:** Frogs have been back in breeding ponds for some time now (my first record for this year was a local report of them on Jan 24) but I had seen no reports of spawn until the end of the recent cold snap which brought news of spawn seen in a Waterlooville pond on Feb 18

**Adder:** Although there have been at least five reports of Adders out sunbathing on the cliffs at Durlston since Jan 8 (and one from the Rother Valley in East Sussex on Jan 28) a further report of them out at Durlston on Feb 12 during the cold snap was surprising.

**Common Starfish (*Asterias rubens*):** We recently heard of various sea creatures being washed up by storms in the Rye Bay area but on Feb 15 the Devon Birding blog mentioned a massive wreck of Starfish in the Budleigh Salterton area (Exe estuary) and the entries for Feb 15 included an eye-catching photo by Martin Cox of what I think to be a Black-headed Gull holding a Starfish in its bill with all five arms of the star symmetrically displayed around the bill and a vacant look in the gull's eye as if unable to decide which of the five arms should go down first. To see it go to <http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2012-02-17T14:42:00Z> and scroll down the the Feb 15 entry

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 13 - 19 (WEEK 7 OF 2012)**

### **Mon 13 Feb**

#### **Two new wildflowers and the first Mimosa as the cold snap ends**

Daffodils, Snowdrops and Croci can be seen everywhere now as the temperature starts to rise and today the **first Mimosa blossom** was out in Mill Lane at Langstone but I was more excited by the first flowers on **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** in Havant and **Cherry Plum** trees at the south end of Southmoor Lane near Budds Farm.

After lunch I walked down the Langbrook Stream finding one plant of **Field Pennycress** still flowering in Juniper Square and **Marsh Marigold plus Blackthorn** still flowering near the South Moors from which I put up **three Snipe**.

At Budds Farm pools there were **good numbers of Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Pochard with the pair of Swans** that will nest there but nothing new so I headed east along the seawall with the tide just past high and, as expected, this gave me a close view of a **Rock Pipit** on the seaweed along the tideline but I found more interest near the mouth of the Langbrook stream where the falling tide was allowing the fresh water from the stream to flow out into the harbour, attracting a number of duck species to the triple benefits of such a place - fresh water to drink and in which to bathe (fresh water being better than salt for both purposes) plus whatever food items might be washed down with the stream. Seeing **Wigeon, Gadwall, Mergansers and three male Goldeneye** all making a bee line for the outflow as the tide started to fall made me realise that for some time the rising and then standing tide would have been penning back the fresh water and only now was the falling tide releasing it to flow out into the harbour. (Here this outflow is invisible to our eyes but when I was at school, evacuated during the war from Canterbury to a cliff top hotel at St Austell Bay in Cornwall, the outflow of the local stream, stained bright white with china clay effluent, could be seen forming a narrow white line extending almost a mile out to sea, not dispersing as soon as it reached the open water)

Turning inland my eyes were drawn to the sky over the Moors from which came the non-stop calls of a **Green Sandpiper** but there was little more to see until, after crossing the main road into Langstone village, I found more than **170 Brent** also enjoying the falling tide as it brought the previously underwater weed within reach of their necks. Although it was now nearly sunset I could only see **four Egrets around Langstone Pond** - no doubt a few more came in later but numbers based there will soon start to rise as they start to build nests.

Finally, if you have not already seen the weekly summary I posted yesterday, you might be as interested as I was to discover the **sex life of an earthworm** which I explored in the Other Wildlife section, and to see the news of **a presumably wintering Stone Curlew** just over the Sussex border near Arundel.

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## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 6 - 12 (WEEK 6 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** A count of **1459 Red-throated** off Thorpeness on the Suffolk coast on Feb 6 was impressive but the best we could do on the south coast was a report of 134 seen in Rye Bay off Pett Level on Feb 9 (that did not claim to be an exhaustive count) and a count of 24 off Worthing on Feb 11.

Locally the Eling **Black-throated** remained at the head of Southampton Water and one was seen close in at Sandown Bay on the Isle of Wight on Feb 9 (Derek Hale's website directed me to <http://wightvogels.blogspot.com/> for a photo of the bird and this made me aware that Kris Gillam is still providing a blog featuring the more exciting aspects of birding on the Isle of Wight).

**Great Northern** were still scattered in small numbers along the south coast and on Feb 5 a **White-billed** re-appeared in Orkney (last seen around Jan 10 in Shetland)

**Grebes:** 318 **Great Crested** were seen in Rye Bay from Pett on Feb 9 and 133 were off Torbay in Devon on Feb 5 but for numbers the Netherlands had 3000 all together at one site on Feb 9.

Single **Red-necked** were in the mouth of Southampton Water, at Weymouth Bay and Shell Bay (Studland) in Dorset, and in the Kent Stour valley during the week with a peak of 11 at a Netherlands site on Feb 11.

**Slavonian** were seen at eight sites during the week with a peak of three off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 9 (three also seen in the Fleet in Dorset as well as in the Scillies) but the peak was 5 off Pagham Harbour on Feb 4.

**Black-necked** were more widespread (11 sites) and more numerous (62 in Carrick Roads at Falmouth, 18 in the Dorset Studland area and 13 off the Hayling Oysterbeds)

**Fulmar:** First reports of these back on breeding cliffs in the Brighton area (from Feb 5) and at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire)

**Cormorant:** This species rouses strong feelings both for and against among birders and fishermen and I am sure both would be excited by the sight of 16,000 birds at one Netherlands site on Feb 5

**Bittern:** Two birds have been seen on several occasions at the Blashford Lakes but Feb 5 brought the first report of three there (matching counts of three in Poole harbour/Hatch Pond both this week and back in January) but the new report which caught my eye this week was of one at the east end of the Sinah Gravel Pit lake on Hayling on Feb 9. Another first (at least for this year) was one at Shinewater Lake in Eastbourne on Feb 10 followed by 3 there on Feb 11

**Cattle Egret:** The last sighting of the bird at Warblington here in Havant was on Feb 6, followed by a sighting at Newhaven in Sussex on Feb 7 (that bird not refound) so I concluded that the Thorney/Warblington winter visit was over but I then saw that RBA had a report of one in Hampshire on Feb 9 (with no further confirmation of that sighting I am assuming it may have been a case of mistaken identity). P S The following report was on the SOS website as I completed this summary. Dated 12 Feb it read .. **After dipping out on the Great White Egret that had been seen earlier, we instead lucked into a CATTLE EGRET in the field next to the car parking area on the Thornham Lane junction. It then flew off NE at 12.20, presumably back across the border to Warblington. (A & P Bowley).**

**Great White Egret:** The Great Deeps bird on Thorney Island was seen on both Feb 5 and 7 but on neither occasion was it at the west end (once seen from the Guard Post on the main road and once from Thornham Lane). Another bird was at Folkestone up to Feb 11 at least and two were seen together at Sutton Bingham on the Dorset/Somerset border close to Yeovil on both Feb 6 and 10

**Grey Heron:** Some had been seen back at their nests at Weir Wood reservoir in East Sussex as early as Jan 25 and this week we have a further report of birds at their nests at Powderham on the Exe estuary on Feb 5

**Glossy Ibis:** 13 birds were still in Glamorgan on Feb 9 but the only other current reports are of a single bird seen regularly at Thurlstone in South Devon and a second hand report of one at Barnham in West Sussex on Feb 11

**Brent Goose:** 1360 were still on the Lymington Marshes on Feb 7 followed by reports of 850 in the Brownwich area west of Titchfield Haven on Feb 7, 414 in Cams Bay near Fareham on Feb 8 and 300+ on the Thorney Great Deeps on Feb 9. The WeBS count at Wittering in Chichester Harbour on Feb 11 recorded only 500 birds with the comment that the number was very low for February.

**Black Brant:** One in The Fleet near Weymouth on Feb 5 and one on south Hayling fields on Feb 9

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Exe estuary bird was still there on Feb 10 when another was still being reported from Suffolk

**Mandarin Duck:** A sighting of 15 on an unfrozen pond near Kingsley in East Hampshire on Feb 4 reminded me that large numbers of these can be seen on some Hampshire waters - the 2010 Hampshire Bird Report gave counts of 80 at Headley Mill Pond (nr Newbury) in Jan 2010, 36 at Liss Forest in East Hants in Sept 2010 and 34 at Sowley Pond near Lymington in that same month. Another current winter gathering of 35+ was reported at Buckfastleigh in Devon on Feb 10

**Ducks at Chichester Lakes:** On Feb 10 Andrew House visited the Chichester Lakes and reported that .. "Estimates were difficult, but conservatively there were **800 Shoveler** - 400 on Westhampnett Pit and another 300 on Ivy Lake, plus others scattered about on other pits, **500+ Gadwall** spread around the pits, **200+ Pochard**, **500+ Tufted duck**, **50 Teal** and **100 Mallard**, and too many Coots to count!

**Goldeneye:** A total of 37 could be seen in the north east of Langstone Harbour from Budds Mound on Feb 10

**Hooded Merganser:** The bird of unknown origin that appeared at Weymouth on June 2008 was still in that area on Jan 2 this year but has not been reported since. This week RBA report that one was seen somewhere in Kent on Feb 10

**Smew:** On Feb 5 a count of 216 was reported from one Netherlands site and on Feb 7 RBA reported a total of at least 115 in the UK including 34 in Norfolk. In southern England the Testwood Lakes near Southampton have had 3, the Vyne Lake near Basingstoke has had 2 and one has been at the Pagham Lagoon while one has flown as far west as Bodmin Moor

**Stone Curlew:** A report for Feb 12 on the SOS website gives a confident account of a **Stone Curlew** watched for 10 minutes in a field at TQ 051047 near Angmering (south east of Arundel) and then seen to fly a short distance south, apparently landing in another field but not seen again there. Although Stone Curlews are among the earliest migrants to arrive (around mid-March) I would guess that this bird may have been wintering here as was assumed for the bird found in a Hayling Island stubble field on Feb 5 in 2006 and staying there for five days. There have been Hampshire wintering records in Dec 1972 and Dec 1974 and assumed early migrant records for Feb 25 in 1938 and Feb 28 in 1960

**Golden Plover:** A flock of 490 seen on the Hayling Island West Lane fields on Feb 4 has not been reported since so probably consisted of birds pausing briefly on a long journey to the south west in the hope of escaping cold weather. This week there were 300 at Newhaven and 800 at Rye Harbour on Feb 7 with 1000 at Maiden Castle near Dorchester in Dorset on Feb 9

**Knot:** The exceptionally large numbers feeding in the Emsworth/Warblington area increased to 930 on Feb 5 and remained at around 950 to Feb 10 at least

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The Christchurch Harbour (CHOG) website on Feb 9 recorded an observation of **a Crow killing a Black-tailed Godwit for no apparent reason**. The Godwits there were said to always be wary of Crows but this interaction between the species is not something I have heard of elsewhere or

observed here in Chichester Harbour where there are often groups of both species exceeding 100 of each.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** One was found dead on the beach at Sandwich Bay on Feb 7 (very unusual for the time of year)

**Woodcock:** Large numbers have been pouring into southern England to escape the low temperatures on the continent and there have been several sightings in unusual locations such as the one that was seen under a streetlamp in an urban Sussex street by someone who woke at 4am on Feb 6 and looked out of their window. Feb 6 brought a count of 61 to Sandwich Bay bird observatory followed by 47 there on Feb 7 and 67 on Feb 8. Dungeness had 15 on Feb 9 but the majority of the 38 reports I have seen this week were of one or few birds well away from birding hotspots

**Med Gull:** Pre-breeding flocks are now starting to build up in the expected places with more than 95 around Pagham Village on Feb 9 and 440 at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Feb 8

**Shore Lark:** Still present at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 11

**Waxwing:** A report of two seen in Hill Head village (adjacent to Titchfield Haven) on Feb 6 has not been followed by further sightings.

**Continental Thrushes:** Cold weather on the continent has brought many into southern England. Reculver on the north Kent coast had a flock of 60 **Blackbirds** on Feb 6, the Kent Stour valley had 2000 **Fieldfares** on Feb 5 (locally a flock of 15 were in Havant on Feb 8), more than 50 **Song Thrushes** were seen together in the Kent Thanet area on Feb 7, 22 reports of **Redwing** during the week included 250 at Petworth near Pulborough on Feb 9 after 150 flew west over Thanet on Feb 5 (when more than 30 were in north Emsworth)

**Blackbird song:** One heard in my Havant garden at dusk on Feb 6 and another heard at dawn on Feb 8 in Brian Fellows' Emsworth garden.

**Paddyfield Warbler:** Still being seen at the Pagham Harbour north walls up to Feb 12 at least

**Firecrest:** Goldcrest have been seen in the small Nore Barn woodland at Emsworth for some time but this week there have also been two sightings of a single Firecrest there on Feb 10 and 11. In Devon Abbotsbury still had more than 7 on Feb 4

**Corvid roost in Gosport area:** On Feb 10 Peter Raby spent an hour at dusk counting corvids entering their long established winter roost in Elson Wood (SU 593030) on the northwest shore of Portsmouth Harbour. There is no public access to the wood which is within the securely defended naval armaments depot known variously as the Bedenham/Frater or Defence Munitions site but Peter was able to watch the birds from Aerodrome Road (to avoid arrest by the military police it would be as well to check in at their guard post before loitering with intent

to watch birds from anywhere near the perimeter of the site!). His counts were of **1689 mixed Crows and Rooks plus 201 Jackdaws and 106 Magpies**

**Rook:** These are now returning to their rookeries and on Feb 6 I noted at least 20 pairs around the nests at Northney (SU 729 036) on Hayling Island (casual count while cycling by) with others back at the Emsworth Rookery (SU 740 062 in trees behind council flats at the east end of Victoria Road) on Feb 9

**Snow Bunting:** It would seem that continental temperatures have fallen too low even for Snow Buntings with the result that 40 emigrants appeared on the beach at Sandwich Bay on Feb 7. Locally the small group of 4 which flew from East Head on the Sussex side of the Chichester Harbour entrance across to the Hayling Island lifeboat station area on Feb 2 were still there on Feb 9

## INSECTS

### Butterflies:

#### Species reported this week:

Late news of a single **Red Admiral** seen in Gosport on Jan 28

### Moths:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

**672 Parsnip Moth *Depressaria/pastinacella heraclei*** woken from hibernation on Feb 4 when logs were brought into a Dorset house - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1832>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0672.php>

The only other report this week was of **Fox Moth caterpillars** sunning themselves on South Dartmoor in Feb 7

### Other Insects:

No reports this week

## PLANTS

**Greater Periwinkle var *Oxyloba*:** The first flower of this variant which has deep blue propelle shaped petals was out in Daw Lane on Hayling Island on Feb 6

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Earthworms:** Thanks to a mention of them on the Durlston website this week I was introduced to the Earthworm Society of Great Britain and to Earthworm ecology via <http://www.earthwormsoc.org.uk/earthworm-information/earthworm-information-page-2> where the Worm Kingdom is divided into four groups - **Compost Earthworms, Epigeic Earthworms, Endogeic Earthworms and Anecic Earthworms.**

**Compost Earthworms** are the fast working converters of plant waste into soil (you buy pack of them to start your compost bin and providing you keep supplying them with organic matter they provide a self sustaining supply of baby worms to support the soil producing process without further 'fuel'). There are three main species in this group which can be recognized by having an overall rich red-brown colour which on closer inspection can be seen to be divided into alternating brown and pale bands along the length of the body.

**Epigeic worms** are divided into at least ten species which live in leaf litter and do not burrow into the soil. Their colour can vary from rich brown to pale whitish but they never have the banded/striped colour pattern of the Compost worms

**Endogeic worms** live in and eat soil and come in a variety of colours (mostly pale)

**Anecic worms (also known as Lob worms)** are leaf eaters and make vertical burrows, coming up at night to grab a leaf and pull it down into their burrow - as they are slow workers you can often find the ends of the leaves still sticking up vertically above the soil when you go for an early morning walk (especially after a rainy night). To increase their pulling power they swell their tails until they become jammed in the tunnel, leaving the head end free to pull the leaf down into the burrow, These Anecic worms are the largest and strongest species and have dark brown bodies, darkest at the head end and paler at the tail. They excrete what's left of the chewed leaves in 'worm casts' that can be found on the surface near the entrance to their permanent burrows.

If, like me, you have ever wondered **why worms sometimes have what looks like a bandage round their bodies** halfway along them have a look at <http://www.earthwormsoc.org.uk/earthworm-identification/earthworm-identification-page-1> which will show you that **this structure is called a 'saddle'** and does not go all round the body but to find out the purpose of this structure you have to visit <http://www.cocoon.org/cocoon-articles/earthworm-cocoon.shtml> and read about **earthworm reproduction** (all worms are hermaphrodite and when sexually mature separate pores in the body exude eggs and sperm, the saddle then moves forward along the body, gathering up the eggs and sperm - the saddle continues to move forward until it comes off the head of the worm to become a 'cocoon' in which up to 20 baby worms develop - some worms can repeat this process up to 70 times in a year) Another thing that I have learnt is that the **burrowing worms have tiny bristles on each segment to assist in gripping the sides of the burrow when moving through it.**

For photos of eleven of the 26 species of British Earthworms see <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/other-invertebrates/earthworm-slideshow/> and if you want to pursue your interest visit <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/other-invertebrates/british-earthworms/index.html>

**Fungi:** Just one species caught my eye this week when walking past a couple of dying Horse Chestnut trees in Havant Park close to Market Parade. These whitish brackets run up the sides of the trees and are I think young specimens of *Trametes gibbosa* which have not yet acquired the greenish colour to their topsides which come from the growth of algae as the brackets age.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 6 - 12 (WEEK 6 OF 2012)**

**Thu 9 Feb**

### **Along the shore to Nutbourne Bay**

I was not expecting anything in particular on a dull, cold but almost windless morning as I cycled east towards Thorney Island where I had read that there has been an unusually diverse collection of birds on the Great Deeps (which remain ice free longer than some other local waters as a result of tidal movement, especially when as now we are in a period of spring tides).

Rather than following the main road through Emsworth I went via Selangor Avenue, allowing me to confirm that **the Rooks are back** in the rookery where the road becomes Victoria Road, and then to cycle through Brook Meadow.

The Slipper Mill pond and the Little Deeps were frozen and birdless but there was a good show at the west end of the Great Deeps (though the **Great White Egret was not in sight**). A couple of **Cormorant with dramatic 'judge's wig' heads** were among the first birds seen, followed by the dramatic sight of **two huge Great Blackback gulls in fresh breeding plumage** - both made themselves more dominant by holding their wings up at full stretch in order to move short distances over the water seemingly in pursuit of some tin food items. Nearby a pair of **Herring Gulls** were looking equally smart (but relatively tiny) in their breeding plumage and to end the list of gulls there were many **Black-headed (one with a seemingly complete 'black head')** and a single **Common Gull**.

To fill out the space on the water there were around **300 Brent** and among them were **Shelduck, Pintail, Gadwall, Wigeon and a few Teal with Mallard and a couple of Swans**. Waders included **Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Red and Greenhank, Grey Plover, Turnstone and Dunlin** while the distinctive call of a **Spotted Redshank** was heard. To round off the list I saw **one Little Egret and one Grey Heron**.

Continuing east along Thornham Lane I found **Curlew and Starlings feeding in the ex-Llama field** opposite Thornham House and while there I added **Jay** to my year list when one landed in the field hedgerow. The stretch from Prinsted to Nutbourne was remarkably short of birds though I did see **a large and rich red Fox** hurrying across the fields. **No sign of Avocets at Nutbourne Bay** and, now that apples are off the menu in the orchards, **no Fieldfares** in the trees.

Back at home I had an email telling me that the Billy Trail behind my house is to be closed from Feb 20 until work is completed to make the drainage north of East Street effective in order to prevent the flooding which has made the track impassable in periods of wet weather. The purpose of the email was to ask what evidence there was to show that this drainage would be detrimental to **the Frogs which used to spawn in the water beside the track** and this caused me to check my records to see when it was that Frogs ceased to appear here - I see that **the**

last clump of spawn that I saw here was in February of 2005, quite some time after the national 'Frog Mortality Project' was set up in May 1992 (and that was sometime after Froglife became aware that a new virus was killing Frogs on a grand scale in the late 1980s).

I am not sure if the virus is still reducing Frog populations and I know that it has not exterminated all Frogs but if you still have them in your area consider yourself lucky!

Mon 6 Feb

### Around Hayling

Before lunch I took a short walk along the Billy Trail running behind my house (from East St to New Lane) during which I am pretty sure (from the distinctive 'gup' call) that there was at least one unseen Redwing in the trees above the old rail line. Later, skirting the east side of Havant Park, I noticed a lot of new young bracket fungi on the dying Horse Chestnuts close to Elm Lane - I have not been back to check them but I think they were *Trametes gibbosa* (though that usually favours Beech trees and looks different in that older growths often have green algae on the upper surface which in this case was a clean whitish colour)

After lunch I got out my bike and cycled to the south end of the old railtrack on Hayling in the hope of seeing some of the 500 Golden Plover which had been in the West Lane fields last Saturday.

Passing over Langstone Bridge I had good views of six Mergansers passing under it in company with just four Brent and when I reached the Oysterbeds I found few birds there despite the tide approaching high though the Shorelark was showing well on the Tern Island (populated today by four sleeping Mallard). Out in the Langstone Channel there was one noteworthy flock of a dozen Goldeneye including two males demonstrating their virility by regularly 'standing up' on the water and flapping their wings to make sure everyone saw their white plumage.

In the West Lane fields I saw no Golden Plover (I suspect the flock seen on Saturday were on passage to warmer places to the south and west) but there was still a noisy and hungry flock of around 500 Brent which had more or less grazed the northern field bare of the growing green crop.

Coming back I headed east along Daw Lane where a Great Spotted Woodpecker gave me a surprise by drumming on an oak as I was passing under it. Also in the lane, right at its east end, I noted the first flower on the 'Oxyloba' variety of Geater Periwinkle which covers the lane bank here (and which I used to think was Intermediate Periwinkle though that has pale blue flowers and this has very deep blue 'propeller shaped' petals)

My only other observation on the way home through Northney was that the Rooks were back at their nests.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 30 - FEB 5 (WEEK 05 OF 2012)

### BIRDS

**Divers:** Red-headed were seen on the move all along our south coast this week with a peak count of 400 going east off Dungeness on Feb 3. Maybe some of the

**Black-throated** thought it was time to head south, bringing a peak count of 36 from Jersey on Feb 4 (though the Southampton Water bird remained there going no further south than Mayflower Park before returning to Eling). Maybe also on their way south were a group of 8 off The Lizard in Cornwall on Jan 28 though 7 were still nearby at Gerrans Bay on Feb 2. **Great Northern** were in the minority this week with a peak of just 5 off Jersey on Jan 29 when 4 were seen at Selsey.

**Grebes:** More than **2000 Great Crested** were off Dungeness on Jan 29 after last week's peak of 2500 there on Jan 27. **Single Red-necked** were reported at Studland Bay on Jan 28 and in Southampton Water on Feb 4. Selsey Bill had **5 Slavonian** on Jan 29 while Hampshire had just one off Lymington on Feb 4. Two **Black-necked** were off Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 29 when another two were off Calshot in Southampton Water and 11 were in Portland Harbour but the big flock of 40+ were still off Feock near Falmouth, also on Jan 29

**Shag:** One was near the Hayling Ferry on Jan 29 but may not be there much longer as on Feb 2 a couple of birds were seen bringing nest material to the cliffs at Durlston

**Cattle Egret:** The Warblington bird was still present on Feb 1 but has not been reported since.

**Great White Egret:** The bird which was first seen at the west end of the Great Deeps on Thorney Island on Jan 29 has been seen there again on both Feb 2 and 3. Also on Feb 2 two different birds were at Radipole (Weymouth) and other singles were seen during the week in Kent and Cornwall.

**Glossy Ibis:** Although one has been at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight from Jan 20 to Feb 4 at least and others have been reported this week at Wadebridge in Cornwall, Lodmoor in Dorset and the Stour Valley in Kent, these birds have been heading to Pembrokeshire in Wales where 23 were seen together on Feb 2 when a UK Total of 30 birds was listed by RBA.

**Spoonbill:** At least 15 (maybe 25) were in the Bideford area of North Devon on Jan 29 while a separate flock of at least 11 (maybe 15) was in Poole Harbour and one was still in the Plymouth area roosting on Drake Island.

**Canada Goose:** Plenty of these still to be seen in large flocks but at least one pair had flown off to claim a nest territory on Budds Farm pools at Havant on Feb 1

**Brent Goose:** Although spring passage of birds leaving their winter quarters has been underway fairly continuously since mid January (365 east past Dungeness on Jan 14 with 1150 going east past Sandy Point on Hayling on Jan 15) we can expect to see small flocks still passing at the end of March and into April and the variation in numbers seen at any one site currently shows the effect of birds making relatively short overnight flights to settle and feed in different areas each day. Another reflection of this movement was shown on Feb 3 when a single Brent (which had presumably lost contact with the flock with which it was travelling) touched down for no more than 30 minutes at Alresford Pond (well

north of Winchester up the River Itchen) before resuming the search for its travelling companions. PS - the bird apparently gave up the search and returned to the pond where it appeared settled on Feb 5

**Red-breasted Goose:** It would seem this has not yet felt the urge to move east and it was still on the Exminster Marshes near Exeter in Devon on Feb 3

**Pintail:** A flock of 76 were in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Feb 1

**Wigeon:** The number at Rye Harbour on the morning of Feb 4 had shot up to 900 while over in the Netherlands one site had a count of 3242

**Teal:** Rodden Hive (on the Fleet in Dorset) had an estimated 1100 on Feb 3

**Smew:** Numbers have shot up following the great freeze in central Europe. In southern England the number at Dungeness reached 17 on Feb 3 when there were 3 on the Testwood Lakes near Southampton with two more further west at Blashford and Longham Lakes. In the Netherlands there were at least 26 on Feb 3, 55 on Feb 4 and 159 on Feb 5 (possibly around 350 if we add all the Trektellen reports for that day together). In Hampshire 2 were reported on Feb 5 at a new site (the Vyne near Basingstoke).

**Marbled Duck:** A new species (albeit a presumed escapee) reported on Feb 4 was a single Marbled Duck on the lake at Petworth near Pulborough. The only report of this species which I saw last year was of one on Arlington Reservoir in Sussex from July 3 to 9 and I see that one was thought by some to be a wild vagrant which had been 'grounded' after injuring its left leg. The species does have seven small breeding colonies in Europe including sites in Spain and Italy and at least one turns up in the UK in most years.

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The long staying bird in the Arun valley near Burpham was last reported on Jan 30

**Dotterel:** The single bird which was found with Golden Plover at Dungeness on Jan 25 was last reported there on Jan 30

**Golden Plover:** Although there have been the usual large flocks of these birds in the Chichester Harbour area since last August the only reports from the west side of Hayling Island have been of a recent fly over flock and one small flock of around 20 birds on the Langstone village shore on Dec 3 so a sighting of some 40 birds in fields on the east side of the coastal path close to West Town Station by the Havant Wildlife Group on Feb 4 was significant. PS Tim Lawman, who lives close by, saw 490 Golden Plover on the West Lane fields on Feb 4 so perhaps the 40 seen from the Coastal Path brought the total to over 500?

**Knot:** The birds which have taken to feeding on the Emsworth shore this winter reached a peak count of 510 on Jan 29 though there were around 350 there on Feb 3. After writing this I see that Brian Fellows had over 600 there on Feb 4

**Little Stint:** The long staying bird in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester (usually seen where the R Lavant flows into the channel) was still there on Feb 1

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** Two which turned up at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Jan 2 were not seen there after Jan 12 but on Feb 2 one was again at Lodmoor and on Feb 3 one was reported at Rodden Hive (only 5 miles north west of Lodmoor)

**Woodcock:** The cold weather has brought the usual burst of sightings in unexpected places including one which flew into a building at the Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth on Feb 2 and was taken to Brent Lodge animal hospital by John Goodspeed. Further local sightings on Feb 3 were at Sandy Point on Hayling and in the St Ann's Hill cemetery at Gosport while Feb 4 brought one to Oxley's Coppice on the southwest fringe of the Fareham built up area. Also on Feb 4 three birds arrived at Rye Harbour and 10 were seen at one Netherlands site that day.

**Bar-tailed Godwit:** A flock of more than 225 were seen in the Sword Sands area of Langstone Harbour on Feb 2 by an observer looking from the Eastern Road into Portsmouth.

**Spotted Sandpiper:** Up to Jan 29 there had been regular reports of a juvenile in the Lyme Regis area of Dorset and an adult in the Chew Valley Lake in Avon but since then I have only seen reports of one which arrived at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 1 and was still there on Feb 4

**Wood Pigeon:** An **eggshell** on the ground under a nest near Petersfield on Feb 1 was probably the mark of an inauspicious birth for a featherless squab to appear in this world but **Collared Doves** have also been indulging in similar folly with reports of an **eggshell** found in the Winchester area on Feb 1 after earlier **young managed to fledge** from a Southampton nest on Jan 23

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** One was drumming at Fleet Pond in north east Hampshire on Jan 29

**Woodlark:** Song heard at a New Forest breeding site on Jan 29

**Shorelark:** The Hayling Oysterbeds bird was still present on Feb 4

**Swallow:** After the sighting of one at a Cornish sewage works on Jan 19 there has been another sighting at Camborne in Cornwall on Feb 1

**Rock Pipit:** There are several local sites in the Havant area where I expect to see these birds each winter but this month we seem to have added a new site at Nore Barn at the west end of the Emsworth shore. I first saw one there on Jan 14 and it was seen again there on both Feb 2 and 3 with Brian Fellows getting photos of it on the latter day. Several features distinguished it from **Meadow Pipit** without a close look at its plumage (the call is quieter and more 'fuzzy' and when put up it tends to fly low and pitch nearby where a **Meadow Pipit** would climb steeply into the sky making sharper calls before disappearing into the distance) but for completeness it would be nice to know if it was of the '**petrosus**' or '**litoralis**' subspecies and recent discussion has brought out a simple rule by which you can

start to separate the races merely by the habitat in which you find them - 'petrosus' tend to be found on rocky shores, 'litoralis' on softer shores typical of the Solent harbours. To go further you need a good look at the bird (and Brian Fellows has a couple of photos of the Nore Barn bird in the Feb 3 pages of his Diary at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) Before looking at the photos you can learn what to look for from a page on the Christchurch Harbour website at <http://www.chog.org.uk/Features/Rock%20Pipit%20February%202008.htm> which tells you that the standard petrosus birds have rich brown upperparts (including the nape) where litoralis birds are greyer with a hint of blue; petrosus also has a bolder eyestripe extending behind the eye and tends to have blacker legs (litoralis legs can be light brown to reddish); finally at this stage try to check the colour of the outer tail feathers which are likely to be white on petrosus and 'dirtier' on litoralis. None of these features are absolute guides - plumage varies with time of year and from bird to bird (having learnt a rule from one source the illustration in the next source you look at is likely to contradict it!)

**Waxwing:** It seems unlikely that we will see these in the numbers that we did last winter (when Romsey had 262 birds on Jan 7) but quite a few arrived here from October onward (though in very small groups) and by Dec 10 Lee Evans told us that the total in the UK was just 70 birds and that they were all in Suffolk. Since then I have seen one final report for 2011 of just 3 birds in a Waitrose carpark at Newark (Notts) on Dec 22. This year Lee Evans upped his estimate of the birds in Suffolk to 100 on Jan 2 and that has been followed by news of 1 in the Netherlands on Jan 13, then one flying from Surrey into Sussex (heading for Crawley) on Feb 3 with another report of one bird in the Netherlands on Feb 4

**Ring Ouzel:** Back in the 1980s I once saw one that was wintering in the New Forest and it seems that one has been doing so in Sussex this winter but the only clue to its current whereabouts is that it was photographed in a garden somewhere near Chichester in the last few days of January (the photo proves its id)

**Black-throated Thrush:** The only report of the species for this winter comes from someone who saw it on Feb 2 during a seven hour walk from Killarney in Ireland to to an unspecified remote spot high in a mountain area - he suggests that it is not worth the effort of making the trip to try to refind it!

**Fieldfare:** The current cold weather has brought a significant increase in sightings of winter thrushes but as yet they are not being forced into our towns and gardens. Some of this week's reports have been of 220 at Badminton Common near Fawley in the New Forest on Jan 28, 700 near Firle on the Sussex Downs on Jan 29, 250 at Burpham near Arundel on Jan 30 and 300+ in the Beckley Woods north of Hastings on Jan 31 with 75 at Swanmore in the Meon Valley on Feb 1

**Redwing:** The highest counts this week have been 200 at Swanmore in the Meon Valley on Feb 1 and 100 in the Petworth area on Feb 3

**Paddyfield Warbler:** One was found by the Pagham North Walls on Jan 30 by Ivan Lang (one report suggests that it may have been in that area since November) and it was still there on Feb 4 (after vanishing for a day on Feb 3). Ivan Lang is also in the news this week for keeping his job as Pagham Harbour reserve warden after the management of the site was transferred from West Sussex County Council to the RSPB on Feb 3

**Great Grey Shrike:** What appears to be a 'new' bird has been seen at Glynde village near Lewes from Jan 28 to 31 and on Jan 29 one was seen at another new site on Great Litchfield Down just east of the A34 north of Whitchurch

**Chough:** A sighting of 4 on The Lizard in Cornwall was reported on Jan 28 and another of 2 birds was made at Newquay on the north coast of Cornwall on Jan 31 - I'm not sure of the significance of these reports but guess they may be birds returning to breeding sites after wintering elsewhere.

**Brambling:** Cold weather seems to have brought a few more into southern England with reports of a big flock on Black Down near Haslemere, a flock of around 50 to the QE country park near Petersfield, and 20+ in the Petworth area

**Common (Mealy) Redpoll:** Two were seen at Fleet Pond in north east Hampshire on Jan 29

**Common Crossbill:** A reminder that these birds start breeding at this time of year to take advantage of the early stages of the growth of fir cones to feed their young before the cones become too woody comes with a note from twitchers seeking the Parrot Crossbill at Black Down near Haslemere who heard many of the Common Crossbills singing (the song is said to be like that of Greenfinch intermixed with Crossbill 'Chups')

**Parrot Crossbill:** Reports of this rarity have continued to Feb 2 at least though I am not sure if the purists have accepted the bird as full blooded Parrot - if it is accepted it will be the first to be seen in Sussex since March 1870

**Snow Bunting:** The appearance of four birds close to the Hayling Island Lifeboat station at Sandy Point on Feb 2 presumably means that the birds previously at East Head just across the water have moved from Sussex to Hampshire (and remained there)

## **INSECTS**

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar

information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

**0688 Common Flatbody Agonopterix heracliiana** found at Tinctleton (between Wareham and Dorchester in Dorset) on Jan 24 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=755>

This was just one of 18 species trapped at Tinctleton on Jan 24 and is one of two which appear here by right of being new for the year as far as my records are concerned.

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0688.php>

**1934 Dotted Border Agriopis marginaria** found at East Lulworth (in Dorset) on Jan 25 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3940>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1934.php>

**1984 Hummingbird Hawk-moth Macroglossum stellatarum** found by day at Chickerell (in Dorset) on Feb 1 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2198>

This is not a first for the year - one had been seen at Portland on Jan 18 (also by day) - and both could be migrants but are more likely to be insects which attempted to hibernate here (some of the species do hibernate successfully) but which had been disturbed or warmed up too early

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1984.php>

**2182 Small Quaker Orthosia cruda** trapped at East Lulworth (in Dorset) on Jan 23 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=347>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2182.php>

**2236 Pale Pinion Lithophane hepatica** trapped at Chickerell (in Dorset) on Jan 21 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2448>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2236.php>

## PLANTS

**Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*):** Two plants flowering at the Langstone South Moors site on Feb 1

**Common fumitory (*Fumaria officinalis*):** Still flowering on Budds Mound in Havant on Feb 1

**Danish scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*):** Not yet flowering but the first roadside leaves were seen on Feb 1 and a liberal scattering of road salt plus sufficient precipitation to moisten the ground should bring the plants into flower when the cold snap ends

**Great Herb Robert (*Geranium reuteri*):** Still no word from the experts but the plant assumed to bear this name was still flowering in Havant on Feb 1

**Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*):** Common enough for most of the year but noteworthy to find it flowering on Feb 1

**Small nettle (*Urtica urens*):** Still flowering and in a healthy state on Budds Mound in Havant on Feb 1

**White comfrey (*Symphytum orientale*):** The only genuine 'first flower' for the year found this week. Several plants flowering beside the small stream taking the water from the Homewell spring in Havant down through 'The Parchment' housing to join the Langbrook Stream

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Deer:** On Feb 1 **Fallow bucks were seen sparring** at Pulborough Brooks. As the rutting season is now over and Fallow will soon be casting their antlers (in April or May) I assume this is either a reflection of friction brought on by overcrowding in this population or perhaps just playfulness. Down at Durlston the **Roe Bucks already have their new antlers 'in velvet'** and will have cast last year's antlers before Christmas

**Squirrels:** **Neither Grey nor Red Squirrels hibernate** though they do build winter dreys in which to shelter from bad weather and they are less often seen in winter months though on Feb 2 **seven Red Squirrels** were seen together at Binstead on the Isle of Wight. On the mainland there was another report of a **'white' Grey Squirrel** from Frogmore Lane in Waterlooville (at the Horndean end where it is not uncommon to see two at a time)

**Adder:** A report of one out sunbathing in the Rother valley woods north of Hastings on Jan 28 was not unexpected (after a series of such reports from Durlston recently) but frosts since then make a further report from Durlston on Feb 3 more noteworthy

**Frogs:** Following news last week that Frogs were already back in at least one Waterlooville pond I see this week that they were present in a Cosham pond at the foot of Portsdown on Feb 3

**Beach life:** A survey of beach litter in the Rye Harbour area this week found (in addition to the rubbish) **egg cases of Thornback Ray, Blonde Ray, Undulate Ray** and the **bodies of many Green Sea Urchins** washed up by recent storms

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 30 - FEB 5 (WEEK 5 OF 2012)

### Wed 1 Feb

#### A walk to Budds Farm

Despite the chill north east wind the bright sun and cloudless sky made it a pleasure to be out this morning and there were several signs of spring including the first flowers on **White Comfrey** lining the small stream running through the Parchment housing from the Homewell spring. Not new, but colourful and surprising was a fresh flower on the putative **Geranium reuteri** plant in the alley off East Street.

Crossing Park Road South near the Langstone roundabout I noticed the **leaves of Danish Scurvygrass** were now visible (though it may need both colder weather and a little precipitation - salt spreading and snow or rain - to bring the plants into flower but we have a little time before Feb 17 which is the date on which they started to flower last year). One white flower which was out was an **Ox-eye Daisy** in grass beside the water wheel close to the A27 and further down the Langbrook stream several **Lungwort plants** were in flower in gardens.

Coming out onto the South Moors I put up an unexpected combination of **two Snipe feeding alongside two Song Thrushes**, and when I got to the north end of the Orchid field I not only enjoyed bright yellow **Marsh Marigold flowers** on two plants but also put up what may have been a **Jack Snipe** though I saw nothing to prove the claim - the only suggestive features were that I thought it looked smaller than the other two birds I had just seen and that it flew off in total silence but I did not see the length of the bill and it did not make a short, low level flight and then go to ground (but that may be because it was heading for the Southern Electric office building and had to go over it).

At the south end of Southmoor Lane one **Alexanders** plant was starting to flower and on top of Budds Mound **Common Fumitory and Small Nettle** were both still flowering. On the pools were **many Teal** with the other expected species plus **a pair of Canada Geese** clearly thinking of nesting here.

Coming home via Langstone Pond a **male Kestrel** allowed me to walk right below the branch on which it was perched but otherwise there was nothing special to note and not a single **Cherry Plum** flower to record.

Back at home my notepad showed I had passed 28 wild plant species in flower to start my February list

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 23 - 29 (WEEK 4 OF 2012)**

In this week which celebrates the 70th anniversary of **Desert Island Discs** I wonder how many of you know that the unforgettable signature tune was inspired by the view over the sea from Selsey to Bognor? If you cannot believe that Bognor could inspire anyone to compose such a pleasant tune have a look at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/By\\_the\\_Sleepy\\_Lagoon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/By_the_Sleepy_Lagoon) Birders familiar with the east shore at Selsey will no doubt have seen the plaque commemorating the association of the view with the tune.

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** No big numbers this week (max 7 **Red-throated** off Portland on Jan 25) but at least one of these was still in Langstone Harbour on Jan 23 and another in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Jan 24. The **Black-throated** was still at the head of Southampton Water at the start of the week and two **Great Northern** were in Poole Harbour on Jan 26.

**Great Crested Grebe:** Although 1000 had been seen flying east off Dungeness on Jan 14 last week the reports this week showed that many had remained in the Dungeness area with more than 1000 seen on Jan 25 and 2500 on Jan 27

**Slavonian Grebe:** Just two on the sea off Pagham Harbour on Jan 25 with just one in the Lyminster area this week

**Black-necked Grebe:** Two were still to be seen off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 28 and the high count for the week was of just 14 in Portland Harbour on Jan 22

**Cormorant:** For fans of this species there was a parade of 127 on the saltings near the mouth of Pagham Harbour on Jan 27 but those who travelled to Dungeness to see them at work on Jan 25 could have counted 725

**Cattle Egret:** The Warblington Farm bird was still in the area on Jan 28

**Little Egret:** Passing Langstone Pond soon after sunset on Jan 24 I could only see 7 (possibly 8) there in the leafless trees. Having seen more than one bird already sporting long breeding plumes it will not be long before the numbers based here will increase significantly.

**Great White Egret:** One flew over Fleet Pond in north Hampshire on Jan 23 when one was also unexpectedly seen on the beach at Rye Harbour but more regular birds were seen at Dungeness and Sandwich Bay later in the week. No reports from the Blashford Lakes since Jan 9

**Late news** - see Brian Fellows website ( <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) for a photo of **a Great White Egret seen on Jan 29 at the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps**

**Grey Heron:** These early breeding birds were already back at nests at Weir Wood reservoir on Jan 25 - the report was of 7 birds but I'm not sure if they were singles or pairs.

**Glossy Ibis:** One was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Jan 24, 25 and 27 but I have no idea where it spent the rest of its time (the only other sites at which they have been reported in southern England since Jan 1 have been in the Kent Stour Valley, Devon and Cornwall)

**Bewick's Swan:** A flock of just over 30 remains in the Arun valley with another 6 in the Hampshire Avon valley near Ringwood but this week's news is the first report for the year of a flock on the Romney Marshes in Kent - it comes from Dungeness where a flock of more than 50 flew in to roost on the evening of Jan 27

**Cackling Canada Goose:** One of the 'half size' Canada Goose races put in an appearance at the Lower Test Marshes near Southampton on Jan 27

**Brent Goose:** There were still around 1500 in the West Lane fields on Hayling Island on Jan 23 when another 1191 were reported in the Titchfield area but by Jan 26 I could only find 300 in the area between Langstone and Emsworth.

Flocks heading east past Dungeness were recorded as numbering 2262 birds on Jan 25 and 1030 on Jan 26

**Late news** - see Brian Fellows website ( <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) for news of a large flock of around 900 birds which appeared on the Emsworth western shoreline on Jan 29

**Black Brant:** One seen in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Jan 22

**Red Breasted Goose:** The Exminster Marshes bird was still with Brent in Devon on Jan 21

**Pintail:** Larger than usual counts of 15 at the Blashford Lakes on Jan 23, 19 at Christchurch Harbour on Jan 25 and around 50 in Langstone Harbour on Jan 28 probably indicate an eastward movement of these birds during the week (though there had been 129 on the Thorney Great Deeps back on Jan 14). There is some support for this in a report from Dungeness of **37 Wigeon on their way east** on Jan 25

**Fudge Duck (male hybrid Ferruginous x Pochard):** Seen again on Budds Farm pools in Havant by Richard Ford on Jan 29

**Sparrowhawk:** An increase in sightings this week may be the result of birds starting to patrol the boundaries of their breeding territories - one doing so over Havant close to my house gave me my first year-list tick on Jan 28 (the bird was probably a female as it flew in a level and leisurely fashion at a fair height - not the roller coaster territorial flight of a male)

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird was still present near Burpham on Jan 27 when seven birds were reported by RBA to be still in the UK

**Grey Partridge:** Also in the Burpham area on Jan 27 these Partridges were reported to be 'singing and calling in most fields'.

**Common Crane:** One was in the Frome valley between Wareham and Dorchester (near Bovington) between Jan 20 and 25, making a trip downstream to visit the Arne area on Jan 22 (but not I think as far east as Rye Harbour where one was overhead on Jan 23)

**Dotterel:** The first report for the year is of one among a flock of Golden Plover at Dungeness on Jan 25 and 26

**Knot:** 250 Knot feeding in the Nore Barn area (west end of Emsworth shore) on Jan 26 was a record count for the area

**Late news** - see Brian Fellows website ( <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> ) for news of a record count of around 510 Knot on the Emsworth western shore on Jan 29

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Also at Nore Barn on Jan 26 Brian Fellows counted 148 Godwits and noted that many of them were exhibiting the 'water squirting' behaviour which he sees and photographs regularly but which none of the experts on the behaviour of these birds has noticed (and so cannot explain).

**Lesser Yellowlegs:** On Jan 26 Lee Evans made a birding trip to the south coast which included a visit to Burnham on Sea in Somerset to see the Lesser Yellowlegs which has been there since at least Jan 1

**Spotted Sandpiper:** On Jan 26 Lee Evans also reported the continuing presence of two of these - an adult at Chew Valley Lake in Avon and a juvenile in the Lyme Regis area of the Dorset coast

**Grey Phalarope:** I thought their autumn passage had finished on Jan 12 when one was seen at Splash Point on the East Sussex coast but Jan 27 brought a further report of one on the Netherlands coast

**Wood Pigeon:** Listening to Radio 4 farming programme early on Saturday morning I heard a farmer (I think based in Northamptonshire) saying that his Rape crop was flourishing in the mild weather and that he had been surprised that it had not been damaged by Woodpigeons which seemed to be finding plenty to eat in the hedgerows - I hope that does not mean that when the impending cold period does reach us there is nothing left in the hedges for the winter Thrushes.

**Little Owl:** A phone call from Nottingham asking for confirmation that the sounds which the caller was imitating were indicative of a Little Owl heard near his home reminded me that it was on Jan 11 last year that I heard the pair that reside in the Stoke Common area (across the Hayling Coastal path from the Oysterbeds) calling to each other as they re-established their bonds and territory. So this is a good time to keep your ears open for them.

**Hoopoe:** A report of one on a waste tip at Pendeen in Cornwall on Jan 25 was unexpected

**Swallow:** Another unexpected report was of one Swallow seen over sewage works at Helston in Cornwall on Jan 19 and that was followed by a second report from the Brading area of the Isle of Wight on Jan 25 (though this was reported as possible only)

**Shore Lark:** I was delighted to see the Hayling Oysterbeds bird on Jan 23. I gather it has been there since at least Jan 11 and was still there on Jan 28

**Rock Pipit:** Song heard on Jan 25 at both Portsmouth Dockyard and Durlston

**Grey Wagtail:** Also singing in Portsmouth Dockyard on Jan 25 and seen in central Havant flying up from the Homewell spring pool to perch on a roof top (likely to breed in that area)

**Mistle Thrush:** The bird which I saw in the field north of Langstone Pond on Dec 31 was heard singing and seen there on Jan 25

**Spanish Sparrow:** The Calshot bird was still present on Jan 28

**Common Crossbill:** Several recent sightings in Havant Thicket this week - if you are not familiar with the look of Norway Spruce (cigar shaped) cones after they have been stripped by Crossbills see my photo on my Diary page

**Dark-eyed Junco:** No reports from Hawkhill Inclosure off Beaulieu Heath since Jan 24 but a sighting was claimed on Jan 29 from a new site in Bolderwood (some 7 km north and 11 km west of Hawkshill Inclosure)

## **INSECTS**

### **Butterflies:**

#### **Species reported this week:**

**Red Admiral:** Three reports this week, all from Sussex

**Peacock:** One found on Jan 24 in a garage at Coldwaltham near Pulborough. It was fluttering around a striplight which had just been switched on and when the doors were open it flew out into the daylight

### **Moths:**

I have not heard of any new species for the year seen this week

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Yellow Dung-Fly:** One seen by Brian Fellows on Jan 25 on a Hogweed umbel in Brook Meadow at Emsworth (hoping for other smaller insects to be attracted there as prey)

**Western Conifer Seed Bug:** This large insect is now established in Britain and one turned up at the Portland Bird Observatory on Jan 23. Last year the majority of sightings came between August and October but one was found in John Goodspeed's house on Portsdown as early as Feb 9

**Spider Silk:** Just in case you have managed to miss the recent TV programs showing how the extraordinary qualities of spider silk (strength, light weight and natural colour) have been harnessed for human advantage here is a brief run down on what I have learnt about the subject.

First there is the beauty of the cape now on show at the V & A Museum. For a picture of the Cape and a very brief explanation of how it was created see <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/shortsharpscience/2012/01/the-science-of-the-spider-silk.html> and for the video which was broadcast on BBC News see <http://abcnews.go.com/International/video/million-spiders-produce-golden-cape-15430504>

That silk for that cape was produced by real spiders in Madagascar but it will never be practical to collect the silk directly from spiders so the second approach has been to extract silk-making genes (the silk is a protein) from the spiders and transfer them to silkworms, causing the silk which they spin into their cocoons to have the qualities of spider silk. Once a genetically modified species of silkworm (and the moth of which the silkworm is the larva) have been established the better quality silk can be obtained by the age old traditional method of silk making. It would seem that this technique still has a long way to go but I guess we will get there in the end. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-16399257>

The third approach was the subject of a BBC Horizon programme and you can see a short video clip summarising the project at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00nc1ng> The technique shown in this episode is to introduce the spider silk protein gene into otherwise normal goats and then to extract the silk from the goats milk by some secret technique which can be turned into an industrial process with the silk output only limited by the milk supply

## PLANTS

**Winter Aconite:** This is the time of year when this lovely member of the Buttercup family flowers in many places where it has been naturalised (including the Bishop's Palace Gardens at Chichester) and I was reminded of this by seeing a single flower in a neglected garden in Havant's West St on the north side almost opposite the junction with Brockhampton Road on Jan 24

**Field Pennycress:** Both flowers and seeds could be seen in the roadside grass of Juniper Square in Havant on Jan 26

**White Melilot:** One plant still flowering on south Hayling on Jan 23

**Blackthorn:** The flowers which were out on Jan 1 on the Langstone shoreline between Wade Land and Pook Lane were still to be seen on Jan 26

**Cherry Plum:** Also on Jan 26 many buds were starting to open on trees in Pook Lane and one bud on a tree at the junction of Pook Lane with the shore was clearly showing the white of its petals

**Three-cornered Leek (*Allium triquetrum*):** First flowers for the year were found by Brian Fellows on Jan 24 in the Beacon Square roadside at Emsworth (close to the entrance to the allotments)

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Hedgehog:** In a normal winter any **Hedgehogs** which had not gone into hibernation before Christmas would probably be dead by now but when I was cycling up Staunton Avenue from the south Hayling beach on Jan 23 I saw one very much alive and searching for worms or other food in the broad grass strip alongside the road. It was certainly not as big as these animals can be but looked big enough to survive if it could find food, though by the fact that it was searching in broad daylight I assume it was very hungry.

**Frog:** The first report of these 'active in a garden pond' came on Jan 24 from the Waterlooville area adjacent to Havant - not sure if 'active' means 'mating'

**Adder:** Adders were first reported to be basking in sunshine on the cliffs at Durlston on Jan 8 and a report of 'more than one' basking there on Jan 28 is the fourth such report for this year.

**Heath Snail (*Helicella itala*):** In last week's summary I wrote of Graeme Lyons' current interest in Snails and by co-incidence when I was cycling round south Hayling on Jan 23 I came on a small collection of the small whitish discoidal

snails having one or more thin black bands suggesting the name 'Mint Humbug' snails which I have always used for them. That name is not very helpful as there are in fact two very similar species that are both common on the chalky soils of southern England and I learnt last summer that the way to separate them is to look at the underside where there is a gap (called an umbilicus or 'belly button') in the centre of the whorls of the shell. In one species (**Heath Snail**) the umbilicus is wide (around one third of the whole width of the shell) and in the other (**Striped Snail, Cernuella virgata**) it is much smaller. Both species are variable in size though not exceeding 18mm across. Sadly I had forgotten this when I saw these snails and so I have assigned them to the species which I found to be the commoner last summer!

**Mice and Rats:** On the early Radio 4 Farming programme on Saturday morning I heard that an effect of the recent mild weather has been to generate a plague of mice and rats on farms.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 23 - 29 (WEEK 4 OF 2012)**

**Sat 28 Jan**

### **Havant Thicket for Crossbills**

As **Crossbills** had been reported from Havant Thicket earlier this week, and as John Goodspeed had found them still there a couple of days ago, I drove to the Thicket this morning to look round the conifers alongside what I call the 'Yellow Brick Road' (the road for Forestry Vehicles to access the Thicket from the B2149 Havant to Horndean road which enters the Thicket almost opposite Castle Road in Rowlands Castle and runs almost due west).

Walking north to this area from the public carpark I could see plenty of the **15cm long, cigar shaped cones on mature Norway Spruce trees** which had not yet been attacked by the Crossbills so I continued to search the area keeping an eye open for the silent shower of falling scales torn from the cones by silent and invisible Crossbills - this is often the first sign of their presence but I could not detect it here. Luckily I had not walked far north of the area when I heard the unmistakably '**Chup, chup**' call and looked up to see the red underside of a male flying almost overhead to allow me to add the species to my year list. That was the only Crossbill that I saw but on my way back I walked through an old Spruce plantation where the ground was littered with cones like those in my photo below which are typical of how these birds carefully strip each cone, pulling out each scale in turn before extracting the seeds nestling within the base of those scales - in my photo below you can see that each of the 250 or so (my estimate) scales on each cone has been neatly removed with none of the damage that the teeth of a Squirrel would inflict.

One intact Norway Spruce cone with three that have been stripped by Crossbills  
While in the Thicket area I **heard a couple of Bullfinch plus a Nuthatch with both Long-tailed and Coal Tits and saw two Buzzards soaring high above**. At one point a complaining crowd of **Siskins** landed in tree tops near me but they flew off before I could get a visual on them. Also seen distantly was the crowd of Gulls and Corvids on the Gipsies Plain - among them I could hear some of the **Rooks** that no doubt come from the Rowlands Castle rookery near the railway station

with maybe some from the Leigh Park gardens rookery whose trees overhang the road taking you north from Leigh Park into the Durrants area which comes before the Rowlands |Castle roundabout.

Back at home I was walking down the road outside my house when I added a second bird (following the Crossbill) to my year list - this time my first **Sparrowhawk** which was on a slow high patrol of its home territory, brought to my attention by the calls of gulls. Mention of gulls reminds me that earlier in the week **a pair of Herring Gulls landed on the chimney stack of the house across the road** from mine and raised their heads in a noisy show of thinking the nearby rooves might make a good nesting place. They did the same last year though nothing came of it but I am pretty sure that for several years there have been some nesting on the factory rooves up New Lane not far to the north.

**Thu 26 Jan**

### **Reasons to smile**

After yesterday's gloom today's sunshine was reason in itself for smiling but the glorious colour of my first **Grey Wagtail** for the year flying up from the Homewell spring in the centre of Havant to perch on a rooftop in full sun against the background of the blue sky above caused me to nearly cheer out loud. On that same walk to the Havant shops I also enjoyed the sight of both the pure white of **Field Pennycrest** and the bright blue of **Green Alkanet** flowers.

The phone rang at lunchtime with a query from a Portsmouth NEWS reporter saying she had been told that there was an **unexplained absence of Grey Squirrels** from Havant Park and wondering if I knew the reason to which I could only say that if this was a normal winter **Squirrels should now be hibernating in their Dreys** and that the unusual aspect of current Squirrel life was that there were any at all to be seen - that fact that there are was brought home to me this afternoon when I walked in the Warblington area and saw **three different Squirrels all sitting on branches in traditional Squirrel Nutkin pose** munching on what I must assume were nuts.

On that walk I was hoping to see the **Cattle Egret** but failed to do so (it was certainly seen yesterday morning and I expect it is still around somewhere). Along the Langstone east shore the **Blackthorn flowers** which had been open on Jan 1 were still on show and today's news was that as I headed up Pook Lane I found many **Cherry Plum trees starting to open their buds** (one flower had already started pushing its petals out of their sheath) and as I walked the path from Wablinton Church to Nore Barn I found **Sun Spurge freshly flowering alongside a plant of Groundsel covered with the unusual rayed form of flowers**. In the big field south of the Church Path **two flocks of Brent** were still present but only totalling some 300 birds, not the 5,000 plus that were here recently.

At Nore Barn the **Spotted Redshank** was still present despite the imminence of sunset, and before seeing it I had found several flowers on the large plant of **Japanese Honeysuckle** that covers the brambles and climbs the surrounding trees at the west end of the woodland (I noted this as there were no flowers to be seen on the plant I passed earlier by the Billy Trail in Havant)

**Mon 23 Jan**

## Shore Lark and live Hedgehog go on my year list

Bright sunshine and a light wind augured well for a trip to Hayling but when I got out my bike and checked the tyres I was worried to see that a couple of spokes in the front wheel had broken (luckily the bike survived the trip!)

Before setting out the **local Crow family** of four were in the garden for their usual breakfast and I was surprised to see that one of the two young birds which have been coming here for the best part of a year was still quivering its wings and begging food from one of the parents.

Heading down the Billy Trail it was nice to hear **Mistle Thrush song** from the area near Langstone pond indicating that the bird which I saw twice there in final days of 2011 (but did not get on my Jan 1 list) is still around. Also in that area I heard two or three **Wrens singing** as well as the **Dunnocks** that are now heard daily.

Reaching the Oysterbeds with the tide very high (forecast as 4.8m) there were plenty of birders, several saying the **Shore Lark** had been seen 'not long ago' but no one seemed to see it while I was there (maybe as a result of **several Brent and a mass of Dunlin** roosting on the area of the Tern island where the Lark was supposed to be seen) so I headed on south down the Coastal path.

First stop was at the shore copse in line with Daw Lane hoping to see early **wild Primroses** in flower but I found no buds among the very fresh leaves. Further south the West Lane fields held an estimated **1500+ Brent** which I gave a cursory once over in case the **Brant** which has been in this area recently was showing its whitish flanks but again no luck.

Near the Sinah Gravel Pit lake an Oak tree had a vocal flock of some **20 Greenfinch** in its topmost branches - a welcome indication that these birds, which have been so scarce here this winter that I did not get the species on my year list until yesterday, are returning.

Reaching the Ferry area I checked out the grass in the centre of the roundabout where **Early Forget-me-not** will be in flower before too long (unlikely until March!) and was rewarded with a colony of what I put down as live **Heath Snails (*Helicella itala*)** - yesterday I was writing about my interest in Snails which had been re-awakened by Graeme Lyons recent blog entry but after seeing these molluscs I realised that I had not checked the size of their belly-buttons (umbilici) as this is the only sure distinction between ***H. itala*** (width of umbilicus is one third of the shell diameter) and the **Striped Snail (*Ceriuella virgata*)** which has a much smaller umbilicus - other than this both species look like 'mint humbugs' being white with dark lines). Both species are fairly common on calcareous grass in southern England.

On the grassland south of the Golf Course my only note was a first sight of the **leaves of a couple of Green-winged Orchids** that will soon be pushing up in their thousands. Heading back to the West Town station and the coastal path up Staunton Avenue I had a much more unexpected sight for late January - **a smallish Hedgehog actively searching for worms or other food in the broad roadside grass verge.**

Back at the Oysterbeds the birders and the roosting birds had all left the lagoon area though one of the last to depart said the **Shore Lark** was still there so I got out my scope for a careful search of the tern nesting island but had no luck for about 15 minutes during which another birder (who turned out to be Mark Swann whose usual patch is the Testwood Lakes at Totton) arrived. When my patience ran out and my stomach told me it was long past lunch time I put my scope back in its case and was just mounting my bike to leave when **Mark spotted the bird and we both had excellent views of it through the scope** - a lifer for me bringing my humble year-list to 76 (and in view of Brian Fellows remark that I probably by now had over a hundred flowering plants on my plant list I checked that and found that it currently stands at 96)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 16 - 22 (WEEK 3 OF 2012)**

### **BIRDS**

**Divers:** Mild weather has not only encouraged Brent geese to start their spring passage early but has also produced a similar re-action in some seabirds. Birling Gap at the inland end of Beachy Head saw 81 **Red-throated Divers** flying east overhead on Jan 16 followed by another 62 on Jan 17. A similar hint of eastward passage was seen at both Portland and Christchurch Harbour, while a report of 1097 of these divers at a Netherlands site was probably the result of arrivals from the west. The winter resident **Black-throated Diver** was still in the Eling area at the head of Southampton Water on Jan 16 and three **Great Northern** were at the mouth of Southampton Water that day - one was in Langstone Harbour off the Milton shore on Jan 20

**Great Crested Grebe:** We have not heard much this winter of the very large rafts of these that are normally seen in the Rye Bay and Dungeness area but Jan 14 brought news from Dungeness of 1000 Great Crested already heading east with another 500 seen there on Jan 18

**Red-necked Grebe:** Two were seen off Newhaven on Jan 14 with one off Dungeness on Jan 16, one off the mouth of Langstone Harbour on Jan 17 (when it or another was also seen off the Gosport area from Gilkicker Point) and on Jan 18 one was seen in Shell Bay at Studland.

**Slavonian Grebe:** One was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour on both Jan 17 and 20

**Black-necked Grebe:** The only big count this week was of 45 in the Feock area north of Falmouth but up to 17 were reported in Langstone Harbour by birders drawn to the Hayling Oysterbeds by the **Shorelark**. Portland Harbour had 13 on Jan 21.

**Cormorant:** If you are a fisherman who thinks that these birds are long overdue for a cull have a look at <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-tnzWgADpXCo/TxsZtZYrYBI/AAAAAAAAANo/rRn2V2MaDwU/s400/cormorant%2526perch.jpg> for a very greedy bird about to consume a large Perch

**Cattle Egret:** The Hampshire bird was still near Warblington Church on Jan 22

**Glossy Ibis:** Devon is still producing daily reports of these, not only from the Exminster and Thurlestone Marshes but surprisingly two were at the Crediton Tesco store on Jan 17 (I wonder what special offer had attracted them there?). RBA News records an unusual observation of 5 together on Eigg in the Scottish western isles on Jan 20

**Spoonbill:** Still 15 in Poole Harbour at Brownsea Island on Jan 15

**Bewick's Swan:** Still up to 32 on the River Arun in the Burpham area and 6 at the Blashford Lakes

**Whitefront Goose:** 24 (plus 20 Greylags) with the Bewick's at Burpham and another 12 upstream at Pulborough

**Brent Goose:** Still plenty here for the Jan 15 WeBS counts (well over 1500 in Chichester Harbour) but lots more passing east - Sandy Point on Hayling records 1150 moving east in 2 Hours on Jan 15 (noting that they were approaching the Hampshire coast from the south west, passing south of the Isle of Wight, not via the Solent, to re-inforce the likelihood that these early passage birds come from the west coast of France). On Jan 16 701 headed east over Birling Gap on Beachy Head and on Jan 19 27 went past Portland with another 60 passing there on Jan 21

**Black Brant:** One was with Brent in fields south of Daw Lane on Hayling on Jan 16

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Exminster Marshes bird was still present in Devon on Jan 21 and the Essex bird was reported on Jan 16

**Mandarin Duck:** When I heard the report of a Mandarin Duck being seen on Emsworth Town Millpond on Jan 7 which could not subsequently be found there by Brian Fellows, while one was found on Jan 8 at Southampton Common, I guessed that the Emsworth bird had moved on to Southampton (though I now see that the Emsworth report was of a female and the Southampton one of a male). Now, on Jan 17, Brian has found the female at Emsworth (and a male, maybe the Southampton Common bird, has been seen again on Jan 19 on the Itchen at Mansbridge south of the Itchen Valley Country Park) - it all goes to show how easily these distinctive ducks can escape attention, especially when it comes to breeding. I see from Brian's website that a pair were photographed in Stansted Forest last spring where they could easily have nested in the old boating lake area that is hidden from the public and has lots of cover among the reeds and willows that cover most of its surface as well as more substantial trees that could provide nest holes. The Aldsworth pond area and the stream which carries its overflow down towards Westbourne also provide much suitable cover with trees around it to provide suitable nest sites for these tree nesting ducks.

**Eider:** 50 were seen on Jan 15 in the Milford area (Christchurch Bay) where a similar number have been present since mid-November, sometimes coming into the shelter of the west Solent. Although up to 25 were in the east Solent towards the end of last year there have been no reports of them there this year and there have been only 2 in the Hayling Bay/Chichester Harbour area

**Smew:** No reports from the Blashford Lakes since Jan 7 and only one was at the Longham Lakes (Bournemouth) this week (Jan 21) where there was a pair on Jan 7. There were still five (including one male) at Dungeness on Jan 18

**Red Kite:** One was seen in the Stansted Forest area on Jan 21 by a car driver passing through

**Rough-legged Buzzard:** The bird in the Arundel area near Burpham was still present on Jan 19 and one was at Oare Marshes (north Kent) on Jan 21

**Red Grouse:** Three were seen on Dartmoor (their only foothold in southern England) on Jan 14

**Common Crane:** One seen flying over the Bovington area of Dorset on both Jan 20 and 21

**Avocet:** The Langstone Harbour winter flock numbered 34 in Broom Channel (west of Farlington Marshes) on Jan 17 - the peak count there this winter was 36 on Dec 24. In Devon the Exe estuary flock was more than 520 on Jan 14 (and the Devon Bird News blog at <http://devonbirdnews.blogspot.com/> has its current 'header' an impressive photo of this flock taking off and looking more like the result of a violent pillow fight rather than a flock of birds! Can you spot the single Godwit in the picture?)

**Knot:** On Jan 14 the WeBS count of these in the Pilsey area south of Thorney Island was an unsurprising 340 (the count there on 15 Jan 2011 was 4000) but a flock 150 on the mud off Nore Barn (only 4 km north of the Pilsey area up the Emsworth channel) was unprecedented. On Jan 20 a flock of 100 was on the Milton shore of Langstone Harbour.

**Little Stint:** One was still in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on Jan 16

**Purple Sandpiper:** 12 were seen at Southsea Castle on both Jan 9 and 18 with 9 there on Jan 19 when Christchurch Harbour had 26

**Ruff:** 8 were seen on Amberley Wld Brooks area south of Pulborough on Jan 16

**Black-tailed Godwit:** Last week I wrote that Brian Fellows and at least one other observer had taken more photos of these birds using their long bills as water pistols to squirt long streams of water during their feeding process and that this process was unknown to 'experts' who had no explanation for it. This week Brian

again took photos of birds at Nore Barn to the west of Emsworth exhibiting the same behaviour.

**Whimbrel:** It would seem that there are at least three of these wintering in Chichester Harbour - two were seen at Wickor Point on the west shore of Thorney Island during the Jan 14 WeBS count and one was in the Fishbourne Channel at the other end of Chichester Harbour on Jan 16

**Rare Gulls in Britain:** On Jan 21 RBA News published the following totals of reports they had received - it said .. "Rare and scarce gulls continue to dominate the headlines, with the **Ross's Gull** still present in County Down, **Bonaparte's Gulls** in both County Antrim and County Cork, **eight each of both Ring-billed and Caspian, 19 Kumlien's, 46 Glaucous and 302 Iceland Gulls** noted around Britain and Ireland today". Locally two of the Iceland Gulls are thought to be based in the Canber Docks area of Portsmouth

**Razorbill:** Six reported to be in the Chichester Harbour entrance on Jan 22

**Eagle Owl:** On Jan 14 one escaped from the Totnes Rare Breeds Farm in Devon and may now be spreading terror among pet owners fearing their cats will fall prey to it. This reminds me of a similar escape some years ago here in Hampshire when the police lured the owl back into captivity by offering one of their Alsatians as prospective prey to the hungry and vicious bird - later we learnt that this cunning plan had been hatched when the bird's owner said that, while in captivity, the owl had become good playmates with his own Alsatian and would probably come down to renew acquaintance with a similar dog.

**Shore Lark:** The bird which was first spotted around the Tern Island lagoon at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Jan 16 was still showing well there on Jan 22 - it seems the best chance of seeing it is by looking at the southern end of the island from the 'bus shelter'. This bird could have been there undetected for some time and I think it was found by birders in the area to see the Warblington Cattle Egret

**Swallow:** First report for the year is of one over the sewage works at Helston in Cornwall on Jan 19. Also from Cornwall comes a report of a **Buff-bellied Pipit** at Wadebridge on Jan 18. Another unexpected report for January is that one of the **Desert Wheatears** was still to be seen in Yorkshire on Jan 21

**Black Redstart:** The Peregrines have not yet returned to Chichester Cathedral to nest and in the meantime a smart male Black Redstart was seen there on Jan 19 by David Parker

**Blackbird:** Full song was heard in Wisborough Green near Pulborough on Jan 17 and here in Havant on Jan 18

**Chiffchaff:** A total of 15 were counted at Eastleigh sewage farm (on the west side of the River Itchen close to the big railway works) on Jan 14. Before the modernisation of the Budds Farm works here in Havant it was not unusual to hear reports of 20 or more there in the winter - the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report says that on 28 Dec 1995 there were at least 25 (and possibly as many as 50) wintering there, constituting a Hampshire record.

**Blackcap:** Last week a male was heard singing on a Ramsgate (Kent) allotment and this week another has been singing in Devon (this male had a female with him)

**Penduline Tit:** Two seen at a Somerset site on Jan 15

**Spanish Sparrow:** Still at Calshot on Jan 22

**Brambling:** A flock of 15 in the New Forest on Jan 17 this week made me check on other sightings in Hampshire this winter and I see this is the biggest flock other than an isolated report of 40 in the QE Park near Petersfield back on Nov 8 (a couple of days after a flock of 162 had been reported at Durlston so I assume the 40 were part of an influx that quickly dispersed away from the south of England)

**Greenfinch:** A reflection on the amount by which numbers of this species have been reduced by disease in recent years is that one did not get onto my yearlist until Jan 22

**Dark-eyed Junco:** Still at Hawkhill Inclosure (Beaulieu Heath area of the New Forest) on Jan 19

**Yellowhammer:** A flock of 30 on Gander Down (east of Winchester) is not as surprising as a sighting of one in Southsea Castle feeding with a **Rock Pipit** on Jan 22

## INSECTS

### Butterflies:

**Red Admiral:** Only one reported sighting this week - on Jan 15 at Battle near Hastings

### Moths:

#### Selected sightings this week:

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

The following were new for this year out of the species reported during the week:

**464 Diamond-back Moth *Plutella xylostella*** found at Thanet in Kent on Jan 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5084>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0464.php>

1025 Winter Shade *Tortricodes alternella* found at Folkestone in Kent on Jan 21 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6172>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1025.php>

1061 Lichen Button *Acleris literana* found at Folkestone in Kent on Jan 20 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=692>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1061.php>

1862 Double-striped Pug *Gymnoscelis rufifasciata* found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 17 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=123>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1862.php>

1984 Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* found in a building at Portland in Dorset on Jan 18 (I assume it was hibernating and not flying around though this is not stated) - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2198>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1984.php>

2237 Grey Shoulder-knot *Lithophane ornitopus* found by night at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 16 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5016>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2237.php>

2441 Silver Y *Autographa gamma* found at Preston in Dorset on Jan 18 (presumably one that has been here for some time and not a new migrant) - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1134>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2441.php>

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

Nothing to report this week

### **PLANTS**

Few reports from me this week as I have been confined to barracks clearing 40 years of rubbish from my loft in order to qualify for free loft and cavity wall insulation under the current government scheme

**Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*):** This is my guess at the id of garden escape plant found by Brian Fellows in Emsworth on Jan 20. Brian was deterred from using this id as his flower book said the plant was rare but I think that it is only rare as a native species that has persisted at the same site for many years without human assistance whereas the same species is commonly planted in gardens and can then escape. See Brian's photo at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-186-hellebore-dolphin-20.01.12.jpg>

**Red campion (*Silene dioica*):** A couple of flowering plants seen in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Jan 22

**Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*):** On Jan 16 Brian Fellows website carried news of flowers seen recently, though not by him and among them I was interested in the

find of a Hollyhock in the village of Compton (north of West Marden in the natural continuation of the Ems valley)

**Primrose:** What may well have been wild Primroses were seen flowering in Westbourne churchyard by the Havant Wildlife group on Jan 21

**Dark mullein (*Verbascum nigrum*):** A plant of this was a very surprising find in a council planted flowerbed near Southsea Common on Jan 19

## OTHER WILDLIFE

**Badger:** Here in the Havant area we were very much made aware of **Fox predation** of young birds in nests on the RSPB Langstone Harbour reserve islands last summer and defences against predators invading the nesting areas at Rye Harbour are currently being reinforced with electric fencing plus wire mesh fencing with its base extended along the ground to prevent a tunnelling predator from coming up into the reserve as soon as it has passed under the fenceline. More difficult to protect is the shoreline against seaborne attack (though similar fencing can be deployed above the high tide level where so doing does not deter the birds and an irregular marshy shoreline does not make it impractical) and the Rye Harbour warden has been made aware of the need to defend his seaboard this week by seeing photos of a Badger swimming out and around the end of their fenceline. For the video of the swimming Badger and a photo of their way of deterring tunnelling under the fenceline (not by burying the base of the fence but by extending it along the ground) see

<http://rxwildlife.org.uk/2012/01/18/swimming-badger/#more-15303>

**Weasel:** One sighting at Seasalter on the north Kent coast on Jan 17

**Hare:** Three seen running around Margate cemetery on Jan 14 - perhaps already feeling that March was here?

**Snails:** Graeme Lyons latest blog entry at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/> on Jan 21 shows that he has now turned his attention to snails to boost his 'all species' life list (currently he is on 3745). He lists eight species whose shells he found today, one of them being the **Plaited Door Snail (*Cochlodina laminata*)** which I have not come across so far and this has roused my own interest to get out looking for it (at 16mm long it should be possible to spot it from a reasonable distance) and

<http://www.molluscs.at/gastropoda/terrestrial/lausiliidae2.html> gives me a good idea of what to look for - although that article is written by a continental author the species can be found in England, usually in woodland and my own 'snail bible' (the Shire Natural History booklet on Land Snails of the British Isles by A A Wardhaugh) usefully lists confusion species in each of the species descriptions.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 9 - 15 (WEEK 2 OF 2012)

## BIRDS

**Divers:** The number of **Red-throated** heading south is not up to the peak of 2358 seen off Suffolk on Jan 2 but there were 643 to be seen off Cap Gris-Nez on Jan

8 and 365 off Dungeness on Jan 13 with 31 going west past Splash Point (west of Beachy Head) on Jan 7 and and 39 passing Selsey on Jan 8. Locally Sandy Point on Hayling had 6 on Jan 8. Sangatte (Calais) was the only site to exceed 10 **Black-throated** with 11 there on Jan 7 followed by 9 off Hersey on Jan 8. The one which has settled in the north of Southampton water was still to be seen off the Eling area on Jan 14. Peak count of 9 **Great Northern** was off Penzance in Cornwall on Jan 13 while two were off Pagham Harbour on Jan 7 and 10 and one was near Langstone Harbour entrance on at least Jan 8. A single **White-billed** off Shetland on Jan 10 was the first I have been aware of for the year

**Red-necked Grebe:** Eight reports this week including one off Sandy Point (Hayling) on Jan 8 when 2 (maybe 4) were off the French coast. One has been in the Studland/Weymouth area of Dorset and there is probably still one off the Exe estuary in Devon

**Slavonian Grebe:** A winter flock can often be seen off Pagham Harbour and 23 in the Selsey area on Jan 8 may have settled off Pagham. One remains inside Chichester Harbour off West Wittering and two were off Lymington on Jan 7 with three reported in Poole Harbour off Arne on Jan 13

**Black-necked Grebe:** 10 were in Portland Harbour on Jan 10 and 13 but there were no reports from Studland or Poole Harbour though the Falmouth flock in Carrick Roads near Feock was up to 50+. In Hampshire one was off Calshot on Jan 13

**Bittern:** Reported at seven sites this week including one at Titchfield Haven, two at the Blashford Lakes, one at Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough and a possible one on the Isle of Wight near Brading Marsh (low booming heard by Derek Hale on Jan 10)

**Cattle Egret:** The Warblington bird was definitely present in Jan 12 and I understand it was seen on Jan 14 though neither it nor any Little Egrets were to be seen when I was there around 2pm (maybe with the tide approaching high the Little Egrets had gone to roost at Langstone and the Cattle Egret had joined them?)

**Glossy Ibis:** Still present at Wadebridge in Cornwall on Jan 13 when two birds were in Devon at the Exe estuary and the southern tip of the county at Thurlestone. (RBA was still reporting a total of 13 in Britain on Jan 14)

**Spoonbill:** The 15 strong flock in Poole Harbour was still to be seen off Arne on Jan 13

**Brent Goose:** This week brings two signs that these geese are getting restless to be off. The first is that they are taking longer flights to inland feeding places - Brian Fellows found a flock of 600 on the open fields west of Southbourne village which he believes were commuting there and back from the Emsworth western shore (about 3 km each way - not very far in terms of the journey they are about to undertake and less than half the distance they have been known to travel while still with us when a big flock was found feeding in the Watergate Park fields (SU7811) north of Walderton in the Ems valley). The second and more obvious sign is that those birds which are untrammelled with young to shepherd back are already flying east - on Jan 14 Dungeness watched a total of 365 Brent flying east

in 14 flocks, a fortnight earlier than last year when the first such report from Dungeness was on Jan 29.

**Black Brant:** On Jan 12 one was in a big flock of Brent in fields between the Langstone Harbour shore and the Hayling Coastal path at its south end at West Town station

**Red-breasted Goose:** The Devon bird was still on the Exminster Marshes on Jan 13 but I will be keeping my eyes open for reports of it (and the Brent it is associating with) moving east. In Dec 2006 one was wintering in Poole Harbour and flew east to Lymington on Jan 26, then set off east again on Jan 31 when it was seen at Park Shore near the Beaulieu River mouth before appearing on south Hayling on Feb 17 and West Wittering on Feb 24 before disappearing after Feb 28. Perhaps the same bird spent the winter of 2007/8 in the Chichester Harbour area, being last seen at Black Point on Mar 6. In Oct 2008 it arrived back in the Lymington area where it stayed until 4 Feb 2009 before re-appearing in the West Wittering area on Feb 14 where its last sighting was on Mar 8. In the autumn of 2009 it was in Devon (Exeter area from Oct 28) and it seems to have stayed in Devon until Mar 4. The picture in autumn 2010 was at first confused by a bird of the same species (but subsequently seen to have a red ring on its leg to indicate captive breeding) appearing on Pilsey Island (Chichester Hbr) at the start of October before the 'genuine ' bird appeared at the Exe estuary on Oct 7 (more confusion was caused by another bird appearing at Rye Bay on Dec 26 with further sightings in the Warsash and Isle of Wight in early 2011 though there was a bird in Devon until Mar 4. Autumn 2011 saw one arrive with Brent at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 18 before moving to Devon on Nov 7 (though this was said to be a first winter bird) and it is this bird that is still on the Exminster Marshes.

**Mandarin Duck:** An anonymous report of a drake on the Emsworth Town Millpond on Jan 7 was not seen by Brian Fellows or anyone known to him but the sighting received some support from another one off report in a similar urban situation at Southampton Common on Jan 8

**Ferruginous Duck:** What seems to have been accepted as a genuine adult male that arrived at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Dec 30 was still there on Jan 12 but has not been reported since. Interestingly it was on Jan 12 that I had my first sight for the year of the '**Fudge Duck**' (**Pochard x Ferruginous hybrid**) for the year at the Budds Farm pools. The bird which I and one other birder who was equally unfamiliar with the niceties of Aythya hybrids saw was (we agreed) unlike a female Tufty, it was keeping company with a male Pochard (surprisingly it looked smaller than the Pochard when seen side by side though the way in which it 'rides high in the water' suggests that it is larger than a Pochard or Tufty when seen on its own), and it seemed to have a single feather tuft (maybe a single moulting feather?). It seemed to have worn plumage and showed no reddish ferruginous plumage but it did have the very large and prominent white undertail patch which picks it out.

**Ruddy Duck:** A BBC news item ( see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12603625> ) dated 1 Mar 2011 says that the government sponsored scheme to eradicate this species from the UK had by then killed 4,400 of the birds (which came to Britain from the USA in the 1940s) in response to a request from Spain to eliminate the birds before they interbred with the White-headed Ducks that are endemic to

Spain. An article in the Guardian dated 7 Feb 2010 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/feb/07/ruddy-duck-cull-waste-money>) takes the 'anti cull' side and says that the cull had by then cost British taxpayers £4.6 million (6,200 birds killed at £740 per bird). Another paper published in August 2010 ([http://www.unep-aewa.org/news/news\\_elements/2010/ruddy\\_duck\\_update\\_2010.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/news/news_elements/2010/ruddy_duck_update_2010.htm)) claims to represent DEFRA's official stance at that time and says that the original feral population of some 6,000 birds in Jan 2000 had been reduced to just 200. So far this year I have heard of two sightings of live birds (one in West and the other in East Sussex) but I suspect that many more are surviving as there is an unofficial agreement among birders not to report sightings in case they attract the government gunmen and in any case it must be virtually impossible to eliminate this or any other species of bird that is as wary and secretive in its breeding sites as this one. It will be interesting to see how the cost of the project is regarded in future government planning in view of British financial vicissitudes and the rapid decline of Spain in the political estimation of other European countries

**Water Rail:** Anna Allum, assistant warden at Pulborough Brooks, has recently provided a great attraction for visitors by regularly scattering meal worms on the grass in front of the main viewing window at the reserve visitor centre to attract a wintering **Water Rail** out of the nearby reeds and the Rail has now become semi-domesticated, spending much time in the open in full view of the window. By Jan 14 I was amused to see that Russ Tofts describes this bird's behaviour in the following words .. "Meanwhile the plastic, radio-controlled **Water Rail**(!) was driven around outside the big window at Pulborough" Another aspect of this species behaviour was seen by me when visiting a normally undisturbed section of the Langbrook stream at Langstone on Jan 12. Normally able to take advantage of its thin body to thread its way through reeds or other dense vegetation without giving away its presence by disturbing that vegetation, the bird needs to be familiar with its surroundings in order to achieve this trick. My sighting however was firstly of the bird flying downstream (perhaps disturbed by my sudden appearance and not knowing where to hide) and then crashing down into bankside vegetation and continuing to move about until it felt safe. My guess is that this bird was already on its spring passage and had only just arrived at this stream where it was trying to find food for the next part of its journey on which it would be setting out when darkness fell. Normally I expect to see these 'out of their element' passage birds at the end of March so if I am right this was another manifestation of the false spring weather.

**Common Crane:** Six sightings of wandering Cranes in southern England this week. On Jan 6 one flew west over Farlington Marshes and another was seen over Corfe Mullen in Dorset. On Jan 7 one was over Broadsands in the Torbay area of Devon and on Jan 8 one was over Penzance in Cornwall with another sighting there on Jan 9 followed by one over St Buryan (a few miles west of Penzance) on Jan 10

**Avocet:** 25 seen at Nutbourne Bay (east of Thorney Island) on Jan 12 and reports from Farlington Marshes of 28 on Jan 10 and 30 on Jan 14

**Knot:** Plenty still on mud to the west of Emsworth (90 on Jan 13) and in the Church Norton area of Pagham Harbour (200+ on Jan 7)

**Little Stint:** One remains in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour and can usually be seen when the tide is not too high where the Lavant River flows into the channel

**Long Billed Dowitcher:** Two of these seen to have settled in the Lodmoor area at Weymouth since Jan 2 and were there on Jan 12

**Black-tailed Godwit:** For some unknown reason the birds which have been numerous in the Nore Barn area west of Emsworth suddenly vanished between Jan 2 (94 present) and Jan 12 (100 present). This was probably a result of the changing tide times which prevent the birds feeding in the best places when they are covered by deep water (if alternative feeding grounds are available at those times the birds would be foolish not to move to the alternative sites). Another unknown aspect of their behaviour is something that Brian Fellows first noticed when looking at photos he had taken of some birds on 25 Oct 2011 which showed jets of water being shot out of the bills of the birds as if the bills were powerful water pistols. Since then he and at least one other Blackwit enthusiast have observed this behaviour on three other occasions including more photos taken by Brian on Nov 24 and Jan 14. Brian has referred these photos to wader experts but so far no one else seems to have observed the phenomenon or have a conclusive answer to why they do it - my simple minded view is that, having taken up water in securing their prey they want to get rid of the water before swallowing the prey and variations on this are that they only get rid if the water when it has an unusual taste (maybe pollution, maybe the unfamiliar taste of fresh water when the birds are accustomed to more saline water).

**Whimbrel:** Wintering Whimbrel are a regular occurrence in Chichester Harbour and elsewhere along the south coast and one site at which one has been reported seven times since the beginning of October is the old boating lake (just east of Northney Marina on Hayling) which was once part of the Northney holiday camp before that was abandoned and modern houses replaced a small part of its area. The boating lake was only separated from the sea by a narrow earth bank and this bank was long ago breached by the sea, making the pool an attractive sheltered area for duck and waders to feed and roost. On Jan 10 I went there in the hope of adding Whimbrel to my year list and immediately saw a single Whimbrel-like bird with a hooked (not gently curved) bill and a hint of a crown stripe but a close look suggested that the bird was too big, and the bill too long, to be a Whimbrel while I have since discovered that some Curlew do show a faint crown stripe. The clincher was the bird I was looking at had no eye stripes (supercilia) so, while this is no proof that a Whimbrel does not regularly appear there, I could not add this bird to my list as a Whimbrel

**Grey Phalarope:** Still being seen in late autumn passage (?). This week three reports come from the near continent and one was seen briefly at Splash Point near Beachy Head on Jan 12

**Pomarine Skua:** Contrary to my old belief that Pomarine were the least common of the Skuas in the English Channel they are currently much more frequently seen than Arctic or Great. Four reports this week include one of an adult with full spoons (twisted tail feathers) at Broadsands in Torbay, Devon, and a party of 8 birds off the Netherlands. In contrast there were just two reports of single **Arctic Skua** and four reports of **Great Skua** (though one sighting was of 23 birds off Cap Gris-Nez on Jan 7)

**Iceland Gull:** On Jan 8 RBA news told us that there were currently 187 Iceland Gulls in the UK and one of these has been roosting at night in the Camber Dock area of Old Portsmouth

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** February is usually the month with most reports of these elusive and rapidly vanishing birds as it is then that they are most likely to be detected by their calls but it is encouraging to see that birders are already starting to find them and this week you can have the second hand pleasure of seeing a pair of them in photographs taken in Clowes Wood south of Whitstable on the north Kent coast - see <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/Jan.2012.htm> In Sussex one was seen in Buchan Country Park near Crawley on Jan 8

**Wood Lark:** I used to believe that these birds all left their heathland breeding sites and headed to coastal places like plant nurseries for the winter but this week I see two reports of them singing at New Forest breeding sites where they have been singing

**Skylark:** The first report of Skylark song for the year comes from north Kent on Jan 11 though I am pretty sure they have been heard but not reported elsewhere

**Rock Pipit:** This week brings confirmation from both John Clark and Lee Evans that the majority of Rock Pipits seen in Hampshire during the winter are probably of the Scandinavian race which favours coastal saltings and shuns rocky coasts though it is difficult to confirm this until later in the spring when they acquire a pinkish tinge to their breasts. I wonder if the birds often seen (and I think breeding) in the Southsea castle area are the exceptions to this rule? Perhaps the 2010 Hampshire Bird Report, due to arrive in the post during the coming week, will give us more clues than the 2009 one does.

**Waxwing:** Last week Lee Evans told us that all those currently in Britain were to be found in Suffolk and this week the only additional information is that one has been seen in the Netherlands on Jan 13

**Mistle Thrush:** I have been lucky enough to hear this bird singing again (after hearing one from my garden last week) - this time the song was prolonged and was heard in the Stansted Groves

**Whitethroat:** A very vague report from Devon hints that one was wintering in a garden close to Plymouth over the Christmas period

**Blackcap:** A definite report of one singing in an allotment at Ramsgate in the Thanet area of Kent on Jan 11

**Goldcrest:** Song reported at Durlston on Jan 11

**Spanish Sparrow:** Since Jan 9 birders have been going to Calshot village on the south east fringe of the New Forest to see a Spanish Sparrow which has probably been living there quietly since last spring (certainly since early December) and may have 'fathered' several hybrid offspring. The facts about the bird remain vague but the villagers have been extremely welcoming to the birders, opening up the village hall for them, providing food and drink for them, and in many cases inviting them into their houses for better views of the bird. The birders for their part have been generally well behaved and have contributed to charity by putting money into collecting buckets for the Naomi House Childrens Hospice and for the BTO. For a BBC video of the bird, the twitchers and the local habitat go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-16515456>

**Chaffinch:** I usually hear these starting to sing in the last week of January but this year I heard one in Stansted Forest on Jan 11 and I see that one was heard at Durlston on Jan 13

**Siskin:** These have been less numerous than usual so far this winter but on Jan 12 David Parker saw some in the larches along the northern edge of Stansted Forest across the road from Forestside Church - at least one male Crossbill was with them

**Twite:** Another unusual report this week - two were seen in an Eastbourne town garden on Jan 8

**Dark-eyed Junco:** The bird at Hawkhill Inclosure (north side of Beaulieu Heath in the New Forest) was still there on Jan 14

**Lapland Bunting:** Relatively few seen so far this winter but a newly arrived flock of 20+ on The Lizard in Cornwall on Jan 10 may mark the start of more arrivals as the weather turns colder

## **INSECTS**

[\(Skip to Plants\)](#)

### **Dragonflies:**

None this week

### **Butterflies:**

**Red Admiral:** 17 reports this week, seemingly all of newly emerged individuals which are unlikely to breed successfully and so will reduce next summers numbers

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Lee Evans reports that several were seen in the New Forest when he was there on Jan 11 and two more were reported anonymously at Pagham Harbour on Jan 12. These reports reminded me that overwintering Tortoiseshells were once a common sight, often disturbed by humans from their garden sheds or from little used visitors bedrooms in their houses, until the arrival in this country of the parasitic fly *Sturmia bella* in the late 1990s - see

[http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/science\\_blog/090310.html](http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/science_blog/090310.html) This fly lays its eggs on nettle leaves where they are eaten by the Tortoiseshell caterpillars- the fly larvae develop inside the caterpillars and eat them from the inside. I am hoping that a few sightings of the butterflies overwintering may be a sign that a parasite:prey balance may now be achieved where by the fly has succeeded in killing do many Tortoiseshells that there are none left to take up the fly eggs, thus reducing the number of new flies and so reducing their ability to harm the butterflies. This cyclic balance between parasite and prey has long been established in the relation between the Holly Blue butterfly and the wasp called *Listrodromus nyctemerus*

- see <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/gallery/3513/parasitism.html> for 'The story of the Holly Blue'

**Camberwell Beauty:** On Jan 7 one of these was found in a Lee on Sea garden west of Gosport and the finder carefully moved it to his garden shed where he hopes it will hibernate in peace and emerge in the spring. That this can happen is proved by the fact that late immigrants arriving here in the autumn of 2006 are known to have hibernated successfully and emerged in 2007

**Peacock:** Just one sighting in the Worthing area on Jan 7

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths**

entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at [http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

Dummy entry

**461 Ypsolopha ustella** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 8 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5036>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0461.php>

**819 Scrobipalpa costella** found at Portland on Jan 8- see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2763>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0819.php>

**998 Light Brown Apple Moth Epiphyas postvittana** found at Plumber in Dorset on Jan 6- see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=4388>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/0998.php>

**1045 Rusty Birch Button Acleris notana** found at Tincleton in Dorset on Jan 6 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3452>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1045.php>

**1050 Elm Button Acleris kochiella** found at Folkestone on Jan 19 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2413>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1050.php>

**1395 Rusty Dot Pearl Udea ferrugalis** found at Portland (first immigrant of the year) on Jan 9 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=181>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1395.php>

**1497 Plume Moth Amblyptilia acanthadactyla** found at Portland on Jan 9 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6337>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1497.php>

**1498 Plume Moth Amblyptilia punctidactyla** found at Portland on Jan 9 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2677>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1498.php>

**1631 December Moth Poecilocampa populi** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 6 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1100>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1631.php>

**1760 Red-green Carpet Chloroclysta siterata** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 8 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=4948>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1760.php>

**1775 Mottled Grey Colostygia multistrigaria** found at Portland on Jan 9 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=6191>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1775.php>

**1917 Early Thorn *Selenia dentaria*** found at Portland on Jan 9 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3537>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1917.php>

**1926 Pale Brindled Beauty *Phigalia pilosaria*** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on

Jan 6 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5098>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1926.php>

**1932 Spring Usher *Agriopis leucophaearia*** found at Folkestone on Jan 10 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5099>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1932.php>

**1935 Mottled Umber *Erannis defoliaria*** found at Shaggs in Dorset on Jan 5 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=212>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1935.php>

**2119 Pearly Underwing *Peridroma saucia*** found at Chickerell in Dorset on Jan 8 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=791>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2119.php>

**2187 Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi*** found at Tincleton in Dorset on Jan 6 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3947>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2187.php>

**2190 Hebrew Character *Orthosia gothica*** found at Tincleton in Dorset on Jan 6 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2001>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2190.php>

**2256 The Satellite *Eupsilia transversa*** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 6 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1797>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2256.php>

**2258 The Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii*** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on Jan 2 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1105>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2258.php>

**2259 Dark Chestnut *Conistra ligula*** found at Chickerell in Dorset on Jan 6 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1112>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2259.php>

**2264 Yellow-line Quaker *Agrochola macilenta*** found at East Lulworth in Dorset on

Jan 7 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1106>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2264.php>

**2306 Angle Shades *Phlogophora meticulosa*** found at Punchknowle in Dorset on

Jan 7 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1731>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2306.php>

**2321 Dark Arches *Apamea monoglypha*** found at Broadway in Dorset on Jan 1 -

see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=52>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2321.php>

## Other Insects:

### Selected sightings this week:

**Yew Bud Gall Midge (*Taxomyia taxi*):** Not the insect but the galls which it creates as nurseries for its young - galls of the same name covered one Yew tree seen in Havant Thicket on Jan 8. See

<http://www.bugsandweeds.co.uk/galls%20p1.html#TaxoTaxi> for photos of the gall

## **PLANTS**

[\(Skip to Other Wildlife\)](#)

**Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*):** The tiny male flowers on the massive Redwood trees in the Stansted Groves were shedding masses of pollen when touched on Jan 11

**Field pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*):** A single new flowering plant was a surprise find in Havant's Juniper Square on Jan 12

**Great Herb Robert (*Geranium reuteri*):** This plant found in a Havant alley last November was still flowering on Jan 12 but we are no further with having it identified. It is thought to be *G. reuteri* but the English name given is my own invention!

**Small flowered cranesbill (*Geranium pusillum*):** Another unexpected find in Juniper Square on Jan 12

**Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*):** This Australian emblem tree was shedding its yellow flowers in Havant Park at the entrance to the underpass taking you under Park Road North on Jan 13

**Japanese Spindle (*Euonymus japonicus*):** The bright orange red seeds of this plant are now fully exposed on most bushes as the thin secondary 'wrapping' splits and falls away

**Hazel:** Ros Norton was the first to discover the small red female flowers during the Havant Wildlife Group outing to Fareham Creek area on Jan 14

**Silk Tassel Bush (*Garryia elliptica*):** The very long (up to 30 cm) silvery catkins can now be seen on this ornamental garden plant

**Common Alder:** Now starting to open its catkins

**Dogs Mercury:** I found the first single flowering plant of the year in Pook Lane on Jan 1 but by Jan 14 many plants could be seen there

**Hemlock Water Dropwater:** I came on the first flowering plant I have seen this year in the Langbrook stream on Jan 12 (the first of the season was flowering in the Hermitage stream on Dec 27)

**Lesser Periwinkle:** A pleasant surprise was to find one single flower among the 'million' plants covering the ground of Pitts Copse near the Stansted Groves on Jan 11. Subsequently I found many flowers on what seems to be a garden cultivar of the species in central Havant (from the junction of West Street and Park Road South walk north through the 'Boys Brigade Garden' and as soon as you have passed the solicitors office you will see the plants on your left before you reach the Carphone Warehouse shop).

**Grey Field Speedwell:** Another unexpected flower found on Jan 14 on the north side of the A259 Havant road coming west from Emsworth

**Field Woundwort:** One fresh plant with opening flower buds seen in a Warblington Farm field on Jan 14 (a less fresh plant of **Field Madder** in the same field also had some flowers)

**Green Alkanet:** Plants in Juniper Square which had no flowers and seemed to be dying back last week had new flowers on Jan 12

**Giant butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*):** Several plants already in flower on Jan 12 in the 'waste land' beside the Langbrook Stream immediately north of the now unused bridge connecting the old Langstone Dairy Farm to the South Moors

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

[\(Skip to Endweek\)](#)

**Fox:** As I was walking from Warblington Church to Nore Barn across the big field a sudden disturbance of the birds around the dung heap along the northern border of the field attracted my attention and gave me an amusing view of a very colourful and healthy looking Fox playing 'cat and mouse' with the birds. Both parties knew there was little chance of a kill being made though I am sure the Fox would have enjoyed catching a large and brightly coloured cock Pheasant which gracefully yielded its position as 'king of the castle' on the dungheap to the Fox which was last seen sitting on the highest point with the birds continuing to feed around the base of the heap (but keeping slightly more than one Fox leap from it. Another aspect of Fox life is that we are now well into January when they mate and announce the fact by loud midnight cries - so far I have not heard of these being heard.

**Weasel:** This is probably the best time of year for seeing these small, speedy hunters as the cold makes them more hungry and brings them out in daylight in an environment when there is minimum cover to conceal them. I had a typical view of one hunting in Havant Thicket on Jan 8 though all I saw was a distant streak of something crossing the brod track a long way ahead of me followed by a small dark 'something' bobbing its way through long grass beside the track before disappearing into the cover of bushes. A birder in the Whitstable area of north Kent was luckier - he had just got out of his car in the Wraik Hill carpark (somewhere around TR 097636 - perhaps where the OS map marks 'Elysian Fields'?) when he saw a Weasel making its usual mad dash around the open carpark and he was able to get a photo of it when it made one of its sudden stops - see the Jan 8 entry on <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Seasalter/Jan.2012.htm>

**Roe Deer:** Further evidence of their occasional visits to Brook Meadow at Emsworth was found on Jan 6 in the shape of a 'slot' (a Man Friday like single footprint) indicating that one had come through the arch allowing the Seagull Lane to Lumley Mill track to come south under the railway into the Brook Meadow area - perhaps we will soon have more positive indications of their presence if a buck decides to sharpen his antlers by 'thrashing' you trees in the reserve as they have done in the past.

**Mole:** Many fresh molehills can now be seen in many places where the Moles (made hungry both by cold weather and the need to feed up prior to breeding) have been able to widen old tunnels and create new ones after rain has softened the ground

**Water Vole:** These do not hibernate but do spend more time 'indoors' in winter months chewing on vegetation they stock up during occasional excursions into the outside world so it was not unusual for Brian Fellows to see one out in the River Ems at Brook Meadow on Jan 12 - nevertheless it was the first sighting to be reported there this year.

**Bank Vole:** I had an equally lucky chance sighting of one in Havant Thicket on Jan 8 - my only evidence for its identity was the rich brown tone of its fur (**Field Vole** is greyer)

**'Albino' Grey Squirrel:** To show that the Portsmouth area does not have a monopoly on 'white squirrels' one was reported in the Thanet area of Kent on Jan 10. While thinking about colour variation in Grey Squirrels I thought I would check I would check on the status of the long established Black Squirrel population in the St Albans area of East Anglia and I was interested to see that they are apparently thriving and spreading - see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11444893> for picture (ignore the picture of Bill Oddie!) and more detail. One thing I learnt from this is that there is also a thriving black population in the USA. As an aside I often see Black Rabbits among the wild population and I gather that they were actively introduced into medieval rabbit farms called Coneygarths (hence Coneygarth Point on the Warblington shore) to help catch poachers - presence of a black Rabbit in a peasant's possession was taken as proof that he had poached it). Another sideline on this was that the black rabbits were sometimes called 'Priest Rabbits' on account of the colour of their 'vestments'.

**Bats:** Another facet of our (to date) warm winter is that on the night of Jan 9 two unspecified bats spent some time hawking moths around a moth trap in Blean Woods near Canterbury

**Adder:** Another manifestation of the warm winter is that on both Jan 8 and 11 adders were seen out basking in sunshine at Durlston on the Dorset coast

**The 'Emsworth Tube Worm' (*Ficopomatus enigmaticus*):** Brian Fellows has interesting news and photos of these unusual inhabitants of the Slipper Mill Pond at Emsworth in his entry for Jan 12 at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> Although these creatures have been present in the pond for many years they are currently in the news as the coral like 'tubes' which are homes for the worms have encrusted the sluice gates, preventing them from closing properly and thus allowing the water to drain from the pond when the tide is out and the sluice gates should form a tight seal to retain the water. It is well worth reading a Defra paper on the subject of these worms at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1700> which tells me they were unknown in Britain until 1922 (when they spread north from the Mediterranean) but they then spread rapidly round our coasts with Emsworth being one of the 'hotspots' for them until the numbers there crashed in 1986 (something I was not previously aware of). It would seem they have now recovered from that crash and Brian saw at least 200 of their colonies scattered around the Mill Pond on Jan 12, while the evidence of the sluice gates shows that these colonies are spreading and in each place that they settle the colony is growing. The species flourishes where fresh and saline water mixes and among the factors contributing to their success are lack of competition (no similar species) and the ease with which the larvae are able to grow in the usually 'closed' pond (rather than in a river situation where they would be swept out to sea before they could settle and start building their own permanent home)

**Fungi:** Little to report this week but I see that Durlston has recorded '**Blistered Cup**' (*Peziza vesiculosa*) on wood chips and when I was on the 'Selangor path' forming the eastern border of Warblington Farm on Jan 14 I collected a specimen that I did not recognise and which I think (from a very faint pink spore print) is an *Entoloma* species (though these are not usually seen after autumn gives way to wi

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 9 - 15 (WEEK 2 OF 2012)

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### Sun 15 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

### Thu 12 Jan

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

#### Water Rail, Rock Pipit and Fudge Duck go on my Year List

A walk down the Langbrook Stream to Budds Farm and back gave me the above **three new bird species, bringing my yearlist to 72 species**, but also added **several new flowering plants including the cauliflower-like Giant Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*)** which still grows by the Langbrook Stream where it was planted by ecological consultants 'greening' the then new IBM site in the early 1980s in an area now 'out of sight and out of mind' just north of the bridge which once connected Langstone Dairy Farm to the South Moors where the farm cattle grazed.

Other new plants for the year list were **Common Alder, Green Alkanet, Field Pennycress, Small Flowered Cranesbill, Wavy Bittercress, Spear Thistle, Hemlock Water Dropwort and Pellitory of the Wall**. Another two new flowers for the year were seen in gardens and not counted as wild - one was **Nasturtium** and the other **cultivated Cowslip**.

Also seen at the outset of the walk and still bearing two flowers was the as yet undetermined '**Large Herb Robert**' (probably ***Geranium reuteri***) which I am not including in my database or year list until I know what to call it! A little further on, in Juniper Square, a bush of **Japanese Spindle had acquired a brighter red colour as its seeds have shed a second coat** (the first gave the seeds a dull whitish look, the second (almost translucent) allowed the final red colour to shine through dimly and now, after casting this, the seeds have a glowing red colour.

Returning to the bird interest I had turned off the streamside path to look for the **Giant Butterbur and maybe the female 'common' Butterbur plants** also planted there some 30 years ago when **a small brownish bird attracted my attention as it flew downstream**. I did not get a clear view of it in flight but guessed that it might be a **Water Rail** and so rushed to the stream bank to scan the area where I thought it had landed. I then saw it cross the stream and got several further glimpses to confirm its identity. Its behaviour was that of a bird blundering about in vegetation it was totally unfamiliar with (normally rails creep about their territory in a way that gives no clue to their presence until the call) and this made me think this bird must already be on its return migration which normally takes place at the end of March (another result of the spring like weather).

After emerging from the bramble and nettle patch my eye was caught by what looked like a piece of black plastic which seemed to be caught against the trunk of a Poplar tree some 40 feet up it - if it was a bird I thought it must be a **Black Woodpecker** to be able to cling to the trunk where it was apparently finding something to eat. What it was doing I really have no idea for it very soon clumsily descended to a branch on which it perched momentarily before jumping off and flying down into the stream showing me that it was a **Moorhen!**

Over at the Budds Farm Pools I found what I am almost certain was the '**Fudge Duck**' (the long established winter resident hybrid Ferruginous x Pochard). As it was today in the eastmost pool giving close views from the 'viewing bench' I could see it well (though not the bill nail as it was, as usual, sleeping with its bill tucked under its wing). The first thing that attracted me to it was the large bright white undertail patch, and a longer look showed that it was not at all like a female Tufted Duck but its plumage was in a worn state and not showing the ferruginous colour on its breast and flanks that I have seen in past springs and it also had what might have been a hint of a 'tuft' on its head but could have just been a single out of place feather. All the time I watched it it was keeping close company with a **male Pochard** and I was surprised that it seemed smaller than the Pochard (when seen alone it always seems to look larger than either a Tufty or a Pochard but this must be an illusion caused by its general shape and the way it seems to float higher in the water than either of the other two species. Just as I was leaving another birder came along with a scope and luckily he did not disagree with me that it did not look like a Tufty but he admitted he was not familiar with what to look for in confirming its identity!

By now the sun was setting but I was in time to get a good view of one **Rock Pipit** on the South Moors shore

**Wed 11 Jan**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **A glorious morning around the Stansted 'Groves'**

With only time for a short outing this morning but also in the hope of finding a **Treecreeper** (no luck there) I drove to the southern edge of the Stansted estate for a look round the Redwood Groves but before entering I went a short way along the track which eventually leads to the Racton Monument (my map calls this track Park Lane but others call it Monument Lane). A newly deepened ditch beside the lane has drained much of the water that I expected to flood the footway but also made it more difficult to cross into Pitts Copse south of the lane. I eventually succeeded in crossing and began to scan the million stems of Lesser Periwinkle plants that cover the woodland floor - eventually I found what I was looking for - a single brand new **Lesser Periwinkle flower!**

In the Groves I was not equally lucky in finding a **Wild Strawberry** flower among the many Strawberry leaves beside the footpath as soon as you enter but I was soon distracted from this search by the **glorious song of a Mistle Thrush** which continued for what seemed like five minutes. I never saw the bird but did add **Goldcrest** to my yearlist among a Tit flock and I also heard my **first Chaffinch attempting its song**. Reaching the first of the **Redwood trees** I saw many small male flowers at the tips of the branches - **gently tapping one released a great**

cloud of pollen. A little further on I watched **four Robins (seemingly two pairs) determining the boundaries of their respective territories** without fighting - much hopping around one or two bushes.

While among the trees I heard the calls of a nearby **Buzzard** and on emerging from them to take the path from the north end of the Groves across the grass fields back to Park Lane I watched at least **three Buzzards** enjoying the sunshine which was by now beginning to generate thermals for them to soar. My only other notes were of two fungi species found in Pitts Copse - on a tree stump I collected what turned out to be **Bonnet Mycena** with pinkish gills and a white spore print plus a very young **Common Inkcap** which surprised me by having (at that early stage) white gills.

**Tue 10 Jan**

**[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)**

### **Langstone Harbour now crowded with birds**

This morning I headed for the Hayling Oysterbeds to have a look at the birds brought there by the high tide. My route took me down Wade Lane past the pony field south of Wade Court where the flooded area was alive with **Teal now making their bell-like calls** as they sense the approaching spring.

The water's edge of the harbour off Langstone village had many **more Lapwing than usual (with a few Black-tailed Godwits)** and when I got to Langstone bridge and looked back to the saltings off Northney marina I was able to count some **80 Shelduck**. Another **small flock of Blackwits was present in Texaco Bay** and as I reached the old rail line I saw a birder looking intently inland making me wonder if he had spotted a **Little Owl** in the trees on the far side of the marshy field. When I reached him he said, without my mentioning the name, that he had been watching a **Little Owl**, not where I expected it but across the main road on the roof of the metal shed of the road trailer business and this immediately made me curious to know more so I set up my scope to discover that **the 'Little Owl' was one of those 'bird scarer' models of a pseudo Eagle Owl** (something I have never noticed there before).

Cycling on to the Oyster Bed pools which were by now nearly full I again used my scope to enjoy the thousands of waders on the bund walls and the many **Mergansers** on the harbour beyond (among them were a few **Goldeneye and Great Crested Grebes but no Black-necked Grebe** that I could see). Surprisingly both the **Mergansers and the many Ringed Plover** were new to my year list but they only brought the number of species on it up to 66. On the earth mound by the lagoon the large crop of **dead Teazels** had attracted a flock of around **50 Goldfinch** and in the gateway of the field north of the lagoon the **Sweet Violets** had started to flower.

Heading south down the Coastal Path I took the path by the Pill Box to reach Daw Lane (thus missing the shore copse in line with Daw Lane where **wild Primroses** could already be out) and then headed for Northney where I entered North Common to have a look at the old Holiday Camp boating lake in which a **wintering Whimbrel** has been reported seven times since the start of October. When I reached the useful bench which overlooks this flooded area I saw (in addition to

many Teal and roosting Redshank) a single Whimbrel-like bird standing motionless next to a single Egret. Sadly, when I got my scope on this bird (which had a hooked rather than curved bill and had a faint central crown stripe) I could see no hint of any eye stripes and both the size of the bird and the length of its bill were bigger than I would expect for a Whimbrel so I could not add the species to my year list but I did learn something from the Collins Bird Guide which is that **Curlew can sometimes show a faint crown stripe.**

While still on North Common I checked the northern fringe of the big bramble patch (considerably cut back over the past year) which is opposite the bund wall track leading north from the main path to the Marina entrance. Here, in the area previously hidden from sight by brambles, a **massive display of flowering Sweet Violets** can be seen, making up for the fact that growth of the brambles in other areas makes it almost impossible to get the south side of this patch where I have in the past enjoyed the sight and smell of the violets.

Nothing much more to add but after passing the still flowering **Japanese Honeysuckle** beside the Billy Trail I noticed **a good half-dozen new Lesser Celandines** flowering beside the trail, spread over a lengthy section.

**Mon 9 Jan**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Round Havant Thicket by Bike**

As cycling is permitted in the Staunton Country Park I thought this morning I would check out the practicality of getting round Havant Thicket on my bike from home and I found that (despite a very muddy section between the Staunton Arms roundabout area up to the Thicket carpark area requiring me to push the bike through mud and water for about 200 yards) it was an easy trip and I was home in less than two hours.

Although there were plenty of common birds including noisy **Nuthatches and a Great Spotted Woodpecker**, plus **Great, Blue and Coal Tit song** as well as the **Rooks and Gulls (Black-headed and Common)** on the Gipsies Plain, there was nothing unusual in the way of birds or plants. I only noted three items of interest - one was a brief glimpse of what was **probably a Bank Vole to judge by its reddish brown coat**, the second was **probably a Weasel** (a small dark object moving very fast across the track some way ahead of me and then moving through the trackside grass with a bobbing motion until it disappeared under bushes), and the third was a **Yew tree covered with what I thought were called Pineapple Galls** but I subsequently found that that name applies to a different gall mainly occurring on Spruce trees - the one I found can be seen at <http://www.bugsandweeds.co.uk/galls%20p1.html#TaxoTaxi> and is called the **Yew Bud Gall (Taxomyia taxi)** caused by the **Yew gall midge (also named Taxomyia taxi)** which flies in July. Also noticeable in the country park area were **many fresh Molehills** now that rain has made tunnelling easier for both the Moles and the worms they are after.

## BIRDS

**Divers:** On Dec 29 Dungeness recorded 115 **Red-throated** flying west followed by 130 on Dec 31 when Thorpeness in Suffolk reported 5669 of them - this site went on to report 1552 of them on Jan 1 and 2358 on Jan 2 and 1330 on Jan 3, then 1452 on Jan 6. By Jan 4 there were 40 off Hartland Point on the north coast of Devon showing that these birds are also coming south down the west coast. Best count in central southern England was 21 off Portland Bill on Jan 6. Jersey in the Channel Isles had the highest number of **Black-throated** (16) but Hampshire birders have been able to see one off Eling Great Marsh at the head of Southampton Water where it has been lurking since around Dec 20 up to Jan 6 at least, and one or more have been seen at Selsey Bill on Jan 1 and 6.

The highest count of **Great Northern** has been just 5 in Weymouth Bay on Dec 31 and there was one at Selsey on Jan 1 and maybe the same in Chichester Harbour off Ella Nore on Jan 6 while Langstone Harbour has had up to three in the Hayling Ferry area

**Great Crested Grebe:** The usual winter flocks in the Dungeness/Rye Bay area are now building up with counts from Dungeness of 1260 on Jan 1 and 1300+ on Jan 2

**Red-necked Grebe:** This week's reports are of four birds - one in the Torbay area of Devon, another off the Exe estuary, one in the Studland area of Dorset and one off the French coast near Calais at Le Clipon

**Slavonian Grebe:** On Jan 1 there were 4 in the Selsey area and one in the mouth of Southampton Water and on Jan 6 there was at least one in the Wittering area of Chichester Harbour

**Black-necked Grebe:** 8 were seen in the north of Langstone Harbour on Jan 1 and 6 were there on Jan 5 but the big numbers remain in the Studland area of Dorset (22+ on Jan 4 and 45 on Jan 3). An equally big flock remains at Falmouth with 43+ recorded in Carrick Roads on Jan 6 (when just one was in Hayling Bay)

**Shag:** Singles (probably from the Isle of Wight breeding population) are now to be seen off Southsea Castle and in the Langstone Harbour entrance while 4 were at Selsey on Jan 1

**Cattle Egret:** The bird which moved from Thorney Island to Warblington Farm on Dec 18 was still there on Jan 7 when it had moved east of the church and was seen from the new Cemetery extension

**Great White Egret:** The spread of these from the near continent into Britain seems to be gathering pace - on Dec 28 Lee Evans thought there was a total of 15 in this country but on Jan 2 he revised that number up to 21.

**Snow Goose:** There have been up to three 'white geese' with the **Canada** flock on Farlington Marshes earlier this winter but these birds have been similar in size to the **Canadas** and were almost certainly **leucistic Greylags**. I have not seen any mention of these since the beginning of December but on Jan 2 Colin Vanner took

a photo of a very different 'white' goose there - in his photo the bird appears to be only half the size of a **Canada** included in the picture and has black markings in its plumage. The size seems to fit **Snow Goose** and the black could be an aberration of the black primary feathers of a **Snow Goose** (though those are normally hidden until the bird spreads its wings). Whatever its origin this is almost certainly not a genuine wild **Snow Goose**!

**Red-breasted Goose:** The bird on Exminster Marshes was still there with Brent on Jan 2 and I will be interested to see if it moves east as the Brent start to leave.

**Shelduck:** The number on the Langstone to Emsworth shore doubled this week with more than 45 seen at the Langstone end on Jan 3 and at least 33 seen in the Emsworth area on Jan 5

**Pintail:** A count of more than 320 at Pulborough Brooks on Jan 2 must have been a great sight

**Blue-winged Teal:** The single bird at the Longham Lakes on the fringe of Bournemouth was still there this week but the **Green-winged Teal** that has been in the Kent Stour Valley may be on the move as one was seen at Sandwich Bay on Jan 4

**Eider:** We may soon be seeing more of these along the south coast of England after a flock of 1100 was reported at a Netherlands site on Jan 6

**Surf Scoter:** The bird at Dawlish Warren (mouth of Exe estuary) was still there on Jan 7 as was the **Bufflehead** at Helston in Cornwall. Another very long staying exotic bird, the **Hooded Merganser** which was found as a tame unringed and full winged youngster cowering in a storm drain at Weymouth on 5 June 2008 was still to be seen at Radipole on Jan 2 this year

**Smew:** The redhead at the Ringwood Blashford Lakes was seen on Jan 1 and is probably still there but the number at the Longham Lakes at Bournemouth increased to 2 on Jan 4 when a drake joined the redhead there. In addition to those in the Dungeness and Rye Harbour areas a redhead was seen in the Kent Stour valley on Jan 7

**Ruddy Duck:** Although the number in southern England has been greatly diminished by DEFRA's hit squads one bird was still to be seen in East Sussex on Jan 2 and another was in West Sussex on Jan 7. I suspect that quite a few other sightings have been suppressed in the interests of the safety of the birds and I doubt that the policy of eradicating the species will ever be fully successful

**Red Kite:** The annual HOS walk to view the winter roost at Ashley Warren in extreme north Hampshire (not far east of where the A34 leaves the county) saw 78 birds airborne around the roost on Jan 7 - the total using the roost could be well over 100. I wonder when our government will start paying gunmen to rid us of these pests?

**Rough Legged Buzzard:** The Arun valley bird in the Burpham area near Arundel was still to be seen on Jan 5 and another probably based on Sheppey was seen

from the Oare Marshes at Faversham on Jan 7 but the Folkestone bird has not been reported since Dec 23

**Grey Partridge:** I have long been aware that the majority of birds that are seen in the south of England have been raised in captivity and released, as I have thought up to now, with the altruistic intention of re-establishing a wild population but this week the Devon birding site introduced me to a new thought when a birder who was very surprised to come across a couple of birds in south Devon wondered if their presence was the result of a release by Falconers as potential prey for their birds.

**Reeve's Pheasant:** On Jan 1 Robin Attrill saw two males of this species near Shalfleet on the Isle of Wight but did not include them in his excellent NYD birdlist of 109 species

**Common Crane:** Just one report this week of a bird seen in flight over the Torbay area of south Devon on Jan 7

**Avocet:** The only precise counts from our local area this week are of 24 in Langstone Harbour (Broom Channel) on Jan 2 and 1 at Titchfield Haven that day. On Jan 1 I saw four birds at Nutbourne Bay but the rain meant that there may have been more there which escaped my notice while the only report from Pagham Harbour is from the Muppets birdrace team (Bernie Forbes and Owen Mitchell) who just ticked their presence on Jan 6 when another three were at Christchurch Harbour

**Golden Plover:** Among several reports this week is one of 400 birds at Maiden Castle in Dorset on Jan 2

**Knot:** A count on Jan 2 of 46 on the mud off Nore Barn at the west end of the Emsworth Shore was high for the location

**Little Stint:** One was still in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on Jan 5

**Purple Sandpiper:** There were 12 at Southsea Castle on Jan 2 and 20 in Christchurch Harbour on Jan 3

**Long Billed Dowitcher:** Two of these appeared at Lodmoor (Weymouth) on Jan 2 and were still there on Jan 4

**Black-tailed Godwit:** The number on the Emsworth shore which was up to 94 on Jan 2 plummeted to just 5 on Jan 5 while the count at Pulborough Brooks rose from 135 on Jan 2 to 250 on Jan 6. This does not mean that the Emsworth birds flew to Pulborough but it does indicate the rapidity with which this species responds to changes in their environment. The Emsworth birds may have left because they sensed they had nearly exhausted the food available to them in the mud at Emsworth and/or they were not enjoying the strong winds in the exposed harbour. Equally likely they were happy with the conditions in the harbour but sensed that heavy rain would have brought thousands of earthworms to the

surface of grassland in low-lying inland areas and that they would benefit from moving to places where there was more food more easily available and with less wind to contend with. Another reflection of the opportunism that is essential to the survival of bird species is that immediately the Blackwits left the Emsworth shore a large flock of Redshank moved in - their shorter bills mean that they do not contend for the same food items that the Blackwits are after but the absence of the Blackwits must make it easier for the Redshanks to feed without having to give way to the larger birds.

**Grey Phalarope:** At least three of these were still passing through the Netherlands and one was off the Yorkshire coast this week

**Pomarine Skua:** One was at Selsey on New Year's Day (hopefully spotted by one of the candidates for this year's Pom King award) but on Jan 5 one Netherlands site had 39 of them (and if there was no double counting between the 8 sites which reported them that day there were 78)

**Arctic Skua:** Only one report picked up by me this week, a single seen at Sangatte (Calais) on Jan 6

**Great Skua:** One at Selsey on Jan 1 and 45 at Sangatte on Jan 5 (potentially 172 at the 11 sites reporting the species)

**Little Gull:** Only one reported this week (at Weymouth) though recent counts from the French coast were of 240 on Dec 30 and 104 on Dec 31)

**Ring-billed Gull:** The Gosport bird was still to be seen on Jan 6 but it was just one of eight reported in the British Isles this week including another adult at Radipole (Weymouth)

**Caspian Gull:** One was still being seen at the Blashford Lakes on Jan 6 (9 reported in the British Isles by RBA) and another was at Dungeness.

**Iceland Gull:** Now plenty of these with RBA reporting 120 around the British Isles. One was in Portsmouth Harbour on Jan 2 and another at Shoreham on Jan 5

**Glaucous Gull:** 48 reported in the British Isles on Jan 6 but the only one in the south seems to be the one at Dungeness which has been there right through 2011

**Kittiwake:** 27 at Selsey on Jan 1 and at least one at Southsea Castle on Jan 2 but if you want to see one take the ferry from Dover to Calais - the count at Sangatte on Jan 6 was 12135 (maybe 27746 if you took in three other sites that day)

**Sandwich Tern:** On Jan 1 there were 6 in Langstone Harbour (Milton shore) plus 3 in Poole Harbour and Jan 2 saw two near Black Point in Chichester Harbour,

two more in the Hill Head area west of Gosport and one at Pett in Rye Bay. More unexpectedly there was a single **Common Tern** at a Netherlands site on Jan 4

**Guillemot:** Jan 1 saw more than 1000 at Dungeness with at least one at Selsey and on Jan 2 one was in the mouth of Chichester Harbour with one in Langstone Harbour entrance on Jan 4

**Razorbill:** 3 were at Selsey on Jan 1 and 3 at Black Point in Chichester Harbour on Jan 2 while on Jan 4 there were just over 500 across the Channel at Sangatte

**Black Guillemot:** The single Tystie remained off Portland this week

**Little Auk:** At least 2 were off the Netherlands on Jan 6

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** The colony in the Thanet area of Kent had at least 600 birds seen at a Ramsgate roost site on Jan 5 - no news of the Swanage colony this year but the only report last year was of 2 birds there on Jan 24 - maybe they moved east as 2 were seen in Lymington on Feb 3 with another seen there on Dec 30

**Barn Owl:** Although these are thought to have had a good season in 2011 I can only find two sightings of them this week - one in the Kent Stour valley and the other at Rye Harbour (**Tawny and Little Owls** appeared in several reports)

**Kingfisher:** I get the impression that there are fewer wintering birds in our area this winter and the only two reports of them I have seen this week have been of two birds at Gosport Anglesey Lake and one by the Hamble at the Bunny Meadows (Warsash)

**Woodlark:** One was singing at Iping Common near Midhurst on Jan 2

**Waxwing:** Lee Evans suggests that there are only around 100 birds currently in Britain and that they are all in Suffolk

**Robin:** Brian Fellows has two birds in his Emsworth garden which by Jan 6 were coming to food without showing aggression to each other and this is almost certain proof that they are already paired and may already be nesting

**Desert Wheatear:** These birds are normally found in semi-desert habitat in Africa, Arabia and parts of India throughout the year so it is not clear why two them seem to have settled in to Northumberland and Yorkshire but they were still there on Jan 2 (I think that at least one of them has been in the country since early November)

**Blackbird:** The mild weather caused at least two birds to give full song this week - one was heard in Chichester in (I think) daytime while one which I heard in Havant was singing just after sunset (the time of day when I have normally heard the first song of the year in February)

**Redwing:** On Dec 24 Brian Fellows website mentioned that the current BTO News had told him that there are **two subspecies of Redwing** - those that we normally see in winter in England are **Turdus iliacus iliacus** which breed in Eurasia while the other subspecies is **T. i. coburni** that breeds in Iceland and the Faroe Islands and which moves south down our west coasts in winter, being seen in Scotland, Wales and Ireland and going as far as northern Spain. The coburni birds are marginally larger and noticeably darker in their plumage and these were almost certainly the birds seen on the Exminster marshes in Devon on Jan 2 where four birds seen feeding on the ground were at first taken to be all Fieldfares until a closer view showed that two of them were Redwing looking as large as Fieldfares and having a dark plumage similar to the Fieldfares

**Mistle Thrush:** Not many years ago I would regularly hear **Mistle Thrush song** from my garden through each winter and spring as my garden was on the boundary of two territories - one to the north centred on the the Eastern Road Cemetery and the other to the south near the Havant old Town Hall. In 2002 I heard the song almost every other day from mid January to mid March and I heard it less often in each year to 2008 but I have not heard it here at all in 2009, 10 and 11 so I was very pleased to hear one on Jan 7 this year (I fear it came from a bird just passing through and trying to summon a mate where none was to be found)

**Siberian Chiffchaff:** On Dec 31 one was identified by its calls to be at Newlands Farm between Fareham and Stubbington and this caused me to check on the criteria for separating Siberian (*tristis*) birds from both Scandinavian (*abietinus*) and regular Chiffchaffs (*collybita*) - if you feel the urge to do this have a look at <http://www.ntbc.org.uk/siberian%20chiffchaffs.html>

**Goldcrest:** I still do not have this species on my year list but I see that two were seen in the Nore Barn woodland at Emsworth on Jan 6 though I will probably come across one in the trees lining the Billy Trail in Havant before too long

**Bearded Tit:** Another bird still not on my personal yearlist but they are still present in the Thorney Little Deeps and the Farlington Marshes reeds and should reveal themselves in the near future if high pressure brings one or two of those still, sunny days. Some were seen at the Little Deeps on Jan 6

**Marsh Tit:** I was very pleased to hear their calls and see at least three birds among a tit flock in Stansted Forest just east of Forestside church on Jan 2

**Willow Tit:** I am very unlikely to come across this species in south east Hampshire nowadays but I am pleased to see two reports of them in south Devon this week

**Brambling:** No big flocks yet but on Jan 4 there were at least 10 at Barrow Moor in the Rhinefield Arboretum area of the New Forest seen by birders after the Hawfinches coming in to roost and 2 were seen in the West Dean Woods north of Chichester on Jan 6

**Twite:** Two were reported to have been seen in the Rye Harbour area on Jan 2 (the first I have heard of in southern England since a report of 5 at the Oare Marshes in north Kent on Dec 10)

**Hawfinch:** While at the New Forest Hawfinch roost at the end of his Jan 5 tour of Hampshire birds Lee Evans learnt that a peak count of **44 Hawfinch** had been recorded there last month (Dec 2011) with up to 28 noted already this month

**Dark-eyed Junco:** The bird in the Hawkhill Inclosure area of the New Forest (about 3 km west of Beaulieu village on the north side of the road heading to Brockenhurst) has provided the biggest pull for twitchers in the last couple of weeks. It was first seen on Dec 24 and has been provided with an ample supply of seed since then. To get an impression of the bird and its location go to <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo/> and scroll down through the entry about the Siberian Chiffchaff at Stubbington to that about the Junco seen on Jan 6

**Snow Bunting:** The birds at East Head in Chichester Harbour were still there on Jan 6 the Worthing Widewater birds were present on Jan 7. I have also seen reports of singles at Portland on Jan 2 and Christchurch Harbour on Jan 6

### **New Year Birdrace results**

Most birders have a competitive spirit and want to get their 'year lists' off to a good start as soon as possible in the year even if the competition is not against other birders but just against their own inertia (who wants to get up earlier than usual and carry on searching for more birds in the wind and rain we had on this New Year's Day). A secondary reason for getting a good list is that it can be used to raise money for good causes through sponsorship on the basis of so many pence for every species seen. In recent years an informal set of rules has evolved to govern the 'sport' and one of these rules is that the race need not be run on Jan 1 but on the day within the first week of the year that is likely to give the best results so it is necessary to wait for the end of the week before all the results are in but I think I now have the counts achieved by most of those willing to publish them and the numbers I have seen are ...

Score / Day / County / Team Name / Comments

**121** / Jan 1 / Hants / Ornitholidays (Nigel & Phil Jones) / Beat the existing county NYD record of 120 set in 2009

116 / Jan 1 / Hants / Nicorettes

116 / Jan 1 / Hants / Chavsisters

109 / Jan 1 / IoW / Robin Attrill

106 / Jan 1 / Hants / Ovenreadies

103 / Jan 5 / Sussex / Bald Eagles (Richard Ives )

97 / Jan 7 / Sussex / 'First Winters'

96 / Jan 6 / Sussex / Muppets (Bernie Forbes & Owen Mitchell)

90 / Jan 1 / Sussex / Russ Tofts

84 / Jan 2 / East Sussex / Ashdown Men

81 / Jan 1 / IoW / Derek Hale

72 / Jan 1 / East Hants / John Norton & Peter Raby

69 / Jan 2 / Sussex / TQ01ers / team of 7

67 / Jan 2 / Sussex / Cuckfield Cuckoos / The Crabtree family including Eleanor aged 13 and a half  
59 / Jan 2 / Sussex / Henfield Fab Four  
54 / Jan 1 / East Hants / Steve Mansfield / by cycle around Alton  
52 / Jan 1 / Langstone area / Havant Wildlife Group / 15 people on foot  
49 / Jan 1 / Sussex / L & F Dray  
48 / Jan 1 / Hants & Sussex / Ralph Hollins / by cycle from Broadmarsh to Nutbourne Bay

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

No reports

### **Butterflies:**

**Brimstone:** One seen near Andover on Jan 2 - earliest ever spring emergence?

**Red Admiral:** Eight reports with sightings in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire (including one in Havant Garden Centre). Also seen on Dec 29 were many active caterpillars feeding on nettles beside the Sussex Ouse

**Small Tortoiseshell:** Another 'first of year' from Pulborough on Jan 6

**Peacock:** Another 'first of year' seen near South Chailey in Sussex on Jan 2

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

**1053 Acleris hastiana** found at Portland on Jan 1 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5580>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1053.php>

**1799 Winter Moth Operophtera brumata** found at Portland on Jan 1 - see

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1813>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1799.php>

**1640 The Drinker Euthrix potatoria** caterpillar found hibernating on a Blackthorn twig (with no shelter from the elements) at Harting Down near Peterfield on Jan 4 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2149> and also see photo in the entry for Jan 4 at <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings.html>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1640.php>

### **Other Insects:**

### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*):** A queen was seen gathering nectar at Clanfield (north of Waterlooville) on Dec 24 - not unusual as Queens semi-hibernate through the winter - but more unusual was the sight of a worker also gathering pollen at Northiam in the Rother Valley area north of Hastings on Jan 4 (implying that there was still an active nest with grubs to be fed at this time of year)

### **PLANTS**

My personal New Year list of flowering plant species is now up to 70, not all of them listed here!

**Marsh Marigold:** At least one flower seen on the Langstone South Moors on Jan 3

**Common Whitlowgrass:** Flower buds starting to open in Waterloo Road, Havant on Jan 5 - see my Diary page for photo

**Herb Robert:** The normal plant was seen in flower in Havant on Jan 5 when I also took more photos of the as yet **unidentified Geranium species** also growing in Havant - see my Diary pages for more detail and photos but the suggestion from Martin Rand (south Hants plant recorder) is that I have found a specimen of **Geranium reuteri** which has only started to appear in Britain in the past few years and consequently is not listed in my 1997 edition of Stace's British Flora.

**Spotted Medick:** First flowers seen in Havant on Jan 7

**Cherry Laurel:** One white 'candle' with open flowers seen on Jan 4

**Thyme-leaved Speedwell:** Just one tiny flowering plant spotted in my garden lawn on Jan 6

**Field Madder:** Flowering in roadside grass in Havant on Jan 7

**Grape Hyacinth:** One plant with opening flowers seen under a roadside hedge in Havant on Jan 7

### **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Bats:** These do occasionally emerge from hibernation on warm days during the winter for a brief fly around, enabling them to defecate and prevent a dangerous build up of waste products in their bodies but a birder's report from the Clennon Valley at Torquay in Devon seems to suggest there have been more regular sightings there of what are thought to be **Daubenton's bats** as if they have not yet settled into full hibernation

**Fungi:** Little to report this week but I have noted three observations. On Jan 1 the Havant Wildlife Group found **Jelly Ear (aka Jew's Ear)** in Pook Lane at Warblington. On Jan 3 I was at the footbridge over the Langbrook stream at the west end of Mill Lane in Langstone where several clusters of fungi have been visible for some time on a branch of an Elm tree overhanging the water and submerged under the highest tides. On that day the tide was out, enabling me to get into the (very muddy) stream bed and collect a sample which immediately

showed me the distinctive black velvet stems under the egg-yolk yellow caps telling me these were **Velvet Shank, not Brick Caps** which I had previously suggested in the absence of a sight of the stems. Finally, walking round the Havant Eastern Road cemetery on Jan 7, I found a cluster of **Wood Blewitts** which have come up in the past week, easily differentiated from **Field Blewitts (also called Blue Legs)** by the fact that the bright lilac blue colour was in the gills, not the stems or caps.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 2 - 8 (WEEK 1 OF 2012)**

**Thu 5 Jan**

### **64 birds and 64 flowers currently on my New Year lists**

So far I have seen the results of 15 NYD bird lists, 12 of them achieved on Jan 1 in atrocious weather, so it is amazing to see that **Team Ornitholidays (Nigel and Phil Jones from the Romsey area)** actually broke the previous record of 120 (set in 2009) with a score of 121. Two more Hants teams each achieved 116 while fourth place on the honours board went to Robin Attrill on the Isle of Wight with 109. Fifth highest score was achieved by the last of the four Hants teams to take the challenge seriously - they scored 106. The highest score in Sussex was 90 achieved by Russ Tofts and next came Derek Hale on the Isle of Wight with 81. South East Hants was represented by John Norton and Peter Raby who managed to clock up 72 while **Steve Mansfield scored 72 on his bike in the Alton area and the Havant Wildlife Group managed a very respectable 52 on foot in the Langstone area**. My own cross-border score cycling from Langstone to Nutbourne was 48, just one less than the Sussex team of L & F Dray. Three more Sussex teams achieved 84, 67 and 59 respectively but are disqualified as they did their counts in the much better weather on Jan 2.

By today (Jan 5) my own bird year list has risen to 64, exactly the same number as that of flowering plant species I have seen this week but my plant list has the unique cachet of (probably) including a species that was not known in the British Isles when my edition of Stace's Flora of the British Isles was printed in 1997 and which, by 2010, had only been found here at three sites, two in the Scillies and one in Cornwall.

Since my previous entry on Jan 3 when I thought I had found an uncommon plant called **Geranium rubescens** I have had a reply from Martin Rand (south Hants plant recorder) suggesting that my plant might be an even rarer species - **Geranium reuteri** - which has just started to invade this country from the Canaries. Until the plant has been examined by an authority on alien plants (most likely Eric Clement from Gosport) I cannot claim the honour of finding a genuine rarity but the possibility certainly boosts my excitement in the chase for species old and new which has already brought my list of flowering wild plants for 2012 to 64. To supplement the evidence for the plant being **G. reuteri** I revisited the site today and took a couple more photos showing the site and collecting more specimens of the leaves and flowers (still leaving a healthy plant with at least two buds coming into flower).

View of the wall top site of the potential *Geranium reuteri* plant

After this visit I went on to Waterloo Road and took a photo of the **Whitlowgrass on which the flowers are just starting to open**. This photo shows two well developed plants one of which has flower buds on a short stem, the other has flowers showing their white petals but difficult to see (follow the flower stem up and you should find them!). These two plants are surrounded by just a few of the hundreds of tiny developing plants that cover the ground at the foot of the fence line along the north side of Waterloo Road.

First flowers appearing on Whitlowgrass in Waterloo Road near Havant rail station

**Tue 3 Jan**

[\(Link to previous day's entry\)](#)

### **Through mud and water to Madeira on a brick wall**

I had not expected get out at all today but after gale force winds and torrential rain in the morning I was tempted out to add to my growing year list - both **Marsh Marigold** and **Snipe** should be available on the South Moors.

To avoid the mud of the Langbrook Stream path, and to have another look for **Mistle Thrush** in the Wade Court south field, I went via Wade Lane and while I **did not see the Mistle Thrush** I did add **Pheasant** to my list and noticed that **four more Egrets** had joined the singleton that I regularly see in the Wade Court north fields. I also found many **Lords and Ladies (Arum lily) leaves** were pushing up.

At the shore I turned east to look for the **Blackthorn flowers** which the Havant Wildlife Group had recorded on Sunday and found a substantial spray of flowers on a tree about two thirds of the way from Wade Lane to Pook Lane. On the shoreline here there had been a significant increase in **Shelduck** with more than 45 to be seen along with a big roost of **Lapwing** but sadly **no Golden Plover**.

In a Langstone village garden I noted my first **flowering Snowdrops** (but did not list them as wild flowers!) and after crossing the main road I noticed that the strong winds had blown the fallen leaves off the previously hidden **Bee Orchid leaves** by the footpath connecting the main road to Mill Lane where **Sweet Violet flowers** had also been revealed.

At the west end of Mill Lane with the tide low I decided to risk my life by getting into the muddy channel of the Langbrook Stream immediately below the footbridge in order to resolve the identity of the fungi which I have been calling **Brick Caps** as I had not been able (from the footpath) to see the stems of the fungi. From the stream bed I was able to collect a sample of the fungi and see that they did have the distinctive 'black velvet' stems of **Velvet Shank** (photos below)

Caps of Velvet Shank fungi found on trunk of English Elm overhanging, and occasionally submerged by, the water of the Langbrook stream adjacent to the footbridge at the west end of Mill Lane at Langstone

The underside of these fungi showing the distinctive black velvet stems

On the open South Moor the wind was still difficult to walk against and the ground water level was high enough to force me to use the old footpath 'bridge' which was in regular winter use in the last century! I just managed to cross the 'stream' in the orchid field without getting my feet wet and so was able to add the **Marsh Marigold flower and five Snipe** to my lists before making a quick visit to Budds Farm Pools (nothing new there) and heading home up Southmoor Lane thinking that there would be no more to go on my notepad.

Before I had reached the Harts Farm Way roundabout I had the notepad out again to record **a Blackbird in full but brief song** (my first Blackbird song of each year is usually recorded in the gloaming after sunset but usually in February, not early January).

Back in Havant the best was yet to come as I remembered a plant which I had seen on Nov 30 growing on top of a brick wall forming one side of a narrow alley running south from East Street just west of Town Hall Road. On a whim I decided to see if it was still flowering, which it was. As I had not identified it after the last sighting I collected a sample and brought it home where a close look and a check with Stace strongly suggested this was a species called **Greater Herb Robert (*Geranium rubescens*)** which is native to Madeira but has started to appear in Britain (not sure if it has been found in Hants). Below are photos which I will be sending to Martin Rand (BSBI recorder for South Hants) for his opinion.

General view of a single branch of what I think to be Greater Herb Robert with samples of its various parts in the foreground

The underside of a flower showing the hairs on the calyx and flowerstem (where they seem to form a single line down the stem)

### Mon 2 Jan

(For previous entries see diary for December 2011)

### Sun after rain

Only a brief outing today to the Forestside church area but under a bright sun shining from a cloudless sky in complete contrast to the low cloud and almost continuous rain of yesterday when I struggled along the coast from Broadmarsh to Nutbourne Bay in search of birds with which to start my new Year List.

When I set out at sunrise yesterday morning the drizzle was intermittent and there was some hope that the sun would break through but in fact heavy rain set in around midday and by the time I got to Nutbourne bay my binoculars were effectively useless, nevertheless they did show me enough to convince me that there were at least **four Avocets** present while **Greenshank and Turnstone** both identified themselves by call.

During the five hours that I was out I listed 48 species of bird and 50 of wild plants in flower (you can see the species names at the foot of my weekly summary for Week 52 of 2011) and here I will just pick out what I considered to be the highlights. Top of my list was the very first sight of a new **Dog's Mercury** plant with its male flowers found in Pook Lane at Warblington and not far away in the road verge of Church Lane was another first flower of **Red Hot Poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*)** - hardly a native wild flower but growing ( as they do on the track passing

the Little and Great Deeps on Thorney Island ) in a place with no garden in sight and surviving there for years. Right at the start of my outing I noticed that the **Hazel catkins** on trees by the Billy Trail just south of the East St carpark had fully opened and when at Budds Farm pools I checked out the **Goat Willow tree** on which the 'Pussy Paw' catkins are in flower and while at Nutbourne I went a little out of my way to visit the **Strawberry Tree** at the west end of Farm Lane which had a good show of its white, bell shaped flowers. The western carpark at Broadmarsh had several flowers that I would not expect in January - **White Melilot, Black Medick, Storksbill and Bur Chervil**. Back in Havant at the end of my trip I made a short circuit to tick the new flowers on the **Whitlow Grass** in Waterloo Road, the **Grey Alder** catkins at the entrance to the Prince George Street car park and the **American Willowherb** by the East Street carpark on the Billy Line. One very early flower which I did not see on this trip (but had seen flowering, along with **Marsh Marigold**, at the South Moors on Dec 26) was **Blackthorn** which the Havant Wildlife Group spotted by the shore east of Langstone Pond between Wade and Pook Lanes - I hope the group also noticed the **Cow Parsley** flowering under the Warblington Farm barn at its corner where Church Lane turns into the carpark area.

Among the bird interest was a widespread '**dawn chorus**' of **Song Thrushes** and at the Budds Farm pools the mild air had encouraged **a pair of Gadwall to mate**. At the mouth of the Langbrook stream I had to thank other birders already there for pointing me to a pair of **Goldeneye** in flight and while there my own ears led my eyes to a **Green Sandpiper** in flight high over the South Moors. At Warblington I could not see the **Cattle Egret** among the cattle but I soon found it with three **Little Egrets** in the next field (I needed my scope to pick it out by getting a glimpse of its bill which was hidden in its feathers most of the time as it worked on its morning toilet). After adding **Black-tailed Godwit** to my list at Nore Barn things went quiet until Nutbourne where **Greenshank, Turnstone and Avocet** ended my list.

Today, after dealing with three days washing up, I got the car out and drove to the north of Stansted Forest opposite Forestside church for a short walk in the Forest. Getting out of the car I found a mass of **Rooks** back at their nests in the church yard and heard **Jackdaws** among them - both were additions to yesterday's list as was the **Nuthatch** heard as soon as I entered the woodland. The large block of larch trees was devoid of birds but the mix of older trees beyond them came up trumps with a large tit flock which added both **Long-tailed and Marsh Tit** to my list (I thought I saw both Tree Creeper and a Gold or Firecrest in flight but never re-found them - this area holds memories for me of a Firecrest seen many winters back).

Walking back to the car I heard **Coal Tit song** and had a bonus sighting of **a TV Star as seen on Countryfile** - this was a **Gloucester Bull** surrounded by his cows and calves. A notice on the entrance to the field told me he is one of only 30 Bulls left to procreate his endangered species. **For more about the species** go to <http://www.gloucestercattle.org.uk/> which tells me that the breed is the source of Gloucester Cheese - it also lists many more than 30 'males' currently alive though a fair number of them were born in 2011 and so perhaps do not yet qualify as 'Bulls'. Intrigued by the mention of the cheese I checked out [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooper's\\_Hill\\_Cheese-Rolling\\_and\\_Wake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooper's_Hill_Cheese-Rolling_and_Wake) which

describes the **annual downhill race by people wanting to win the complete Double Gloucester cheese that is rolled down Cooper's Hill at speeds of up to 70 mph** - all available local ambulances are busy on the day of the race which is never complete without many sprains and broken bones.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 26 - 31 (WEEK 52 OF 2011)**

### **BIRDS**

**Red-throated Diver:** A lot were moving west along the English south coast this week with a peak count of around 103 in the Rye Bay area on Dec 27. On that day other sightings included 40 passing Worthing and 17 at Selsey Bill

**Black-throated Diver:** One seems to have been in the north of Southampton Water all week while on Dec 27 singles were seen in both Pagham and Christchurch Harbours. The only flock (10 birds) was off the Cornish coast at Gorran Haven near Mevagissey, just west of St Austell Bay

**Great Northern Diver:** On Christmas Eve there were three in the south of Langstone Harbour and four in Southampton Water with another four in Dorset at Studland Bay

**Pacific Diver:** A bird of this species was off Penzance in Cornwall from Jan 8 to Mar 14 and it may have returned - there was a 'possible' sighting off St Austell on Dec 26. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific\\_Loon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Loon) for more about the species which is rare in Britain

**Red-necked Grebe:** Singles seem to be resident both in Chichester Harbour and Studland Bay and both birds were reported on Dec 24

**Black-necked Grebe:** No reports from Langstone Harbour this week and the number seen at Studland Bay was down to six but a small flock of ten was new in Portland Harbour and Torbay in Devon still had at least four

**Cattle Egret:** The Warblington bird was still there on Dec 30

**Great White Egret:** According to Lee Evans on Dec 28 there are now 15 of these in this country (and have been since Nov 30)

**Glossy Ibis:** Also in Lee Evans latest summary he tells us he is only aware of five currently in the UK, two of them being in the Kent Stour Valley

**Spoonbill:** The Poole Harbour flock of 15 birds was seen again at Brownsea Island on Dec 29 one day after Lee Evans had reported that the largest flock in Britain was the 9 birds at Isley Marsh in north Devon (showing that he is not 'all knowing')

**Bewick's Swan:** Last week I reported a total of 178 at Slimbridge as a result of their method of listing the birds seen at the several different lakes at the site - they gave 140 on one and 38 on another but I think the 38 were actually part of

the 140 which had moved between the lakes as the report for Dec 27 just lists 140+ on 'the Rushy' (but I may be wrong as their method of reporting does not give consolidated totals for the site and seems to be a list of 'off the cuff' counts to attract visitors to come and see for themselves)

**Black Brant:** On Dec 24 one was on Hayling Island at Tournurbury Marsh

**Egyptian Goose:** 67 were at Eversley on the Hants/Berks border on Dec 28 (there were 174 there on Oct 5)

**Blue-winged Teal:** The female/immature bird which has been on the Longham Lakes (northern fringe of Bournemouth) since Dec 3 was still there on Dec 29

**Ring-necked Duck:** A male was found in the Chard Junction/Forde Abbey area of west Dorset and two were there from Dec 25 to 29 at least

**Ferruginous Duck:** One was a newcomer to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood on Dec 30 and was still there on Dec 31 - it is thought to be a pure blood Ferruginous, not a hybrid

**Goldeneye:** These have been seen this week in small numbers in Langstone Harbour, Portsmouth Harbour (Cams Bay) and at the Blashford Lakes where one of the males was already displaying as if winter was over. Peak count was of 13 in the Kent Stour valley

**Smew:** One of my favourite winter birds but a very uncommon visitor to Hampshire - in recent years the most likely place to find one anywhere near Havant has been at the Chichester gravel pit lakes where I have (in the past) been lucky enough to see one of the males whose plumage gives the bird its alternative name of 'White Nun' (to see why have a look at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/73441567@N00/474966008/?q=smew> white nun ). So far this winter we have only had 'redhead' females (photo of one alongside a male at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smew> ) and the nearest has been one on the Blashford lakes near Ringwood with another not far away on the Longham Lakes which are on the northern fringe of Bournemouth. Others have been at Dungeness and Rye Harbour but I think these too have all been redheads and the only males I have heard of this winter have been two at Newark in Nottinghamshire.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** No shortage of these now with counts of up to 42 seen from the Milton shore of Langstone Harbour this week

**Goosander:** This week's reports have come from the Lewes area of Sussex and Longham Lakes in Dorset (singles at both sites) with Hampshire doing best with up to 95 roosting at the Blashford Lakes on Dec 27 (during the day these disperse to a number of different ponds in the New Forest area). Another 11 could be seen in the north of Hampshire at Bramshill plantation on Dec 28. Sadly this species has become the latest target of the 'Brussels Bureaucrats of Birding' who have decided that the name **Goosander** should be banned and that we should call the bird '**Common Merganser**'.

**Rough Legged Buzzard:** Lee Evans tells us that he was aware of 12 of these still in the UK on Dec 28, and this week I have seen reports of the birds at Burpham near Arundel and in the Folkestone area

**Avocet:** The number in Langstone Harbour (Broom Channel area visible from the Eastern Road bridge) was up to 36 on Dec 24 and by Dec 27 there were 8 in Pagham Harbour (no news from Nutbourne in Chichester Harbour)

**Golden Plover:** There were 3000 reported at Rye Harbour on Dec 30 but only 200 in Pagham Harbour, 300 in the Alton area of East Hants, and just 46 at Titchfield Haven this week

**Knot:** On Dec 27 there were 47 at Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore and around 120 in Pagham Harbour

**Sanderling:** The high tide roost at Black Point at the mouth of Chichester Harbour had 150 on Dec 27

**Green Sandpiper:** On Dec 27 I found the bird in the concrete channelled Hermitage Stream running through the Stockheath area of Leigh Park standing within inches of where I had seen it on Nov 16. Further upstream (just below Middle Park Way roadbridge) many birds were using the shallow water of the stream as the best place to take their daily bath.

**Iceland Gull:** One was seen in Portsmouth Harbour on Dec 27 and was seen again twice on Dec 28 (no further reports)

**Sandwich Tern:** Two were seen in Langstone Harbour entrance area on Dec 24 and five were in the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour on Dec 28 but it may be that these wintering birds based in the Solent harbours take quite long day trips outside the harbours as one was seen flying west past Worthing on Dec 27

**Guillemot:** This week these have been seen not only in the harbour entrances but also well 'inland' - in Chichester Harbour one was in the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester and in Southampton Water one was off Hythe. On Dec 24 Portland Bill had a distant sighting of a **Black Guillemot**

**Ring-necked Parakeet:** Singles seen in both Chichester (Dec 27) and Lymington (Dec 30) but with no clue as to whether these had escaped from captivity in those areas or had flown from the over-crowded population in London

**Long-eared Owl:** One was seen roosting in the Exminster marshes beside the Exe estuary in Devon on Dec 27 and 28 but is thought to have been disturbed by birders hoping to photograph it

**Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Three reports of drumming heard at different places in Sussex on Dec 25 and 27 prompted an earlier report of one heard in Alexandra Park at Hastings on Dec 11

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Also three reports of these - on Dec 26 one was seen travelling with a Tit flock at Avington in the Itchen valley north of Winchester;

on Dec 30 a male was watched for 10 minutes in St Leonard's Forest near Horsham and also on Dec 30 one was seen in the New Forest (I think in the Denny Wood area)

**Woodlark:** On Dec 30 one was singing in the Ashdown Forest near Crowborough

**Shorelark:** Very few in southern England so far this winter but one which turned up at Swalecliffe on the north Kent coast on Nov 14 was still there on Dec 22

**Rock Pipit:** These are normally difficult to spot when creeping about in seaweed spread over a large area of shore but on Dec 26 I walked along the South Moors shore at Langstone at the top of a very high tide which left no more than a metre of seaweed exposed between the seawall on which I was walking and the water and this allowed me to see three separate birds along that stretch of shore.

**Waxwing:** No great news of these birds but anyone wishing to keep up with their appearances when they do reveal their presence can do so through a twitter site at @waxwingsuk - the only three birds I am aware of this month were in a typical site (a Waitrose carpark in Newark, Notts, but they flew off west soon after being spotted on Dec 22)

**Dunnoek:** Their song has become much more frequently heard in the Havant area this week

**Blackbird:** Just one report of song this week 'somewhere in Sussex' heard on Dec 29 at 6:30 am in the dark

**Mistle Thrush:** One in full song from a Brighton town chimney pot on Dec 27. Of interest to me were two sightings of a single bird in the pony field south of Wade Court and seen from Wade Lane - hopefully it may show on Jan 1

**Goldcrest:** Song heard at Durlston on Dec 26. Also singing there was a Coal Tit - here in Havant Blue and Great Tits have been heard singing fairly frequently

**Firecrest:** One was seen in Leigh Park Gardens here in Havant on Dec 30 close to where it had been seen on Nov 20. Although not reported since Dec 18 the best place to find these beauties has been Abbotsbury in Dorset where 13 have been found on two days this month

**Carrion Crow:** The Weston Shore area near Netley south of Southampton remains a prime roost site for these birds and on Dec 24 the count there was of 370

**Siskin:** On Dec 30 a small flock of around half a dozen finches seen near the north end of the Billy Trail in Havant (opposite Fairfield School) may have been Siskin to judge by their 'complaining' calls though I did not have my bins with me to confirm this

**Snow Bunting:** There were still 4 at East Head in Chichester Harbour on Dec 24 (3 on Dec 27) while the regular two remain at Widewater in the Worthing area

**Vagrants:** Lee Evans gives the total of bird species seen in the UK this year as 451 - have you seen more?

## **INSECTS**

### **Dragonflies:**

Nothing to report

### **Butterflies:**

Nothing to report

### **Moths:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Note** - I assume that readers are as ignorant of moths as I am and so I attempt to provide background info about each species through links to sources of expert knowledge. **For each species two links are given.** The first is to the **UKMoths** entry for that species giving one or more photos (if more than one thumbnail is shown clicking it will cause it to replace the large image) plus background info at the national level. The second is to the **HantsMoths** entry giving similar information at the Hampshire county level - clicking the Phenology, etc boxes gives charts relating to records in the Hampshire database and the meaning of the colours in the Flighttime Guide can be found at

[http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying\\_tonight.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/flying_tonight.php) Finally note that a **Sussex Moths** site is under development at <http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/>

**1799 Winter Moth *Operophtera brumata*** found at Folkestone on Dec 21 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1813>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1799.php>

**1984 Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum*** seen nectaring on Pansies in Westbourne village near Emsworth on Dec 22 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2198>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1984.php>

**2258 The Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii*** seen at Folkestone on Dec 21 - see <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=1105>

For the HantsMoths info go to <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2258.php>

### **Other Insects:**

#### **Selected sightings this week:**

**Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*):** A queen was seen nectaring in Clanfield (north of Waterlooville) on Dec 24

**Cave spider (*Meta menardi*):** Not local and very uncommon but if you wish to extend your knowledge of spiders you can see two photos of this species taken in a cave in Staffordshire by Graeme Lyons on Dec 30 - see

[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-NQXWChRXwAM/Tv2hbLfmG7I/AAAAAAAAACKI/bp9FRXqLdLs/s1600/DSCN6672.JPG)

[NQXWChRXwAM/Tv2hbLfmG7I/AAAAAAAAACKI/bp9FRXqLdLs/s1600/DSCN667](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-NQXWChRXwAM/Tv2hbLfmG7I/AAAAAAAAACKI/bp9FRXqLdLs/s1600/DSCN6672.JPG)

[2.JPG](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-NQXWChRXwAM/Tv2hbLfmG7I/AAAAAAAAACKI/bp9FRXqLdLs/s1600/DSCN6672.JPG) and [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-AjKHL8ii2g8/Tv2hj-](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-AjKHL8ii2g8/Tv2hj-4LYMI/AAAAAAAAACKU/7AC8z4LgmnE/s1600/DSCN6678.JPG)

[4LYMI/AAAAAAAAACKU/7AC8z4LgmnE/s1600/DSCN6678.JPG](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-AjKHL8ii2g8/Tv2hj-4LYMI/AAAAAAAAACKU/7AC8z4LgmnE/s1600/DSCN6678.JPG)

## PLANTS

**Lesser Celandine:** Found flowering in two new places (one in Emsworth, one in Havant) this week

**Marsh Marigold:** Plants at Langstone South Moors which had been flowering on Oct 10 were flowering again on Dec 26

**Common whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*):** My best find of the week was of this starting to flower in Havant on Dec 30. Last winter I did not see the first flowers until Jan 26 so this winter they are nearly a month early. To see them for yourself turn right from North Street in Havant into Waterloo Road just before entering the Rail Station forecourt, take the pavement on the north side and go past the first building (Morris Crocker offices) to their carpark entrance and then look along the base of the fenceline separating the pavement from the carpark - the flowers which I saw were near the foot of the second concrete fence post after the entrance.

**Blackthorn:** One bush already had flowers at the extreme east end of 'new' footpath connecting Southmoor Lane to the South Moors. The bush was in fact a little further east than where the path turns south and was on the north side

**American Willowherb:** A surprise find on Dec 26 was of one healthy plant with several flowers growing in the grounds of the Social Services building on the west side of the carpark on the Billy Trail immediately south of the East Street bridge in Havant. The plant may have ceased flowering but was just south of the parking ticket machine.

**Hazel:** The first catkins had started to open by Dec 26 on the tree overhanging the bus stop in the layby on the west side of the only road to Hayling (just south of the junction with Mill Lane at Langstone)

**Grey Alder:** By Dec 30 many catkins were open on a tree overhanging the entrance to the Prince George Street carpark which you pass when driving to the Waitrose underground carpark in Havant

**Goat Willow:** Two or three golden 'pussypaw' catkins were open on Dec 26 on a tree which overhangs the entrance to the South Moors nature reserve from Southmoor Lane in Havant (the tree is just outside the metal gate into the reserve)

**Hemlock Water Dropwort:** A big plant had come into full flower beside the Hermitage Stream where it passes the outflow of water from the Bedhampton springs when I was there on Dec 27 but it can only be seen if you walk to the end of the outflow channel (in which **Hybrid Water Speedwell** was still flowering) and look down into the stream edge.

**Butcher's Broom:** Brian Fellows and I have been discussing how to separate male and female plants of this strange plant (which often has hermaphrodite plants showing characteristics of both sexes - many male plant have a few female berries though a true female is normally covered with them). The best source of

information that I have come across is a paper which can be downloaded as a pdf if you go to <http://www.springerlink.com/content/n46pr12242117211/> (there is a download link below the main title of this paper).

## **OTHER WILDLIFE**

**Slow-worm:** A second-hand report of one seen outside the Westbourne Church Hall near Emsworth on Dec 27 does not mention the reptile's state of health. Normally the species would be in hibernation by now but it is possible that this one had not felt it was yet cold enough to hibernate and it might have been out seeking food (though the site given - outside the church hall - suggests it was in a tarmaced car parking area where it was perhaps more likely to have been left by a cat which had found it in hibernation, played with it as with a mouse caught as prey, and then left as inedible)

**Fungi:** Little of great interest this week but a find by Graeme Lyons is worth a mention. On Dec 30 he was in Staffordshire exploring Thor's cave in the Manifold valley and, when far enough in for no natural light to penetrate he came across a large and un-named fungus which you can see at <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-dNhSDuv0sn8/Tv2iN4wv84I/AAAAAAAAACLI/bcnOXRr6b6c/s1600/DSCN6670.JPG>

## **My own New Year's Day finds:**

Route was from central Havant west to Broadmarsh then east along the shore via Langstone, Emsworth and Thorney Island to Nutbourne before coming home along the A259

## **BIRDS** (48 species)

Little Grebe Goldeneye Herring Gull  
Cormorant Moorhen Great Blackback Gull  
Cattle Egret Coot Wood Pigeon  
Little Egret Oystercatcher Collared Dove  
Grey Heron Avocet Pied Wagtail  
Mute Swan Grey Plover Wren  
Canada Goose Lapwing Dunnock  
Brent Goose Dunlin Robin  
Wigeon BlackTailed Godwit Blackbird  
Gadwall Curlew Song Thrush  
Teal Redshank Blue Tit  
Mallard Greenshank Great Tit  
Shoveler Green Sandpiper Magpie  
Pochard Turnstone Carrion Crow  
Tufted Duck Black Headed Gull House Sparrow  
Goldeneye Common Gull Chaffinch Goldfinch

## **FLOWERING PLANTS** (50 species)

Meadow Buttercup Grey Alder Oxford ragwort  
Lesser Celandine Goat Willow Guernsey fleabane  
Common fumitory Dog's mercury Ox eye daisy  
Yellow corydalis Annual mercury Daisy

Charlock Petty spurge Winter heliotrope  
Hedge mustard Cow parsley Yarrow  
Shepherd's purse Bur chervil Scentless mayweed  
Common whitlowgrass Fools parsley Creeping thistle  
Sweet violet Hogweed Dandelion  
Common chickweed Wild carrot Hawkweed oxtongue  
Common storksbill Strawberry Tree Bristly oxtongue  
White melilot Greater periwinkle Smooth sowthistle  
Black medick Red dead nettle Prickly sowthistle  
American willowherb White dead nettle Butcher's broom  
Small nettle Japanese Honeysuckle Red Hot Poker  
Ivy Red valerian Summer snowflake  
Hazel Common ragwort

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 26 - JAN 1 (WEEK 52 OF 2011)**

### **Fri 30 Dec**

#### **It feels like spring has sprung**

After yesterday's feeling of depression caused by the prospect of strong wind and rain on New Year's Day I woke this morning to a radio forecast for the day which began by saying that it would be sunny with secondary mentions of wind and rain. That mood of optimism was strongly re-inforced as soon as I went into the garden and heard almost continuous **Dunnock song** with a backing chorus of **Robin, Wren, Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove** but the discovery that really brought a smile to my face came when walking along Waterloo Road and finding the **first white flowers** (not yet open) on half a dozen of the thousands of **Common Whitlowgrass** plants that line the bottom of the fenceline bordering the Morris Crocker carpark on the north side of the road (the plants were around the second fencepost starting from the west end of the fence).

Crossing the road and heading through the public carpark to Prince George St and Waitrose, quite a few of the **Grey Alder catkins** overhanging the exit from the carpark were also open, and earlier in my walk I am pretty sure that the complaining calls of a small group of finches meant that they were **Siskin** and not Goldfinch though I did not have my bins with me to confirm this.

Optimism should always be backed with caution and so when back at home I brought in from the garage my rainproof cycling trousers to have them ready and warm to put on at dawn on Sunday.

### **Mon 26 Dec**

#### **Five new flowers and a high tide**

I set out on my usual Monday walk to the South Moors under a dull sky with little expectation of any exciting finds but the orchid field at the South Moors gave me, in addition to four **Snipe**, newly flowering **Marsh Marigolds**, and the exit path from the Moors onto Southmoor Lane gave me both **Blackthorn** and **Goat Willow** flowers. The **Blackthorn** flowers were on a bush at the extreme east end of the straight 'new' path (in fact a little further east than the end of the path as I had deviated off it to check what turned out to be just **Hogweed** flowers) while the golden '**Pussypaws**' were at the extreme west end just beyond the metal kissing

gate. The fourth new flower came when back at the main road to Hayling with at least **two catkins 'open' on the Hazel tree** overhanging the bus stop in the layby close to the junction with Mill Lane. The number of **Lesser Celandines** flowering by the Lymbourne stream was still only two but I did find a new single flower in the ditch beside the Billy Trail just north of where it goes under the A27.

The unusually high tide brought water up to couple of inches above the footway of the bridge over the Langbrook stream taking me from the South Moors into Mill Lane and was also well over the seawall footway at four places in the section from the Royal Oak pub and Langstone pond though at no place did the water overtop my boots.

Bird interest, in addition to the **Snipe**, was provided by **three Rock Pipits** at widely separated points along the South Moors seawall (the tide had brought them close to the seawall where they were searching for food in the mass of washed up seaweed). Also of excitement to me was a single **Mistle Thrush** in the pony field north of Langstone pond (where I had also seen it on Dec 23 and hope to do so again on Jan 1) Another bit of late news came from a Portsmouth birder to whom I chatted at Langstone pond - talking about the **Cattle Egret** at Warblington he told me that he had seen one on Dec 23 in fields visible from Scant Road at Hambrook (around SU 70066) - there were lots of gulls there but no cattle so I think it unlikely the bird will still be there.

My last note from today's outing came as I was in the carpark on the Billy Trail immediately south of the East St bridge in Havant where, just before the slope up out of the carpark, I spotted a healthy plant of **a pale flowered Willowherb** growing in the Social Services building grounds - although I could not easily get close to it and so could not check the stigma I am close to certain that it was **American Willowherb** and so the fifth plant to add to my December flower list.