

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 28 - JAN 3 (WEEK 53 OF 2015)

Fri 1st January 2016

### 54 Birds and 45 Flowers to start the year

In my garden just before sunrise the moon was close to Jupiter high in the southern sky and Robins and a Song Thrush were serenading it from local gardens as a Carrion Crow flew down to collect the scraps of bread I threw out on the lawn before setting out on my bike in search of birds. Also on my lawn I was surprised to see that a **Meadow Waxcap fungus** had sprung up a couple of weeks after I thought my garden fungus season was over - later I added another fungus to my day list with a smart fresh **Yellow Fieldcap (*Bolbitius vitellinus*)** growing from a cowpat on the South Moors

Internet photos of Yellow Fieldcap and Meadow Waxcap

My proposed route was along the shore from Langstone to Farlington Marshes lake and as the wind was forecast to become increasingly strong from the south-east, and the tide to be rising from low at 9.0am I thought it best to follow the shore with the wind behind me on the way out and to stick to the cycle track and roads on the way home so I rode down Wade Court Road listening out for garden birds among which I heard **bursts of song from more than one Dunnock** (not a bird I associate with winter song) and saw **two smart cock Pheasants** in the horse feeding area immediately south of Wade Court. Langstone Pond had the **Swan pair and five cygnets** and the only unexpected bird on the mud offshore was a **Grey Plover**. On reaching the South Moors the first birds I saw while manoeuvring my bike through the kissing Gate from Mill Lane were **two Green Sandpipers** in a pool on the grass before taking off noisily when they saw me. From the seawall, with the tide at its lowest I saw my first **Grey Heron** (there were none at Langstone Pond) and my first **Merganser**, both hoping for breakfast in small pools left by the tide.

On the Budds Farm pools I added **Pochard, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Shoveler and Little Grebe** before I was joined by another birder who had just seen a **Great Northern Diver in the Hermitage Stream south of the Harts Farm Way bridge** so I headed off that way. Before reaching the stream, at the south end of Southmoor Lane, I found **White Comfrey and Goat Willow** in flower had a close view of a **Goldcrest** As I arrived at the stream a small flock of **Long Tailed Tits** flew across it into the trees on the slopes of the 'Broadmarsh mountain' where one of them gave a burst of its tiny trilling song. **No sign of the Diver** but both **Great Crested Grebe and Wigeon** were new to my list and where I stopped to view them a young tree was revealing its identity by bearing the first **Cherry Plum flowers** I have seen (the first were reported at Brook Meadow on Boxing Day and, later today, cycling home along Harts Farm Way where it passes the north of the Broadmarsh mountain, I found several mature trees on both sides of the road were flowering. **Proof that the Diver had been in the stream** came when I checked Brian Fellows blog and saw it had a close-up photo of the bird taken by Peter Raby (see [Great Northern Diver](#)).

From the Broadmarsh cycleway I spotted at least one male **Pintail** in the great mass of Brent Geese in the Chalk Dock lake and a little further west another Green Sandpiper took off from a pool in the Marshes 'Slip Field' (shown next to the North-east entrance to the reserve on the map below):-

### Bob Chapman's map of Farlington Marshes

Next I had a distant view of something large and white in the distant North Marsh - stopping to use my bins I found this was one of the two '**white geese of uncertain origin**' that traditionally accompany the many **Canada Geese** which winter here - while it was not added to my list the Canadas were recorded. Reaching the entrance road to the reserve I was disappointed not to see the expected Avocet flock in the Broom Channel which runs past Kendall's Wharf and under the Eastern Road into Ports Creek though I did add **Common Gull and Cormorant** to the list and was impressed by **a Kestrel's ability to hover motionless** above the Eastern Road roundabout while facing into a near gale force wind.

Parking my bike at the reserve entrance I walked to the seats at the Lake viewpoint with a Banana and some biscuits for refreshment. While there a large flock of **Lapwing** gave me another tick and the hordes of Brent on the marsh seemed to disprove my suggestion that they had already left to seek shelter in the Baltic - nevertheless yesterday saw another 160 pass Dungeness bringing the total already seen leaving us to over 2,500 to which must be added a similar number flying east without being seen. Walking back to the bike two birders who stopped to chat pointed out the **Avocet flock** sheltering just north of Kendall's Wharf and so removed the one disappointment of the morning and put me in a good mood for the ride home.

After lunch, although it was starting to rain it was not enough to stop me walking around the local area to make a list of flowering plants during which, while in the centre of Havant, I added two more birds - **Pied and Grey Wagtail** - to bring my daylight total to 54. My flower list ended with a total of 45 species of which the most unexpected for the date were **Hazel catkins, Goat Willow 'Pussy Paws', Cherry Plum, Cow Parsley, Red Clover, Ox-eye Daisy, Bulbous Buttercup, and Hedge Mustard**. Hopefully nature will provide me with much more pleasure during the remaining 365 days of this Leap Year.

### Thu 31 December

#### **Mass departure of Brent Geese and mass arrival of Auks**

On my visits to the Warblington shore area on Monday and Tuesday of this week I did not see any Brent Geese but assumed they had flown inland to escape the strong winds along the shore. Today, however, I spent some time catching up with internet reports from coastal sites and was left with **a strong impression that the Brent are so fed up with the winds affecting Britain that they are leaving en masse in the hope of find shelter in the Baltic** until the time comes to head to their breeding grounds. One strand of the evidence for this came from the Dungeness website which had reported the first 140 Brent flying east on Dec 14 (three weeks

earlier than the first departure last winter) followed by 210 heading east on Dec 22.

Normally these early reports of departing birds only come from Dungeness but this year **Christmas Day** brought a report of 150 heading east seen from the east coast of the Isle of Wight and **Dec 28** brought news of 408 passing Dungeness plus 28 flying east past St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight (a southerly route suggesting that these birds might come from the west coast of France).

Also on **Dec 28 the Selsey blog reported 15 juveniles in a flock of 1300 Brent at Chichester Marina** - suggesting that that flock was on the move from somewhere outside the local area in which the highest number of juveniles in any one flock had been just 7.

On **Dec 29** another 300 went past Dungeness followed on **Dec 30** by 1165 more plus another 100 going east from the Isle of Wight and 144 passing Selsey (possibly the same birds).

Today's search of the internet also **corrected the impression that I had yesterday that no mass movement of Auks had yet started moving down the English Channel**, making Tony Gutteridge's sighting of a Razorbill off Langstone an isolated precursor of the main arrival. Although the figures I saw today specify Guillemots I guess the numbers also include a proportion of Razorbills. Counts of birds heading west past Dungeness were **399 on Dec 27** and **1104 on Dec 30** with a third report dated **Dec 28 of 15 going west past St Catherine's point** of the Isle of Wight.

Local news received today included another **drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker** in the Staunton Country Park and a **Great Grey Shrike** in trees around the carpark for the new Havant Crematorium off Bartons Road just west of its junction with the Horndean Road coming north from Emsworth. Brian Fellows blog entry for Dec 26 also has two local surprises - the first was that **the cultivar of Cherry Plum in Brook Meadow was just starting to flower** (last spring the first hint of these trees flowering came on Feb 1 with general flowering not starting till the second half of February) and the second was the **discovery on Dec 25 of a Collared Earthstar fungus (Geastrum triplex) in Nore Barn wood**. A final mention must be made of yet another **late Swallow** - this one seen at Charmouth in Dorset on Dec 27.

## Wed 30 December

### Christmas Birds and Butterflies

My own finds over the Christmas Holiday have already been noted and today I did not venture out so had nothing new to report but this evening I had an email from Tony Gutteridge telling me he had **today watched a Razorbill floating east just off Langstone Pond**. Uncommon at the best of times in the Langstone - Emsworth area I see that this month the species has only been reported 8 times in Hampshire since Dec 1 - the sightings have been widespread from Portsmouth Harbour to Milford on Sea and up Southampton Water to Southampton Town Quay but no one has seen more than a single bird. Guillemot has been equally

elusive in December with another 8 reports, all of single birds, and none of them being in our local waters - the latest of these, at Stokes Bay on Christmas Day was said to be floundering in shallow water where it was being harried by gulls (maybe it had been successful in its fishing - maybe it was weak and sickly?).

This prompted me to look through other recent reports which have excited my interest. Most exciting for me was news of **both Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers starting to drum** - the first Lesser Spotted was heard today (Dec 30) in Chandlers Ford; the first Great Spotted was heard in Chichester on Christmas Day with a second heard in Chandlers Ford on Dec 28. Even more exciting has been the presence of **three Penduline Tits** which arrived at Titchfield Haven on Dec 7 where they were seen until Dec 13 before moving to the Cosham IBM Lake where they were seen from Dec 15 to 26 but have now returned to Titchfield Haven on Dec 29.

Finally the regular winter sightings of **Red Admiral butterflies** resumed when the sun came out on Dec 28 with two separate sightings on the slopes of Portsdown and another two in Sussex and one more at Portland plus a **male Brimstone** in the Fleet area of north Hampshire. Also on Dec 28 Portland trapped another **two uncommon migrant moths** from the distant south - a **Levant Blackneck** (the 24th ever to be seen in Britain) and two **Eyed Veneer**.

Also reported in the last two days has been the long staying **Yellow-browed Warbler** at Eastleigh Sewage Farm - on Dec 29 - when Black Point on Hayling had a **Little Stint** plus **154 Sanderling** at Sandy Point. Today (30th) a **Leach's Petrel** was at Weston Shore in Southampton Water and single **Little Gulls** were seen at Eastleigh Lakeside and Milford. More local was a **male Marsh Harrier** over the Thorney Little Deeps on Dec 28 and on Boxing Day **Brighton Pier had an impressive murmuration of 18,500 Starlings**.

## [Tue 29 December](#)

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

### **A visit to Warblington Cemetery**

When the sun eventually broke through this morning I was on my bike heading for Warblington Cemetery extension. There seemed to be very little natural plant life so I began by taking a photo of the overall scene taking in the Castle tower and the Church spire, matching it with the first appearance of some Narcissi flowers planted in the Natural Burial area.

#### General view of the Cemetery extension and flowering Narcissi

Walking round the periphery of the extension the sun lit up the coming year's purple catkin buds and the remnants of last years cones on a **Common Alder** while the northern hedge had **fresh leaves sprouting on Elder bushes**. Through this hedge some bird life could be seen around the motionless cattle - Blackbirds, Song Thrush, Moor Hens and a Black-headed Gull were added to the Pied Wagtail already seen in the cemetery while the ubiquitous Crows flew over.

## Common Alder catkin buds and fresh Elder leaves

Moving to the main cemetery I had the same difficulty in finding natural interest so started with a general view focussing on the Warblington Church spire, backing that with a shot of **fresh flowers opening on a Cherry tree**. One or two Robins were singing here and House Sparrows could be heard chattering around the farm. From a hedgerow south of the cemetery came a noisy burst of sound from an unseen cock Pheasant and along the public path crossing the field west of the cemetery a line of Black-headed Gulls seemed to be finding something to eat but there was a complete absence of the Brent Geese that I was expecting.

A view of the main cemetery and a close up of fresh Cherry blossom.

Absence of wild flowers persuaded me to photograph the first **white flowered Camellia** I have seen, and puzzlement as to its identity caused me to focus on a tree whose white trunk and long thin evergreen leaves caused it to stand out as clouds obscured the sunshine. **The tree almost certainly is of the Eucalyptus tribe** originating in the southern hemisphere and probably arriving here as a cultivar engineered by some UK plant breeder. My investigation into giving it a species name showed me that earlier in its life the shining white of the trunk will have been clothed in a greenish outer covering which has now peeled off and that the leaves of some Eucalypts can be boiled to make a tea-like drink - but beware that young leaves are said to contain cyanide. Before ingesting anything coming from a Eucalyptus have a look at the following two webpages - [Warning re toxicity of Eucalyptus oil](#) and [Warning re Cyanide in Eucalyptus leaves](#)

My first white flowered Camellia and a view centred on a Eucalyptus tree.

### Mon 28 December

#### **Sweet Violets flowering at two more sites plus my first Lungwort**

This morning I walked down Wade Lane to the shore, then along it to Nore Barn in the face of a stiff wind and with a rising tide, before coming home up the Selangor Avenue path and along the main road into Havant. My first find was of garden escaped **Lungwort newly in flower** at the Lymbourne Triangle site, and beside the unmade final section of Wade Lane south of Wade Court **a patch of Sweet Violet leaves had five flowers hidden within it** - later I found another single flower in the Nore Barn wood which, with yesterday's find of a flower in St Faith's churchyard, gave me the feeling that they have decided that spring is here! One other flower that appeared to have started general flowering was **Spotted Medick** with flowering specimens seen at half a dozen sites along the main road from Selangor Avenue back into Havant's Emsworth Road.

**Song Thrush, Collared Dove, Robin and both Coal Tit and Great Tit were singing** in Havant and in the trees along the Warblington west stream at the south end of the Selangor Avenue path I watched **a single Jay** which seemed to be

accompanying a Tit flock while the open field east of the path had several airborne **Skylarks** making their contact calls but sadly not breaking into song despite the pleasant sunshine. Also at Nore Barn I watched a smart **Scandinavian Lesser Blackback gull** flying over and earlier a **Kestrel** had been hovering over the Warblington Cemetery area - in total I heard or saw 34 bird species including a 'wheezing' **Greenfinch** in Nore Barn wood.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 21 - 27 (WEEK 52 OF 2015)**

**Sat 26 December**

### **My first Snowdrop in Havant Cemetery and a Sweet Violet in St Faith's churchyard**

Boxing Day gave me the chance to make **my December visit to Havant Cemetery**, where I came on **my first Snowdrop**, and to **St Faith's Churchyard**, where a single **Sweet Violet flower** was the first I have seen this month, and in walking between the two sites I also added **Common Whitlowgrass** to my flowering list.

Walking along Eastern Road towards the Cemetery entrance I was expecting little of wildlife interest (despite the bold show of Lesser Celandines outside the wall at the corner of New Lane) so I took a photo of **a prominent Lichen** on the wall (I think it is called *Diploica canescens* or maybe *Buellia canescens* but I may be wrong!) and another of a grave onto which what looked like **a Reindeer** had crashed in the recent strong winds.

Lichen on wall and a crashed Reindeer

Inside the entrance gate **Daffodils** were in full flower below the Conservation Volunteers Interpretation Board and with them my first **Snowdrop flower** of the winter was in bud.

Daffodils and my first Snowdrop bud

Other than Primroses and Daffodils there was little in the way of flowers though some attractive **Cyclamens** (planted, but now well established) caught my eye. Even the **Holly Berries** were in short supply, hopefully as a result of having provided Christmas food for birds.

Long established Cyclamen and Holly Berries

In the St Faith's area I was pleasantly surprised to find a couple of fungi - one was tiny and bright yellow (probably the last of the *Hygrocybe quieta* which I discovered here on my November visit) and the other could not be identified as they were only just starting to push up through the soil near the Eastern Road gate but I guess they will soon become prominent and may turn out to be edible **Horse**

**Mushrooms** or the similar (but not to be eaten) **Yellow Stainers**. Near these the Conservation Volunteers had earlier this year cleared a couple of small patches of the long grass and planted a few Primroses which were just starting to flower (though I suspect they will have vanished into the grass before the spring of 2017).

Three fresh white fungi and one old yellow fungus

Just inside the entrance to the Dissenters area the **Mahonia aquifolium bush** was at last starting to flower and further into the area the **Ivy berries** were the first I have seen to reach the final stage of their development into large black fruit to sustain birds through the depths of the winter.

Mahonia starting to flower and fully mature Ivy berries

Walking to St Faith's churchyard I was coming out of the Prince George Street carpark when I took a photo of the now **fully open catkins on a Grey Alder** before starting south down Prince George Street where, on its east side, I spotted the first hint of **tiny white flower buds opening on a single plant of Common Whitlowgrass**.

Fully open Grey Alder catkins and tiny flower buds on Common Whitlowgrass

St Faith's churchyard seemed to be devoid of any flowers or other wildlife interest with one exception - under the big Yew tree I found **a single Sweet Violet flower**. Their usual autumn re-flowering started here on Oct 16 but I have not been able to refind any here since then (I suspect they were mown down in a pre-Remembrance Day tidy-up) - I hope they will be left to flower this time! As a token of the absence of any other flowers I have included a photo of a single **Red-deadnettle** which was the only other blossom I could find.

Sweet Violet and Red Deadnettle

**Fri 25 December**

### **Some unseasonal reports**

Over the last few years I have become used to seeing reports of **migrant Brent Geese starting to fly east** past Dungeness in January but this year the start of their return migration has been brought forward by three weeks by the spring like temperature. The first flock to be seen leaving last winter was 250 passing Dungeness on Jan 7 followed by another 100 on Jan 8 and 148 on Jan 12. **This winter 140 flew east on Dec 14** with 210 following on Dec 22. Locally Peter Raby saw **Grey Herons collecting sticks and carrying them to nests around Langstone Mill Pond on Dec 16** and on Dec 18 he reported activity at four nests there.

The mild weather has also brought reports of late departing summer visitors - the most surprising being a convincing report of a **Nightjar** heard and seen by Mountain bikers on heathland near Midhurst at 9pm on the evening of Dec 15 - the report on the SOS website read .. "Mountain biking over Trotton Common about 21.15 at night heard typical chirring in the heather ahead of us, as we approached on the narrow path put up a bird a few feet away of the right size and shape with flash of white on wings. However, the flight away was strong and direct, not the fluttering around you typical of nightjar so not sure. Are they supposed to be here in December, it was very warm about 15C and the rain had eased to give a nice night." More expected were at least a dozen reports of **Swallows** with the last being seen on Thorney Island on Dec 13 (to be superceded by a **Red-Rumped Swallow** which has been in Norfolk from Dec 17 to 24 at least).

Unexpected insect news includes two **Dragonfly sightings in December** - on December 9 a 'rather moribund but still living' **Southern Hawker** was photographed in Wiltshire (you can see it at [Dragonfly seen near Bath](#)) - then on Dec 22 a probable **Migrant Hawker** brought the following entry on the British Dragonfly Society sightings page .. "Leyland, Lancs. Migrant Hawker in my garden, dusk tonight, 22nd December. It came in to my living room with me from the garden, flew about a metre away then flew back at me then out again. Not overly energetic, but still on the wing. Believe it was a Migrant Hawker, very slender, about 60mm in length, dark coloured." I have seen several reports of butterflies flying in December but suspect these have probably been unwittingly ejected from spare rooms in houses where they were hibernating until the arrival of a human Christmas visitor warmed the room but that cannot explain **the unprecedented report for Dec 23 on the Sussex Butterfly site** saying .. "Even in this extraordinary December, I was amazed to see **a Speckled Wood on the wing** in the sunshine today, on the Downs above Bopeep near Alciston." Also on Dec 23 the Sussex website had a photo of a **Painted Lady** taken near the Halnaker Windmill (just east of Goodwood to the north east of Chichester). **Moths are regularly active on winter nights** (the December Moth gets its name from a month in which it is regularly seen but to save the trouble of setting up a moth trap you can see it at [December Moth](#)) but the **prevailing southerly winds are bringing unusual numbers of cross-Channel migrants** including numerous examples of the **African Sober** which the Portland Bird Observatory found in its traps on Dec 20 and commented .. "**Just a matter of days ago African Sober had been recorded fewer than ten times in Britain, so the subsequent influx - right across southern England - of several dozen has been a remarkable event for so tiny an insect.**" To see it look at [African Sober moth](#).

## **Wed 23 December**

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

### **Return of the sun (for one day only)**

After two days on which my three children and their families occupied my time and kept me pleasantly housebound their departure this morning allowed me to

spend an equally pleasant day out of doors in sunshine which we are unlikely to see again this year.

The day started with a cloudless sky bathed in sunshine which attracted a **small white-tailed Bumblebee** (presumably a *Bombus terrestris* worker which would normally have finished its useful life by this time in December, leaving only the much larger Queens able to fly) to visit flowers in my garden in search of nectar. Also in the garden was a **cloud of tiny flies dancing in the sunlight** while the obligatory Song Thrushes and Robins provided a musical accompaniment assisted by a solo Collared Dove.

After my guests had left I had a quick lunch and set out for a walk to Langstone and along the South Moors shore before returning via Southmoor Lane. My first note was of **Holly in flower** (I think in response to hedge trimming) and my next was of a handsome **Mistle Thrush** in the pony fields alongside Wade Lane north of Wade Court - hopefully a pair is still present and may soon start to sing.

Outside the Electricity Substation opposite Wade Court I was excited by my **first sight for the month of White Comfrey in flower**, and beside the muddy section of the lane south of the buildings I found an Elder tree already bearing fresh new leaves but there was no special interest on the harbour at very low tide, nor on Langstone Pond.

Reaching the South Moors shore I almost immediately saw a **Short-eared Owl** hunting, then landing on a fence post until I got too close when it flew off and disappeared while my attention was diverted to the calls of a **Green Sandpiper** high in the sky before it dived down and also vanished into one of the channels crossing the Moors.

Turning my attention to the harbour I saw what I thought was a **Rock Pipit** fly off from the Shingle close to me, only to land among seaweed further out where I was able to confirm that it was my first Rock Pipit of the winter. Looking back over the Moors I had a second prolonged view of the Owl which at one point, flying into the wind, hung motionless for what seemed a long time but did not plunge down on some vole which I thought it had detected. After that it again turned away from me, and again my attention was diverted to what I assume was the same Green Sandpiper heading west and calling to make sure no-one missed it!

The **Budds Farm pools** had the usual selection of duck - Mallard, Shoveler, Gadwall, Tufted Duck and lots of Teal plus the first two Pochard I have seen this month. Coming down from the mound to walk up Southmoor Lane I was both surprised and pleased to see that the odd **Goat Willow** which overhangs the kissing gate leading to the path across the Moors, and which is always the first I see in flower, already had golden 'Pussy Paws' on show.

Passing the Apollo Fire Alarm factory just before turning into the path along the north side to the Langstone Technology Park I noticed several plants of **Field Forget-me-not** were still in flower, and nearing the Langbrook Stream I was genuinely surprised to find **one or two Hazel catkins already fully extended**. At the stream I checked the **Meadow Sweet plant** which already had unopen fresh

flower heads on Dec 1 but found that while the flower heads had expanded there were still no open flowers on show. Nothing more of note on the way home.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 14 - 20 (WEEK 51 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 18 December**

#### **More signs of spring**

Today **Redwings were starting to sing** on Steepdown above the west bank of the River Adur which separates Worthing from Shoreham, a **Wheatear was seen at Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset** where at least one **Black-headed Gull in Christchurch Harbour had already grown its black head feathers**, and a **Red-rumped Swallow was seen in Norfolk yesterday**. Nearer home I am told that a **Blackbird has been singing in Havant** at dusk for several days. Also of local interest Barry Collins saw a **male Marsh Harrier hunting over the Thorney Island Little Deeps** today. More expected, but news to me, is that the first **Shaggy Inkcap fungi** have been seen in the Emsworth area. Not all of these are signs of spring but they all contribute to a feeling that the season is 'out of joint'

### **Thu 17 December**

#### **Avocets in Nutbourne Bay and a December Nightjar sighting**

Since Anne de Potier saw **a flock of 36 Avocet in Nutbourne Bay on Dec 9** I have been waiting for a day when the weather would be fine and the tide low when I arrived to have a look in the hope that they would be still there. Today the conditions were forecast to be right and when I arrived there around midday I found 17 birds feeding surrounded by a good flock of Wigeon, Teal, Pintail and even a couple of Shelduck plus a mass of Brent - passing Prinsted Bay I heard the distinctive twittering of Turnstone as a small flock flew by.

I would probably have seen more Avocet, but had more distant views of them, if I had gone to the Eastern Road bridge west of Farlington Marshes where between 38 and 45 have been reported since the start of December but if I wanted numbers I see that there are now at least 500 wintering in the Exe estuary and 350 in Poole Harbour.

One report that almost tempted me to visit my old haunt of the IBM Lake at Cosham was the news that **the three Penduline Tits which were recently at Titchfield Haven moved to the IBM Lake on Dec 15** and were still there yesterday but have not been reported today. Also seen yesterday at Langstone Mill Pond, in addition to the returning female Goosander, were several **Grey Herons collecting sticks and using them to start refurbishing the nests around the pond which they used last year**.

Also in the news from the Isle of Wight is that a flock of some **80 Fieldfare and 20 Redwing were in the Bembridge Marshes area on Dec 15** and were still present today though in reduced numbers

Top of the bill for surprise news is that on Dec 15 some Mountain Bikers were riding over Trotton Common (a mile or so west of Midhurst) in the dark at 9:15pm

when they heard .. "churring in the heather ahead of us, as we approached on the narrow path we put up a bird a few feet away of the right size and shape with flash of white on wings. However, the flight away was strong and direct, not the fluttering around you typical of nightjar so not sure. Are they supposed to be here in December, it was very warm about 15C and the rain had eased to give a nice night." I don't think the directness of the flight (when chased by a group of bikers) in any way detracts from the likelihood of the bird being a Nightjar, and the flash of white on the wings plus the churring is enough to convince me that they did see a Nightjar even though the latest reports of the species which I have seen on the HOS website was dated Sep 27 and the very latest was seen at Portland on Oct 12.

### Wed 16 December

#### A couple of botanic puzzles

A couple of days ago I visited Chris Oakley's website about the wildlife of the Hampshire Farm site just west of Westbourne ([Hampshire Farm Meadows](#)) and was very surprised to see a photo of the umbellifer **Pignut (*Conopodium majus*) in full flower** which Chris had taken on Dec 7 some six months after the normal flowering period for this plant (May to July) had ended. The Hants Flora says this is a frequent and locally common species on clayey and sandy soils but is decreasing with the loss of old meadows though I cannot recall finding it around the Havant area. I had no reason to doubt Chris' identification of the species and the presence of both small bracts at the top of the main stem (below the main rays of the flowerhead) and whiskery bracteoles below the flower clusters seemed to confirm the id (though the grooved main stem suggested that the plant might be Hemlock Water Dropwort which I would have been less surprised to find on the banks of the River Ems which borders the meadows).

Today I came on another species just coming into flower at a more expected time of year which I thought I recognized and could name as an **Australian Wattle Tree** planted in an Emsworth garden on the south side of Victoria Road a little east of Bosmere Gardens - this is a tree that I see each winter flowering in Havant Park, close to the Cricket Club House, against the road bridge over the railway (though it was not yet flowering last time I was there). For a photo of the flowers and leaves see below.

An image of *Acacia melanoxylon* (Australian Blackwood) from the internet  
The reason I have headed this update as a botanic puzzle is that when I asked Google to give me the proper name for an 'Australian Wattle Tree' I was given the following statement plus a huge array of images - Wikipedia told me that **Wattles are properly known as Acacias and that .."Of the 163 species, 52 are native to the Americas, 83 to Africa, Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands, 32 to Asia and 9 to Australasia and the Pacific Islands"**. Alan Mitchell's Guide to the Trees of Britain has **only one Acacia species - *A. dealbata* - which I know of as Mimosa**, and when I consulted Stace's Flora of the British Isles I again found just one brief entry for ***A. melanoxylon* (Australian Blackwood) saying that while there are several exotic species to be found here this is the only one which has become naturalised** in South Devon and the Scillies.

I set out today to look for the Sweet Violet which Brian Fellows had seen flowering beside Warblington Road in Emsworth last Monday - although I found

this species in flower in November I have not yet seen it in December and I failed to spot a flower among the roadside patches of leaves today but further west on that road (just east of Beach road) I did tick **my first Three Cornered Leek flowers** (with a thin green line running along the length of the white petals). Later, in a Havant garden, I also ticked my **first flowering of Summer Snowflake** with flowers that differ from the Leek in having green tipped petals.

To end today I see from Brian Fellows website that Peter Raby saw a **female Goosander back on Langstone Mill Pond** and I thought that Peter and others might like to know that the 'metal pipe' which Peter says the Goosander was perched on is part of the structure of a sort of barge that, many years back, was floated on the pond as part of **a scheme to dredge the mud from the pond and tip it over the sea wall into the harbour** but that scheme was firmly blocked by Chichester Harbour Conservancy who objected to the pollution of the harbour.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 7 - 13 (WEEK 50 OF 2015)**

### **Sat 12 December**

#### **Some unexpected observations for December**

The continuing mild damp weather makes a report of a **Southern Hawker dragonfly** still alive in Wiltshire on Dec 9 possibly the latest ever Dragonfly sighting for the UK and equally surprising to me was a sighting of a **Green Lacewing** at Titchfield Haven on Dec 8. The Lacewing was seen to fly into a spider's web but it did not arouse the spider which had built that web unlike a spider which quickly responded to a tiny fly which flew into a web outside my bathroom window on Dec 9. Another recent insect sighting was of **11 Hornets** still active around their nest in south Devon on Dec 6. Both a **Peacock** (at Pulborough Brooks) and a **Red Admiral** butterfly in Devon were still flying on Dec 9.

Perhaps a little more expected was news of **4 Newts (presumed Common)** in John Goodspeed's garden pond on Portsdown Hill but news of **Natterjack Toad tadpoles** in a Christchurch Harbour pond on Dec 11 surprised me

**Swallows** are still being seen along the south coast - the latest reports I have seen come from Dungeness on Dec 10, Hythe (Southampton Water) on Dec 9, and from Folkestone, Lodmoor and Portland on Dec 8. Down in Cornwall a **Turtle Dove** was visiting a garden feeder in St Ives on Dec 4 when a **Whinchat** was still present in the Scillies. Other exciting bird news is that the **3 Penduline Tits** which turned up at Titchfield Haven on Dec 7 were still there on Dec 12. Also in connection with the recent discussion on Brian Fellows' Emsworth Blog of how to attract birds into gardens I notice that on Dec 1 **a flock of 160 Bramblings were active around gardens in the Test Valley which were adjacent to fields in which a Sunflower crop was being cultivated** (on Sep 3 when riding along Daw Lane on north Hayling I saw that a big crop of sunflowers was growing on the Stoke Fruit Farm fields but I believe it was harvested soon after).

One bird species that we would all like to see locally is **Waxwing** but so far none have been reported in the south of England - it is however encouraging to see that the number being reported in the UK by RBA (Rare Bird Alert) jumped to 44

on Dec 11 and Twitter seems to suggest that Leicester is currently a hot spot with a flock of 30. Although we have yet to see **flocks of winter Thrushes** in the immediate Havant area I have just used the Hampshire 'Going Birding' search facility for **Redwing** in Hampshire between Dec 1 and 12 and see that 5 were on the Langstone Southmoors on Dec 8 and that 21 were in the Curbridge area near Botley on Dec 2 with odd birds in Fareham and Southsea recently. The only sizeable flock of **Fieldfare** in our area this month was of 30 at Titchfield Haven on Dec 3. Maybe we are not yet seeing many continental Thrushes (though I suspect we are overlooking a good number of **Blackbirds** - a count of 50 in the Priddys Hard area of Gosport on Dec 11 is one sign of a recent influx) but **every day this week I have heard one or more Song Thrushes in full song** and assume that some or all of them are new to this area and are using their song to establish winter territories.

### Wed 9 December

#### **Avocets at Nutbourne, Penduline Tits at Titchfield Haven and a Dusky Warbler at Climping**

My outing today was a ride to south Hayling and back which was made the more strenuous by the closure of the Coastal Path south of the Oyster Beds forcing me to ride south on the busy main road before turning down West Lane, as well as battling against a strong head wind, with just six new flowers for the month as a reward - of the six the two which pleased me most were Meadow Buttercup and Pale Toadflax.

To make up for the lack of personal finds a quick scan of the internet on getting back home showed me that Anne de Potier had found the first **flock of Avocets (36 birds) in Nutbourne Bay today** while the **three Penduline Tits which arrived at Titchfield Haven on Dec 7** were apparently still there today though only giving brief and distant glimpses. For those wanting to pursue even more elusive rarities I see that a **Dusky Warbler was in the Climping Gap area** (coastal strip immediately west of where the River Arun enters the sea at Littlehampton). For a first hand report with indistinct photos (and lacking sound recordings of the bird's calls) see [Dusky Warbler at Climping](#).

Other reports which caught my eye were firstly of **Swallows** (On Dec 4 one was at Rye Hbr, on Dec 8 one was at Lodmoor and one - maybe the same - at Portland, and on Dec 9 one was at Hythe on Southampton Water). Secondly I noticed three more **reports of juvenile Brent** (on Dec 4 7 juvs were among 29 Brent at Southsea, also on Dec 4 1 juv was with 200 adults at Christchurch Hbr, and on Dec 7 2 juvs were among 12 adults at Baiter Park in Poole). Finally, in addition to the **Siberian Chiffchaff** at Titchfield Haven, Dec 8 brought reports of a 'possible' at Lodmoor and a more definite sighting at Abbotsbury.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 30 - DEC 6 (WEEK 49 OF 2015)**

### Sun 6 December

#### **Song Thrush heard and seen at Langstone where I find three more flowering plants.**

This morning I walked down the Billy Track from Havant to the old railbridge pierhead at Langstone, enjoying the sight of a **Grey Wagtail** in the Lymbourne Stream (just south of the A27) and both hearing and seeing a **Song Thrush singing** from the back garden of one of the houses on the Main Road in Langstone - that was my third Song Thrush song since I heard my first for this winter on Nov 26.

I was not expecting to find new plants in flower but very soon after hearing the Thrush I came on a small cluster of flowering plants among which **Green Alkanet** and **Wood Avens** were new for December and a single full size plant of **Stone Parsley** in flower was a real surprise although I already had the species on my December list after seeing the remains of a plant which had suffered roadside mowing and which was retaliating by opening a few flowers on what was left of its stem. After walking to the end of the rail bridge pier and back without seeing a single flower on it I spotted a couple of plants of **Fool's Parsley** sheltering among brambles where I re-joined the Billy Trail - that brings my December count up to **106 species**, still well short of the 183 I found in November but I still have to visit South Hayling and Portsdown.

Also seen today, in a flowerbed outside the gate of the West Mill at the end of Mill Lane, was yet another plant of **Lesser Celandine** with a couple of open flowers.

From the internet I see that there were **195 Great Crested Grebe** roosting on Southampton Water off Hythe today. As the previous peak count of these in Southampton Water was only 44 (off Weston Shore on Nov 26) I suspect most of today's birds were from the regular winter flock in the east Solent of which there were two reports (also on Nov 26) of 245 off Brownwich plus 23 off Lepe.

Also reported at Titchfield Haven today is the **Siberian Chiffchaff** which has been seen five times there since Nov 22. As Malcolm Phillips who had several sightings of this species in Brook Meadow at Emsworth last year only returned to Emsworth from Cuba on Dec 3rd he and others might wish to refresh their memories of how to recognise this species by looking at the Portland Observatory website entry for Nov 26 which has photos, a video, and a sonogram of this species - go to [Siberian Chiffchaff at Portland Castle](#)

## **Sat 5 December**

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

### **Despite the strong wind and gloomy sky my December Wildflower count reaches 103.**

As I got my bike out this morning I noticed that one of the self sown **Yellow Oxalis plants** growing in my driveway was opening two flowers to catch my eye and to give me hope that I would reach my target of 100 species on my 'new month' list before the morning was out. I started off towards Emsworth along the new cycleway connecting the new housing by the New Lane level crossing to Warblington School on Southleigh Road and made my first stop on the Emsworth side of the A27 underpass. I was not expecting anything here but found a large plant of **Common Knapweed (Centaurea nigra)** in flower on the overgrown

southern side of the site. From there I headed for what I thought was a certainty of Common Comfrey outside the Doctor's Surgery near the central Emsworth round about but all I found there was the rotting remains of long dead plants.

On my trip to the Portsmouth Eastern Road yesterday I found what might have been a plant of Black Mustard but which turned out to be Charlock so today I headed for a reliable site for Black Mustard on the outer sea wall of Emsworth Marina. When I got there the wind threatened to blow me into the marina but I struggled on along the narrow path with no sign of Mustard flowers, nor those of the even more unlikely (though guaranteed to be seen at the right time of year) flowers of Hedgerow Cranesbill. When within yards of the end of the path at the Marina boat entrance I passed a leafless small Elder tree on the seaward side and found two totally unexpected plants in flower - on the seaward side was a large bush of **Tree Mallow** bearing many open flowers and on the marina side were several rather wind battered stems of **Hemlock**, each topped by a good show of white blossom. Coming back through the marina to its narrow gate onto Slipper Road I looked for and found plenty of bright yellow flowers on the **Spanish Broom** plants (no doubt planted there many years ago but having looked after their own survival ever since and thus qualifying as wild flowers in my mind).

Brook Meadow had nothing to offer me and as I left the site I did not count the Cherry Blossom arching over Seagull Lane from the last garden in that road. Heading north up New Brighton Road I found healthy leaves, but no flowers, of the Christopher Way Wild Clary and a little further north there was no sign of the Dwarf Mallow but while checking the grass where it grew I spotted a plant of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** with two open flowers to add to my list.

Heading home along Southleigh Road I saw nothing new until approaching Southleigh Farm where I stopped to hear **Song Thrush song** coming from the trees across the road and noticed another new flowering Lesser Celandine in the 'Emsworth Wayside' area. I stopped again where the road turns south into Denvilles and East Leigh Road heads off north. Here I made my obligatory search of the ancient hedge on the north side of Southleigh Road and almost immediately found an open flower on the **Lesser Periwinkle** plants in the hedge bottom.

Coming to the point where I turn off the Southleigh Road into Fourth Avenue I found a good section of the grass along the east side of Southleigh Road covered with upright small plants of **Sticky Mouse-ear** just starting to open the many flowers in their compact round flower-heads and on crossing the road to the west side found yet another flowering Lesser Celandine plant - the second seen today and I think my sixth for the month.

Just two more sites to visit before heading home - first was the peripheral hedge of the Havant Health Centre where the **var Oxyloma form of Greater Periwinkle** was in full flower and then the Eastern Road site where it crosses the underground Lavant Stream and where White Comfrey had been in flower on Nov 8 but not today.

[Fri 4 December](#)

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

## **A sunny morning brings my December wildflower total up to 94.**

This morning I rode into a strong headwind on the way to the Eastern Road roundabout close to Farlington Marshes main entrance and arrived there without spotting a single new wildflower for my list so I was very pleased to find eight new species in flower in the roadside rough grass between the roundabout and the nature reserve entrance. First came a plant of **Bladder Campion** with up to a dozen fresh white flowers waving in the wind. While looking at that I noticed at least two **Common Vetch** flowers at my feet and a few paces further on was a large clump of **Tufted Vetch** in full flower. Retracing my steps to the pedestrian crossing which gives safe passage to the north side of the busy round about for pedestrians and cyclists I found **Small Scabious** and **Red Valerian** in flower before I remounted my bike and allowed the wind to push me along the access road to the reserve entrance and in this section of the grass separating the access road from the slip road coming from the westbound A27 I found fresh **Hemp Agrimony**, **Hawkweed Oxtongue** and an almost defunct, but still bearing flowers, plant of **Spear Thistle**.

Nothing more until past the eastern entrance to the reserve where a faint hint of yellow caused me to get off the bike and discover that the colour came from unopen flower buds on a lone plant of **Yellow-wort** and by walking further along this section I found two flowers of **Blue Fleabane** (and noticed what I am pretty sure were several leaf rosettes of Pyramidal Orchid plants recharging their underground bulbs with winter sunshine).

Riding on to the roundabout at the end of Harts Farm Way I again dismounted and checked the roadside grass finding both **Common Storksbill** and **Wild Carrot**. From there I rode down to the west carpark and followed the seawall east to the slipway, en route seeing just one plant of **Golden Samphire** still bearing fresh flowers. Nothing more in the Broadmarsh area but a diversion down the Brockhampton Stream path gave me the **Turkish Tutsan** after which the base of the fence around the Apollo Fire Extinguisher factory gave me several small flowering plants of **Field Forget-me-not**. That brought the December list to a **total of 94** and a dull and windy forecast for tomorrow still makes it possible to reach the 100 mark along a route around Emsworth (possibly extending north to Havant Thicket if I have any strength left!)

I see from both Brian Fellows' blog and the **HOS sightings for today** that there were **9 Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle** and that a small flock of **29 Brent on Southsea Common had 7 juveniles among them**, while over in the Lymington area a **Snow Bunting** has apparently been at Setley Pond for at least two weeks without being reported before today. Also in the Lymington area the **Long-billed Dowitcher** was again seen in the Pennington area where it has been regularly reported since Sept 23.

Sussex news is of another late **Swallow** at Rye Harbour this morning and the arrival of what I think are the first **two redhead Smew** there (though they have been at Dungeness since Nov 12). In the West Dean Woods near Chichester there were still around **50 Bramblings** today (75 had been reported there on Nov

24 with another 80 at Wakehurst Place near Haywards Heath around that date). Yesterday a **Little Auk** was on the south Dorset coast in Studland Bay and another was at Flamborough Head in Yorkshire (on Dec 2 there were 21 at Anstruther, Fife in Scotland but the main passage of these birds is probably over). More locally there was a flock of **45 Avocet** between Farlington Marshes Lake and the Eastern Road bridge on Dec 2 and 33 had been reported thereabouts on Nov 26. Smaller flocks were there on Nov 2 and 4 but I think these are all passing by and have yet to settle there - maybe they are still heading for the Exe estuary where the flock numbered around 550 on Dec 1 and 2. News from Selsey is of an **unspecified Swift species** briefly in the Church Norton area today and of **two Black Brants** with the Brent at Chichester Marina yesterday. I think it **unlikely that the Swift was a Common Swift** - more likely to have been a **Pallid Swift** (during November one spent two days in Margate and there were other brief sightings in Norfolk and Glamorgan), another possibility is **Alpine Swift** of which one was in Cornwall on Oct 11.

## [Wed 2 December](#)

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

### **Eight more flowering plants for my December list.**

A short bike ride today added **Winter Heliotrope** but failed to find any Sea Campion on the Southmoor shore though that was made up for by finding several fresh blue flower buds on the **Bugloss** under the fencing of the industrial units at the south end of Southmoor Lane before I came back into Havant along Solent Road where earth around the Marks and Spencers building site still had **Common Ramping Fumitory** but had lost its Green Amaranth - to make up for that fresh **Lesser Swine Cress** had appeared there. Also added to the list on Wade Court Road was a lone **Creeping Buttercup** - **the count now stands at 78** but I have hopes of hitting 100 in the promised sunshine of Friday

## [Tue 1 December](#)

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

### **My first of the month wild flower search finds 70 species and I read of another Song Thrush singing near Chichester.**

I set out on foot this morning on my monthly search for wild plants in flower and came home some six hours later with a list of **70 species found while wandering round Havant, Langstone and Warblington**. To me the most exciting find was of **two wild rose bushes bearing several fresh flowers** at the very south-eastmost corner of the Warblington Farm Fields - if walking along the shore from Nore Barn towards Langstone one of these Rosebushes is behind the corner post of the field fence where you turn west after coming south from the wood, the second is only a few paces along the southern fence of the field seen from where you meet the first Tamarisk tree. Until a few years ago I used to find these December Roses on the Southmoors shore close to the mouth of the Langbrook stream but they vanished when a new bench for viewing the harbour was installed and a lot of the old rosebushes around the area were removed.

Another good find came at the start of my outing when I found **Grey Alder catkins** already open on the tree which overhangs the road entrance to the Prince George Street carpark near Havant rail station. Another surprise came by the Langbrook Stream just after emerging from the A27 underpass on my way south - on the bank of the stream **a tall healthy fresh plant of Meadow Sweet** had two flower heads ready to open into flower tempted me into breaking the rules and counting it as already flowering. Continuing south towards Langstone Pond I found the single flowering plant of **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** still flowering where I first spotted it on Nov 28 and went to to refind the **Bulbous Buttercups** still flowering in Russell's Field - I looked closely at one of these as the sepals under the flowers were not curved down as they should be but in other respects the plants looked good for Bulbous (big plants, big bright gold coloured flowers and big swollen stems looking like those of a stem of Waitrose's best salad Celery).

At Langstone Pond I had a close view of a **Kingfisher**, in the pony field north of the pond there were what seemed to be two female Wigeon among the Teal and Moorhens, and out on the mud I counted at least 32 Shelduck. On my way home in the afternoon there were at least 200 Brent on the largest of the Warblington arable fields with winter wheat already growing well. The fields west of the farm which had Cattle in them also had a mobile population of around 15 Little Egrets. Also noted when coming home via the bridge over the A27 was that the ditch beside the cul de sac road serving the Pook Lane pony stables had a new fifth site for flowering Lesser Celandines. Finally for today the field immediately behind Conigar Point still had its unique crop of **Dwarf Spurge** accompanied by Common Fumitory, Field Madder and Field Woundwort.

A brief scan of the internet this evening told me of **another Song Thrush being heard singing** today in the Runcton area near Chichester - maybe I will hear one again locally when I get out again tomorrow to see what another hopefully dry day can bring in the way of more flowers.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 23 - 29 (WEEK 48 OF 2015)**

### **Latest news from the internet including some fascinating fungi, more migrant moths, and local bird news .**

The gale force winds and gloomy skies did not tempt me out today but the internet had plenty of interesting sightings over the past few days to keep me in touch with the out doors.

At the Hayling Oysterbeds today at least one birder had a brief glimpse of a **Grey Phalarope**, probably the same bird that was showing well there yesterday. Today there was also a first winter **Iceland Gull** on the bar across the mouth of Stoke Bay immediately south of the Oysterbeds. Yesterday what I think was the first **Goldeneye** to appear off the Langstone - Warblington shore was seen (17 were reported seen from the Southmoors shore on Nov 27) and a female **Goosander** (maybe the bird that was at Langstone Millpond on Nov 9) was back on the sea there on Nov 27 and a male was at Pagham Hbr on Nov 29 after a male and female were seen together on the Thorney Deeps on Nov 24. Each winter I look forward to seeing 100 **Shelduck** on the Warblington shore and that day may not

be far off after hearing that 75 were at the Sidlesham Ferry pool today (Nov 29) though a count of 38 on the Warblington shore on Nov 28 was the highest count there so far. Two other local reports were of **9 Sandwich Tern** together near Black Point at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Nov 29 while from the Shoreham area comes news of **a lone juvenile Brent Goose** on the Wdewater Lagoon beside the A259 road below Lancing College - is it the only one on the South Coast? and where are its parents?

This evening Brian Fellows reports that an Emsworth garden has had a **Brambling** visiting it for two or three days - the photo of it shows a grey head indicating it is a youngster and its very unusual appearance in a garden before the weather turns cold suggests to me that it, like the Widewater Brent, has lost contact with its parents while migrating in the recent gales. I think there are larger than usual numbers of Brambling in southern Britain this early in the winter (157 were recorded passing up the Test valley north of Romsey on Nov 13 and another 75 were at West Dean in Sussex on Nov 24 and 80 were at Wakehurst, also in Sussex, on Nov 25) but maybe they have not yet decided where to settle as I was surprised to see that Portland had counts of 25 and 36 heading south out to sea on Nov 8 and 12. One other species seemingly starting to arrive in the UK in increasing numbers is **Waxwing** - on Nov 27 the RBA site gave a total of 15 birds in the UK but on Nov 28 that had increased to 28.

Turning to other migrant species I see that migrant moths are still getting across the channel. On Nov 28 there were 3 Rusty-Dot Pearl moths in the Portland traps - for details of the species see [Rusty-dot Pearl Moth](#). Finally for today I see that Graeme Lyons has been adding some unusual fungi to his 'All Species' personal list which is now nearing 6000 species. If you are interested in fungi see the entries for Oct 31, Nov 5 and Nov 20 at [Graeme Lyons blog](#)

**[Sat 28 November](#)**

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

### **Another November wild flower in Havant plus today's internet news.**

A sunny morning encouraged me to take a walk around Havant during which I found one plant of **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** in flower to bring my November species count up to 183. I also found **Celandines** flowering at two new locations, counted seven plants of **Bulbous Buttercup** in flower in Russell's Field (the footpath/ dog walking area just north of the Royal Oak at Langstone through which a public path connects the Billy trail to Langstone Mill). Also in that field I came on the third flowering plant of **Cow Parsley** that I have seen since Nov 16.

Back at home I was pleased to have confirmation that the distant **Song Thrush song** that I heard from my garden on Nov 26 was not imagined - on Nov 28 another bird was heard singing near the Pagham Harbour visitor centre. In my blog yesterday I said the last report of a Swallow was on Nov 23 and of a House Martin on Nov 22 - both have now been beaten by a **Swallow** at Sandwich on Nov 27 and **two House Martins** at Folkestone on Nov 28. Further afield the **Pacific Diver** which has spent several recent winters off Penzance in Cornwall made its first appearance for this winter there on Nov 26.

**Siberian Chiff Chaffs** can turn up almost anywhere and in case one re-appears at Brook Meadow in Emsworth there are several photos plus a video of one at Portland in Dorset which can be seen in the Portland website entry for Nov 26 - go to [Siberian Chiffchaff at Portland Castle](#).

Finally my blog entry for yesterday may have given the impression that the redhead **Smew** seen in Oxfordshire on Nov 26 was the first to be seen in Britain this winter. In fact the first I know of were two redheads on the Dungeness gravel pits on Nov 12 and by Nov 27 there were four there. On Nov 26 one turned up in Poole Harbour near Arne.

**[Fri 27 November](#)**

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

### **I discover new 'Going Birding' websites**

For some years I have relied on Derek Hale's personal website (<http://iowbirds.esy.es/IOW.htm>) for bird news from the Isle of Wight but when I visited it today I saw it now has a link saying "Click here for the **new 'Going birding in the Isle of Wight' website**". On clicking this link I discovered that the software created by Marek Walford (a keen birdwatcher educated at Brighton University and now working as a software developer for a firm based in Reading - see [Marek Walford's profile](#) for more detail) now provides a county based free website for reporting bird sightings in eight counties - not only Berks and Hants but now covering Bucks, Hereford, Oxford and the Isle of Wight (active since Nov 12). There are also websites for Cornwall and Scilly though they have not yet caught on with birders there. If, like me, you are a regular user of the Hampshire Going Birding site ([Going Birding in Hampshire](#)) you may not have noticed that there is a link to '**Going Birding Home**' at the very top of the 'Bird News' page and if you click this you can select the equivalent news for any of the other counties and this allowed me to discover from the Oxford site that a redhead **Smew** has already arrived there (on Nov 26 and still present on Nov 27) at the Sonning Eye gravel pits (near the River Thames just outside Reading). To checkout the Isle of Wight news see [IoW bird news](#)

Another discovery made yesterday on the RBA website was that there are now at least **15 Waxwings** somewhere in the UK - since Nov 5 they have been reported to RBA on 12 days with the peak count of 15 on Nov 24. Waxwings have not yet been reported from the south coast but on Nov 25 a possible sighting of **4 Glossy Ibis** was reported in Hampshire (only seen from a train in the Shawford area by the River Itchen south of Winchester). The only other Ibis sightings I am aware of this month have been in south Devon.

It now seems certain that our Dark Bellied Brent have had a very poor breeding season but that does not apply to the **Pale Bellied Brent** which breed in Canada and spend the winter in Ireland with a few overflying to the west coast of England. **On Nov 15 21 Pale Bellied birds arrived at Ferrybridge in the Weymouth/Portland area and 8 of the 21 were juveniles.** Then on Nov 25 **a family of two adults with three young turned up at Pagham** and photos taken by Alan Kitson show that the juveniles of this species not only have pale bars on their closed wings but also have varying degrees of the white neck collar that can be seen on adults, something to help distinguish them from the Dark Bellied juveniles which have all black necks. I am not sure how reliable this feature is as I can find no mention of it in the websites I have searched but it is clearly visible on juveniles in Alan Kitson's photos - see the juvenile at the right on the group in [Juvenile Pale Bellied Brent at Pagham](#)

To end this update I will mention that the first **Goldeneye** (a group of three) to be seen in Langstone Harbour this winter were seen there on Nov 26 (elsewhere on the south coast Goldeneye have been reported throughout November, initially at

the Blashford Lakes but also at Sandwich in Kent, Christchurch in Dorset, Hayle in Cornwall, Pagham in Sussex, Reculver in north Kent, Weir Wood and Pett Pools in East Sussex, Fishbourne Creek in West Sussex and the Lymington area of Hampshire. **Swallows** have been seen almost daily through November with the last so far being seen on Nov 23 at both Hill Head/Tichfield Haven and Abbotsbury in Dorset. I have only seen five reports of **House Martins** with the last at Folkestone on Nov 22. The last **Wheatears** that I know of were at Rye Harbour, Shoreham and Pagham Harbour, all on Nov 20 and I have only seen two reports of late **Lesser Whitethroats**, one at Falmouth in Cornwall on Nov 21, the other at Eastleigh sewage farm in Hampshire on Nov 22.

## **Thu 26 November**

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

### **Insects in November**

This morning I heard the **first Song Thrush song of the winter** coming from somewhere near my garden and later heard subsong from a Dunnock as a mixed group of Tits moved through the garden - a couple of days ago a similar Tit flock contained a Goldcrest as well as Great, Coal, Blue and Long-tailed Tits. Later today I spent time at my computer catching up with the latest reports of wildlife from the internet and below is a table of the latest dates at which various insect species have been reported.

Note 1: To see details about any species that you are not familiar with go to the British Dragonfly Society webpage (link given below), search for the relevant species name then click that name to go to the page showing the details of that species. Start by clicking the link to [Dragonfly species index](#)

Note 1: I do not record moth species in full but have picked out this **Silver Y** to show that migrant moths were still arriving in November.

Note 2: This **Red Admiral** arrived overnight in the Portland moth traps indicating that it was a migrant.

Note 3: This summer several **Long-tailed Blues** arrived as migrants in Sussex and bred here. This late record is of one of their offspring which are unlikely to survive the winter here. For more information on the species see [Long-tailed Blue](#)

Having spent some time today creating this format for showing late insect species I hope to use it again tomorrow to show the **latest news of departing migrant birds** and the arrival of winter visitors.

## **Mon 23 November**

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

### **Little Auks, Green Sandpiper, Short Eared Owls and Turkish Tutsan**

Reports of **storm driven Little Auks** remind me of past autumns when I read of people along the south coast finding dead and dying Auks in their back gardens and dumping them in their wheelie bins for the local council to bury in unmarked graves on their landfill sites. Once I myself found a dead bird in the Bells Copse area of Havant Thicket with injuries suggesting that it had been speared by the sharp end of a broken branch as it flew through the trees, probably in the dark when flying low to avoid the brunt of the high winds. A better memory is of finding one resting on the sheltered water of the IBM Lake in Portsmouth.

These memories were stirred when Brian Fellows recently reported that a Kite Surfer off the south coast of Hayling had seen one on the sea there in Nov 15 and a search of the internet yesterday showed that **the past week has brought another storm driven surge of these birds to waters around Britain**, the great majority of

the birds having been seen on the north east coast but with a few seen in southern England or the north coast of France. The magnitude of the surge was best seen on the RBA website which listed total numbers reported to them from all over the UK, while the Trektellen website gave totals from individual sites reporting to Trektellen. **Nov 21 was clearly the peak day of this event** with RBA reporting a UK total of 3601 birds compared to the next highest day total of 62 birds on Nov 20. Trektellen had a peak count of 584 from Craster in Northumberland among 22 reports, 8 of them from northern England. Also on Nov 21 Sandwich in Kent reported 9 birds, Lulworth in Devon had a single bird and across the Channel in France Cap Gris Nez had 2, Dunkerque had 5, Gatteville had 11 and Le Clipon had 6.

One report which reminded me of past 'back garden' sightings came from Devon on Nov 19 and read ... "Just had a call from Robin Khan. He spotted a small black and white bird by the side of the roundabout at Clyst St Mary around midday. He stopped the car and went back to the bird which was still alive and turned out to be a Little Auk!! It seemed healthy so he took it to Exmouth where released and flew out to sea unharmed. So hopefully this casualty of the storms will survive!."

Another bird rescue story came in the recent Radio News and was of a **Short Eared Owl found exhausted on a North Sea oil rig and taken by helicopter to a bird rescue center in Scotland** - mention of this species reminds me that a couple of days ago I had a phone call reporting a sighting of a Short Eared Owl hunting over the Langstone South Moors and today, when I took a late afternoon walk along the South Moors shore, I found a birder with a telescope trained on the spot where he had seen one of these owls plunge into the grass - he told me he had had excellent views of one there yesterday so it seems that at least one has been hunting the moors for three days in succession.

My own sightings today were limited to a noisy **Green Sandpiper** flying south following the Lymbourne Stream when I was in the Lymbourne sping area and as darkness was falling seeing **Turkish Tutsan** still flowering beside the Brockhampton Stream where it had been planted in an informal garden alongside where a small sailing ship had been berthed before it was swept out to sea some 20 years ago!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 16 - 22 (WEEK 47 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 20 November**

#### **My November flowering plant list reaches the proud Dart's Player's target of 180.**

This afternoon **a new section of cycleway running along the south side of the railway from the new housing just south of the New Lane level crossing to Warblington School just south of the level crossing at Warblington Station was to be opened at 2:30pm** (presumably timed for the end of the school day to allow children needing to get from the school back to homes in Havant without having to use the busy main road from Emsworth into Havant). As I might on occasions find this to be useful and not knowing where it would emerge at the New Lane

end I decided to make Nore Barn area my target for an afternoon visit and to come home via the Warblington Shool area some time after the scheduled opening of the cycleway.

I set out along the usual road route towards Emsworth and, on reaching Selangor Avenue, turned south onto the footpath leading to Nore Barn where I left my bike and walked west along the 'Church Path' to the entrance of **the field immediately west of Nore Barn** (Field W on my map of Warblington Farm at [Warblington Farm Map](#)). In this field I followed the northern and eastern hedges down to the pond from which the eastern stream of the farm exits under the seawall into the creek running along the south of Nore Barn Wood. As soon as I reached the edge of the pond I had a big surprise in finding **a single plant of Common Centaury covered with red flower buds** (which would no doubt have been open were there to be enough sunshine to arouse them). Crossing the field to its western hedge I found two fungi in the grass - one was the common **Yellow Fieldcap (*Bolbitius vitellinus*)** which grows in cowpats, the other was larger and looked similar to the Fairy Ring Champignon (*Marasmius oreades*) in forming a large ring in the grass but which was clearly a different species which I could not name on the spot so I gathered a specimen to take home. With the aid of my books I soon named it as ***Clitocybe rivulosa*** which is a poisonous species. I found a photo on the internet which you can see below - to help you recognize and avoid this species it measured about 5cm across the cap and had a short stem (less the 30mm long and 6mm wide), with decurrent pale brown gills and an overall sickly whitish look.

An image of *Clitocybe rivulosa*

Next I retrieved my bike and rode to the shore to have a look at **Field V behind Conigar Point**. The wheat crop in this field was cut some time ago, long enough for the interesting weeds that grow in it to come to maturity. Clambering in through the gap in the hedge the first thing I saw was fresh **Field Woundwort** in flower at the edge of the cultivated area immediately in front of me. From this entrance I walked across the field to its northwest corner finding masses of **Field Madder** in fresh flower and plenty of plants of this field's speciality, **Dwarf Spurge**. This was not in flower but had unopen flower buds to qualify for my November flowering list (which now numbers 180 species after today's four additions). It could be mistaken for the **Common Fumitory** that was also present and which did have open flowers but to give a clue to what to look for I collected a specimen of the Dwarf Spurge and show two photos of it below - the first shows the mass of leaves which is what you see as you approach the plants which form small bushes some 20cm tall (note that my specimen is only a small fraction of the complete plant) and my second photo is of a single strand taken from the complex mass to illustrate the shape of the individual leaves. The Hants Flora says the species is locally common but the distribution map shows that it grows where there is a mass of chalky soil in the arable fields of the northern half of the county - I have not seen it anywhere else in the Havant area other than this one field.

Samples of Dwarf Spurge

On my way home I followed the broad path along the north edge of Nore Barn Wood and, close to the spot where the Hairy Garlic once grew in the northern

hedgerow, I found **Cow Parsley** in full flower. Following the roads up to the main A259 I was pleased to see that the promise on improving the cycle lanes (which had seemingly been limited to the northern side of the road west of Selangor Avenue) is now being extended, as originally promised, into the centre of Emsworth. The whole road has been re-surfaced to its edges, temporarily removing the cycle lane markings and making it rather dangerous for cyclists to use the road so I stuck to the footpath along the southern side of the road!

**Thu 19 November**

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

### **Yesterday's unidentified fungus now has a name**

I finished yesterday's entry by mentioning a fungus found in Langstone Mill Lane which I had been unable to identify but which I now feel confident is **Cortinarius causticus** as shown in the following photo from the internet.

An image of *Cortinarius causticus*

A distinctive feature of those that I found in Mill Lane was the shape of the cap which measured 5cm across - from the rim it sloped up, then levelled out, and finally had a large central hump (which mycologists call an 'Umbo'). The next thing I noticed was the cap colour which was off white with undertones of yellow - when cut to reveal the flesh within the cap I found that was thin and yellow while the gills were brown of a deeper tone than shown in this photo. The stem was straight, narrow and white with no ring - it measured 5 cm. Last night I cut off the stem so that I could lay the cap on a sheet of paper to obtain a spore print and this morning there was a good deposit of rust brown spores on the paper.

My books give the season as autumn and the habitat as deciduous and coniferous woodland which agrees with where I found the fungus beside the short path leading from the east end of Mill Lane to the main road just north of the crossing to Langstone High Street. Stefan Buczacki, in his Collins Guide to Fungi, says that the species is often found in troops or tufts and when I gathered a specimen to take home I found I had a tuft of three whose stems all grew from the same spot.

Two other things omitted from yesterday's entry were that the **Swan family of five cygnets and their parents** were again off Langstone Pond and that when in Mill Lane I found a mass of the tiny white flowers of **Stone Parsley** on regrowth of the stumps of some of these plants which had been cut down.

**In view of the almost total absence of any juveniles among the Brent Geese** along the English Channel this winter I was excited to see that on Nov 15 the Portland website told us that there were **21 Pale-bellied Brent** at Ferrybridge and posted a photo showing that **at least 8 of them were juveniles**. A couple of other reports from Portland (on Nov 12 and 16) were also of interest in showing that the vast flocks of **Woodpigeons** that we see each autumn apparently flying around in circles with no known origin and no destination do sometimes fly south across the Channel along with significant numbers of passerines which seem to spend their autumns flying east and west, again with no evidence of heading south (though it is clear that many of them do reach us from the continent). **On Nov 12 Portland reported the following as heading south:-** 7000 Wood Pigeons, 627 Goldfinch, 461 Chaffinch, 260 Starlings, 71 Meadow Pipits, 42 Linnets and 36 Bramblings. On Nov 13 another 8000 Wood Pigeons flew south (but some 5000 chickened out

and flew back north). On Nov 16 25000 Wood Pigeons flew south and if you have 2 minutes to spare you can watch a procession of 'dots in the sky' at [Wood Pigeons leaving Portland Bill](#). With them went 750 Goldfinch, 300 Chaffinch and 2 Bramblings.

Also at Portland a **Red Admiral** arrived in the Observatory moth traps during the night of Nov 16/17. Other insect news is that at least one **Wasp** flew out of my garden nest this morning (Nov 19) while **four Hornets** were seen around their nest in the Itchen Valley Country Park yesterday (Nov 18). Other late insect sightings have been a **Long-tailed Blue** on Brighton racecourse on Nov 11, a **Painted Lady** in a Ryde garden on Nov 10 and a **Humming-bird Hawkmoth** in the Brighton area on Nov 8. **Latest dragonfly sightings** have been Common Darters in Gloucestershire on Nov 16, a Southern Hawker in Cornwall on Nov 16, a Common Hawker on the Isle of Arran on Nov 14 and a Migrant Hawker in Norfolk on Nov 11.

Finally my sighting of **Brent on the West Hayling fields** on Nov 13 prompted Chris Oakley to tell me that he saw hundreds on the arable fields between Bosham and Nutbourne while driving back from Chichester on Nov 14.

### [Wed 18 November](#)

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

#### **My first Lesser Celandine flower**

A dry morning allowed me to repeat yesterday's walk, this time with a camera to show you the impressive Salvia plant that I found. First I checked out the **Lesser Celandine** site in Juniper Square and discovered that there were now two flowers open.

#### Celandine flowers in Juniper Square

Across the A27, in Rectory Road, I started by taking a couple of photos of **the garden of number 21, where the exotic Salvia grows, which I described yesterday as having interesting plants but showing no signs of tidy gardening**. From a distance the small garden is hidden behind an untrimmed hedge of **Wilson's Honeysuckle (Lonicera nitida)** with a **flowering plant of Borage** seemingly growing from the pavement at the road end of this hedge. A closer view, looking into the garden, shows the Salvia plant as the centrepiece of this seemingly totally neglected area

#### The garden of 21 Rectory Road

I could not reach the Salvia plant to measure the length of its flowers but estimated that the fully open specimen in my picture below measured 4 or 5 cm long. To complete the scene I also took a photo of the Borage plant.

#### Close ups of the Salvia and Borage plants

From Rectory Road I headed for the Langbrook Stream via the Langstone Technology Centre approach road and then turned south along the streamside path. A few yards downstream from the road I took a photo of the **Yellow-flowered Strawberry fruit** with one unopen flower bud and when I reached the South Moors I took another of the **Tufted Forget-me-not** still flowering in the stream running down the centre of the Moors to the Tamarisk Pool near the mouth of the Langbrook Stream. Between these two points there was nothing else still flowering and later, walking along the shore, the gale force wind would not allow me to stand still enough to use the camera!

Yellow-flowered Strawberry fruit and Tufted Forget-me-not flowers  
Walking back along the shore I found a single **Parasol Mushroom** sheltering from the gale in a ditch on the landward side of the seawall near the mouth of the Langbrook Stream and a little further on I found **Sea Campion** flowering on the shingle - this, and the Tufted Forget-me-not, were both new to my November list bringing the total to 176 species. Crossing the Langbrook to come home via Mill Lane I saw my first **Velvet Shank fungi** on the tree which overhangs the stream a little down from the bridge, and at the other end of Mill Lane, close to the main road I came on another cluster of fungi which I have so far failed to identify. Finally, back at home, the **Wasp nest** in my garden which has been quietly active since the summer is still managing to send out one or two Wasps when it is not raining.

[Tue 17 November](#)

### **My first Lesser Celandine flower**

This morning a brief pause in the wind and rain allowed me out of the house for a brief walk to buy Christmas cards from the Havant Arts Centre but I decided to extend my walk to visit Juniper Square where I had recently seen a lot of **fresh growth among the Lesser Celandine plants** which thrive on the east side of the peripheral road which has no houses fronting onto it (only the back entrances to some houses in Orchard Road). The Celandines grow on an earth bank at the southern end of this road before it turns to run west towards South Street and today a search of this bank found **a single fresh Celandine flower** growing under the shelter of a bramble.

Having found this flower I went on over the A27 to Southbrook Road to see if any flowers were showing in my traditional spot for finding the first Celandine of previous winters on the bank of the Lymbourne Stream where the warm water (which has not long emerged from underground warmth at the Lymbourne Spring) enables them to flower earlier than other local plants. When I got there I had difficulty in finding a single Celandine plant but en route, in a garden on Rectory Road (the short road connecting the A27 overpass to Southbrook Road) which has a collection of unusual plants and little attempt at tidy gardening there was a new and **impressive cluster of plants which I believe to be exotic Salvias** standing the best part of a metre tall and bearing long, deep blue, flowers. A search of the internet suggests that these are one of many cultivars of **Meadow Clary (Salvia pratensis)** which, in its wild state, is described by Fitter and Fitter as "**one of our most gorgeous wild flowers**". As these plants are now in full flower I assume they are not *Salvia pratensis* but a similar plant imported from the southern hemisphere. When we get another break in the weather I must take my camera to record these plants.

Also seen today was a healthy flowering plant of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** which I was surprised to find was not already on my November list and which, with the Celandine, brought the current total to 174 species.

Yesterday (Nov 16) while cycling home from Warblington, a single **Comma butterfly** flew across my path to possibly become my last butterfly of the year - a fresh Comma is the last species to be reported from Sussex (seen near Lewes on Nov 12 with a Red Admiral being seen at Selsey on the same day), while the Isle of Wight had a Painted Lady in a Ryde garden on Nov 10. Perhaps more

surprising is that Portland Bill recorded **11 individual migrant moths of 4 species still arriving on the night of Nov 11.**

**Mon 16 November**

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

**A bright yellow toadstool that I've never seen before and both Cow Parsley and Fool's Parsley to add to my November list**

Today was forecast to be dry and with a moderate wind so I decided to do my monthly cemeteries round, starting with Warblington Cemetery in the morning. The first surprise of the day came as I was passing the Warblington Farm barns at the southern end of Church Lane where a single plant of **Cow Parsley was in full flower** and within the cemetery was another surprise called **Nostoc commune - a strange blue-green alga containing cyanobacteria to which we owe our ability to live on this planet thanks to their role, some 2.8 billion years ago, in providing the planet with an atmosphere containing oxygen.** Later in the day I also found this alga at the Havant cemetery where it demonstrated why it is sometimes called 'Witches Butter'. In both locations it appeared to be growing on a stone base on which it will have mysteriously appeared 'out of thin air'. Here are my two photos showing a 'dry' form at Warblington and a 'wet' form at Havant

Nostoc commune at Warblington and Havant cemeteries

To get a better idea of this species read the following web page written by an organisation offering to eradicate this unwanted species from your garden - that's gratitude for a species that made life on earth possible!. Go to [Blue-green Algae](#) While at the Havant Cemetery I also came on **a bright yellow fungus** which I have never come across before though it is said to be common. I believe it to be **Hygrocybe quieta** and here is my photo of one of the specimens found in the grass of the St Faith's section.

Hygrocybe quieta in Havant cemetery

The **Fool's Parsley** mentioned in today's heading was found at the end of the day when walking home through Havant and brought my November flowering plant total to 172.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 9 - 15 (WEEK 46 OF 2015)**

**Fri 13 November**

**I struggle against the wind and the curse of Friday the 13th to find 10 more flowering plant species on South Hayling**

The weather forecast for today was for heavy rain during the morning followed by a dry afternoon with a strong westerly wind so I did not set off for south Hayling until after an early lunch when the sun was shining but even in Havant the headwind as I rode down the Billy Track kept me in a low gear. Crossing Langstone Bridge I was seriously concerned that any sudden gust of even stronger wind could blow me off the cycleway into the traffic - luckily I survived but had to struggle with the wind all the way down the Hayling Coastle Path. South of the Oysterbeds the windsurfers were achieving 'personal best' high speed runs when the wind was behind them.

**On the West Lane fields what seemed like 1000 Brent were on the young wheat crop.** This is the first time I have seen Brent on the fields and I cannot find any reports of them coming ashore to feed on crops but I'm pretty sure today's birds were not the first to do so. As an aside I was wondering what stage of

development the crop had reached and got a more comprehensive response than I had expected when I asked Google to tell me what stages of growth were recognised by agricultural experts - have a look at the table of numbered stages to be found after the brief introduction on the following webpage at [Stages of Wheat growth](#).

On reaching south Hayling I continued my struggle into the wind along Ferry Road to check if the **Bell Heather** was still flowering on the Golf Course opposite the Kench and to my surprise some plants were still in flower. While stopped I also found **Sea Radish** and **Autumn Hawkbit** flowering in the roadside grass. At the harbour entrance I could find nothing new so I turned back and nearing the end of the Kench shoreline I stopped to investigate a half-hidden yellow flowered plant which I could not name so I collected a leaf and a flowering shoot which had both incipient seed pods and at least one flower - back at home I convinced myself that the plant was **Rape!**

I rode on to the Golf Club entrance where I turned south outside the golf club fence to make an unexpected find in the shape of at least one flower on **Butcher's Broom** before I came to the expected **Pale Toadflax** at the south east corner of the mini-golf course. From here I rode on til I was south of Staunton Avenue but instead of turning north I continued east along the common and was rewarded with flowers on **Tamarisk** (which turned out to be new for the month). A few yards further on I had a totally unexpected find well outside a garden of several **Blue Globe Thistles (Echinops bannaticus)** which you will probably recognize in the photo below (taken from the internet).

#### Blue Globe Thistle (Echinops bannaticus)

Just one more flower for the list was the **Cocks Eggs (Salpichroa oranifolia)** before the relatively easy ride home with the wind behind me. There, after a much needed rest, I updated my spreadsheet to show a total of **170 plants for November** and am now ready to put the results online.

#### Thu 12 November

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

#### One more wild flower found in Havant

A short walk around Havant after lunch today discovered that the miniscule flowerhead which I had found on Nov1 in the gravel drive of a house opening onto Prince George St, which at the time seemed likely to be **Common Corn Salad (Valerianella carinata)**, had grown into a full-sized plant and justified inclusion in my November list. Later, close to the Langstone roundabout I also found **Spotted Medick** with flowers, bringing my November count to 160. The photos below are not mine but are taken from the internet.

#### Common Cornsalad and Spotted Medick

On my way home I came up Town Hall Road and had a brief look for the **Black Redstart** which Martin Hampton saw there a couple of days ago with no expectation of seeing it. So far this month I have seen 13 South Coast reports of Black Redstart, several of them being combined sightings from several locations on the same day (e.g. on Oct 31 when a major influx occurred the Dorset County website gave me a single report including 27 birds seen at 8 sites of which Portland Bill with 14 birds was just one). Looking through these reports the great majority seem to be of birds that have not yet settled down for the winter and have

only been seen once at the reported site - the exceptions being Portland Castle, the Meon shore chalets at Titchfield Haven, and Medmerry near Selsey Bill, at all of which one or more birds have been seen on more than one day. I guess the things which attract the birds to stay are a good supply of food (they eat insects, spiders, worms, berries and seeds), shelter from winter weather, and lack of disturbance - while the complex of buildings at the Old Town Hall site may offer shelter it has little in the way of food and is subject to continuous human disturbance. Of course these are not the only factors determining where the birds settle - one other factor must be population size (i.e. competition for sites), another must be the weather, and I guess this was a factor in the years between 1972 and 1988 when these birds bred regularly at several of the forts on Portsdown.

Also today the post brought me the latest HOS Kingfisher magazine which had a very interesting article by Alan Cox on [how birds navigate on migration](#). Alan wrote about the contribution of a German called Wolfgang Wiltschko (and his wife Roswitha) over 50+ years to what now seems to be the answer to this question - [they have eyes which can 'see' the earth's magnetic field using an aspect of quantum physics](#). Alan sums this up by saying ... "Bird migratory sense appears to be an exquisite genetic adaptation combining elaborate photochemistry with quantum physics."

I first came across the possibility that quantum physics might be involved in a BBC TV programme presented by Jim Alkalili last summer and a search of the internet today came up with the following as the clearest (to me) explanation of what's involved - see [How birds navigate their migratory journeys using quantum mechanics](#)

Brian Fellows latest blog entry (dated Nov 11) told me something that I was not aware of, that [Japanese Honeysuckle](#) has jet black berries at this time of year but his photo of them illustrates the way that I separate this species from the native Honeysuckle and its 'garden centre' variants. In the garden varieties the flowers are all based in one terminal cluster whereas in Japanese Honeysuckle the flowers are arranged singly in the leaf axils on either side of the stem. In addition to the normal 'climber' type plants [the genus Lonicera also contains a couple of very common species used for hedging rather than flowering](#) (search Google for 'Lonicera nitida images' and 'Lonicera pileata images') and there is one more species ([Tartarian Honeysuckle](#)) which is found on Hayling Island and which I often mention in the summer months when its delicate pink flowers can be seen on the west side of the road leading to the Sinah Gravel Pit lake at its junction with Ferry Road - this may be the only specimen growing wild in Hampshire as the species is described in the Hants Flora as very rare and its discovery in 1990 is ascribed to Dick Barrett with whom I once worked at IBM

Tartarian Honeysuckle flowers in summer

**[Tue 10 November](#)**

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

**[Havant Thicket brings my November wild flower list to 159 species](#)**

While making my breakfast this morning the door bell rang and I found Martin Hampton on the doorstep wanting to tell me that as he walked up Town Hall Road beside the Spring Arts centre he had just seen a [Black Redstart](#) on the roof of the Old Town Hall. Needless to say I got down there as quickly as possible but, not

unsurprisingly, did not see the bird. Another bird that I did not see yesterday, but have a better chance of seeing in the near future, is a **female Goosander** which Peter Raby photographed on Langstone Pond yesterday.

This morning the strong southerly wind pushed me uphill through Leigh Park to Havant Thicket after a brief pause at Havant Health Centre to collect a repeat prescription for Eye Drops which I have to use since having a detached retina repaired back in 2001 - at the Health Centre I also collected my first **Sun Spurge** tick for the month. My next find was not a plant but a large cluster of **Giant Funnel (Leucopaxillus giganteus) fungi** which can be seen in the grass on the east side of the Petersfield Road just north of its junction with Wakefords Way. The photo below is from the internet and only gives a rough impression of what I saw in open grassland with a similar number of fungi, each with a cap some 30cm across and on stems around 40 cm high.

#### Giant Funnel fungi

In Havant Thicket, at the foot of Horsefoot Hill, I found **Wood Sage, Devil's Bit Scabious** and **Dwarf Gorse** still in flower (but at the very end of their flowering) and as I worked my way up the hill I managed to find one or two plants of **Golden Rod** which had not gone to seed. Stopping to check these I found **one plant of a Hawkweed species** which had relatively fresh flowers so I collected a stem which had no flowers but whose leafiness and hairiness allowed me to say, when back at home, that it belong to **the Subaudea group of this complex tribe of plants**. Continuing my circuit around the Thicket I could not find a single example of the common Ling heather that was still flowering but I did find **Tormentil** still in fresh flower. Heading home I had left the Thicket and was walking up the steep slope into Leigh Park Gardens when I had a bonus in finding **Germander Speedwell** starting to reflower as if this was spring. A little further on, in the Cedar Drive area, **I kept my eyes open for the 5 cm long 'furry catkins' that I found on the ground here in early December last year**. On that occasion the ground was covered with them but I had no idea where they came from and I had to seek help from Martin Rand who referred me to a tree specialist to learn that these were the **male flowers of the Cedar of Lebanon** and that late autumn was their 'breeding season'. Today I found just a few and have also found a photo on the internet which I believe shows the male catkin on the right and a tiny female flower on the left - in due time the female will grow into the substantial cone shown in the second photo

Cedar of Lebanon flowers and cones

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 2 - 8 (WEEK 45 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 8 November**

#### **A dozen more flowering plants for November**

Yesterday afternoon the clouds parted and the sun came out so despite the continuing strong wind I walked down to Langstone to see if the **Winter Heliotrope** which Brian Fellows had found starting to flower in Emsworth on Nov 6 was also flowering beside Wade Lane outside Wade Court. I have been keeping an eye on

that site as the first flowers normally appear there in early November but, in my experience, they never come up until we have had the first frost. This year that rule was broken both here and in Emsworth when I found a single flowerhead though none of the flowers that I saw were fully open - today I put that right when I found another single flower head among the array of leaves lining the east side of 'Rusty Cutter' roundabout where the A3M joins the A27. Going back to yesterday's outing I walked home up Pook Lane from the shore in the hope of finding **Dog's Mercury** in flower and surprised myself by finding one fresh young plant with fully extended male catkins and surrounded by three or four more young plants with catkins starting to be detectable.

Today, with cloudy skies and a fresh southerly wind, I pushed my luck by getting on my bike and heading for Farlington Church, then walking the bike up the steep side of Portsdown to meet the Portsdown Hill Road outside Fort Purbrook. Before reaching Farlington I found a mass of the white-flowered **Potato Vine (*Solanum jasminoides*)** in full flower in Bedhampton. Admittedly this is a garden plant but, once planted, it takes control and grows over any garden fence to qualify for a tick in my list of wild flowers, besides which it is a member of the Nightshade family and has many genuinely wild relatives. I have already mentioned the Winter Heliotrope I found when leaving Bedhampton and when still negotiating the cycleway round the north of the big roundabout I added **Musk Mallow** to my list.

Nothing else went on my list until I was well up the steep slope of Portsdown where the road cuts through the large underground reservoirs of the Portsmouth Water Company. Here **Marjoram, Field Scabious, Burnet Saxifrage, Ploughman's Spikenard** and one small plant of **Small-flowered Cranesbill** were still flourishing before I crossed the Portsdown Hill Road to have a look round the short cul-de-sac road giving access to the hill top Golf Course. Here I found plenty of **Eyebright** but nothing else new before I continued up the Hill Road in the hope of seeing the Lesser Periwinkle I found at this time last year under the hedge bordering the Hoylake Road area. Failing to see either leaves or flowers of this plant I started the easy downhill ride back to Bedhampton and around the north of Havant to the Havant Health Centre, under the southern hedge of which the **Oxyloba variant of Greater Periwinkle** flowers almost year round and I was not disappointed today.

Thinking I would find nothing else new for my list I rode on homewards down Leigh Road and then along Eastern Road towards the New Lane level crossing but, as I was about to cross the underground channel of the Lavant Stream which makes its subterranean way through the town centre to join the Langbrook Stream, I was stopped in my tracks by the sight of **White Comfrey** in full flower on just one of a series of these plants growing on the north side of the road where a driveway goes north to some houses. These plants were the first to flower this year but now just one was flowering. This **brought my November list up to a round 150** but I still have to visit Havant Thicket.....

## **Fri 6 November**

### **Fungi enjoying rain on my lawn**

My lawn currently has **eight species of fungi** and so, despite the light rain, I took my camera into the garden this morning to record what was there and to

demonstrate my reward for leaving my lawn for some 50 years undamaged by the chemical treatments which most gardeners think to be essential for producing a good crop of (to me) totally uninteresting grass.

Perhaps the commonest and most easily recognizable species, now that the season for **Blackening Waxcap** is over, is the **Parrot Waxcap**, named for its green and yellow colouration, and I have started with this as the one you are probably most likely to see. Next I have chosen the **Meadow Waxcap** whose colour picks it out from the others.

#### Parrot and Meadow Waxcaps

The next two are also reasonably large with caps around 5cm across and the white colour of the first - **Snowy Waxcap** - stands out at a distance. The second - the **Herald of Winter** - is less easily spotted but a close view shows that its grey brown is partially camouflaged by a thick coating of sticky slime.

#### Snowy Waxcap and The Herald of Winter

The next two would be easily overlooked for their small size (usually no more than 3cm tall) and their total non-conformity to a 'mushroom like' shape. The first, **Trichoglossum hirsutum**, is sometimes called an **Earth Tongue while the second looks more like a colourful small yellow worm**. The traditional mushroom fulfils its purpose in life by dropping its spores from a height which should allow the wind to carry those spores to distant places where they can generate a new underground fungus plant to exchange (via their roots) the minerals it can extract from the soil with the sugars created by photosynthesis in above ground plants. The 'non mushroom like' fungi 'shoot' their spores out into the air using a complex mechanism that can be simplistically likened to a highwayman's pistol but the fungus world has many other ways of dispersing its spores, among them attracting insects to what smells like a rotting corpse and palsterring them with a sticky 'spore mixture' when they land on the 'corpse'. A sophisticated application of mechanical principles is used by the Bird's Nest Fungus which creates bundles of spores (simulating bird's eggs) in the bottom of a bowl shaped structure (the nest) whose design is such that a raindrop striking the inner edge of the nest will run down the side and under the eggs, propelling one or more of them high into the air - what's more, to prevent the ejection of unripe spores each 'egg' is attached to the nest by an elastic thread which will pull an unripe egg back into the nest but will snap to release ripe spores.

#### Earth Tongue (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*) and *Clavulinopsis helvola*

My last two fungi are called White Spindles (another 'worm') and *Mycena fibula* a tiny but very common species of the mushroom type.

#### White Spindles (*Clavaria vermicularis*) and *Mycena fibula*

While out on the lawn I thought I would check out a **Holly bush** to see if it, like one I saw on Nov 1, was already showing flowers. Sure enough I did find one cluster of flowers and as with the first one it was on a stem which had recently been cut back.

An early Holly flower

Turning to a different subject possibly connected with a fungus I was recently listening to the 'Costing the Earth' programme on BBC Radio 4 and heard of yet **another tree killing disease** that has recently reached Europe from South America and **which threatens to destroy the Olive Trees** which supply our Olive Oil and provide an income for a huge number of farmers in the Mediterranean region. If you are interested in this have a look at [Disease killing Olive Trees](#)

**[Wed 4 November](#)**

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

**My November flowering plant list now up to 134 and reports show 16 Dragonfly species on the wing in October**

After the good weather on Nov 1st which gave me a list of 110 flowering plants in the Havant area we still have not been driven to take cover by the strong winds and heavy rain forecast for November though there is now only one significant habitat (Portsdown) left to give any significant boost to my flower list and I doubt I will feel like exploring that in the increasingly wet and windy weather. **Today's outing** was to the Bedhampton, Broadmarsh and Budds Farm area during which I found 16 more plants for the list, including **Hybrid Water Speedwell** in the Water Works overflow channel with fresh **Teasel** flowers and **Spear Thistle** nearby, **Golden Samphire** and **Black Mustard** on the Broadmarsh shore, both **White and Ribbed Melilot** plus **Perforate St John's Wort** where Harts Farm Way ends at the A27 interchange, and the remnants of flowering **Bugloss** by Southmoor Lane - these, plus a few omitted as not very exciting, brought my **total for this month to 134**.

Before November is out I expect to add Winter Heliotrope and Dog's Mercury to the list but I doubt the total will exceed 145 and it is of some interest to me to compare that figure with my totals for the preceding months of this year which have been:-

Feb 47  
Mar 74  
Apr 148  
May 222  
June 289  
July 267  
Aug 276  
Sep 233  
Oct 184

While trying to complete my records for October I found I had not got round to looking at the British Dragonfly Society website reports for the month and it may be of general interest to list the **last dates on which dragonfly species were seen**.

Oct 2 - Emerald Damsel, Beautiful Demoiselle and Gold Ringed - all in Cornwall

Oct 4 - Yellow Winged Darter at Dungeness and Azure Damsel in Lancashire

Oct 6 - Emperor in Nottinghamshire

Oct 8 - Black Darter in Norfolk

Oct 13 - Vagrant Emperor in Devon

Oct 20 - Willow Emerald Damsel in Norfolk

Oct 25 - Southern Hawker in Lancashire

Oct 28 - Red Veined Darter, Common Darter and Common Blue Damsel all in Hampshire

Oct 28 - Migrant Hawker in West Midlands

These are not necessarily the last sightings for the year - if you go to <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/latest-sightings> you will see that six species had been reported in November as I write this. Further, if you are unfamiliar with the names of some species reported, you can discover what they look like and other info (such as when they first appeared in the UK) by visiting <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/uk-species>. This page lists the species and by clicking a species name you will see the full info for that species.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 26 - NOV 1 (WEEK 44 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 1 November**

#### **A good start to November with 110 flowering plants and my first Fieldfare**

This morning's mist soon cleared and did not hamper my walk around Havant in search of wildflowers of which I found 91 before lunch as well as hearing the 'chack, chacking' of **a Fieldfare in the tall trees of Havant cemetery**. I also heard the **songs of Dunnock and Wren as well as the ubiquitous Robins**. After lunch I got on my bike to enjoy the warm sunshine as I cycled past Farlington Marshes to the Eastern Road entrance, adding another 19 flowering plants to give **a total of 110 species for the day**.

During the morning I also came on **a fungus which I cannot recall ever seeing before**. I found it when walking east along the north pavement of Southbrook Road in Langstone, shortly after turning into Southbrook from the main Langstone Road. I had already seen several fresh Honey Fungus, and several masses of very small dark capped 'bonnet Mycena' type fungi, in the roadside grass when I came on a group of about five **smallish fungi (flat cap about 5 cm across and stems about 40 by 4 mm) with striking orange red caps, off white stems and dark brown, crowded, gills**. After searching my books and the internet I cannot name them confidently and the nearest I can get is *Cortinarius sanguineus* which fits the look of the cap but not the gills or stem. Another mystery find of the morning was a tiny flowering plant growing in the gravel drive on the east side of Prince George St in Havant - it seems to be **Common Corn-Salad** and I have counted it in my list though it should be flowering in June rather than November and should be noticeably larger in size. Just before finding that, walking along the north side of Waterloo Road opposite the public car park in Prince George St, I checked the regular site where I expect to find Common Whitlowgrass after Christmas and found many of these distinctive plants confidently identifiable by their leaf rosettes looking as if they may flower before Christmas this year (they were not included in today's total!).

Among today's flowering plants were several that deserve a mention for being unexpected. The first of these was a **Holly Tree which had several clusters of its**

tiny white flowers already out among its red berries; another was to find one **Buddleia bush still bearing new fresh flowers**; the next was to find a tall plant of **Water Figwort with fresh flowers** by the Langbrook stream; then came the **Musk Storksbill** growing outside Pemberley House alongside Langstone Road just south of the north entrance to Southbrook Road (a little south of the Langstone Technology Park entrance on the other side of the road). Heading across the Billy Line towards Langstone Mill the large grass field which borders the Lymbourne Stream had a scattering of large Buttercup plants in flower and I assume they were the **Bulbous Buttercups** that abound here in the spring - before that, while still among the Langstone 'new' housing, I was surprised to find an **Opium Poppy** just opening a fresh flower.

My afternoon ride brought me more unexpected flowers. **Gorse, Blue Fleabane and Yellow-wort** were expected and found but at the carparking area near the Eastern Road **Tufted Vetch, Bladder Campion, Wild Celery, Hemp Agrimony and freshly flowering Traveller's Joy** were unexpected additions to my list as were **Common Knapweed and Wild Parsnip** seen on the way home. My outing ended with **Common Ramping Fumitory and Green Amaranth** still flourishing beside Solent Road opposite the Tesco carpark in Havant where I came across them on Oct 23.

## [Sat 31 October](#)

### Late October news

My database of reports extracted from south coast wildlife websites during October now has 1118 entries so I will limit myself to a few recent highlights starting with the first two reports of **Long-tailed Duck**, one of which flew west over Selsey Bill on Oct 24, the second being of one settled at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Oct 30. Also on Oct 30 a single **Velvet Scoter** flew west past Christchurch Harbour and which remains the only report of the species that I know of. The first **Goldeneye** to reach Dungeness was reported on Oct 20 and the only subsequent reports have been of one at Blashford on Oct 29 and two there on Oct 30 so they have started to arrive. Also arriving are **Purple Sandpiper** with the first at Folkestone on Oct 23, the first for Hampshire being a single at Southsea Castle on Oct 29 and the first small flock of 8 at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 30.

**Woodcock** are also arriving with the first at Sandwich on Oct 21. One on the edge of the New Forest on Oct 23 may not have been a migrant but two on the Scillies on Oct 26 and 3 at Dungeness almost certainly were.

Mention of the **Scillies** reminds me that I have only just discovered why I was missing news from the hotspot - they had moved their sightings from the page for which I had a bookmark to a different page on the same website and in case anyone else is missing out for the same reason the page to look at is their home page at [Bird news from the Scilly Isles](#) (just scroll down a short way to find the sightings). Among the more interesting reports were of a single **Turtle Dove** seen up to Oct 27, a **Dusky Warbler** still there on Oct 29, a **Spotted Sandpiper** on Oct 21, a single **Quail** seen from Oct 20 to 23, a **Hudsonian Whimbrel** present from Oct 15 to 19 (only the second ever seen on the islands), a **Red-flanked Bluetail** on Oct 13 with a **Radde's Warbler**, a **Snow Bunting** and a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** on the same day, a **Corncrake** on Oct 11, a juvenile **Garganey** (present from Oct 10 to 29), an **Isabelline Wheatear** on Oct 8 and a **Red-eyed Vireo** on Oct 1.

Returning to the mainland Oct 30 brought news of **54 Guillemot** and **92 Razorbill** (plus many more unidentified auks) passing Dungeness on their way west. Less specific news from RBA was that there were at least **5 Glossy Ibis** and **4 Rough-legged Buzzard** in the UK on Oct 29 (one Rough-legged Buzzard has been at Scotney on the Kent-Sussex border since Oct 18). A late **Hobby** was seen at Hastings on Oct 24 but another was seen at Arne on Oct 29. The first **Little Auk** to reach the south coast was at Selsey on Oct 29 and Selsey had the first 'local' **Snow Bunting** on the shingle on Oct 29 though there had been some 10 previous reports from sites from Kent to Scilly since Oct 1. The first two **Black-necked Grebe** were at Dungeness on Oct 1 and maybe one of these was in Langstone Harbour on Oct 2 and 3 before 4 appeared on Oct 4 at Studland in Dorset which is nowadays their favourite wintering site. The wintering flock of **Avocets** on the Exe estuary in Devon had reached 144 birds by Oct 26 but as yet there is no sign of wintering flocks in the Nutbourne area of Chichester Harbour or around Farlington Marshes. Devon also currently has the biggest flock of **Golden Plover** with 1500 on the Taw estuary on Oct 27.

Turning to other wildlife the first **Stinkhorn fungi** have appeared in Nore Barn wood at Emsworth on Oct 28 (when a single **Golden Spindle look-alike** appeared on my lawn). In Sussex more progeny of the immigrant **Long-tailed Blue** butterflies have hatched in Sussex with reports between Oct 25 and 28 from five sites (Southwick, Newhaven, Brighton racecourse, Beeding and Lancing). Other late butterflies seen on Oct 28 were a **Meadow Brown** at Beeding and a **Wall Brown** at Mill Hill while Oct 27 brought reports of **Peacock** and **Red Admiral** in Sussex and **Comma** and **Speckled Wood** in Hampshire.

To end this ragbag of recent news - on Oct 29 the Rye Bay website commented on an uncommon bat species (**Nathusius Pipistrelle**), which appears in Britain as an occasional migrant, and gave us a link to a Sussex Wildlife Trust webpage describing how a Nathusius Pipistrelle had been trapped at Rye Harbour on Oct 10 and was found to have a tag which had been fitted to it on Aug 20 this year in Latvia proving that **this bat had flown at least 905 miles from Latvia to Sussex**. For the full report see [Nathusius Pipistrelle from Latvia](#).

### Wed 28 October

#### A sunny ride round north Hayling

While hanging out some washing to take advantage of this morning's sunshine I noticed a new fungus on my lawn and believe it to be called **The Herald of Winter (Hygophorus hypothejus)** - a very slimy species with grey-brown cap 5 cm across and bright white gills and stem. Here is an image taken from the internet (ignore the wet pine forest ground!).

#### The Herald of Winter Waxcap

This morning's high tide was forecast to be the highest of the month so I got on my bike to have a look at it as I rode over Langstone Bridge to the Oysterbeds shortly after it reached its peak. Much of the bund walls were submerged and waders familiar with the harbour had flown to the islands or to Farlington Marshes to find somewhere to sit out the tide but there were still thousands of recently arrived birds trying to find a foothold on the remaining dry land, many of them failing to do so and flying round over the area in large swirling flocks. The majority of these birds seemed to be Dunlin or Grey Plover with a number of Brent and

Wigeon on the water. My best find here were some large plants of **Yellow-wort in full flower**.

As I was leaving I saw **a single Mute Swan cygnet** in the lagoon and wondered if this could be the missing sixth cygnet from Langstone Pond showing an independence and urge to explore the world rather than a weakness and inability to keep up with its five other siblings. I can't prove this but when I got back to Langstone over an hour later the two parent Swans were at the seaward end of the High Street, the 'gang of five' cygnets were on the pond, and **what must have been the sixth cygnet** was on the harbour water close to the seawall of the pond. So it has survived and is looking strong and healthy.

I continued my ride via Daw Lane and Copse Lane, seeing a flock of some **50 Stock Dove** on the fields north of Daw Lane and finding more flowers on the Butcher's Broom beside Copse Lane before reaching St Peter's Church in Northney where the **Strawberry Tree** overhanging the road was festooned with tiny white bell-shaped flowers.

Despite the sunshine the only butterfly seen today was a white species - probably Small White - reminding me that we are now close to the end of the butterfly season and it may be of some interest to list the last appearance of each that I am aware of after scanning both the Hampshire and Sussex butterfly websites yesterday - here is the list that I came up with.

Clouded Yellow - Oct 25 at Dungeness

Large White - Oct 20 at Hill Head

Small White - Oct 25 at Eastbourne

Green Veined White - Oct 1 at Brighton

Brown Hairstreak - Oct 11 at Coldwaltham

Small Copper - Oct 25 near Lewes

Long-tailed Blue - Oct 25 at Beeding (fresh British born insects of which more may still appear)

Common Blue - Oct 3 on Downs above the Cuckmere

Adonis Blue - Oct 11 at Upper Beeding north of Shoreham

Holly Blue - Oct 25 at Eastbourne

Red Admiral - Oct 26 at Horsham

Painted Lady - Oct 25 at Portland

Small Tortoiseshell - Oct 2 at Old Winchester Hill

Peacock - Oct 20 at Botley Woods

Comma - Oct 20 at Gosport

Speckled Wood - Oct 20 at Gosport

Wall Brown - Oct 4 at Mill Hill (Shoreham)

Meadow Brown - Oct 12 at Portchester

Small Heath - Oct 2 at Old Winchester Hill

Other insects which caught my attention were Humming-bird Hawkmoths at Eastbourne and Dungeness on Oct 25, a Clifden Nonpareil moth at Waterlooville on Oct 12, Southern Hawker dragonfly near Gosport on Oct 11, Migrant Hawker at Farlington Marshes on Oct 25 and Common Darter at Gosport on Oct 20.

Looking at the British Dragonfly Society latest sightings as I write this I see that Oct 26 brought reports of Southern Hawker, Common Darter and a possible Black Darter in Lancashire, and Migrant Hawkings in Norfolk. Oct 20 had Red-veined Darters and Common Blue Damsels at Badminton in Hampshire and Willow Emerald Damsels in Norfolk. Oct 13 had a Vagrant Emperor on Lundy

Island (seen by Ivan Lakin, one time Farlington resident). Oct 8 had two Ruddy Darters in Norfolk. Oct 6 had an Emperor dragonfly in Nottinghamshire. Oct 4 had an Azure Damselfly in Lancashire and a Yellow-winged Darter at Dungeness. Oct 2 had a Golden Ringed dragonfly in Cornwall with Beautiful Demoiselle and Emerald Damsel. Finally Oct 1 had a Brown Hawker in Norfolk.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 19 - 25 (WEEK 43 OF 2015)

### Sun 25 October

#### A lovely start to winter

My day started with the discovery that a troop of snowy white waxcaps had appeared over night on my lawn, accompanying a smaller clump of Meadow Waxcaps which have been present for a couple of days - these have both cap and gills of a distinct peach colour (there are other forms of this species in which the gills are white). For photos and info on the Snowy Waxcaps see [Snowy Waxcaps](#) and for the Meadow Waxcaps see [Meadow Waxcaps](#).

After breakfast I got on my bike for a visit to Farlington Marshes, arriving there with the tide high and the water glassy smooth, unperturbed by any wind. First stop was at the lake where the reeds were alive with Bearded Tits - I saw at least a dozen in small groups of two or three together but was told that the total was 31 birds. I was also told that a couple of Twite had been seen earlier in the morning but no report of them has yet appeared on the HOS sightings page - while checking the sightings reported there I see that I missed the best bird of the day by about ten minutes (a White Rumped Sandpiper at the deeps at round 12:30) and I also missed a Short Eared Owl by about the same margin. In compensation for dipping on these two I convinced myself that I saw and heard a Wood Lark which arrived from the north, called as it flew over me, and pitched out of sight on the outer edge of the newly exposed saltings near Little Binness island south of the main marsh. I certainly can't claim to have identified this bird on the single "lu" note that I heard, especially as on checking Xeno-Canto none of the call notes recorded there sounded like the "lu" which I heard and which instantly reminded me of the repeated "lu-lu-lu" of Woodlark song.

Among other birds that I definitely did see were half a dozen Stonechats and a couple of Rock Pipits, while when pausing to eat a banana outside the reserve building I was entertained by a noisy Water Rail in the reeds and a busy Migrant Hawker over the stream. I also watched a number of what to me were Mayfly-like insects fluttering around and landing on reeds close to me - I was pretty sure that Mayflies are true to their name and appear in May but then I remembered an entry dated Oct 23 on the RX (Rye Bay) website by Patrick Bonham about Caddis Flies with photos of insects similar to what I was seeing and which Patrick said were currently filling his moth traps - this current date for them to be on the wing was confirmed by Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects (Pages 183 - 9). So I feel fairly confident that I was seeing day-flying species of this large group which I have only been aware of previously as those intriguing under water larvae which

encase their bodies in 'stone vests' of small pebbles and pieces of detritus which the larva somehow sticks together with its own form of superglue. See Patrick's article and photos at [Caddis Flies](#).

Nothing special seen on the way home but I cannot end without mentioning the glorious gold of the many **Gorse bushes now in full flower** all along the cycleway from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes.

### [Fri 23 October](#)

#### **Some unexpected flowers but no juvenile Brent**

This morning I walked down the Langbrook stream where the only surprise was a **short burst of Dunnock song**. Reaching the shore I found around **300 Brent but could not see a single juvenile among them**. Families with young often travel more slowly than parties of adult birds but it is now six weeks since the first migrants reached us and it has been cold in the Baltic so I would expect a significant number of young to have reached us by now but so far I have only seen one report of them (5 juveniles in Langstone Harbour on Oct 15) so I am expecting to hear that 2015 was a very poor year for their breeding success. Figures from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust showing the percentage of young among Dark-bellied Brent wintering in the UK for each year from 2003 to 2014 vary from just 1.1% in 2008 up to 23% in 2014 and 28.4% in 2005 and the variability of these figures from year to year makes it likely that a good season last year will be followed by a poor one this year but we will have to wait a bit longer before counts confirm or deny this guess. For the WWT figures see [WWT breeding statistics for DB Brent](#)

One other bird that I was hoping to see along the South Moors shore was **Rock Pipit** and just before leaving the shore two small birds flew in from the harbour and landed among the seaweed at the edge of the falling tide. I got a distant view of one showing it was a Pipit but too far away to see the leg colour though I did hear a weak call confirming it was likely to be a Rock Pipit.

At the Budds Farm pools I was pleased to see at least **five male Shoveler** with at least twenty Teal and a few Gadwall plus at least one Tufted Duck. In addition to a singing Cetti's Warbler I kept hearing short, high pitched calls which turned out to be coming from **a small flock of Dunnock**, presumably recent arrivals.

Throughout the summer I find **Sea Wormwood** on the South Moors seawall, often with well developed flower heads but never see any open flowers. Today all those flower heads were covered with dead flowers but I still have never seen this plant with open flowers! Walking up Southmoor Lane I had better luck with several plants of **Bugloss (Anchusa arvensis)** bearing bright blue fresh flowers. Later, after the bridge over the A27, I turned east along Solent Road only to find the pavement on the south side of the road was closed for work in progress. This forced me onto the north side pavement passing the site where a new Marks & Spencers store is being built. Here I found two good plant species in flower - the first being **Common Ramping Fumitory** and the second being a single fully grown and flowering plant of **Green Amaranth**. If you are not familiar with this species here is a photo from the internet.

Green Amaranth (aka Pigweed)

### [Thu 22 October](#)

#### **The first Primrose flower was out today**

A short walk around Havant today surprised me with a single Primrose in flower (albeit in a garden) and, in another garden, a Fatsia japonica bush in flower. If you are not aware of this name here is a photo taken from the internet

#### Fatsia japonica in flower

The only addition to my October wild flowers was a patch of Wavy Bittercress in flower alongside the footpath from Wade Court Road to Pook Lane while after crossing the A27 the old section of Pook Lane had a few fresh young plants of Dog's Mercury which will probably be in flower next month. The big field south of the Old Rectory had been ploughed and had attracted many Black-headed Gulls and something had caused a local Kestrel to give several bursts of its loud repetitive 'screams'.

Down on the shore two Lapwing were the first I have seen this autumn and at Langstone Pond a Cetti's Warbler was singing while off shore the two parent Swans were swimming out in the channel with their five remaining cygnets.

Wed 21 October

#### Harp traps for Bats and recent news from the internet

Watching the BBC Countryfile programme on Oct 11 I was interested in a segment on Bats and puzzled by the device being used to catch Bats in flight. I had the impression that the device consisted of a vertical frame holding a large sheet of glass or translucent plastic in the flight path of the bats which seemed unable to detect its presence and would fly straight into it and slither down into a collecting tray from which they could be lifted out by hand for examination and tagging. I have always understood that the Bats echo-location system would detect anything in their flight path and so I was very puzzled by their inability to detect the large screen into which they flew at full speed.

Some time after the programme I was in conversation with Nik Knight and asked him what was going on. I knew that Mist Nets used for catching birds were sometimes used to catch bats (and Nik had told me in the past that they sometimes caught off-road night cyclists in these nets) but this time he told me that what was being used in the TV programme was called a Harp Trap and the photo below shows one - the metal frame holds a large number of nylon type threads with small gaps between the threads such that the threads do not reflect the sounds emitted by their echo location systems but do stop the bat's body, surprising and temporarily confusing it for long enough for it to be caught by hand when it falls into the collecting tray. This device gets its name from its basic similarity to a musical Harp (many strings mounted in a wooden frame) but has no musical abilities.

#### Harp Trap for catching Bats

I have spent much of the last few days trying to catch up with other people's observation recorded on the internet and here are a few random sightings that caught my attention.

Starting with last Sunday (Oct 18) I see that a single Turtle Dove was seen in Bournemouth and a late juvenile Cuckoo was still on the Isle of Wight. Also on Oct 18 a Great Grey Shrike was briefly at Christchurch - others have been seen recently in the New Forest (Blackgutter area) on Oct 13, another was seen on several days around Oct 16 on the South Downs near Amberley, Oct 19 brought

another to the Latchmore Bottom area of the New Forest and Oct 20 saw three in Sussex at Beachy Head, Iping Common and Blackdown.

Oct 19 brought a **Bittern** to the Lower Test Marshes near Southampton (one of several moving in for the winter). That evening a **Night Heron** was seen flying west over Dibden Purlieu near Southampton Water while in East Sussex the first **Rough Legged Buzzard** could be seen at Scotney near Rye Harbour. West Sussex had **70 Pintail** in Pagham Harbour and in north Hampshire birders were surprised to see their first **5 Avocets at The Vyne near Basingstoke**. Also in Hampshire the count of **Fieldfare** flying over the area south of Fleet was up to 324 heading west (with another 300 seen over Wilverley Plain in the New Forest). Portland had a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** and a **Serin** that day while near Romsey a total of **206 Chaffinches** flew north east.

Oct 20 brought reports of 8 **Egyptian Geese** at Goring and 9 at Climping making me wonder if these had come from the continent. Another species which attracts the attention of some birders at this time of year is **Wood Pigeon** and Portland reported the start of their mass movements with a small count of just 250 moving overhead. Another relatively large flock was of **400 Greenfinch** on the shingle at the mouth of Pagham Harbour.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 12 - 18 (WEEK 42 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 18 October**

#### **Fungi and some unexpected flowers at Warblington Cemetery**

This morning I went to Warblington Cemetery expecting little new in the way of wildlife but was pleasantly surprised with what I found in the way of wild flowers and fungi plus the autumn colours of the trees.

Parking my bike at the east end of the Cemetery Extension the first surprise was to find that the great mass of wild flowers, resulting from the sowing of wild flower seed several years ago, was looking as if this were springtime rather than autumn and I spent some time photographing them. I will include some of those photos later but will start with an uncommon fungus which I found here for the first time last year growing on wood in the southern hedge of the area. I only found it today at the very end of my visit by searching for the dead wood on which I found it last year - by now much fresh growth of the hedge had almost completely hidden the fungus and made it impossible to photograph in situ so I extracted one of the fungal growths (leaving several others to continue to spread their spores) and photographed it on the bench where I intended to have my lunch. This fungus has the English Name of Wrinkled Peach and is increasingly uncommon as it only grows on Elm wood and that tree has now almost vanished from our countryside as a result of Dutch Elm disease. That disease is caused by another fungus called *Ophiostoma ulmi* which blocks the channels which carry water around the tree and that fungus is spread by Elm Bark Beetles which infest mature Elm trees but show no interest in young shoots arising from the roots of dying Elms and the fungi I found were on such shoots which had been cut down during hedge trimming. My example had a delicious Peach colour but no hint of wrinkles!

Cap and gills of the uncommon Wrinkled Peach (*Rhodotus palmatus*) fungus  
The most numerous fungus was the Weeping Widow (*Lacrymaria velutina*) of which a large number were to be found in the Natural Burial area where, among many decaying specimens, I found this fresh example showing (in the underside

view) the ragged edge around the cap which is supposed to resemble the tattered edge of a Widow's Veil.

Cap and underside of the Weeping Widow fungus  
I think my next find was a single example of *Melanoleuca arcuata*.

Cap and underside of *Melanoleuca arcuata*  
My next two fungal species were, first, what I think is *Pluteus cervinus*, or the Deer Shield fungus, which was growing out of the base of a very dead tree trunk and, second, a tight cluster of what I assume were Common Inkcaps.

Cap and underside of the Deer Shield fungus and a tight cluster of young  
Common Inkcaps  
Turning to the wild flowers I will start with Chicory in the wild flower seeded area and for a second choice here is a freshly flowering Poppy

Chicory was one of many freshly flowering species in the Wildflower seeded area, along with the first flower on a Common Poppy plant.

My next two flowers are Cutleaved Cranesbill and *Anthemis austriaca* which is supplied in seed mixes as a substitute for Corn Chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*)

Cut-leaved Cranesbill and *Anthemis austriaca*  
My last two flower photos are of Pencilled Cranesbill (distinguished from French Cranesbill by the white background colour) and Round-leaved Fluellen, still flowering when I thought its season was well over.

Pencilled Cranesbill and Round-leaved Fluellen  
Lastly a group of miscellaneous subjects starting with some autumn colour and falling leaves

Examples of Red and Yellow fallen leaves  
Next come colourful berries of Hawthorn and Holly  
Hawthorn and Holly berries  
And finally a general impression of leaf fall and a reminder of the colourful lichens which will persist through the  
inter

General view of falling leaves and of a lichen (*Xanthoria parietina*) that ignores the changing seasons

## Sat 17 October

### A look around both St Faith's churchyard and the Havant cemetery

Spurred on by yesterday's discovery that **Sweet Violets were already flowering in the Havant Churchyard** I took my camera round there this morning for my regular monthly cemetery visit but before reporting what I found in the Churchyard I have more good news in an email from Nik Knight who walked past the **Havant Town Millpond early this morning and saw two Water Voles** in it. In yesterday's notes I said that I thought the Voles had departed as I could see no evidence that they had been eating any of the Water Cress which is abundant in this pond and which seemed to be their main food here. Nik saw one of them this morning collecting grass from the land on the north side of the pond and carrying it down to the

water (presumably to eat in the privacy of its burrow). This surprised me as I had thought that they ate a variety of plants but only those which grew in the water. My ignorance of their diet was revealed when I checked what Wikipedia had to say, namely ... "**Water voles mainly eat grass and plants near the water**. At times, they will also consume fruits, bulbs, twigs, buds, and roots. In Europe, when there is enough food to last water voles a long time, water vole "plagues" can take place. Water voles eat ravenously, destroying entire fields of grass and leaving the fields full of burrows, during these plagues. Ecologists have discovered that normally vegetarian water voles living in Wiltshire, England have started eating frogs' legs and discarding the bodies. This has also been observed at a pond in Lincolnshire. The predation in 2014 was severe and no tadpoles were observed in the pond for the first time in about 8 years. It has been speculated that this is to make up for a protein deficiency in the voles' diet."

When I arrived in the Churchyard the first flower that I saw was a single Daisy so I am beginning my photos with that, closely followed by a couple of Sweet Violets.

A single Daisy and two of half a dozen fresh Sweet Violet flowers  
Next I turned my attention to the most numerous flowers, those of Ivy, and to the many insects they were attracting. Most of these insects were Honey Bees whose legs were laden with full pollen baskets, but among them were Flies  
Wasps, Hoverflies and Bumblebees.

One of many Honey Bees and a single Chrysotoxum cautum Hoverfly

A white-tailed Bumblebee and a small sample of the Yew arils (fruits) which will attract the winter thrushes now arriving in this country  
Among the flowering plants there were several examples of Red Deadnettle and one of a newcomer to the site - Prickly Sowthistle.

Red Deadnettle and the first Prickly Sowthistle I have seen here  
A Cotoneaster bush was laden with small red berries to provide more winter food for birds and Common Polypody (one of the five fern species to be found on the old wall south of the Churchyard) - I have deliberately turned one of its leaves over to show the spore cases holding the seeds which it will release when the rains arrive.

Cotoneaster berries and the leaves of Polypody Fern  
Later in the morning I visited Havant Cemetery where the most interesting find was of a plant which I believe to be Borage seen over the wall growing in the allotments. To end this visit report I have a picture of a Holly tree, laden with bright red berries, in the St Faith's area.

Bright blue flowers of Borage in the adjacent allotments and bright red Holly berries

**[Fri 16 October](#)**

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

**The first Sweet Violets of the autumn and some facts about Ichneumon Wasps**

A short walk around Havant today on the way to the shops gave me a couple of pleasant surprises, the main surprise being to see several **Sweet Violets** flowering in St Faith's churchyard a good ten days earlier than their first appearance on Oct 25 last year. Before seeing them I had another pleasant surprise in finding a wintering **Grey Wagtail** back at the **Homewell Spring** where Stream Water Crowfoot is also putting up new flowers. Less exciting was to see Mugwort flowering beside Park Road South near the Havant Mill Pond where there were no indications of Water Vole grazing the Water Cress.

On Oct 14 Chris Oakley sent me the following photo he had just taken (at the Hampshire Farm site on the outskirts of Westbourne) of a **giant black Ichneumon** which may well be a species called **Dolichomitus imperator**. Chris asked if it was unusual to see this at this late stage in the year, particularly as he had had a similar sighting around the same date last year. In trying to answer this question I discovered a number of facts about Ichneumons which only intrigued me more.

<="" p="" border="0" height="300" width="462">

Large black Ichneumon photographed by Chrs Oakley at Hampshire Farm  
**In what follows please do not assume that anything I say is true.** In the absence of any complete and authoritative source of information that I can find my statements are only intelligent guesses, and certainly are not true of all the many Ichneumon species

The first is that, although we only see them occasionally, **there are probably more Ichneumon species in the world than all the vertebrate species known to man.** My source for this can be seen at [Facts about Ichneumons](#). Coming back to Chris's question I read that **some Ichneumons have up to four generations during each year**, though the adult insects only live for long enough to mate and lay their eggs so for the major part of each year Ichneumons are invisible as parasites living within, and eating the bodies of, the insects which they parasitise. As an aside to this I gather that Charles Darwin lost his faith in a loving Christian god when he realized how many Ichneumon species supposedly created by this god followed a life style devoted to feeding on the bodies of other insect species in a way calculated to keep their hosts alive for as long as possible until they (the Ichneumon larvae) were fully grown and ready to emerge. Another discovery was that in the process of laying eggs into a host larva hidden deep inside the wood of a tree **two unexpected things happen to the Ichneumon.** Firstly **what appears at first sight to be a single ovipositor (or egg-laying tube) protruding from the back end of the female Ichneumon** turns out to be a bundle of 'filaments', each of which is a specialist tool for use as and when needed. One of these filaments may be a 'sting' for injecting poison into another insect (not normally into a human!), another may be a drill for penetrating wood, others may form a protective shield around the drill, and when the target host insect is reached a different instrument may be needed to create an incision in the insect larva so that the Ichneumon egg can be inserted in the right place for it to develop without damaging the host (which needs to be kept alive for long enough for the Ichneumon to complete its development). As if that were not complicated enough **the back end of the Ichneumon opens up during the egg-laying and what looks like a large white balloon emerges** (disappearing when the egg-laying is complete). I am not sure exactly what purpose this serves but the website referred to below seems to

suggest that it supplies some sort of oil to help with the drilling process by softening the wood being drilled into. The text and pictures describing this can be seen at [The egg-laying process](#). I guess that's enough for tonight!.

**[Wed 14 October](#)**

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

### **Bird news from the internet**

On Sunday (Oct 11) I took a six hour walk to the Hollybank Woods and then around the Emsworth area in pleasant sunshine but with no major finds. For me the most exciting thing was to find the 'rayed form' of **Groundsel** (with Daisy-like yellow petals surrounding the otherwise Groundsel-like flowers on at least two plants in the big, recently harvested, arable field through which the Church Path crosses the Warblington Farm). For a photo of this variant of normal Groundsel see [Rayed flowers on Groundsel](#). Other miscellaneous observations were of a fresh **Rufous Milkcap** in Hollybank and a large **Boletus** - possibly **Boletus appendiculatus** - at the north end of New Brighton Road (cap measured 24 cm across). An unexpected flowering plant was **Stone Parsley** covered with fresh flowers beside Bartons Road. Insects included a **Common Darter**, a **Peacock** and **two Speckled Wood butterflies** plus a **Clouded Yellow** reported to have been seen in the Nore Barn area.

At home I recently re-filled my bird feeder after noticing that House Sparrows were back in town after their summer holiday and there is now a queue of both Sparrows and Tits each morning with a Wood Pigeon patrolling the ground under the feeder to pick up any spillage.

A check on the internet shows that the first **Great Grey Shrike** of the winter was back in the New Forest today (Oct 14) while **40 Fieldfares, 145 Redwings plus smaller numbers of Mistle Thrushes, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds and Ring Ouzels plus a single Brambling** were all reported at Blackdown north of Midhurst. Locally both **Fieldfares** and **Redwings** (plus a Wheatear) were seen by the north end of the Hayling Billy Line on Hayling. I see that the birder reporting the Fieldfares was disappointed to notice that berried trees were being cut down in the same area and an email received by me this morning suggests that the people cutting down the trees were probably a group of Conservation Volunteers who found **two young Adders** and **two Slow Worms** under some metal sheets that were being used as a base for a bonfire on which to burn the wood they had cut down.

Yesterday (Oct 13) the first **Slavonian Grebe** of the winter was in Hampshire at Blashford Lakes, with **9 Fieldfares** in the Itchen Valley Country Park, while at Portland there was **an Olive Backed Pipit, a Long-eared Owl, a Corncrake and a Honey Buzzard**.

On Monday (Oct 12) the highlight at Dungeness was a **Pallas Warbler** accompanied by **90 Ring Ouzels, 31 Fieldfares, 40 Song Thrushes, 11 Redwings and 8 Bramblings**. Also on Monday **two Cranes** flew over Portland where a **Nightjar** was seen - also in Dorset Christchurch Harbour had their first **Purple Sandpiper** of the winter with **10 Rock Pipits** and their first large flock of **120 Greenfinch**. In north Hampshire a total of **1009 Redwings** flew over the Tweseldown Racecourse near Fleet during a 3.5 hour watch.

On Sunday (Oct 11) the earliest ever (by one day) **Bewick's Swan** arrived at Slimbridge and Rye Harbour had a **Stone Curlew**.

Saturday (Oct 10) brought **two Glossy Ibis** to Abbotsbury in Dorset while Durlston recorded **6900 Swallows** and **4100 House Martins**. Durlston also had an early **Brambling** and a late **Swift** on Oct 7.

Oct 6 saw a new UK record set by a flock of **53 Spoonbills** at Arne in Poole Harbour (there may be more in that area as a total of 60 were recorded round the Harbour on Oct 8 but some of these may have been double counted at different sites). Also on Oct 6 a **Cattle Egret** was seen at Abbotsbury. On Oct 4 the winter flock of **Black-necked Grebe** in the Swanage/Studland area was reported for the first time with just four birds and on Oct 1 a **Snow Bunting** was an unexpected bird in the Swanage area.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 5 - 11 (WEEK 41 OF 2015)**

### **Sat 10 October**

#### **Winter Thrushes and the sky at night**

A scan of the **Hampshire and Sussex bird sightings for the first ten days of October** shows five reports of **Redwings** from these two counties, though the biggest flock reported so far was of just 8 birds in the Itchen Valley on Oct 8 (though that increased to 29 in the Test Valley area on Oct 10), but only one report of **Fieldfares** (three seen at Blackdown, north of Midhurst, on Oct 4). In contrast **Song Thrushes**, many of which should already be resident here, have just two reports - one expressing surprise at their apparent absence when just one was seen near Gosport on Oct 8, the other reporting a dozen of them disappearing into Yew trees at Cissbury Ring (north of Worthing), probably eager to feed up on the Yew arils after crossing the Channel. In contrast to the absence of winter immigrants there have been seven reports of **Ring Ouzels** heading south with up to 16 being seen at Blackdown and 10 at Leaden Hall in the New Forest plus singles on Portsdown and at the Meon Shore close to Titchfield Haven.

**Yellow-browed Warblers, Goldcrests** and **Firecrests** all have several reports, mainly from Sussex but once again these arrivals are heavily outweighed by the number of departing (though some may already be arriving from Europe) **Blackcaps**, including an estimated count of 450 at Beachy Head on Oct 8 - for a full report of migrants seen there that day (including photos of a Yellow-browed Warbler) see [John Cooper's blog](#).

Our local excitement in the presence of a **Red-backed Shrike** at the Hayling Oysterbeds lasted from Sep 29 until the afternoon of Oct 4 after which no further reports have been posted. Happily visitors to the Oysterbeds still have a chance of seeing an **Osprey** with one seen on the Langstone Harbour islands on Oct 10, and there is a good chance that one or more **Black-necked Grebe** will be seen in the Harbour following the single bird seen on Oct 2 and 3. There should soon be flocks of **Golden Plover** around with reports of 45 at Warsash (Bunny Meadows) on Oct 1, 60 at Thorney Island on Oct 3 and up to 70 south of Andover on Oct 10. Another bit of shorebird excitement came when Brian Fellows confirmed (on Oct 7) that a sighting of a **Spotted Redshank at Nore Barn (Emsworth)** on Sep 27

almost certainly marked the return of the regular wintering bird at that site for its 13th year.

Turning to something very different you may have seen some reports in the TV News bulletins recently that there have been **sightings of the Northern Lights** as far south as North Wales but these are unimpressive compared to some photos which I have just come across on the internet - to see these (taken on the night of Sept 7) go to [Photos of the Northern Lights](#). While on this website I discovered two more entries describing **how to see all five of the naked eye visible planets during the second half of October**. For these see [How to see Venus, Jupiter and Mercury in the pre-dawn sky](#) and [How to see five planets in the October sky](#)

## Thu 8 October

### A morning in the Emsworth area

This morning I cycled to Emsworth to add a few more plants to my October list and then went down the western sea wall of Thorney Island as far as the Great Deeps before returning along the main Emsworth to Havant Road.

My reason for visiting Thorney Deeps reedbeds was that on Oct 3 and 4 I saw four reports indicating the **Bearded Tits are on their autumn journeys** into the unknown. One sighting was in the reeds around the IBM Lake at Portsmouth (where the species is not a resident) and another was of a couple 'high flying' above the reeds at Blashford (but not leaving that site) while on Oct 4 ten birds out of a total of fourteen seen at Farlington Marshes did leave that site. Sadly I did not see or even hear any at the Little Deeps today. I hope I am not disappointed in the next few days in seeing none of the winter thrushes that should be streaming across the North Sea assisted by the strong east winds and good weather caused by the current high pressure - today (Oct 8) a flock of 8 Redwings were in the Itchen Valley.

My first target in Emsworth today was the small colony of **Wild Clary** growing at the north end of Christopher Way, just off New Brighton Road, and I was not disappointed as nine plants could still be described as flowering. From there I rode north up New Brighton Road in search of the **Orange Hawkweed (aka 'Fox and Cubs')** I had seen on Sep 8, but I was stopped before I had gone more than 100 yards at the entrance to Wensley Gardens by the sight of a plant I have not seen for a couple of years (**Dwarf Mallow**) growing just outside a garden. I took a sample of its flowers, leaves and seed pods and, although it may be a cultivated version, I am convinced that I have got the right id and added another species to those that I know in Emsworth. Here is an image of the plant taken from the internet ...

Dwarf Mallow flower, leaves and seed pod

Just south of the roundabout at the north end of New Brighton Road I failed to find the Orange Hawkweed but did come across my first clump of **Honey Fungus** for the autumn with my first **Shaggy Inkcaps** and a single **Red Cracking Bolete**. Nothing to report on the way down Mill Lane from Westbourne to Lumley and across the main road into Slipper Road but as soon as the Slipper Mill Pond came into view I got a strong scent of the flowers on two bushes of **Ebbinge's Silverberry** growing on the pondside. Without its flowers and their strong scent this relative common and widely planted shrub would probably not attract your attention.

Ebbinge's Silverberry bush

Reaching the west end of the Great Deeps I disturbed a cluster of 18 Cormorants which had been fishing but on the Wickor Bank (seawall) I enjoyed a fresh **Small Comma butterfly** and spotted **3 Pointed Snails** showing that this species is not yet extinct here. With little else to see here I set off for home but on reaching the main A259 road I stopped to check that the **Shaggy Soldier plants** at the end of Queens St were still flowering. Back at the A27 underpass I also ticked the **Field Woundwort** as still flowering, bringing my October list of flowering plant species to 164

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 28 - OCT 4 (WEEK 40 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 4 October**

#### **A visit to Havant Ticket brings my October flower list to 161 species**

This morning I cycled to Havant Thicket and brought my October wild flower list up to 161 (including **Thorn Apple**, now past flowering but looking in good health with many knobbly fruits that will hopefully give us more plants next year). The expected heathland species were all seen (**Golden Rod, Wood Sage, Ling Heather** and **Cross-leaved Heath** plus **Dwarf Gorse** and **Devil's Bit Scabious** which almost lived up to its name when I was pushing down a narrow overgrown path and surprised two fierce dogs coming the other way, causing them to charge at me with much barking but luckily no 'biteing'). One unexpected find was of a freshly flowering **Lesser Stitchwort**. I also added **Marsh Thistle** which I was surprised I had not seen elsewhere.

The only butterfly seen in the woods was a **Speckled Wood** but doing some gardening back at home I disturbed a fresh **Brimstone** which I have not seen mentioned on the butterfly websites for some time until I looked today and saw a mention of two seen on Old Winchester Hill on Oct 2. Also seen on the internet today was a report from Barry Collins of **60+ Golden Plovers** seen yesterday on Thorney Island with **two Ospreys** at the Great Deeps and **18 Common Seals** on the Pilsley area mudflats with 300 Brent - the latest entry on the SOS website was of **3 Fieldfares, 6+ Redwings, 3 Ring Ouzels, 2 Song Thrushes, 6+ Blackbirds** and **11+ Mistle Thrushes** seen this morning on Blackdown in the Haslemere area north of Midhurst.

I don't often hear wildlife news on Radio Solent but on Friday someone mentioned that their house was currently being invaded by **Ladybirds seeking a warm, dry place to spend the winter** and this reminded me that was in the past an annual event but this autumn I can't recall seeing a single Ladybird anywhere in the past week or so of warm sunshine - not even a Harlequin! A very different item of wildlife news came from a BBC TV programme about **Honey Badgers** shown on Saturday evening - I did not know that these fearless feeders will attack and eat almost any living creature (luckily excluding humans) including highly poisonous snakes (even Cobras) and that they seem to be immune to their venom - if they are bitten they react by going to sleep, then waking up again as if nothing had happened.

A more local item of wildlife news came from Rewell Wood near Arundel via the Sussex Butterfly Conservation site entry for Oct 1. This was headed by a photo

(see [Fearsome Ichneumon called Dolichomitus imperator](#)) The only insect I have ever come across which looks similar is called [Rhyssa persuasoria](#) and an example of that species can be seen at [Rhyssa persuasoria](#). Should you be lucky enough to come across either species they can be easily separated by the presence or absence of the white spots on the otherwise all black body of Rhyssa. I think both species use their long ovipositors to penetrate coniferous wood and lay their eggs in the larvae of insects such as the [Horntail, Uroceras gigas](#), - see [Great Horntail Wasp \(Urocerus gigas\)](#). At the moment I can find no confirmation of [something that I have read in the past](#), namely that because the larvae of both species take some time to mature it is possible for the tree in which they are living to be cut down and then cut into planks without killing the larva inside the wood. If this happens the cut wood can be built into a new house and will give the owners of that house a big surprise when one or other of these large insects, each with its dangerous looking ovipositor, emerges in their living room (or perhaps worse their bedroom).

### Sat 3 October

#### **Portsmouth brings my October flower count up to 145**

A ride to Bedhampton Water Works to add [Himalayan Balsam](#), [Hybrid Water Speedwell](#) and [Stream Water Crowfoot](#) was extended west to Farlington Church, then up Gillman Road to Fort Purbrook before taking the more direct route home. [Common Calamint](#) was found in several places and other unexpected finds were of [Round-leaved Cranesbill](#), [Yellow-wort](#) and [Yellow Meadow Vetchling](#). The total of my October flower list is now 145.

A brief scan of the internet shows that the Red-backed Shrike is still at the Oysterbeds for the fourth day and that the single Black-necked Grebe was today much closer to the Oysterbeds (off Long Island, so perhaps visible from Broadmarsh at high tide). Further away Dorset today had a Corncrake, a Hoopoe and a Snow Bunting while over in Sussex the Pallid Harrier was still at the Burgh

### Fri 2 October

#### **I see more than I expected at the Hayling Oysterbeds but dip on a sight of both John Clark and the Black-necked Grebe he saw**

As promised in yesterday's blog today's outing was to Hayling with the twin targets of seeing the [Red-backed Shrike at the Oysterbeds](#) and ticking the wild plants still flowering in October on south Hayling - [this second target brought my October species list up to 122](#).

Even before reaching Langstone Bridge I was pleasantly surprised to see some [50 Brent feeding at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream](#), and when I reached the steps up to the Oysterbeds north entrance I stopped to look for the Shrike in the field to the east of the track - no sign of the Shrike but a sharp call from the hedgetop behind my back made me look up and see a Starling sized bird perched on a treetop - as I got my bins onto it it turned to show me a profile with a beak much too long for a Starling. Almost immediately it was off, heading north east across the field I had been watching with a high-speed, straight as an arrow, bumble-bee like flight which could only be that of [a Kingfisher](#), an id that was backed up by its blue colour.

I then made a circuit around the meadow north of the lagoon and spoke to several hopeful birders but none of them had seen the Shrike though one person

said its presence had been reported this morning, so I rode on south adding **Pale Flax** and **Pepper Saxifrage** to my plant list and seeing a **large number of Brent** feeding and flying around the harbour (on the return trip, when the tide was high, I made an **estimate of 500 birds**). Another indication of the winter bird population building up in the harbour was **my first sight of some 30 Great Crested Grebe**. In the warm mid-day sun the Sinah area gave me my first **Small Heath of the summer** (!) as well as singles of **Clouded Yellow** and **Red Admiral** plus several Whites and at least one Common Darter. One of the flowers seen today was the lovely blue **Sheep's Bit** but there was still no sign of the Rose Campion which I have not seen since June.

Returning to the Oysterbeds the first birder I spoke to told me **he had just seen the Shrike** and suggested that I leave my bike by the Billy Line and climb the steps to the north entrance. Less than 100 yards from the steps, at the first point at which there was a gap in the bushes to allow a view south over the meadow, I found three birders with their scopes trained on the bird and **one of them let me have a look through his scope**, satisfying my need for a tick! Back at home I found that John Clark had been there this afternoon to see the Shrike and had also seen **a single Black-necked Grebe in the harbour**.

To end the day I entered all the flower species seen yesterday and today into my spreadsheet, ensuring an accurate count with no duplication or mental miscounting and giving me a good total of 122 species in flower so far this month.

### [Thu 1 October](#)

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

#### **A good start to my October flower list with 91 species**

This morning I walked around Havant, finding **84 wild plant species in flower**, and this afternoon I cycled west along the cycleway to the Eastern Road roundabout just beyond the main entrance to Farlington Marshes **bringing my total up to 91**.

With the sunshine forecast to remain with us I plan to head to the Oysterbeds tomorrow in the hope that the young **Red-backed Shrike** which has spent the last two days there may still be around before I press on to south Hayling.... if I don't see the Shrike there is a chance of seeing the **300+ Brent that were in Langstone Harbour today** though I suspect they will have flown on west overnight. Sussex birders still have a chance of seeing the young **Pallid Harrier** that has been showing well on the Downs above the Arun river north of Arundel and south of Pulborough from Sep 27 up to this afternoon at least - I will be content with seeing that in Dorian Mason's photos which include [Pallid Harrier](#).

In addition to the flowers seen today I had five butterflies (**Speckled Wood**, **Comma**, **Red Admiral**, **Small White** and **Peacock**) plus one **Common Darter**. Among the flowers the most unexpected was to find **Spotted Medick** starting to re-flower in Havant (Juniper Square) - **Thale Cress** is also flowering again. Also worth a mention was a good show of **Least Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*)** along the footpath going north from Southbrook Road in Langstone and of **Yellow-flowered Strawberry** beside the Langbrook Stream footpath immediately south of the Langstone Technology Park approach road. On the negative side I was surprised that only one of the many **Gorse Bushes** lining the cycle path from Broadmarsh to the Eastern Road had started to re-flower.

### [Tue 29 September](#)

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

## **Langstone cygnets seen flying while counting 64 Egrets coming to roost plus news of Redwing already in Hampshire**

This evening the tide was very low at sunset and when I arrived at **Langstone pond to see how many Egrets flew in to roost** I could not see any already in the trees. They started to arrive a few minutes after the sunset time of 18.45 and by 19.15, when I could hardly see enough to jot the numbers on my notepad, **my count was up to 64** including a penultimate group of 9 arriving together. Before they started to arrive I noted **the Swan family with their 6 cygnets** were all resting on a shingle bank and shortly after I saw **five of the cygnets making a formation fly past** without their parents or 'weakest link' sibling. To add to the confusion I then saw **a formation flight of six apparently adult Swans** fly towards me over the pond and continue east towards Thorney. Also seen out on the mud was a single gull which I felt confident was an **adult Yellow-legged Gull** and after the last Egret I was buzzed by **a Pipistrelle bat**.

News from the internet today (Sep 29) was of **a flock of 13 Redwing** seen at Fleet Pond plus another 7 flying west over the Aldershot area. These were not the first to be seen in Hampshire - one was reported flying south over North Baddesley (near Romsey) on Sep 11, then came one going west near Aldershot on Sep 27 followed by 4 over Crookham (nr Newbury) on Sep 28 (when two went over Painswick in Gloucestershire). Another item from the internet concerned the **Duncock song** which I heard at Langstone of Sep 25 - I thought that was unusual at this time of year but Sep 26 brought two more reports of this song, one from the Andover area and another from Milton Common in Portsmouth.

To end this entry I see that my account of **my walk around Emsworth** on Sunday did not mention anything that I saw en route. Fungi included a **Bay Bolete** in Wade Court Road, a couple of **Rooting Shank** in Seafields between Warblington Road and Beacon Square, and a cluster of **Common Inkcaps** in the Warblington Road grass. Two plants which deserve a mention were **a single flower on Garlic Mustard** near Southleigh Farm and a surprising cluster of **Hoary Plantain** flowering in the grass of a mini-lawn outside a Rowans Road house in Denvilles (presumably the turf for this lawn had come from chalk downland!). One other item was that the **Tamarisk trees along the Warblington Farm shore** were coming in full flower but to appreciate this you have to look up - most of the flowers are well above eye level.

**[Mon 28 September](#)**

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

### **A long walk around Emsworth**

Yesterday I walked along the shore from Langstone to Emsworth, then north through Brook Meadow and on beside the river to Westbourne before coming home along Southleigh Road. Part of the reason for doing this was to check how long it took me to walk each kilometre (and to confirm that I still have the stamina to complete this four and a half hour walk!). If I succeeded in getting round I could then use the information gained to plan other walks, including a trip from home around Farlington Marshes.

My route planning tool is the 'Where's the path website' designed for ramblers, and here I will explain how I use it. In order for you to be able to read my comments on how to use it at the same time as observing how the website works please at this point start a second copy of my blog in a new tab, then click the following link in the second tab which will then display the 'Where's the path'

screen, leaving my instructions and comments available in the first tab and thus allow you to switch between the two tabs at will.

The first step is to get the website to display the OS map covering the area concerned - for this go to the second tab and click the following link, then switch back to the first tab for further instructions on how to use the map tool in the second tab. In the second tab only, before switching back to the first tab for further instructions, click [Where's the path website](#). At the top centre of the second tab screen you will see a set of controls which you need to set. Before choosing the area to be displayed set the three drop-down lists as follows:

First OS - select OS

UK Grid - select UK 1Km

Second OS - select OS

Now choose the area to be displayed by clicking the 'binoculars' icon above the controls you have just set, then click the 'Enter a place' box and type e.g. 'Havant' in that box. This will display a text box saying 'Select a result' which you do by clicking the down arrow and selecting 'Havant, Hampshire, TOWN'. At this stage you should position the map so that the whole area your walk will cover is visible on the screen - to do this click and hold somewhere in the centre of the walk area, then move the mouse around until the whole of the walk area is visible. When you have done this you can use the 'scale control' (+ - and slider) shown at the top left of the display to enlarge the map image as much as possible while still keeping the whole walk area visible.

Before starting to use the map click the 'Pins in a map' icon - this may be difficult to see but is the next to the right of the 'binoculars' icon. It sets up the route planning functions and a new set of controls appears).

Now for marking and measuring your route. First check that the text box above the set of control icons says "Metric Click map to start" - if it does not, click the second icon from the left in the top row (positioning the cursor over this control will reveal that its function is to 'Delete the route' and clicking it will remove any route marker points and will restore the 'Click map to start' message). Now click the point on the map where your walk starts, then click the next point on the map where the route changes direction and repeat this until you have marked the whole route. Each time you click a new route marker point you will be told the overall distance travelled in the text box above the controls. If at any time you mis-position a route marker point you can delete the last stage from the current route by clicking the top right control (which has a 'go back' pointing arrow, and you can repeat this to undo multiple stages).

This route planning facility can of course be used to measure the straight line distance between any two points. It can also be used to get a rough idea of the distance to be walked through woodland where there are no footpaths shown on the map - for example from the Hollybank Lane entrance into Hollybank Woods to the orchid site at the southern foot of Longcopse Hill. All you have to do is to enlarge the map scale (using the + and - controls at the top left of the screen) and then mark out your proposed route through the wood to give you a minimum distance to be walked (leaving it up to your judgement of how long it will actually take you to get round thickets of trees, boggy bits, etc).

Finally, before deleting the 'Where's the path' website I strongly suggest you bookmark it for your own use - it has far more to offer than the above example suggests and it has its own Help facility to guide you.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 21 - 27 (WEEK 39 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 25 September**

#### **A short burst of Dunnock song on the South Moors**

This morning I walked to Langstone Pond and on via Mill Lane and the South Moors shore to Budds Farm, coming home up Southmoor Lane, but the only interesting observation was **a single burst of Dunnock song** near the mouth of the Langbrook stream. The tide was high when I reached the mouth of the stream and I was expecting to see the **Langstone pond Swan family there but today I could only see the two adults**. Peter Raby saw these adults with just three of their cygnets on the harbour near the pond early on Wednesday morning and later that morning I had a distant view of the parents with just three cygnets in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream (also, as did Peter) noting the white adult feathers now showing in one of the cygnets wings when it shook them, but yesterday Peter implies that he saw all six cygnets returning to Langstone Pond - clearly the cygnets are now demonstrating their rebellion against parental control!

Other birds seen on the South Moors included **two Wheatears, two Kestrels, a flock of at least 30 Linnets and a much larger flock (200+) of Starlings** with a moderate number of Swallows in the air here and over the Budds Farm pools. On the Pools I saw **two adult Swans and one cygnet and four Wigeon** as well as the usual suspects.

### **Thu 24 September**

#### **Re-introducing wild species to Britain**

This evening after finishing my tea I switched my TV to BBC 1 and found myself watching **a family of Cranes which have been breeding on the Somerset Levels** and as I was already thinking about the **Long-tailed Blue butterflies which have been breeding along our south coast this summer** I turned my thoughts to a review of the bird and butterfly re-introduction schemes that I was aware of.

I was aware that a growing number of **Cranes** have settled in East Anglia in recent years but I did not know that the current resident Crane population of the UK was as much as 75 birds, to which has now been added a further 100 birds released in Somerset. Details can be found by visiting [Somerset Crane Re-introduction Project](#) and [Un-invited Cranes in the UK](#). I was also already aware of the scheme to introduce **Great Bustards** to Salisbury Plain and of their winter flights to southwest England and across the Channel - for an overview of this less successful project see [Great Bustard project](#). There have been no problems in bringing **Red Kites** to Britain and for a reminder of how it all started see [Red Kites](#). Another successful project has been to bring **White-tailed Sea Eagles** back

to Scotland - for this see [Sea Eagles](#). One more unaided return to this country has been by [Eagle Owls](#) - for this see [Eagle Owls breeding in Yorkshire in 2008](#) - this article also tells us that there are some 3000 Eagle Owl in captivity in the UK. Finally for a [round up of re-introduction projects](#) see [Some more species re-introductions](#)

Winged Insects regularly settle in Britain and the current excitement concerns the [Long-tailed Blue Butterfly](#) which is currently producing fresh butterflies in areas where the Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea attracts their parents. This has been going on since at least 2013 and you can read about it at [Long-tailed Blue](#). For more recent sightings see the Sep 19 entry at [Sussex Butterfly News](#) (while on this website see the photos of [Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillars](#) which I mention below). Both the [Red Admiral](#) and the [Clouded Yellow](#) have had resident breeding colonies in the UK for several years and in 2009 the [Queen of Spain Fritillary bred successfully in the Chichester area](#) (though not again since then) - for that news see [Queen of Spain](#). Turning to moths the [Humming Bird Hawkmoth](#) has successfully hibernated in Britain over several recent winters and a couple of Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillars have been found in Sussex gardens in the past week.

### [Wed 23 September](#)

#### **A walk to Northney discovers Musk Storksbill by the Langstone Road and the sweet smell of Ebbinges Silverberry near Bosmere School plus the first Brown Tail Moth caterpillars of this year**

I had no particular target in mind as I set out to walk across Langstone Bridge in this morning's sunshine but before reaching Langstone Bridge I had two good additions to my September lists. The first came as I was climbing the steps, just south of Bosmere School, onto the footbridge over the Langstone roundabout area, and was detected by my nose rather than my eyes - it was the [pungent scent of the fairly common, but inconspicuous, shrub called Ebbinges Silverberry \(Elaeagnus ebbingei\)](#) whose small, trumpet shaped flowers hide among its large and unexciting green leaves. You'll probably recognize it from the photo below though you may well not associate it with the strong scent which its flowers are currently broadcasting.

Ebbinges Silverberry in flower

My next find came as I was walking south along the east side of the main Langstone Road before reaching the junction with the southern end of Southbrook Road. This time it was a wild flower which I have in the past found in a couple of places in south Hayling, but have not seen for several years. It was clearly [a species of Storksbill, but larger than Common Storksbill and I felt confident that it was Musk Storksbill](#) but took a specimen home to confirm the id which was clinched when I found that the critical point is that the subdivisions of the large, pinnate leaves do not go more than three-quarters of the way to the main mid-rib of the leaf as shown in the following picture which has Common Storksbill on the left and Musk on the right.

Leaves of Common and Musk Storksbill

Following the cycle track round the rear of the Langstone houses south of Mill Lane I heard a **Coal Tit in full song**, and when Langstone Harbour came into view I saw that several Wigeon were already back in the outflow of the Langbrook stream. Here I followed the old railway embankment to its southern end where I was rewarded with a good show of both **Blue Fleabane** and **Common Centaury** plus some late flowering **Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot** which replaces Bird's Foot Trefoil here.

Back on Langstone Bridge passing the Sailing Club I spotted both some re-flowering **Hemlock** and the first **Brown-tail Moth tiny caterpillars on the silk tents in which they will spend the winter**. Across the bridge I paused for refreshment on one of the benches near the carpark and found a fresh fungus in the nearby grass which I collected to take home for identification - I thought this would be easy but so far I have got not further than saying that I believe it to be a **Tricholoma species**. Back at home I took a couple of photos showing the white gills and the chunky white stem, plus the brown, greasy cap which you can see below. With it are a couple of small white puffballs which I believe to be **Bovista plumbea** and also a fresh specimen of the **Blackening Waxcaps** growing on my lawn.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 14 - 20 (WEEK 38 OF 2015)**

**Sat 19 September**

### **Today's walk from Langstone to Nore Barn and recent news from the internet (including the arrival of Slavonian, Black-necked and Red-necked Grebe)**

A sunny and almost windless morning, with the tide very low, was the setting for my walk down to Langstone Pond, then along the shore to Nore Barn and home via Warblington Church which gave me **57 plants** in flower, **23 bird** species (including **a bright cock Stonechat** on the Warblington Farm field nearest to Nore Barn Wood) and 5 colourful insects including **many Migrant Hawkets**, one Common Darter and one Comma plus what I think was a **Devil's Coachhorse type Rove Beetle** which had been hiding in a wooden fence until the fence was given a coat of Creosote which brought out the beetle looking sorry for its self and not cocking its tail as Rove Beetles normally do in self defence. At first glance I thought this was an Earwig before I noted to absence of pincers at its rear end.

On my way to Langstone I met Tony Gutteridge on his way home with his grandchildren and he told me he had seen the **'Pond Wigeon'** which had been on the pond last winter but I could not spot it. Continuing along the shore I was surprised to see how few **Tamarisks were starting to flower** - those around Gunner Point on Hayling were more or less in full flower by Sep 11. A little excitement started as I was about to turn the last corner of the shoreline and head north to Nore Barn Wood - in this final shore field a couple of **Yellow Wagtails** flew over the cattle and headed across to Hayling and after they had gone I noticed another small bird flying around the pond area in the field and giving me a great views of a **bright cock Stonechat**. After stopping for refreshment I walked along the shore path just within the wood until I reached the sign telling horse-riders to

turn off the shore path and here I checked out one of the **Butcher's Broom** bushes, finding at least one flower to become my second of the new season after one seen on Hayling on Sep 3.

The only special interest on the way home came just after crossing the A27 footbridge to the bottom of the 'made up' part of Pook Lane. Taking the first left turn into the footpath leading back to Havant I found a **'pretty' garden flower peeping over the fence** and remembered having identified this yellow flowered Clematis recently enough to remember that it is called **Clematis tangutica** (but sold under the name of **Clematis 'Golden Tiara'**).

Turning to some recent reports on the internet I see that a **Slavonian Grebe** was already in the Exe estuary on Sep 10, a **Red-necked Grebe** was off Weymouth on Sep 13, and **two Black-necked Grebes** were in the Jersey area on Sep 15. Of similar interest what I think was the first **Black-throated Diver** was on its way south past Flamborough on Sep 14. Still with the wildfowl it seems that our **Dark-bellied Brent** which started to appear on our south coast on Sep 8 were matched this year by a single **Pale-bellied bird** at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on that same day while a flock of 26 seen in Devon on Sep 11 matched the date that the larger flocks of up to 75 started to appear in Chichester and Langstone Harbours.

One other thing which caught my eye were the **Trektellen site entries** for Sep 17 was the large migrant movements - 3448 Swallows and 2725 House Martins passing over Painswick (Gloucester) plus 3100 Meadow Pipits and 4520 Siskins over Sandwich. Similar movements continued on Sep 18 with 3100 Swallows over south Hayling while 6662 Swallows and 7710 House Martins flew over Painswick in Gloucestershire on Sep 19.

In contrast to the pitiful human migrants heading north through the middle east at the moment Bourgas in Bulgaria reported on Sep 17 61 Booted Eagles (Batumi on the Black Sea had 605 Booted Eagles). On Sep 18 Bourgas had 2645 Lesser Spotted Eagles and on Sep 19 it logged 3293 Great White Pelicans plus 366 Sand Martins and 159392 Swallows.

## **Tue 15 September**

### **My monthly round of Havant Cemeteries finds Early Dog Violets reflowering, Ivy flowers starting to attract insects, and several fungi including Poison Pie**

As the clouds receded and the sun came out I was in **Havant Cemetery** where Council workers were giving the St Faith's area a much needed grass cut. With these workers was Graham Palmer, the senior Council Officer in charge of their work now that Rob Hill has moved on. I was able to have a brief chat with him after he had finished talking to the mowers to congratulate him on the way the cemeteries are still being managed and I gathered that Rob Hill's position is not being replaced but that the functions he performed are being absorbed into the wider remit of Graham Palmer's job.

My own observations started with finds of three new species of **Fungi** of which I took the photos shown below. I think the first, whose cap felt slimy, was probably **Hebeloma crustuliniforme aka Poison Pie**. The second species had a brown centre to an otherwise pale cap and white gills which indicated a **Tricholoma**

species, possibly *inocybeoides*. The third find seemed to be an edible mushroom, probably *Agaricus pilatianus* but if it is that species it would be poisonous to eat.

Fungi under the eastern conifers of Havant Cemetery  
Under the conifers lining the eastern peripheral path there is a great show of **Early Dog Violets** in the Spring but I was delighted to find one of these re-flowering today. My photo of this flower shows the straight and narrow spur which distinguishes this from the Common Dog Violet. At the north end of these conifers a **Rowan tree** brought more colour to the scene with its mass of red berries.

#### Early Dog Violet flower and Rowan berries

There were plenty of other wild flowers still on show both in the Cemetery and over the wall in the Allotments but none of these were new or surprising. Just two more photos taken in the St Faith's section and the Dissenters section respectively are worth inclusion here. First was a **fresh Comma butterfly** and second came **the first Ivy flowers of the autumn** opening and attracting Wasps and Flies for whom nectar is becoming scarce as winter draws on.

#### Comma butterfly and the first Ivy flowers of the autumn

Moving on to St Faith's Churchyard I discovered a species of **Puffball fungus** which I have not seen there before. I believe it is called **Scleroderma areolatum**. Equally typical of the autumn season was the rich crop of Blackberries covering some of the tombstones.

#### Scleroderma puffballs and blackberries in St Faith's churchyard

My final visit of the day was to Warblington Cemetery where one newcomer among the plants was the small **Cyclamen**, almost certainly planted to adorn a grave but which has now established itself. I gather that once planted it is spread to new areas by ants which carry the seeds (as they do with Snowdrops) and soon becomes established over a wide area. It gets the name of **Sowbread** as it is a favourite food of pigs in those woods where the pigs occur. Another seasonal sight here were the **red berries on a Cockspur Thorn tree**

#### Sowbread (Cyclamen) flowers and Cockspur Thorn berries

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 7 - 13 (WEEK 37 OF 2015)

### Sun 13 September

#### Langstone Egret roost count of 116 birds as Fieldfares reach Belgium on their way south

With the tide low and the sky clear at sunset I rode down to **Langstone to count the Egrets coming to roost and got a good total of 116 birds** spending the night there (an estimate of 30 birds already in the trees when I arrived plus a definite count of 86 seen to fly in). This was the first time this year that I watched this large total flying in as I have seen in previous autumn counts - nearly all came in well above the trees, silhouetted against a clear sky, before going into the

vertical, spiral dive down to the pond. Sometimes two or three arrived together but on one occasion nine were in the air together.

My first attempt to count this night roost was made on June 23 when Peter Raby had seen 54 adult birds during a daytime visit which supported an estimate of around 30 nests requiring a total of 60 adults, a few of which would escape detection. That evening I saw only 5 birds fly in at dusk (and noticed at least one juvenile already out of the nest) so my estimate of the adult population was 60 birds. My next count on July 21 saw that all the young seemed to have fledged and my count of birds (mainly juveniles) in the trees when I arrived was 30 to which I added 52 which subsequently flew in. I did not make a count in August but last night's excitement makes me keen to try again when weather and tide coincide but I doubt I will ever beat my all time record of 225 birds.

Yesterday I reported a single **Redwing** among the HOS sightings for Sep 11 and there are signs that it will not be long before we start seeing **Fieldfare** - 8 were in the Netherlands yesterday with another 27 in Germany and another two were in Belgium on Sep 9. Nearer home **the number of Brent in Chichester Harbour yesterday (Sep 12) was up to 98** and at the other end of the size scale I see that a single **Goldcrest** in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Sep 11 was the first to be seen there for some time, possibly suggesting it was an early migrant arrival - that suggestion is backed up by a remark that a group of five seen on the Sussex Downs on Sep 7 where the 'first of the autumn' while a couple seen at Church Norton on Sep 13 also attracted attention. 3 **Lesser Redpolls** which flew north over Selsey that day were also presumed migrants as well as being the 200th species to be logged at the Bill this year.

### **Fri 11 September**

#### **First large flocks of Brent in both Langstone and Chichester Harbours and south Hayling brings my September flower list up to 230**

As promised this morning saw me heading for south Hayling and finding **a flock of an estimated 75 to 100 Brent Geese out in the centre of Langstone Harbour** (Sword Sands area) at high tide. On my way home as the tide was starting to fall the same flock was still present but had moved closer to the Hayling shore and positioned itself over a mud bank which I could see as a brown stain contrasting with the greener deep water of the Langstone Channel and the geese were reaching down into the water, obviously hungry to get a meal of weed after their long journey. This time I reduced my estimate of numbers down to around 75 birds and when I was back at home I found that Andy Johnson had also estimated 75 birds in Chichester Harbour close to the Hayling shore at some time between 7 and 8 am when the tide was still low enough for them to be seen on the mud of the Dip Rithe area off Tournurbury - I can only guess that the flock I saw was the same as his sighting and had taken flight across Hayling when the tide rose.

The other aim of my visit was to add to my list of wild plants flowering in September and by this evening I had entered my finds into my computer which told me that **the number of species seen in September was now up to 230 compared to my final count for August of 276**. One of the plants I was looking for was **Autumn Ladies Tresses** which had been mentioned in the report of the Tawny Pipit in the Gunner Point area on Sep 5 - I was not aware that this orchid grew in this area so I was pleased to find at least 20 specimens. Also in this area

it was good to see the Tamarisk bushes just coming into flower - at least three other species were having a good second flowering, among them White Bryony and Pale Flax seen by the Hayling Coastal Path and Sea Campion here on Sinah Common. Surprisingly, among the thousands of Gorse Bushes in the Sinah area only one had started to re-flower.

Nearing the southern end of the Coastal Path, in the fields south of the Saltmarsh Lane houses, I noticed a gap in the hedge separating the old rail track from the field just at the point where a large mound of manure/compost has been dumped in the field edge and I stopped to have a look for any plants growing on the mound and in so doing I found **some large Agaricus type fungi** growing on this compost. I was not certain of their id so I collected a sample to bring home. Later, at Gunner Point, I found **another clump of similar fungi** growing unexpectedly where the thin grass gives way to pure shingle and also collected one of these. My tentative id is that both samples are of **Agaricus litoralis (Sand Mushroom) aka Agaricus bernardii** whose favoured habitat is the seashore - spores from the toadstools growing here on the shore could well have blown inland and found the compost heap was a good place to grow.

One other observation worth a mention was the large numbers of waders coming to roost at the Oysterbeds with the rising tide - I reckon I saw around 750 Oystercatchers and 500 Dunlin with my first few Ringed Plover of the winter. In the pools north of the lagoon there were also at least 8 Shelduck (are these already starting to come back from the summer moult on the sands off the German coast?). These numbers, and the presence of the Brent, tell me that we have today moved from autumn into winter and this is backed by a sighting of **a single Redwing** seen this morning over North Baddesley (in the Romsey area). Against this gloomy prediction of winter I did see a single **Clouded Yellow butterfly** at Gunner Point and there were also many Small Whites on the wing everywhere.

**[Thu 10 September](#)**

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

**Seven Brent in Chichester Harbour close to Hayling shore and a Blackening Waxcap on my lawn**

Tomorrow I hope to cycle down the Hayling Coastal Path, with the tide high, in the hope of seeing Brent back in Langstone Harbour. Encouragement that they will be there comes from a sighting of 7 on the Chichester Harbour mud close to the Hayling shore at Dip Rithe (between Black Point and Mill Rythe) on Sep 8 plus 3 flying east off Hill Head on Sep 9 and 1 flying towards Lepe (near Calshot) from the direction of the Isle of Wight on Sep 10. Hopefully these unusually early arrivals are a few wind assisted non breeding birds rather than the outrunners of a majority which have had a bad breeding season.

After several days devoted to looking for wild flowers I spent much of today catching up with entering records from the internet into my computer but took a break just before my tea time to visit Cliff Dean's website, the contents of which are mainly photographic, often with no text to explain what we are looking at. When I looked his latest entry for Sep 9 was devoted to the current look of the countryside around his home at Pett on the west shore of Rye Bay. The previous entry is dated Sep 7 and seems to cover a flying visit to the Baltic area where he photographed whatever caught his eye in the way of the local inhabitants and the 'built environment'. The three preceding entries focus on birds seen around his home, including a record 'flock' of 33 Buzzards enjoying the thermals and a Red-

backed Shrike posing on a Blackberry bush. Before these came two entries showing his interest in Art Exhibitions. If you want to take a break a break from stress in your life I strongly recommend a visit to [The world seen through the eyes of Cliff Dean](#).

A brief stroll round my lawn this evening found the first Blackening Waxcap starting to push up through the grass. I see that this common species had started to appear on Portsdown on Sep 2 and I expect the rain forecast for this weekend will bring up a lot more fungi.

### [Wed 9 September](#)

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

#### **More Brent fly past Dungeness and the first Ivy flowers of the autumn open to feed the insects**

I have not had time to scan the internet for news this evening but a quick look at the [Dungeness Bird Observatory site](#) showed that five Brent had flown west past that site yesterday (Sep 8) to confirm that the two which arrived in Pagham Harbor that day were new arrivals and not birds which have been summering with us. Three flying east past Hill Head today (Sep 9) were probably summering birds.

My own outing this afternoon was initially just to the [Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton](#) to ensure that my month list of wild flower species topped the 200 mark with the [Indian Balsam](#), [Purple Loosestrife](#) and [hybrid Water Speedwell](#) to be found there went on the list. Having done that I did not want to waste the sunny afternoon by visiting places I had already been to this month so I headed west to Farlington Church from where I walked up [Portsdown](#) to Fort Purbrook and in this area I added [Common Calamint](#), [Lucerne](#), [Ploughmans Spikenard](#) and a few others before turning downhill thinking I would not find anything more on this trip so I was doubly delighted, just before re-entering the built-up area, to find [a large clump of Ivy in flower](#) (and buzzing with insects) in the roadside hedge. The Ivy brought my [September flower count to 212](#) with one garden species that I had collected en route still un-named. This was a climber which I did not recognize but which may be a form of the [Trumpet Vine \(Campsis radicans\)](#) with which it shares pinnate leaves and clusters of long tubular flowers - some of the sites I have looked at say its flowers can be yellow rather than the red of the standard form but none mention the strong, pleasant scent given off by the samples I brought home.

### [Tue 8 September](#)

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

#### **Brent Geese are starting to arrive and my September flower list reaches 190**

Trektellen reported the [first Dark Bellied Brent \(a flock of 14\) in the Netherlands on Sept 5](#) with 3 more on Sept 6 and [5 Pale-bellied Brent in Yorkshire on Sept 7](#). Today (Sep 8) the Selsey Blog reported [2 already in Pagham Harbour](#). With high pressure continuing to support an airflow from the south-east until next week end I may well have to bring forward my estimate of the first to reach the Solent Harbours from Sep 14 to later this week!

Another early arrival seems to be a group of [five Red-breasted Mergansers](#) flying past Lepe at the mouth of Southampton Water today (Sep 8) but they seem to have been going the wrong way (flying east). Other current news is of [a Barred Warbler being ringed at Titchfield Haven](#) and the first autumn [Ring Ouzel](#) being seen on Black Down near Hazelmere, both today. Yesterday (Sep 7) a young

**Pectoral Sandpiper** arrived at Medmerry and was seen again today at the Sidlesham Ferry pool this morning. Also on Sep 7 a **Hoopoe** flew in off the sea at **Portland** and a **Ring-neck Parakeet** was seen in the Aldershot area.

Non-birding news for today is of a **Jersey Tiger moth** seen near **Southampton** but when I checked on Hants Moths I found that this uncommon species is now less rare since it settled on the Isle of Wight in the 1990s - for photo and background info see [Jersey Tiger Moth](#). A photo showing the underwing can be seen at [Jersey Tiger in Sussex](#). Another very colourful **Red Underwing** moth was seen at Portland yesterday (Sep 7) and you can see it at [Red Underwing at Portland](#). Much more cryptic was a **bug** seen in the **Peasmarsh** area north of Hastings - see [Strange bug](#). For a more recognizable species - **Marsh Frog** - that you won't find locally go to [Young Marsh Frog](#).

My own latest outings have been a walk to the South Moors yesterday and a cycle ride round Emsworth today. Yesterday's walk set off following the Langbrook stream and my first surprise as I emerged from the A27 underpass was to see a brand new four storey building towering above me on the old Bosmere School field. If you are interested to know what is going on have a look at [Development of the Bosmere school field](#). Carrying on downstream I found both **Water Forget-me-not** and **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** in flower just after crossing the Technology Park approach road. Emerging onto the South Moors both **Marsh Ragwort** and **Ragged Robin** were still in flower and on reaching the path across the Moors I added **Tufted Forget-me-not** to the list. A look round the Orchid Field encouraged me with a better display of **Devil's Bit Scabious** than I had expected and I was also surprised to find a **single Southern March Orchid** (well past flowering but standing tall with large seed pods). Budds Farm pools also gave me good news with both adult Swans and two cygnets having come out of hiding. Both Shoveler and Teal were present in addition to the regular wildfowl and at the mouth of the mouth of the Hermitage stream the small flock of Swans had increased in number to 20 (I well remember the years when summer flocks numbering 200 could be seen here and in Emsworth Harbour). Turning up the Brockhampton Stream a few flowers of **Turkish Tutsan** reminded me of the days when a small sailing ship was permanently moored here and its occupants planted a garden on the bank beside their berth.

Today's cycle ride was aimed at finding the fungi which Chris Oakley had photographed recently at the lower end of Redlands Lane but I failed to spot them so continued down New Brighton Road (seeing the **Wild Clary** still flowering beside Christopher Way). In Brook Meadow I failed to spot the Wasp Spiders which were there before the recent mowing but I did find **Skullcap** still flowering by the Lumley Stream outside number 4 Raglan Terrace and coming back down Lumley Road I had a surprise in finding a plant of **Moth Mullein** in flower in a garden where it was almost certainly not planted (Earlier in my ride today I had already seen one example of this species growing unplanted in a very much neglected garden of number 581 Southleigh Road). Heading home along the A259 I added three more species to my September list - **Shaggy Soldier** by the roadside south of Peter Pond, **Field Woundwort** at the A27 underpass, and **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** at the Meadowlands Road junction with the Emsworth Road in Havant. One final observation came in Emsworth as I rode uphill from the Peter Pond area to the town centre roundabout - in the centre of the road was a totally unidentifiable splodge where some bird had been run over maybe

hundreds of times but somehow a single leg had survived to give a clue - the leg seemed to be coated with pure white feathers right down to what seemed to be a foot with claws - **could this have been a Little Owl???**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 31 - SEPT 6 (WEEK 36 OF 2015)**

**Sun 6 September**

### **A visit to Havant Thicket plus a Water Vole in Havant and highlights of internet news**

Highlights of my visit to **Havant Thicket** this afternoon included **Thorn Apple** still in flower plus at least one 'thorny' fruit **with both garden Tomato and a Pumpkin plant** flowering on the 'compost heap' in the field alongside Durrants Road. **Lesser Skullcap** was still in flower and 'the usual suspects' (**Ling Heather, Golden Rod, Wood Sage, Devils Bit Scabious and Dwarf Gorse**) were easily found. A couple of unexpected additions to my monthlist were **Yellow Pimpernel** and some late **Hedge Parsley** (*Torilis japonica*).

Back at home I had an email from Roy Ewing to say that he had just seen **two Water Voles in Havant** - one in the Langbrook stream near the Water Wheel and the other eating Water Cress in the Dolphin pool, seen from the path leading to South Street. I only had one sighting in the pool last month (Aug 13) but it has been clear that something is eating a lot of Water Cress throughout the summer.

Brian Fellows, in his blog for yesterday, commented on **recent Hornet sightings** and slightly surprised me by referring to the 'workers', which do all the work in a Hornet's nest, as 'females'. While this is strictly true it nudged me to look into the **Hornet Life Cycle and Reproduction**. Two web sites (both advertising pest controllers) described the facts as follows ...

"The colony starts in the spring with a fertilized queen that spent the winter hibernating. She finds a place to build a nest. She uses chewed-up cellulose from decayed wood to make the nest. At first, the nest only has a few cells. The queen lays an egg in each cell. When the eggs hatch, the queen feeds the larvae nectar and insects. When the larvae have developed into adults, they take over the work. These workers are sterile female insects." Although not stated anywhere I think all the eggs which the Queen lays through the summer hatch as 'Workers' and there are no males at this stage. Continuing the story I read ...

"When the nest has reached its maximum size in the autumn the worker hornets build special cells in the nest, these are reserved for new queen larvae and male larvae. Once these new queens and males have hatched and pupated into fully formed Queens and Male Hornets, they leave the nest and fly off to search for their opposite numbers from other nests to mate with. Once mated, these new queens will search out a suitable place to hibernate over the winter. The males, having played their part, do not return to their birth nest but live a life of idleness until killed off by frost - these are the insects which give us most of our autumn

sightings. The whole cycle starts again in the spring, when each of these new queens will start a new nest."

The two websites from which I gleaned this information can be visited at [Hornet Info 1](#) and [Hornet Info 2](#).

My usual scan of wildlife websites this evening showed that the **Siskin invasion continues unabated**. HOS reported at least 60 over the Warsash area today with another 11 seen at Brownwich while Dorset reported 180+ and Sandwich Bay reported 232 flying north on Sep 5. Also at Brownwich on Sep 6 were **1041 Med Gulls** and at the other end of the numeric scale **a single Tree Sparrow** flew over Gilkicker.

For Sep 5th Peter Gammage adds to the news of the Tawny Pipit at Gunner Point with the comment that there is **an exceptional show of Autumn Ladies Tresses** in the area where the bird was seen. From Portland comes the first sighting of a **Death's Head Hawkmoth** on Sep 5. To see a photo of it go to the Portland website and scroll down to the photo - the link is [Death's Head Hawkmoth photo](#). News from Selsey is of **yet more Siskins** - 179 flew over heading west on Sept 5 - you may also like to see a **good photo of a Yellow Legged Gull** taken there - see [Yellow Legged Gull at Pagham North Wall by Dorian Mason on Sep 6](#).

## Sat 5 September

### Recent rarities and a bit more late August news

Today **a Tawny Pipit was seen near Gunner Point on Hayling Island** by an unknown birder who put the news out on the Pager system where it was picked up by Simon Ingram who posted the news on the HOS birding site around 10:30 and David Stevenson found the bird still in the same place at 14:25. For a photo of this bird taken today go to the Birdguides website and scroll down to the recent photos, then click the thumbnail photo (currently the first in the selection) for an excellent image showing the almost unmarked breast, prominent white supercilium and the row of dark spots on the median coverts. The website link is [Birdguide's Tawny Pipit page](#). Keith Vinicombe's excellent book on Bird Identification says that if an autumn bird is seen before mid-September that almost certainly rules out the confusion species - Richard's Pipit - which turns up on our shores a little later than the Tawny. In any case Tawny looks darker with heavily streaked throat and upper breast and also has a darker back and wings. For Tawny Pipit photos see [Tawny Pipit info](#).

Yesterday's news (Sep 4) starts with a **juvenile Red-breasted Flycatcher** on the Isle of Wight. This bird is Chiff-chaff size but flicks its wings and jerks its tail like a Flycatcher. You won't see the red breast on a juvenile but will see the prominent white on either side of the base of the tail in flight and should also see the thin white ring around the eye when the bird lands. An identification 'app' designed for mobile phone has photos of a juvenile as well as adults and also has a map of the UK showing that the species may be expected on migration anywhere on the East or South Coast except the Isle of Wight! - see [Red-breasted Flycatcher id](#). RBA has 6 reports of **Red-backed Shrike** in the UK for Sep 4 and one of them was at Rye Harbour with another at Durdle Dor in Dorset. For a photo of the Rye bird see [Red-backed Shrike](#). Further west Portland had both an **Ortolan Bunting** and a **Barred Warbler** (one of 7 in the UK). To the east of us another **Honey Buzzard** flew south over Selsey and from Cumbria comes news of **one juvenile**

**Bee Eater having fledged** from a nest there. One other interesting report for Sep 4 comes from the Sandwich Bird Observatory which includes the following in its entry for Sep 4 ... "Avid followers of Siskin Monthly will have noticed from the July issue that **this has already been a bonkers year for Siskins and more than the previous annual record were trapped this morning, bringing the likely total for the day to over 200.**" I have been unable to track down the reference to 'Siskin Monthly' but I have noticed more reports than usual of Siskins coming to this country during the past summer rather than waiting to arrive as winter visitors - among the long list of reports generated by a search of the HOS website for Siskins since Apr 1 this year I see that Jeff Goodridge in Southsea had 9 flying west low over his house on July 9 and that Graham Stephenson had 66 going west over south Hayling on the morning of July 18. Recently this influx has speeded up with Pete Potts seeing 30 going west over Chilling on Sept 2 with another 30 over the Gosport Wildgrounds on Sep 3. This contrasts with low numbers in the UK last winter - a BTO press release in April of this year said .. "This winter has seen incredibly low numbers of Siskins, a small finch that traditionally turns to our gardens for food during the winter, according to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden BirdWatch. This is probably due to a bumper crop of Sitka Spruce seeds, but with the recent drop in temperatures, will Siskins return to our gardens before the winter is out?" Note that this report of low numbers refers to Gardens, not the UK as a whole.

For a further snippet of news from August I see that **on Aug 27 there were 400 Storm Petrels** in the Scillies area while **Dorset had a new county record with 63 Egyptian Geese** at Cowards Marsh near Christchurch. **Aug 25** brought a **Phalarope** to the Exmouth area but we are not told if it was a late Red-necked or an early Grey. Nearer home the 'first for the site' **Pintail** of the winter was at Farlington Marshes on **Aug 23** while several sites reported an unusual number of **Wood Sandpipers** that day - 33 at Exmouth, 22 at Pennington and 5 at Titchfield Haven.

**Fri 4 September**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

**Have you seen our Queen in the Huffington Post? Plus some data from the last week of August.**

Next Wednesday, Sept 9, **Queen Elizabeth II will break Queen Victoria's record as our longest reigning monarch.** Whatever your views on the monarchy this is a notable achievement and a search of the internet to find out more about this event took me to a site that I have never visited before - the Huffington Post - where I not only found the detail I was after but also **an unforgettable photo of the Queen** delivering a 'Queen's speech' to Parliament which, for me, sums up why Britain still deserves the title of Great Britain and why our Queen deserves recognition as 'mother of the nation' for her humanity and self-discipline. Do have a look at this photo which you can see at **Huffington Post article about Queen Elizabeth's long reign.**

Getting back to wildlife news I have now finished recording data for August and here I will try to pick out some interesting reports from the last week of the month. starting with news from **Aug 31** when a **Spotted Crake** was in the Exmouth area of Devon - the first I know of in southern England this autumn - here is a photo of it **Spotted Crake in Devon.** Next come a couple of reports of **Hoopoe**, one from Sandwich Bay announcing that one had been in East Kent for several days, the

second was in Cornwall at Carnyoth, a hamlet near Penzance. In Devon a **Pilot Whale** was seen off Berry Head at Brixham.

**Aug 30** was the day on which **25 Cattle Egrets** flew over the loW and then disappeared after heading north up the Hampshire Avon. Since then no reports of the big flock but **Aug 31** saw 2 on the Lymington Marshes, Sep 2 saw one over Blashford and one at Titchfield Haven - that one was still at the Haven on Sep 4 but Keith Turner saw one briefly at Farlington Marshes on Sep 3. This may be the bird seen by the Sussex Ouse on Sep 2. Also on **Aug 30** three **Brent Geese** were seen in the Hardway area of Portsmouth Harbour following a sighting of six in the South Binness area of Langstone Harbour on Aug 29 and nine in Chichester Harbour on Aug 22 - this is typical behaviour of birds which have summered with us and now, having completed their moult, are getting ready to greet their friends when they return from Russia on Sept 14 (my guess!). At Dungeness 5 **Honey Buzzards** on their way from breeding in Scandinavia to winter in equatorial Africa passed over the south east corner of Britain - in Sept 2000 a depression in the North Sea diverted hundreds of these birds over England, generating at least 300 reports from 26 UK counties (including a peak sighting of 26 together over Minsmere) and there was another, smaller, surge of reports over the UK in 2008 - will there be another surge this year? So far RBA has reported 10 over the UK on Aug 29 and six more on Aug 30. Another record count of migrants came from Sandwich on Aug 30 when they had **51 Whinchats** at the Observatory though I was more interested in a **Red-backed Shrike at Climping** (near Bognor) and a **Woodchat Shrike at the Lizard** in Cornwall that day. For those more interested in butterflies Aug 30 brought one **Long-tailed Blue** to a Seaford garden and Aug 29 brought another to a Worthing garden which had the butterflies favoured food plant (Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea) - a photo of one on these flowers can be seen at [Long-tailed Blue showing its 'tail'](#).

**Aug 29** started with a **Black-necked Grebe** already in winter plumage on the sea off Paignton in Devon. Since August 14 there have been many reports of a single juvenile **Black Stork** in the Bexhill area and on 30 August a group of six Black and one White Stork were circling high over nearby Cooden. The Bexhill bird seems to have flown a few miles inland on Aug 29, ending up in another garden where it was photographed - see [Black Stork in a Crowhurst garden](#). More **Honey Buzzards** were seen on Aug 29 with four flying out to sea from Folkestone and another one over Dungeness (a single reported from the Isle of Wight on Aug 27 may have been from the New Forest rather than Scandinavia). Also seen on the Isle of Wight on Aug 29 was a single **Montagu's Harrier** while locally Peter Raby saw a **Hobby and a Spotted Flycatcher** in the Wade Court area at Langstone plus **a Peregrine, an Osprey, a Sparrowhawk and two Buzzards** all over Northney across the water from Langstone. Maybe the Peregrine was one of the Chichester Cathedral family as one of two seen over the Oysterbeds that day is said to have had colour rings to mark it as Chichester bred. **Three Swifts** were over Langstone that day while a **single Bee-eater** was logged at Christchurch Harbour and a **Bluethroat** was caught and ringed in Poole Harbour. Finally for Aug 29 a **Red-backed Shrike** which had arrived at Chuch Norton on Aug 28 moved off from the Selsey area but at Brook Meadow in Emsworth there was a first sighting of a female **Wasp Spider (Argiope bruennichi)**, which will hopefully stay there for some time, calmly eating a male which had just performed his duties and was now surplus to requirements.

I will end this entry with news for **Aug 28** when a **single Red-throated Diver** flew east over Selsey and a single **Hump-back Whale** was an unexpected sighting off Porthgwarra (just south of Land's End) in Cornwall. Back in the Beachy Head area a single **Red-breasted Merganser** was off Hope Gap and a single **Dotterel** was photographed on the Isle of Wight where it stayed for at least a couple of days - see [Juvenile Dotterel on Afton Down](#). Over at Titchfield Haven **the night roost of Yellow Wagtails was reported as 165 birds** and down in Cornwall a **single Grey Phalarope** was the first I have heard of this autumn (seen from the boat heading for the Scillies). Other news from Cornwall was of a **Red-billed Tropicbird** off Porthgwarra between Land's End and Penzance - for a photo of this species see [Red-billed Tropicbird](#) and for more info see [Tropicbird info](#).

### **Thu 3 September**

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

#### **Around north Hayling**

This morning I set out on my bike for north Hayling, deviating from the Billy Trail when opposite the bridge over the Lymbourne stream to check out the **Least Yellow Sorrel** where the footpath heading south for the Royal Oak crosses Southbrook Road. That was still in flower but because of this diversion I found myself going down the east side of the main Langstone Road and thus found **an unexpected display of large fungi under the trees between Langstone Avenue and where the Billy Line crosses the main road**. These were large Boletus type fungi up to 20cm across the cap and having a reddish tinge to the pores under the brown caps, plus a net of red veins on their broad stems. Back at home I identified them as **Boletus erythropus** and you can see a good photo of the species at [Boletus erythropus photo](#). Later in the trip alongside Daw Lane, I found **another troop of large autumn fungi appropriately called Stubble Rosegill (Volvariella speciosa/gliocephala)** - they are often found in stubble fields - and a good photo can be seen at [Stubble Rosegill photo](#).

Continuing down the Hayling Coastal Path past the Oyster Beds I added **Pepper Saxifrage** to my list with more and larger plants than in previous years beside the track in the area from the pond to the Pill Box where I turned off to West Lane. Reaching Daw Lane a plant of **French Cranesbill** was a colourful sight by the road, and in the Stoke Fruit Farm fields north of the lane the big Sunflower crop had been joined by a large area of Sweetcorn now in flower.

Heading up Copse Lane I stopped to check some roadside **Butcher's Broom plants and was rewarded the first flower of their new season**. Next stop was at North Common where **Hedgerow Cranesbill** had resumed flowering but other than the Fragrant Agrimony I found nothing there to add to my new month list though I did not have to go much further before I found the **mass of Green Nightshade flowering and fruiting** in the entrance to the big field planted with Potatoes - also there I added Pale Persicaria. Green Nighshade looks similar to Black Nightshade but its leaves are a much lighter shade of green and its identity is confirmed by the 'hat' half covering the berries - see [Green Nightshade berries](#). I think this brings my September flower list so far up to 160 species.

### **Wed 2 September**

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

#### **Are we seeing a Cattle Egret invasion? plus my first of the month finds**

August 30th saw **the biggest flock (25 birds) of Cattle Egrets ever recorded in Britain** sweep over the Isle of Wight, touch down on Cowards Marsh near

Christchurch in Dorset, then at least 22 of them headed up the Avon valley to disappear at nightfall somewhere south of Fordingbridge. Since then the only reports have been of two birds in the Christchurch area (plus the same or another pair over the Lymington Marshes) on Aug 31, and a report of three somewhere in the UK on the RBA website entry for Sept 1st. No doubt someone will eventually track them down but it's surprisingly easy for rare birds which do not head for the known birding 'hotspots' to disappear into the English countryside.... For some interesting background info on the species (prompted by the first record of Breeding in the UK in the summer of 2008) see [Cattle Egret is the worlds most successful bird colonist](#) which includes the following

Sept 1st saw me out in the Havant area in search of wildflower species and a three hour local walk in the morning, plus a couple of hours on my bike in the afternoon along the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway, gave me a **total of 146 species** and one whose id is still puzzling me (probably Parsley Water Dropwort). I started as usual with the Havant Cemetery where the surprise find was a couple of **Giant Puffballs** - a photo showing the size that these fungi can reach see [Man blowing up a Giant Puffball](#) and for a more rational account of the species go to [Info on Giant Puffballs](#). **Chicken of the Woods (Sulphure Polypore)** was still looking good where I found it on my Aug 18 Cemeteries round (see [Chicken of the Woods in Havant Cemetery](#)) and my search for flowers was temporarily interrupted when a Buzzard flew over attracting a noisy response from the Herring Gulls still based at their nest site on the factory rooves beside the railway north of the cemetery. The adjacent allotments gave me the expected 'Weasel's Snout' (Wild Snapdragon) and the garden of the house immediately south of the allotments entry from New Lane gave me an **eye-catching shrub with long scarlet 'catkins'** (see [Mystery shrub](#)) which I did not recognize but have since identified as *Acalypha hispida* (aka Red-hot Cat's Tail or Chenille plant). For info see [Acalypha hispida details](#).

My afternoon ride began with a surprise sight of **a young Hedgehog** under the railings of the grass around the big office block which abuts on the Langstone roundabout. It was searching for food at edge of the grass, only separated from the continuous flow of traffic coming into Havant or heading for Hayling by the breadth of the pavement I was on and I did what I could to stop it from committing suicide by giving it a gentle nudge with my foot to send it back towards the building.

Before heading west along Harts Farm Way I rode down Southmoor Lane to make sure **Slender Hare's Ear** was on my list. Back on the cycleway towards Broadmarsh I climbed the 'mountain' to add the **Hairy Vetchling** and was very pleased to find a plant in flower in the north-west of the grassland (in all the previous years I have found it here the plants have only been in the north east of the site). Less welcome here was **a single plant of Japanese Knotweed in full flower** (my first sight of its flowers for the year). Continuing along the stretch of cycleway bordering the harbour I found lots of **Blue Fleabane** (now very much easier to spot thanks to the tufts of white as its inconspicuous flowers start to become seeds). Also in this section I came across just **one bush of Common Gorse which had started its winter flowering season** after two months of 'aestivation' (the summer version of hibernation). Alongside Farlington Marshes a few flowers could still be seen on the **Goat's Rue** and nearby I stopped to puzzle

over two species which were in their last throes of flowering - I'm pretty sure that one of them was **Marsh Woundwort**, usually very easy to spot at a distance but not so easy when you only have the shape of the leaves and one or two 'past their best' flowers hiding in the vegetation on the motorway bank. I collected a specimen of the other feeling pretty confident that it was a white-flowered Bedstraw species but which turned out to be an umbellifer which I am dubiously thinking may be **Parsley Water Dropwater** though it could be **Cowbane** which is listed in the Hants Flora as native the Sussex but absent from Hampshire. Reaching the slip road down to the Eastern Road roundabout I again found **Japanese Knotweed in flower** on a plant poking out of the wooden fence surrounding the 'Knotweed Control Area', and back at the west end of Harts Farm Way I crossed the road to the old playing fields where **Creeping Yellow Cress** was still flowering.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 24 - 30 (WEEK 35 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 28 August**

#### **Portsdown gives me my first Autumn Ladies Tress and Autumn Gentian plus Common Calamint**

I chose Portsdown for today's outing in the hope of seeing my first **Autumn Ladies Tresses** orchid and the first **Autumn Gentian** for the year both of which I found in the Fort Widley area after a bonus by the roadside on the way up the hill in the shape of **Common Calamint** which I have not found anywhere for several years. Another good first for the year was **Ploughman's Spikenard**. A few other species that I have not recorded so far this month brought my count of flowering plants for August to 275

To see a photo of **Autumn Ladies Tresses**, which normally stands no more than 10 cm high on a rigid green stem with a basal rosette of leaves that you will probably not notice, and has its flowers arranged spirally round the top of the stem, go to [Autum Ladies Tresses flowerhead](#). For **Autumn Gentian** - the specimen I saw stood not more than 3cm tall and had only two flowers - see [Autumn Gentian](#) - and for the much taller (around 1 metre) **Ploughman's Spikenard** see [Ploughman's Spikenard](#)

For a photo of Common Calamint see [Common Calamint](#). The one or two plants I found stood about 15cm high and attracted me by their long tubed, almost white, flowers though closer inspection showed delicate lilac markings on the lip of each flower, and the plant had a strong minty scent. Back at home I used the Fitter and Fitter Wild Flower book to check the id of this plant and decided it was Lesser Calamint, but on checking the Hants Flora that species was said to be extinct in the county and on referring to Stace I found that my specimen would fit with a small plant of Common Calamint, and that the flowers lacked the hairs which protrude from the flower tube of Lesser Calamint, convincing me that what I had was **Common Calamint**. The last time I saw this uncommon plant was 20 years ago on the IBM site in Cosham where it appeared for several years in just one location. If you want to look for the plants I found you will have to walk up the pavement of Portsdown Hill Road from its junction with College Road to the exit road from Fort Purbrook - I'm afraid I did not note anything to refind the precise location but the plants were in the lower, partially mown, section of the roadside bank and were visible enough to catch my eye as I was cycling up the pavement.

### **Thu 27 August**

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

### **Brief return of sunshine gives me a Painted Lady and a mass of Slender Hare's Ear. Also more thoughts on Red-footed Falcon.**

Bright sunshine in the late afternoon yesterday after a prolonged deluge of rain encouraged me to get my bike out for a short ride to Budds Farm. In addition to the sunshine two things gave me great pleasure - the first was a fresh Painted Lady sunning itself in my driveway as I was starting, the second was a mass of Slender Hare's Ear in flower on the South Moors shore. Should you want to see this uncommon and difficult to spot flower in the next few days go to the south end of Southmoor Lane and turn east along the shore path. At the point where the higher seawall path starts take the lower route used by vehicles and stop at the large Japanese Rose bush which is now re-flowering. Here get into the inland of the two wheel tracks and continue east looking at the edge of the track nearest the moors. After only two or three paces I found myself looking at a yellowish patch of flowering Hare's Ear perhaps 30 cm across and overtopping the grass which usually obscures it. Moving on I quickly found two more large clumps and by the time I got back to the Rose Bush from the point where the lower track rejoins the seawall I had seen seven clumps, several of them consisting of just one or two plants and on the seaward edge of the tracks.

A short scan of the Budds Farm pools showed a mass of hirundines, the majority being Sand Martins, and a mass of Coots. Among these on the water were the expected Mallard and Tufted Duck but also a few Gadwall and singles of Mute Swan and Grey Heron. Thankfully there were no Canada Geese and sadly, for the first year that I can recall, no Shelduck appear to have been here on any of my visits.

Reaching the Langstone rondabout on my way home I noticed that the number of plants of Narrow-leaved Bittercress on the dry, dusty ground at the edge of the slip road bringing eastbound traffic down to the roundabout had increased from the one or two which gave me my first sight of the plant on Aug 4 to around half a dozen but I did not stop for a close look. To see these plants look where the metal fence gives way to the normal motor-way crash barrier close to the traffic lights at the end the east bound slip road into Havant.

Continuing the saga of the unlikely but possible Red-footed Falcon over Brook Meadow on Aug 21 Malcolm Phillips has responded to Peter Raby's view that its behaviour (circling around over the Meadow for several minutes without hovering or perching) was entirely consistent with it being a Kestrel. Malcolm responds to this by saying that he (the only person to have actually seen and photographed the bird) is convinced it was not a Kestrel (which he has watched closely on many occasions over the years) but is still not certain what it was.

Brian Fellows, who has spent some time searching the internet for clues as to its identity, accepts that Malcolm's photo does show a similarity to the internet photo of a Red-footed Falcon but is put off accepting this id because the species has not been reported by anyone else in the local area. Further research by Brian revealed past records show that this is an unlikely time of year for the Red-foot which most frequently turns up in Britain during May and June when it is blown off course during its migration from wintering in South Africa to its breeding sites in eastern Europe and Asia

I agree that Brook Meadow in August is an unlikely place to see this Falcon but would like to make three points in support of the possibility...

1. If you are flying from Eastern Europe to South Africa at this time of year and are so badly off course that you find yourself over Britain then there seems to me no good reason why you should not be over Emsworth rather than the Lake District or Birmingham.

2. The RBA Website ([Rare Bird Alert website](#)) entries for this year show that on Aug 25 there were at least three of these Falcons in the UK (at Aberdeen, in Yorkshire and in Lincolnshire - this one has been present there since Aug 12). On Aug 24 there was also a report from Wiltshire and earlier there had been one in Staffordshire from July 18 to Aug 9.

Recent sightings in Hampshire were of one over a roundabout in Fareham on May 28 in 2010 seen by Ian Calderwood and another over Petersfield Heath Pond on May 9 2013 seen by Ted Raynor (both experienced observers) - note that both these were one off sightings with no subsequent reports from anywhere near by. In Sussex one was present by the River Ouse close to Lewes from May 30 to June 3 this year and a few days earlier (May 26) one was in the Wareham area of Dorset - see [Good photo of the Wareham bird](#). More photos and a blog about the Barcombe Mills (nr Lewes) bird can be seen at [The Lewes area bird of May 30](#).

**[Tue 25 August](#)**

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

### **Fleabanes, Recent reports, and today's discoveries**

The subject of identifying Fleabanes of the *Conyza* genus has concerned me for some time as it is my impression that for many years when I was younger the only species I was likely to see was **Canadian Fleabane (*Conyza canadensis*)** whereas nowadays I have difficulty in finding that and the species I see everywhere is **Guernsey Fleabane (*C. sumatrensis*)** which worries me for another reason - my inability to distinguish that species from two other newcomers to the British scene, Argentine Fleabane (*C. bonariensis*) and Bilbao Fleabane (*C. bilbaoana*).

The Hants Flora which was published in 1996 classifies **Canadian Fleabane as 'locally common'** and has been found in the county since 1877 while saying that **Guernsey Fleabane is 'rare'**, Bilbao is 'very rare', and not mentioning Argentine Fleabane at all. Today I made a great step forward in my understanding of how to recognize these 'new to Britain' species thanks to Google presenting me with **a paper written in 1988 for the BSBI** (Botanical Society of the British Isles) see [Identifying Guernsey and Argentine Fleabanes](#). The interesting parts of this paper for me came towards the end. First is a section headed 'Autoecologies of the three *Conyza* species' which indicates that **the new invaders like a hot, dry habitat** and thrive in urban pavement cracks whereas the older **Canadian Fleabane is markedly 'moisture intolerant'** (maybe the current rain will drive it from this country for good!). The second section of interest to me is **a brief key to separate the newcomers from *Canadensis* from the newcomers** on the basis of the overall shape of the flower head (*Canadensis* is columnar - its branches not spreading, the others have spreading branches giving the flowerhead a pyramidal shape) - note that *C. bilbaoana* does not get a mention but is described elsewhere as a synonym for *C. canadensis*. At last I feel I have a chance of identifying the newcomers and also a reason for the decline of Canadian Fleabane.

To start on **recent reports** I am delighted to see that Pete Potts is out and about again and submitting reports to the HOS website - it was only very recently that I was told that he had been suffering from a serious illness.

The Dungeness Bird Observatory website has news of yet **another new species arriving in Britain** from the continent - **an Italian Tree Cricket (*Oecanthus pellucens*)** which seems to have established a colony close to the observatory. Read all about it at in the entries for August 24th and 23rd at [News of a new species for Britain](#). Note that this website starts with a clean sheet at the start of each month and seems to have no means of letting you view what happened in the previous month so if you are interested in this news visit the website before the end of Aug 31st.

If your interest is in Birds then the Selsey Bill website recorded their **first Wigeon of the autumn on Aug 17** while Aug 23 saw 10 back at Farlington Marshes (with one Pintail - the first two of these were at Hook/Warsash on Aug 20). **Shoveler are also starting to return** in force with 3 at Dungeness on Aug 21 and 56 at Waltham Brooks on Aug 24. On Aug 17 the **first Merlin of the Autumn** was seen at Keyhaven and on the following day Sussex had its first back at Climping (east of Bognor). Also that day (Aug 18) Climping had the **first Fan-tailed Warbler (aka Zitting Cisticola) I have heard of this year**. Among departing summer migrants **Wryneck** have been seen on Aug 9 at East Harting, Aug 14 at Seaford, Aug 16 at Church Norton and Christchurch Harbour, and on Aug 22 at Sinah Common (Hayling). Among passage migrants there was a **sudden flurry of Wood Sandpipers** with 22 at Pennington (plus 5 at Titchfield Haven) on Aug 23 and 14 at Medmerry on Aug 24. Also worth a mention was a **Red-backed Shrike** at Cuckmere on Aug 17. Finally a reminder that it is only three weeks before the **Brent Geese** start to arrive in the Solent Harbours - shortly before they arrive the few Brent that have stayed with us through the summer come out of hiding and the first sign of this came on Aug 22 with a sighting of 9 Brent at Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour.

Recent excitement in the insect world is the **possibility of an invasion of Long-tailed Blues** as happened in 2013 - we have already had one at Browdown near Gosport on Aug 18 and when I last looked at the Sussex Butterfly website it had a 'heads up' message from Neil Hulme saying .." There have been a few reports of Long-tailed Blue in the SW, SE and E of England this summer, most latterly at Ipswich (9 August) and Sevenoaks (14 August). These look good for another influx, with similar timing to the 2013 invasion." This is accompanied by an excellent photo of the species - see [Photo of Long-tailed Blue](#). Impressive moths include **Convolvulus Hawkmoth** of which three were seen together at Portland on Aug 20 and one was videoed there on Aug 24 - to see it go to [Convolvulus Hawkmoth in action](#). Another good photo is of a **Bedstraw Hawk** at Dungeness - see [Bedstraw Hawkmoth](#).

Finally I took a brief walk round the Bellair Road area off East Street in Havant this morning and in one of the house driveways I found a small Speedwell which I am pretty sure is a **Grey Field Speedwell (*Veronica polita*)** which is nowadays becoming rare - all the similar plants I see appear to be Green Field Speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*). To check out the features of both species go to [Grey Field Speedwell](#) and [Green Field Speedwell](#). In a nearby garden I saw an **attractive yellow flowered Clematis which was new to me**. See [Clematis tangutica](#) and [Another view of the open flowers](#).

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 17 - 23 (WEEK 34 OF 2015)

Sun 23 August

### A multitude of moths

Last night I watched a BBC 4 programme called "Lost land of the Volcano" in which one of the few remaining parts of the natural world still untouched by modern man fell prey to the scientific curiosity and commercial money making of that world. The TV film makers, no doubt backed by those who could foresee considerable profits to come from the project, recruited a team of biologists and backed them with helicopters, lots of scientific equipment as well as the food and camping equipment necessary to support their human needs, and sent them into the cone of an extinct volcano in a remote part of New Guinea previously unvisited by modern humans where the animals were innocent of human ways and allowed themselves to be handled and 'petted' by the scientists.

Enough of my personal sadness at the way modern man, driven by the need to survive in a commercial modern world, deprives the natural world of its 'age of innocence'.

My reason for mentioning this programme is a very short clip towards the end in which **a bright light shining on a large white sheet at night attracts a huge array of moths**. To see this go to [Moths in New Guinea](#) and scroll forward to 50 mins 36 secs then watch to 54 mins 8 secs (including a section about a Tarantula type spider).

Before experimenting with the suggestions I make below I suggest that, while learning how to use these suggested techniques, you should reload this website (my blog) in a new tab alongside the first and use the first tab version as a permanent reference to my text while using the second tab version to execute the links to the moth websites and any subsequent operations on those websites - this will make it possible for you refer back to my suggestions by switching back to the first tab while trying out those suggestions on the second tab - best of luck!

Though we cannot expect to see such a variety of moths here those that we do have are well worth our study and I suggest that you begin to explore them by going to a UK Moths webpage at [Systematic list of all UK species](#) which will show you the **2,717 species(including butterflies) that are found in Britain**. For quick reference each species is given a number - until 2013 this was the number used in a checklist compiled by two people called **Bradley and Fletcher and published in 1979** but **in 2013 a new numbering system was introduced** in which each species had a two part number, the first part being the number of the family (e.g. 69 for Sphingidae - the Hawk Moths) and the second part being the number of the species within the family giving 69.001 for the Lime Hawkmoth and 69.010 for the Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

Yesterday Brian Fellows illustrated two members of a family called Pyrausta and if you want to explore the rest of this family (which has seven members called Pyrausta but includes quite a few other from different genera) go to [Pyrausta](#)

[family](#). On this page you will see that above the moth name (Pyrausta cingulata) both the new checklist number (63.003) and the Bradley and Fletcher number (BF1367) are shown. Now click 'Next Species' at the top right of the screen and you will see that the new checklist number has increased by one to 63.004 but the BF number has become BF1364 indicating that new criteria are used for the sequence of the new list.

When trying to identify a moth species you need to be aware of several features in addition to what it looks like - the time of year, the habitat, and the rarity of the moth in your district all need to be taken into account and anyone living in the Havant area on the Hants/Sussex border and downwind from the Isle of Wight would be well advised to check out the moth websites for both Hants (which also covers the Isle of Wight) and Sussex as well as the national UKMOTHS website. Be aware that currently the UK and Hants sites use the new 'decimal' numbers to sequence the species they show (while also showing the B&F numbers with each species) but the Sussex site still uses the B&F numbers only.

My preferred method for arriving at a species name in which I can feel confident is ...

Having found a potential species name by whatever means (Google, a Field Guide, or whatever) first find the two relevant sequence numbers for that species by going to [List of UK Moths](#) and then entering CTRL + F to bring up a Find box at the top right of your screen (Do not use the 'Moth Name Search' box provided!). In the Find box enter the name you want to identify and this will automatically take you to the systematic list entry for that species. Now note the two sequence numbers shown and then click the species name shown alongside them. This will take you to the UK Moths full species entry which has a brief descriptive text and a main photo (click on it to enlarge it and click again to restore the original size). It also has one or more other photos shown as thumbnails - by clicking on any of these they enlarge to become the main photo. Finally one of these thumbnails should be an image of the British Isles and by clicking on this you will get a distribution map of where the species has been reported across the British Isles.

To compare the data for this species with that of its close relatives go to the top right of the screen and use the 'previous species and next species arrows to look at those relatives. To get local information on the species replace the \*\*\*\* in the following URLs [http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/\\*\\*\\*\\*.php](http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/****.php) (including leading zeroes to make a four digit number) for Hants or, for Sussex, [http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/speciesData.php?taxonNum=\\*\\*\\*\\*](http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/speciesData.php?taxonNum=****) replace the \*\*\*\* with the species B&F Number (this time replacing the \*\*\*\* with a 1 to 4 digit B&F number having no leading zeroes). Note that on the Sussex pages the distribution of records is shown on the screen and that to enlarge the main photo you click the small symbol below the photo while to move to the next or previous species you use the left and right arrow symbols below the main photo.

**[Thu 20 August](#)**

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

### **Little Terns move their nests from Chichester to Langstone Harbour and back again**

Last Monday the Portsmouth News devoted half a page to an RSPB Press Release saying that Little Terns had had a good breeding season in Chichester Harbour with 17 young fledging there to give the best result since the mid-1970s.

The article goes on to say that some have bred there almost every year and I think the nest site they use is the shingle bar running west from Cobnor Point towards the southern tip of Thorney Island.

Since I read this I have been trying to find evidence for a strong memory in my own head of a similar announcement some twenty years or so ago saying that the Little Terns had given up attempts to nest in Chichester Harbour and had moved en masse to the newly created Hayling Oysterbeds which became a Nature Reserve in 1996. So far I have not tracked down any evidence for this move but while searching I came on a You-tube video of Anne de Potier talking about her involvement in protecting the Terns on the shingle bank at the southern end of the Nutbourne Marshes. If you feel like indulging in a bit of nostalgia on this subject have a look at [Anne de Potier remembers the early days of conservation in Chichester Harbour](#)

**[Wed 19 August](#)**

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

**Yesterday's mystery tree appears to be a Carolina Silverbell and full grown Wasp Spiders are present on Langstone Harbour islands**

The puzzling tree which I found in Warblington Cemetery on Monday is almost certainly a **Carolina Silverbell (*Halesia carolina*)**. The photos below were taken from the internet today and seem to match my photos of the Warblington tree in every respect bar one - although I visit the cemetery at least once each month I cannot recall ever seeing the mass of white flowers which give the tree its name of 'Silverbell'. To read more about this tree go to [Description of Carolina Silverbell tree](#)

Photos of the Carolina Silverbell tree taken from the internet  
Whilst on the internet I chanced on the two photos below showing that full grown female Wasp Spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) were found yesterday (Aug 18) on the RSPB Islands in Langstone where they were photographed and 'tweeted' by our local RSPB Warden, Wez Smith.

Upper side of female Wasp Spide and lower side of another found nearby seen through that Spider's web

**[Tue 18 August](#)**

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

**Signs of autumn in my monthly round of Havant cemeteries**

Yesterday I visited the Havant cemeteries where common themes were the **first appearances of autumn fungi**; developing fruits such as **Blackberries**, **Elderberries** and **Sloes**; and the **start of re-flowering of several wild flowers** that

have not been seen since the spring. I also found a couple of **firsts for the year** with a show of **Cockspur Grass (*Echinochloa crus-galli*)** and **Autumn Hawkbit**, both in St Faith's churchyard in central Havant. Continuing this theme of autumn this morning brought the **first prolonged Robin song** here in Havant (following the brief appearance in my garden last Saturday of a Robin - which I assumed to one of this year's young - wearing a 'half grown' red breast)

Cockspur grass growing in the south gutter of St Faith's church  
The first new fungus was Sulphur Polypore (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) aka 'Chicken of the Woods' which was growing on a tree in Havant Cemetery that had been reduced to a bare trunk earlier in the year and which was now starting to shoot new branches - to see it enter from Eastern Road and turn right at the first junction to find the tree second on your left. With it is a photo from the internet of the Fairy Ring Champignon species that I found in the short grass of St Faith's churchyard

Sulphur Polypore in Havant Cemetery and Fairy Ring Champignon at St Faith's  
The next fungus was the massive Giant Polypore (*Meripilus giganteus*) on the north side of Emsworth Road just after the junction with Meadowands, seen en route to the Warblington Cemetery.

Giant Polypore around a old tree stump beside Emsworth Road in Havant  
In St Faith's Rose Hips and Elderberries were ripening and at Warblington Sloes had acquired their autumn colour and Alder cones (not edible!) had reached their full size

Rose Hips and Elder berries in St Faith's churchyard

Sloes and Alder Cones at Warblington

Also at Warblington a small tree in the old cemetery, growing on the north side of the northernmost path near its eastern end, has so far defeated all my attempts to identify it - the most puzzling thing about it are the seed pods which hang from the branches like uninflated green bladders, each having a thin stalk around 2 cm long, then the bladder like seed pod around 3cm long ending in a needle-like spike 1 cm long. I assume when they are ripe they will fall to the ground and the spike is intended to hold the bladder in an upright position while it bursts to scatter the seed. Below are my photos to illustrate what I mean

Mystery tree overview and leaf shape

A closer view of the seed pods

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 10 - 16 (WEEK 33 OF 2015)**

[Sun 16 August](#)

## Ash dieback disease and commercial growing of Sunflowers in the UK

Yesterday I had a phone call from a friend living in Nottingham who was concerned that the **leaves were falling off a big Ash tree in his garden and was wondering if this was a sign that the tree had become infected by the Chalara fraxinea fungus commonly known as Ash dieback disease**. As I couldn't answer his question I did a little research and sent him the following email...

"To get an idea if your Ash tree is suffering from the Chalara fraxinea fungus (Ash die-back disease) go to [www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara). Ignore the photos for the moment and scroll down to a video entitled "**How to identify Chalara ash dieback in the field**" and play the video.

"**To see how the disease is spreading** go to <http://chalaramap.fera.defra.gov.uk/> and click the Map Legend button then enter the name of the area you are interested in - I first entered Nottinghamshire which showed me that there was effectively a complete ring of 10km squares surrounding Nottingham City picked out in the lightest shade of blue (indicating that the disease had been found there this year (2015)). To get a view of the area closer to your home I changed to area to be displayed by entering in the box at the top of the map first Nottingham and then NG3 5EL. At the moment these areas seem to be free of the disease but that does not mean they are safe from its spread."

**For local interest here in the Havant area** I applied the same procedure to areas along the south coast and found that the disease, which was first detected in the UK as recently as February 2012, has by now been found in Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire, with the oldest sites being in the east and with an increasing number of infected 10km squares being recorded each year as the infection moves west to a current western limit of widespread infection marked by Southampton Water (there are less than a dozen infected squares west of that line with none currently west of Exeter. **Of particular interest to us in the Havant area** is that while the disease has been found in SU60(Portsmouth), SU61(Horndean), SU71(Rowlands Castle and Stansted), SU81(Stoughton and West Dean), and SU90(East of Tangmere) **the area from Havant to Chichester and south to Selsey is currently shown as free of the disease** but will not, I suspect, remain free for long.

To visit the two websites I referred to in my email go to [Symptoms of Ash dieback](#) and to [Maps showing where the disease has been found sofar](#)

Turning to the subject of **Sunflowers as a commercial crop in the UK** (brought to my attention by seeing a crop being grown in the area north of Daw Lane on Hayling Island) I began by looking at [A sea of Sunflowers in Lincolnshire](#) which shows me that there is money to be made out of this crop but the crop is not without its problems caused by the weather in this country and by the need for expensive specialised equipment. One example of these difficulties is explained in **another website about growing a much smaller crop at Bishops Waltham** - see [Problems with growing sunflowers](#). This explains that the height of the sunflower stems causes regular jams when using a non-specialised combine designed for

short stemmed cereal crops but also shows that there is a growing and profitable market if you know how to market it on the internet.

## Sat 15 August

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

### A trip to south Hayling gives me 13 new flowering species for August including Slender Hare's Ear

The first two additions to my August flowering list were both species which I have seen earlier in the month but omitted to record - the first was **Lesser Water Parsnip** in the Lymbourne stream and the second was **the 'pink flowered' Tamarisk species (*Tamarix ramossima*)** growing in the Langstone Sailing Club grounds. Nothing else new until I was approaching the turn off the Hayling Coastal Path (Hayling Billy track) onto the Saltmarsh Lane sea wall area - here, in the hedge separating the Billy Line from the West Lane fields, a garden escape **Hollyhock** was in full flower. By the path leading to the Saltmarsh Lane seawall I at last found at least four plants of **Slender Hare's Ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*)** with one in full flower showing the yellow which associates this tiny umbellifer to its nearest relative, Wild Parsnip. Also here **Lesser Sea Spurrey** was in flower to give me another tick.

Nothing more for the list till I was passing The Kench where **Bell Heather** was flowering in the Golf Course and **Restharrow** began to appear in various places. Rounding the corner to head south towards Gunner Point I found **Hare's Foot Clover** still in flower and at least one tree of **'normal' Tamarisk (*Tamarix gallica*)** with freshly open flowers. Following the southern fence of the Golf Course I added **Sheep's Bit** and **Sea Campion** to the August flowering list and on the way home I made my last tick with **Rosebay Willowherb** bringing my current total of species seen flowering this month to 256.

## Fri 14 August

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

### Some invasive species and some nasty flies

Recent rain has brought the first of many **Slugs** out onto my lawn and this evening when I took my wheelbarrow out to collect some garden rubbish I found that a particularly large slug was using it as a daytime retreat. This slug, in its inactive state, measured around 8cm in length but I guess it could have stretched out to about twice that length when it was active. Its overall colour was a light brown but the fringe around the base was a bright orange colour and a search on the internet makes me fairly certain that it is **Arion vulgaris, the Spanish Slug, a recent highly successful invader**. The basic facts about this species can be found at [Spanish Slug facts](#)

If you are not excited by Slugs the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website has photos of two other invaders from the continent. The first is a **Swallowtail butterfly** photographed recently in a Sussex garden - see [Swallowtail Butterfly](#). This the first report I have seen of the species this year but you may remember that in

2013 the species bred successfully in Sussex and native-born specimens were seen in at least 5 areas of the county during May 2014.

The other invader is the **Death's Head Hawkmoth** of which a colourful caterpillar has been found in the Lewes area - see [Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillar](#)

The Rye Bay website has more insect news from Chris Bentley - see [Lophosia fasciata fly](#). If the photo of this fly does not excite you then you may find Michael Chinery's description of the group (Tachinidae) to which it belongs even more disgusting than the thought of Spanish Slugs dining on Dog excrement. Michael says .. "The Tachinidae is a large family with over 250 British species... their larvae are all internal parasites, mainly of other insects, which attack the non-essential organs of the host first and kill it only when they themselves are fully grown and ready to pupate. These larvae get into their hosts in several ways: the female parent may pierce the host and lay eggs within it; she may lay her eggs near the host and leave the larvae to bore their own way in; or the eggs may be laid on the host's food plant and not hatch until eaten by the host."

**[Thu 13 August](#)**

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

### **At least one Water Vole still living in Havant Town Mill pond**

Although the Water Cress in the Havant Town Mill Pond (across Park Road South from Tesco's) has been regularly grazed (presumably by Voles) the last actual sighting of a live Vole that I am aware of was by Christopher Evans on May 9 when he photographed a single Vole. After today's heavy rain and thunder, and with more of the same impending overnight, I guessed that the Voles (which eat 80% of their body weight each day) would be out among the Water Cress making up for lost time and preparing for the stormy night during the interval of quiet and dry weather this evening and so it turned out. I walked down the path from South Street at around 7:15pm and found one close to my feet under a Willow Tree just before reaching Park Road.

Earlier in the day I had been searching for reasons why there have been so few sightings at Brook Meadow this year after so many in previous recent years and my first observation was that there seems to have been an increase in sightings (certainly in the Langbrook Stream here in Havant and Langstone) in the last couple of years. This volatility in population numbers can be accounted for by two features of their lifestyle: the first is that each adult female gives birth to five litters, each of up to seven young, each year (so each breeding female can add up to 35 voles to a given population each year). To balance this rate of population growth the Voles have a high death rate - at best their life expectancy is only around two years and before we think about predation there are two main causes of 'natural death'. The first is that almost as soon as a baby vole has been weaned it is driven out of its birthplace by its mother (on average a female give birth to a new litter just 22 days after giving birth to the previous litter) - the totally inexperienced youngster has to move away and learn how to feed itself without adult help. The second cause of natural death is winter - a hard winter can kill up

to 70% of a population (note that Voles do not hibernate so need to feed each day).

Water Voles seeking new homes are able to make overland trips of 5 km or more in search of a place which has the combination of a good food supply and a water body with banks sufficiently tall to allow creation of a burrow with both under water access and dry (above the water level) living quarters - see diagram on page 2 of [Water Vole Burrow](#)

The pdf referred to above has a list of predators and chief among them is the American Mink which was widespread and desperate for food after fur farms were attacked by Animal Rights idiots, e.g. 5,000 Mink were released into the New Forest when a Fur Farm at Ringwood was attacked in Aug 1998 but I think this is not a serious threat nowadays. Mink farming has been banned and there are 22 packs of Mink Hounds hunting them in the UK. While there are still lots of Mink living successfully in the wild (my investigation found two recent reports from Sussex of Mink entering houses via cat flaps, plus one account dated 17 July 2015 on the Sussex Birding Website of a mother Mink carrying her young from one nest to another at Weir Wood - south of East Grinstead in East Sussex) I have not seen any reports from anywhere near the Emsworth/Havant area.

**[Wed 12 August](#)**

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

### **A dozen more flowers for August in Havant Thicket**

This morning I cycled to Havant Thicket, seeing both **Annual Wall Rocket** and **Grey Field Speedwell** beside the Petersfield Road en route. In the country park area my first new flower for the month was **Marsh Woundwort** followed by **Marsh Cudweed** and **Thorn Apple** growing on the 'compost heap' in the field bordering Durrants Road. In the wooded area of Havant Thicket **Lesser Skullcap** was still flowering and I found a 'new to me' site for **Dwarf Gorse** (though this had gone on my August list last week when I was on Hayling). Most of the **Golden Rod** had still not started to flower but I did see one plant in flower and also found my very first for the year **Devils-bit Scabious**.

In the afternoon I got my bike out again for a trip to Thorney where I once again **failed to find Slender Hare's Ear** though I did see **two live Pointed Snails** to prove that the colony at the west end of the Great Deeps is not extinct and added **Sea Plantain** to my flowering list bringing my count for the month to 242.

My only surprise in the way of birds was to find **two Great Blackback Gulls** (probably the pair whose chicks drowned when they fell off to raft in the Slipper Mill Pond) on the Little and Great Deeps respectively - had they been a married pair of humans one might think that they were no longer on speaking terms, each blaming the other for the loss of their children!

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 3 - 9 (WEEK 32 OF 2015)**

**[Fri 7 August](#)**

## A ride around Hayling brings my August flower count to 227 and I see my first Sparrowhawks of the year

Before I reached Langstone Bridge I had heard a **Coal Tit singing** and **several Robins uttering snatches of autumn song** but the only new flower for August was the difficult to spot **Pepper Saxifrage** by the Hayling Billy Line just before turning off it at the Pill Box. This turn took me on to West Lane but I soon turned off it into Daw Lane which gave me the slightly unusual sight (more to be expected in France) of **a field of Sunflowers** on the north side of the Lane (presumably a new venture by the Stoke Fruit Farm). I continued south along the main road pavement as far as the approach road to the Mill Rytte Holiday Camp before turning south on the footpath leading past the Hayling College fields and here I had a pleasant surprise in hearing **a Little Owl calling** several times from some Oak trees on the east side of the path.

No more flowers (despite dismounting for a close look at some unmown grassy gardens beside Southwood Road where I have seen Autumn Lady's Tresses in the past) until I reached Black Point where **Sea Holly, Sea Aster, Bugloss** and some late **Spanish Broom** were all ticked. Heading south towards Sandy Point I diverted from the shore to follow the path following the Reserve fence round the back of the old Hospital grounds where the expected **Dwarf Gorse** was flowering. While I was here I glimpsed a couple of birds flying among the tree tops which seemed to be 'playing with each other' and when I had a clear view of them twisting, turning, gliding and flying in circles I had no doubt they were **juvenile Sparrowhawks** - the very first I have seen this year!

The shingle beside the long Eastoke shore cycleway added **Yellow Horned Poppy, White Melilot, Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*)** and **Sea Radish** to my list. Sinah Common added **Cock's Eggs** and **Pale Toadflax** to my list before I headed back up the Coastal Path where I realised that I had not ticked the **Greater Knapweed** on the way out. Back at home I saw that I had noted **Lucerne** as one of my finds but could not remember where I had seen it.

Back at home I was confronted by a clear sign of approaching autumn - **a 'huge' male House Spider (*Tegenaria gigantea*)** with a body more than 1 cm long - scuttling round the skirting boards in search of a female until I collected him and told him to continue his search in the garden - no doubt he will be back in the house! This reminds me that so far this summer I have seen only one report of a **Wasp Spider (*Argiope brennichi*)** which came from the Isle of Wight on July 30. I fear we have lost them from the Havant Cemetery site but hope the absence of reports does not imply a decline in the numbers of this attractive species here in southern England. It was first recorded in Britain back in 1922 and has so far continued to spread its range here - let's hope it continues to flourish here. For more info see [Wasp Spider info](#)

[Tue 4 August](#)

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

A walk to the South Moors brings my August flower total to 210 and *Tipula maxima* is a garden surprise

Today's strong wind persuaded me to walk rather than cycle to the Langstone South Moors in search of flowers. I followed the path alongside the Langbrook stream and my first surprise after emerging from the tunnel under the A27 was to see that house building has now started on the old Bosmere School playing fields on the east bank of the stream. Reaching the Langstone Technology Park approach road I found both **Brooklime** and the large flowered **Water Forget-me-not** in flower. Further south I came on my first autumn Fungi - a cluster of **Fairies Bonnets (*Coprinus disseminatus*)** - and in the section of the path that is often under water in the winter I found some tall Willowherbs with tiny flowers that were almost pure white - back at home I checked out a specimen and found it was **Short-fruited Willowherb (*Epilobium obscurum*)**. When I emerged onto the South Moors grassland I had a second surprise in finding quite a lot of **Ragged Robin** in flower. Also here **Marsh Ragwort** was flourishing (not new to my list) along with **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort** and **Tufted Forget-me-not** whose flowers are much smaller than the Water Forget-me-not. Other new species for the list which had evaded me so far were **Storks-bill, Agrimony, White Campion** and **White Deadnettle**.

Budds Farm Pools had a couple of **juvenile Little Egrets**, presumably from Langstone nests, and **two adult Swans without any cygnets** (they started with four but were recently down to two). Overhead were a few **Sand Martins** and at least one **Swift**.

Back at home a pristine **Red Admiral** was feeding on a Buddleia and while doing some gardening I had a close view of the very large **Daddy Longlegs (*Tipula mexima*)** with its patterned wings - see [Tipula maxima](#)

[Mon 3 August](#)

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

A ride around Emsworth brings my August flower count to 196 plus some research into Flying Ants

Today I cycled to Emsworth in search of more wild flower species for my August count. Stopping at the Bellair Road junction with East Street the Bowling Club carpark gave me **Heath Groundsel** and the Meadowlands road junction added **Sharp Leaved Fluellen** before I entered Emsworth territory on the east side of the A27 and saw **Field Woundwort**. In Emsworth the Recreation Ground gave me **Greater Burdock** and Christopher Way added **Wild Clary** before I headed for Brook Meadow which I did not enter but turned left to follow the path around the north of the reserve. Opposite the reserve entrance the tall hedge was covered with **Russian Vine** and the shady field north of the Constant Spring property still had **Enchanters Nightshade** in flower. Reaching Lumley Road I counted the garden escape **French Cranesbill** before seeing the **Skullcap** flowering outside the Lumley Cottages (when I first found this a few days ago I said it was growing upstream of the bridge to cottage number 2 but today I realised I should have qualified this as number 2 Raglan Terrace).

In Brook Meadow I parked my bike in order to walk around without it and this enabled me to spot a **Dark Bush Cricket** on some low vegetation and to spot a

probable **Southern Hawker dragonfly** plus a **Harvestman species** as well as four common butterfly species despite the lack of sunshine. Among the plants noted were flowers on **Cleavers** (presumably a second flowering) and single plant of **Yellow Rattle** after the majority have gone to seed.

Crossing under the A259 via the footpath tunnel I found **Shaggy Soldier** (***Galinsoga quadriradiata***) still flowering at the edge of the road before I headed to the Warblington Cemetery where **Chicory** had more or less taken over the Natural Burial area though I did spot a single plant of **Small Flowered Cranesbill**. I ended my list for the day with the **Round Leaved Fluellen** in the old cemetery.

Turning to something entirely different, the subject of **Flying Ants**, I was asked yesterday by someone who had just seen Ants flying up from his garden in Nottingham why some of the Ants had wings and others did not. I had to do some research to answer this and other associated questions and this is the answer I gave him.....

To understand what's going on when Ants take to the air start by looking at [Components of an Ant colony](#). The only Ants born with wings are **the young females (Princesses)** and **those males (Drones)** whose only purpose in life is to fertilise the Princesses during the mating flight. Before take off you will see a lot of unwinged Ants milling around on the ground among the winged ones. These unwinged ones are the Workers and Soldiers who take no part in the mating - their only function is to keep the original colony functioning.

During the flight the Princesses fly strongly to get away from the Drones to which they are related (to avoid inbreeding) but when they do mate they do so with multiple males, **accumulating a 'sperm bank' within a 'sperm pocket' inside their bodies - they should collect enough sperm to fertilise the 'tens of millions' of eggs they will lay during their lifetime.**

As each male is mating his genitalia 'explode' and he falls from the sky mortally wounded. The females drop their wings as soon as they land and set about the business of digging a new nest in which to lay the eggs that will hatch into the workers and soldiers needed for the colony to function. When the colony is established and the weather is warm the Princess (now Queen) will lay eggs that develop into the Princesses and Drones which will found new colonies but I have no idea what triggers this, nor how long it takes from the laying of these eggs to the time when the winged young hatch and are ready for take off (the length of this time governs how many flying ant days can occur in the course of one summer). Nor do I know how the day chosen for the flight is co-ordinated between the many different colonies which must participate to avoid in-breeding.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 27 - AUG 2 (WEEK 31 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 2 August**

**172 wild flower species seen in the first two days of August**

The weather has been kind to **my August flowerhunt so far and I have ticked 173 species** in trips around Havant on foot plus rides along the cycle way to Farlington Marshes yesterday and to North Common on Hayling Island today.

Some of the more interesting finds were **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** reflowering on my lawn after not being seen throughout July, a single plant of **Wintercress** near the New Lane level crossing (not seen since May), and the first flowering of **Japanese Spindle (Euonymus japonicus)** seen in Havant Cemetery. Another first for the year was the flowers on a **Hop vine** overhanging the Lavant stream in Leigh Park with **Marsh Ragwort** flowering on the banks of the same stream and my first sight of **Guernsey Fleabane** nearby. An unexpected find was **Red Goosefoot** in flower beside the Petersfield Road outside the Havant Pastoral Centre.

My trip to the Farlington Marshes area started with the rare **Hairy Vetchling** flowering on the Broadmarsh 'mountain' and continued with my first **Blue Fleabane** of the year alongside the cycleway before reaching the Marshes where the cycleway added **Danewort, Dark Mullein** and **Great Mullein**. The sliproad from the A27 west to the Eastern Road gave me a very unexpected find of **Rock Samphire** (normally only found on seawalls) with both **Californian Poppy** and **Montbretia/Crocoshia** alongside the approach road to the Marshes. On the way home **Creeping Yellowcress** was still flowering on the old playing fields at the west end of Harts Farm Way and the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton added both **Indian Balsam** and **Purple Loosestrife** but the Havant Rail Station flowerbed had been weeded of **Thorn Apple**. Back at the Hermitage Stream I had noted the **tiny first signs of flower buds forming on Ivy** (not counted as flowering).

This morning I headed down the Billy Trail and diverted into the 'new' Langstone housing, stopping where the footpath from the Langstone roundabout to the Royal Oak crosses Southbrook Road to find a few tiny flowers of **Least Yellow Sorrel (Oxalis exilis)** under bushes on the north side of the road (this is the only site I know off for this plant). Back on the old rail line **Tansy** was in full flower just before reaching Langstone Bridge and at the south end of the bridge, on the Northney Road, I was able to make out a few flowers on a close mown roadside clump of **Black Horehound**. More close mown grass by the driveway into the Langstone Hotel had a pretty display of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** flowers before reaching North Common where the **Fragrant Agrimony** was only just starting to flower. Continuing east here I explored an area which I do not normally visit close to the houses replacing the old Holiday Camp and this gave me **Slender St John's Wort, Hoary Willowherb** and **Common Centaury**.

Heading back towards Langstone Bridge I stopped at the open entrance to the huge fields now filled with a crop of Potatoes - here at the edge of the Potatoes (which are a species of the Nightshade tribe) I not only found a mass of **Green** and **Black Nightshade** but also lots of **Black Bindweed**. Back at Langstone Pond **Gipsywort** was newly in flower and **Lax-flowered Sea Lavender** was struggling to hold its flowers above the water at high tide.

**Fri 31 July**

## A Blue Moon, a 'Death Fly', and the Countess Bolingbroke given the name of a Butterfly by her Entomologist father

I'll start with **last night's magnificent full moon** which had attracted me out into the garden to have a look through my binoculars but it was not until I was making my scan of the internet this morning (and came across the phrase "Despite last night's Blue Moon ..." on the Sandwich Bay bird sightings) that I realised that this astronomical event was what is known as a **Blue Moon**, not because of its colour but because it is the second full moon to occur in July. If you are interested in such things have a look at [What is a Blue Moon](#). This report is dated July 31, implying that what I saw last night was not technically the full Blue Moon so you should have another chance to see it tonight!

### Cynomya mortuorum

My second item tonight started with an email from Chris Oakley who lives in the new housing development adjacent to the Hampshire Farm open space on the west side of the River Ems where it flows past Westbourne. Chris attached the **photo of a fly** (shown above) which was of a species I had never come across before but eventually found a possible match for in *Cynomya mortuorum* (see [Cynomya mortuorum](#)). I could not find any confirmation that the species exists in England nor do I know of any Fly expert to consult but I thought that Phil Budd of the Southampton Natural History Society might be able to help so Chris sent his photo to Phil and received the following response...

"I'm no expert on Diptera but your fly is clearly *Cynomya mortuorum*, as you suggest. The shape of the abdomen is very distinctive as is the yellow facial area. I've only seen and recorded this fly three times - on all occasions in chalky districts of Hampshire and Wiltshire. I would be interested in the record (date/place) if seen in Hampshire"

### Valezina form of female Silver Washed Fritillary

I came on the above photo, taken by Nick Lear at Knowlands Wood, Barcombe on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website entry for July 27. It took me back to the 1940s when, during the war, I lived on the western fringe of the New Forest and became acquainted with **a butterfly enthusiast with the title of Viscount Bolingbroke** (a name I had previously come across in the works of Shakespeare) during the period that I knew him he married the daughter of a very well known butterfly expert (F.W. Frohawk) whose hair was a vivid reddish colour similar to that of the Silver Washed Fritillary but who had been christened 'Valezina' by her father who was keen to perpetuate the name which had been given to this rather drab but still very elegant form of this butterfly.

### Wed 29 July

## Skullcap flowering by the Lumley Cottages and a magnificent 'Scotch' Thistle at Westbourne

This morning I headed for Emsworth to add the **Greater Burdock** to my July flowering plant list. The only local site where it can be found is in the south west of the Emsworth Recreation Ground alongside the path leading to Washington Road and after seeing it in flower I went on to see the **Wild Angelica** now flowering at the south end of the Brook Meadow site. Coming in over the north bridge I had a bonus while following the riverside path south in the shape of some **Hogweed with red-tinged flowers** - a not uncommon variant but if you are not aware of it see [Red tinged Hogweed](#).

Leaving the reserve by the gate leading to Lumley Road I turned north and found the highspot of this outing - several plants of **Skullcap** flowering on the wall of the 'canal' carrying the Lumley stream past the front doors of the Lumley Cottages. To see the plants go to the bridge leading to Cottage number 2 and look at the far wall on the upstream side of the bridge. For an image see [Skullcap flowering](#)

I rode on up the bumpy Mill Lane track to Westbourne where I turned left and found my next floral excitement, albeit planted in a garden on the north side of the road immediately east of the main River Ems stream. This is a fine example of a **Cotton Thistle (Onopurdum acanthium)** standing over 2 metres tall with striking silvery grey foliage and huge prickly flower heads - see [Cotton Thistle](#). Nothing else of particular note today.

## [Tue 28 July](#)

### **A visit to Havant Thicket**

This morning I cycled to Havant Thicket in search of **Dwarf Gorse** and **Golden Rod** and found both species just starting to flower. If not familiar with Dwarf Gorse see [Dwarf Gorse](#). At this time of year you are very unlikely to see any flowers on Common Gorse. The wild Goldenrod is very different from the tall Canadian Goldenrod found both in gardens and as an escape in the wild - for our native species see [Goldenrod](#). There are only a few plants of Dwarf Gorse in Havant Thicket and you are unlikely to see it by chance - one other place I expect to see it is in the Sandy Point old hospital grounds but they are very overgrown nowadays. The Goldenrod is easy to find by starting from the Havant Thicket vehicle entrance opposite Castle Road and heading north on the track from that entrance along the eastern boundary of the Thicket with only a strip of mature woodland separating you from the road (but be aware that today I only found one plant in flower out of the thousands growing on the east side of the track).

The other interest in this visit came as a result of the field gate into the field between the track going north out of Hammonds Land Coppice and Durrants Road approaching the Rowlands Castle 'roundabout' road junction. In this field there is a tall 'compost heap' and growing on this rich soil I found my first **Small Nettle plants** for the year plus lots of **Black Nightshade** and single plants of **Thorn Apple, Tomato** and the leaves of what may be an escaped Pumpkin plant. Also in that field entrance I found my first **Marsh Cudweed** plants for the year. Nothing much to add from my skim through the internet but I see that the **Red-backed Shrike** is still the New Forest near the road from Beaulieu Heath to Lymington. From Sussex the news is that the **Hudsonian Whimbrel has not been seen at**

Pagham since July 24 and it is thought to have departed. At Brook Meadow **Wild Angelica** has started to flower.

## Mon 27 July

### Six new flowers seen on Hayling

This morning I cycled down the Hayling Billy track as far as the Saltmarsh Lane seawall on Hayling where I hoped to find **Slender Hare's Ear** but once more failed! I did find two plants of some interest there - one was **Fern grass** (**Catapodium rigidum**) which lives up to its scientific name in being uncharacteristically (for a grass) rigid and being flattened to the ground with its rigid leaves forming a circle round the central rooting point. For a photo of a young specimen see [Fern Grass](#) though the specimens I found were old, the green colour had become silvery and the stems were flat on the ground. The other plant found here was, I think, **Equal-leaved Knotgrass** but I have not yet had time to check out the specimen I brought home and am going by the fact that the tiny flowers were white without the tinge of pink seen in commoner Knotgrass.

The other 'new for the month' flowers which I noticed on the way south started with **Fool's Parsley** and **Tansy**, both seen where the path leading to the north pier of the old rail bridge diverges from the new cycle track. In the Oyster Beds area I came on some **Prickly Lettuce** with its flowers fully open and also a stand of **Mugwort** on which the flowers seemed to be over, having gone from the silvery flower bud stage to the drab look of these plants without my having seen the delicate and surprising brown colour of the flowers. Nearing the pillbox where a footpath branches off to West Lane I found four plants of **Pepper Saxifrage** in flower. The only other flower that was new to my July list was **Fragrant Agrimony**, found just south of the section where the sea has eroded the west side of the track and forced it to be fenced off. I did not check all the larger Agrimony type plants here but found one on which the spines on the seeds were curled back and the leaves of which had a pleasant smell when crushed. Two other plants which caught my attention but which I had already recorded in July were **Vervain** (just one impressive clump) and **Toadflax** which has had isolated plants flowering since early June but which is only now starting to flower prolifically.

One exciting bird which has just turned up in Hampshire on its autumn passage is a **Red-backed Shrike** in the Beaulieu Heath area of the New Forest where it has been over the past week-end after arriving on July 25. A very unexpected insect find in north Kent (Reculver) on July 15 was a **Norfolk Hawker dragonfly** which is normally restricted to the Norfolk Broads and a few sites in nearby Suffolk - probably the Reculver sighting was a result of recent strong winds but maybe this rarity is showing signs of extending its range. Going back to birds the Oare Marshes site, also in north Kent, has a photo of a fledged Cuckoo (see [First young Cuckoo heading south](#)).

Portsmouth is in the news for a sighting of **11 Glow-worms** during the past week and more significantly for a **rare Shieldbug (the Down Shieldbug)** found by the Portsmouth warden, Richard Jones. For a photo and description of this insect see [Down Shieldbug](#).

Maybe of interest to our local Black-tailed Godwit enthusiasts is a report of 7 Islandic Blackwits turning up in the Scilly Isles on July 7 - this is the first mention of 'our birds' arriving back in the south after their breeding season that I have seen and tells me that there should be quite a few back in Hampshire by now (though the birds in the Scillies may have been early returning failed breeders).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 20 - 26 (WEEK 30 OF 2015)**

[Fri 24 July](#)

### **Osprey back at Thorney Island and other departing summer birds**

All the **Osprey reports** noted by me in June were of birds heading north but on July 11 one flew west over Langstone Harbour (possibly heading for Poole Harbour where one was seen on July 14) and on July 18 one was seen from Newtown on the Isle of Wight flying south across the Solent but turning back north at 9:40, preferring **Thorney Island where it was seen by Barry Collins**. Next day (July 19) Barry watched it fishing off Pilsley Island (where he also saw **30 Common Seals** on the mudflats). What was probably the same bird was seen again on July 21 perched near the Thorney Deeps landing lights and it and/or others can be expected to be around Thorney Island for the next two or three weeks.

Another report which caught my eye on July 21 was of **a flock of 21 Green Sandpipers** seen at Alresford Pond (with 7 seen together at Weir Wood reservoir in East Sussex on July 22). The first to return to the Pagham Harbour area were seen as early as June 9 but the Alresford 'flock' shows a marked increase in the number of arrivals of post breeding birds. Other shore birds now starting to appear on the south coast are **Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint** with one of each at Pennington (near Lymington) on July 20 - two Little Stint had already been seen at Rye Harbour on July 7). Also newly back are the first **Common Gulls** with 3 being included in the July 17 WeBS count at Fishbourne on the Isle of Wight and another seen at Goring on the Sussex coast on July 19. If you are interested in **birds which prefer to spend the summer in the local harbours** I see that 4 Brent were in Portsmouth Harbour on July 16, where they had been seen on June 14, probably in addition to the 7 in Langstone Harbour on June 30 and the 12 seen in Chichester Harbour (Fishbourne Creek) on June 7. At least two **Red-breasted Mergansers** have also been seen in Chichester Harbour between Emsworth and Langstone on two dates in June with one still there on July 21.

Among the first land birds reported as leaving us was a single **Sand Martin** seen at Sidlesham Ferry on June 27. More recently the first departing **Willow Warblers** were heard singing at Portland on July 17, at Christchurch Harbour on July 18 and at Titchfield Haven on July 20. **Yellow Wagtails** were seen flying south at Dungeness on July 7 and Pagham Harbour on July 8 with 2 at Portland on July 14 and 1 at Hook (Warsash) on July 23. Other recent reports are of a **Whinchat** at Medmerry on July 18 and a **Pied Flycatcher** somewhere in Dorset on July 22. Maybe not departing but of local interest Martin Hampton heard a **Nightingale still singing near Petersfield** at dusk on both July 12 and 21.

A favourite wild flower for which I used to visit Cobnor Point in Chichester Harbour at this time of year is **Marsh Mallow** and I was reminded of this by the following entry on the Rye Bay website - see [Large Garden Bumblebee enjoying Marsh Mallow](#). To find out more about this rare bee check out the fact file links at [Bombus ruderatus facts](#)

**Wed 22 July**

**Around Havant Cemeteries and an evening roost count of Egrets at Langstone**

My news in this update relates to yesterday (July 21) starting with a visit to **Havant Cemetery** where **Himalayan Giant Brambles** were starting to fruit and several butterflies were on the wing - as well as the **Comma** which I photographed there were many Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns plus at least one Small Skipper.

Giant Himalayan Bramble fruit and a Comma butterfly  
Two less common observations were of **Caucasian Stonecrop** in flower and a **Wild Rose stem which had been denuded of its leaves by hungry Rose Sawfly caterpillars** (not visible as they will already have pupated).

Caucasian Stonecrop signs of hungry Rose Sawflies  
En route to St Faith's Churchyard I photographed the **Thorn Apple (Datura stramonium)** plants growing in Havant Rail Station adjacent to the Taxi turning circle. These are now in flower but do not yet have their distinctive knobby fruit. When I reached the churchyard I found it had once again suffered a very short 'back and sides' haircut leaving no plants for me to photograph though I did find **my first flowering Black Nightshade** of the year - a very small plant cowering on some steps to evade the mowers.

Thorn Apples Black Nightshade in flower

At **Warblington Cemetery** in the afternoon I parked my bike near the Natural Burial area where **Chicory** was now the dominant flower but amongst it were **several Butterbur plants which looked unlike both the common Lesser Burdock and the less common Greater Burdock**. I have not yet come to any firm decision as to their identity but rather suspect they have a foreign source and arrived here in a packet of wildflower seed.

Chicory and an unidentified species of Burdock

While still in the Cemetery Extension I found **Sloes starting to develop** in the hedge before moving to the main cemetery where I encountered a **tree bearing 'strange fruit'** (not the bodies of lynched negroes but a strangely shaped type of fruit on a tree that I had not noticed as being unusual on past visits).

Early signs of a good crop of Sloes and a tree bearing 'strange fruit'

At the west end of the main cemetery **Round-leaved Fluellen (Kickxia spuria)** was flourishing in places where it could escape the clearance of the path edges and the mowing of the grass

Round-leaved Fluellen leaves evading mowing and showing flowers

To end this visit I found two more signs of oncoming autumn in the form of **Bittersweet Nightshade** with berries changing from green to yellow and then to red plus one newly flowering plant of **Black Nightshade**

Bittersweet Nightshade acquiring coloured berries and Black Nightshade newly flowering

With low tide co-inciding with sunset and the weather dry but windy I made my second **count of Little Egrets coming in to roost at Langstone Pond**. My first attempt at a roost count this year (on June 23) found a good number of Egrets in the trees but very few coming to roost and my experience this evening was the reverse. On arrival I found the growth of the reeds greatly reduced my ability to see birds already in the trees and my starting count of birds seen in the trees was less than 30 but by staying on for half an hour after sunset I ended with **an arrival count of 52 birds**, the majority arriving in the last ten minutes. **Most of the young are now fledging and I had a good example of this** when two parents arrived at a nest with food which was immediately devoured by the two young in the nest. The youngsters clearly wanted more and pestered the parents so actively that they both flew off with both young also taking wing to follow them. While all this was going on **a Magpie had been perched close to the nest, obviously intent on taking any left over scraps** (of which it got none).

**Mon 20 July**

### **Sharks at Medmerry**

One of my regular sources of birding info is the Selsey Blog but it also comments on other wildlife seen in the area so I was not unduly surprised when the entry for July 15 reported the following news ...

**"Medmerry: Breach area** - Fairly quiet bird-wise, but there was an amazing spectacle in one of the small tidal pools near the breach, **where over a hundred Starry Smoothhounds had gathered**. The water was thick with dorsal fins and tails as the fish, many a metre or more in length, circled round and round. Eventually, as the tide came in, they drifted off though a number were stranded along the

waters edge, presumably exhausted from their exertions, but soon swam away with a bit of encouragement." and illustrated this with the following two photos

### Starry Smooth Hounds in the Medmerry pool

This news went 'viral' in the British media and most of you will have seen it on the BBC TV News but if you want a middle of the road example (which includes [a video of moving shark fins!](#)) go to [The Independent's version](#)

My interest in such reports is to learn more about creatures that I am not familiar with and so I first visited Wikipedia which told me that the **Starry Smoothhound (*Mustelus asterias*)** is just one of 28 species to be found worldwide in the genus *Mustelus* (presumably the genus was named to show a relation to the other Mustelids such as the Weasel) - see [Mustelus species list](#). [The page devoted to the Starry Smooth-hound](#) is found at [Starry Smooth-hound description](#). A point of interest to me was that **this species is 'Ovoviviparous'** meaning the fertilised eggs hatch within the female and the seven to fifteen young remain within the mother's body for up to a year until they are about 30 cm and are presumably able to fend for themselves.

**Collective nouns** are always interesting and those for **a group of sharks are given as "a gam, herd, frenzy, school or shiver"**. I've no idea what is meant by 'a gam' but I think we can all agree that 'a shiver' is an appropriate name.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 13 - 19 (WEEK 29 OF 2015)**

### Sun 19 July

#### Seen today on a brief trip to Thorney Deepes plus research into Tortrix moths

Yesterday I enjoyed a beautiful morning for my 84th birthday but my only observation of interest was the sight of **a single Swift flying west high over my garden** (maybe the last I will see this year though others will have occasional sightings through August and into September). Today I made a short outing to the west end of the Thorney Great Deepes in the hope of seeing my first **Slender Hare's Ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*)** at the inner foot of the sea wall and hopefully some **Pointed Snails (*Cochlicella acuta*)**. On this occasion I saw neither (probably too early for the Hare's Ear and maybe too late for this dwindling colony of small snails)

#### Slender Hare's Ear plant and a cluster of Pointed Snails

The **Slender Hare's Ear** is, surprisingly, an umbellifer but only grows to a height of around 30cm (often much less) and has very thin, wiry stems which are difficult to spot among grasses - what you must look for are the zig-zag shape of the stems and the tiny yellow flower umbels. I hope to see it during August both here and on the South Moors sea wall plus along the track leading to the Saltmarsh Lne seawall on Hayling. The **Pointed Snail** photo typifies how I usually see the species - in hot weather these snails leave the ground (where the temperature might fry them in their shells) to climb plant stems to a height that brings them into a much cooler zone where any slight breeze will cool them. Empty shells of past generations can still be spotted on the ground.

Not much else seen on this trip but I did pass the **corpse of a Hedgehog** beside the main A259 road outside Emsworth House (residential home for the elderly) and on the way home I turned down Wade Court Road as far as North Close to find two examples of **Indian Bean Tree** (see Friday's entry below) in flower - the old tree overhanging the road in the garden on your left where the road turns left had very flowers on show but after going round the bend a younger tree in the back garden of number 10 (seen between the houses) was in exuberant flower. Also seen in the Slipper Mill Pond area of Emsworth were the **pair of Great Black-back Gulls** perched forlornly on their raft with three Cormorants, and by the roadside one plant of **Prickly Lettuce** was the first I have seen to have put up its flower heads though no flowers were yet open. Also here most of the **Stone Parsley plants were now in flower** - I had noticed the start of general flowering in the Langstone area on July 15.

Seeing Swans and Great Black-backed Gulls in the Emsworth area reminded me of a report from Suffolk on July 12 of **an extraordinary combination seen on the Minsmere Reserve of a Black-browed Albatross and Swans on this inland water**. Two accounts of this event are worth reading - for the first go to [RBA account](#) and for the RSPB official description see the 'Recent Sightings' entry for 13 July at [RSPB account of the July 12 event](#)

Finally for today **I must thank Tony Davis for extending my knowledge of moths** by correcting my guess that a 'tube shaped' moth recently seen in what is now officially to be known as the Hampshire Farm Meadows (by the River Ems west of Westbourne) was one of the Grass Moths (Crambinae) currently on the wing. Tony points out that these Grass Moths are by no means the only moths which fold their wings tightly around their bodies and that I had overlooked some 228 species of Tortrix moths (mostly associated with trees) which do the same in this country (world wide there are over 10,000 Tortrix moth species). For a brief summary of the characteristics of this large group of moths see [Natural History Museum page on Tortrix Moths](#). That page tells us this group have the English name of 'Bell Moths' (the one photographed at Hampshire Farm is the '**Marbled Bell (Eucosoma campoliliana)**') and that when they unfurl their wings to fly they reveal many distinctive patterns on wings that in general have a span of around 2 cm. For a list of the approx 228 Tortricidae (aka Olethreutinae) species which we might encounter in Hampshire see [HantsMoths list of Tortrix species](#). Clicking a species name in this list will take you to the data page for that species

## [Fri 17 July](#)

### **Indian Bean Tree in flower, Flying Ants in my garden, a colourful spider at Hampshire Farm, and Monarch Butterflies for sale to brighten up weddings**

Walking into Havant this morning I found a mass of flowers on an **Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa bignoniodes)** in the back garden of a house almost opposite my own home. This is one of four gardens where this tree can be seen in the Havant area and the photo below may excite your interest in seeing one or more of them. To see the one I saw walk down the narrow East Pallant road joining Beechworth to Fairfield Roads and look north up the lane separating the back gardens of the houses in Beechworth and Fairfield Roads. Two of the others can be seen from

North Close off Wade Court Road and the other is in Denvilles at the junction of First and Second Avenues - I am not certain if these others are yet in flower.

The distinctive huge leaves and flowers of an Indian Bean Tree  
This tree is number 255 on my personal list of plants seen flowering in July. Two species which were added to this list last week were the **Danewort** at the junction of the Billy Trail and the footpath going east from Grove Road. At the same place I also found the first flowering **Teazels**. If you are not familiar with Danewort (*Sambucus ebulus*) see [Danewort photo](#). The folklore about this plant says that the red tinge in the white flowers represents the blood of the maidens who died during the raping/pillaging raids made by the fearsome Danes in past years. On the afternoon of July 15 I went to get out my lawn mower but was deterred from using it by **a massive uprising of Black Garden Ants**. Outside the shed where the lawn mower is kept I had to battle my way through a black version of a snow storm of the ants which had already taken flight upwards to where many gulls were circling in anticipation of feast, and along the edge of the lawn where it borders a concrete path the grass had turned black with a writhing mass of ants awaiting their turn to take off. For a good account of goes on between the male and female ants high in the sky (including the explosion of the male genitalia at the climax of the act) read [Details of Flying Ant orgy](#). Brian Fellows Emsworth Wildlife Diary entry for July 16 included a photo taken at Hampshire Farm in the Westbourne area of **a colourful spider which I believe to be a species called Enoplognatha ovata** and below I have included the original photo taken by Chris Oakley alongside a photo from the internet of what I believe to be the same species with the colourful egg sac which the female will produce and then wrap it in a tree leaf where it will eventually hatch a mass of spiderlings to repeat the process next year. The text of the web page describing this species includes .. "one of our commonest, prettiest and most recognizable species of comb-footed spiders (family Theridiidae), found throughout the British Isles (Figure 4, ref. 3) and an occupant of most domestic gardens." For the full text and photos see [Spider description](#).

The Hampshire Farm spider and an image from the internet showing the 'blue' eggsac which the species produces  
**A recent surge of sightings of Monarch butterflies in the Brighton area** caused great excitement among Sussex butterfly enthusiasts until someone made them aware of **the following website which advertises the supply (in the UK) of Monarch butterflies at Weddings, Funerals or other occasions**. (100 live Monarchs cost £260). See [How to purchase Monarch butterflies to brighten a wedding](#) for details of this trade in the UK (agent based in Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 6 - 12 (WEEK 28 OF 2015)**

### **Thu 9 July**

#### **14 new flowers for the month on Portsdown**

My first good find this morning was a close view of a **Volucella zonaria Hoverfly** nectaring on bramble flowers in the Fort Purbrook wildlife area - further into this

area I saw a second of these insects and also had a 'probable' fly by **Southern Hawker dragonfly** (these have been on the wing since June 27 after an isolated single report on June 17). Best plant in this area was my first **Nettle-leaved Bellflower** with one plant of **Hemp Agrimony** having its central flowers starting to open and a lot of **Canadian Golden Rod** doing the same.

Next stop came after passing Fort Widley and the hilltop roundabout, then along James Callaghan Drive to where the Radar towers dominate the north side of the road. Here I chained my bike to the fence of the southern slopes and climbed over one of the stiles to explore the southern hillside. My first target was **Bastard Toadflax** which I soon found before adding **Eyebright, Hare Bell, Fairy Flax, Betony** and **Wild Basil** to my July list. Heading back to my bike along the roadside path outside the fence I noticed several examples of **Upright Hedge Parsley (Torilis japonica)** starting to flower and also found quite a lot of **Hairy St Johns's Wort**.

Back on the road I cycled on to stop just before reaching Fort Southwick. Here I chained my bike to a lamppost and set off from the west end of the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit to head diagonally downhill to where I hoped to see **Rock Rose** in flower. I did find this flowering after a search during which I came on the first **Great Green Bush Cricket** that I have seen for a good few years. After this I continued west towards Portchester Common but while still at the bottom of the hill a family of four **Peregrines** attracted my attention upwards by their calls to watch a short flying display. Also here I found my first wild **Michaelmas Daisies**. On Portchester Common I failed to find the expected **Basil Thyme** (by this time I was feeling exhausted so only looked for the plant in one area where I have seen it before).

Among the few birds still singing I was pleased to hear a **Yellowhammer** and a new insect for my year list was a **Greenbottle**.

## Mon 7 July

### My first Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals in Havant Thicket

This morning I cycled round Havant Thicket where I saw ten species of butterfly including my first **Silver-washed Fritillaries** and **White Admirals** plus a fresh **Small Tortoiseshell** and several **Ringlets** as well as adding ten flowering plant species to my list (in addition to **Annual Wall Rocket** seen en route).

The first flower of interest was **Marsh Woundwort** (my first though it had been seen in Brook Meadow on June 25) followed by the easily missable **Lesser Skullcap**. After looking in vain for Sneezewort and failing to find any of the many plants of Goldenrod showing any signs of flowering I was pleased to find **Cross-leaved Heath** out in several places but could not spot any flowers on the Common Heather (aka Ling) - while searching for this my first **Emperor dragonfly** flew by (presumably newly emerged from its underwater larval life and enjoying a look round drier areas before returning to a watery site to fulfil its breeding duties).

After a refreshment break I explored one of the less used tracks where my personal best find of the day was **Bog Pimpernel** in effusive flower. If you are not

familiar with this delicate, pink flowered, ground hugging plant see [Bog Pimpernel in flower](#). Close by I also found the much commoner **Yellow Pimpernel** and some **Heath Bedstraw**. After this I went to a different area to search (in vain) for Dwarf Gorse which should now be opening its small flowers to make up for the complete absence of flowers on Common Gorse. After abandoning that search I headed home for lunch.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 29 - JULY 5 (WEEK 27 OF 2015)**

[Sun 5 July](#)

### **Sickle Medick flowering again on Portsdown**

A visit from my son and his family today left no time for solo flower hunting but the need to give their dog some exercise after being confined to a cage in the boot of their car led to a mutually acceptable suggestion of a walk on Portsdown after lunch and this enabled me **to add a few Portsdown specialities to my month list**. By far the best of these was the **Sickle Medick** which has acted as the sole representative of its species to occur in Hampshire for many years and is to be found at the busy junction of the Portsdown Hill Road and the London Road coming up the hill from Portsmouth. To find this plant you must walk down the east side of the short slip-road coming south from The George pub and just before it reaches the north bound carriage way of the London Road you will find a yellow painted box holding salt to spread on the road when it is icy - on reaching this box turn round and walk a couple of paces back to find the brightly yellow flowered plant lurking in the grass within your reach from the pavement. To be sure of its identity you must wait until flowering is over and the distinctively curved (sickle shaped) seed pods have developed but after several years acquaintance with the plant its generally structure and yellow coloured flowers are sufficient evidence for me - for photos and description see [Sickle Medick identification](#). The only other interesting find today was my first **Dwarf Thistle** of the year.

After writing the above I tried to confirm my suggestion that the only Sickle Medick in Hampshire is this one on Portsdown and I came across a Norfolk Nature web page saying that Sickle Medick is not a species in its own right but **a subspecies of Lucerne** which has another subspecies known as **Sand Lucerne** in which the flowers are varied in their colour, and this reminded me that many years ago this Sand Lucerne could be found on the shore of the Portsmouth Harbour inlet north of Portchester Castle where the lowlying ground near the Castle rises a few feet before reaching the built-up area.

Chris Oakley's photo of a Roesel's Bush Cricket at Hampshire Farm in Emsworth

While Brian Fellows was on holiday last week Chris Oakley sent the above photo to me for confirmation of its identity as a Roesel's Bush Cricket and it clearly shows two features which prove that it is the species. The first is the broad cream border which curves around the pronotum area immediately behind the insect's head; the second is the three cream coloured marks along the side of the body behind the pronotum. Along the back of the body are its wings but these are too

small for the insect to take flight and that is part of an interesting history of the species.

Until around 1930 this species was confined to coastal marshes in the south east of Britain but since then it has spread widely and the interest lies in the fact that while **a very small percentage of the population have wings large enough for them to fly long distances the majority are unable to fly** but still cover long distances on foot. No one so far seems to have come up with a reason why some develop long wings (technically they are known as the 'macropterous' form as opposed to the short winged 'brachypterous' form). Observations show that **two factors seem to be associated with the development of long wings** - one is the density of the species population (suggesting that some grow wings to relieve the population density pressure), the other is the average temperature (more grow wings in hot years). Hopefully this ability to grow wings in response to population pressure and increasing temperature will not spread to the millions of humans hoping to reach Britain. For more info and photos of both the fully winged and the inadequately winged forms see [Roesel's Bush Crickets](#).

## Sat 4 July

### 205 wild flower species seen so far in July

On July 1 I walked around Havant listing the plants in flower and on July 3 I cycled down west Hayling to Gunner Point and back. Today I am ready to comment on my findings starting with what was to be seen in my garden on Wednesday morning.

Three surprises before I set out on my walk were to find **Buddleia flowers** opening for the first time and to see the delicate flower heads of **Lesser Meadow Rue** opening under a Holly bush - if you are not familiar with the latter (for which I only know of one local location on Portsdown) see [Lesser Meadow Rue](#). Best of the three was the first appearance of **Enchanter's Nightshade** forcing its way through a mass of weeds in my front garden.

When I set out the first notable find was of flowers on the **Tree of Heaven** growing in a garden in my road but before getting excited about this tree read the dire warnings at [Tree of Heaven - Saint or Sinner](#).

From within Havant Cemetery I looked over the wall into the New Lane allotments to find the **Lesser Snapdragon aka Weasel's Snout (Misopates orontium)** in flower with **Common Ramping Fumitory** nearby while within the Cemetery I came on my first **Marjoram** for the year plus the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant**. Just before entering the long grass of the St Faith's area the stone cover of one grave had the first flowers of **Caucasian Stonecrop** that I have seen this year - see [Caucasian Stonecrop](#)

Hiding within the long grass where the St Faith's chapel once stood where the tall blue flowers of my first **Field Scabious** of the year and at the edge of the mown track around this area the delicate pink of **Musk Mallow** was able to survive while the more forceful yellow-flowered **Meadow Vetchling** was battling more successfully with the grass.

Moving on up New Lane a garden next to the Allotments entrance had two surprises in the form of some **Caper Spurge** plants and one flowering plant of **Wall Lettuce**, neither of them looking to be the result of deliberate gardening.

A little further up New Lane I crossed the road and headed west down an alley into the open space beside a section of the Lavant Stream heading south to run under the rail station area before emerging in the concrete channel along the south of Havant Park. Currently the stream is dry and I was able to walk along its bed to discover unexpected **Marsh Ragwort** and **Meadow Sweet**. Leaving the stream bed I walked north towards Crossland Drive where the metal grid covering the stream where it emerges south of this busy road had plants of some **unidentified crucifer** emerging through the grid - I will have to re-visit this site when these yellow-flowered plants have developed some seed that may enable identification. While still in the open space an earth bank blocking the entrance to what had been some temporary council offices (now demolished) had a bush of **Ribbed Melilot** flowering on it and attracting **Marbled White** and **Small Skipper** butterflies.

A diversion around the Havant Health Centre found the expected **Greater Periwinkle of the variety Oxyloba** flowering in its southern hedge and on the roadside of the patients carpark I managed to find one plant of **Wall Speedwell** still in flower before reaching Havant Park where many plants of **Fiddle Dock** had escaped close mowing on the east side of the Tennis Courts. Leaving the Park by the path leading into the rail station forecourt I found both **Small Toadflax** and **Thorn Apple** in flower before reaching home for some lunch.

After lunch I got on my bike to head west towards Farlington Marshes, ticking off both **Black Horehound** and **Rest Harrow**, one on each side of the busy Park Road south close to the Langstone roundabout. Next area of interest was the Broadmarsh 'mountain' where, after turning off Harts Farm Way on the road to the harbour slipway, I immediately turned left on the steep path up the mountain through the trees that clad its lower slopes - coming down this path was a **large bright orange butterfly** which suggested that it was an out of habitat Silver Washed Fritillary - luckily it landed and closed its wings to show that it was a **very fresh Comma of the Hutchinsonii type** that occurs in the summer brood - for a photo with the wings spread to show the bright colour see [Hutchinsonii type Comma](#). While searching for a photo I came across this interesting quote on the UKButterflies website .. "This butterfly was once widespread over most of England and Wales, and parts of southern Scotland, but by the middle of the 1800s had suffered a severe decline that left it confined to the Welsh border counties. It is thought that the decline may have been due to a reduction in Hop farming, a key larval foodplant at the time. Since the 1960s this butterfly has made a spectacular comeback, with a preference for Common Nettle as the larval foodplant, and it is now found throughout England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands and has recently reached Scotland." Another interesting fact is that the summer brood of Commas which is now emerging consists of two types - the standard form with the darker colour follows the normal routine for summer brood butterflies - it goes into hibernation soon after emerging and does not mate until the next spring. The Hutchinsonii type do not hibernate but mate in the

summer and their offspring, which emerge in the autumn, are the ones to carry on the species in the next year.

In the extensive rich grassland covering the top of the mountain one of the first plants to go on my list was a single **Grass Vetchling** (if you look back to my entry for June 11 you will see that I then estimated that 20,000 of these plants were flowering here). A little further on, in the north east part of the grassland, the rare (in Hampshire) **Hairy Vetchling** was now easy to find. Coming down and following the cyclepath towards Farlington Marshes the first section was lined with abundant **Pyramidal orchids** and **Common Centaury** (but no Bee Orchids) and at the eastern entrance to the Marshes the **Dark Mullein** was flowering but the Danewort was still in bud. Other trackside flowers were **Goat's Rue**, **Great Mullein**, **Vipers Bugloss**, **Yellow-wort** and **Large Flowered Evening Primrose**.

At the Eastern Road, where I turned round, the mass of **Vervain** which had been here on June 28 had vanished (I did find one plant missed by the mowers) but I did find **Small Scabious** and **Common Toadflax** plus one plant of **Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea** and my first **Hawkweed Oxtongue**.

Back at the west end of Harts Farm Way I crossed onto the old Broadmarsh playing fields where I not only found the **Creeping Yellow Cress** but also my first **Red Bartsia** before taking the footbridge over the A27 into Bedhampton where the Hermitage stream had **Stream Water-crowfoot**, hybrid **Water Speedwell** and **Himalayan Balsam**.

July 2 was mainly spent at the computer but I took a short walk at dusk which started most unexpectedly with a **screaming party of six Swifts** over my head as I left the house. It also added a couple more plants - **Sweetbriar** and **Heath Groundsel**.

On July 3 I got on my bike to go down the west Hayling section of the Billy Line to Gunner Point. First tick was the **Least Yellow Sorrel** in Langstone and my first 'new for the year' was **Golden Samphire** starting to flower around 'Texaco Bay' at the southern end of Langstone Bridge followed by **Spiny Rest Harrow** almost opposite the steps of the northern entrance to the Oysterbeds area. **Rosebay Willowherb** was a colourful addition just south of the Oysterbeds but I then had to ride past the open West Hayling fields before I found some tall garden escape **Hollyhocks** alongside the railtrack just before turning off it to visit the Saltmarsh Lane seawall where the expected **Bastard Cabbage** and **Lucerne** were found plus a large patch of **Dyers Greenweed**.

Sinah Common had a mass of **Wood Sage** and the east side of the Kench not only had some flowers left on the **Bladder Senna** bush but also gave me **White Melilot**. Back on the Ferry Road **Bell Heather** was out on the golf course. In the Gunner Point sand dunes I found the tiny flowers of **Sand Spurrey** among a mass of **Hares Foot Clover** and south of the Golf Course **Sheep's Bit** and **Sea Bindweed** were flowering together with the small and difficult to spot patch of **Nottingham Catchfly**. After a pause for refreshment during which both Skylark and Meadow Pipit song were heard I pressed on east finding a patch of **Wild Thyme** as well as the **Yellow Horned Poppies** and a late flowering **Sea Kale** plant. The **Pale Toadflax**, **Rose Campion** and **Cocks Eggs** ended the contribution from Sinah

Common and nothing new went on my list until I was back at Langstone Bridge where the Texaco Garage area had my first **Strawberry Clover**. A short excursion along the Northney Road showed me that the close mown roadside flowers which I had in past years thought were Basil Thyme had tall unmown stems which showed that the plant was **Black Horehound**. Across the bridge the area round Langstone pond gave me **Lesser Sea Spurrey, Lax Sea Lavender and Water Dock**.

Another local dusk walk gave me **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** and **Argentinian Vervain** while a brief cycle ride today gave me **Field Woundwort** by the A27 Emsworth underpass and **Round-leaved Fluellen** in the Warblington cemetery to bring my total for July up to 205 species in flower so far with plenty of areas still to be covered.

## Tue 30 June

### David Attenborough meets President Obama plus a round up of June Insect News

Before looking at the latest Insect news I want to suggest that anyone who has not yet done so takes half an hour to consider what they can do to ensure that the Earth retains an ecosystem that continues to support the needs of humanity with food and with bodily, mental and spiritual well being for all. To my way of thinking the well intentioned individuals and conservation organisations which are the front line of current efforts to achieve this aim cannot hope to win against the forces which give precedence to their own objectives (personal and corporate profit, personal pleasure, and the need to satisfy the desire for personal survival and status) over the survival of the planet's ecosystem.

The slight glimmer of hope that we can win the battle came this week when I watched **a discussion on this subject between President Obama and David Attenborough** which you can see at [President Obama discusses the future of our planet with David Attenborough on his 89th birthday](#).

I do not expect this short film to have a significant effect on the future of our planet but it does point to two things that are necessary if we are going to get anywhere. The first is that the world's leaders, and the politicians and electorate on which their influence is based, must be sincerely dedicated to the objective of preserving what Obama referred to as the 'blue marble' of our planet as seen from space, and secondly all of us that enjoy the excitement of the natural world should follow David Attenborough's example by dedicating their lives to showing others how they can enhance their enjoyment of life by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

Now for the **latest insect news** which has as headlines the emergence of the **Dark Green** and **Silver Washed Fritillaries, White Admirals** and **Purple Emperors** of high summer. First to show themselves were the **Dark Green Fritillaries** with the national first in Devon on June 4 - general emergence in Hampshire came on June 24 with 12 on Stockbridge Down and 8 at Martin Down. **Silver Washed Fritillaries** were first seen somewhere in Hampshire on June 17 with two at each of Havant Thicket and Martin Down on June 24 increasing to 6 at Rownhams (by

the M27 north of Southampton) on June 29 when the first and so far only report of a **Purple Emperor** came from the Tadley area in north Hampshire. Other summer butterflies have been the **Purple Hairstreak** which was reported in Christchurch on June 24 and then in Sussex on June 28 - the less common **White Letter Hairstreak**, which has almost vanished following the demise of the Elm trees on which its caterpillars feed, continues to survive around the IBM Lake in Cosham where it was first seen on June 16, four days after its national appearance in London on June 12, and maintained a foothold in Sussex on the elms in Preston Park in Brighton where two were seen on June 23. Recent exciting oddities have been another **Monarch** of the year in Southampton (Hollybrook Cemetery at Lordswood for three hours on June 30) following earlier sightings in Portchester on May 27 and in Cosham on June 4. Back in September 2012 the Daily Mail reported that one had turned up on Portland which was thought to be a genuine cross ocean traveller caught up by Hurricane Isaac - read about it at [Monarch arrives at Portland Bill today](#). While it would be exciting to think that the other sightings are equally likely to have come from America be aware that (a) genuine American butterflies are normally seen on the south west coast of the UK (not e.g. in Cosham), (b) when a genuine invasion occurs as a result of weather conditions the butterflies usually arrive in big numbers, not singly. In 1933 40 arrived together and in 1999 300 were counted while in 1995 large numbers arrived in western Europe (see [1995 invasion](#)), (c) aspects of these isolated non-coastal sightings suggest it is more likely they came from eggs or larvae purchased online from websites such as [Worldwide Butterfly suppliers](#). A less exciting summer butterfly is the **Grayling** which was first seen in Dorset on June 19 with the next report being from Devon on June 25 when one was also seen on the Isle of Wight but has yet to be reported in Sussex where some of its most sincere worshippers live.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 22 - 28 (WEEK 26 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 28 June**

#### **A ride from Havant to Farlington Marshes road entrance**

This morning I rode west along the Havant to Portsmouth cycle way as far as the Eastern Road roundabout, returning along the same route and noting a good list of **birds still singing at the end of June**. I have not heard a Robin all week although one keeps an eye on me whenever I am doing any gardening but **Song Thrush, Blackbird, Wood Pigeon and Collared Dove** are heard daily along with the **Wrens** that will be heard all summer but I am slightly surprised that **Dunnocks are still regular songsters** (I heard one twice before I left home today). Also regularly heard are **Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Greenfinch** (though today the presence of the latter was indicated only by their 'wheezing' calls). In appropriate habitat both **Blackcaps** and **Reed Warblers**, plus **Common and Lesser Whitethroats** (and of course **Cetti's Warblers**) are still active singers while **Skylarks and Meadow Pipits** can be heard over open grassland. This morning I heard a brief burst of song from a **Coal Tit** (but have not heard a Great Tit all week).

Nothing new in the way of flowers until I was past Broadmarsh when I started to see **Old Man's Beard (Clematis vitalba)** opening its first flowers and then came on the first tall yellow spike of **Greater Mullein** (one clump of **Dark Mullein** was also seen). In the Farlington Marshes 'slip field' a mass of **Goat's Rue** was also flowering but I had seen that at Northney on June 24. Near the main entrance to Farlington Marshes many plants of **Vervain** were newly flowering and around the way in from the roundabout **Small Scabious** was abundant.

Heading back along the cycleway I spotted **Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea** (wild Sweet Pea) starting to flower and also spotted one plant of **Common Toadflax** in flower (already recorded on Portsdown on June 3 but not yet in general flowering). Passing the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes the **Danewort** had big umbels of unopen flowers that must open within days and the edge of the cycle track had my first **Greater Birds Foot Trefoil** in flower before I came to the massive display of **Pyramidal Orchids** among which I only noticed a couple of **Bee Orchids** - recently we have heard much of these orchids doing well this year in Emsworth but they are totally unpredictable in their flowering from year to year - I was reminded of this by not seeing a single example anywhere along the Hayling Coastal path during my trip around Hayling on June 24. Reaching the west end of Harts Farm Way I crossed the road to the edge of the old playing fields to see that **Creeping Yellow Cress** was now flowering and back in Havant I passed my first stand of **Common Fleabane** with its flowers fully open.

When going through my notes I checked on a couple of plants which I thought I had already recorded some time ago but see that I had not so both **Wild Carrot** and **White Stonecrop** have now been added to my list, as has **Fool's Watercress** which I saw sometime during the week but could not at the time recall its name! Having entered all these species into my spreadsheet I see that I have so far found **289 plant species in flower during June** (but there are still two days to go!)

## Wed 24 June

### A tour of Hayling Island adds 20 plants to my June flower list

Before starting on today's ride around Hayling I see that I have not yet mentioned three new plant species found in Havant on Monday evening - they were **Black Horehound**, **Large Flowered Evening Primrose**, and **Spear Thistle**. This morning my first find was **Meadowsweet** flowering on the bank of the Lymbourne Stream seen from the Billy Trail before crossing the bridge to Hayling and turning left to find both **Sea Lavender** and **Lax Sea Lavender** in flower in the saltings and **Wild Celery** in flower in the roadside ditch after passing the Langstone Hotel and before coming to the first houses of Northney village. A brief look into the North Common open space found **Goats Rue** in flower and Fragrant Agrimony showing flowerheads with no flowers as yet (so not counted).

Nothing more until I reached Black Point where I collected a specimen of what turned out to be **Heath Groundsel** and not the look-alike **Sticky groundsel** which I have already recorded in error - the critical id factor seems to be the tips of the green bracts on the outside of each flower head which are green tipped on Sticky and minutely dark tipped on Heath. It was also interesting to see many bushes of both **Broom** (very few flowers left but many seed pods) and **Spanish Broom** (still

covered with extra large and bright yellow flowers) and to be able to compare the smooth round flower stems of the Spanish with the grooved stems of the standard Broom. Back on the causeway leading to the Sailing Club I found my first **Knotted Clover** in the sandy roadside and **Bugloss** (not to be confused with Vipers Bugloss) where the road slopes up into the sailing club premises.

South of the Lifeboat Station the grounds of the old hospital gave me my first **Wood Sage** and a lot of **Common Centaury** (plus a couple of Pyramidal Orchids which I have never noticed here in the past). While skirting Sandy Point reserve I added **Sea Spurge** and **Ray's Knotgrass** while just inside the fence I saw two plants of **Hound's Tongue**, both now past flowering, plus a lot of freshly flowering **Bell Heather**.

The long stretch of seafront path gave me a lot of unexpected **White Melilot** in the shingle but I did not add anything new along the Ferry Road where the Gunner Point area south of the Golf Course added the lovely **Rose Campion** and the rare **Nottingham Catchfly** which was in full flower. To find this plant go east from the sand dunes, past the concrete pill box and stop at the first wooden bench close to the Golf Club fence. From the west end of the bench head towards the golf club fence and up a slight slope on which you will find these inconspicuous plants on the east side of a circular patch of low gorse.

Continuing my journey east I saw nothing more new until I reached the south-east corner of the mini-golf course. Here, in the edge of more gorse on my right just before coming to the cafe beside the approach road to the carparks, I found the expected **Pale Toadflax** newly in flower at its only Hayling site. Following the beachside road towards the Beachlands Funfair I turned off it when I came south of the first houses on the south side of Ferry Road and here (on the south side of Ferry Road opposite Staunton Avenue) the tiny white flowers of '**Cock's Eggs**' had started to appear as they have done for as long as I can remember.

Finally, heading home up the Billy Line, I passed lots of **Agrimony** newly flowering plus one plant of **Perennial Sowthistle (Sonchus arvensis)** in flower. Just before reaching the Oyster Beds area I closed my list with flowers on both **Rosebay Willowherb** and **Musk Mallow**.

## Tue 23 June

### An evening visit to Langstone Pond plus some recent news from the internet

**A sunny evening with a very low tide co-inciding with sunset found me on the seawall at Langstone pond hoping to see a lot of adult Egrets coming back to their nests bringing their young a late supper.** When I arrived, well before sunset, I counted 14 nests easily visible from the path outside the Mill buildings. At least one well grown juvenile was standing on a branch well away from a nest, clearly showing its green legs, but it was not possible to separate adults from juveniles on the other nests on that island and the bright light of the setting sun directly behind the many other nests in trees on the west side of the pond made it even more difficult to see those nests, let alone their contents, so I could only guess from the evidence of past visits that the total of nests was between thirty and

forty, giving a minimum population of 60 adults and 30 juveniles. Peter Raby had visited the pond earlier in the afternoon and saw at least 54 adult Egrets so I am assuming that they all spent the night there. Around sunset another 5 flew in and more may well have arrived after I left but the anticipated count of many birds flying in did not happen.

Peter's visit was made shortly after the morning's wind and rain had abated and I was interested to hear that he had **seen more than 20 Swifts in the area** - Swifts that are not nesting (and many that do have nests) normally fly far from bad weather and only return when it has passed, so I guess these birds were nesting in the area and were taking advantage of the improving weather to collect insect food for their families. During the hour I was there between 8 and 9 pm I saw at least 2 Swifts regularly hawking over the area behind the Royal Oak and guessed that they had nests there. While on the subject of Swifts I have recently seen **first two reports of the 'screaming parties'** we expect in June - on June 14 six birds were screaming around Hove at head height and on June 19 a party of 12 was screaming in the Lindfield area near Haywards Heath.

Among other reports on the internet that have attracted my attention have been **two Quail which I presume to be newly arrived migrants**. The first was of one at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on June 11 and the second was of a possible sighting near Robertsbridge to the north of Hastings on June 14. Birds that we are more likely to see locally are the **Lapwing** and **Green Sandpipers** now starting to return to the coast after their attempts at breeding. Less welcome news comes from the Rye Harbour website describing how **Grey Herons have developed a taste for the chicks of Gulls, Terns and Avocets** in much the same way as the Badgers at Minsmere which featured on the Springwatch programmes - have a look at [Seabird chick predation by Herons](#).

Another entry on the Rye Harbour website described how the East Guldeford levels on the edge of Romney Marsh are providing a **last breeding site for Yellow Wagtails in Sussex** (they had effectively ceased to breed in Hampshire by the year 2000). For their current status in Sussex see [Yellow Wagtails still breeding in Sussex](#). I personally still remember their colourful and numerous breeding presence in Hampshire on the still working water meadows at Bickton beside the River Avon just south of Fordingbridge during the 1940s and those memories of 'long ago' were re-inforced when watching the Egrets at Langstone last night by a conversation with an 85 year old birder and farmer visiting this area from Hereford. More recent memories were recalled when Jason Crook and his mother came by and stopped for a chat - at one point the conversation turned to **Cetti's Warblers** and Jason confirmed three points which some birders may not be aware of - firstly that only the males sing and secondly that the females are noticeably smaller than the males, and thirdly that they do not form pairs for breeding but the male may have up to three females that he breeds with.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 15 - 21 (WEEK 25 OF 2015)**

[Sun 21 June](#)

## My Cemeteries Page now updated and comments on Painted Ladies and Black-necked Grebes

My Cemeteries page has now been updated with the details of what I found on June 17 - to see it use the link at the head of this page. Items in it which may be of interest are, in the Havant page, a link to [a video about the moth whose larvae will soon be causing Horse Chestnut leaves to turn brown](#) as the tiny caterpillar of the *Camereria ohridella* moth feed on those leaves from the safety of the 'inside' of the leaves. At Warblington I was pleased that [Round-leaved Fluellen had re-appeared en masse](#) where I used to find it annually but have not seen it for at least three years. Also at Warblington [Creeping Jenny was flowering](#) in several places - I don't recall ever seeing it here before though it is present each year in the marshy SSSI immediately east of the cemetery. The visit to St Faith's churchyard in Havant had as its high-spot the sight of [Umbrella Liverwort \(\*Marchantia polymorpha\*\) in a frenzy of sexual excitement](#) (the umbrellas which it raises when in this mood were first noticed by me at this time last year - all we now need is some rain which will enable the male plants to shoot their 'sperm' for up to a metre in search of a female plant, see [Liverwort reproduction](#)).

Since my last Diary entry I have had time to look through Hampshire Bird Reports to refresh my memory about [Black-necked Grebes breeding in Hampshire](#). In Friday's entry I wrote .. "I don't think breeding has ever been proved in Hampshire but I do recall hearing of possible breeding in the past 20 years or so." Since then I have checked 'Birds of Hampshire' which was published in 1993 and has only one record of breeding in Hampshire - a pair raised two young at Winchester Sewage Farm in 1987. The annual reports since then show that summering birds were in Langstone Harbour annually from 1995 to 2002 but no breeding was reported, while the 2004 report says that a pair bred at an inland site in that year but the only chick that was produced did not survive. It seems unlikely that the bird in breeding plumage reported in the Warsash/Hill Head area between June 16 and 20 - always offshore and very mobile - is likely to give us a breeding record this year.

In his blog entry for June 20 Brian Fellows commented on [reports suggesting that we were in for a massive Painted Lady invasion](#) this summer - many websites have echoed this suggestion which seems to have started with an entry dated June 15 on the national Butterfly Conservation website - see [Painted Lady migration](#). The last line of that entry has a link to a Butterfly Conservation 'Migration Watch' page on which you can report your sightings of both Painted Ladies and Humming Bird Hawkmoths and for each species there is a link to the results of the '2015 Survey so far' which will show you that [Painted Ladies have already been seen throughout England](#) and in both Ireland and Scotland (with one report from Orkney) - you can go directly to this map at [Painted Lady Sightings map](#).

Two aspects of this mass movement of butterflies which I found interesting were, firstly, that [the butterflies do not make non-stop flights from Africa to e.g. Orkney but make their journey in stages](#) - those that started from north Africa will have

stopped somewhere in France or Germany where they will have laid eggs from which a new generation will have developed to take over the baton and continue north. How long it takes from egg laying to adult depends on latitude:- in tropical areas it can take as little as 33 days but in cool places it can take as much as 60 days - my guess is that the 'pit stop' time in northern France in a hot summer is about 6 weeks (42 days) before the fresh adults are ready to cross the English Channel. It follows that the end of summer return flight south will consist of the offspring of those now moving north over Britain.

The second aspect of the **Painted Lady migration that I was not previously aware of is that it regularly (but not always) takes place at heights of up to 1 kilometre and at speeds of up to 30 miles an hour** - this has been revealed recently by using sensitive radar to detect large flocks of butterflies that could not be seen from the ground. I cannot find anything that tells me how long an individual butterfly can keep up this high level, high speed travel without coming down to feed.

**Fri 19 June**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Recent sightings by others**

I have been busy recently with editing my 'Cemeteries Page' sightings but have noticed some interesting sightings by others. Before coming to them you might be interested in **a video by some 'Naked Scientists' describing the life cycle of the Cameraria Ohridella moth** which I mentioned in my last post will soon be turning the leaves of Horse Chestnut trees prematurely brown. To see this video go to the UK Moths page for the moth and click the link in the bottom line of the text - see **Cameraria ohridella**

Also today I had an email from Christopher Evans describing his sighting of **a mature Eel in Langstone Mill Pond**. He was wondering if Eels were resident in the pond to which my answer is .. 'not as far as I know'. My guess is that sightings of mature Eels (Christopher estimated the length of the one he saw to be 40 cm) at coastal sites at this time of year are connected with the migration of mature Eels to their breeding area in the Sargasso Sea. While investigating this theory I found an RSPB website which answers two questions that support my guess that the eel seen today was heading for the sea, passing through the pond as one stage in the long and arduous journey from some inland water where it had been growing over the past 12 years towards the open sea - the two clues in the website were the statement that the mature eels time their departure from our shores for July and that when they are ready to go they should measure around 40 cm long. See **Eel migration to the Sargasso Sea**. This leaves us with major unanswered questions as to the location of this Eels childhood home and the route from there to Langstone!

The most interesting bird sightings I have noticed in the last couple of days have been of this year's **first Quail sightings** - a report of one on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on June 11 and a 'possible only' at Robertsbridge in East Sussex on June 14. Closer to home there have been two sightings of **a breeding plumage Black-necked Grebe** in the Warsash area. I don't think breeding has ever been proved in Hampshire but I do recall hearing of possible breeding in the past 20 years or so.

Latest butterfly news includes many **Marbled Whites** on Portsdown since June 14 and the **first Ringlet** seen on Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on June 16 with a second seen today (June 19) at Brook Meadow in Emsworth where the first **Burnet Moths** were on the wing. Not quite so recent were **two sightings of Monarch butterflies (presumably trans-Atlantic migrants)** - one at Portchester on May 28 and another in Portsmouth on June 4. A much commoner butterfly, the **Small Skipper**, started to emerge on June 9 in Surrey, joining the **Large Skippers** which were first seen on May 17.

### Wed 17 June

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

#### Some good finds during today's monthly round of the cemeteries

Before coming to today's finds yesterday gave me the **first flowers on Creeping Jenny** in my garden and an unexpected sighting of **two Bullfinches** as I was cycling along the old rail line behind the Langstone housing in the section between Mill Lane and the first view of the harbour. I think these were two recently fledged birds as they repeatedly emerged to fly just a few feet in front of my bike before making a quick dash for cover. If you are unfamiliar with Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) have a look at [Creeping Jenny](#).

This morning I set out for Havant Cemetery with my camera and after visiting both Havant and Warblington cemeteries plus St Faith's Churchyard in central Havant I came home with 124 images to be edited into my Cemeteries page. Here I will pick out the things which seemed significant starting with the **Horse Chestnut trees** in Havant Cemetery which I was surprised to see showed none of the **Leaf Miner damage** that I have come to expect in recent years since the first **Cameraria ohridella moths** arrived in Britain in 2002. A short check up on this moth shows that it does not lay its eggs until May and the damage to the leaves is not apparent until mid-June so lack of damage to the leaves today does not mean that the invasion is over! The next thing that I noticed was a resumption of flowering by the **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** which was in full bloom during my May visit, then ceased to show any flowers but was starting to make a come-back today. The one new flower seen here today was **Self-heal**.

Walking to St Faith's Church I had a look in the small flowerbed at the west end of the Havant Station buildings (south side where the Taxis queue) and saw the first leaves of the **Thorn Apple plants** which appear here each year. Outside the station, by the nearby motorcycle parking, I also saw one tiny plant of **Small Toadflax** growing in a pavement crack (another first for my yearlist).

At St Faith's my best find was of the **Umbrella Liverwort** which I only discovered there in July last year. This grows in the damp shaded 'gutter' outside the north wall of the nave of the church and gets the name of 'umbrella' from the fruiting structures it grows at this time of year - see [Liverwort 'umbrellas'](#). Walking home from St Faith's I passed my first **Hoary Willowherb** in flower.

At Warblington I came on my first **Fool's Parsley** of the year (not yet flowering) and also found **Tutsan** (in flower) and **Ladies Bedstraw** (just beginning to show its bright yellow as the flowers open). I also found two much more interesting flowers in **Round-leaved Fluellen** and **Creeping Jenny** and near the latter I saw my first **Meadow Brown butterflies**.

### Mon 15 June

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

## **A visit to Havant Thicket where I am surprised by a Brown Argus butterfly and hear Robin 'autumn song'**

After neither seeing or hearing a **Robin** in my garden for well over a week I heard brief song from one yesterday and this morning one was on my birdtable as if it had never been away. Later I heard several short bursts of its quiet autumn song and when in Havant Thicket this afternoon I heard several others in similar mode - Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon are still regular songsters with Wren and Dunnock still giving occasional vigorous bursts of song.

The only new plants for my June list were **Heath Bedstraw**, **Tufted Vetch** and **Pepper Saxifrage** and I was disappointed, after seeing a mass of **Dotted Loosestrife** when emerging from Hammonds Land Coppice on the track heading towards the Rowlands Castle road roundabout, not to have a glimpse of the native **Yellow Loosestrife** in the Thicket Lawn grassland south-west of the Staunton lake where there used to be a lot of it showing the orange edges to its calyx segments. However, while scanning the flower rich wet grassland, my eyes fell on **a butterfly which I had not been expecting - a Brown Argus** looking almost as good as that taken from the Hants Butterfly Conservation sightings at [Brown Argus](#) - (photo taken by Francis Plowman at Noar Hill on June 10). Other butterflies seen by me were **many Speckled Woods**, **one male Brimstone** and what I think (from a very brief glimpse as it flew off) was a **Large Skipper**. Also seen on the ground in this area was **the web of the Funnel Web Spider (Agelena labyrinthica)**. I did not see the spider in action but you can do so in the video at [Funnel Web Spider](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 8 - 14 (WEEK 24 OF 2015)**

### **Sat 13 June**

#### **A ride to north Hayling and back via Langstone Pond where the Swans now have only six cygnets**

After watching Chris Froome win the seventh stage of the Criterium de Dauphine with a very impressive show of cycling up a long and very steep final climb during which he out-rode all the others I got on my bike and rode very slowly to Emsworth with the wind behind me! When I reached Peter Pond I turned left up Lumley Road in the hope of seeing the Blue Water Speedwell which Brian Fellows had seen there on June 3. No luck with that but I did see a clump of **Corn Cockles** flowering near the blue Cornflowers which Brian had also seen. From Lumley Road I turned into Brook Meadow from which I took the south exit and underpass onto the path which runs behind Lillywhite's garage, passing a plant of **Japanese Honeysuckle** in flower (just a couple of days after seeing this flowering in my own garden).

The Slipper Road added another first flower with wildflower seed **Corn Marigold** in flower. After entering the Emsworth Yacht Haven I paused to look at the north east corner of the marina where the expected large plant of **Spanish Broom** was

in full and impressive flower (if you stick to the regular path through the boats you will not see it - you have to pause and go round the stern of the first boat on your right after entering from Slipper Road). Another regular flower seen in the south west corner of the marina by turning right up the dead end path along the harbour side is the mass of **Black Mustard** now in flower and confirming its identity by holding its seeds pressed tight to the flower stems.

I rode down to the end of the Great Deeps but saw little in the way of birds other than a dozen Canada Geese and a similar number of Shelduck but I did enjoy the sight of a **pair of pristine Small Tortoiseshell butterflies** that are now starting to emerge. I also had my first sight of **Perforate St John's Wort**.

On the way home I turned down Church Lane at Warblington to get onto the shore via Pook Lane and thus have a look at Langstone Pond before heading home. Reed Warblers were singing at the pond but from the seawall sluice all the Egrets I could see showed no sign of activity at their nests. Moving on to the back of the Mill building there was some **Egret noise from the nests** but I could not be certain that any of the many white-feathered birds in the trees were juveniles. What I could be certain of was that **the Swan family which had just returned to the pond for the night had lost one cygnet** - I could only see the two parents and six cygnets and this count was later confirmed by an email from Christopher Evans.

Heading home up the Billy Trail my last note was of a **pristine Red Admiral** enjoying the evening sunshine, spreading its wings on a Poplar tree leaf.

## **Thu 11 June**

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

### **Hairy Vetchling now flowering on the Broadmarsh 'mountain'**

This afternoon I returned to the Broadmarsh mountain (old rubbish tip which was topped with soil when it ceased to be used for dumping and which is now the best patch of grassland in HAVANT Borough) in my search for **Hairy Vetchling in flower** and this time I found it. Nothing else new there but **Grass Vetchling was abundant** - wherever I stood I could see at least 100 of these lovely flowers and that inspired me to look at the OS based ramblers/naturalists best map website (<http://wtp2recorder.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm>) which showed me that the overall area of grassland covers some 6,300 square metres which I conservatively estimate to contain around 20,000 Grass Vetchling plants in flower (assuming an average of 300 plants in each of the 63 ten metre squares) I carried on west along the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway as far as the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes collecting four more 'new for the month' flowering plant species (**Bristly Ox-tongue, Common Ragwort, Yellow-wort and Common Fleabane**. New to this area was **Stinking Iris** and there were many more Pyramidal and Bee Orchids but I did not see the expected **Tufted Vetch** which Brian Fellows found flowering in Emsworth yesterday when he also saw **Hemp Agrimony (very early), Hedge Bedstraw, Hoary Willowherb and Perforate St John's Wort**, none of which I have yet come across.

## **Wed 10 June**

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

### **News from the internet and of a Robin in my garden**

Before coming to the excitement of the **Hudsonian Whimbrel** at Church Norton, a **Red-necked Phalarope** at Lancing, a **Red-backed Shrike** near Hastings, and a **Bee Eater** flying over a match at the Sussex County Croquet ground in the Southwick area between Shoreham and Hove I have more local news of a Robin in my garden and Barry Collins sighting of the first **Meadow Browns** of the year on Thorney Island.

In my last blog entry I said I was devoting this week to local bird watching rather than flower hunting and one of my most significant observations this week has been the **disappearance of the local Robins**. In my account of last Monday's bird song I said that no Robins were to be heard anywhere that day (and the only Robin seen was one of the juveniles that have been on display in the southern end of Wade Lane at Langstone for the past ten days). Until a few days ago any time that I looked out on my back garden there was nearly always an adult Robin perched on the clothes line stretched across the lawn but that vanished a week ago (not replaced by a family of juveniles!) so a major item in my own notes for today was the brief appearance of an adult Robin flying across the lawn (but no song heard). I expect that the next time a Robin gets a mention in my news will be in August or September when they recommence their autumn song, quietly advising other Robins to keep off the winter feeding territory which they hope will provide them with food through the winter months.

Barry Collins report of the first six **Meadow Brown butterflies**, seen on Thorney Island on Monday 8 June, has not yet been topped on the national Butterfly Conservation website though it is spot on the date suggested by Jeremy Thomas in his 1986 RSNCG Guide to Butterflies. Interestingly **I once made the mistake of confusing an early Meadow Brown with a Gatekeeper**, but they do not normally appear until mid July, and I assume that person who reported 'the first Gatekeepers of the year' as being seen on June 4 with his Sussex bird reports for that day from the Combe Haven area near Bexhill had made the same mistake. Before coming to the major birding news I see that birders visiting Pulborough Brooks on the evening of June 5 'found **magical Glow-worms in the carpark**' as they were leaving but the big bird news is the addition of a new bird to Sussex with the arrival of a **Hudsonian Whimbrel** at Church Norton in Pagham Harbour on June 9th. This may or may not be the same bird that attracted crowds of birders to Meare Heath (in the Shapwick Nature Reserve in Somerset from May 2 to 4) but if you go to Church Norton I gather that the way to pick it out from the few other Whimbrel present there is to look for a bird slightly larger and with a longer bill than the others and to confirm the id when it takes flight by seeing that it does not have the white wedge extending up its back from the rump. For a photo showing the bird in flight see [Hudsonian Whimbrel in flight](#).

Three other very good birds in Sussex during the past week have been a **Red Necked Phalarope** on Widewater at Lancing on June 3; a **Red-backed Shrike** in a reed bed at Westfield (just north of Hastings) on June 6; and a **Bee Eater** which flew west, calling, over the Sussex County Croquet ground (at Southwick just east of Shoreham) during a match on June 7.

**[Mon 8 June](#)**

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

**A walk to Budds Farm gives me my first House Martin of the year and nine more new flowers**

Having spent the first week of June in search of wild flowers I thought I would spend the second week 'birding' so when I took a walk to Langstone Pond, then across the South Moors shore to Budds Farm, and home via Southmoor Lane my notepad was at the ready to record all the bird species I encountered but I could not resist including any 'new for the month' flowers. Back at home I found I had seen or heard 35 bird species including **a lone Brent off the South Moors** (where **one Meadow Pipit was making non-stop parachuting song flights**) and **my very first House Martin of the year** at Budds Farm. The **Langstone Swan family still had all seven cygnets** on the water off the Royal Oak and the Budds Farm pair had four cygnets. In all 13 species were heard singing throughout the day (not a Robin among them but Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Dunnock and Wren plus Reed Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Goldfinch were all heard). As well as the Swans, Mallard, Coot and Moorhen all had tiny youngsters and the large number of Egrets all clustered around their nests in relative silence suggested that their young are close to hatching.

New 'first flowers' included one that was 'cheating' by opening its flowers early in response to having been half cut down - that was **Stone Parsley** in Langstone Mill Lane - while at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream the mass of **Sea Campion** was not yet on my June list. Nearby I added **Sea Beet** to my list though I had to use my hand lens to confirm that, in the absence of coloured petals, at least one flower was open - this reminds me that when passing the Royal Oak in Langstone the pavement cracks had another similarly colourless first flower - this was **Annual Pearlwort**. A little further west on the Southmoor sea wall I found my first flowering **Knotgrass** of the year and on emerging from the sea wall into the Southmoor Lane carparking area I found something that I do not recall seeing growing wild ever before - that was **Chives** (see [Chives](#).)

Further up Southmoor Lane, just before reaching the Havant Council offices, I found what may be their last gesture (now that budgets are being cut to the bone) towards encouraging wild flowers in the shape of a lovely clump of **Corn Cockles** in fresh flower. Further up the road again a genuine wild flower which has been growing for years in a 'difficult to mow' grass bank was just starting to open its very inconspicuous flowers - this is **Knotted Hedge-parsley**, a minute relative of Cow Parsley that you can see at [Knotted Hedge Parsley](#).

Back in Havant, passing the growing skeleton of the new Marks and Spencers store (opposite the vehicle entrance to the Tesco carpark), I found the very first flower open on **Creeping Thistle** and in Havant East Street my first **Wall Lettuce** was managing to flower in the paved stone garden of one of the houses that replace to long defunct Empire Cinema. No more flowers to mention but back at Budds Farm the dusty roadside of the hill up to the viewpoint had a single fresh fungus in the form of an **Agaricus bitorquis**. This has a pure white cap similar to a Field Mushroom but does not grow in lush grass meadows, preferring to push its way up through the dirtiest of soils (even forcing its way through asphalt) - see [Pavement Mushroom](#).

To end tonight some of the **excitement from yesterday's Canadian Grand Prix** that you may have missed - see [Groundhog safely crossing the race track](#). I learnt that Groundhogs are more properly called Marmots and are treeless members of the Squirrel tribe which have an interest in photography - see [Groundhog photography class](#)

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 1 - 7 (WEEK 23 OF 2015)

### Sun 7 June

#### A trip to south Hayling adds 21 species to my June flowering plant species bringing the total to 213

On May 21 I described how I found a very dead Hedgehog on my garden lawn with no clues to the cause of death and this morning **a second dead Hedgehog was lying in the centre of the lawn** (freshly mown yesterday evening) having been deposited there during the night, almost certainly by a Fox.

After breakfast I got on my bike and headed south down the Billy track to see what new flowers I could find on south Hayling for my June flowering plant list. The first to go on the list was **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort** (my first for the year) with **Thrift (aka Sea Pink)** nearby. Next came three more species on the Saltmarsh Lane sea wall - **Bastard Cabbage, Wild Radish**, and my very first **Lucerne** flowers. Nothing more until I reached Sinah Common where **Tartarian Honeysuckle** (I see that Fitter and Fitter list this as 'Tartar Honeysuckle') still had some flowers remaining at the road entrance to Sinah Gravel Pit Lake and the World War 2 'gunsite'. Having turned off the Ferry Road I continued on the path through the gorse to find an upright, bristly flower spike just opening its first pure white flower - this baffled me for several minutes until I realised it was the uncommon **white-flowered form of Viper's Bugloss**. Also here were many whitish but pink-tinged Stonecrop plants that it is tempting to call White Stonecrop (but that is pure white with no pink - this is called **English Stonecrop**).

Back on the Ferry Road my next stop was at The Kench where a trip along the eastern side found the first large yellow flowers of **Bladder Senna** already out slightly over half way to the open harbour. This plant is almost a small tree growing among the bramble bushes and easily picked out by its large, bright yellow flowers - see [Bladder Senna flowers](#). Later these flowers will become large, translucent seed pods (which I assume are the 'Senna pod' laxative available from chemists when I was young!).

Turning into the shore carpark just before reaching the Ferry Inn the first plant to go on my list was **Cerastium tomentosum**, the garden relative of the **Mouse-ears commonly called 'Snow in Summer' or 'Dusty Miller'**, and as soon as I reached the carpark I could see both **Tree Lupins** and **Hare's Tail grass** at their best. Reaching the sand dunes the first section accessible through the Tamarisks gave me the large pink flowers of **Sea Bindweed** (see [Sea Bindweed flowers](#)), the small bright blue of **Sheeps Bit** (see [Sheep's Bit flowers](#)) and the tiny flowers of **Sand Spurrey** (see [Sand Spurrey flower](#)).

Having turned east along the south of the Golf Course I followed the outer edge of the grass, where it gives way to shingle, in the hope of finding a plant of 'Little Robin' (a close relative of Herb Robert but smaller and with bright yellow pollen in its flowers) but with no success. I did find many very small plants of Bittersweet

Nightshade growing in the shingle and wondered if they could be [Solanum dulcamara var marinum](#) but checking with Stace they should have had 'procumbent' main stems with 'succulent' leaves and none met this description.

Other new for June plants found in the sandy Sinah Common area were [Sheep Sorrel](#), [Sticky Groundsel](#) and [Common Rampion](#). Back in the Langstone area I added both [Feverfew](#) and [Hedge Woundwort](#) plus one clump of Alexanders still in flower.

Going back to Sinah Common in the area south of Staunton Avenue I was intrigued to find some of the [Gorse bushes draped with huge amounts of what seemed to be spider silk](#), reminding me that I had discovered what this was only last year thanks to a couple of photos sent to me by Alistair Martin whose photos showed that the webs were the home of thousands of tiny, bright red, spider-like mites, each no more than half a millimetre long, called [Tetranychus lintearius or the Gorse Spider Mite](#). For an account of the life cycle of this insect and how it works as the only biological control on Gorse see [Gorse Spider Mite facts](#).

What I saw today was an apparently 'empty' silk 'nest' (see [Gorse Mite 'nest'](#)). The best photo I could find of the mites which inhabit this nest (an idea of their size is given by the single spine of Gorse included in the photo) is to be seen at [Gorse Spider Mites](#).

[I think Alistair Martin's photos below, taken in September last year, show mature mites in the process of leaving their 'home web' to drift on the wind in order to disperse to find new homes.](#)

Alistair Martin's photo of mites emerging from their web

Alistair's photo of mites 'abandoning ship'

## [Fri 5 June](#)

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

### **Three more flowering plants bring my June list to 192 species**

I spent the morning updating my spreadsheet with my June entries and found that I had [189 plant species](#) already on it, and in the late afternoon I made a quick trip to Emsworth which added three more plants plus a fresh [female Broad-bodied Chaser](#) dragon fly, a fresh [Red Admiral](#) and a [male Banded Demoiselle](#). The three new plants were [Shining Cranesbill](#) (in Norris Gardens, close to Pook Lane in Havant) and both [Common Comfrey](#) and [Water Forget-me-not](#) in Brook Meadow). Unfortunately I forgot to check the location of Brian Fellows [Blue Water Speedwell](#) find before setting out and so wasted some time searching for it in Brook Meadow rather than along the east side of Peter Pond which is where he found the plant on June 3. My search of the River Ems was not fruitless as I found [Stream Water Crowfoot](#) in flower and what I believe to be [Water Forget-me-not](#) (a tall, large flowered Forget-me-not) at two or three places along the far bank of the river near the S bend where I could not get close to it.

Genuine [Blue Water Speedwell](#) is recorded as being found in Emsworth (at least in the past) but the Hants Flora says that throughout Hampshire the genuine Blue Water Speedwell has been ousted by a hybrid between Blue and Pink Water Speedwell which continues to spread so there is no guarantee that a plant seen

in Emsworth is 'true blue'. A BSBI publication called 'The Plant Crib' gives the number of flowers in a raceme as the best way of separating the true species from the hybrid - the values are 14 to 40 flowers (with a mean of 25) for the Blue species and from 30 to 90 (mean 60) for the hybrid. To count the flowers in a raceme is almost impossible till late in the season when the tight packed flower buds at the tip of the raceme have mostly opened leaving countable flower pedicels spread out along the raceme (see [Blue water Speedwell late in its flowering period.](#)) so it is much too early to be sure of separating the true species from the hybrid but a look at the photo Brian took on June 3 suggests a low count and thus the likelihood that this is true species (See [Blue Water Speedwell at Emsworth on June 3.](#))

In his blog entry for today (June 5) Brian Fellows raises another question of how to identify similar looking flower species with the **separation of Willowherb species** as his subject, but the photo with which he illustrates this subject clearly provides its own answer. The fully open flower nearest the camera shows a cross-shaped stigma in the centre of the flower and this cross shape indicates **Broad-leaved Willowherb - American Willowherb** has an upright, club-shaped stigma - (see [Broad-leaved Willowherb](#)).

**Thu 4 June**

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

### **First Pyramidal Orchids and Wild Parsnip plus two Broomrapes and Common Toadflax on Portsdown**

Cycling up Portsdown this morning I found several **Pyramidal Orchids** and one plant of **Greater Knapweed** starting to flower as I passed Fort Purbrook on the road pavement and at the top of the slope there was a good show of **Sainfoin** below the carpark east of the London Rd. Crossing the southbound sliproad into the unmown grassland I quickly ticked off **Squinancywort**, **Fairy Flax** and **Hoary Plantain**. Beyond the tarmac footpath which follows the brow of the slope down to the London Road the steep slope down to the road was covered with a **ground hugging Cotoneaster species** which I think is a form a *C. horizontalis* but I did not look at it closely. Also on the road side of the footpath, close to the Hill Road bridge, I came on two spikes of **Common Broomrape** (**Knapweed Broomrape** went on the list much later when I was west of Fort Widley).

Next find was of a single plant of **Common Toadflax** in full flower at the edge of the Hill Road just before reaching the View Point/Burger Bar carpark round which I made a detour through the Crows and Gulls (among which were several Rooks from the nearby rookery, their crops visibly stuffed with fast food). On a bench furthest away from the busy carpark I found Ros Norton resting after activity with the Portsdown volunteers and I enjoyed a lengthy chat about wildflowers before continuing west to park my bike at the entrance to the stables at the west end of Fort Widley. From here I walked downhill in search of **Common Gromwell** (soon found) and whatever else might be on show. I found nothing new until almost at the bottom of the steep slope where I turned west to follow a well used 'ridge path' with deep gullies on each side and before long I noticed a circular patch of bright, creamy yellow on the southern slope below me. Crawling down to collect a sample I found this was **Horseshoe Vetch** and later I met Richard Jones (conservation warden for the hill) who told me these plants had been brought to this area, where it did not previously occur, from areas of Portsdown further west where it is common.

After continuing west for some way I turned back along the main path, outside the fenced compartments, hearing my first **Yellowhammer song** of the year and passing an isolated clump of **Sainfoin** before being surprised by my final find of the day - a single plant of **Wild Parsnip** in full flower. Retrieving my bike I started for home but passing the central frontage of Fort Widley I met up with Richard Jones who had just been photographing a Kestrel nest site high on the wall of the fort. While we were chatting Richard raised his camera to photograph something behind my back - a smart **Med Gull** feeding in the middle of the busy road on some human food dropped from a passing car and giving us good views of its scarlet bill and legs. It could well have been hit by a speeding car but surprisingly the next car slowed down almost to a stop for it!

### **Wed 3 June**

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

### **Another 38 species added to my wild flower list today on north Hayling and Emsworth**

My claim to have found 138 flowering plants on June 1 was wrong - after sorting out duplicates I actually had 130 species on the list but I easily topped the 138 for the month after cycling round north Hayling this morning and making a second outing to Emsworth in the afternoon so my June list this evening stands at 169 and will hopefully rise again tomorrow when I plan to visit Portsdown.

The first new flower this morning was **Sweetbriar rose** in the Billy Line carpark off East Street and the second was on the Spindle Tree by the footpath crossing the old rail line from Grove Road. South of the A27 I added Yellow Iris in the Wade Court lake.

After crossing the main Hayling road I went a short distance down Mill Lane and found **Hairy Garlic** still flowering in the unkempt roadside bank which contrasts with the 'Gardeners World' next door to it. Back on the Billy Line I quickly added Greater Celandine before switching to the track along the old rail bridge embankment where I felt sure I would find **Sea Sandwort** on the shingle but also found (on the chalk used to create the embankment) **both Mignonette and Weld plus my first Hop Trefoil**. While there I had a close look at what was at first sight a form of Birds Foot Trefoil but is strictly **Narrow Leaved Birds Foot Trefoil** which has grown here for many years. As I was leaving the embankment I had a real surprise in the shape of a young plant of **Dotted Loosestrife** (I checked that the calyx segments were green and did not have the orange edges of our native Yellow Loosestrife).

At the southern end of the sailing club one bush of **Tree Mallow** was covered with flowers and reaching the southern end of the bridge I found my first Storks Bill on the month. In the Oysterbeds area I found the white flowers of **Field Rose** and also the white of **Dames Violet flowers** while at the southern end of the mound beside the lagoon the **Milk Thistles** had sent up their tall flowering stems topped with flowers ringed by their 'crown of thorns' and the edge of Stoke Bay gave me both **Yellow Horned Poppies** and the white flowers of **Sea Kale** plus the yellow flowers of **Sea Radish**. More unexpectedly this shore also gave me **Honeysuckle** in a wild situation.

The short path from the block house to West Lane had another surprise with **Stinking Iris** in flower but though I cycled on to Northney and North Common I did not add anything new.

Heading east on my afternoon trip I found **Field Woundwort** shortly after the A27 underpass and on the Selangor Avenue path to Nore Barn I added **Black Bryony** in flower (I forgot to mention my first **White Bryony** seen at the Oysterbeds). The field immediately west of Nore Barn Wood gave me **Large Bittercress** as well as the expected **Sea Clover**, **Sea Milkwort**, **Greater and Lesser Sea Spurrey** but I could not add Brookweed as it was not yet in flower but before leaving that field I did find **Rough Chervil** flowering in its eastern hedge. The east end of Nore Barn wood gave me **Three Cornered Leek** and the nearby saltings still had flowers on some of the **English Scurvygrass**.

I missed out Brook Meadow so did not tick the Common Comfrey there and my route had also omitted the southern end of Pook Lane (north of the A27) and so I still do not have Shining Cranesbill on my list but in Emsworth I did find **Wild Clary** flowering both in its original site (having found a breathing space on the roadside kerb where it is not suffocated by the uncut grass) and on the low cut grass where it was recently mown by the council mowers but has had no problem in regrowing in the short grass (though it may soon be re-mown as when I was on the very overgrown footpath leading north towards Southleigh Road I met a lady dog-walker who commented on the overgrown path and said she would be contacting the council to get them to clear the path). My final addition to my list came at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads where **Crosswort** (but no Lesser Periwinkle) was in flower.

**Mon 1 June**

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

### **At least 138 wild flowers flowering on June 1st**

As usual on the first day of a new month I have been out for much of the day to see **how many wild flower species I could find in flower and today's total came to 138 species** (with probably a dozen more that I have seen recently in places I did not visit today).

Pick of the bunch was the first **Bee Orchid** in flower beside the cycleway running from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes and to make it more exciting there was also a single **Southern Marsh Orchid** flowering nearby (a species that I have never seen here before). Also beside the same cycleway where it starts to go uphill to the roundabout at the end of Harts Farm Way I found **Pale Flax** in what is a new site for me. Sadly when I went down to the shore carpark near the roundabout I found the lovely flowers of **Rosy Garlic** had all been cut down by very recent mowing of the verges - the mowing had left two other species for my list, one was the very **first Large Bindweed**, the other was the **Horse Radish** that has been flowering for some time.

Coming back along Harts Farm Way I went to the top of the Broadmarsh 'mountain' and enjoyed the hundreds of **Grass Vetchling** flowers and also found several clumps of **Hairy Vetchling** (not yet flowering but easily identified by the distinctive pairs of upward pointing long thin leaves). Another first flower seen on this leg of my search was a small bush of **Burdock** just opening its flowers.

The first leg of my search was on foot around Havant and first prize for that part of my list went to the **first Weasels Snout of the year** with two plants already flowering in the New Lane allotments. Other good finds were my first plant of **Square Stalked Willowherb** out to join the **Broad Leaved Willowherbs**, and when passing the entrance to the Havant Health Centre I found a **False Acacia tree** festooned with its white flowers. Near the junction of the Petersfield Road with

Crossland Drive, in the rough ground viewed from the cul de sac road running south to Havant Station, I was puzzled by **two huge plants of what seemed to be giant Antirrhinums**. I know these come in a great variety of colour but I don't recall ever seeing them growing to a height of at least three feet (a metre) and being correspondingly bulky. Searching the internet I found a photo of a plant that looked similar in colour and size to what I saw - see [Giant Red Antirrhinum](#). Finally, on a different subject, I had an email today from John Goodspeed questioning something I wrote about my visit to Portsdown last Wednesday (May 27). **I claimed then to have found Chalk Milkwort and to have identified it by the deep blue colour of its flowers**. John said that he did not think there was any Chalk Milkwort on Portsdown and a look at the distribution map for that species in the Hants Flora confirms that there are no records for Chalk Milkwort in south east Hampshire and that to see it you have to go to the northwest of the county. **To separate Chalk from Common Milkwort you have to dig up a complete plant with its roots and you will find that below the basal rosette of leaves at the bottom of the erect flowering stem there is a horizontal woody section of stem between the basal rosette and the roots** - I do not recommend that anyone goes round digging up these plants: just remember that the flower colour is not an indication of the species and that Chalk Milkwort does not occur on Portsdown!.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 25 - 31 (WEEK 22 OF 2015)**

### **Sat 30 May**

#### **Warblington Farm eastern stream**

An email from one of the group that has been working on the Selangor Avenue path connecting the Nore Barn Woods to the main Emsworth-Havant Road told me that at least two orchid spikes had recently appeared in the cleared area beside the path and this afternoon I went there to see what I could find.

Cycling south down the path I could see one of the **Southern Marsh Orchids** in flower and after locking my bike I crossed the eastern stream by the bridge on the main path from the woods to Warblington church, then walked north up the west side of the stream to recross it into the area where the trees have been cleared under the overhead power cables which is where I had seen the first orchid. I soon found a second Marsh Orchid in flower and the leaves of a couple more 'blind' plants. Perhaps there would have been more had it not been for the brambles and other scrub growth but that has not stopped a major growth of both **Ragged Robin** and **Giant Horsetail**. Work on the path improvement has cleared some of the brambles and shade from the well established Alder trees lining the stream has prevented the growth of impenetrable scrub under them. This enabled me to work my way north to the end of the Alders and out into a stretch of rich wetland grass where I again crossed the stream to return south.

In the scrub and alder copse I found one patch of **Large Bittercress** in flower and several clusters of **Creeping Jenny** leaves interspersed with plenty of **Marsh Thistles** (just coming into flower - my first for the year) and **Lesser Stitchwort** plus

one **Common Blue** and several **Large White butterflies**. I also had three surprises with single plants of **Black Bryony** already in flower, one of **Marsh Marigold** still in flower, and one very large plant of **Lesser Spearwort** not in flower (I did wonder if this could be Greater Spearwort but rejected that as very unlikely). One other find was two or three patches of very distinctively shaped umbellifer leaves which I am pretty sure were **Pepper Saxifrage**.

After finishing this look round the stream north of the 'Church Path' I had another look at the pond where water from the eastern stream accumulates when the tidal flap is closed. In particular I wanted to see if the **Brookweed** which I had discovered on May 23 was yet in flower but what I found was a group of eight well grown heifers munching on everything succulent - I suspect they will soon clear the Brookweed.

On the way home I added one more first flower for the year with **Field Woundwort** starting to flower by the northern kerb of the cycle way just before entering the A27 underpass. Back at home another first for the year was in flower - **Purple Toadflax**.

**Thu 27 May**

### **Shieldbugs and Orchids**

Today I washed my sheets and having hung them out in the garden they soon attracted a **shieldbug** to land on the white surface giving me a good view of its bright orange legs, overall brownish colour and the thorn-like projections from its 'Shoulders'. A good match for these features in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects was called **Pentatoma rufipes**. That source said that although the species was common it was unlikely to be seen before July but the British Bugs online website says that while new adults normally appear in July .. "Adults can sometimes be found in the early spring, suggesting that a secondary breeding cycle may be possible." The website gave the species the English name '**Red-legged Shieldbug**' and you can visit their description and see photos at [Red-legged Shieldbug](#).

I also saw a little group of three **Common Green Shieldbugs** on the leaves of a tree as I was going up Portsdown Hill yesterday but omitted to mention them. Another insect which I read about on Brian Fellows blog yesterday is one of the **Cuckoo Bumblebees** (*Psithyrus vestalis* though the taxonomists are now calling it *Bombus vestalis*) which lives as a '**cuckoo parasite**' on the **White tailed Bumblebee** (*Bombus lucorum*). Brian described the complicated procedure which the Cuckoo has to go through in order to get into the Bumblebee nest and lay her eggs in cells created by the host but his account said that she then kills the Bumblebee queen and fools the Bumblebee workers into raising eggs laid by the Cuckoo Queen and this left me wondering how the Cuckoo Queen killed the Bumblebee queen. I know that male bees (drones) do not have stings whereas the workers do and I was uncertain if the Queens had stings. It seems that they do and that the Cuckoo Queen has (a) a thick skin which the stings of the defending worker Bumble cannot penetrate and (b) the Cuckoo Queen has a longer sting than that of the Bumble Queen, answering my question as to how the assassination of the Bumble Queen was achieved but there is apparently more

than one outcome to the invasion by the Cuckoo - in some cases the Cuckoo and the Bumble Queens continue to live side by side in the same nest. For more on this see [Cuckoo vs Bumblebee](#)

The other subject that attracted my attention today is the **flowering of Orchids**. This interest was aroused by reports on the Sussex butterfly site of several species now being found so I have put together a list of what I have heard has been found so far this year.

First to flower were the **Early Spider Orchids** at Durlston in Dorset on Apr 11 and at Folkestone in Sussex on Apr 20. Next came the **Green Winged Orchids** at Gunner Point on South Hayling with nearly 300 out when I was there on Apr 24 - these were followed by the **Early Purples** in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth where I found 125 on Apr 23. On May 13 John Goodspeed found a **Twayblade** flowering on Butser Hill and on May 18 the first **Southern Marsh** were in flower at Brook Meadow. Finally the Sussex Butterfly site told us that on May 25 the Heyshott Down escarpment had **Fly, Common Spotted, Greater Butterfly and White Helleborine** all in flower.

## [Wed 27 May](#)

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

### **My first Common Spotted Orchids among 12 new flowers on Portsdown**

My first new flower today was the large red **Oriental Poppy** that will soon be flowering in my own garden but which was already in flower as I passed the Bedhampton Bowls Club ground before reaching the bottom of Portsdown. Soon after starting the climb I found my first **Opium Poppies** in flower. Beside the pavement outside Fort Purbrook I had my best find of the day with **two spikes of Common Spotted Orchid in full flower** and also in this section I noticed quite a lot of **Goatsbeard** together with **Field Bindweed** and **Yellow Meadow Vetchling**. Just before reaching the bridge over the London Road I came on a single patch of **Rest Harrow** but did not add anything more to my list until reaching my destination at the junction of Skew Road and Nelson Lane at the north end of the bridge over the M27 leading to Hill Road down into Portchester.

Here the first thing I spotted was the deep blue of **Chalk Milkwort** (the colour distinguishing it from the commoner, paler Common Milkwort) Before crossing to the Nelson Lane side of the junction I also found my first **Pale Flax** and the very upright **Hairy Rock Cress**. The crash barriers alongside this part of Nelson Lane made a convenient seat on which to sit and eat my sandwiches after which I walked round this Hampshire County Council 'Wild Flower Verge' finding my first **Kidney Vetch** and enjoying the sight of a **Green Hairstreak** before making my way along Nelson Lane to the tall Nelson Monument and then starting back home along Portsdown Hill Road. On this return journey my only addition to the flower list was **Biting Stonecrop** seen on roadside kerb stones near the hilltop roundabout.

## [Tue 26 May](#)

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

## A visit to Broadmarsh

This afternoon I cycled to Broadmarsh, starting with a look round the lovely grassland on top of the 'mountain' which owes its height to the great pile of rubbish dumped here in the past. No sign of Hairy Vetchling so far but I did find a single flowering plant of **Grass Vetchling** to add to my list of firsts for the year and also found masses of **Lesser Stitchwort** of which I had found the first at the Warblington SSSI last Saturday (May 23).

Coming down to the Broadmarsh slipway I counted 12 Swans marking the start of the summer flock of non-breeding birds which assembles here. Heading west along the shore I found the **Hemlock was now mostly in flower** and in the small west carpark the **Rosy Garlick was at its best**.

Continuing west along the cycle way as far as the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes I did not spot anything new but coming back along the same route I found my first **Heath Speedwell** flowering in five clumps spaced out along the landward side of the cycleway in the section from which the small stream runs out into the harbour. Leaving this shore-side section and climbing towards the roundabout at the end of Harts Farm Way I ticked my first **Black Knapweed** in flower.

This evening Brian Fellows blog has a photo, taken yesterday, of a **Shelduck plus 15 very young ducklings** on Swanbourne Lake at Arundel. I know that young Shelduck are left here in large groups in the charge of a single adult when the parents of the various family groups making up the 'creche' fly off to the north German coast where huge areas of sand allow them to feel safe from predators during their summer moult when they become flightless and I did wonder if the 15 ducklings were the beginning of such a creche but I think not. First I checked the number of eggs which a Shelduck can lay and found that the maximum is 16 so the 15 were probably one family with their mother. Secondly the adults do not leave on their moult migration until July and thirdly I think the creches normally occur on the open sea rather than in small ponds such as Swanbourne Lake. For more info see [Shelduck info](#).

Other news from the internet today includes the **first Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary** sighting (at Bentley Wood on the Hants/Wilts border on May 23) to be reported in Hampshire or Sussex although they were seen in Devon on April 30. Also now being seen are the daytime flying **Cinnabar** and **Mother Shipton** moths but the most exciting moths in the current sightings were a couple of **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoths** seen at Porton Down on May 17 - see [Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth](#) and also check out [Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth](#).

## Mon 25 May

### Reminders that it will soon be summer

My scan of the internet today discovered colourful reminders that we are entering summer with photos of hawkmoths, nymphs of bush crickets, birds which breed in the high arctic and which must now be on their way there if they are not to miss

the brief window of opportunity, and the first sight of those orb-web spiders which will be everywhere in high summer but which so far have not shown themselves.

Starting with the spiders they were brought to my attention by a photo, which appeared on Brian Fellows 'Emsworth wildlife' blog yesterday, showing **a tight packed ball of tiny black and yellow spiderlings** which I have come across in the past but whose name I could not remember. In my search for the name I found a website showing both the 'tight ball' and the very rapid way in which they disperse if they feel they are threatened (see [Spiderling ball](#)). It named them as the **young of the Garden Cross spider (Araneus diadematus)** and described their life story from being laid as a bundle of eggs last autumn, surviving the winter in a thick cocoon of spider silk, then starting their development into the big orb-web spiders we will see in late summer but this website did not show what they will then look like so to complete the story see a photo of the adult form at [Adult Garden Cross spider](#)

A couple of moths which have just started to emerge at Rye Harbour are the **Poplar Hawkmoth** and the **Small Elephant Hawkmoth**. The RX (Rye Harbour) website has a good photo of the latter at [Small Elephant Hawkmoth](#) and for the Poplar species see [Poplar Hawkmoth](#). Another group of insects that are just starting to appear, and which got a brief mention on the Springwatch TV programme this evening, are the **Bush Cickets** which are still some way from their adult size and form, and are still in their nymph stage. Springwatch showed a nymph of the **Great Green Bush Cricket** that will become the most impressive species on Portsdown while the Dungeness website found a much less common species which has only recently arrived in Britain (despite being wingless) from the continent (probably by hitching a lift on one of the lorries which human illegal immigrants try to cross the channel). This is the flightless **Southern Oak Bush Cricket** - see it and our resident **Oak Bush Cricket** at [Two Oak Bush Cricket species](#). Before leaving the insect world I must mention that the first **Glanville Fritillary butterflies** were seen at Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight on May 21 - see a photo of one at [Glanville Fritillary](#).

Bird interest comes from a **Little Stint** at Medmerry near Selsey on May 23, a **Bee Eater** and an **Ortolan Bunting** at Portland on May 24 after a **Subalpine Warbler** was caught and ringed there on May 23. A common shorebird which I thought had already left the south coast for distant breeding sites (though some do stay and nest here) is the **Ringed Plover** but both Christchurch and Rye Harbour have recently seen flocks of them which are assumed to be birds which choose to nest in the high Arctic which is only just warming up enough for the birds to survive when they arrive - see [Tundra Ringed Plover](#). Another interesting bird has been a **Red-footed Falcon** at Wareham in Dorset - see [Red Footed Falcon](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 18 - 24 (WEEK 21 OF 2015)**

### **Sat 23 May**

#### **A good day out at Warblington and a Stag Beetle on the way home**

This morning I headed for Warblington Farm to check out the marshy SSSI shore field east of the Cemetery. En route I noted the birds that were singing and heard a dozen species with **Wren, Blackbird and Song Thrush** among the most persistent and with **Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting** both heard from the reed bed in the SSSI. A **Holly Blue butterfly** was already active as I walked through the East Street carpark on the Billy Trail and a **fresh Speckled Wood** (presumably a forerunner of the second brood of that species) welcoming me to the SSSI where I also saw a **male Orange Tip and one Peacock**, plus one of the common immigrant **Silver Y moths** which showed me the white 'Y' shaped markings on its wings (its scientific name of *Autographa gamma* is more accurate as the marking is more like the letter 'gamma' in the Greek alphabet than the English 'Y'). Later, in the south-eastmost field of the farm (adjacent to Nore Barn wood) one **Common Blue** was patrolling the grassland.

My primary objective in the SSSI was to add flowering **Southern Marsh Orchids** to my year-list but I only found three (no doubt there will be more but not the 800 of past years). One of the first plants I came on was **Large Bittercress** which is common here among lots of **Ragged Robin and Brook Lime**. In the wet area I found **Tufted Forget-me-not** and what I am pretty certain was my first **Lesser Stitchwort** of the year.

Nearer the shore you leave the lush boggy area and emerge onto an area of what seem to be small stream channels but are in fact fingers of salt water which fill at high tide. Between them are drier areas of grassland where I found the expected **Sea Milkwort** and what I learnt to call **Subterranean Clover** from Francis Rose's Wildflower Key but which Fitter, Fitter and Blamey call **Burrowing Clover** - whatever you call it what you see are single white Clover flowers and a few leaves pushing up from the mainly underground plant stems in very short grassland. The **Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*)** is also a bit of an oddity not related to the chalk downland Milkworts.

The saltwater channels are currently lined with yellow **Celery-leaved Buttercup** plants but among them are also **many tight clusters of green, spoon-shaped leaves from which (quite soon) tall spikes will arise with small white flowers**. This is called **Brookweed** and normally grows where the soil is watered by both fresh water from the land and salt water from the sea (though I have also found it in inland woodland north of the modern A27 in the area between Bosham and West Ashling where maybe the Bosham Channel reached inland in the distant past). This plant was my second target in this area though none was yet in flower.

Moving on towards Nore Barn I crossed the big arable field which currently has a crop of young wheat and reaching the kissing gate at its east end I paused to have a look at the Oak tree overhanging the small pond on the left of the path close to the deep step down from the kissing gate. On the oak, as in past years, there were at least half a dozen large **Oak Apples** caused by tiny wingless female **Biorhiza pallida gall wasps** which emerged in early spring from hidden galls attached to the underground roots of the oak. On emerging these insects climbed the trunk of the oak tree and laid eggs in the leaf/flower buds of the tree. They also injected a poison which caused the oak buds to develop, not into leaves and flowers but into Oak Apples which can be 5cm in diameter and inside these

apples the wasp eggs develop into a new generation of gall wasps. Note that the eggs laid in the Oak Apple were fertile with no male intervention but the young wasps which emerge from the Apple are winged, allowing them to fly off in the summer to find mates from different 'mothers' to encourage evolution of the species (and to ensure that there is no inbreeding between young of the same 'mother' each Oak Apple has young wasps of the same sex - one Apple will have male young, another will have female). After the summer mating the fertilised females creep down to the tree roots to create galls on the tree roots while the males, with no further purpose in their lives, will enjoy the autumn as they think fit! For pictures and more info go to [Biorhiza pallida](#).

After that diversion I returned to my search for plants, heading south into the field from which the eastern stream of the farm accumulates in a small pond before making its way under the seawall into the harbour channel running along the southern edge of Nore Barn wood. My target here was to look for **Sea Clover** plants which grow on the field side of the seawall above the point where the pond empties its water into the harbour via a tidal flap which closes at high tide to prevent the sea water getting into the pond and opens to drain the fresh water as the tide falls and releases the pressure on the tidal flap. When you reach this pond the water exit channel is easy to spot but to reach it you have to make your way round the southern end of the pond across some marshy ground. Having done this you make your way up the seaward side of the pond to the water exit point and as you do so you should find the Sea Clover at several points along the upper part of the seawall where the soil is dry. To get an idea of what you are looking for see [Sea Clover flowers](#) and you will discover that it is not like the colourful balls of flowers seen on the common Red Clover. After seeing it from the field today I found that it can also be seen from the seaward side of the wall in at least one small area where there is little grass growing below the wire fence running along the top of the wall, this spot is not far south of the bench overlooking the harbour at the west end of the Nore Barn Wood.

Back in the field, as I was making my way round the southern end of the pond, I found a lot of **both Greater and Lesser Sea Spurrey growing together** allowing you to pick out the bigger, whiter flowers of the Greater plant. Also here some **Sea Milkwort** was growing but the big surprise was that, for the first time in the 30 years I have been familiar with this field, I found **several clusters of Brookweed leaves** growing at the edge of the field side of the pond roughly opposite the water exit channel and close to where a well beaten track coming from the west reaches the pond edge.

Returning to the main path into Nore Barn I turned south along the west edge of the woods and was surprised to see, as I neared the harbour, many plants of **Rough Chervil** starting to open their flower umbels in succession to the Cow Parsley that is still dominant in most places. Also here at least one **Dog Rose flower** was open in the wood. On reaching the shore I found most **Tamarisks** were now in flower and as I walked back to Langstone along the shore I passed my first **Cuttlefish 'bone'** washed up on the shore and saw a single **Shelduck** in the outflow of the main farm stream.

To make a great day out even better I found a motionless but live **male Stag Beetle** sitting on the top of a garden fence at the southern end of the short footpath connecting North Close (off Wade Court Road) to the more used footpath running east from Grove Road to the footbridge connecting the north and south sections of Pook Lane over the A27.

[Fri 22 May](#)

### **Kent earthquake trigger early dawn chorus by birds**

When I woke this morning the BBC news told me that **a minor earthquake had occurred in the Thanet area of Kent** between Ramsgate and Sandwich with the tremors peaking at 2.0 am. There were no reports of damage to people or property but **it caused the dawn chorus of bird song to break out considerably earlier than usual**. Checking on whether this was unusual I found an RSPB webpage which said .. "There are other triggers, besides light, that can bring about night-time song in robins and some other birds. If a bird is suddenly awakened by a sudden noise like thunder, fireworks, earthquake, wartime bombing etc, even a sudden shaking of its roosting tree, it may burst into song." Surprisingly the Media does not seem to have blamed the earthquake on Nigel Farage despite the epicentre being in his South Thanet constituency.

My own news for today is that the big yellow **flowers of Fremontodendron californicum (aka Flannel Bush) have now started to open** in the back garden of a house in Grove Road here in Havant and can be seen if you turn off South Street opposite the 'Old House at Home' and walk along the back street called The Twittens - continue until round the S bend and then look into the small private carpark on your right where the flowers can be seen above the rear wall of the carpark. This is possibly the largest member of the Mallow family and is native to the southern States of the US - for a photo see [Fremontodendron](#). A much less attractive 'weed' which was opening its flowers for the first time today is **Ground Elder**.

Looking through today's wildlife reports on the internet I see that Simon Ingram had a brief look at a **Ring-necked Parakeet** which visited his Eastleigh Lakeside 'patch' early yesterday morning before flying south. Maybe it then turned south-east to follow the M27 to the Funtley area north of Fareham where Trevor Codlin has had four sightings of one in or near his garden this month between May 4 and 14. Could this be a sign that at least one of the thousands now resident in the London area has decided to move to the country but is feeling lonely and is searching the countryside around Southampton for a mate?

**Mandarin Duck** is a species which is increasing in numbers in southern England and a sighting of two (presumably a pair) in the Hookheath area at the north foot of Portsdown today suggests that they may be starting to breed in this area which has the small streams with lots of woodland cover which they favour. On the Sussex birding site there is a report for yesterday of a Mandarin pair with three ducklings in the Rewell Wood area near Arundel and two males were seen with one female at Pulborough Brooks on May 20.

Alan Parker, a regular contributor to the RX (Rye Harbour area) website has an interesting contribution for May 21 with a photo of **a beetle which fell out of his shopping onto his kitchen table when starting to prepare some Asparagus** he had just bought. See [Asparagus Beetle](#).

**Red Kites** are becoming very common throughout the south but an account of one found in the Dungeness Bird Observatory trapping area yesterday morning should encourage our many bird photographers to keep a close eye on what is in their gardens early in the morning. Go to the following link and check out the report for May 12 and the associated photos - the link is [Sleepy Red Kite](#).

## Thu 21 May

### Visits to Havant Thicket and north Hayling add nine flowers to my year list

Before getting to today's outings I should mention that earlier this week (Tuesday morning) I found **a very dead (body full of large maggots) Hedgehog** on my lawn which solved the problem of a nasty smell that had been detectable in that part of the garden on the previous couple of days but which did nothing to solve the mystery of what goes on in the garden at night when (I guess) Foxes come into the garden from the Hayling Billy line and have 'fun and games'. For several months I had suspected that the garden was also visited by a Hedgehog which I assumed was the source of the small, thin, very black droppings left on the grass but those were on the front lawn not at the back of the house where the body was found so it remains a puzzle as to how the Hedgehog got from the front to the rear garden though I have been told that Hedgehogs are capable of climbing a four foot high wall (I learnt this from a lady in Portsmouth who had a Hedgehog make a nest and give birth to young in her garden which was completely shut in by walls that did not stop the mother Hedgehog getting in and out for her nightly 'shopping expedition' to collect food for herself and her young).. I have also been told that if Foxes come across a Hedgehog which they would like to have as a meal they know how to make the Hedgehog uncurl its defensive ball of prickles by urinating on it - after a short time the Hedgehog cannot stand the smell of the urine and opts to uncurl and run which gives the Fox its chance of a kill.

This morning I cycled to Havant Thicket where I came on my first **Dog Rose, Lesser Spearwort, Burnet Saxifrage, Yellow Pimpernel** and **Silverweed**. (Brian Fellows had seen Silverweed in flower on May 19). I also found a **great display of Lily of the Valley** in the usual place (west side of the peripheral main track at approx SU 718108) and estimated the area covered by these lovely flowers, now at their best, was more than four times that of the patch in the Hollybank Woods and looks more natural as it is not fenced in.

Continuing north I took the next left turn and sat down for a refreshment break during which I was pleasantly entertained by **Willow Warbler song** coming from a lone Oak tree above a large area of scrub. Elsewhere on this visit I heard **Bullfinch calls** and noted song from 13 bird species plus a lot of **dog barking interspersed with the hoarse 'barks' of a Roe buck** which went some way to explain why I had just seen two Roe deer running across the main track I was on to get away from the dogs - I hope the dogs did not injure the deer. Also seen in the Thicket were many **Brimstone butterflies** (one male settled on Ragged Robin

flowers made a colourful sight) plus an **Orange Tip** and a **Red Admiral**. The most numerous flying insects were **Speckled Yellow moths**. Another colourful sight was **a pure white Crab Spider resting on Bluebell flowers** - not a good example of these spiders normal camouflage! One thing I had hoped to see where the spikes (if not the flowers) of Common Spotted Orchids but none were seen in the expected places.

After lunch I headed south to the Oysterbeds where the expected **Dames Violet plants were flowering** despite their site being heavily choked with brambles. In that same area I found more Dog Roses in flower plus one plant of **Changing Forget-me-not** among the millions of Field Forget-me-not. Stopping for a chat with Chris Cockburn I noticed an unexpected single **Slender Thistle in flower** but at the carpark behind the Esso Garage I could see no sign of Goats Rue plants having survived the 'cleaning up' of the vegetation around the carpark. South of the Oysterbeds **Sea Kale was in full flower** on the shingle. On the way home via Northney I passed a garden with **Honeysuckle in flower** and hope to see it growing wild very soon. The only note I made at North Common was of a very loud-mouthed **Cetti's Warbler** close to the carpark.

## Wed 20 May

### **My Cemeteries Page now updated and an interesting project by the Wildlife Trusts**

If you want to see what I found last Friday in my round of the local Cemeteries go to [Cemetery Visits](#) and click on the May 15 links to St Faith's Churchyard, Havant Cemetery, and Warblington Cemetery.

On Tuesday of this week the Portsmouth News printed an article describing how the national Wildlife Trusts are running a campaign under the title "30 DAYS WILD" which aims to get as many people as possible out of doors on every day in this coming June to interact with the natural world in whatever way interests them. If you go to [30 Days Wild](#) and sign up for this project they will send you a starter pack complete with badges, wallcharts, ideas and encouragement plus "Random Acts of Wildness" (whatever that may mean).

I sincerely hope that this project gets many people, especially families with young children, to start a lifetime interest in the wildlife around them so that they keep going when the daily emails of encouragement cease at the end of June. If they are to keep going I would suggest that they make a plan which includes the following elements:-

1. A recording system for their daily finds which continues throughout their lives - at the simplest a normal diary with enough space for daily entries or a computer spreadsheet set up to suit their interests. Beware of using existing software packages that are limited to one section of wildlife (e.g. Birds) which does not also allow the recording of e.g. Seaweeds or Fungi which are of equal interest to them. Remember that over the years your interests will hopefully widen so keep your system simple and flexible.

2. Have a plan for visiting as many different habitats as possible - a family with young children may be restricted to visiting places close to their home, but as the children grow up the range can be extended and eventually the parents can be free to roam alone! An important factor is to include in your plan of places to visit sites which are not acknowledged nature reserves, and another aspect is that sites which are of great interest at one time of year may be of little interest in a different season.

3. Always have targets to spur yourself on to see more species and to understand more about them. I find that monthly targets encourage me to go out at the start of each month to see if I can find species that I did not find in the previous month while annual targets encourage you to be permanently on the lookout for 'firsts of the year'.

4. Implicit in seeing more species is the ability to recognise them so equip yourself with best and most comprehensive field guides that you can afford, use the internet search engines (but with caution that the species they come up with that look like what you saw do occur in your vicinity and at the current time of year), and join in the activities (talks, guided walks, workshops and recording projects) that are available in your home area.

5. Finally take every opportunity to find people who share your interest in wildlife, especially those who know more about it than you do, and be prepared in turn to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with anyone who will listen to you.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 11 - 17 (WEEK 20 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 15 May**

#### **My monthly round of the Cemeteries**

I started at Havant Cemetery in sunshine though the clouds rolled over before I had finished there but luckily the wind remained light throughout the day. It will take me a day or so to sort out the 120 photos which I took but I can give you the basic facts about what I saw (other than the name of one tree in St Faith's churchyard which I have never succeeded in naming but which has today given me a look at its flower, though that clue has as yet got me no nearer to its identity).

In the Havant Cemetery the biggest surprise came right at the end as I was just about to leave via the gate onto New Lane - here, on a tree stump sawn off at ground level, **a fresh clump of 'Chicken of the Woods' fungus** was developing. The only addition to my first flowers list here was the **blossom on the Cockspur Thorn trees** against the wall in the north east corner though I took 40 photos of what I thought attractive from the huge **Horse Chestnuts now in full blossom** to a Buttercup flower with a tiny fly resting in it. The **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant was in full, fresh flower** as were several plants of **Russian Comfrey** seen over the wall in the New Lane allotments. The **flowers on male Holly trees** were now at their most prominent.

Walking via Havant Station footbridge to St Faith's I found the pink flowers of the **Eastern Rosebud tree (Cercis canadensis)** out in Havant Park (overhanging the

path near the Tennis Courts) - you can see the photo I took of them last year at [Eastern Rosebud tree](#). In St Faiths area, in addition to the puzzle tree at the west end near the young Red Oak that is now in leaf, I got several photos of Speedwell species including **Slender Speedwell** which shows a couple of features that I find characterise this plant - one is the pale flowers which generally have three almost white petals plus one that is pale blue, the other is the pale yellowish colour of the leaves (almost as if they had been dosed with weedkiller) which snake through the grass for some distance before bearing a flower. A more obvious sight here was that the **Common Lime trees** around the periphery of the church yard near the 'Old House at Home' had been drastically pruned - I wonder if a shortage of leaves later this summer will make them less attractive to the Ladybirds which visit them to eat the Aphids which are there to enjoy the nectar from the Lime flowers (it is the sticky excreta of these Aphids which falls onto cars parked under the trees and reduces the visibility through their windscreens). You can see what I wrote about this in August 2013 at [Aphids on Lime Trees](#).

At **Warblington Cemetery** in the afternoon, after noting my first **Lesser Trefoil flowers** en route, I found my first **Creeping Cinquefoil flowers** of the season and (after identifying it on Portsdown this week) I found **Siberian Squill** flowering here and took a photo that may help others to recognize the plant. I also photographed three 'grave ornaments' which I may not include on my cemeteries page (for fear of offence to people who created them) - one was the grave of someone who had died at the age of 100 and had been given a personalised headstone which attracted my attention - of the other two one was a 'straw dog' which appealed to me in a happy way while the other was a grave with no expensive headstone, just a simple wooden cross to which a sort of 'bicycle basket' had been attached with a simple teddy bear in the basket as if that treasured memory was all that the bereaved family were able to afford....

**[Wed 13 May](#)**

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

**A visit to Portsdown adds 11 flowering plants and 4 insects to my year list.**

This morning warm sunshine and light winds augured well for a cycle ride up Portsdown. In the steep first section of the ascent (where I see the new houses in the old quarry east of the A3M are now ready for sale) I saw my first **Bittersweet (aka Woody) Nightshade** in flower before finding Annual Wall Rocket still flowering near the bridge over the A3M where I had seen it on Apr 15. New for this part of Portsdown (but first seen by me on Apr 29 at Broadmarsh) was **Salsify** which now had a long line of flowers strung out beside the road before reaching Fort Purbrook where I chose to leave the roadside pavement and walk through the flower rich area between the Fort and the road. Here I found my first **Common Blue butterflies** and also my first **Bladder Campion**.

Reaching the hill top area I found at least four clumps of **Sainfoin** already had open flowers below the car parking area east of the London Road but could not spot any of the expected Rosy Garlic near the slip-road to the southbound London Road. Crossing that slip road I found my first **Wild Thyme** and stopped to look at some Bluebell-like flowers which were scattered across the grassland and which turned out to be **Siberian Squills** (see [Siberian Squill](#)). The internet page which I have used to illustrate what these flowers look like (note the dark blue streak down the paler blue petals) carries a warning as to how rapidly these

plants can spread across grassland in the USA and I hope that spread is not repeated here to the detriment of our native species.

Crossing the bridge over the London Road I walked down the slip road to the northbound main road without finding any new plants but as I was looking for them at the southern tip of the grassland a small butterfly settled right in front of me and spread its wings to reveal the black upper surface of my first **Small Blue** (I see the first of the year in Hampshire was out at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on May 11 and you can see a good photo of that find at [Small Blue](#). Sussex had its first on May 12 though one was seen in Dorset on Apr 28). Another new insect for my year list, seen very briefly in several places, was almost certainly the very common migrant **Silver Y moth** but as usual all I saw was a fast, low flying, greyish brown blur which disappeared into the grass almost as soon as I spotted it.

Continuing west I crossed to the north side of the Hill Road before reaching the popular viewpoint and here I came across my first swarm of **St Mark's Flies** but nothing else of special interest until I had passed the back of the Churchillian pub and come out on the large area of open grassland on the north facing hill top. Walking across this well mown grass to the Widley Walk road going down to Purbrook I noticed large numbers of **Slender Speedwell flowers** in the grass confirming my impression that this species is far more common than I once thought. Still nothing new as I walked round the back of Fort Widley to the popular car parking area west of the fort where I sat down on a bench to have my sandwich alongside another "elderly gent" who immediately uttered the popular phrase which so often greets me - "I know who you are" followed in this case by the qualifer "You are the IBM wildlife man" showing that his memory for faces went back more than 20 years. We continued to chat for some time before I finished my sandwich and we went our separate ways.

My next and final visit was to the area adjacent to the hilltop roundabout and its small carpark. Here under the massive electricity pylon I added **Common Fumitory** and **Scented Mayweed** to my firsts for the year before heading back downhill and passing, close to the hill bottom roundabout in Bedhampton, my first **Broad-leaved Willowherb** flowers.

Finally something entirely different - back at home I was woken from a much deserved snooze during which I had left Radio 3 on by the Jungle Book tune "I wanna be like you" sung in a very lively fashion with the words in French and at the end I learnt that this was a version by a jazz group from New York called 'The Hot Sardines'. I expect I am years behind the times in not being aware of this group but if you too have not heard of them I feel compelled to introduce them to you in the hope that, as with me, they will take 50 years off your actual age and revive your youth in a way that the NHS cannot! If you want to try this remedy for old age go to [Hot Sardines](#). Hopefully the first track you will hear is "I wanna be like you" but if you let the computer run on it will load another track of their repertoire and will continue to load new tracks until you can take no more... maybe their singer Miss Elizabeth with her washboard strapped to her bosom will win your heart as it has done mine.

**[Mon 11 May](#)**

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

**A good start to the week with at least eight new flowers for the year**

This afternoon I walked to the Broadmarsh area, coming back via Bedhampton Mill. At the start I found my first **Small Flowered Cranesbill** in Juniper Square, recognising it first by the small size and colour of its flowers, then confirming the id with a close look at the flower stems. With other species of Cranesbill the flower stems have hairs of varying lengths but Small Flowered has all the hairs short and of even length - this, and the flower colour tone to look for, can both be seen at [Small Flowered Cranesbill](#). Not much further on I came on my first **Common Mallow** flowers near the Langstone Roundabout before crossing Park Road South to join the cycleway passing the Langstone Technology Park where I noticed many **blackberry bushes in bud**. Eventually, beside Harts Farm Way, I found one bush with open flowers, and also found my first **Spindle Flowers** in a roadside hedge (the first report of this had come from the Havant Wildlife Group at Stansted last Saturday) but much more colourful were the first flowers on a **Japanese Rose (*Rosa rugosa*)** beside the Hermitage Stream (see [Japanese Rose](#)).

My first objective was to climb the 'Broadmarsh Mountain' which I did from the bank of the Hermitage Stream and as I made my way up the steep slope through the trees I met a **Crane Fly (*Daddy Longlegs*) species** coming down the path as if it were injured (or maybe newly emerged and not yet having learnt how to fly!). I did not pay much attention to it but was struck by the orange tinge of its body which, when I get home and tried to identify it, suggested it might be ***Tipula vernalis*** (which is said to be a common and widespread species normally found in wet woodland which can be found from April onwards - it certainly was in woodland though I would not call it wet!). Two websites had picture resembling what I saw at [T. vernalis 1](#) and [T. vernalis 2](#). It was too early for the speciality of this 'mountain top' - the **Hairy Vetchling (*Lathyrus hirsutus*)** for which this is the only site in Hampshire - so I went down the other side of the mountain and on to the small west Broadmarsh carpark where I solved a problem of many year's standing when I came across some **freshly flowering Tamarisks of a pinkish tinge** commonly planted by roads and clearly a cultivated species very different to the Tamarisk species (*Tamarix gallica*) planted all round our harbours by the Victorians - I did not solve my problem on the spot but back at home when selecting photos to illustrate the two species I also learnt that the pink Council planted species is ***Tamarix ramosissima***. For the pink one see [T. ramosissima](#) and for the older harbourside species see [T. gallica](#).

In the carpark, close to the exit road on the east side, **Rosy Garlic (*Allium roseum*)** is just coming into flower (see [Rosy Garlic](#)) and a little further up the exit road on the west side **Horse Radish** was already in flower. Leaving the carpark I crossed to the broad central reservation at the end of Harts Farm Way where I had another first flower for my list with **White Clover** and on crossing to the Broadmarsh ex-playing fields I had my second recent find of **Cut-leaved Cranesbill**. In the far north east corner of these ex-playing fields where I reached the bank of the Hermitage Stream just south of the footbridge over the A27 and was greeted by a magnificent display of several **Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*) trees in full flower** - see [Bird Cherry](#)

To end this walk I added the first blue flowers on **Brooklime** (see [Brooklime](#)) in the Hermitage Stream where the overflow from the Water Works joins the stream and back in Havant a cluster of white capped **St George's Mushrooms** (getting their name from the supposed emergence of this fungus on April 23) had

unintentionally appeared in a small garden flower bed beside the access road leading from the Multi-storey carpark area into the Homewell area.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 4 - 10 (WEEK 19 OF 2015)**

**Sat 9 May**

### **The Langstone Swan family are in the Langbrook Stream as the first Southern Marsh Orchids start to push up their leaves**

This morning I walked to **Langstone Pond where there was still no sign of the Swan family** which disappeared a couple of days ago so I walked on down Mill Lane to check on the Southern Marsh orchids on the Southmoors. This evening when I sat down to write this blog entry I received an email from Christopher Evans with the photo (see below) of the **Langstone Swans and their seven cygnets which Christopher Evans had found this morning in the mouth of the Langbrook stream.**

The Langstone Swan family in the Langbrook stream on May 9 - photo by  
Christopher Evans

I can only assume that when I was looking for them on May 7 they were already en route from the pond to the stream (the tide was high then, making the journey possible for the young cygnets without having to walk across a long stretch of mud before reaching the water) and the fact that I could not see them was because they were at that time in the stretch between Langstone road bridge and the old rail bridge where they would be out of sight from the Royal Oak at Langstone and from the Southmoors shore path - the two places from which I looked for them.

Coming back to my own walk this morning the only interest I noted at Langstone Pond was the **song of both Cetti's Warbler and Reed Warbler** plus the presence of **two tiny Coot chicks being fed by both their parents.** In Mill Lane I made a more unexpected find on the north side of the Lane in the very 'weedy' bank immediately west of the 'show garden' which you reach immediately after passing the Harbourside Road on the south side. In this weedy bank where it borders the driveway into the second house I spotted half a dozen white flowerheads almost hidden in the surrounding 'weeds' and was able to confirm by the continuous line of hairs along the side of one of the long, flaccid leaves associated with these long (but not erect) floppy flower stems that this was **Hairy Garlic** - the only remaining plant of the species known to me in the Havant area after the plants at Nore Barn in Emsworth have succumbed to conservation work which did not value these plants. (Mention of Nore Barn reminds me that the **yellow flowers of Welsh Poppy** may possibly now be seen in the southern fringe of that woodland - to see what they should look like click [Welsh Poppy flowers](#)) - this thought was prompted by seeing the flowers out in a garden that I passed on this walk).

Reaching the Langbrook Stream I did not turn south towards the sea or I would have seen the Swans, instead I continued west across the Moors with the

intention of seeing if there was any sign yet of the Southern Marsh orchids in the 'orchid field'. Reaching the gate into the field I was surprised to find a chain and padlock prevented me from entering as I have done for years but beside the gate is a form of stile and (with some difficulty at my age!) I managed to climb over to access the field where I found the **young leaves of just two Marsh Orchid plants**. I am pretty sure I would have found more if I had searched but instead I continued on a peripheral walk round the area and at the northern edge I was pleased to find some **200 Marsh Marigold flowers** on plants spread out over a much larger area than in past years. Even better at one point I found my first **Ragged Robin plant in flower** and in the stream running through the field there were **plenty of Yellow Iris plants** in flower.

After managing to climb out of the field I headed home up the path beside the Langbrook but not before I had seen my first **Celery-leaved Buttercup** and **Yellow Cowpat fungus (*Bolbitius vitellinus*)**. Nearing the Langstone Technology Park approach road I was pleased to see that I had been wrong (on April 29) to assume that the **Yellow Flowered Strawberries** flowering there would soon be shaded out by regrowing trees - today there were many more and a new colony had been established on the unshaded bank of the stream. After crossing the approach road I was also pleased to find the number of Wintercress plants on the stream side of the path had much increased in number - these are **Medium-flowered Wintercress (*Barbarea intermedia*)**.

At the north end of the A27 underpass the **Ox-eye Daisies were now mostly open** and after crossing Park Road South I paused to look for **Water Voles in the old Havant Mill Pond**. No live animals seen but the area of Watercress nearest to their burrows is heavily cropped by what must be their teeth, strongly contrasting with the larger area of untouched Watercress further south. Back at home Christopher Evans' email about the Swans also had a **photo of one healthy looking Water Vole** lurking in the cover of the uneaten Watercress adjacent to the heavily nibbled area, showing that they are still present.

Leaving the pond and walking towards the multi-storey carpark I found many **Burnet Rose flowers** on the roadside hedge and this reminds me that at the very start of today's walk I had found, towards the southern end of the carpark on the old Billy Trail close to East Street, a substantial amount of **Sweetbriar Rose leaves** still intact - no flowers or buds yet but the leaves had the distinctive smell of apple.

### Thu 7 May

#### **A sunny morning in Hollybank woods and the Langstone Swans have seven cygnets**

This morning I went to have another look at the **Early Purple Orchids** at the foot of Longcopse Hill in the Hollybank woods but I also wanted to have a look at the **Lily of the Valley plants** which are to be found in what is known as the Jubilee Plantation. For those unfamiliar with the woods this area can be found by walking uphill for some 400 metres along the continuation of Hollybank Lane road until you reach a 'cross roads' where an east-west track crosses the south-north track you have come along. Here you turn left and head west for not much more than 100 metres to find a large area on your right showing signs of much work by the

woodland volunteers and this is the **Jubilee Plantation** which is described in the 'Woodland Blog' as follows:

#### "JUBILEE PLANTATION

An area of approx 1.6 acre (1% of the woodland) has been cleared of bramble, bracken and holly over the past 9 months, opening up mature oaks to restore it to an open area of wood pasture, meadow and coppice. Log piles for insects and small mammals have been created with timber from the clearing work, and chipped branches used for mulch. The area has been planted with hedges and trees to provide winter berries in the future for birds and mammals. The area will be designated the Jubilee Plantation, marking the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

Planting of over 400 new tree saplings was carried out from the end of February into March 2012. School children from schools in Emsworth, Southbourne, Westbourne and Havant planted the new trees.

Each tree planted has been recorded with the name of the child planting it, the school and the date."

Walking in a north westerly direction into this area as soon as you reach it you will find a small square area of no more than 2 x 2 metres has been **fenced off to prevent people trampling the wild Lily of the Valley plants that now fill the area and are currently in full flower.**

I actually approached this site from the extreme west end of the east-west path which comes out of the woodland a few yards south of where the Emsworth Common Road meets the Horndean Road coming up from Emsworth and I used this entry in the hope of finding **Heath Speedwell** in flower beside the track but today I was too early and only saw much **Wood Speedwell** and a few yellow flowers of **Tormentil**. After seeing the Lily of the Valley flowers I cycled down the Hollybank Lane track to where it emerges into Hollybank Lane road where I chained my bike to the road name sign before walking back into the wood to head for Longcopse Hill.

Making my way east along the southern fringe of the wood I found the trees now in full leaf with the Bluebells below them still in full flower but the big Wild Cherry (Gean) tree in a clearing behind the site of Hollybank House seemed to have lost all its flowers to the recent gale force winds. There was plenty of bird song to be heard, including Stock Dove and Nuthatch, and butterflies included Holly Blue and Brimstone.

Across the county boundary stream there was a new comer among the flowering trees - a couple of **Crab Apple trees** which have pure white flowers with none of the pink seen in domesticated apple blossom. **In the orchid area I counted a total of 397 flowering orchid spikes** compared to the count of 125 I made on Apr 23.

This time all the flower spikes were fully extended so I think their season has reached its peak and that the count will not increase any more. Two unexpected finds were firstly of a small unidentified fungus of the type that I call 'Japanese Lanterns' and secondly what seemed to be a large mature Oak Apple on the ground with no tree nearby that it might have come from. Another thing that caught my eye was what I think was an early example of Wood Millet grass.

In the afternoon **I went to Langstone to see how the Swan family was faring** but could not find them - speaking to a couple walking their dogs (I think they are the owners of the Mill which owns the pond) I was told that they had seen the **family off the nest with seven cygnets early this morning** and that number ties up with

the total of seven cygnets plus one unhatched egg that were produced on May 4 last year. Before coming home I had a look at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream in case the Swans had moved there (no luck) and then had a look at the **Budds Farm Swan pair** which gave me the impression that they were close to hatching. When I arrived the male was just leaving the nest where he might have been visting to check on the arrival of young - after leaving he aggressively chased away a pair of Canada Geese and the female Swan behaved restlessly all the time I was there.

**Tue 5 May**

**Langstone Swan has at least two cygnets and Slow-worms breeding in my garden**

Two things that I forgot to mention yesterday were my sighting of **two pristine Small Copper butterflies** seen in the south Hayling Sand Dunes and the sight of **two Slow-worms** in my garden when I was back at home and was filling my newly acquired Council Garden Waste wheelie bin for collection today. The first Slow-worm was an adult disturbed from a long established heap of garden waste that I was putting in the bin and it escaped from my efforts unharmed; the second was a much smaller youngster which seemed to fall off the bin as I was wheeling it through my garage en route to the roadside collection point - this one had no suitable cover into which to make its escape and spent some time violently writhing on the concrete floor until I found a suitable flat bladed tool to slide below its body before carrying it back into the garden. I did not try to pick it up in my hands for fear that it would struggle even more and might well part company with its tail - it must have had a fright but hopefully suffered no long term damage. Later that evening I saw on Brian Fellows' blog that the first Small Copper had also appeared at Brook Meadow yesterday which is around the time of year we normally expect to see the first brood of these to emerge (to be followed by a second brood in July and, in many years, a third brood in late September or early October). This year, however, there was an unusual early emergence in mid March which I first heard of when someone reported to John Goodspeed one being seen on Browndown in the Gosport area on Mar 18. At first I thought this must be a mis-identification but I then saw that the national Butterfly Conservation website had a 'first for the year' report of one in Glamorgan on Mar 19, followed by further sightings in Devon on Apr 6, Hastings on Apr 9 and locally at Warsash on Apr 13.

Today I walked down to Langstone to check up on the Swan nest in which Peter Raby had, on May 2, seen the first cygnet peeping from its mother's wings on the nest. Today the mother was still on the nest and may have had a full brood of six or more (Swans can hatch up to twelve cygnets with an average of six) keeping warm under her wings but all I saw in a short watch was **just two cygnets which emerged briefly**. My first note of this Swan starting to sit on the nest was dated Mar 16 (47 days before the first cygnet was seen on May 2) and I have compared this with the number of days which different organisations give as the normal incubation period. The Swan Sanctuary at Shepperton in Middlesex gives a precise figure of 42 days (but that only starts after 2 to 3 weeks of nest building plus up to three weeks of egg laying at the rate of around one a day); the RSPB quotes an incubation of from 33 to 37 days; and the BTO gives a band of from 35 to 45 days.

On my way to the pond I added a new plant to my May list with **garden escape Solomon's Seal** in flower and when on the seawall by the pond I watched around **ten adult Herring Gulls** on the newly exposed mud, **two of them actually mating**. Maybe these are some of many Herring Gulls that regularly nest on the rooves of industrial buildings beside the the railway heading north though the Leigh Park area but they may well have nests closer to the water on rooves of relatively small houses in the Langstone area.

### Mon 4 May

#### A visit to south Hayling brings my May plant list to 121 species in flower

A relatively light southerly wind today invited me to ride to South Hayling and I was rewarded with another 19 plant species in flower, bringing my total for May to 121. Of these two were unexpected and of special interest for me, the first being **Bastard Cabbage (*Rapistrum rugosum*)** which regularly grows en masse on the west Hayling seawall in the Saltmarsh Lane area which is where I found it today. To be certain of its identification you need to see its distinctive 'Chianti Bottle' shaped seeds (see [Bastard Cabbage seeds](#)) but none had developed at this early date so you'll have to take my word for it that this is the only Brassica species to be seen on this seawall in recent years. The other species to excite me was **Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*)** whose tiny mauve flowers surprised me in the Gunner Point Sand Dunes - the flowers were only 3 or 4 mm across and hardly have any stem to lift them above ground level but they catch the eye like sparkling jewels - see [Sand Spurrey](#).

Other interest on Sinah Common came from **Sea Kale** just starting to open its flowers on a very few of the many plants, and from the many **Tree Lupin plants** of which most had well developed flower buds but none were open. On the way home I passed just one of many plants of **Parsley Water Dropwort** starting to open its flowers and when nearly home I found the very first flowers open on **Russian Comfrey**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 27 - MAY 3 (WEEK 18 OF 2015)**

### Sat 2 May

#### A ride around the Emsworth area takes my count of flowering plant species for May past the 100 mark

Although I know of several plant species which must be flowering in Hollybank Woods, Havant Thicket, Portsdown and South Hayling that I have not yet visited in May a tour of the Emsworth area on my bike today took my flowering species count for the month to just over 100 and gave me a bonus find with the sight of the first open flowers on the **Wild Clary** at the north end of Christopher Way where it joins New Brighton Road.

My tour started with a find of **Shining Cranesbill** where the footpath from Havant to Warblington crosses Norris Gardens road shortly before reaching the bridge over the A27 where the new road cuts Pook Lane in two (for a very good clump of the Cranesbill look at the junction of the footpath with the east side of Norris Gardens). Another good find was of **Three-nerved Sandwort (*Moerhingia trinerva*)**

as I was going down the Selangor Avenue path towards Nore Barn where there is now a great show of **English Scurvygrass** on the saltings east of the wood.

Heading on along Warblington Road I was unexpectedly brought to a stop by a patch of bright yellow colour on the north edge of the road a couple of houses west of Clovelly Road. Getting off my bike to have a close look I found this was a small clump of newly flowering **American Wintercress** (identified by its pinnate leaves). Nothing more until I reached the north end of the Slipper Mill Pond where peering over the brick parapet gave me a plant of **Pellitory of the Wall** with tiny white flowers in the axils of its leaf stems. Turning back to take the footpath leading to Brook Meadow via a pedestrian underpass I found a single flower on just one of the many hundreds of **Wood Avens** plants that are now widespread and in the Meadow I found the expected **Common Comfrey**.

Next stop was at Christopher Way for the **Clary** after which I headed for home along Southleigh Road where, just before reaching the Southleigh Farm entrance road, I passed **the corpse of an adult Badger in the roadside grass**. On a more cheerful note the junction of East Leigh Road had **Crosswort** in flower as well as **Lesser Periwinkle**. Although I do not normally include grasses in my count I noted a typical sign of spring here in the form of **Sweet Vernal Grass**.

After lunch at home I made one further short trip down the Hayling Billy Trail to add the **Yellow Irises** flowering in the Wade Court lake and extended it to the Langstone Shore where I made an unexpected find of **Buckshorn Plantain** in flower.

## [Fri 1 May](#)

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

### **86 wild plants flowering on the first of May, 5 of them new for the year**

As usual on the first day of a new month I set out to see how many wild plant species I could find in flower in the Havant area, on foot in the morning and on my bike in the afternoon. The total was 86, and the new species were **American Wintercress** with its pinnate leaves, surprisingly found near the New Lane level crossing; **Germander Speedwell** with many plants in the Havant Cemetery; **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** growing in the cul de sac extension at the north end of Leigh Road behind the Curlew pub; and **Field Madder** growing beside the Petersfield Road alongside the Council Offices. Those were seen during my morning walk and just one more, **Wild Mignonette**, was found in the afternoon at the southern end of the north pier of the Hayling Billy rail bridge. At the end of my afternoon trip, just south of the A27 underpass as I was coming up the Billy Trail on my way home, I stopped to look at a couple of plants of **Russian Comfrey** which already have several clusters of unopen flowers (so not counted as in flower). Another plant newly in flower but not counted as new for the month as it first opened its flowers a couple of days ago, is **Laburnum**, while one not getting onto the month list as my neighbour has recently cleaned his frontage onto the pavement, is **Pellitory of the Wall** though I'm sure I can find that in flower next time I visit Budds Farm.

## Thu 30 April

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

### A new insect and four more new flowers to end the month

This morning I rode west along the Broadmarsh Cycleway to the Eastern Road roundabout near the Farlington Marshes main entrance and with the wind behind me on the way home I noted what was to be seen by the wayside. Just inside the road entrance from the roundabout the number of **Brown-tail moth caterpillar tents** had increased dramatically and it appeared that they had eaten all the Hawthorn leaves close to their tents, and all the way back to Broadmarsh the tracksides had been close mown by a wild flower loving strimmer operator who had carefully cut round anything currently in flower and this allowed me to collect a specimen from a large clump of **Anthemis like daisies with silvery leaves** which look very like something I found on the internet as **Anthemis 'Susannah Mitchell'** - see [Garden species of Anthemis daisy](#). This was found close to where the **leaves of Goats Rue** are already well grown within the 'Slip Field'. Also new for the year to me along this trackside was one plant of the **Hybrid of Red and White Campion**. Back at the roundabout at the west end of Harts Farm Way I came on my first example of **Salsify in flower** close to a single plant of **Ox-eye Daisy** with a fully open flower near a small bush of Broom. A little further east, before reaching the entrance to the Broadmarsh slipway, I found the trackside ditch full of many **Cuckoo Flower plants** in flower.

Back at home I found the Council had delivered two Garden Waste wheelie bins and after lunch I spent some time in the garden starting to fill one of them. While in the garden I came on a new insect for my year list, the **Ichneumon Wasp Amblyteles armatorius** - see [Amblyteles armatorius](#). Later I watched the first **Comma butterfly** I have seen for some time sunning itself. Before tea I went to the Havant Cemetery to confirm that the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant was in full flower** and before coming home I had a look at the adjacent New Lane Allotments where planted **Borage** was in flower as was self-sown **Common Ramping Fumitory**.

## Wed 29 April

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

### New flowers in the Havant area plus more internet reports

Yesterday (Apr 28) I found just one new flower for the year, **Wall Speedwell**, while walking around Havant.

After a heavy rain shower this morning the sun came out after lunch though the wind was fairly strong and the air distinctly chilly as I rode down Wade Court Road and Wade Lane to Langstone Pond where the female Swan was off her nest. Before reaching the pond I watched **an adult Grey Heron with two tufty headed juveniles** in the pony field and from the back of the Mill buildings I had good views of **seven Little Egrets on their nests, one above the other in the same tree**.

Next stop was the north pier of the old rail bridge and just before reaching this I enjoyed the flowers of the **Greater Celandine plants** on the east side of the cycleway. Out on the pier I found **lots of Common Vetch now flowering** and at the southern end a couple of plants of **Birds Foot Trefoil** were newly in flower while down on the shingle I found plenty of **Sea Sandwort** flowering in the area where there was once a berth for boats onto which trains could run to be carried across to the Isle of Wight. Wikipedia confirms the existence of this rail link with the following...

"In 1884, the Isle of Wight Marine Transit Company started a rail freight ferry link between the Bembridge branch line at St Helens quay and the Hayling Island Branch line at Langstone. To provide this link the rail ferry PS (=Paddle Steamer) Carrier was moved from Scotland. The project was unsuccessful and the service ended in 1888, despite having been acquired by the LB&SCR in 1886." For more on this see [Rail Freight link from Langstone to Bembridge](#) or see [Langstone Rail Station](#)

On my way home I followed the main road up to the Langstone Technology Park where **Yellow Flowered Strawberries** were in full flower at the start of the Langbrook Stream path heading south, though the amount of other vegetation now overwhelming this site, after the light had been briefly let in by the cutting down of some trees, indicates that this site may soon vanish as has the Juniper Square site in Havant.

I now headed upstream to the A27 underpass, finding Stream Water Crowfoot at last starting to flower in the Langbrook and seeing at least **three plants of Medium-flowered Wintercress (*Barbarea intermedia*)** very close to opening their flowers. On the north side of the underpass Ox-eye Daisies were even closer to opening their first flowers close to the Mill Wheel and as I followed the pavement beside the A27 sliproad towards the roundabout I was able to confirm that **Black Medick** was now flowering here (Chris Oakley had found it on his north Emsworth Hampshire Farm site on Apr 27).

Back at home today's scan of the internet started with news for yesterday of **6 Little Terns seen off Northney**, a **Hobby flying north over Broadmarsh** and the **first Little Stint** of the season at Blashford. On Apr 27 a female **Montagu's Harrier** was hunting at Willingdon near Eastbourne and the **first Spotted Flycatcher** was at Christchurch Harbour - earlier a Montagu's Harrier had been seen on Apr 24 by people watching the Hoopoe at Crawley to the west of Winchester. Also of note on Apr 27 was a count of **40 Little Terns** at Medmerry near Selsey. On Apr 26 Jeff Goodridge was at Marlpit Lane where he heard **3 Nightingales** and a **Turtle Dove** and also recorded a fly over Tree Pipit. On his way home to Southsea he visited the **Thorney Little Deeps where he heard the pinging of a Bearded Tit**.

Non-bird recent reports include the emergence of **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** at Bentley Wood on the Hants/Wilts border on Apr 23 and at Stockbridge Down on Apr 27; **Small Heath** at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 25 with the first for Hants in the Meon Valley on Apr 28; the **first Fox Cubs above ground** in Dorset on Apr 27 (see [Fox Cubs](#)); and finally on Apr 28 or thereabouts John Goodspeed came on the first lovely **Wood Sorrel flowers** in woodland at the north foot of Portsdown.

[Mon 27 April](#)

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

## A ride to Nutbourne via Thorney Island and back via Brook Meadow plus recent news from the internet

After a couple of rest days to recover from my long walk back from south Hayling last Friday and to mend the puncture that caused that walk I was back on my bike in this morning's sunshine, heading for north Thorney. As soon as I arrived in the Little Deeps area I heard the **Sedge Warbler song** I was expecting plus a couple of chuntering Reed Warblers and several Common Whitethroats. Heading on to the Great Deeps I heard a **Greenshank** and saw a pair of **Great Crested Grebes**. Overhead on my way south I was accompanied by a cloud of midges, presumably the **Buzzer Midges (Chironomus plumosus)** seen by Brian Fellows on Apr 14. Also seen on a trackside Hawthorn bush were a couple of **Brown-tail moth caterpillar tents** with their small inhabitants now enjoying the sunshine outside their over winter home. For my flower list I found my first **Common Vetch flower**.

Heading east along the NRA track I met a couple of Brook Meadow photographers hoping for a Cuckoo but only having a **Buzzard on the phone lines above the reeds**. Nothing more of special interest as I rode on to Nutbourne Bay and then back along the main road to Emsworth for a look at Brook Meadow where I soon found the **Common Comfrey** which Brian Fellows had found in flower on Apr 22 - his find was on the bank of the River Ems but I found both the purple and the creamy white flowered versions soon after entering the south entrance in the damp ground between the main path and the one east of it running closer to Gooseberry Cottage. Walking over the area between these two paths I noted what must have been a number of **Wavy Bittercress plants** looking un-naturally erect (not 'wavy') where they had been forced up by the thick ground layer of other plants but still retaining the distinctive tiny pinnate stem leaves and short (not overtopping the flowers) seed pods. Before leaving I heard a single burst of **Cetti's Warbler song** from the Gooseberry Cottage area.

I ended my previous **round-up of internet news** (on Apr 21) with the sentence .. " Next time news of a mini invasion of Hoopoes and the appearance of migrant Wryneck." so that is where I will start. Back on Apr 10 the RBA website reported a total of **32 Hoopoes in the UK** and since then I have picked out 25 more reports of which the last was dated today and was of a bird in the Meon Valley (Soberton/Swanmore area). Yesterday one was on the Isle of Wight (Luccombe Down) and on Apr 24 and 25 many birders have had good views of one at Crawley (not in Sussex but a village west of Winchester). The majority of the reports have come from the west country - Scillies, Cornwall, Devon and Lundy with at least one at Lulworth in Dorset. To the east they have been seen at Dungeness, Folkestone in Kent, Cuckmere in East Sussex and in the Goring and Littlehampton areas - the message is that one could turn up on your garden lawn at any time so keep an eye open!

I have only picked out 10 reports of **Wryneck**, starting with one caught and ringed on Lundy on Apr 8 but again the message is that they can turn up in your back garden as easily as on a nature reserve - and if they find a supply of ants they

may stay for a day or so. An entry for Apr 24 on the SOS bird news reads .. "A friend asked me about a strange bird he had had in his garden! Attached is a picture of what appears to be a wryneck. The bird was watched in their garden in North Chailey (TQ 390201) for about half an hour from c.11.00 on Friday 24 April 2015. It was last seen flying off south." For the photo see [Wryneck in garden](#).

Another bird attracting a lot of attention (it even got a mention among the Election and Nepal Earthquake news on BBC TV) was a **Hudsonian Godwit** which had crossed the Atlantic by mistake, ending up at Meare Heath (adjacent to Shapwick Heath) in Somerset on Apr 25. Before reading what the Daily Mail made of this get some facts from [Hudsonian Godwit facts](#) and then [enjoy the media view expressed by the Daily Mail](#) at [Daily Mail account plus readers comments](#).

Other new bird species arriving in the UK in the past few days are **Roseate Tern**, **Golden Oriole**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Black Tern** and **Pomarine Skua** - more on these next time.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 20 - 26 (WEEK 17 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 24 April**

#### **My first Lesser Whitethroat and Whimbrel plus some 300 Green Winged Orchids on Hayling**

Today I cycled to Gunner Point on south Hayling but had a long walk back after getting a puncture but my long list of plant finds made it all worthwhile.

First plant find was **Yellow Iris** in the Wade Court lake seen from the Billy Line and next note was of **13 Brent** in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream, then over Langstone Bridge I had the first of **two Lesser Whitethroats singing** as I passed the northern entrance to the Oysterbeds. Further down the Billy Line I passed several Common Whitethroats while the area was immersed in a chill seamist driven by a headwind from the south.

Reaching the Kench the sun broke through and once past the harbour entrance carpark I found my first **Bur Chervil** and **Eastern Rocket** before turning into the Dunes area through the Tamarisk bushes. Here I had two surprise finds, the first of a lovely mass of **Early Forget-me-not** and the second of a single plant of **Hairy Tare**, neither of which was expected here. On the shingle the **leaves of Sea Kale** were at last showing but with no sign of flowering yet - nearer flowering were several large plants of **Sea Radish** and I eventually found one in full flower. Heading for the **Green Winged Orchid area** I passed my first **Sheep Sorrel** and **Ribwort Plantain** in flower and long before I expected I began to pass outlying **orchids in flower** - I counted at least **275** during a straight transit through the area.

Still in the shore area I found **Thrift** starting to flower and at least one plant of **Beaked Hawksbeard** and another of **Smith's Pepperwort** in flower as well as some pretty Apple Blossom on trees growing in the shingle. I was also surprised

to find numerous plants of Oxford Ragwort in full flower in this shingle environment.

Still in south Hayling I passed a **Horse Chestnut** tree with single flowers already open and a **Wayfaring Tree** in full flower. Another garden had the first open flowers on **Perennial Cornflower**. At the Oysterbeds my first **Whimbrel** flew low over the water and near Langstone Bridge I had a better view of another showing its clear eye-stripe. At the south end of the bridge I noted my first **Mayweed** in flower and at the north end flowers could be seen on **Tree Mallow** plants at the southern edge of Langstone Sailing Club (I had to use my binoculars to spot these and only looked because Brian Fellows had found the plants around the Emsworth Slipper Millpond in flower yesterday). Nearer the cycleway I was able to spot my first **Browntail Moth caterpillar tent** with small caterpillars sunning themselves. Back on the cycle track behind the Langstone housing I enjoyed the first flowers on **Greater Celandine** (just north of the Langbrook mouth viewpoint) and my final note of the trip was of a couple of Hawthorn bushes in full flower beside the Billy Trail where it passes the end of Grove Road. The walk back from Gunner Point took me four and a half hours but the sun was shining and there was plenty to see!

**[Thu 23 April](#)**

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

### **A good show of Early Purple Orchids on St George's Day**

With today being forecast as the last day of full sunshine I walked through the Hollybank Woods and across the Sussex boundary to see how the **Early Purple Orchids** were faring at the southern foot of Longcopse Hill. When I was there on Mar 30 I could only find around half a dozen orchid plants with no flowers yet open and I thought we were in for a very poor show of these lovely flowers but today I found **125 plants in flower**. On 25 April 2009 I counted 644 orchids flowering here and on 9 May 2008 Brian Fellows counted 745 in flower, a higher total than in any of the preceding five years, but still not reaching the **counts of around 800 expected in the 'good old days' of the 20th century....**

Walking from Hollybank Lane through the woods there was a magnificent display of **fresh leaves on Oak and Birch trees** that were not yet limiting the sunlight reaching the ground where **Bracken was starting to unfurl** but not yet blanketing the earth. Butterflies here included a **Red Admiral** (now becoming quite scarce as age takes its toll on those which wintered here before this year's migrants start to arrive in force) with the expected **Brimstones, Orange Tips, Holly Blues** and **Speckled Woods**. Large **Male Ferns** were starting to unfurl their fronds and one plant of **Broad Buckler Fern** had completed the unfurling of its smaller triangular leaves. Several **Wild Cherry (Gean) trees were in full blossom** and of course there were Bluebells everywhere.

In the orchid area there was the expected carpet of **Celandines, Primroses, Wood Anemones, Dog's Mercury, Ground Ivy** and **Dog Violets** but new to my yearlist were **Wood Spurge** and **Wood Sedge** while some **Wild Strawberries** and a clump of **Bugle** were pleasant surprises and a single tree of **Wild Plum (Prunus**

**domestica**) with its smallish single white flower among its pale green leaves was something I usually find on higher, drier ground. Something that I do not recall finding here in the past was what looked like the leaves of **Moschatel** but with no flowers to confirm the id.

Seen on my way through Denvilles was my first tree of **Lilac in flower** and something that I noticed flowering at the foot of the old signal box while waiting for the New Lane level crossing gates to open was **Oxford Ragwort** - not my first for the year but seemingly much less common than usual this spring.

**Tue 21 April**

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

### **Male Garganey at Budds Farm**

On March 27 in 1982 I was at the small lake in what was then the Paulsgrove Rubbish Dump for a WeBS count when **a flock of 9 Garganey, 5 of them males, flew in and landed on the water**. For the next 33 years Garganey evaded my year lists but **today a superb male swam around on the eastern pool of Budds Farm** giving me up to half an hours close viewing while feeding on what I assume were insects on the surface of the water. The only thing lacking from today's sighting to make it as good as the 1982 sighting was a **Stone Curlew** which also flew in to the Paulsgrove tip that day and took cover in a pile of rusty car exhaust pipes from which its huge eye stared down at us before it recovered its strength sufficiently to fly on north.

Also seen this morning during a walk which took in Langstone Mill Pond, the Southmoors seawall and Southmoor Lane were an estimated **60+ Egrets with 20+ nests**; a mass of **tiny black Mining Bees (possibly Halictus tumulorum)** which had somehow managed to drill their nest holes down into the rock hard sunbaked clay and stone left after the recent sea-wall repairs; at least **four male Holly Blues and a male Orange Tip** among other butterflies (a male Brimstone flying over the low tide mud and seaweed off Langstone was a surprise); my **first flowers on Nipplewort, Bulbous Buttercup, Sea Campion, Scarlet Pimpernel, Pellitory of the Wall** and both **Field Maple and Sycamore** plus a brief burst of Reed Warbler song and two presumably summering Brent Geese off the Southmoors (I later heard of a small flock of migrants still in the Langstone area). Yesterday in my garden I saw another first for the year - a **Tawny Mining Bee** flying low around the dome of earth around its nest hole.

Carrying on from the review which I started yesterday of recent sightings gleaned from the internet I will pick out a few reports of birds which interested me starting with news of the first **juvenile Great Crested Grebe** out on the water with its parents, seen on Apr 14 in the Crawley area - one reason why this caught my eye is that I have read in the past that when these juvenile Grebes leave their nest one or other of the parents 'adopts' it and becomes its sole carer and that if a youngster does not catch the attention of either parent at this critical time it is left to starve to death...

On Apr 8 an exhausted **Night Heron** was found at Wootton on the Isle of Wight and taken into care by the RSPCA. The number of **Great White Egrets** continues to increase and on Apr 18 I learnt, from photos of one at the Exe estuary and subsequent research, that it is not true that adults always have yellow bills - it seems that in the breeding season the bills turn black. See [Great White Egret](#). Another photo which you might enjoy is of **a pair of Mandarin Duck mating** at a Devon site (Yarner Woods) where I think there is a substantial colony of them - see [Mating Mandarin](#). This seems to be a good year for **Garganey** with 14 reports in March starting with a pair at Arlington in Sussex on Mar 8 and RBA reporting 9 in the UK on Mar 12. This month I have not recorded all the reports but must mention that John Goodspeed had **two pairs moving through the Hookheath area** (River Wallington) at the northern foot of Portsdown on Apr 10. I guess that most reports of **Honey Buzzards** are not put in the public domain at this time of year but I guess they may now be back in Hampshire after a report of 2 in the Netherlands which appeared on Trektellen on Apr 18. The **first two Hobbys** were in Sussex on Apr 4 and 5 with one in Hampshire on Apr 8.

This year the first report of a **Black-winged Stilt** came from Abbotsbury in Devon on Apr 1 and it stayed till the next day before 'vanishing'. Next report was from the Sidlesham Ferry (Pagham Harbour) on Apr 13 and it seems to have remained there (alone) until the present though it or another was at Medmerry on Apr 15 and 16. On Apr 14 RBA reported a total of 9 in the UK and on Apr 17 there were two at Dungeness while two others were in Staffordshire on Apr 18. No indications of breeding so far! Several reports of **Woodcock** led me to an interesting map showing the dispersal of satellite tagged birds returning to their breeding sites - this is part of a Game Conservancy project and you can see their blog and the maps at [Woodcock tracking](#). The first **Little Tern** was at Dungeness on Apr 7. Next report was from Seaford Head on Apr 12 and by Apr 14 two had turned off the migration route to be seen in Pagham Harbour and on Apr 18 one was seen within Langstone Harbour. The first **Swift** report came from Denmead on Apr 8 but it was not until Apr 15 that daily sightings started with one at Lodmoor near Weymouth - by Apr 17 there was a flock of 18 at the Blashford Lakes. Finally for today a **Bee Eater** was seen in Cleveland on Apr 11 and a flock of five were at Dungeness on Apr 19 before flying on to the Hailsham area (Abbot's Wood) later that day. ... Next time news of a **mini invasion of Hoopoes** and the appearance of **migrant Wryneck**.

## [Mon 20 April](#)

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

### **April surprises**

I have spent the last few days catching up with the internet news of 'first sightings' in the first half of April and am now ready to list what I have found (stressing that there are many observations that I never see). Today I will look at Insects.

Before dealing with the 21 Butterfly species that have been seen on the wing I have news of three dragonfly species starting with the expected widespread emergence of **Large Red Damselflies** the first of which emerged from a garden pond in Kent on Apr 5 if we ignore one raised in an indoor tank which took

advantage of the warmer air to appear on Apr 2. I am also ignoring the indoor emergence of a foreign species (Marsh Bluetail or *Ischnura senegalensis*) presumably brought home as a holiday souvenir. Skipping over 14 more reports of Large Red and a couple of unidentified larger species we come to an **Azure Damselfly** in Suffolk on Apr 16 of which you can see a photo at [Azure Damselfly](#). Another very early emergence was of a **Broad Bodied Chaser** at Portland on Apr 18.

I no longer attempt to keep up with the moth enthusiasts but I am interested in **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** which do hibernate in England as well as arriving as migrants and two of these were recorded at Portland in March (on the 1st and 20th) with several April records including one in Cosham (Portsmouth) on Apr 6. I was also interested in the very early emergence of an **Eyed Hawkmoth** in a north Emsworth house on April 8 - this was so early that I checked with the Hants Moths website which shows such a date has been recorded in the past - on this website click the Adult Phenology button and scroll down to see that there has been at least one record for the second week of April - the website is at [Eyed Hawkmoth](#).

Turning to Butterflies the following first appeared in March (**Small Tortoiseshell** 1st; **Small White** 3rd; **Brimstone** 5th; **Comma** 7th; **Peacock** 8th; **Speckled Wood** 10th and both **Green Veined White** and **Small Copper** 18th). **Red Admiral** was seen even earlier - seen in three counties on January 1st. April first sightings have been of **Large Tortoiseshell** on 5th; **Orange Tip**, **Painted Lady** and **Holly Blue** on 6th; **Dingy Skipper** and **Scarce Tortoiseshell** on 7th; **Clouded Yellow** and **Wall Brown** on 8th; **Grizzled Skipper** on 9th; **Duke of Burgundy** on 14th and **Green Hairstreak** on 15th. Not a first and only a 'probable' was my Portsdown sighting on the 15th of a butterfly which I could not identify but which may have been a Comma (not a Dark Green Fritillary which I did mention) and which I now think may have been a Wall Brown. **For more about the Large and Scarce Tortoiseshell sightings** go to the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website and in particular look at the entry for Wednesday 8 April where Neil Hulme has posted annotated photos with detailed guidance for identifying these rare species. Several other photos of the species appear on this website and can be found on entries for April 12 and 6. The link to the website is [Large and Scarce Tortoiseshells](#).

To end today's entry I found my first **Hawthorn in flower** yesterday and see that the **first report of a single Little Tern in Langstone Harbour** was dated Apr 18.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 13 - 19 (WEEK 16 OF 2015)**

### **Wed 15 April**

#### **Portsdown west of the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit**

This morning I cycled to the top of Portsdown for a walk on the southern slopes between Paulsgrove Chalk Pit and Portchester Common. I chained my bike to a lamp post on the south side of the wide section of James Callaghan Drive opposite what used to be the main entrance to the (now demolished) ASWE site and walked downhill from the road to come out above the west end of Paulsgrove

Chalk Pit. From here I walked west past the entrance to the Chalk Pit area and on downhill to the area below what is now the Driving Test site.

Before reaching the bottom of the hill a **Green Hairstreak** landed on a Gorsebush right beside the path and at the bottom of the slope my first **male Orange Tip** flew close by me. A little further on, near where the Rock Roses will flower in summer, I noted **Sanicle** in flower with a smart male Kestrel hovering high overhead.

Next to attract my attention was **a small, low flying, insect** which landed in grass beside the path. In flight it showed a bright reddish colour and when it landed and closed its wing cases I was expecting to find it was a Ladybird but what I saw was a Shield Bug with a very plain pale brown back now that its wing cases were closed. Unfortunately I did not attempt to capture it for a close look and so far I have not found any pictures of Shield Bugs with their wing cases open to show the colour of their exposed backs but one possibility is that this was a **Spiked Shield Bug (*Picomerus bidens*)** which does inhabit grass or heathland rather than trees, and has red legs, but is not normally in its adult form until July - see [Spiked Shieldbug](#)

Still at the bottom of the slope I began to see Hairy Dog Violets which I could identify but I was almost immediately thrown back into mental uncertainty when a relatively large butterfly flew boldly across my path with a 'flap and glide' level flight and orangey brown upper surface which instantly suggested that it was a Dark Green Fitillary though that species is not expected to appear until mid-June at the earliest. I'm pretty sure I can rule that species out in my search for a name but I feel equally certain that this was not the only other likely for the date and location (a Comma).

Nothing new on Portchester Common but as I headed back to the Fort Southwick area I added two birds to my year list - first was a **Yellowhammer** uttering its unique mono-syllabic call note and the second was a **Common Whitethroat** singing and uttering its warning 'churr' call from a patch of brambles. Both birds insisted on their privacy and remained unseen for several minutes while I searched for them. Just one more note on my way back to my bike when I came across one plant of **Crosswort** in flower after passing many that were not flowering.

During the lengthy ride up the hill before the walk described above I added another five flowering plants to my year list. First was **Annual Wall Rocket** followed by **Red Clover**, **Meadow Buttercup**, **Common Mouse-ear** and **Spotted Medick**. Not a first, but confirming my feeling that the species is much commoner than I have assumed, was **Slender Speedwell** - nearing the old London Road near 'The George' pub I saw what seemed to be a large anthill covered with pale blue flowers which, when I went to have a close look, seemed to be composed entirely of this species forming a mound some 15cm high. At one stage I also had a totally unexpected glimpse of a **Common Lizard** scuttling back into the cover of the roadside grass from the tarmac on which it had presumably been sunbathing.

**[Tue 14 April](#)**

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

## Cemeteries page now updated and both Bugle and Hoary Cress newly in flower

After lunch I finished the preparation of my **Cemeteries Pages** with the results of my visits on April 9 and uploaded them (use the link at the head of the Diary Page to access them). The St Faith's page has photo of the first **Keeled Cornsalad** in flower; the Havant Cemetery visit gave me my first **Creeping Buttercup** and **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** in flower plus my first **Queen Wasp** and **Speckled Wood** butterfly; and the Warblington Cemetery page includes details of an impressive plant that I first saw here last year but whose name and history I have only recently discovered - I had been looking for it as a Lily but it is called a **Crown Imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*)** and has been known in Europe since the 17th Century but is rarely planted in gardens as it gives off a Skunk-like smell at some stages of its growth. Re-visiting the Cemetery extension with my daughter's family on Apr 10 we found my first **Yellow Wagtail** of the year in the adjacent field where I had photographed the cattle on Apr 9.

With plenty of afternoon sun ahead I cycled to Nore Barn and on along Western Parade where I was surprised to find one of hundreds of plants of **Hoary Cress** had opened a few of its flowers. Continuing through Emsworth to North Thorney I found nothing of note until I reached the old NRA track connecting the western seawall to the main Thorney Road where **a pair of Swallows** were circling overhead and may well be intending to nest in the area. On the bank of Thornham Road before reaching the left turn to Prinsted I had another surprise find of **Bugle** in flower and as I was passing Thornham House (the rebuilding and extension of which is almost complete) I found a couple of **Creeping Buttercup** plants in flower (following the first find at Havant Cemetery on Apr 9). The only note from my journey home along the main road was of a **Coot** swimming on the Slipper Mill pond with what looked like half a dozen chicks following in line astern.

### Mon 13 April

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

### Egrets now nesting at Langstone and Daw Lane in full flower

This afternoon I cycled over Langstone Bridge and on down the Billy Track past the Oyster Beds but turned off at the Block House onto West Lane and then onto Daw Lane where I was delighted to see the **great display of wild flowers** - Primroses, Greater Stitchwort, Common Dog Violets, Herb Robert and Lesser Celandines all backed by a Blackthorn hedge in full flower. To the south of the lane the large open field was a sea of flowering Rape.

While still on the Billy Track I met Chris Cockburn walking north and he told me that the first **Little Tern** of the year had already been seen at Dungeness and hopefully it will not be long that some of these migrants will enter Langstone Harbour. After leaving Chris I heard my first Willow Warbler singing from trees near the Pony stables (and later I heard another in the Tye area as I was heading up Copse Lane).

One feature of this outing was the **sea mist** that surrounded Hayling. Crossing Langstone Bridge on my way south I could see a mist starting to hide the Emsworth and Thorney Island area and while talking to Chris the southerly wind over Stoke Bay seemed to be dragging strands of mist up out of the exposed sea bed (not driving a bank of mist in from the sea). When I reached North Common the mist was thick enough to obscure the Warblington shore but when I reached Langstone Bridge the area south of Langstone village was in clear sunshine but the area east of Northney Marina was hidden by a wall of fog while to the west of the bridge there was another bank of fog being blown up over Portsdown.

Reaching Langstone Mill Pond I immediately saw the **Egret nesting season was underway** with nine Egrets staking claims to nest sites on the island trees facing the Mill House (the first signs of Egret nesting were noted by Peter Raby on Apr 5). Subsequently I see that Peter Raby had also visited the pond this morning and found a total of 24 Egrets in the trees (including those near the Heron nests) while the southerly wind had brought **2 Common Redstarts, at least one singing Reed Warbler and 3 Willow Warblers** to the area around the pond. I see from the HOS website has seven reports of Reed Warbler so far, the first being heard on Apr 1.

## **ILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 6 - 12 (WEEK 15 OF 2015)**

**Fri 10 April**

### **Swallows at Wade Farm (Langstone), a Yellow Wagtail at Warblington where *Fritillaria imperialis* was flowering**

Today my daughter brought her family down from Egham where she is C of E Chaplain at Royal Holloway College (London University) and after lunch we all walked down to Warblington Cemetery to visit my wife's grave. En route down Wade Lane to the shore we had a good view of **a Buzzard perched on a bare branch near the Pine Trees in which the Buzzard's mate is probably now sitting on her nest**, and passing Wade Farm we watched my **first two Swallows** of the year behaving as if they intended to nest there. At the Warblington Cemetery I added another bird species to my year list with **a Yellow Wagtail around the feet of one of the cattle in the 'Ibis field'** adjacent to the Cemetery Extension.

Following my visit to the Cemetery yesterday I had done some research into **a tall lily-like plant with a 'crown' of pendent yellow flowers** which had been planted among Daffodils in the north east corner of the Cemetery Extension and had found that this plant is called the **Crown Imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis lutea*)** which can be seen growing with tulips at [Fritillaria imperialis](#). The species first came to Europe from the Middle East in the 16th Century and had flowers of an orange colour. It has been popular with gardeners ever since and various cultivars have been developed of which 'lutea' is a popular yellow flowered variety. One feature of the plant is that, at least in early stages of its growth, **the leaves give off a powerful smell of Fox or even Skunk** and for this reason it can deter human visitors to your garden but this facet can be used to advantage as it deters Moles, Mice and even Deer from approaching it, so judicious planting can protect other plants from animal damage (but beware that the smell does not deter Lily Beetles from attacking the plant).

Other things seen on our walk today were what was probably a tiny **Common Shrew** scurrying off when we tried to get a closer look at it at Warblington, and also, on the way home when crossing the Wade Court Road near North Close, we heard **repeated Nuthatch calls** coming from the tall trees beside the road (I think Nuthatches have nested here in several recent years but proof of their presence is usually limited to one encounter per year!) Another interesting bird sound came as we were crossing East Street near the Royal Mail Sorting Office - I'm almost certain that I heard **Mistle Thrush song** there but could not pin down where the bird was.

**Thu 9 April**

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

### **Cemetery visits for April**

With more sunshine today I made my monthly visit to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries plus St Faith's churchyard in central Havant and took 95 photos from which I will compile the new entries for my Cemeteries Page over the next few days. Here I will just describe the highlights.

My first highlight came before I had even entered the Havant Cemetery but was having a look at the ground outside the cemetery wall at the junction of Eastern Road with New Lane where the conservation group had planted Primrose plants which are now flowering. The surprise here was to find my **first Creeping Buttercup flower** of the year. Inside the wall at the eastern end of the cemetery I took a few poor shots of the Bee Flies that were visiting the flowers and also of the ground covering Primroses and Early Dog Violets plus the smaller number of Dog Violets and Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa*) flowers.

Nearer the Allotments I found **Red Currant** and **Red Campion** newly in flower plus a couple of trees (Ornamental Cherry and Norway Maple) in flower. Also in this area I came on my **first Thyme-leaved Speedwell** in flower.

Heading for the St Faith's area I paused near the notice board and discovered my **first Queen Wasp** of the year chewing the wood of the notice board to create the wood pulp that she will use to build a nest in which she will raise the first workers that will take on such menial work while she devotes herself to motherhood.

Following the newly mown paths of the St Faith's area I had my best sight of the day - my **first Speckled Wood butterfly** - and even got a passable photo of it.

Finally I had a look round the Dissenters area where the newly open flowers on a Bay Tree were the only excitement.

In the St Faith's churchyard my best find was of a **Holly Blue butterfly**, clearly seen but up and away before I had a chance to point my camera at it. On the old wall south of the churchyard a couple of plants of **Corn Salad** were just starting to open their flowers but I was more interested to see that where the brickwork of the wall outside Homewell House had been thoroughly re-pointed the Wall Lettuce plants had managed to find crevices for their roots and look set to flower as usual. Elsewhere in the Churchyard the White Comfrey plants were starting to flower and Slender Speedwell was flowering in several places while the bench in the Dewhurst Garden had been taken over by a well equipped 'gentleman of the road' who told me that Havant was a regular stop on his year round tour of southern England.

At Warblington Cemetery in the afternoon many trees were in flower - an ornamental Cherry was laden with pink blossom, a Pear Tree was shining with

white flowers, and a Silver Birch had well developed catkins and was starting to open its leaves - but the only possible newcomer was found lining the path leading to the Cemetery Extension around the southern wall of Warblington Church. Here, among a variety of common weeds, were **several plants which could well be Wavy Bittercress**. In favour of this id were their long, branching, 'wavy' stems, the fact that their seed pods only just over-topped their flowers, and the fact that they had more than four stamens in each flower. Against this id was the very dry habitat (Wavy Bittercress likes to grow on damp woodland tracks), and the fact that all the flowers that I looked at had five stamens (not the six which Wavy normally has - Stace says of Wavy 'stamens mostly six' and of Hairy 'stamens mostly four'). I hesitate to claim these plants were Wavy Bittercress but I think the evidence favours that id rather than that of Hairy Bittercress of which there was plenty intermixed with these larger plants. As a let-out Stace records a hybrid between Hairy and Wavy but indicates it is rare and sterile.

Finally I made two other finds today. Walking home from St Faiths I found **Herb Robert** starting to flower in the concreted 'gardens' outside the East Street houses which were once the Empire Cinema, and coming home from Warblington I found **Shining Cranesbill** starting to flower at the southern foot of the bridge over the A27 connecting the two parts of Pook Lane (I had found this plant flowering for the first time in Southmoor Lane on Apr 8 - see my previous blog entry).

A quick look at the internet this evening shows me that Keith Turner found **a small fall of 8 Willow Warblers** in the Sinah Warren area of south Hayling this morning while others were seen at Farlington Marshes, in Southampton, in the Lymington area and at Woolmer Pond. Even more exciting was the first report of **a Cuckoo calling persistently** in the Ibsley Common area near the Blashford Lakes. At Timsbury in the Test valley the **first two Yellow Wagtails** were seen (with another Willow Warbler and an Osprey). In Sussex the first **Grasshopper Warbler** was 'reeling' by the A23 south of Crawley. In the butterfly news the **first Dingy Skipper** of the year was seen at Levin Down (north of Chichester) on Apr 7; a **Large Tortoiseshell** was seen at Lullington Heath on Apr 6 when other first sightings were of a **Holly Blue** on Thorney Island, a **Green-veined White** at Runcton and **Orange Tips near Billingshurst**.

Finally I see that the **Dragonfly season started on Apr 2 when a Large Red Damselfly** emerged from an indoor tank while the first outdoor emergences were from a garden pond in Kent and another in Cornwall both on Apr 5.

### **Wed 8 April**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

Yesterday I cycled through the Leigh Park Gardens to make a circuit of Havant Thicket where the only real interest was in the number of **Peacock butterflies** - I did not count them accurately but ended with an estimate of at least 50 to which I must add two or three **Commas** and at least one **Small Tortoiseshell** but only **one Brimstone** which usually outnumbers any other species in the Havant Thicket area as a result of the large number of **Alder Buckthorn** bushes (its favourite caterpillar foodplant) which grow here. The other memory which I have of this trip is of the ground in the Hammonds Copse area being densely carpeted with **Wood Anemones**.

When I got home I discovered from the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website that Ashley Whitlock, our top local butterfly enthusiast, had also been in Havant thicket yesterday and had seen **30 Peacocks** in the woodland rides he visited plus

15 Brimstones, 5 Commas, and singles of Small White, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral. Earlier in the day, in the Milton area of Portsmouth, he had also seen one Speckled Wood.

Today the sun continued to shine and in the morning I spotted my first Honesty flowers growing in the next door garden to make up for my missing the flowering plant which Brian Fellows had seen on April 3. Later I took a look round the Havant Cemetery where the Early Dog Violets are at last covering the ground at the east end where I also saw my first Bee Fly of the year and found the lovely yellow flowers of Norway Maple were newly out. Another first flower seen today was Shining Cranesbill, growing in a most unlikely place where I have not seen it before (outside the car repair works at the south end of Southmoor Lane) - I was then on my way to Budds Farm pools where the Swan was on its nest and a pair of Canada Geese were forcing their way through the brambles which now cover the tiny island at the west end of the pools where they have nested in the past. Among other butterfly news I see the first Orange Tip was flying in Brook Meadow at Emsworth on Apr 6 - at the time I thought this was the first for the year anywhere but I subsequently discovered that one had been seen in Dorset on Mar 19. That early record on the national Butterfly Conservation website also drew my attention to a similar isolated report of a Small Copper being seen in Glamorgan on 19 Mar to support the report of one being seen on Browdown near Gosport on Mar 18 (no other sightings of this species so far). Other recent sightings have been of a Humming Bird Hawkmoth in a Cosham garden on Apr 6 (there had been two earlier reports of this moth at Portland on Mar 1 and Mar 20 - probably these had hibernated); a Painted Lady in Gosport also on Apr 6; and the first Holly Blue seen at Hook (Warsash) on Apr 7. Three other national first dates which I have not mentioned so far are for Clouded Yellow in Devon on Mar 27; a Green Veined White in London on Mar 30; and a Green Hairstreak in Cumbria on Apr 4.

**Mon 6 April**

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

### **Bank holiday on Hayling Island**

This morning I cycled down the Billy Line to Gunner Point at the mouth of Langstone Harbour, adding five new flowering plants and two bird species to my year list - I also saw what I'm almost certain was my first Small White butterfly of the year but it would not settle to allow me to be certain it was not a Green-Veined. The plants were the Tartarian Honeysuckle beside the Ferry Road at its junction with the access road to the Sinah Gravel Pit lake, Early Forget-me-not at the roundabout near the Ferry Inn (I also found Sea Mouse-ear here), and Spring Beauty under the Tamarisks in the Sand Dunes. As I was leaving Sinah Common to go up Staunton Avenue several of the garden escape Spring Starflowers (*Tistagma uniflorum*) were in flower. My two new birds were a singing Blackcap in trees beside the Billy Trail opposite Langstone Avenue in the Langstone area and at least five Wheatears on the Sinah Common shore south of the Golf Course. Also over the Golf Course I heard my first Meadow Pipit song of the year. Coming over Langstone Bridge in the morning I saw three lone Brent Geese and guessed they were probably non-starters in the flight to the Arctic and when passing the bay south of the Oyster Beds I found a flock of 34 feeding on the weed before the tide was fully up - when I came back with the tide high what I assume was that same flock were floating on the water off the north end of the

Oysterbeds, probably waiting for sunset before taking off for the next stage of their journey.

## **Wildlife diary and news for Mar 30 - April 5 (Week 14 of 2015)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

### **Thu 2 April**

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

#### **Another six flowering plants to add to yesterday's list**

This afternoon I got on my bike to add **Stream Water Crowfoot** to my April list and I had no difficulty in doing so where the overflow from the Bedhampton Springs flows into the Hermitage Stream. I then rode on to see what else might be on offer and came on **Broom** in flower beside the road connecting the A3M to the A27 before continuing west along the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway on which I went as far as the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes. Here I unexpectedly found **Coltsfoot** freshly flowering before I started on my return journey which I thought I would vary by turning off the cycleway to have a look round the Broadmarsh west carpark in which a lot of fresh **Charlock** was flowering and realised that I had missed this on yesterday's outing. Finally, when nearing the Langbrook underpass below the A27 a flash of white caught my eye, coming from now fully open **Cherry Laurel** flowers. These five plants, plus the **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** in the Pallant carpark, brought my April count up to 70 species (and I still have not been to south Hayling!)

### **Wed 1 April**

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

#### **64 plants in flower to start my April list, 8 of them being firsts for the year**

This morning the first **Yellow Corydalis** flowers I have seen this year were open in my garden and as I wandered around Havant on foot I added **English Elm, Garlic Mustard, Field Forgetmenot, Dove's Foot Cranesbill, and Alkanet** as further 'firsts'. After lunch I got on my bike for a circuit of the Emsworth area where I found the first **Greater Stitchwort** and **English Scurvygrass** for my year list. The overall total of 64 plants showing signs of flowering today compares with 35 on March 1 and 23 on February 1 (on Jan 1 I was pre-occupied with counting birds!). My route today started off going south through Juniper Square and then down Wade Lane to Langstone Pond where the tide was high and I had a distant view of **my first Sandwich Tern** and half a dozen Brent Geese before crossing the main Hayling Road to find **16 Fritillary Flowers** beside the path leading to Mill Lane. At the mouth of the Langbrook Stream there was a small group of about 25 Brent and three Mergansers to add to a couple seen off Langstone Pond and at the far end of Mill Lane I crossed the Langbrook and went a short way towards the shore to confirm that the young **English Elms** overhanging the stream were now in flower - I also found that the **shore path had re-opened** but I doubled back to cross the South Moors and have a look at the 'orchid field' where I found 16 flowers open on the few remaining **Marsh Marigold** plants.

Pausing for refreshment on the bench at the start of the path which leads to Southmoor Lane I spotted a tiny red and black **Rove Beetle (Paederus littoralis)** which you can see at [Paederus littoralis](#) before continuing to the Budds Farm pools viewpoint. Here I could see no Swans but did see five Canada Geese - on the plus side there were a good few Tufted Duck and at least one pair of Gadwall plus a singing Cetti's Warbler.

My walk up Southmoor Lane was one of the more productive parts of this outing - just beyond Penner Road I found myself staring down at a very unexpected plant of **Garlic Mustard** in full flower and a little further on, under the metal fencing of the car repair site, I was even more surprised to find a battered plant of **Alkanet** bearing its small deep blue flowers. Close to it was my first flowering **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** for the year and all along the lane Stork's Bill was flowering. Turning right towards the Technology Park I found my first **Field Foreget-me-not** flowering under the fence of the Apollo site.

After lunch I got on my bike and set off for Emsworth via Southleigh Road. Stopping at the East Leigh Road junction to tick the **Lesser Periwinkle** I was delighted to find **two flowers of Greater Stitchwort** before I pressed on to Brook Meadow for **Butterbur**. Coming back I headed for Nore Barn where I was again surprised to find many plants of **English Scurvygrass** in flower on the saltings before adding the expected Neapolitan Garlic and a flowering plant of Hogweed plus the Wild Strawberry flowers beside the Selangor Avenue path.

### **Mon 30 March**

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

#### **A Firecrest in Hollybank Woods and Slender Speedwell flowering in Havant**

A clear sunny sky in the morning looked good for a visit to the **Early Purple Orchid site** below Longcopse Hill in the extreme south east corner of the Holly Bank woods area. While still in Denvilles, heading north along Fourth Avenue, I had reached the only bend in this otherwise straight road when I noticed someone working in a small garden on the east side of the road which has in it a small tree which has long puzzled me so I stopped and asked the man if he knew the name of the tree which is just starting to open its pure white flowers on branches still without any leaves. Luckily I got the answer that it was **a Magnolia** and that he had planted it within the past five years or so but he could not tell me what made it so different from the common species of Magnolia currently opening their flowers and leaves in many gardens (including two in Beechworth Road and the tree in East Street which gives its name to the Magnolia House Dental Surgery). I think I may have found a possible name (**Magnolia stellata**) for the species in Fourth Avenue - see [Magnolia stellata](#) but when I went to discover the name of what I have called 'the common species' I found I had opened 'a can of worms' - try putting 'Magnolia Trees UK' into Google and then looking at 'Images for Magnolia Trees UK' or try looking up 'Magnoliopsida' in Stace's Flora and you will find that virtually every plant family in the UK seems to belong to the group and Magnoliidae seems to be a group name of all the Dicotyledons.

Arriving at the top of the road section of Hollybank Lane I secured my bike and then set off on foot through the woods towards Long Copse Hill finding nothing of special interest but hearing a dozen species of bird songs and calls by the time I reached the stream at the eastern boundary of the woodland. Crossing the stream I found many **Wood Anemones** and **Primroses** in flower and when I reached the point at which the final finger of woodland follows the southern boundary of the adjacent field eastward into the area where hundreds of **Early Purple Orchids** have been found in the past I saw **only half a dozen clumps of the orchid leaves**, several of them with still sheathed small flower spikes. This small number seems to presage a very poor 'crop' of orchids this year. The only flower added to my list here was Early Dog Violet and as I was leaving the area **one Larch tree had a fresh green tinge** to its upper branches.

On my way back I saw and heard a couple of Jays and the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker but when close to Hollybank House I did get a glimpse of what must have been **my first Firecrest** of the year - just a brief view of the white patch on its face.

Back at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads I stopped to see if **Greater Stitchwort** could be seen but had no luck - I did see **well grown Crosswort plants** but with no hint of yellow flowers.

Reaching home I changed from my boots into shoes and in doing so broke one of my shoelaces and so went into Havant to get a new pair - on the way home I went through St Faith's Churchyard and found my **first flowers on Slender Speedwell** for the year

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 30 - APRIL 5 (WEEK 14 OF 2015)**

### **Thu 2 April**

#### **Another six flowering plants to add to yesterday's list**

This afternoon I got on my bike to add **Stream Water Crowfoot** to my April list and I had no difficulty in doing so where the overflow from the Bedhampton Springs flows into the Hermitage Stream. I then rode on to see what else might be on offer and came on **Broom** in flower beside the road connecting the A3M to the A27 before continuing west along the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway on which I went as far as the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes. Here I unexpectedly found **Coltsfoot** freshly flowering before I started on my return journey which I thought I would vary by turning off the cycleway to have a look round the Broadmarsh west carpark in which a lot of fresh **Charlock** was flowering and realised that I had missed this on yesterday's outing. Finally, when nearing the Langbrook underpass below the A27 a flash of white caught my eye, coming from now fully open **Cherry Laurel** flowers. These five plants, plus the **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** in the Pallant carpark, brought my April count up to 70 species (and I still have not been to south Hayling!)

### **Wed 1 April**

#### **64 plants in flower to start my April list, 8 of them being firsts for the year**

This morning the first **Yellow Corydalis** flowers I have seen this year were open in my garden and as I wandered around Havant on foot I added **English Elm, Garlic Mustard, Field Forgetmenot, Dove's Foot Cranesbill, and Alkanet** as further 'firsts'. After lunch I got on my bike for a circuit of the Emsworth area where I found the first **Greater Stitchwort** and **English Scurvygrass** for my year list. The overall total of 64 plants showing signs of flowering today compares with 35 on March 1 and 23 on February 1 (on Jan 1 I was pre-occupied with counting birds!).

My route today started off going south through Juniper Square and then down Wade Lane to Langstone Pond where the tide was high and I had a distant view of **my first Sandwich Tern** and half a dozen Brent Geese before crossing the main

Hayling Road to find **16 Fritillary Flowers** beside the path leading to Mill Lane. At the mouth of the Langbrook Stream there was a small group of about 25 Brent and three Mergansers to add to a couple seen off Langstone Pond and at the far end of Mill Lane I crossed the Langbrook and went a short way towards the shore to confirm that the young **English Elms** overhanging the stream were now in flower - I also found that the **shore path had re-opened** but I doubled back to cross the South Moors and have a look at the 'orchid field' where I found 16 flowers open on the few remaining **Marsh Marigold** plants.

Pausing for refreshment on the bench at the start of the path which leads to Southmoor Lane I spotted a tiny red and black **Rove Beetle (*Paederus littoralis*)** which you can see at [Paederus littoralis](#) before continuing to the Budds Farm pools viewpoint. Here I could see no Swans but did see five Canada Geese - on the plus side there were a good few Tufted Duck and at least one pair of Gadwall plus a singing Cetti's Warbler.

My walk up Southmoor Lane was one of the more productive parts of this outing - just beyond Penner Road I found myself staring down at a very unexpected plant of **Garlic Mustard** in full flower and a little further on, under the metal fencing of the car repair site, I was even more surprised to find a battered plant of **Alkanet** bearing its small deep blue flowers. Close to it was my first flowering **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** for the year and all along the lane Stork's Bill was flowering. Turning right towards the Technology Park I found my first **Field Foreget-me-not** flowering under the fence of the Apollo site.

Ater lunch I got on my bike and set off for Emsworth via Southleigh Road. Stopping at the East Leigh Road junction to tick the **Lesser Periwinkle** I was delighted to find **two flowers of Greater Stitchwort** before I pressed on to Brook Meadow for **Butterbur**. Coming back I headed for Nore Barn where I was again surprised to find many plants of **English Scurvygrass** in flower on the saltings before adding the expected Neapolitan Garlic and a flowering plant of Hogweed plus the Wild Strawberry flowers beside the Selangor Avenue path.

## **Mon 30 March**

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

### **A Firecrest in Hollybank Woods and Slender Speedwell flowering in Havant**

A clear sunny sky in the morning looked good for a visit to the **Early Purple Orchid site** below Longcose Hill in the extreme south east corner of the Holly Bank woods area. While still in Denvilles, heading north along Fourth Avenue, I had reached the only bend in this otherwise straight road when I noticed someone working in a small garden on the east side of the road which has in it a small tree which has long puzzled me so I stopped and asked the man if he knew the name of the tree which is just starting to open its pure white flowers on branches still without any leaves. Luckily I got the answer that it was **a Magnolia** and that he had planted it within the past five years or so but he could not tell me what made it so different from the common species of Magnolia currently opening their flowers and leaves in many gardens (including two in Beechworth Road and the tree in East Street which gives its name to the Magnolia House Dental Surgery). I

think I may have found a possible name ([Magnolia stellata](#)) for the species in Fourth Avenue - see [Magnolia stellata](#) but when I went to discover the name of what I have called 'the common species' I found I had opened 'a can of worms' - try putting 'Magnolia Trees UK' into Google and then looking at 'Images for Magnolia Trees UK' or try looking up 'Magnoliopsida' in Stace's Flora and you will find that virtually every plant family in the UK seems to belong to the group and Magnoliidae seems to be a group name of all the Dicotyledons.

Arriving at the top of the road section of Hollybank Lane I secured my bike and then set off on foot through the woods towards Long Copse Hill finding nothing of special interest but hearing a dozen species of bird songs and calls by the time I reached the stream at the eastern boundary of the woodland. Crossing the stream I found many [Wood Anemones](#) and [Primroses](#) in flower and when I reached the point at which the final finger of woodland follows the southern boundary of the adjacent field eastward into the area where hundreds of [Early Purple Orchids](#) have been found in the past I saw [only half a dozen clumps of the orchid leaves](#), several of them with still sheathed small flower spikes. This small number seems to presage a very poor 'crop' of orchids this year. The only flower added to my list here was Early Dog Violet and as I was leaving the area [one Larch tree had a fresh green tinge](#) to its upper branches.

On my way back I saw and heard a couple of Jays and the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker but when close to Hollybank House I did get a glimpse of what must have been [my first Firecrest](#) of the year - just a brief view of the white patch on its face.

Back at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads I stopped to see if [Greater Stitchwort](#) could be seen but had no luck - I did see [well grown Crosswort plants](#) but with no hint of yellow flowers.

Reaching home I changed from my boots into shoes and in doing so broke one of my shoelaces and so went into Havant to get a new pair - on the way home I went through St Faith's Churchyard and found my [first flowers on Slender Speedwell](#) for the year.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 23 - 29 (WEEK 13 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 29 March**

#### **March goes out like a Lion**

Today's gale force winds and threatening clouds contradicted the folk lore saying that '[March comes in like a Lion but goes out like a Lamb](#)' and further proof of this contradiction comes from my Diary entry for March 1 which started with the words .. "The weather was good for starting a new list of flowering plants for March ..." - hopefully another saying which told us that .. "March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers" will turn out to be more accurate. Despite today's winds the threat of rain diminished in the afternoon and I was able to add a new flower

to my year list with **garden escape plants of the cultivar of Wood Forget-me-not** which is very common and much larger than the Field Forget-me-not.

Another spring plant which I used to find beside the Purbrook stream where it runs through a patch of un-managed wood west of Purbrook Heath (and which may still occur there) is the **Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage** which Cliff Dean has recently found and photographed in the Brede High Woods near his home in Pett on the shore of Rye Bay - see the first photo in his blog entry at [Cliff Dean's blog](#). Scrolling on down through the blog the next photo is of **Bluebells uprooted by Wild Boars** which like to eat the bulbs and below that is a photo of **Marsh Frogs** sunning themselves on a fallen tree trunk while at the end of this entry he has a photo of people looking in vain for **Brook Lampreys** which have been seen recently in one of the woodland streams draining into the River Rother. A photo of one of these strange creatures can be seen at [Brook Lamprey in a bottle](#) - in the past these creatures could be found in streams near Winchester and an article dated January 2011 shows they were active in the River Itchen then - see [Brook Lampreys in River Itchen](#)

Two other recent sightings that caught my eye were of an **Alpine Swift** seen over Crawley in West Sussex on Mar 28 - see [Alpine Swift](#) which tells me that these birds are twice the size of Common Swifts and are easily recognized by a large white patch on their bellis - and the first report of a **Beefly** seen at Durlston on Mar 27.

### [Fri 27 March](#)

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

#### **New flowers include Rue Leaved Saxifrage**

This morning **Green Alkanet** (my first for the year) was in full flower on the roadside outside the Havant area B&Q store and after returning from this shopping trip I cycled down to Langstone where the Swan was on her nest but there was not sign of any Little Egrets. There were half a dozen Teal on the pond but none in the adjacent Pony Field. All four juvenile Herons could be seen in the Holm Oak top nest.

Outside the Royal Oak Beer Garden three plants of **Lesser Sea Spurrey** were all flowering and a visit to the path outside the West Mill at the end of Mill Lane gave me **Glory of the Snow** newly in flower next to the Summer Snowflake. An unexpected find was a clump of **white flowered Common Dog Violets** apparently planted by the entrance to the Mill - their appearance was later confirmed by the sight of **more normal violet flowers** beside the Billy Trail and by a report of the species in flower at Durlston on Mar 25.

Back in my home area the first flowers were out on **Rue Leaved Saxifrage** in the Pallant Carpark. These are not easy to spot and if you want to see them enter the carpark from Beechworth Road and immediately turn right over a patch of cobblestones which are liberally covered with the tiny white flowers of Common Whitlowgrass - the Saxifrage plants were close to the wall of the carpark. The plants can also be found on more cobble stones at the foot of a street light on your left where an access road to the back of some East Street houses branches off from the public parking area. The unique leaf shape of the Saxifrage plants picks them out from all other plants - see [Rue leaved Saxifrage plant](#).

### [Tue 24 March](#)

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

## **Tree Creeper at Brook Meadow and Neapolitan Garlic at Nore Barn plus Egrets back at Langstone nest site**

After reading of several **Tree Creeper** sightings on Brook Meadow at Emsworth last Saturday and seeing Malcolm Phillips photo of one nest building in Palmers Copse close to the south bridge from Brook Meadow into the Copse area in Brian Fellows blog last night I felt I had a good chance of adding this bird to my year list if I went there before the nest building is complete (when the pair will probably maintain a low profile to protect the location of the nest). So I took advantage of this morning's sunshine and had no difficulty in seeing the Treecreeper. While I was there I also enjoyed the sight of a **male Brimstone** butterfly and of **two Buzzards soaring in a thermal** over the north of Brook Meadow - while watching them one of the two folded back its wings and went into a high speed almost vertical dive (a three minute video including this type of display can be seen at [Youtube Video of Buzzard display](#)).

In Brook Meadow I chained my bike to an Ash tree at the foot of the steps coming down to the Butterbur patch and when I came back to unlock it I was impressed by the **delicate patches of lichen on the tree trunk**. Although I can't name the species with confidence I think they may be **Lecanora chlarotera** of which you can see an example at [Lichen on smooth Ash tree trunk](#) - what I saw lacked the prominent 'button like' fruiting bodies in this photo.

Before reaching Brook Meadow I stopped on Victoria Road close to the Emsworth Primary School and counted around **25 Rook nests** in the trees behind the block of flats on the south side of the road. After leaving Brook Meadow I made my way along the shoreline to Nore Barn where there were very few birds and I could find no sign of flowering on the English Scurvygrass plants but I did find several of the Garlic plants which I had seen in the east end of the wood on Mar 12 had now started to open their flowers, revealing by the absence of green stripes down the petal edges that they were **Neapolitan and not Three-Cornered Garlic**. Along the Selangor Avenue path several plants of **Wild Strawberry** had come into flower.

My last stop was at Langstone Mill Pond where the female Swan was again off her nest enjoying a breakfast of bread but it was well worth coming here to find **a dozen or so Egrets taking an interest in potential nest sites** though there were no obvious signs of nest building. I also had very good view of **all four juvenile Herons plus one adult in the top nest on the Holm Oak tree** and on another tree which had no nest there was one fledged juvenile which must have come from another nest - it was perched quite high up and must have flown up to its perch but was looking very uncertain about taking to the air again. Offshore there was **a distinct absence of ducks and geese** - I reckoned that there were no more than 100 Brent in the whole stretch from Emsworth Harbour to Langstone and I saw just one male Wigeon in that area (plus a pair of Merganser and a fair number of Teal).

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 16 - 22 (WEEK 12 OF 2015)**

**Sun 22 March**

## Hairy Violets on Portsdown plus recent news from the internet

This afternoon I cycled to Fort Widley on Portsdown in search of **Hairy Violets** and found more than 40 clumps of them in flower on the south face of the hill in front of the Fort. Before that another new flower for the year was starting to appear on my garden lawn - this was **Field Woodrush (*Luzula campestris*)**. Also seen as I was making my way up the hill from Bedhampton was an **aerial display by four Buzzards** over Farlington Church area and while walking along the hill I had good views of the huge **American aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt** making its way into Portsmouth Harbour.

Yesterday was spent searching the internet to catch up with news I had missed while working on my Cemeteries pages and one of the first reports I noted was of a **Red Kite flying east over the old Havant Post Office at the end of my road** on Mar 21. Even more frustrating was news of **two Sparrowhawk sightings in the Wade Court area** on Mar 17 and 18 (I still don't have a Sparrowhawk on my year list!). Another bird needed for that list is **Tree Creeper** of which there have been at least four sightings in Brook Meadow at Emsworth between Feb 15 and Mar 22 indicating the presence of at least two birds.

Another bird to look out for is **Osprey** after the second to be seen in Hampshire this spring was over the Hilsea Lines in Portsmouth on Mar 21. Sadly Ospreys do not normally stop locally on their spring journeys (unlike their lengthy stop overs in the autumn) so I am not expecting to tick that species.

Two new butterfly species for the year were **Green-veined White** (seen in the Milton area of Portsmouth on Mar 18) and **Small Copper** (said to have been seen on Browdown on Mar 18 though this species does not normally appear until May and as the report was not on the Butterfly Conservation website I am wondering if the id was mistaken). Also in the recent news was the first mention of a **Grass Snake** seen at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 18 while the Portland Website has photos of **Wall Lizards** out there in the sunshine on Mar 20.

### [Fri 20 March](#)

#### My Cemetery Pages now updated and I visit the Green Hellebore site at Walderton

Today I completed the editing and uploading to my Cemeteries Pages of the results of my visits last Tuesday to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and to celebrate the completion of this monthly task I took advantage of this afternoon's sunshine to cycle via Westbourne and Stansted to the Woodlands Lane site on the hill brow above the River Ems valley at Walderton where the only local site for **Green Hellebore** can be found. This year there were relatively few plants with flowers (about half a dozen) under the Ash trees lining the north side of Woodlands Lane immediately before it plunges down to Walderton though I expect there are more in the Lordington Copse private woodland south of the lane.

As I was passing the entrance to the Stanted House offices before reaching Woodlands Lane I heard the distinctive chur of a **Long-tailed Tit** followed by several **bursts of very high pitched, fast repeated, notes which I believe to be this bird's song** (a belief that was confirmed when I checked with Xeno-Canto).

Heading south down the Ems valley I passed at least four plants of **Butterbur in full flower** where a branch of the river flows under the road from the grounds of Lordington House but I could find none at what used to be the main site for this plant at the road junction where the road to Funtington goes off to the east. In Racton hamlet I turned right up the short steep hill from which I could hear and see the many sheep and their lambs in the riverside fields below Racton Park farm. At the top a **Skylark was in full song** and looking north towards Racton Tower I saw what I am pretty sure, by its huge wingspan and strange noises, was **a Raven which may well be nesting in the Tower** as they have done in the past. A couple of news items from the internet start with a report of the **first Willow Warbler** I have heard of - it was heard singing at the Chichester Gravel Pits back on Mar 17. Today brought a **Wheatear onto the Warblington Farm fields** - seen on the newly ploughed field on the east side of Pook Lane immediately south of the Old Rectory.

**Wed 18 March**

### **Four more 'first flowers' and the colour puce**

Walking down Wade Court Road this morning I found **the road covered with large, woolly catkins under the tall old Grey Poplar** which grows opposite the entrance to North Close. This always flowers early but this year I had forgotten to look up to spot the developing catkins so did not notice it flowering until today when the top branches were thickly covered with open catkins, many of which had fallen to cover the roadway since I last passed under it a few days ago. A little further south I turned right on the unofficial pathway at the foot of the southern embankment of the A27 which comes out on the Billy Trail at the point where the Lymbourne Stream emerges from its culvert under the road. Halfway along this track between the Wade Court Road and the old railway, and at head height part way up the embankment, **a magnificent clump of Cowslips** was in full flower giving me my second 'first flower' of the day.

After lunch I got on my bike and rode down to **Langstone Pond to find the Swan sitting on her nest** and this suggested that I should ride on to check if the pair at Budds Farm were nesting but before I got there I found **my third newly flowering plant for the year on one of the Snakeshead Fritillary plants** beside the short-cut path from Langstone High Street to Mill Lane where two of the plants had colourless unopen flower buds but one was fully open. I suspect that these were planted by George Hedley, onetime farmer of Langstone Dairy Farm, whose old home (now for sale) is alongside the site of the plants.

When I got to Budds Farm I found one birder already there and he told me that he had recently seen one of the **Swans nest building in the reeds straight ahead from the view point** but they were nowhere to be seen today. Later in the day the name of this birder returned to my very poor memory system - he knew my name and I must apologize to him if I have got his name wrong but I am pretty sure it was Dave Mead, onetime leader of the Portsmouth RSPB Group.

My next stop was at the **Broadmarsh western carpark where I was surprised to hear a Cetti's Warbler singing** in the bushes surrounding the carpark - presumably making a short stop there on a journey to find a good site for a more permanent home. Heading back along Harts Farm Way I noticed the **Alexanders plants outside the old entrance to the recycling 'amenity' site were starting to flower** but I had already seen my first of these near the Kench on Hayling on Mar 10

Reaching the Langstone Technology Park the cycle track swerves round to the north side of the Technology Park site and as I was going round this bend I noticed that **a large tree overhanging the carpark within the site had taken on an attractive red colour** so when I got to the nearest point to the tree I stopped and scanned it with my binoculars to find that the colour came from **a mass of 'pincushion-like' flowers** lining the otherwise bare branches. Such flowers must belong to some species of Elm but clearly this was not an English Elm and my current best guess is that this was a **Wych Elm** - whatever the species it was the fourth newly flowering species for my year list!

Back at home I completed my write-up of yesterday's visit to the Havant Cemetery and while doing so I did some further research into **the Hoverfly that I had described in yesterday's blog as a 'Long Hoverfly'** but I did not feel happy with this id so today I had another try and am now thinking that what I saw was a **Chequered Hoverfly (*Melanostoma scalare*)**, a common species, which is of the right size and colour pattern and which does appear early in the year - furthermore all the photos of it on my source website show it resting on bright yellow flowers matching my specimen on Lesser Celandine petals. Another factor that helped was that the Windows Photo Viewer which I was using has a 'magnifying glass' tool which helped to reveal the yellow and black pattern of the insect's abdomen through its closed translucent wings. The website which helped my id was [Melanostoma scalare](#) but the ISPOT website also helped by giving the likely id of *Melanostoma scalare* to an insect very similar to mine seen on March 7 this year - it also shows a dead specimen infected with a fungus which causes it to climb a stem before dying to be in the best position to spread the fungal spores from the dead body (see [ISPOT examples](#))

**Tue 17 March**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Visits to Havant and Warblington Cemeteries plus St Faith's churchyard discover the first White Comfrey and Blackthorn flowers**

This morning I headed for the Havant Cemetery to gather photos for my monthly Cemeteries Page - the edited material will not be online for a few days but I can now reveal the highlights, starting with what I found in the Havant Cemetery.

The first highlight here was a clump of **four Early Dog Violets in flower**, followed by one of my personal favourites - the clump of **Blue Anemones** which come up each year among long grass with no obvious association with a grave suggesting that the bulbs had in the distant past been dug up and thrown away. These were the only newcomers to the scene here and a search for flowers on the Holly trees failed to come up with anything better than a mass of unopen buds with no hint of the white of the flowers. The various Yew Trees were now shedding clouds of pollen in response to the slightest shaking of their branches

Moving to the Dissenters section the bush of **Mahonia aquifolium** just inside the gateway was now covered in its bright yellow flowers and nearby an open Lesser Celandine flower had attracted what looked like a **Long Hoverfly (*Sphaeophoria scripta*)** though these do not normally appear until April. Also seen here was a small patch of **Ivy Leaved Toadflax already in flower** (only my second find of this species for the year)

Walking west along Eastern Road on my way to St Faith's church I came on **my first flowering plants of White Comfrey for the year** and in St Faith's church yard the only plants of interest were the **mass of Sweet Violets** that has sprung up in

the past week under and around the massive Yew tree at the west end of the church. While wandering round in search of anything else to photograph I did find the distinctive leaves of Slender Speedwell but as yet with no flowers or even buds. One bird which I do not associate with this town centre site, but which I heard calling from high above, was **Mediterranean Gull**.

At Warblington the Cemetery Extension gave me another first for the year - **Blackthorn in flower** - but the only other excitement was to find a few plants of **Ground Ivy in flower** following my very first sight of it yesterday.

I came home via Langstone Pond where the female Swan was once again not on her nest and I extended my route home to the end of the Billy Line where the leaves, but no flowers, could be seen on the **Wild Garlic (Ramsons)** which grows by the steps coming down onto the Billy Line from the back of Fairfield School.

**Mon 16 March**

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

### **Langstone Swan on nest, Water Rail coming to bread and my first Ground Ivy in flower plus a vote for the Wren**

After the first rain for weeks in the morning I got on my bike after lunch for a quick ride to Langstone Pond where I had my first sight of the female **Swan on her nest** (17 days after she was first seen nest building - maybe she is now about to lay some eggs). Another first for me was to see a **Water Rail (after Tony Gutteridge pointed it out to me!) coming to bread** that was being fed to the ducks at the seawall feeding place next to the Interpretation Board and while there we also watched a female Tufted Duck on the pond.

Before going home I decided to check out the **Denvilles site of the possible Cedar Cup fungus** which I mentioned yesterday, so I rode up Pook Lane en route to Southleigh Road and where I turned right along to the tarmac road connecting Pook Lane to Church Lane I was surprised to find **one Ground Ivy plant already in flower** (this is a traditional site for the earliest flower of this species - look on the bank where you would turn right from the tarmac road to go up the dead end road to the stables and the A27 footbridge). Another surprise here was that the large field south of the Old Rectory has just been ploughed (for the first time in at least 30 years).

In Devilles I found **the garden with the Cedar tree was in Hallett Road**, not Fifth Avenue. The Cedar is an Atlas Cedar (with 'ascending' tips to its branches - Cedar of Lebanon has 'level' branches and Deodar had 'drooping' tips) and more or less fills to small front garden but today **the grass below it was devoid of any fungi**.

Having been stirred into political awareness by a doorstep visit from the Green Party candidate yesterday my political thoughts were re-awakened today, first by the Radio 4 Today Programme and later by the BBC TV News, telling me to go online and **vote for one of ten common birds species to be elected to the position of Britain's National Bird** on May 7th. To vote I went to VOTENATIONALBIRD.COM and nominated the **WREN** for this important position which I think it is best qualified for as **the smallest species with the loudest voice** - just the qualities which typify Britain's place in the world.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 2 - 8 (WEEK 10 OF 2015)**

[Sat 7 March](#)

### **A springlike day plus more news from February observations**

This morning I walked south from Havant beside the Langbrook Stream to check if the female Butterbur plants on the waste land south the 'The Mallards' housing, and just north of the bridge to the one time Langstone Dairy Farm, had started to flower. Before reaching that site I enjoyed my first sight of **Lungwort in full flower** where it had been planted alongside the path. At the **Butterbur site** I could a first see no sign of the many flower spikes that I was hoping for but I eventually spotted two full grown flower spikes at the very edge of the stream and later I came on a few others away from the water but as yet hardly pushing above the surface of the ground.

Moving onto the open South Moors I was welcomed by a fresh Red Admiral enjoying the warm sun. On the wall of the West Mill at the end of Langstone Mill Lane the white flowered creeper **Clematis arandii** was starting to flower (and I saw this again when passing Wade Court on Wade Lane - here it has climbed a Hawthorn tree overhanging the lane). For photo of this plant species in flower see [Clematis arandii](#).

At Langstone Mill Pond the female 'Pond Wigeon' was still present and the male Swan was in full view but I could see no sign of the female despite spending some time peering into the area near the interpretation board where she had been seen starting to build a nest on Feb 27 - my guess is that she is nesting but in some more hidden place. From the seawall I watched the restless Brent flying around while above the a **Buzzard** flew west from Warblington Farm and over Wade Lane.

The Pony Field south of Wade Court had a big display of **Teal and at least four Heron plus 11 Egrets** but none of these birds were worried by the presence of **three, maybe four, adult Foxes** chasing each other across the field.

Nearing home I collected a roadside specimen of **Grey Field Speedwell** to add to my note of a first flower bud of what seemed to be **Sea Spurrey** growing on the seawall near the Royal Oak at Langstone. Back at home as I was eating my lunch **my first male Brimstone butterfly** flew past the window and when I went out into the garden I disturbed **two Small Tortoiseshells**, one of which kindly came back to resume its sun bathing on the concrete path to allow me to be certain of its identity.

[Fri 6 March](#)

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

### **Wheatear, Dotterel and White Wagtail arrive plus some reflections on February news**

In my previous blog entry I said that Portland had reported the **first Wheatear** arrival of this spring on Mar 1 but since then Jeff Goodridge's blog has told me that **one was reported in Norfolk as early as Feb 26**. Another spring arrival was even earlier - **two White Wagtails** were seen in Devon on Feb 26 to be followed by one at Portland on Mar 3 and four at Trowbridge in Wiltshire on Mar 5. Another species which may or may not be a migrant arrival is a **Dotterel** seen at

Wadebridge in Cornwall on Feb 25 and again on Feb 27, on both occasions in company with a large flock of Golden Plover - this suggests to me that the Dotterel came south with the Golden Plover in the autumn and has stayed with them through the mild winter. Another overwintering bird has been a **Lesser Whitethroat** seen in Devon on Feb 19 and 26 in the same location that there was a possible sighting of it in January. Yet another overwintering species has been reported from Haywards Heath in Sussex where a **Ring Ouzel** was seen on several occasions in the same garden between Feb 5 and 10. Another Ring Ouzel (reported as a 'young bird') was reported in the West Dean Woods on Feb 21.

My own observations were made on Mar 5 when the unopen **Early Dog Violet** flower buds became one fully open flower on that day. I have noticed that House Sparrows and probably other birds are partial to the nectar in flower buds and often peck them off before they can open so I am glad that at least one of the buds that have been appearing in my garden since Feb 20 has managed to survive! Later that day I cycled to north Hayling where **many Brent Geese were behaving in a restless way**, spending much of their time in the air. At the south end of Langstone Bridge **Danish Scurvygrass** was starting to flower under the white roadside railings and at the Oysterbeds the number of **Coltsfoot flowers** had increased to at least 35 while the number of **Med Gulls** on the island had increased to 40 or more. Along Daw Lane the first Primroses were in flower and at Northney I could see **at least 25 Rook Nests** with their occupants nearby. I have now collected **observations up to the end of February** from my regular sources and today I have started to look through them and pick out some that I think are of interest. My comments appear below in the sequence of species that I use for my database.

**Water Vole**: One was in Leigh Park Gardens Lake on Feb 4 (New site for the species). Wondering how it got there I looked at the map and found one continuous stream connecting the lake to the coast at Broadmarsh though the Vole would have had to make an overland trip to get from any of its known local sites to this stream (but I understand that overland travel does occur, at least in Scotland). A Norfolk Wildlife Trust web page says they do not travel overland but a detailed study of them in the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve says .. "Water voles are effective dispersers and in upland areas travel an average distance of 3. km (and up to 23.9 km) to find a mate and appropriate habitat.

**Radio tracking has shown that they disperse both along waterways and overland** and can create temporary refuges as they move through less suitable habitat. It has also shown that they are capable of travelling hundreds of metres in one day." The route which I think they might use to get to the lake is via a stream which branches off the Hermitage Stream just south of Corhampton Crescent in the Stockheath area of Leigh Park and continues in a north east direction to pass through the Great Copse area branching again to drain the Havant Thicket area with one branch coming from the Lake where the vole was seen. Neither Google Maps nor my printed OS maps show all the minor streams involved but I used <http://wtp2recorder.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm> which takes some time to master (start by clicking the blue ? and reading the Help info) but has a complete set of facilities for showing the whole of the British Isles in full OS detail.

**Red Squirrel**: I know these can be seen on the IoW and in Poole Harbour as well as in Scotland but was not aware that they can also be found around Ottery St

Mary in Devon until I came on a photo of one regularly visiting bird feeders in this Devon area. For photo see [Red Squirrel Photo](#).

**Bats:** Local reports of **Pipistrelles** emerging from winter hibernation started with a sighting on Portsdown on Feb 9. This was followed by a sighting at Durlston on Feb 12

**Frogs** started to spawn in a Waterlooville garden pond on Feb 11 followed by a report of 'dozens' in Horndean on Feb 16 and by Feb 28 John Bogle was able to get a photo of a mass of spawn in Southleigh Forest - see [Frog Spawn photo](#).

**Great Crested Newt:** None actually seen during the month but the Feb 3 entry on the Solent Reserves blog included the statement that the South Lake at the HWT Swanwick reserve "could well be one of the largest water bodies in Hampshire without fish and as a result holds a great population of Great crested newts." I assume that the presence of fish means that Newt eggs would be eaten by the fish but survive in this lake. To learn more about the Swanwick Lakes reserve go to [Swanwick Lakes reserve](#).

**Adder:** The first to emerge from hibernation was seen on the cliffs at Durlston on Feb 17

**Red Cage Fungus:** On Feb 13 the Durlston Rangers Diary contained the sentence .. "On the Timeline path, the intricate white shape of a fresh Red Cage fungus - not yet open, but worth keeping an eye on for when it opens to reveal the extraordinary, intricate, bright crimson interior (and foul smell!) which gives it its name." On Feb 24 it was mentioned again but had still not turned red. For a photo of this fungus in its full glory, attracting blowflies to its strong smell, see [Clathrus ruber photo](#) - for more about this fungus go to [Clathrus ruber](#).

**Red throated Diver:** These started to leave their wintering sites when 98 flew past Portland on Feb 7 and by Feb 19 Dungeness reported 470 pass in a period of 2 hrs 25 mins. On Feb 28 Folkestone was still reporting them with a count of 416 flying east.

**Great Northern Diver:** On Feb 14 Selsey Bill had a new site record of 18 together on the sea.

**Pacific Diver:** The lone bird which has spent the winter in the Penzance area of Cornwall was seen there on five occasions between Feb 4 and 28.

**Great Crested Grebe:** I do not have any records of birds pairing and displaying though many were doing so during the month but I do have counts of rafts on the sea off Hampshire (167 at Brownich on Feb 2 and 172 off Weton Shore in Southampton Water on Feb 4) but as usual these numbers are dwarfed by those in the Rye Bay area (400 in the bay on Feb 1 and 1432 on the sea off Dungeness on Feb 25)

**Slavonian Grebe:** The peak count of these on the sea off Pagham Harbour was 32 on Feb 9

**Black-necked Grebe:** The peak count for Langstone Harbour this month seems to have been just 9 on Feb 15 and I did not see any large numbers reported from the Falmouth area of Cornwall (max 16 on Feb 16) but Dorset seems to have had 36 on Feb 20.

**Great White Egret:** I am still expecting these to invade the British Isles as the Little Egrets have done and this was supported by a report of **6320 birds at a roost site in Holland during Oct 2014**. Numbers at English sites seem to have peaked at 9 at the Dungeness RSPB site on Feb 14.

**Grey Heron:** 3 pairs were nest building at Langstone Mill Pond on Jan 9 and by Feb 25 at least 2 chicks could be seen in one of these nests.

**Mute Swan:** The Langstone Pond female was seen nest building on Feb 27 but has shown no evidence of settling to the task since then.

## **Tue 3 March**

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

### **Some personal and wildlife news including the first Wheatear at Portland**

For the past couple of weeks my mind has not been entirely focussed on wildlife as my 17 year old central heating boiler has been going through its 'death throes' and finally died last week. Today I am rejoicing in the warmth of a new boiler installed in the past couple of days and yesterday (Mar 2) I was able to celebrate with **a full two hours of full Blackbird song in my garden between 4 and 6 pm** (can anyone tell me why Blackbirds always start their spring song with late afternoon performances while the majority of other bird species are normally first heard in the early morning?).

Later yesterday evening around 7pm I had another celebratory sight in the heavens of **a full Moon with a bright Jupiter very close to it** (that was in the east while Venus is very prominent low in the west soon after sunset) and if you want to be kept up to date with what's to be seen each night go to

<http://earthsky.org/tonight>. You may have heard that **an eclipse of the sun is coming up this month** and for details go to

<http://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/solar/2015-march-20>.

A short local cycle ride this afternoon (Mar 3) gave me a couple of items of local wildlife news. At **Langstone Pond** the male Swan was on its own and I was told that the female had again been on her new nest at the north end of the island where she nested last spring (visible from the seawall path somewhere near the Chichester Harbour interpretation board) but I could not spot her or the nest.

Much more dramatic was news that **the female Goosander had recently been seen on the harbour just off the pond with the front half of her lower mandible hanging vertically down after being somehow broken** (cause not known - maybe snagged on something under water and having to break its own bill in order to get back to the surface before its air supply ran out or maybe having it broken in a fight, but with what?) Regardless of the cause it seems the bird is now doomed to die through being unable to feed itself....

A bird photo that appeared on the main BBC News today is worth seeing - it shows **a Green Woodpecker in flight with a Weasel perched on its back** and the story is that both survived the encounter. Go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31711446>.

Other wildlife news from the Internet is that the **Surf Scoter** was still in Stokes Bay today while in Sussex **a male Shoveler was seen near Henfield with its photo showing a deformed bill** - see

[http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com\\_jobline4/logo/p1010211---copy.jpg](http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com_jobline4/logo/p1010211---copy.jpg). From Portland comes a report of **the year's first Wheatear arriving there on Mar 1** - also there on Mar 1 their **first Hummingbird Hawk Moth** was seen. For

**something entirely different** seen in the Rye area on Mar 2 go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2015/3/3/brook-lamprey.html>. Also seen in East Sussex on Mar 1 were **4 Small Tortoiseshell butterflies** plus one **Red Admiral**

(another Red Admiral was seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Mar 2 after another/the same? had been seen there on Mar 1). Finally an item of 'useless but

interesting knowledge' comes in the final paragraph of the Durlston Ranger's Diary for Mar 1 telling us that **Buzzards "can squeeze their eyeballs to create an egg shaped eyeball that gives them 'binocular' vision."** (see <http://www.durlston.co.uk/durlston-today.aspx?nid=10ebf345-8cbd-4025-ad59-65dee5c8f591>) - if this gives you the index to the Diary entries select the one for Mar 1 and click 'Read More'..

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 23 - MAR 1 (WEEK 9 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 1 March**

#### **35 wild plants in flower on a sunny day**

The weather was good for starting a new list of flowering plants for March and I am only aware of one species which I know to be out but which I failed to see but **today's count of 35 species** is only two more than the 33 which I found on Feb 1 - the consolation is that things can only get better from now on.

Today's list started with the **Early Dog Violets** in my garden and the count had risen to 14 when I came across **the first unexpected species** - a single roadside specimen of **Sticky Mouse-ear** with the white of its petals just starting to show in several of its tightly clustered flower heads.

Soon after this was seen I reached Langstone Pond where the Swan pair were swimming round together and showing no desire to let me see their nest which they had started to build last Friday. To make up for this I had a good view of **one of the Mistle Thrush pair** in the pony field south of Wade Court and even better I saw **a parent Heron feeding one of its young** in the Holm Oak top nest. On the pond I did not see either the Goosander or the 'Pond Wigeon' and am wondering if they have now left us - hopefully not as last spring the female Goosander was seen at Langstone between Mar 21 and 29 so should be with us for another three weeks or so.

From the pond I crossed the main road to tick the garden escape **Summer Snowflake plant** outside the West Mill before heading back into Havant where I went west to the outflow from the Bedhampton Springs to see **Stream Water Crowfoot** in flower. Normally it is possible to walk along beside the outflow channel to the bank of the Hermitage Stream but today I found that a new padlocked gate prevented me from leaving the Wayfarer's Way path.

Next target area was the Petersfield Road/Crossland Drive area where I found the **Danish Scurvygrass, Cow Parsley** and **Ivy-leaved Toadflax** I was expecting plus the flowers of the **Oxyloba variety of Perwinkle** in the hedge of the Health Centre. Before heading home I made a diversion around the south side of the Multi-storey Car Park to see the **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** that I had found in flower last Friday.

After lunch I got on my bike again and rode through the Denvilles area to the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads where, as I had hoped, at least **five**

flowers of Lesser Periwinkle were seen (along with a lot more Cherry Plum blossom and one more flower of Ivy-leaved Speedwell). Back on the bike my final target was Brook Meadow where I added male Butterbur to bring my March list to 35 species. I could have made the score 38 with Cherry Laurel, Blue Anemone, and Common Yew in Havant Cemetery but the Laurel and Yew flowers were not really open and the Anemone was distinctly planted on a grave, unlike the 'self sown' cluster which has so far shown no sign of putting up flower buds among the leaves which are already showing.

One further bird deserves a mention and that is Chiff-chaff. On my way home near the junction of Warblington and Beach roads (not far from Nore Barn) I heard at least two of them calling incessantly and this reminded me that the SOS website has recently had an increasing number of reports of Chiff-chaffs since one on Feb 23 headed 'First Chiffchaff' which said "A Chiffchaff singing hesitantly near ASDA at Brighton Marina this morning took me by surprise and must have been a new arrival." These calling birds which I heard today close to the shoreline did suggest that migrants are already arriving.

Other reports which have caught my eye in the past couple of days include one from Dungeness on Feb 25 reporting another 588 Brent heading east and a flock of 1432 Great Crested Grebes on the sea there. Feb 28 saw another 230 Brent flying east off Folkestone. In Hampshire the Surf Scoter was still being seen at Stokes Bay today (Mar 1). On Feb 27 Portland reported a trickle of incoming Meadow Pipits and also in Dorset Durlston had a female Adder sunning itself on the cliffs (the first had emerged from hibernation there on Feb 17). Other signs of spring at Portland have been sightings of three species of Shield Bug (Common Green and Hawthorn on Feb 25 plus Gorse on Feb 27. Going back to Feb 22 Portland had its first Manx Shearwater of the year. One final bit of news is more local and come from Barry Collins who was on Thorney Island at mid-day on Feb 27 when a Red Kite flew over, putting up all the Brent Geese before heading west towards Langstone. Barry also saw three juvenile Spoonbills in the 'canal' which runs beside the Wicor Bank seawall to connect the Little to the Great Deeps. Latest local news comes from Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow in Emsworth where he came on what he (and I) thinks were a pair of mating Frogs locked in their amorous embrace. To see what a mating pair of Toads would look like go to a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD1Q2skUnPw> - the warts and black spots on these Toads are not to be seen in Brian's photo at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x209-toads-zz-mating-bm-01.03.15.jpg>.

## Fri 27 February

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

### A ride to Gunner Point and back

Today's sunshine and light wind invited me to cycle all the way down the Billy Line and on to visit Gunner Point at the entrance to Langstone Harbour. High spots started with the first 'wild' Primrose flowers in what I call the 'Daw Lane shore copse' on the seaward side of the track where Daw Lane would meet the shore if it were extended west. In south Hayling many Daffodils were in flower and as I cycled west along Ferry Road the area north of the Golf Course was a glorious mass of flowering Gorse. After passing through the shore carpark south

of the Ferry Inn I began to notice **fresh green on the Tree Lupin plants** and while searching for any early flowering on the mass of leaves of **Spring Beauty (Montia perfoliata)** under the Tamarisks I did find a few plants of Common Whitlowgrass flowering. If you are not familiar with Spring Beauty have a look at the greatly enlarged photo of it at <http://www.luontoportti.com/suomi/images/14612.jpg> but do not expect to see it flowering before April at the earliest.

While having a sandwich on a bench facing the sea I enjoyed **full song from two Skylarks** high above me and as I continued east along the south side of the Golf Course I was surprised to see a **small flock of Brent feeding on the short grass of the fairway**. In the gorse east of the Golf Course I was hoping to hear the churr of a Dartford Warbler but had to make do with a good view of a **male Stonechat** - the first I have seen this year (82 on my yearlist).

On the way home the tide was still very low but all the way along the Coastal Path there was a continuous muttering from several flocks of Brent out on the mud and when I reached the Oysterbeds the air was filled with the distinctive calls of the **Med Gulls of which I counted 35** in a single scan of the nest islands (there must have been a good number more in the air and not counted). Beside the exit road from the area to the main road I could see the golden flowers of **Coltsfoot** at the entrance to the little used official carpark and estimated there are now around 20 plants in flower.

Passing **Langstone Mill Pond** I noted **one of the Swan pair** standing alone close to the path in the area where they nested last year and when I got home there was an email from Nik Knight saying that he had seen **one of the pair starting nest building** earlier this morning. Another email from John Gowen said he had seen **two Water Rails on the west side of the pond** close to where the Lymbourne Stream runs out under the Mill building.

Snippets from the internet which caught my eye this evening started with **news from Dungeness that on Feb 25 there was a noticeable increase in eastward Brent passage with 588 of the geese passing**. Also at Dungeness but on Feb 26 there was a flock of **1432 Great Crested Grebe on the sea** there. Two other notable counts came from **Poole Harbour where 20 Woodcock were seen** (no detail of whether they were scattered individuals or a flock of migrants heading back to the continent together) and from **Rye Harbour where 20 Jack Snipe were seen**. For 'something entirely different' Cliff Dean has a blog entry about **an exhibition of Ladybird Books which he visited at the De Le Warr Pavilion in Bexhill** - this is likely to be of more interest to those old enough to have been brought up on those wonderful books and is not of much wildlife interest but if you want to check it out see <https://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2015/02/26/an-ideal-world>.

**Thu 26 February**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **More signs of spring in Havant**

When the rain stopped this afternoon I took a short walk around Havant and was cheered by what I saw.

First stop was at the Havant Cemetery in the hope of seeing an Early Dog Violet to match the three flowers that can now be seen in my garden (though as yet those flower buds do not have the strength in their stems to hold themselves upright!). No sign of Violets but I did see **Blue Anemone flowers** opening on one grave where they were planted in the past and are surviving without any care.

Leaving the Cemetery and walking west along Eastern Road my attention was drawn to a very smartly dressed pair of **Herring Gulls** on a house roof where what I assume was the male was throwing his head back and emitting loud 'love calls'. While I watched them they flew to another house and made their way down from the ridge of the roof to where the roof slates met the brickwork of a chimney stack (a similar place on the roof of a house in Nore Farm Avenue which connects Selangor Ave to the A259 in Emsworth had been the site of a Herring Gull nest a couple of years ago).

Walking south over the rail station footbridge at around 4:15 pm I had my first experience of **full Blackbird song** from a bird perched in a tree on the edge of Havant Park and almost directly above the foot bridge - the bird continued singing at least until I was in the Park and could see it clearly.

After walking through the Meridian Centre I came alongside the western edge of St Faith's Churchyard and found that **the single Sweet Violet flower which had opened on Feb 10 had suddenly become 10 flowers** thanks the warm air yesterday and today but perhaps the most unexpected observation came as I was rounding the southern front of the multi-storey carpark and spotted **two tiny flecks of blue among a great mass of inch high hairy Ivy-leaved Speedwell leaves** - yes they were the flowers of this soon to be abundant spring flower!

Just a couple of reports from the internet (both from the HOS news) deserve a mention in case you haven't seen them for yourself. First was a genuine observation from ten observers at Stokes Bay on the Gosport shore of the **first Surf Scoter to be seen in Hampshire this winter**. It was first reported by D E Stevenson at 11:45 on Feb 25 and was still being seen at 15:20 on Feb 26. The bird is an adult male and a check with Birds of Hampshire shows that when that book was published in 1993 there was only one report of the species in the county - an adult drake flying east on 15 May 1976. **The current bird seems to be the fifth for the county** after one seen on 19 Nov 2011. Before that a female was in Langstone Harbour on 18 Dec 2006 and stayed for several hours unlike the previous sighting of a 'fly by' on 23 Apr 1999.

The other report which caught my eye among the current HOS news is **a less convincing report by a single observer who claims to have seen a flock of 30 Twite** near the Southampton Ordnance Survey offices on several occasions during the week preceding Feb 23. Many other birders have been to the site but all of them who have seen the birds say they are Linnets. My MacMillan Field Guide gives the following **tips for distinguishing Twite from Linnet in winter**. First is the distinctive harsh, nasal 'tchooik' note. Second is the yellow bill. Third is the 'rich orangy-buff' face and throat. In flight Twite has white wing bars not present on a Linnet. Finally the bookmakers odds are heavily in favour of Linnet rather than Twite in Hampshire - numbers wintering in the county have declined to the point where none are seen in some years and a group of more than ten birds would be very unlikely.

**[Wed 25 February](#)**

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

### **A walk to Nore Barn on a spring-like day**

This morning I walked along the shore from Langstone to Nore Barn, returning via the Selangor Avenue path and the main road into Havant. Along the shore the tide was very low and some **400 Golden Plover** were roosting off Langstone Pond

with a similar number of Brent off Warblington church area where there were few other birds other than **30 Shelduck**.

The first interest came as I rounded the corner of the Warblington Farm fields and headed north to Nore Barn wood. Here there was a **Greenshank** in the outflow channel from the eastern stream of the farm and while I was watching it I heard the call of a **Rock Pipit** flying higher than they normally do and coming in a straight line from the north west. As it came over the farm fence it circled two or three times and then settled on the barbed wire of the fence as if checking out the shallow pool where the stream is prevented from flowing out into the harbour when the tide is high. My impression was that this was a bird on a long distance passage flight and unfamiliar with this area but stopping for refreshment if the pool had anything to offer.

Moving on along the shore path within Nore Barn wood I was stopped in my tracks when **a Goldcrest flew down and started to bathe in a puddle no more than a metre ahead of me**, giving me excellent views of the bird for a couple of minutes until two other walkers with a docile dog overtook me and naturally disturbed the bird before it had finished its toilet. This sighting was all the more exciting for me as Goldcrest was a new species for my year list, bringing the count to 81 species. From the east end of the wood I had another good view of **ten pairs of Pintail** feeding out on the otherwise deserted mud (there were quite a few Teal and Wigeon and a small number of Black-tailed Godwit keeping a low profile in the water channels). Reaching the stream which runs out of the Maisemore Gardens wood I initially thought it was devoid of birds but eventually saw a single Redshank at the southern end of the visible section, then saw the **Spotted Redshank** at the north end, close under the bridge, where it was accompanied by the **song of a single unseen Stock Dove**.

Just two other notes of interest on the way home. Reaching the A27 underpass 'wayside' **a freshly open Dandelion flower in full sunshine** had what I think were **two Hoverfly species enjoying its nectar**. One was I think a **female Drone Fly (Eristalis tenax)** - the females hibernate and emerge on warm days as early as today - but I have not been able to put a name to the other species which was tiny in comparison to the Drone Fly and had an all black body and long translucent wings. It may not have been a Hoverfly and one possibility is that it was a **Carrot Fly** (see photo at

[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/lifesci/wcc/research/researchstories/carrotfly/carrot\\_fly\\_1.jpg](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/lifesci/wcc/research/researchstories/carrotfly/carrot_fly_1.jpg)). The larvae of Carrot Flies are a serious pest of Carrots but I read that the **adults do overwinter and come out on warm days** in early spring. The second observation was of a **Coal Tit persistently singing** from the trees opposite the One Stop shop at the junction of the Emsworth Road with Southleigh Road.

**Mon 23 February**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **My year list of birds reaches 80**

Since last Friday I have added two new birds to my year list, both of which should have been seen weeks ago - they are **Reed Bunting**, seen on Saturday at the Thorney Little Deeps, and **Pheasant**, seen today in the Pony field south of Wade Court - at least it was a handsome Cock bird! Also seen on Saturday in a walk around Havant, was the first substantial flowering of **Common Whitlowgrass** with 69 plants counted along the edge of Prince George Street and Waterloo Road.

Today's walk took me down Wade Lane to Langstone Pond where the **female Goosander** and the pair of '**Pond Wigeon**' were both sheltering from the strong, chill wind and the high tide which had overtopped the seawall path for the third day in a row. I then headed west down Mill Lane (where the garden escape **Summer Snowflake** plant outside the West Mill had opened a couple of flowers - thanks partly to my having recently cut back the brambles which were choking the site)- and across the South Moors to Southmoor Lane where the white flower buds were starting to open on the **Cherry Plum** trees. The Budds Farm pools had few birds on show but the **Gadwall** there were looking particularly smart in their breeding plumage - the only other species I noted were **Pochard, Tufted Duck** and **Teal**.

At Langstone Pond **one Heron was bravely withstanding the wind to be with its young chicks** of which Peter Raby reported the first evidence when he heard them on Feb 13 (which happens to be 25 days - the normal incubation period for Herons - from Jan 21 when Peter first saw at least one bird 'sitting' in its nest and assumed it was on eggs). Peter's observations show that three pairs are present at the pond, occupying three nests, but I think that so far he only has definite evidence of chicks in one nest.

Today brought a report of **Chiffchaff song** from Brighton which I thought was the first reported this year but a check showed that one had been heard on Feb 2 in Southampton and **Crossbill song** reported yesterday from the New Forest had also been heard on Feb 2. A more dramatic observation came today from Chris Corrigan at Pulborough Brooks where a **Sparrowhawk thought it could take a short-cut through the open door of a building after seeing through a window beyond the open door** - unfortunately the hawk did not see that the window was closed and ended up with concussion on the floor inside the building. Luckily it suffered no permanent damage and flew off when released outside the building. It is not uncommon for various bird species to fly into windows from the outside but this is the first I have heard of hitting the inside of a window.

There have been many reports of **Brent Geese heading east** past coastal sites such as Dungeness since Jan 4 but I think these early departures originate from the west coast of France and only follow the English south coast for convenience of navigation (others follow the north coast of France). What may be the **first report of Brent that have been wintering at English sites starting to leave** came in a report on the Selsey Blog for Feb 22 of a total of just over 1500 Brent taking off from the Pagham Harbour area to head east.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 16 - 22 (WEEK 8 OF 2015)**

### **Fri 20 February**

#### **First Early Dog Violet flower**

A walk round my garden this morning discovered the **first flower on a clump of Early Dog Violets** which infiltrated a crack in a concrete path some years ago and have now developed into a substantial mat of flowers. Later a cycle ride found a **female Tufted Duck on Langstone Mill Pond** and the very **first open flower on one**

of the **Cherry Plum trees that line Wade Lane** where at least one of the many plants of Cow Parsley which line the banks of the lane is also in flower.

On the internet Durlston reports that the **first four Adders have emerged from hibernation** on Feb 17. Also on Feb 17 **a Magpie managed to get inside the big Havant TESCO store** and spent two whole days in the store pecking at food items while some staff attempted to catch it and others followed it around taking any food items which it had sampled off the shelves before they could be purchased by customers. The bird was eventually caught on the morning of the third day (Feb 19) and released outside the store.

Another report that caught my eye came from **Selsey Bill** where a new site record was set on Feb 14 with the presence of **18 Great Northern Divers** on the sea together. Further along the coast on Feb 16 Rye Harbour reported the return of the first Med Gulls and Avocets that will breed there.

Insect news includes reports at various sites on Feb 17 of **1 Comma, 2 Small Tortoiseshells, 3 Peacocks** and **5 Red Admirals**. I also found that the Shield Bug seen at Portland on Feb 18 and described as a **'Hairy Shieldbug'** (a species that I said yesterday I had never heard of) is also known as a **Sloe Bug** which I have come across before.

#### **Thu 19 February**

##### **Danish Scurvygrass now in full flower and the first Ivy-leaved Toadflax is out**

This morning I extended my walk to the shops to go north to Crosslands Drive, then west to the Petersfield Road and south down it to the roundabout outside Havant College. I thought this was likely to be a waste of time but today it not only gave me the first **Ivy-leaved Toadflax flowers** on a south facing garden wall but also a **mass flowering of Danish Scurvygrass** along much of the west side of the Petersfield Road between a point opposite the Curlew pub and the Havant Health Centre with smaller clusters of flowers further south to the roundabout.

A quick scan of the internet this evening found photos on the Portland Bird Observatory blog of both a **Dock Bug** and a **Hairy Shieldbug** which have just come out to enjoy the spring - see the entry for 18 Feb at

<http://portlandbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk/>. I am familiar with the Dock Bug but have not previously come across the Hairy Shieldbug (*Dolycoris baccarum*) which is well described at

[http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Pentatomidae/dolycoris\\_baccarum.html](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Pentatomidae/dolycoris_baccarum.html)

where the first photo shows the hairs on it's 'shoulders'. As it is said to be 'Common and widespread in many habitats throughout Britain, particularly hedgerows and woodland edges' it's worth keeping an eye out for it this summer.

Another insect in the news is the **24-Spot Ladybird (*Subcoccinella vigintiquatuor punctata*)** which I came across on the Rye Harbour website (see <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2015/2/17/24-spot-ladybird.html>). This is another hairy insect and you can read more about it at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subcoccinella\\_vigintiquatuor\\_punctata](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subcoccinella_vigintiquatuor_punctata).

Another welcome news-item comes from John Goodspeed's website which says "There were **dozens of frogs cavorting in a Horndean garden pond** last night (16th) and this morning there is one dollop of spawn. I am sure there will be much

more to follow. (David Dew)" It's great to know that at least one person is still experiencing an abundance of Frogs - sadly for most of us these amphibians are now a thing of the past

[Wed 18 February](#)

### A walk round Farlington Marshes

This morning I decided to walk round Farlington Marshes for the first time since I ceased to own a car nearly a year ago so I had a long walk to get there and back from my home in central Havant - in total the walk took me 5 hours and 40 minutes including a half hour spent resting for a couple of refreshment breaks, but the outing gave me a list of 47 bird species and 17 flowering plants.

The only new flower for my year list was **Cherry Plum**. I have been watching the flower buds on the many local Cherry Plum trees for some time, recently expecting them to open any day. Yesterday Brian Fellows found the first flower open on a closely related tree at Brook Meadow and today I found a whole tree in full flower on the north side of Harts Farm Way just west of the Hermitage Stream bridge - soon there will be half a dozen trees flowering in this area.

The bird list gave me two surprises - the first was to see **a very recently fledged Song Thrush** on the ground (I doubt it could fly as it had no tail) by the cycle track running north of the Langstone Technology Park; the second was a **'mystery duck' on a pool in the 'North-east Slip Field' at Farlington** (see map at <https://solentreserves.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/farlington-marshes-map-2.jpg>). I only had a brief view of this duck before it flew off and my impression was of a very white Mallard sized bird with a lot of pale brown flecking on its upper body plumage. At the time I assumed it was an albino version of some species that I should recognize but on getting home and searching for other possibilities on the internet I found a good match in an **uncommon domestic duck breed called a Silver Appleyard** (originally bred in Suffolk as recently as the 1930s by a breeder called Reginld Appleyard). For a photo see <http://www.feathersite.com/Poultry/Ducks/Apple/AppleydYDuck.JPG>.

While at the Marshes I heard my first **brief snatch of Skylark song** and saw masses of **Brent, Wigeon, Teal, Shelduck** and **Shoveler** but no Merganser, just one Mute Swan, one pair of Mallard, one pair of Tufted Duck, two Goldeneye and only 4 Canada Geese. I also failed to spot the flock of Avocets which I was expecting to find roosting on South Binness during the high tide.

One other discovery during this walk relates to the excellent **mural which has recently appeared on the wall of the A27 underpass** taking the Langbrook Stream as well as the footpath from the Tesco area - as you emerge on the south side there is now **an interpretation board explaining the various aspects of Havant's history which appear in the mural**. I spotted this on the way out and on my way home I saw another bit of good news as I emerged from the underpass on the north side close to the broken Water Wheel - this was a **female Grey Wagtail** at the base of the Wheel, suggesting that **the pair which nested there last spring will do so again this year**.

[Tue 17 February](#)

### Med Gulls calling and Coltsfoot flowering at the Oysterbeds

This morning, in lovely sunny weather, I enjoyed two of the joys of spring - the first was to hear the **distinctive mewing calls of Med Gulls** for the first time this year and the second was to see **Coltsfoot in flower**, both at the Oysterbeds.

Another highlight today was to hear my first **Mistle Thrush song** from the top of an Oak tree beside Copse Lane as I was heading back to Northney.

When I reached Northney there was a good show of **Rooks in the trees in which they will soon be nesting** and back in my garden this evening a **Coal Tit could be heard singing** for some time just before sunset.

So far this year I have come across reports of four butterfly species already on the wing (**Brimstone, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell** and **Peacock**) but this evening a check with the national Butterfly Conservation Website First Sightings page (<http://butterfly-conservation.org/52/first-butterfly-sightings-2015.html>) shows me that both **Painted Lady** and **Comma** have also been seen (in Surrey and Berkshire respectively).

**Mon 16 February**

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

### **Signs of Spring**

Yesterday (Sunday Feb 15) brought all of us a feeling that spring was at last just around the corner and among the observations supporting this feeling was that of the **first full Blackbird song** heard at dusk by Brian Fellows in Emsworth while earlier in the day the **first 20 Med Gulls were back at the Hayling Oyster beds** - for more news from the Oyster Beds see Chris Cockburn's report on Brian Fellows blog entry for Feb 16. Over in Sussex single **Small Tortoiseshells** and **Peacocks** were on the wing with at least two **Red Admirals** - a less obvious insect emergence was seen in my bathroom when I opened the window and exposed a **Ladybird which had just emerged from hibernation**. When I got out for a walk around Havant I found at least **20 plants of Common Whitlowgrass in flower** where I had never seen more than two flowering before and over in Emsworth at least one of the **Butterbur plants had a fully open flower**. This morning before the rain started a couple of **male Blackbirds were marking out their breeding territories** on my lawn with 'parallel walks', each keeping to their side of the invisible dividing line while watching the other to ensure they knew how far they were allowed to come across the grass in their search for worms.

On Saturday (Feb 14) the **first 14 White Storks** were back in Germany while a second batch of **120 Cranes** were seen in the Netherlands following a first report of 145 in Germany on Feb 13. Over on our side of the Channel more and more birds are starting to move east - on Feb 10 **10,000 Auks flew east off Portland** and on Feb 13 **1093 went east past St Adhelms Head**, also in Dorset. On Feb 9 **310 Red-throated Divers were at Cap Gris Nez**, then on Feb 13 **150 flew east off Dungeness** and 53 went the same way past Selsey followed by a count of 300 going east in 2.5 hours from Dungeness on Feb 14. Reports of **departing Brent Geese** came from Dungeness on Jan 4 (few), Jan 7 (250), Jan 12 (148) and Jan 13 (45) and a second burst of movement east seems to have started on Feb 10 with 32 east past Selsey, then on Feb 13 there were reports of 21 passing Splash Point and 218 passing Dungeness while on Feb 14 there were reports of 75 passing Splash Point, another 120 along the Normandy coast and 128 passing Folkestone. Similar early movements in previous years have been attributed to birds coming from the west coast of France.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 9 - 15 (WEEK 7 OF 2015)**

[Fri 13 February](#)

### My Cemetery Pages now updated

Today I have updated my Cemeteries Page in respect of the visits I made on Feb 10 to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and St Faith's Churchyard in Havant. The main interest in them is the identification of **Western Red-cedar (Thuja plicata)** trees at Havant and **Arizona Smooth Cypress (Cupressus glabra)** at Warblington, helping to extend my knowledge of trees. If you do click the 'Cemeteries Page' link at the top of this page it will take you to a page of links to all the monthly visits I have made to these three sites since 2012 and if you click the top link for each site you can then scroll down through all the reports for that site.

Other interest from the internet includes the **first report of a Pipistrelle Bat** for the year - one seen at Durlston on the night of Feb 11. Reports of bird song are increasing with **Siskin, Woodlark, Skylark, Greenfinch** and **Chaffinch** all starting to sing recently. There are also signs of some coastal winter visitors starting to leave us - in particular Portland recorded **10,000 Auks heading east** up channel on Feb 10 and another 1,093 went east past St Adhelm's Head in Dorset on Feb 13 (when Splash Point in Sussex also had 591 going east). Also presumably departing were **314 Bewick's Swans** and **154 Whoopers** at Netherlands sites today (Feb 13) where they are not normally seen. Trektellen today also reports **154 Cranes** at a German site - I think this is the first news of these birds returning from their winter quarters. One report from Haywards Heath in Sussex is of a **male Ring Ouzel** seen on Feb 10 but thought to be wintering rather than a first migrant.

[Tue 10 February](#)

#### An outburst of Chaffinch song on my round of Havant cemetery visits

Although I did not expect to find much of botanic interest with the night temperature remaining low today was dry, almost windless and slightly milder than the last few days (more than may be expected later this month!) so I decided to make my monthly visits to the local cemeteries in the hope that my camera would find something of interest for the wildlife posters that go on the cemetery notice boards.

Yesterday I heard my first snippet of **Chaffinch song** in my garden and as I set out to walk to Havant Cemetery this morning I was surprised to hear them singing everywhere - in some places as many as three birds competing with each other. **Dunnocks were also singing** in many places and in the Cemetery area I also heard the inevitable **Great Tits, Collared Doves and Wood Pigeons plus a few Robins and one Wren**. Later in the day, at St Faiths, I heard my first burst of song from one of the Town Pigeons as well as the expected Goldfinches and at Warblington (where several of the many Collared Doves that roost there at night were singing and making their vertical display flights) I also heard a Song Thrush. **Snowdrops, Lesser Celandines, Primroses and Daffodils were all flowering** in the Havant Cemetery but **the only 'first flowers' were on Cherry Laurel bushes** which were holding up their white candles of flower buds - if you are not familiar with these see <http://www.howardianlnr.org.uk/images/trees/laurel-flr.jpg>. Less impressive were the leaf buds on an otherwise bare Hornbeam tree

Walking to my next site (St Faith's churchyard) I passed one tiny plant of **Common Whitlowgrass** holding up two flower buds on full length stalks and in the churchyard I was very pleased to find a single **Sweet Violet flower** to show that the 'chainsaw massacre' (close mowing to tidy the area for the November Remembrance Day ceremonies) of these lovely plants which cover a considerable area of the site was not terminal. The only other flowering plants found there today were three **Red Deadnettlles** - not even a Daisy or Dandelion was in flower.

The one surprise here was **the purring 'Crooo' of a Town Pigeon** though there was also both Greenfinch and Goldfinch song. The usual very tame Robin came and sat beside me when I sat on the bench where many people take time out from shopping to have a snack and presumably scatter a few morsels for the Robin and the House Sparrows. Several Blackbirds were also scouring the ground in the hope of finding a bite to eat - probably more interested in insects than breadcrumbs.

I did not spend long here but went home for lunch before cycling to Warblington Cemetery. Here the only surprise was to find **one of the Elder trees in the north hedge of the Extension area was already showing several clusters of flower buds** in addition to the leaves that were already starting to unfold on my January visit. Another tree that was in flower was **Grey Alder** with several trees forming the central (east-west) avenue of the old cemetery dangling their catkins. Another tree that caught my eye was what I think is a **Smooth Arizona Cypress** covered with small cones that look like old fashioned leather buttons - for an image see <http://www.naturesongs.com/vvplants/azcypress1.jpg>. Nearby I was surprised to see that grass mowing had already started.

### Mon 9 February

#### Giant Butterbur and Marsh Marigold in flower

Very little to report today but a walk down the Langbrook Stream to the South Moors found a dozen plants of **Giant Butterbur (Petasites japonicus)** flowering on bit of waste ground adjacent to the bridge over the stream connecting the one-time Langstone Dairy Farm to the Moors where the cattle would feed. To see what this plant should look like go to [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/77/Petasites\\_japonicus.jpg/220px-Petasites\\_japonicus.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/77/Petasites_japonicus.jpg/220px-Petasites_japonicus.jpg) - none of the plants seen today were as perfect as that photo, all had their leaves damaged and their flowers blackened by frost but were recognizable as being the same species. They were planted here around 1970 when IBM acquired the land stretching down to the harbour and built their manufacturing plant (now the Langstone Technology Centre) The planting was, I think, intended to show their responsibility for the natural environment. Moving onto the South Moors I had a look at the 'orchid field' where the tiny pool at the north end of the field (close to the SSE building) rewarded me with two flowering plants of **Marsh Marigold**. Nearby I put up a very noisy **Green Sandpiper** and heard the calls of a Jay and both Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers. At Budds Farm the **Swan pair that will breed on the pools** were present for the first time this year. The most numerous and vocal duck species today was Teal with only one Shoveler seen plus a couple of Tufted Duck and five each of Pochard and Gadwall. From the pools I walked along the Budds Farm shore where a single **Rock Pipit** gave close views. During this walk I heard **Greenfinch starting to sing**, interspersed with their wheezing calls but no display flight.

Dunnock were singing everywhere and before I started out a Chaffinch made a single attempt to sing in my garden.

Although the sun remained hidden the air felt distinctly warm (well, less biting cold!) but there was no repetition of the warmth that brought out at least three Red Admirals yesterday (one at Brook Meadow and two in Sussex where a Small Tortoiseshell was roused from hibernation and was let out of the house where it had been 'sleeping'). I see that this warmth encouraged partial song from a Blackcap in Gosport. Other news from the internet includes what seems to be a Little Bunting in Sussex (Ashdown Forest) where it was seen on Feb 5 but not confidently identified at the time - support for the id comes after submitting photos to the ISPOT group - see <http://www.ispotnature.org/node/641192?nav=latest>. Another sighting on the Selsey Bill blog today gives a high count of 32 Slavonian Grebe off Pagham Harbour.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 2 - 8 (WEEK 6 OF 2015)

### Sun 8 February

#### White coated Stoat near Andover and Lichen growing 'toadstools'

Bransbury Common is a good site, located by the River Test south of the A303 road not far east of Andover, for birders looking for Raptors and wetland birds. Yesterday Peter Hutchins went there and saw a Great Grey Shrike, a Barn Owl, a Raven and a small flock of Greylag Geese but the most interesting part of his report is a footnote mentioning a Stoat in Ermine (its white winter coat) - something that is not often seen in Hampshire. Another unusual report comes today from The Vyne Watermeadows to the north of Basingstoke where 34 Snipe (and 2 Jack Snipe) were seen. The unusual thing again comes in a footnote to this report describing how a Sparrowhawk was seen to hover four feet above the Snipe in an unsuccessful attempt to catch one. The observer says he had never before seen a Sparrowhawk hover and I have never heard of this before.

My own outing today was a brisk cycle ride to Farlington Marshes where, from the vehicle entrance from the main road rounabout, I saw more than 40 Avocets on the edge of the Broom Channel which connects Langstone Harbour to Ports Creek. As I turned to return I noticed something that has vanished from many of the places where in many years it is a common sight - here in the hedge between the reserve approach road and the slip road from the A27 to the Eastern Road into Portsmouth, were many of the silk tents in which Brown Tail moths pass the winter. Today they showed no sign of any live inhabitants but I'm pretty sure that when the weather warms up and the leaves start to regrow on the hedgerow trees hundreds of tiny caterpillars will emerge.

Back at home I spent some time on a website which I thought might help me to understand and identify lichens - see <http://www.britishlichens.co.uk/index.html>. It certainly gave me some new information and has many photos against which you can check your tentative id guesses. One thing it did was to show me that the complex reproductive strategies of lichens can include the growing of tiny toadstools to spread their spores - see the photo of one such at <http://www.britishlichens.co.uk/species/Lichenomphalia%20umbellifera%20small.jpg>. From the same website I picked another photo of a colourful lichen in its

reproductive stage - see

<http://www.britishlichens.co.uk/species/Cladonia%20polydactyla%20small.jpg>.

A couple of other reports which interested me started with **news of 350 Med Gulls at Ferrybridge** (between Weymouth and Portland). So far this winter I have been puzzled by the apparent absence of the large numbers of these gulls that are normally reported - hopefully it won't be long before we see these gulls back in Langstone Harbour and feeding in local fields. Another report was of good numbers of **Great Crested Newts** in the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Swanwick reserve lakes - apparently they do well there as there are no fish in these lakes to eat the eggs which the Newts will soon be laying. Lastly the slight increase in temperature this afternoon brought out a **Red Admiral at Brook Meadow** in Emsworth with one of the **Primroses** that are now starting to flower.

### Sat 7 February

#### Hoopoe in Dorset and Ravens nesting near Winchester

On Feb 5 there was an unexpected report of a **Hoopoe** at Piddlehinton in Dorset (where it was seen in a pub beer garden on Jan 8) and today a **Twite** was seen at Sandwich in Kent - the latter was one of only four currently being reported south of the Scottish border. It is unlikely that either of these species will be seen here in south Hampshire but there is a report of a female **Smew** at Fawley on Southampton Water. Another report that caught my eye was of a pair of **Ravens indulging in their tumbling display flights and carrying nest material** over Longwood Warren (at the foot of Cheesefoot Head east of Winchester). Another Raven in the news is the subject of a **superb Photo of one in the Portland area carrying a Brown Rat in its bill** - you can see it at [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_y3Ut8kQfcSc/VNVERqIWx1I/AAAAAAAAAB7Q/i6OfAVH44Vg/s1600/bp\\_raven\\_060215\\_2.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_y3Ut8kQfcSc/VNVERqIWx1I/AAAAAAAAAB7Q/i6OfAVH44Vg/s1600/bp_raven_060215_2.jpg).

My own sightings today came during a walk to Nore Barn and back and included a **Buzzard** soaring over the Pook Lane area and a **male Kestrel** (probably the one which has often nested in the Warblington Castle Tower) hunting over the farm fields east of the Castle. At Nore Barn **I did not see the Spotted Redshank** but a colour ringed Greenshank and a single Black-tailed Godwit were in the stream where it is usually seen. I saw these from the saltings adjacent to the stream - these were littered with **many white feathers which seemed to indicate the recent demise of a Swan**. Further out I noted a sign of spring when a **Redshank gave a fluttering display flight and raised its wings on landing**.

Walking back through the wood I had my third find this week of **Sweet Violets** in flower, these were close to the southern end of the Selangor Avenue path and at the northern end of the path by the exit gate onto the main road, a patch of **Dog's Mercury was flowering**.

### Fri 6 February

#### More Waxwings and a Garganey reported in the UK

I see that RBA reported a total of **42 Waxwings** in the UK on Feb 2 giving a minimum figure as the RBA total only shows those that were reported to RBA on that day. Considering the cold weather this seems a very low number - the only thing I have to compare it with is an estimated total of **2,500 birds here in October 2010** which was I think the most recent 'influx'. There have been reports of one or two in both Hampshire and Sussex earlier this winter so its still worth keeping an

eye out for them though it is my impression that there are very few berries left to attract them.

One other internet report that caught my eye today was of a single **Garganey** at Beddington Sewage Farm in Surrey on both Feb 1 and 5. Assuming this was not a mis-identification it is possible that the bird is a genuine early spring arrival (the species is always one of the first to arrive but not until the beginning of March!) - alternatively it may have been lulled into trying to overwinter here by the mild first half of the winter.

My own birds sightings today were limited to the **Green Sandpiper** in the Hermitage stream running through the Stockheath area of Leigh Park (interestingly it was **accompanied by a single Redshank**, something I have not seen in this stream before). I also enjoyed sunlit views of a **Grey Wagtail** in the canalised section of the Lavant/Langbrook stream immediately north of West Street in Havant. The only other note I brought home was of two **Sweet Violet flowers** seen beside the Petersfield Road just north of Havant College - the second spring flowering of this plant after the one in Wade Lane.

### Wed 4 February

#### Bedhampton, Budds Farm and Langstone Pond

On the morning of Feb 1 I walked around Havant in search of flowering plants and found 23 species including a single wild looking **Primrose** in Martin Hampton's 'Grove Conservation Area' (at the junction of Grove Road and Lower Grove Road) and a couple of **Common Whitlowgrass** in flower on the Petersfield Road edge where I was looking without success for Danish Scurvy Grass. Also in that area a single plant of **Cow Parsley** was in flower and on the way home I ticked the **Grey Alder** in the Prince George St carpark.. In the afternoon I got on my bike and added 7 more species starting with the **Sweet Violets** in Wade Lane, where **Winter Heliotrope** and **Butchers Broom** were flowering, before finding many young plants of **Dogs Mercury** flowering in Pook Lane and **Butterbur** and **Common Gorse** at Brook Meadow with just one plant of **White Deadnettle** seen en route.

I did not get out on Feb 2 though did hear my first **Coal Tit song** from a bird in the treetops along the Hayling Billy line passing my garden and I also stayed at home on Feb 3 to enjoy the brief spectacle of the snowfall.

Today glorious sunshine saw me walking to Bedhampton Mill, then down the Brockhampton Stream and along the shore to Budds Farm before coming home via Langstone Mill where the female **Goosander** was still present as was the **male Wigeon who was calling loudly** (the first time I have heard it) perhaps for the female, which I did not see, or perhaps in response to the call of nature which seems to have caused a considerable reduction of the wintering Wigeon in the harbours. Still thinking of the birds I saw there were **three Rock Pipits** on the shingle of the Budds Farm shore with two male **Goldeneye** out on the harbour and a single **Great Crested Grebe** in the mouth of the Hermitage stream. Earlier I had close views of a **Kingfisher** in the small pond of the industrial building on the west side of Brockhampton Road immediately north of the small roundabout at the west end of Solent Road in Havant.

My route aimed to include the outflow from the Bedhampton Water Works and I was not disappointed as I found my first flowering **Stream Water Crowfoot** of the year there but while walking through Havant before reaching the stream I had added **Creeping Buttercup** (one very tatty flower) and first signs of flowering on a

**Monterey Pine.** Nothing more until after I had had a look at the birds on Budds Farm pools - turning off Southmoor Lane onto the path across the South Moors I passed under the early flowering **Goat Willow** which overhangs the entrance kissing gate and which is now adorned with a mass of golden 'Pussy Paws'. A little further along this path I passed the first flowering **Hogweed** I have seen this month. This was the last new flower for my **February list which now has 33 species on it.**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 25 - FEB 1 (WEEK 5 OF 2015)**

**Sat 31 January**

### **Sweet Violets in flower and a pair of Mistle Thrush at Wade Court**

Despite the strong northerly wind I took a walk this morning across Langstone Bridge and around the Oyster Beds without adding anything new to my sightings of the month. Coming back over the bridge into the wind I had some reward for my effort in the form of **a Rainbow** as the sun began to emerge from the dark and somewhat damp clouds, and as I reached the more sheltered area of Wade Lane after passing Langstone Pond, where the sun started to warm the air, I enjoyed two signs of spring. In the pony field south of Wade Court **two Mistle Thrushes** were seen on the ground where Peter Raby had heard one of them singing on Jan 6 and I had heard two in flight making their football rattle calls on Jan 9. Today's sighting is pretty good proof that this pair intend to breed here again this year as they have in most recent years - maybe they already have young in a nest based on the evidence of a pair in Glasgow reported to have fledged young by Jan 13 this year.

My second sign of spring was even more unexpected and came further up the narrow lane - on the bank a clump of **Sweet Violet plants had three fully open flowers.**

One more sign of spring was seen on the internet when I came across the **first reported sighting of a White Wagtail** seen at Folkestone yesterday (Jan 30), presumably having just crossed the Channel as this species regularly does in the spring. A bird which has made a much longer journey to be seen on the south west shore of the Isle of Wight is the **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** which I reported yesterday as having been seen on Jan 25 - today I see it was seen again in the same area on Jan 30.

Also seen yesterday in Emsworth, despite the low temperature, was yet another restless **Red Admiral**. This sent me to check the other butterflies I have seen reported this month - the list of these reports has **10 Red Admiral sightings, 3 each of Brimstone and Peacock, plus two unexpected Small Tortoiseshells.**

**Fri 30 January**

### **By the Wind Sailor in Rye Bay**

The Rye Harbour website today has a very interesting contribution from Andy Dindsdale who was walking along Winchelsea beach earlier this week when he found what looked like a **Mussel shell with a cellophane wrapping attached to it**

**washed up on the tideline**. This was something that can occur in thousands on beaches washed by warm seas but is most unexpected on the shore of Sussex and especially at this time of year. It's scientific name is *Verella verella* but it is more usually called a '**By-the-wind-Sailor**'. For a photo and description of the species go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2015/1/30/by-the-wind-sailor.html> and use the link at the end of that account to see an account of the species in British water. The best way to find out **its extraordinary life-style** is to visit <http://www.planktonchronicles.org/en/episode/verella-planktonic-vessels> and start the video which lasts 2 mins 36 seconds

Another rare species in the news is an **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** seen in the Atherfield area of the Isle of Wight on Jan 25. I was made aware of the species by Jeff Goodridge's blog (<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/thefinancialbirder/>). To read the finder's account and see the **photos of the bird** go to <http://birdingfrontiers.com/2015/01/28/eastern-yellow-wagtail-3/>.

Another bird of interest in Hampshire is a **Waxwing** that was reported on Twitter to have been **seen in Lyminster on Jan 28** - this would be the first south coast sighting for 2015 though a couple were seen in Totton in December with others at Crawley in Sussex.

Another first for 2015 is news of **6 Common Frogs** (and a couple of Newts) seen this week in John Goodspeed's garden pond on Portsdown. Potential local news came in the Portsmouth NEWS a few days back which talked of rising ground level waters and **predicted that the Lavant stream** which rises at Idsworth and follows the railway down past Rowlands Castle and into Leigh Park **would soon be flowing**.

A contributor to John Goodspeed's news who reported a sighting of 8 Magpies on a roof in Old Portsmouth on Jan 25 commented that **a collective noun for Magpies was 'a tittering'**. I had not come across this one before but when I checked on the internet it was one of at least nine terms used to describe a group of Magpies. Another which I was unaware of but rather like is '**a conventicle**' - the others are **Congregation, Charm, Flock, Gulp, Murder, Tiding and Tribe**. My vote for best of these names goes to an **Implausibility of Gnus** while one that may have overtones for politicians as well as describing the animals is a **Coalition of Cheetahs**.

Brian Fellows' blog this evening raises the question of **how to tell whether a Blue Tit is male or female**. The photo taken by Malcolm Phillips to which this question relates (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x240-blue-tit-bm-MP-30.01.15.jpg>) may have a clue in what looks like a brood patch on the breast (other sources say that the female does all the brooding) but it seems rather early for the bird to be brooding eggs. Two ways of being certain are given by Google - the first is intended to help a Taxidermist answer the question by telling him how to dissect the dead specimen he is about to 'stuff' and check the bird's sex organs (see <http://www.taxidermyguide.com/posts/how-to-identify-the-sex-of-a-bird-for-taxidermy/>) but **the solution that appeals to me** is to first ask the question as to how a male Blue Tit distinguishes a female - Swedish scientists have looked at **the bright blue head crowns of Blue Tits under ultra-violet light** and find that it is then easy to distinguish male from female (for the original paper see <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/50813?sid=21105213635301&uid=3738032&uid=2&uid=4>).

**Thu 29 January**

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

## January bird song

With the end of January in sight I have been looking at the reports of bird song which I have come across during the month and here is my list of them in date order but please note that this is not to be taken as an accurate record for two good reasons - one is that I only see a minute fraction of the observations that are recorded, the other is that many birders do not bother to record bird song (or disguise it using the word 'heard' which could mean just a call note). Another factor is that several species were already singing regularly in December and even in my own records I do not record every date on which I heard a species singing after the first.

On Jan 1 I heard **Collared Dove** song but it was not until Jan 4 that I added **Wood Pigeon, Robin, Song Thrush, Great Tit and Stock Dove**. On Jan 5 full **Blackbird** song was heard in Brighton (and I heard one in subsong). On Jan 6 **Mistle Thrush** song was heard at Wade Court and **Duncock** is listed on Jan 9.

**Woodlark** song was heard at Broadway Warren near Tunbridge Wells on Jan 13 and I heard a **Cetti's Warbler** on Jan 15. A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was drumming in Gosport on Jan 16 and a **Grey Wagtail** was heard in the Itchen Valley on that same day with **Goldcrest and Marsh Tit** song heard on Jan 17. I have seven reports of **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** for the month and the first of these that mentions drumming comes from Mark Ash Wood in the New Forest on Jan 19 but the only other site reporting drumming was Redenham Park to the north west of Andover on Jan 27. Next on the list is the much commoner **Nuthatch** on Jan 23 followed by my own 'lifetime first' hearing of a **Long-tailed Tit** on Jan 25. Also on Jan 25 came the only report I have seen of **Treecreeper** song heard in the Kent Stour Valley while nearer home Jan 25 brought news of **Chaffinch** song from both Sandy Point on Hayling Island and from Durlston. On Jan 26 a **Coal Tit** was heard at Church Norton and on Jan 27 my list ends with a report of **Crossbill** song on Dartmoor. This gives me a count of **22 species already in song this year**.

[Tue 27 January](#)

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

## 75 Barnacle Geese fly over Havant on an unknown journey

Yesterday Peter Raby watched **75 Barnacle Geese flying west over Langstone** and on that same day the Sandwich Bird Observatory in east Kent reported an **incoming flock of 56 birds over Pegwell Bay**. Earlier in the month a flock of **31 had made a brief stop at Selsey Bill on Jan 1** before continuing west and **on Jan 6 a flock of 40 was at Rodden Hive** on the Dorset coast between Weymouth and Abbotsbury. None of these reports suggest a regular winter destination to which the birds were moving but they give me the impression of random movements influenced partly by weather and partly by the pressures of a growing population. They also seem to indicate that this species is a master of the vanishing trick. This last aspect was emphasised when I checked on the **growing population at the Wildlife Park at Seaview on the Isle of Wight** and read that .."the central part of the park is given over to the Barnacle Geese that return here every year to breed. At first there were only a pair that came and now over 200 arrive in the spring and leave in early autumn." I'm not sure when that was written but I feel sure I have heard reports of up to 300 Feral birds at the Park in recent years and have long wondered why none of them seem to be seen on the nearby mainland.

What I did not know was that these birds only visit the Isle of Wight for the breeding season leaving where they spend the rest of the year as a mystery. Perhaps they fly north to join the large numbers wintering in the Solway and Islay area - this is indicated by the statement on the [RSPB website that the UK Wintering population](#) consists of .. "58,000 from the Greenland breeding population, 33,000 from Svalbard in northern Russia and 3,000 from the feral UK populations". An indication of where the 900 pairs which the RSPB says breed in the UK can be found in a PDF giving results of a [1991 survey of the species by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust](#) - see [http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/NaturalisedGooseSurvey\\_1991.pdf](http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/NaturalisedGooseSurvey_1991.pdf). This survey is mainly concerned with Canada Geese and info on Barnacles does not come until Page 13 but to jump straight there use the Find function (CTRL F) and put '819 Barnacle Geese' in the search box. Interestingly this goes on to say that Hampshire had the third highest county total but the distribution map which follows (Find 'Figure 8') admits that info for the Isle of Wight is missing. The final source of information which I investigated was a [Police \(National Wildlife Crime Unit\) website](#) at <http://www.nwcu.police.uk/animal-of-the-month/barnacle-goose/> which tells us that Greenland breeding Barnacles winter on Islay while those from Svalbard head for the Solway. The main contribution from the Police is that .. "the barnacle goose, an amber-listed bird that has the full protection of the law and, unless under licence, must not be killed or injured."

I am not sure we are much nearer answering the question about where the Barnacles over Langstone (and those from the Isle of Wight) were heading but the most likely answer is that they were on a strange route to the Solway Firth.

**[Mon 26 January](#)**

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

### **Common Whitlowgrass and Butterbur both starting to flower**

This morning I could detect the white of tiny opening flower buds on two of the thousands of [Common Whitlowgrass plants](#) lining the stony edges of Waterloo Road and Prince George Street near the Havant Rail Station. At the moment the plants lie on the ground looking like tiny green starfish no more than two centimetres across (see [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-6iBfzWz3yL4/TVVHtSVbWwI/AAAAAAAAAqE/RqYwK6tAPt4/s1600/IMG\\_1520.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-6iBfzWz3yL4/TVVHtSVbWwI/AAAAAAAAAqE/RqYwK6tAPt4/s1600/IMG_1520.jpg)) but very soon tiny white flowers on relatively tall thin stems will shoot up to give this sort of image (see

[https://lensweb.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/common\\_whitlow\\_grass.jpg](https://lensweb.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/common_whitlow_grass.jpg)).

This afternoon I cycled to Brook Meadow in Emsworth in pursuit of [Butterbur](#) which Brian Fellows has found starting to flower and has featured on his blog at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x245-butterbur-sprout-1st-bm-25.01.15.jpg>. When I found this specimen I saw that it had already opened two minute star shaped florets and before long (after the cold at the end of this week!) will hopefully look like this

[http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/B/Butterbur/Butterbur\\_2008\\_03\\_31\\_Stalybridge\\_HarridgePike\\_Greenfield\\_012p1.jpg](http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/B/Butterbur/Butterbur_2008_03_31_Stalybridge_HarridgePike_Greenfield_012p1.jpg)). Later these flowers (which remind me

of lavatory cleaning brushes) will disappear below huge leaves like those shown at

[http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/B/Butterbur/Butterbur\\_2007\\_06\\_20\\_greenfield\\_Diggle\\_Mossley\)023p3.jpg](http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/B/Butterbur/Butterbur_2007_06_20_greenfield_Diggle_Mossley)023p3.jpg).

Butterbur is an interesting plant in many ways, perhaps the most intriguing being that **it occurs as separate male and female plants** with all those occurring in Hampshire (and most of southern England) being males (with the one exception of **a colony of female plants by the banks of the Langbrook Stream in Havant** which were introduced by landscape designers working for IBM when they acquired the land for their Havant manufacturing plant in 1968. The female plants are much taller and quite distinct from the males.

It is thought that the reason for male Butterbur colonies being quite common in southern England, despite the absence of the females, is that **they were introduced to provide early nectar for Bees** and they continue to attract early Bumble Bees. The **larvae of some Craneflies live in the roots** and **Butterbur is the larval foodplant of a moth called The Butterbur (Hydraecia petasitis)** which is described at <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?bf=2362>. I see the text of this webpage suggests that **the caterpillars of this moth are possibly cannabilistic** so if you want to rear them at home you should feed them on separate plants! One final aspect of this plant is that it has in the past been a recommended **cure for headaches and migraines** but it is now thought to **cause serious liver damage** - see <http://anh-europe.org/news/bye-bye-butterbur>.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 19 - 24 (WEEK 4 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 25 January**

#### **Long Tailed Tit song and Buzzard joins Crows chasing bread at Budds Farm**

This afternoon I walked down Southmoor Lane to Budds Farm intending to come home along the Southmoor shore and Langstone Pond but found that **the Southmoor shore path has been closed for seawall repairs** with barriers at the end of Southmoor Lane and just south of the Langstone Mill lane bridge so you cannot access the mouth of the Langbrook stream. Notices say this will remain in force for no more than three weeks. You can of course still use the field path from Mill Lane to Southmoor lane and the Langbrook stream path north of Mill Lane.

At the start of my walk I had a brief look at the Havant Town Millpond where I saw **no Water Voles** but did meet a photographer there hoping to get some pictures - he told me he had in the past seen as many as four Water Voles in the pond. Crossing Park Road South I kept my eyes open for **Danish Scurvy Grass** and spotted a single flower - maybe the cold weather forecast for the coming week will see gritters spreading salt on the roads to restore the marine environment on which these plants rely.

Along the path north of the Havant Technology Park I heard **what sounded a little like Blue Tit song though something about it was not quite right** - it was too rhythmic and sounded almost mechanical. I soon spotted the birds from which the sound was coming and they were all **Long-Tailed Tits**. This evening I found a Youtube video which confirms that what I heard was their song - something I have never knowingly heard for myself in my 84 years! We are all familiar with the

normal rattling contact call of these birds but **the song is much quieter and higher pitched with a rhythmic "tsee tsee tsee tsee" sound**. You can hear it among the normal contact calls in the video at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBGp25R6nBY>

At Budds Farm half a dozen male Pochard were prominent but there was nothing out of the ordinary until something disturbed the mass of gulls on the settling tanks and I found it was caused by **a group of Crows chasing one of their number which had a large white object in its bill** (perhaps a chunk of bread). Looking amongst the chasers I found that one of them was **a Buzzard, presumably so hungry that he too wanted the bread**. The Crows too thought the bread was number one priority but from time to time they would feel obliged to turn on the Buzzard which would respond by temporarily perching on whatever part of the sewage works equipment was nearest but when the Crows returned to their chase of the bread the Buzzard would follow them. This went on for some time and I never saw the outcome.

Nothing unusual at Langstone Pond (other than the absence of last years Cygnets) but I reckon there were at least a dozen Egrets roosting there compared to the maximum count of seven that I would have expected in previous winters.

## Sat 24 January

### Today in Havant plus news from the internet

A short walk around Havant today found a **notable increase in the number of Lesser Celandine flowers (now 20 fully open)** in Juniper Square but still no hint of flowers on Common Whitlowgrass or Danish Scurvygrass despite a good show of leaf growth. An unexpected sighting was of a **Water Vole** scurrying home from a foraging expedition in the old Havant Mill Pond viewed from Park Road South over the wavy white railings. This sighting was different from previous views in that **the Vole was only seen swimming fast underwater** from the now much nibbled Water Cress to the grass mound on the far side of the pond in which the Voles have several well used tunnels, then shooting up the bank and into what seems to be a new tunnel further from the road. Because of the underwater swimming and the speed of its exit from the water and into its burrow I could not swear that what I saw was a Vole and not a Rat (Rats can also swim underwater though, like Voles, they normally swim on the surface) but I think the odds are on it having been a Vole - I don't think Rats eat Water Cress and this animal appeared to come from the Water Cress which is now looking as if something has been having a goodchew at it.

Back at my computer the most unexpected report was of a **Red Cage (Clathrus ruber) fungus** seen at Durlston yesterday (Jan 23). If you are not familiar with this striking species see

[https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2317/1541981591\\_597f958cd0.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2317/1541981591_597f958cd0.jpg).

More local reports are of **a Black-headed Gull already wearing a full face mask**, seen at Eastney by Jeff Goodridge on Jan 24 - for Jeff's photo see

[http://www.surfbirds.com/community-](http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/thefinancialbirder/files/2015/01/P1260070.jpg)

[blogs/thefinancialbirder/files/2015/01/P1260070.jpg](http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/thefinancialbirder/files/2015/01/P1260070.jpg). A couple of day's earlier at least **5 pairs of Mandarin Duck were seen in flooded woodland at Sothwick** (north foot of Portsdown Hill) on Jan 22 and on Jan 21 there was an encouraging report of a **pre-roost gathering of around 100 Greenfinch at Southampton Docks** -

presumably this species, which has been almost non-existent here in the south so far this winter, is being pushed south by the onset of winter. Another **hint of the imminent arrival of more Fieldfares** comes from the Netherlands where Trektellen today reports to first big flocks that I am aware of - one site had a flock of 6000 and another reported 3395

Another hard weather visitor which has been hard to find in the south so far this winter has been **Brambling** but a flock of 70 at Leith Hill in Surrey on Jan 23 may presage the arrival of more in local woods. Despite the cold today's sunshine brought the first report I have seen of **Marsh Tit song**, heard by Cliff Dean at Pett on Rye Bay while Ampfield Woods near Romsey brought what is described as spring **song from three Nuthatches** plus the **drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker** (not the first of the year)

Yesterday the Folkestone website reported **an unwelcome visitor, a Mink** - the only good aspect of this news is that it is the first I have heard of for a long time - maybe these non-native predators are succumbing to the attempts to eradicate them. Much more welcome news from Folkestone, also dated Jan 23, was a sighting of **7 Great White Egrets emerging from a night roost** - this is the biggest 'flock' I have heard of so far and may be another sign the Great White Egrets are about to follow the lead of the Little Egrets and become a common sight in southern England. Finally a **Little Egret in the Lymbourne Stream** by the Hayling Billy Trail south of the Havant Bypass has got into Brian Fellows Emsworth Blog with a photo of it taken by Christopher Evans **holding a small rodent in its bill** after catching it on the bank of the stream. Christopher says that the Egret had no difficulty in swallowing this welcome item of winter food. For the photo see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x247-little-egret-rodent-CE-23.01.15.jpg>.

## Fri 23 January

### Surprising info from Winterwatch

I was intrigued by two things that I saw on last night's **Winterwatch TV programme** - one was **the surprising behaviour of Flame Shells creating an almost tropical 'coral reef' type environment in Scottish waters**, the other was the statement that **Common Shrews**, which I had previously thought had to eat several times each hour, **were surviving at high altitudes in the Scottish mountains in very cold weather** when very little food was available to them. Chris Packham told us that **they do so by shrinking not only their internal organs but even the size of their bone structure** and so reducing their metabolism and need for food (as if they had entered a state of hibernation while remaining awake and active). Today I have found confirmation of what he said in a webpage at <http://www.mammal.org.uk/species-factsheets/Common%20shrew> (see the General Ecology section of this page).

When I heard about the **reef building of the Flame Shell** I thought this this must be a new species which had only recently arrived in the British Isles but my investigations today show that the species has long been known and is listed in my 1985 Country Life Guide to the Seashore and Shallow Seas of Britain and Europe, though under a different name - **Gaping File-shell (Lima hians)** - than the current name of **Limaria hians** and what appears to be a media name of **Flame Shell**. Whether it is an effect of changing sea conditions or the availability of modern underwater cameras I do not know but **the species seems to have leapt**

in media prominence in the past few years following a survey in 2012 of the water between Skye and the Scottish mainland - see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-20838775>. Another video well worth watching is at <http://vimeo.com/99329566>

## Tue 20 January

### Two new birds for my Year list

Late this morning I took a walk to Nore Barn using the footpath going south from the A259 along the eastern edge of Warblington Farm having included a pair of secateurs in my haversack in case I needed to cut my way through the path side vegetation if I encountered deep water covering the path well above my ankles (as was the case last winter). Today the sun was shining though the air was cold and after passing the first bridge I found a lot of work had been done to improve the path. Thick bramble growth along the west side of the path had been cut down, the ditch on the east side had been cleared and deepened, and the path surface had been improved with a layer of stone chippings.

Soon a band of volunteers came in sight continuing the bramble clearance and learnt from them that the work was directed by an Emsworth local called Jonathan Roberston who had organised the project in full consultation with English Nature and Havant Borough Council, who own the farmland, and Henry Young the farmer. I was delighted to see these people not only making the path usable but also doing it in a way that should make it more attractive to wildlife (though it is unlikely to bring back all the species that could be found here in the 1980s such as the **Turtle Doves** and **Tree Sparrows** which have suffered a national decline, nor the bring back the **Rooks** which nested around the farm but which are now reduced to one Rookery behind the flats across the Selangor Avenue/Victoria Road join opposite Emsworth Primary School.

Talking to Tony Gutteridge, who led the BTO Common Bird Census of the Farm for some 25 years (and in which I participated for most of that time), I found that he will be supplying the project with bird information and I will make them aware of a couple of plant species that they may not be aware of - **Bog Stitchwort** and the **Great Horsetail** which grow in the area which they intend to work on. Neither of these species is a rarity but this is the only area where I have ever found them in the Havant area. Another plant which I look forward to seeing each spring on the side of this path is the **Wild Strawberry**.

Reaching the southern end of the path without encountering any serious flooding I turned east to the stream flowing past the Maisemore Gardens housing into the bay where the regular **Spotted Redshank** can be found though I did not expect to see it today as I arrived before the high Spring Tide had begun to ebb so after a few minutes rest on one of the benches I was startled to hear the **loud 'Chew-it' call** of the bird returning to its favourite feeding area and to watch it start seraching for food at the tideline. Not only was this the first time I have ever heard this particular bird call but I had the impression that it arrived from upstream where it may continue looking for food during the high tide period.

Soon after the arrival of the Spotted Redshank I saw another bird much closer to me in the grass near the Picnic Table which I saw well through my binoculars but was still unable to make up my mind as to whether it was a Rock Pipit or a Meadow Pipit. The first thing that struck me was that it was alone and looked larger than a Meadow Pipit but it did not have the dark plumage and black legs of

a Rock Pipit. On the other hand when I approached it and put it to flight it did not fly steeply upward and give the sharp calls of a Meadow Pipit but flew away fairly low and silently. My guess is that it was a **Rock Pipit** but I am not confident enough to add it to my year list which still lacks the species. For anyone not familiar with separating Rock, Meadow and Water Pipits there is a good BTO video on the subject at <http://www.bto.org/about-birds/bird-id/bto-bird-id-water-pipit-and-rock-pipit>

Heading home I first walked along the waterside path of Nore Barn Wood (in which I had found a good display of Sulphur Tuft fungi on my way out) and just after turning north at the west end of the wood I was struck by the display of Lichens on a twin trunk old tree at the edge of the wood - I think this shows a **positive improvement in the air quality in recent years**.

One thing that I have not yet mentioned is that just before I reached Nore Barn wood while I was still on the Selangor Avenue path a **Buzzard** took off from trees just inside the Farm to give me a 75th tick on my year list and as I reached Warblington Cemetery on the Church Path across the fields I added **Greenfinch** to the list to bring me up to 76. There were several Greenfinch and with them were at least half a dozen Chaffinches of both sexes in the Cemetery area. My final note was of a pair (not a small flock) of **Long-tailed Tits** in trees near the Old Rectory which ties in with a report of a pair already nest building at Brook Meadow today.

**Mon 19 January**

### **Three New Flowers**

This afternoon I walked from East Street up Bellair Road and in a garden on the left near the end I was surprised to find a tall shrub (more than six feet tall) with fresh tough looking green leaves and small clusters of bright yellow flowers. The shape of the flowers and the pinnate leaves suggested that it was a member of the Pea family. Back at home I consulted Google and feel fairly confident that this was a **Siberian Pea Tree (*Caragana arborescens*)** which does grow in the UK and matches what I saw (see [http://www.perverdonk.com/wild%20flowers/Peas/Siberian%20Peashrub/200605051000%20Siberian%20Peashrub%20\(Caragana%20arborescens\)%20-%20Troy,%20Oakland%20Co.JPG](http://www.perverdonk.com/wild%20flowers/Peas/Siberian%20Peashrub/200605051000%20Siberian%20Peashrub%20(Caragana%20arborescens)%20-%20Troy,%20Oakland%20Co.JPG)). Two contrary features were that the species is supposed to be deciduous and to flower in May.

Another first flower was seen in the entrance to the Prince George Street carpark. By its long newly open catkins and small cones from last year I am pretty sure this is a **Grey Alder** (not the Common Alder which can be found around Langstone Mill Pond where it will not open its catkins for some time).

Another prominent garden shrub which has recently started to open its catkins is the **Silk Tassel Bush (*Garrya elliptica*)** see [https://apps.rhs.org.uk/Advice/ACEImages//RHS\\_WSY0034279\\_819338.jpg](https://apps.rhs.org.uk/Advice/ACEImages//RHS_WSY0034279_819338.jpg). I first noticed this a few days ago after using the underpass from Havant Park into the retail park on the west side of Park Road North. As you emerge into the retail park there is a line of these shrubs along the foot of the road embankment on the east side of the shoppers car-park.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 12 - 18 (WEEK 3 OF 2015)**

**Fri 16 January**

### **Signs of Spring**

Yesterday I walked to Budds Farm and back and, despite getting caught in a fierce rain squall while crossing the exposed sea wall of the South Moors, I noticed a couple of signs of Spring. The first was that in the Budds Farm area I heard **four different Song Thrushes in full song**, the second came in Mill Lane at Langstone where a **Mimosa tree was newly in flower** in a garden just east of the road into the Harbourside housing while the last garden in the Lane before reaching the main road to Hayling had a clump of **Summer Snowflake in flower**. If you are not familiar with this look at

<http://www.srgc.org.uk/bulblog/log2007/020507/Leucojum%20aestivum.jpg> and note the green tips to the tepals (combined petals+sepals) which distinguish this from the Three Cornered Leek which has green lines running down the tepals - see [http://s0.geograph.org.uk/photos/16/14/161416\\_9823bca4.jpg](http://s0.geograph.org.uk/photos/16/14/161416_9823bca4.jpg)

Another cause for optimism that winter is on the way out is that tomorrow (Jan 17) the time of Sunrise is 07:59, the first time it is earlier than 08:00 since just before Christmas, but more obvious signs of Spring come from Peter Raby's observation a week ago (Jan 9) of **Hérons refurbishing their three nests at Langstone Mill Pond with birds now sitting on all three**. On Jan 13 Brian Fellows blog carried a photo of **Blue Tits investigating a nest box** at Brook Meadow and yesterday I was asked by a non-birder why he was seeing **two Robins happily feeding side by side on his bird table** (this question was prompted by his understanding that no Robin would tolerate the close presence of another) - my answer was that they would have been a pair though the female may not build her nest until March - see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/r/robin/nesting.aspx>

My only outing today was to Staunton Country Park to have another look at the trees which had dropped the mass of woody 'catkins' which had led me to wonder if they were Golden Larch though that guess seemed unlikely as the trees show no sign of autumn gold foliage nor dropping that foliage for the winter. Thanks to a suggestion from Matthew Parratt of the Forestry Commission and confirmed by what I saw today I am now pretty certain the trees are **Cedars of Lebanon**.

### **Wed 14 January**

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

#### **My Cemeteries page now updated**

A brief note today to say that the results of my visits to Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and St Faith's Church in Havant are now on my website - to see them go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and select the latest links to the three sites

Later in the day I began to catch up on my regular sources of web info and I must mention a couple of highspots. First is news from Peter Raby that **three Heron's nests at Langstone Mill Pond now have sitting birds** and second is in the Butterfly reports telling me that **both male and female Brimstones have been seen** (on Jan 9 and 10) in addition to the Red Admirals. There have also been two reports of Small Tortoiseshell but these are probably insects disturbed from hibernation.

### **Mon 12 January**

#### **A new lead in the mystery of the Staunton Country Park conifers**

On Dec 5 I was puzzled by finding what seemed to be woody 'catkins' lying below some tall old conifers in the park and on January 6 I revisited the site and obtained a sample of the foliage which, together with the catkins, **suggested that the trees were Golden Larch (*Pseudolarix amabilis*)** but if they were the foliage

should have turned from green to gold in the autumn and to have fallen from the trees by the year end. I then referred this puzzle to Martin Rand, the BSBI recorder for South Hampshire and he passed the query to Matthew Parratt, a tree expert in the Forestry Commission. Today his response was that **the trees were more likely to be a species of Cedar (Lebanon or Deodar)** and this would answer the puzzle over the trees failure to drop its leaves or to change colour. It would also explain the failure to drop its leaves and the fact that the 'catkins' (properly called Strobili) were larger than and appeared later than those of the Golden Larch. For final confirmation of the species I need to return to the site with camera and binoculars to obtain photos of the trees and to search their branches for female cones which differ in shape between the two Cedar species.

An interesting report on the SOS website for Jan 11 suggests that somewhere in Sussex (location deliberately withheld) there is currently **a night roost of up to 60 Ravens**. Another observation reported on the Christchurch Harbour website for Jan 10 is a photo which you can see at

[http://chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2015/January%202015/Turnstone\\_100115.jpg](http://chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2015/January%202015/Turnstone_100115.jpg) of a one footed Turnstone which has been seen in the area on several occasions and which seems to cope well with its disability. I am pretty sure that

**the foot will have been lost when the bird accidentally trod on the open shell of a shellfish (such as a Clam)** which thought some food had come into its 'mouth' and so closed its shell rapidly before the 'food' could get away. I have heard that this sort of injury affects quite a few waders, particularly when they are feeding in the dark as they have to do when hungry and the low tide occurs by night. I can't remember the year in which **a similar accident occurred to a Gull at Langstone**.

The bird was seen to be in difficulty and a boat went out to catch the gull (which could not take off as the heavy shellfish was still attached to its foot). The Gull was caught and brought back into the kitchen of the Royal Oak where a special hammer designed for cracking open Crab claws was used to break the grip of the shellfish and so free the Gull which then flew off without permanent damage.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 5 - 11 (WEEK 2 OF 2015)**

### **Sun 11 January**

#### **I visit the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries plus St Faith's churchyard for my January wildlife round-up**

My first visit was to Havant Cemetery in the morning sunshine and before reaching the Eastern Road entrance I was photographing **Lesser Celandines** flowering outside the wall at the New Lane junction and as soon as I did enter the gate I was confronted with **Snowdrops** and the **first (unopen) Crocus flowers**. More Snowdrops planted at the central Holocaust memorial were accompanied by **an attractive white flowered Hellebore named H. niger** but commonly known as a **Christmas Rose**. Returning to the Eastern Road wall I re-found the **small White Coral fungus (Clavulinopsis cristata)** which I had discovered on Boxing Day. Entering the St Faith's area I could find no trace of the mass of red Holly Berries that have been dominant here, confirming the impression that the birds have

already exhausted the supply of winter food that was available here but the **Yew Trees were heavy with their stock of pollen sacs** which look nearly ready to burst open. Continuing into the Dissenters section the **Mahonia bush** by the gate was just starting to flower and a big **Bay tree was laden with many white flower buds** which had attracted a **queen White-tailed Bumblebee (Bombus lucorum)** which seemed to be searching for nectar but I very much doubt she was finding any. While in this cemetery I heard **bird song from Blue Tit, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Wren and Great Tit** plus the loud clamour of the Herring Gulls that will soon be nesting on the nearby factory rooves.

Back at home I warmed up with a cup of coffee and some toast before getting on my bike to ride to Warblington where the usual flock of Crows that usually greet my arrival in the Cemetery Extension were showing signs of being already paired. Looking round for wild flowers my choice was limited to White and Red Dead-Nettle plus Daisies but walking along the northern hedge I found **many Elder bushes already had fresh leaf shoots** several inches long. In the old Cemetery more **Snowdrops** were in flower and the first **Daffodils** were starting to open their flowers though they were outclassed by a couple of bunches of Florist's Daffodils placed at one grave. Nearing the east end I watched **a Blackbird chasing a Song Thrush** along the ground, presumably in defence of its already established breeding territory and I also heard **Song Thrush song** so maybe it too is paired and starting to think of nesting. As I reached the eastern hedge a **Green Woodpecker** flew into the hedge trees and as I made my way back west I took a photo of the tree hole which was once an active Green Woodpecker nest. Near that decaying tree I had a look at another which is now no more than **a rotting stump and found a couple of Pluteus cervinus toadstools** growing from its base.

Nearing the west end I came on the **feather's of a Wood Pigeon covering the ground** and the fact that the points of the quills were intact told me they had been plucked out by a bird (possibly a Peregrine) - had it been killed by a Fox the tips of the quills would have been bitten off. Looking up from this scene I found the **sky full of Brent Geese** which had been disturbed from the field south of the Old Rectory and many of them were settling on the field just beyond the Cemetery hedge. As well as photographing them I was very pleased to get shots of both **Song Thrush** and **Blackbird** on the ground within the Cemetery. To end this visit I took close-up shots of **Mosses starting to hold up their spore bearing organs** on the Warblington Church wall and if you want to become an expert of the reproductive system used by mosses in one minute flat go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcWYAnmm-QE>.

With clouds now covering the sun I took a brief walk round St Faith's churchyard where my photos were of a **variety of lichens** on the old wall of the path passing Homewell House where I also got quite a good shot of a **Robin** which came to see what I was doing. Turning up Homewell Street still outside the churchyard I also got a couple of reasonable shots of a **Grey Wagtail** searching the roadway for food. Very little of interest in the Churchyard though I did take a picture of the reddening buds developing on the Lime tree shoots.

It will take a little time to sort out the 86 photos taken today and to add the text to make my Cemeteries pages look presentable but they should be online within a few days.

**Sat 10 January**

### **More flowering plants and an unexpected fungus**

On Jan 14 last year I took the photo shown below of the first buds of **Common Whitlowgrass** appearing by the pavement of Waterloo Road in Havant (the last road joining North Street before it enters the Rail station forecourt) and as I was there today I had a good look for this year's flowers but found none though there was a fair show of the tiny plants - hopefully the delightful little flowers will appear within the coming week.

Last year's flower buds on Common Whitlowgrass.

This afternoon I set out to find flowers on **Dog's Mercury** in Pook Lane and was more successful - lots of small fresh plants showing their male flowers under a canopy of the leaves of last year's fully grown plants but before reaching Pook Lane I found a much more unexpected plant in flower at the junction of the Emsworth Road and Bellair Road - this was **Sticky Groundsel** still bearing several fresh flowers. Still walking east along the Emsworth Road and nearing the traffic lights at the junction with Southleigh Road, I not only saw several **Lesser Celandine** flowers but also found **Cow Parsley** in flower.

I went as far as Warblington Cemetery before heading back along Church Lane and then the spur road passing the Old Rectory and it was here that I found an unexpected fungus hidden in the roadside grass. My first impression when I saw it was that I was looking at some fallen leaves which happened to have an unusually bright red/brown colour but when I pulled these 'leaves' up out of the grass I found they were **False Chanterelle (*Hygrophoropsis autantiaca*)** which you can see at [https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4013/4712598894\\_bb4d5f63b2.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4013/4712598894_bb4d5f63b2.jpg). They had a very pleasant smell which you cannot get from the photo!

Today's flower finds bring my list for the month up to 34 species which is good for January and I may add to it tomorrow when I hope to take advantage of some sunshine to get round the local cemeteries to make my monthly visits.

**Fri 9 January**

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

### **Thirty flowering plants, a couple of fungi and a pair of Mistle Thrush at Wade Court plus news of the first Brent heading back to Russia**

Having seen most of the bird species that I am likely to come across locally I am now concentrating on the **wild plants currently in flower** and walks yesterday and today have found **30 species** among which some of the more unexpected have been **Meadow Buttercup** and **Mugwort** with the first white flowerbud of **Stream Water Crowfoot** poking up from the Havant Homewell Spring today. I expected to see the **Golden 'Pussypaws' of Goat Willow** on the tree overhanging the kissing gate entrance to the South Moors from Southmoor Lane, which I did, but I also found several of the buds open on a tree in a Havant Grove Road backgarden overhanging the 'Twittens'. Also seen today were my first **Velvet Shank fungus** on a tree where Langstone Mill Lane meets the Langbrook Stream and group of **Lycoperdon pyriforme puffballs** on the bank of the unsurfaced section of Wade

Lane. After seeing the latter I was heading up the Wade Lane roadway and had just passed the last house on the east side in the Wade Court area when a familiar football rattle sound attracted my attention to a **Mistle Thrush** flying strongly into the wind to pass over Wade Court, **followed by a second bird making the same unmistakeable call**. These were not only new to my Yearlist but strongly suggested that the Mistle Thrush which Peter Raby heard singing here on Jan 6 has a mate and once again intends to breed here. Also seen in the Langstone Pond/Wade Court area today was a total of 14 Little Egrets, more than I expect in January though a cold snap still to come may well send many of them inland. Also seen there by Peter Raby today were two **Hérons starting to build their nests..**

Back in Havant after today's walk I found a large number of cars parked in the southern section of the carpark on the Billy Line below the East Street bridge, adding to the signs that the building above the carpark on its west side is now coming into use by the firm called 'Livelink' which has taken it on as their base so when I got home I checked their website at <http://www.livelinktechnology.net/> to find that they are in the business of selling 'photo-booth' type machines which can be installed in shops to provide a service of creating cards to your own design - they also provide an online service so that you can design the cards from your own home. I may not be describing their offer very well but you can read about it for yourself by going to <http://www.livelinktechnology.net/>. It appears that some of the staff in these East St offices will provide a call centre to support their business.

Returning to wildlife matters the Dungeness website tell me that **the first Brent Geese have already started to fly east** towards their breeding grounds. The first few were seen on Jan 4 followed by 250 on Jan 7 and 100 on Jan 8. This early start is normal - in 2014 362 Brent were seen heading east on Jan 1 with 200 more on Jan 4. Other items of interest that I spotted on the internet today were that the first **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** to be reported this year was seen visiting garden feeders in Hove on Jan 7 while in north Hampshire a **Wood Duck** got a first mention on a farm pond near Basingstoke. From the Kent side of Rye Bay at Broomhill Level comes a sighting of **60 Tree Sparrows** on Jan 6 while on Jan 5 another of the Wiltshire **Great Bustards** was seen at Wyke Down in north east Dorset. January has also produced five more sightings of **Red Admiral butterflies** including one seen in Portsmouth on Jan 6 and another in Emsworth on Jan 9. Few butterflies are seen in the winter but a relatively large number of moths can be found by those who have the equipment to attract and trap them but they can also be found by chance and Brian Fellows has today published a photo of one found on a wall of Emsworth railway station which I am pretty sure is a **male December Moth**. My guess that it is a male is based on the broad antennae which males depend on to track down females by the pheromones they give off. My guess as to the name is based on the December Moth being one of the most numerous species at this time of year and by comparing Brian's photo at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x260-moth-mystery-rail-CF-06.01.15.jpg> with photos on the UK and Hants Moths websites (note that both these websites give you a set of images to look at so if the main image presented when you visit the site is not convincing you can replace it with others - with UK Moths you click the smaller images to select them, with Hants Moths you click the left or right arrows below the main image. The links are to

<http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/1631.php> and to <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=3897>.

### **Wed 7 January**

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

#### **Dusky Warbler at Chichester lakes and Hooded Crow at Portland**

I see that the top scores so far reported as achieved by Sussex birders in **New Year Bird Races** are given by Val Bentley as 103, 97, 88 and 84 while IoW listers achieved 87, 83 and 77. If any Hampshire scores have been published I have failed to spot them but I do know that my own yearlist to date has 71 species on it, not including the **Dusky Warbler** found by Ads Bowley at the East Trout Lake at Chichester on Jan 5 and still present today (Jan 7). To get an idea of the calls which are likely to be the first indication of its presence listen to the brief sound recording of the bird that was at Portland in November - go to [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/sf\\_dusky\\_warbler\\_051106.mp3](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/sf_dusky_warbler_051106.mp3) and for a video showing the bird but with lots of background noise try <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSBRD-IA2Mo> and for more choice and a map of the global distribution of the bird followed by a long list of sound recordings (the first was made in Holland and lasts for over a minute) go to <http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Phylloscopus-fuscatus>. If you go to Chichester the reports so far suggest that the **South West corner of the East Trout Lake** is a good place to start your search but that the bird is mobile and shows well at times.

A bird that has fond memories for me of seeing it on the North Kent coast when I was at school at Canterbury in the late 1940s is **Hooded Crow** and if you want to know what one looks like there is a good video of the bird that has been in the Portland area for several months. To see it among a large flock of Carrion Crows go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-hQEUI3MOE>.

Finally, if you do go to the Chichester Lakes keep an eye open for a **pair of Great Crested Grebes already practicing their spring 'weed dance'** which was seen there today.

### **Tue 6 January**

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

#### **Six more species for my bird yearlist and a puzzling conifer in the Staunton Country Park**

The news on Brian Fellows website last night that Peter Raby had found a female **Goosander** on Langstone Mill Pond persuaded me to put on my over-trousers in anticipation of rain on this dull morning and set off for the pond in the hope that the Goosander was still present and luckily it was. Peter Raby was also back at the pond and told me that he had heard two other birds that I still want for my yearlist but did not hear today - one was a **Cetti's Warbler song** at the pond and the other was **Mistle Thrush song** in the pony field north of the pond.

From Langstone I cycled back up the Billy Trail where I was lucky enough to find a **Grey Wagtail** in the Lymbourne Stream before I continued north into Leigh Park in the hope of seeing Lesser Blackback near the shopping centre (another of Peter Raby's finds). No luck with the gull but I continued north to the Staunton Country Park to have another look at the **tall old conifers that had puzzled me on Dec 5** when I found a mass of what looked like 5cm long 'catkins' under these trees but could not at that time find any species that fitted the very brief mental description that I brought home. Before reaching the free access part of the

Country Park a finch sized bird flew across the road ahead on and through a hedge into the fee payment section showing a very bold white rump and I was sufficiently convinced to add it to my yearlist as a **Bullfinch**.

The trees in question are a group of five which are the last trees to be found as you leave the high ground above the lake and follow the track downhill into Hammonds Land Coppice and then on round the Gipsies Plain fields to Havant Thicket. All the trees are tall (my guess would be 100 feet) with fairly level branches starting well above my head height, making it difficult to get a look at the foliage and any flowers/fruits/cones that they might bear. The trunks have bark with deep crevices breaking the surface into 'plates' - see <http://davisla3.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/pseudolarix-amabilis-bark.jpg> and luckily I was able to find one sample of the foliage which you can see at <http://cdn1.arkive.org/media/34/3470D913-7C0E-4104-ADB5-9D7CC473B6C5/Presentation.Large/Close-up-of-golden-larch-leaves.jpg>. Below are my own photos of the sample of foliage that I brought home plus one of the 'catkins' lying under the tree.

My sample of foliage.

My sample 'catkin'.

I started my search for a species name with the key to conifers in Alan Mitchell's Field Guide to the Trees of Britain and this led me directly to the **Golden Larch** (*Pseudolarix amabilis*) of which the description satisfied my observation of the general structure and size of these mature trees and of the bark and foliage but told me nothing about the 'catkins' though some of the photos I came across on the internet seemed to be of tiny versions. The internet also indicated that I am not alone in having problems with this tree - one website said it could not give a Conservation Status because the available information was 'Data Deficient' and when I looked at the species Description on the ARKIVE page for the species it said .. 'We are working on this and will publish when we have the information'. One other major puzzle about this tree is that the tree is called the 'Golden Larch' because its foliage is supposed to turn from green to golden in the autumn and then shed its leaves as other Larch species do but there was no hint of either colour change or leaf fall on any of these trees so I may be totally wrong in thinking it is this *Pseudolarix* species but so far I can find no other species which matches the feature I have seen.

This afternoon the sun came out and I took advantage of it to cycle along the shore from Langstone to Nore Barn ticking **Pintail**, **Knot** and **Greenshank** en route.

**Mon 5 January**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Blackbird subsong in thanks for garden compost spreading plus more interest from the internet**

Rather than go birding on this dull morning I stayed at home to take down the Christmas Tree, then made a short walk to return a copy of the excellent new "Birds of Sussex" book to Tony Gutteridge from whom I had borrowed it before Christmas. In my own garden I heard my local **Song Thrush in full song** and in Tony's garden, where I found him and his wife working hard in their well kept and flower rich garden, I had the greater pleasure of hearing **continuous subsong from**

a very tame Blackbird showing his thanks for the good meal he expected to get from the mature compost that was being spread. While chatting to Tony we watched three Long-tailed Tits passing through the garden and Tony added one new bird to my yearlist when he pointed out a Green Woodpecker in a tall but dying Acacia tree in a nearby garden (the same tree in which he had last summer shown me the only Turtle Dove that I saw in the year). Before heading home I extended my walk around Havant but only found one new Lesser Celandine flowering in Juniper Square.

Back at home I continued my trawl of southern bird websites, finding that David Hale on the Isle of Wight had clocked up 75 species on Jan 1 (including Coal Tit, Shag, Gannet and Great Skua which no one had mentioned previously in my scan). Next site in my scan was Portland which added an unexpected entry in the form of a Diamond-back moth found in the Observatory moth trap on Jan 1 (the first migrant moth of the year there).

Yesterday I explored the differences between Tundra and Taiga Bean Geese and today I had to make a similar effort to sort out the differences between the relatively common White Front Goose and the much less common Greenland White Front (my use of 'much less common' only relates to my experience of them in southern England - the RSPB estimates of the winter populations in Britain are 13,000 Greenland birds, mainly in Ireland and West Scotland, against only 2,400 of the European birds) when I came on a report of one of the Greenland birds at Rodden Hive near The Fleet in Dorset. For a comprehensive account of the differences go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater\\_white-fronted\\_goose](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_white-fronted_goose) and scroll down to the section on "Differences between European and Greenland birds" where I noticed that the apparently easy way of separating them on bill colour is only helpful when looking at young birds - in adults it is more difficult to apply.

The first butterflies of 2015 have now been reported in Sussex with two sightings of Red Admiral on Jan 2 plus a more unexpected sighting of a Small Tortoiseshell in Mountfield Churchyard on that day

From Brian Fellows news for today I see that Peter Raby has made another major find on Langstone Mill Pond with a female Goosander, maybe the same bird which he found there in March of 2014 and pointed out to me on March 29 though he had seen it earlier on Mar 21. Today it soon flew out into the harbour but I am hoping it will again stay for a few days to let me get it on my yearlist. Peter also found a Kingfisher perched by the outflow of the Lymbourne stream alongside Langstone Mill (in past winters this has been a regular Kingfisher fishing perch but this is the first time one has been reported there this winter).

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 29 - JAN 4 (WEEK 1 OF 2015)

### Sun 4 January

#### Seven birds added to my 2015 list and more news from Hampshire and Sussex

I spent the morning cycling to the Oysterbeds and then to the Thorney Deeps, adding seven species to my 2015 list to bring it up to 64 but it still lacks Greenshank and Pintail among other local species. I have also been investigating

the **two varieties of Bean Goose** as well as reading that only 40 **Ruddy Duck** are still alive in this country and that it costs around £3,000 to kill each of them. Starting with my own day the first new birds came as Langstone Harbour came in sight from the cycle track leading to Langstone Bridge. Here, on the water off the Langbrook Stream mouth, were plenty of **Merganser** and out beyond them were a pair of **Goldeneye**. Next sighting was a bonus **Kingfisher** at the Oysterbeds where I could not see any Grebes out on the harbour but in the high tide roost on the outer (western) bund I clearly saw at least half a dozen **Ringed Plover** but the best was yet to come as I followed the waterside track back to Billy track - in the northern pools a single **Avocet** was waiting for me to spot it (this may be the lone bird that Peter Raby had off Langstone Pond on New Year's Day but as he again had that lone bird off Langstone shortly before I saw one at the Oysterbeds there may be two).

With the tide still high I took the main road through Emsworth to have a look at the west end of the Deeps. The Little Deeps had a fair show of Tufted Duck but little else other than a couple of Gadwall and a few Coot and Little Grebes. The Great Deeps were a bit more active but only added **Cormorant** to my list. Back at home after lunch I happened to go into the garden where I was very surprised and pleased to hear **Song Thrush song** bring my year count to 64.

After entering my finds into the computer I went on to enter items of interest from the Hampshire and Sussex bird sites, bringing the overall total of species reported in the two counties to 151 and giving me three interesting news stories, first of which was an account of the first **Daylist team's result - a count of 97 species** seen in the Rye Bay area of East Sussex by a team of six birders (including Cliff Dean and Mike Mullis) who walked 14 miles on Jan 1. They started at 7am and so found both Tawny and Little Owls before sunrise. One local speciality not to be found in Hampshire were Fulmars on their breeding cliffs (a separate report tells of Fulmars also seen on cliffs near Brighton). The bird I would most like to have on my list was Smew which they found at Castle Water (Rye Harbour) - this species was seen in Hampshire with one at Pennington (Lymington).

Second of the news stories concerns **Ruddy Ducks** and comes from late reports for December. I have already reported a sighting of two of these birds in Kent on Dec 26 and today I came on a belated report dated Dec 31 of a single male seen (probably) in Sussex though no location is given. The interest in this news is that it refers to a report in The Guardian newspaper which says that **only 40 Ruddy Duck are still alive in the UK** and that it costs us (those who are taxpayers!) around **£3,000 to kill each bird**. I wonder what odds you can get from a bookmaker on the eventual success of this Government project?

The third 'story' in what I read on the internet today concerns **migrant Bean Geese** which come here in the winter. Most of the reports that I read name the Geese as Tundra Bean Geese but one report from the Beeding Brooks beside the River Adur for Jan 2 said 'Feeding unobtrusively, among the Greylag Geese flock was a Bean Goose' and this lack of qualification as a Tundra Bean Goose made me wonder if it was the alternative Taiga Bean Goose and that made me realize that I did not know the difference between the two subspecies nor the relative likelihood of having the Taiga subspecies on the south coast. Taiga is a very large northern forest habitat extending round the globe, Tundra is a much smaller area north of where trees grow. As might be expected the world

population of Taiga Bean Geese is larger than that of the Tundra subspecies and the RSPB gives the number of both subspecies which winter in Britain as around 410 Taiga birds concentrated in just two areas (North Norfolk and Stirlingshire in Scotland) and 320 of the Tundra species, mostly found in Norfolk but also scattered around the rest of the UK. My conclusions in answer to the first of my two questions is that **any Bean Geese seen in the South of England is almost certainly of the Tundra subspecies** while for an answer to my second question about the differences between the two subspecies I suggest you go to <http://www.gobirding.eu/Photos/TundraBeanGoose.php>. Just one other thing you need to know - we consider the Tundra and Taiga birds to be subspecies of *Anser fabalis* but the **American Ornithologists Union has split the Tundra birds off into a separate species *Anser serrirostris***, hence the website just referred to gives both names and heads its page with the name **Tundra Bean Goose *Anser (fabalis/serrirostris) rossicus***.

**Sat 3 January**

**(Link to previous day's entry)**

### **Birds seen in Hampshire on Jan 1**

I have just finished entering into my spreadsheet the bird species seen in Hampshire on New Year's Day as reported on the HOS Going Birding site with my own sightings and so have a count of the overall number of species which I see comes to only 95 species, which is lower than I would have expected. I also see that my own tally was in fact 54 rather than the 52 which I gave in my Jan 1 Diary entry.

A few of the species seen by others but not by me were a **Kittiwake** flying east past Titchfield Haven, an inland male **Scaup** at Yateley, the **Great White Egret** at Blashford, an **Egyptian Goose with a Pintail** at Ewhurst Pond (north of Basingstoke), and single **Marsh Harrier** and **Spoonbill** both at Farlington Marshes. The Lymington shore added **3 Ruff**, **4 Avocet** and **1 Great Northern Diver** while the Overton area (west of Basingstoke) had **380 Lesser Blackback Gulls** in one field and a few **Red Kites**, **Redwing** and **Fieldfare**. In the New Forest area Bob Chapman had a **Firecrest** in his garden hedge and a **Med Gull** at Lepe while Simon Woolley had a **juvenile Glaucous Gull**, a **Long-tailed Duck** and a **Black-necked Grebe** at Blashford close to his home (and another birder saw **55 Siskin** there before going to Eyworth Pond near Fritham to see **7 Mandarin Duck**). The only **Ringed Plover** to be reported were 10 at Hill Head, and the only **Blackcap** were a pair in a Chandlers Ford garden. Another one off was a wintering **Whimbrel** in Portsmouth Harbour off the Jolly Roger pub at Hardway and the only reported **Great Grey Shrike** was at Milkham Bottom in the New Forest with a male **Hen Harrier** at Ashley Walk, both seen by Simon Ingram who added **4 Slavonian Grebe** off the Normandy Marsh at Lymington where he also had a genuine **Raven** to support my dubious bird at Bedhampton. In Southampton Water Ian Watts saw **80 Cormorant** at Weston Shore and a **Buzzard** over nearby Netley Castle plus a couple of first winter **Yellow-legged Gulls** in a Southampton Business Park. Back in Basingstoke area Peter Hutchins heard of some **25 Goldcrest** in the fields of one farm.

David Thelwell was in the Over Wallop area south of Andover and had a **male Merlin**, **46 Magpies** going to roost in the late afternoon, and the biggest flock of **250 Golden Plover**.

Back in the Havant area Peter Raby's daylist of 76 species (he added a heard **Reed Bunting** at Budds Farm after I left him on 75) included **80 Knot and one Greenshank** off Emsworth. Moving west towards Langstone he had an **unexpected Avocet and a female Goldeneye with 72 Shelduck** on the Warblington shore.

Not seen on Jan 1 but logged on Jan 2 and almost certainly present on Jan 1 were the **Ring-billed Gull and a Black Brant**, both at Gosport, with **8 Water Pipits** at the Lower Test reserve and a couple of **Kingfishers**. Also not reported until Jan 2 were the Southsea **Purple Sandpipers** with their **Rock Pipit** companion. Surprisingly no **Goosanders** were reported at Blashford until Jan 2 when 30 were seen. More exciting birds seen on Jan 2 were a **Ring Ouzel** at Selborne and a **Ferruginous Duck** at Blashford. Species first seen on Jan 2 but which I would have expected to be seen on Jan 1 were a **Short-eared Owl** near Kingsclere, a **Peregrine** at Blashford and a **Common Sandpiper** at the Lower Test plus Snipe and **Yellowhammer** at Bransbury Common in the Test Valley near Andover (also near Andover was the first **Skylark** report of the year). Jan 2 also brought the first **Crossbill, Tree Creeper and Hawfinch** reports from the New Forest. Two birds which were on Peter Raby's Jan 1 list but were not in the HOS list were **Reed Bunting and Sparrowhawk**.

**[Thu 1 January](#)**

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

### **My New Year's Day Bird count**

My plan for today was to walk west from Havant via Bedhampton Mill Pond and the long abandoned Havant playing fields at the west end of Harts Farm Way to reach the shore at the small western Broadmarsh carpark, then to head back to Langstone along the shore. Following this route I saw **52 bird species in five hours**. I failed to see **Grey Wagtail, Song Thrush, Green Woodpecker, Buzzard, Rock Pipit, Red Breasted Merganser, Black and Bar-tailed Godwit** but did get **Stock Dove, Meadow Pipit, Green Sandpiper, Canada Goose, Chiffchaff, Jay** and a very unexpected **Raven** on the list.

I did not start my walk until 9:30 with **Robin, House Sparrow, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Magpie** and a marauding flock of **Black-headed and Herring Gulls** already on the list and as I walked through Havant I admit to adding **Feral Pigeon** when I counted 30 of them lined up on roof tops near the church - I also got my first **Common Gull** perched on the roof of the multi-storey carpark. In the Bedhampton area I failed to identify one small passerine (possibly a Greenfinch) calling/wheezing from some bushes but I did feel justified in putting **Raven** on the list when a bird which I at first thought was a Buzzard by its size and 'lumbering' flight, but when I got my bins on it very briefly I could see its plumage was all black, took off from trees around Bedhampton Mill Pond. The first of three flocks of **Goldfinch** was seen near the Mill House.

After crossing the A27 footbridge I came on a small flock of ground feeding birds in the shelter of the trees at the southern end of the bridge but as they scattered I got my bins on one and saw it was a **Chiffchaff**, another burst into song to identify itself as a **Wren**. Coming alongside the Hermitage stream I noted a party of five Little Grebes which I had already ticked with the Gadwall and Coot on Bedhampton Mill pond. Nearing the Harts Farm Way bridge I turned right to cross the old playing fields which gave me two bonus birds - first was a flock of 12

**Stock Doves** and after them a flock of around 10 **Meadow Pipits** - also seen here, flying towards the stream, was my first **Heron**.

I reached the Langstone Harbour shore just as the falling tide was starting to expose some mud close to the shore so had close views of **Dunlin, Redshank, Turnstone, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Brent, Shelduck and Wigeon**. Nothing more till I turned inland by the Hermitage Stream where a lone **Great Crested Grebe** was unexpected.

Nothing new seen as I walked east along Harts Farm Way, then followed the Brockhampton Stream down to the Gravel Quay where I belatedly saw my first **Little Egret**. Reaching the Harbour shore again the wind had increased to what felt like gale force, and with the tide now well out it was difficult to see anything at the water's edge but climbing Budds Mound to overlook the pools I was able to add **Mute Swan, Tufted Duck, Shoveler and Teal** to the list. While here I was joined by Peter Raby who already had a much longer list than mine and left with a score of 75 species after pointing out to me some **Pochard** which I had missed and two distant birds in flight - a **Kestrel** and a **Great Black-backed Gull** - plus an unseen **Water Rail** which was provoked into screaming its indignation at something we did not see.

Walking along the exposed South Moors shore I was glad the wind was at my back rather than having to walk into it but the conditions left little chance of spotting the Rock Pipit (which was probably hunkered down in one of the channels which drain the Moors) but at the mouth of the Langbrook the low bench gave me a chance to scan the distant tideline where I picked out a **Grey Plover** which I had failed to see earlier. I thought that was all I could hope for here but as I walked up the Langbrook Stream path the sharp call of a **Green Sandpiper** enabled me to pick out its white rump as it hurtled down into the 'Tamarisk Pool' and then another familiar sound focussed my attention on a small party of **Canada Geese** also flying over to settle on the Moors (my first sight of them here this spring!).

The shore around Langstone Mill Pond was teeming with families walking off last night's celebrations and I failed to see either the single Avocet or the female Goldeneye which Peter Raby had seen in the harbour here earlier this morning but I did manage to add two species to my list when a flock of perhaps forty **Lapwing** took off from the mud and as they levelled out three slightly smaller birds with thin, pointed wings detached themselves from the main flock and must have been **Golden Plover** that had been sheltering on the shore with the Lapwings. So ended my daylist, leaving plenty of scope for increasing it during the coming year!

**[Wed 31 December](#)**

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

### **A few December highlights**

With most of the more interesting December news from the internet now recorded in my spreadsheet I have been picking out a few items that might interest others and I will start with some late summer birds.

I have seen 15 reports of single **Swallows** during December starting with one in Dorset on Dec 3 and ending with one in Cornwall on Dec 30. Much less numerous were a couple of **Lesser Whitethroats**, one at Plymouth (where one also was present last winter) seen on Dec 13 and the other at The Lizard in Cornwall on Dec 29. One **Common Whitethroat** is also present at Hersey on the Isle of Wight, seen on Dec 1 and 'heard at dusk' on Dec 29. Five separate **Ring**

**Ouzels** have been reported between Dec 4 and 29 at Portland, Dungeness, St Austell in Cornwall, Eastbourne and Overcombe (Weymouth) in Dorset. A **Wheatear** at Christchurch Harbour on Dec 6 seemed to be the last but on Dec 29 there was a possible report of one near Seaford in Sussex.

Top rarity of the month has been a **Little Bustard** seen on the East Guldeford levels near Rye on Dec 30. You can see a photo of the bird at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/12/30/east-guldeford-levels.html> which says that the last sighting of the species in Sussex was on Jan 12 1914 though the most recent for Britain was in Dorset on Nov 18 this year, preceded by one in Cornwall in 1996 - see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-30094854> for the November report. Another unusual visitor from Spain has been a single **Glossy Ibis** seen near the southern tip of Devon on Dec 27 and 28 (Last year there were at least 19 of these birds in the UK in Oct 2013 after a group of 9 arrived in Devon on Sep 23 with other arrivals in the UK probably making a total of more than 50.) This year the big numbers have been **Spoonbills** with 40 in Poole Harbour on Dec 29.

A species which our Government has spent a lot of money in trying to eradicate is still refusing to co-operate with their policy and I was pleased to see that at least two of these **Ruddy Ducks** were still alive in the south of England on Dec 26 - I won't say where for fear of attracting the gunmen to cull them, and hopefully a lot more are going unreported for the same reason. Another species that is being reported thanks to Twitter is the **Waxwing** of which a few have been in the UK since September - see more in my previous Diary entry for Dec 29 when I reported two birds seen in Totton on Dec 20.

Getting away from Bird News I see that the last **Red Admiral** to be reported on Dec 30 in Gosport was caught and eaten by a Pied Wagtail but a more interesting insect sighting was of a **Western Conifer Seed Bug** seen at Durlston on Christmas Eve. Nearer to Havant were several Hoverflies seen in the Southsea Highland Road Cemetery by Jeff Goodridge on Dec 28 and said by him to be a species that I have not come across before (**Eupeodes luniger**) which is said to be a common migrant from the continent to southern England though its flight period is supposed to end in November. You can see photos of this species at <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/eupeodes-luniger> which show very distinctive yellow markings on its abdomen but the photo on Jeff's blog at <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/thefinancialbirder/files/2014/12/P1250035.jpg> has these marking concealed by the closed wings. I will be looking out for this species next spring. The thought of Spring prompts me to close this entry with the news that **Hares** were already showing their 'mad March' behaviour in East Hants on Dec 29 when Trevor Codlin was their to watch Red Kites assembling in a communal roost.

**Mon 29 December**

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

**Woodpecker drumming near my garden and Redwings in Hollybank Woods**

While unfreezing the birds drinking water in my garden this morning I heard a **Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming** on a tree alongside the Hayling Billy trail which runs past the end of the garden. This is not the first that I have heard of as one was reported at Storrington in Sussex on Dec 18 but I have not heard of any others so far.

With the sun already taking the chill out of the air I set out to walk to the Hollybank Woods, starting up New Lane in the hope of seeing a Green Sandpiper in the Lavant Stream (which becomes the Langbrook after passing through the centre of Havant) the only birds I saw in the stream were a pair of Mallard in the section near the Colt factory. At the end of New Lane I turned right along Bartons Road up the hill taking me past the new Havant Crematorium outside which a large patch of **Stinking Hellebore** was coming into flower.

I entered the Hollybank Woods at the junction of Emsworth Common Road with the Horndean road and immediately heard the calls of **Nuthatch** but the area with the most birds was the new Jubilee Plantation where several **Jays** were active and a large flock of what seemed to be all Blue Tits was vocal in the trees. There were also lots of Holly berries shining on the sun and I soon noticed other birds disappearing into the Holly trees - by waiting quietly I soon got a good view of one proving it to be a **Redwing** and I am pretty sure there was a small flock of them here enjoying the berries. Continuing east across Hollybank Lane I surprised a **Buzzard** which had been perched in a tree close to the track, causing it to lumber off through the trees but the only other bird I saw in the woods was a lone Great Tit.

I came home along Southleigh Road and just before reaching the Horndean Road junction I found flowers on a **Butcher's Broom** bush and while doing so also found **Japanese Honeysuckle** in flower. Coming into the Denvilles area I found a **Hazel** tree with its catkins fully open but my only other notes for this outing were of song from Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove and Feral Pigeon plus the inevitable Robins and a single Dunnock (not even a Wren).

Back at home I noticed a report of a single **Waxwing** in the Netherlands, reminding me to check on a Twitter account @WaxwingsUK which I discovered a little while ago and which told me there have been a few Waxwings in Britain since Sep 19 including one at one at Netley Marsh near Totton on Dec 17. Since then new sightings have been of 3 at Crawley in Sussex on Dec 12 and of 2 in Totton on Dec 20. If you want to see the reports of many others scattered across the UK go to <https://twitter.com/waxwingsuk> (you will see there are similar accounts for reports of Hoopoe, Hawfinch, Wryneck, Golden Oriole and Bee Eater).

Other new reports that caught my interest were of a **pair of Smew** on the Moor Green lakes just across the Hampshire border in Berkshire, seen today by John Clark, also two **Ruddy Ducks** seen in Kent on Boxing Day, and a slowly increasing number of **Brambling** (20 at Blackdown near Haslemere and at least 7 at the West Dean Woods north of Chichester, both seen today). At least one of the two **Siberian Chiff Chaffs** at the Steyning sewage works in Sussex was seen today.