

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 13 - 19 (WEEK 46 OF 2017)

### Sun 19th November

#### **A cycle ride to Gunner Point finds Nottingham Catchfly in flower and increases my November flower count to 119.**

Another bright day with a light north west wind saw me riding west to Gunner Point at the entrance to Langstone Harbour, passing more newly flowering Cow Parsley in at least eight places but with little expectation of finding anything new for my month list. Nearing Gunner Point I thought it might be worth checking out an area at the start of the Sand Dunes which has a good variety of flowers in the spring and to my great surprise it had a single plant of **Common Centaury** with a good head of flowers, albeit closed as the warm sun had not yet reached them. Pressing on round the corner of the Golf Course to the bench where I normally stop for refreshment I parked my bike and walked to the small gorse-covered hillock where I had seen **Nottingham Catchfly** re-flowering on Oct 9 and to my astonishment **one plant still had fresh flowers**.

Back on the bench for my sandwich break I watched a small speedboat keeping pace with a low-flying helicopter and then winching someone up from the boat - presumably a practice for the RNLI and aircrew as the Helicopter did not dash off towards a hospital with the 'rescued person'. Nothing new seen on the way home but when I got back I checked to see if any of the plants seen this morning, and which I assumed were already on my November list, were in fact recorded on it and I found three which had been missed - **Common Ragwort**, **Large Bindweed**, and **Red Hot Poker** - bringing the total to 119.

### Sat 18th November

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

#### **My round-the-island cycle ride finds just five new flowers First Mistle Thrush song in a Mistletoe rich orchard Reeve's Pheasant seen in Devon.**

Friday Nov 17 was a great day to be out, with warm sunshine all day and only a light wind from the north. While having my breakfast I enjoyed the sight of a **Red Admiral butterfly** perched just outside my window, enjoying full sunlight and sheltered from the north wind. When I got on my bike and started up the old Billy Trail I was fearing that I would not find any new plants but I did find two before I reached the Oysterbeds - one was **Scentless Mayweed**, the other **Self Heal**. At the Oysterbeds I was hoping for a very early Dog Violet in the large patch of leaves around the gate into the field immediately north of the 'viewing mound' above the pools but had no success there though a little further north, opposite the northern exit from Oysterbeds area, I did find **Greater Knapweed** still in flower, and beside the track connecting the Billy Line to the carpark just south of Langstone Bridge, I had a real surprise in finding one plant of **Wild Clary** still flowering. As I left that carpark and was about to cross the busy Havant Road I saw a plant of **Hedgerow Cranesbill** in fresh flower to give me five new plants for this month and a **November total of 115 species**.

Entering Northney village I found the big field south of the road had been ploughed, eliminating any chance of finding any of the arable weeds (such as Green Nightshade) which grow there, and North Common had no new plants but the old holiday camp boating pool, with it being high tide, had a full selection of Brent, ducks, and a Redshank roost. Nothing more on the ride home, but I was encouraged to see that John Goodspeed had found Cowslips flowering on Portsdown this week and Brian Fellows had found Hemlock Water-Dropwort flowering in Emsworth

Two blog entries which caught my eye on the internet this week concerned a report of a **Reeve's Pheasant** seen in Devon and early Mistle Thrush song heard in an old, abandoned orchard in East Sussex where the trees are liberally covered with Mistletoe growth. The **Pheasant** has magnificent plumage with six-foot long tail feathers and is protected under our laws so that if any trigger-happy Pheasant shooter kills one he can be subject to a heavy fine, unlike the Chinese who have reduced the numbers in the bird's homeland to numbers similar to what can be found here in England. See a picture and read about the bird (not forgetting to click on the link in it to "the history of the pheasant" in the second paragraph) in an article from 'The Field' magazine which you can read [here](#).

The **report of Mistle Thrush song** comes from Cliff Dean (based in the Winchelsea/Pett area around Rye Bay). His latest blog entry (for Nov 17) is worth reading in full, and clicking on his link to 'Rat & Sparrow Clubs' which operated in the First World War to offer an inducement to destroy the Rats and Sparrows which diminished our food supplies. The link is to Cliff Dean's account of this [Deserted Orchard](#)

## **Tue 14th November**

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

### **The first Celandine in flower and four other additions to my November flower list**

#### **Portugese Man-of-War Jellyfish washed up on North Devon shore Young Herring Gulls stealing from shopping trolleys in Brighton**

I had not intended to go flower hunting today but I had to deliver a note to a friend in Bound Lane so despite the gloomy afternoon I got my bike out and rode there. In Bound Lane I have in past years found **early Celandine flowers** in a roadside ditch and today a close look revealed a single flower among a cluster of Celandine leaves in the bottom of this ditch - probably the earliest of my life!

Encouraged by this find I cycled on towards Sinah Common but en route I spotted a single plant of **White Comfrey** with unseasonable flowers before reaching the **Pale Toadflax site** near the Inn on the Beach where at least three plants still had flowers. Returning to the Ferry Road I continued west as far as the Golf Club entrance road, passing a lone **White Campion** flower (an addition to my list) and specimens of both Winter Heliotrope and Cow Parsley (which I have already seen in November). Coming home via Sinah Lane and Park Road I stopped near the old West Town station to check a regular site for **Perennial Wall Rocket** and

hidden among the mass of dead plant material I found a new plant of this species with many fresh flowers, bringing my **November species total to 109**.

Among today's news on the internet was a report of **more than 50 Portugese Man-of-War Jellyfish** being washed up on the North Devon shore near the mouth of the River Taw flowing out from Barnstable. The report included a photo which you can see [here](#). Another unseasonal report came from Chichester Harbour where a pair of **Little Grebes** was found nesting some four months after the normal end of their breeding season. Less unexpected was news from the Brighton area of this year's **young Herring Gulls having learnt to steal from shopping trolleys** in supermarket carparks - is this a sign that they have severed their connection with the sea and now have a round the year source of food?

### [Mon 13th November](#)

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

#### **Will the Sweet Chestnut Tree save humanity from succumbing to bacterial infection as our current antibiotics become ineffective?**

Most people are now aware that **overuse of normal antibiotics has allowed the bacteria against which they are used to increasingly develop immunity to them**, leaving our doctors powerless to save our lives when we are infected. However it seems that there is still hope that the ancient Romans will come to our rescue by their introduction of the Sweet Chestnut tree into Britain. That is clearly nonsense but watching the Countryfile programme on TV yesterday I became aware that the **leaves of Sweet Chestnut trees** contain chemical elements that do not kill the bacteria but 'disarm' them. If you read the article to which I will provide a link you will know as much as I do about this so have a look at [this document](#).

For more about the **Sweet Chestnut tree** here is a page on it from the Ancient Tree Forum website, clearly written before its use against MRSA was widely known. To see this page use [this link](#).

Returning to normality I have just read of a fresh **Meadow Brown butterfly** being seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Nov 10 bringing the number of butterfly species seen flying in November this year to 13. Also seen this month has been the **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** (3 reports) and **5 Dragonfly species**.

#### **Wildlife diary and news for Nov 6 - 12 (Week 45 of 2017)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

### [Sun 12th November](#)

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

**At least three Brent families with young seen locally**  
**Recent increases in numbers of Black-Necked and Great Crested Grebes in our coastal waters**  
**Grey Herons mating at Langstone, an Italian Sparrow in Devon, and more on the unprecedented influx of Hawfinches.**

Sightings of **juvenile Brent** are at last being reported but in very small numbers suggesting they have had a very poor breeding season. The first report I saw was of a family with three young at Church Norton on Nov 6, reported on the Selsey Blog. What was probably the same family was photographed there on Nov 11 (see it [here](#)) followed by two sightings at Emsworth where a single lone juvenile was seen on Nov 10 and a family group with two young was seen on Nov 11.

Other reports of increased numbers of sea birds seen recently have been of **Black-Necked Grebe** off the Hayling Oysterbeds, with a peak of 6 there on Nov 11; **Great Crested Grebe** with 34 seen from Langstone South Moors on Nov 8; and from further afield both Devon and Cornwall have reported groups of 6 **Great Northern Divers** on Nov 9 and 10 respectively.

Perhaps the most unexpected report this week came from Peter Raby at Langstone Mill Pond on Nov 10 where he saw **a pair of Grey Herons mating** in one of their nests there, followed by the female settling down in the nest where she will hopefully lay eggs which should start to hatch in mid-December.

Another unexpected report was of an **Italian Sparrow** in Devon. If you are interested in this potentially new species go to [Devon Birding](#) and read the Nov 11 report (with photos) and if you want to pursue it further put 'Italian Sparrow new species' into Google.

For an interesting slant on the **current unprecedented movement of Hawfinches** all over Europe read Cliff Dean's blog entry for Nov 11 using [this link](#).. And for an account of two **unusual fungi** seen at Ebernoe in West Sussex read Graeme Lyons blog [here](#) - note that the photos can be enlarged by clicking on them, then using the 'back arrow' to restore normal viewing.

## **Fri 10th November**

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

### **A sunny afternoon walk brings my flowering plant count to 104 including more fresh Cow Parsley and Winter Heliotrope.**

Nearing Mill Rythe this afternoon the first new plant I saw was a fresh specimen of **Stone Parsley** in a Kings Road hedge bottom but when I had passed the throng of parents collecting their children from the Mill Rythe school I found that the fields behind the shore had been ploughed, removing any chance of finding Black Bindweed or other arable weeds. This was soon made up for as I walked down the farm track to the shore and found the first of three separate flowering plants of **Cow Parsley** beside the school fence.

The narrow path along the Mill Rythe shoreline not only gave me a sunlit view of gulls on the water with the tide up but also the undimmed bright blue of the **Chicory flowers** I was hoping for - see this Wikimedia photo [here](#) - and on the way back I found another Winter Heliotrope in flower and collected samples of the flowers and leaves of a plant that was similar to, but clearly different from, the Ox-tongue that is still flowering everywhere. This turned out to be **Smooth Hawksbeard** though I did not expect it to be still flowering.

Heading home I took the path running alongside the Tournerbury Golf course and was rewarded with single flowers on **Common Vetch** and **Creeping Cinquefoil** plus several examples of **Herb Robert** before reaching Tournerbury Lane where one small garden had plant of **Apple of Peru** with one remaining blue flower among its black seed pods - if you are not familiar with this member of the Nightshade family see [this page from wildflowerfinder.org.uk](http://this.page.from.wildflowerfinder.org.uk) and note the Skull and Crossbones toxicity of its seeds.

### [Wed 8th November](#)

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

#### **Can David Attenborough be beaten as a producer of Wildlife Films? Another four flowering plants bring my November score to 95 species**

I suspect that everyone reading this blog will also have been watching Blue Planet 2 on TV and will have marvelled at what that series shows us about life on Earth but I hope you will also watch a film which was on BBC 2 this afternoon which was filmed and produced by John Aitchison, with the aid of specialists in Aerial and Underwater photography, and make up your minds which of the two films most closely matches your personal experience of wildlife. To do so watch "<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01sgrpz/hebrides-islands-on-the-edge-episode-2>" which is John's film about the Hebrides.

I must admit that I am prejudiced as, back in the 1990s, John's mother used to work in the Havant Borough Tourist Info office to which I would take weekly Wildlife Posters (which I produced in those days before John Goodspeed took on that job) and I would hear of her son's dedication to wildlife in Scotland where he started his career after leaving home on Portsdown Hill. Over the years I heard and saw more of John's work (including the present series which was first broadcast in 2013) and found that his quiet tone of voice and his intimate focus on the life which we can all see around us in the British Isles, was very close to my own view of it, to the extent that I can imagine myself looking over his shoulder and sharing his understanding of the wildlife stories he tells with his films where I am amazed by the view of wildlife presented by David Attenborough but could never imagine myself watching the scenes he presents and so being unable to share the reality of what is being shown on my screen.

Before watching the TV film this afternoon (not being aware of what I was going to see) I took a walk down to the Hayling Bay shore and added **Hops**, **Annual Wall Rocket**, **Yellow Corydalis**, and the **garden version of Wood Sorrel** to my month list but I was more interested to see the mass of fresh growth on **Alexanders** everywhere here on south Hayling. Another species of which I found a large clump today and whose flowers I expect to see before the month is out (it is already on my list with two flowering spikes in Hollow Lane on Nov 3) is **Winter Heliotrope**. Inevitably, despite the fresh northerly wind, at least one **Red Admiral** was flying.

### [Tue 7th November](#)

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

**12 Butterfly species still active in November**  
**Late departing bird migrants seen this month**  
**Other birds in the news**

**Red Admirals** have been abundant this month with a peak count of 26 seen on Thorney Island on Nov 6. The adults do not go into full hibernation mode, some will fly south but will probably find colder temperatures on the near continent than they would here so many will find places here to shelter from bad weather and be ready to emerge whenever the sun raises the temperature enough for them to fly and find nectar sources to keep them going. Inevitably many will not survive a hard winter but as a backup many of them will have mated recently, and with Nettles continuing to provide food for their caterpillars through the winter a good number of new adults will emerge in the early spring. Other species seen in the first week of November, with their date of last sighting, are **Holly Blue and Small White** (1/11); **Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone** (2/11); **Small Copper and Comma** (5/11); **Speckled Wood, Large White, Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow** (6/11); and finally **Peacock and Red Admiral** on 7/11. Also seen up to Nov 5 have been at least two **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** while two **Vagrant Emperor** and several **Common Darter** dragonflies were seen Nov 1.

Three bird species which have been reported for the first time in the past few days have been **Slavonian Grebes** with a party of four at Selsey on Nov 6 and the first **Glaucous Gull** of the winter on the Yorkshire coast on Nov 5. The third bird is a **Pacific Diver**, probably the only one in British waters, which has been turning up each winter for several years off Penzance in Cornwall and was first seen there this year on Nov 6. Another species which is by no means a first for Britain, but is of local interest as the first to be seen in the Langstone-Emsworth area of south east Hampshire, is a single **Cattle Egret** which was seen among cattle in a field south of Warblington Cemetery early on the morning of Nov 7. Another local report which I found interesting was of a family of Black Swans seen on Ivy Lake at Chichester on Nov 5 with a photo of them appearing on the Selsey blog. I have included a link to the photo [here](#) showing not only that the white down of the four cygnets might (except for the time of year) make you think the parents were baby-sitting for a pair of Mute Swans, but also showing the extensive amount of white in the adults wings that is normally only revealed in flight.

Finally for today here are some late dates for departing summer visitors. Almost certainly not the last of the year are **Swallows** with sightings at five sites in Hampshire, Sussex, Kent and the IOW since Nov 3 with the latest of two birds at Selsey on Nov 6. Of interest the Sandwich Bay sightings were of 37 birds on Nov 1, 16 on Nov 2 and just 8 on Nov 4. The latest **House Martin** was seen at Selsey on Nov 6 and a very late **Yellow Wagtail** was at Berry Head in Devon on Nov 3. A **Dotterel** was still at Dungeness on Nov 6 and a **Ring Ouzel** on the IOW on Nov 5 when a **Grey Phalarope** was still on the Lymington Marshes. A **Wryneck** was seen at Dorchester in Dorset on Nov 3.

**Wildlife diary and news for Oct 30 - Nov 5 (Week 44 of 2017)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

[Fri 3rd November](#)

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

**The first three days of November give me 90 plants in flower with more to come**

**Highlights for Nov 1 were Lesser Calamint, Holly and Almond Blossom  
Nov 3 found early Winter Heliotrope flowers.**

On Wednesday (Nov 1) I was out early for a local walk starting in St Mary's Road where the **White Potato Vine (*Solanum jasminoides*)** was still flowering behind the Mengham Infants School and **Lesser Calamint** still had one flower close to the road junction with Elm Grove. In the Churchyard **Blackberry** was still in flower and in the Church fields I found one plant of **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** still flowering as well as a two metre tall Mallow which I believe to be **Lavatera thuringiaca (Garden Mallow)**. This brought me to the public path through the big caravan park where a small, heavily pruned, **Holly tree** now bears many small white flowers which I would not expect until April (maybe the pruning has induced the unseasonal flowering?). Beyond the caravans, in Higworth Lane, I found a garden escape cultivar of **Viper's Bugloss** (sold as 'Blue Bedder') and a planted bush of **Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)**. Later in the morning, after a scheduled visit to the local Health Centre, I found early **Almond blossom** on a tree in the grounds. Day 1 of the month gave me 43 plants in flower.

On the second day I took a walk centred on the Elm Grove estate where I only added 15 species which included **Butcher's Broom** in South Road, but today I walked a bit further via Hollow Lane and Bacon Lane to the southern end of Staunton Avenue, then back along the sea front, which added 33 species to bring my total so far to 90. Perhaps today's biggest surprise was to find two spikes of **Winter Heliotrope** already in flower but I also found **Green Alkanet, Borage, Viper's Bugloss, and three flowers of Pale Flax**.

Back at home I completed the month end procedures for my Spread Sheets and if it is raining tomorrow I can stay at home and start to catch up on the internet reports of other people's observations.

**[Tue 31st October](#)**

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

**Wild Clary in flower ends my October flower count as the 182nd species  
Tomorrow marks the start of a new month with plenty still to be seen**

Yesterday the wind was light and the sun shone as I cycled up the Hayling Billy track past a continuous line of Brent Geese in Langstone Harbour (none yet in the fields) to what I call 'Texaco Bay' between the disused rail bridge and the Langstone road bridge, where the ebbing tide was exposing the mud and attracting a winter selection of feeding waders (mainly **Black Tailed Godwits, Redshank with the odd Oystercatcher and Curlew plus a couple of Common Gulls**). It was beside the path running along the south side of this bay that I was surprised to see a single freshly flowering plant of **Wild Clary** which I first noticed here in October last year and have seen again this year in May, June, and September - with luck it should survive to go on my November list.

Looking back through the internet reports of the last couple of days I have noticed more winter visitors turning up - on Oct 30 the **Avocets** that winter in the Exe estuary increased in number from less than 10 to 141 on Oct 30. Also settling in for the winter have been **Black-necked Grebes** with 10 in the Studland area of Dorset on Oct 17 and 13 in the Falmouth area on Oct 30. Not yet on the south coast Oct 30 brought the first reports of **Little Auk** from four sites on our East Coast with a max count of 18 at Flamborough Head. Although some adult **Shelduck** stay here through the summer to watch over this years young it seems that the main body of adults which have been moulting on the vast sand banks off the German coast are now returning to us for the winter, indicated by two Trektellen reports on Oct 30 of 185 arriving in Norfolk and 338 on the Normandie coast of France. Another welcome sight on the south coast has been the re-appearance of **Goldeneye** with an early winter bird at Blashford lakes on Oct 27, increasing to 3 there on Oct 28 and 5 on Oct 31 when another arrived at Pagham. - see its photo [here](#).

Other birds currently being reported daily in large numbers are **Redwings and Fieldfares, Wood Pigeons, Stock Doves, and Starlings** plus this years exceptional **Hawfinch** movements but one report from Devon which might have escaped your notice was of **40 Ring-necked Parakeets** flying over Plymouth on Oct 28. These birds have had a colony in the city for some time but I cannot recall such a large number being quoted in the past.

Turning to insects the past week-end has brought reports of **nine butterfly species** still on the wing, and two reports of **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** plus one of a **Deaths Head Hawkmoth** found alive and apparently unharmed in a water butt at Dungeness.

### **Wildlife diary and news for Oct 23 - 29 (Week 43 of 2017)**

[\(Skip to previous week\)](#)

#### **Sun 29th October**

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

#### **During the past week ...**

**Vizmig counts of Woodpigeon movements increased from 11,139 in Yorkshire to 94,000 in South Devon**  
**9 Great White Egrets at Testwood Lakes, White Stork lands on Portsdown and Glossy Ibis flies over Dorset**  
**Brent Geese keep coming as Shelduck start to return; Lesser Scaup at Blashford & Long Tailed Duck at Pett**  
**A Goldeneye arrives in Hampshire & Selsey reports 17 Mergansers with single Goosanders in Sussex**  
**One Osprey still in Hampshire, a late Hobby at Selsey, a late Stone Curlew on the IOW & Purple Sandpipers seen in Kent**  
**Grey Phalarope still passing through & 27 Little Gulls at Dungeness with 13 Sandwich Terns at Langstone**  
**Little Terns fledged a record 73 young at Weymouth last summer & now 329**

**Razorbills reach the south coast**  
**Fieldfares and Redwings are now being seen in hundreds, as are migrant**  
**Blackbirds and Song Thrushes**  
**Coastal sites have already reported daycounts up to 100 incoming**  
**Goldcrests and Firecrests**  
**On Oct 25 Portland reported 'strong southbound passage' of ten species**  
**that I would expect to be flying north**  
**80 Stock Doves fly west past Titchfield Haven & 45,000 Wood Pigeons fly**  
**west over Portdown**  
**1 Turtle Dove still in Poole Harbour & a flock of 40 Ring Necked Parakeets**  
**seen at Plymouth**  
**Swallows still being seen four southern counties with 51 on the IOW and 56**  
**at Dungeness also 30 House Martins in Sussex**  
**Rock Pipits back at Southsea Castle & Water Pipits in Hants and Dorset**  
**Black Redstarts return to Sussex and the IOW & a late Whinchat at**  
**Tit/Haven with a late Wheatear**  
**Up to 12 Ring Ouzels at 6 south coast sites & single Whitethroats in Kent,**  
**Sussex and Devon**  
**Great Grey Shrike at Medmerry & flocks of up to 2750 Starlings on the move**  
**with Bearded Tits still flying to new sites**  
**5 Dragonfly species & 12 Butterflies still flying.**

Today I have tried to summarize all the significant reports which I have seen on the internet and noted in my Spreadsheet with dates since last Sunday (Oct 23) and while I think this is a useful format for my blog I think that in future I will change the format from the present attempt to mention everything in the initial headlines followed by more detail and comment in the subsequent text to turning each of the headlines into a paragraph with more freedom to expand on details, continuing to highlight the species I am writing about with red colour. One of my reasons for doing this is to ensure that my headlines each appear as single lines on my screen, though I realize that most readers of the blog will not use the same line length in the format they use. One thing that brought this home to me was the discovery of a bird identification website at [www.birdfieldguide.co.uk](http://www.birdfieldguide.co.uk) which I found useful for reminding me of the characteristics of a Serin which turned up at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 27. This uses a format designed to be easy to read on a mobile phone - have a look at it [here](#). This long, thin format allows photos, videos and sounds as well as text to be displayed.

The last of my headlines is not very meaningful unless I list the species which were still being seen this week. By far the most numerous Dragonfly species was the **Common Darter** with 35 at Falmouth on Oct 25 and counts of 50 and 20 at Dungeness and in Essex both on Oct 27. Falmouth also had 3 **Southern Hawkers** on Oct 25 while Oct 24 saw 3 **Migrant Hawkers** in Surrey and 2 in Kent. **Vagrant Emperors** were seen at Portland on Oct 25 and 27 and 15 **Willow Emeralds** were active at a Kent site on Oct 27. Butterflies seen during the week were 8 **Clouded Yellows** at each of Gosport and Shoreham with 2 **Painted Ladies** at Bexhill. 1 **Brimstone** was seen in Gosport and 4 at Small Dole in Sussex. 1 **Large White** and 2 **Small Whites** were seen as were 3 single **Small Coppers** at 3 sites. Probably last for the year were 3 **Common Blues** at Shoreham and Bexhill

while the flowers at Nymans Gardens by the A23 south of Crawley produced a surprising 43 **Red Admirals** on Oct 25 with smaller numbers elsewhere that day. Just one **Small Tortoiseshell** was seen in a Sussex Garden on Oct 28 and two **Peacocks** were at Nymans Gardens while the Milton area of Portsmouth had 4 **Commas** on Oct 27. Last were 11 **Speckled Woods** seen at various sites during the week. Not mentioned in the headline were a **Convolvulus Hawkmoth** at Portland Bill, single **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** at Dungeness and in Devon, plus a **Crimson Speckled** migrant from the Mediterranean at Portland on Oct 26 - see their photo of it [here](#).

## [Tue 24th October](#)

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

**First young Brent and first Black Brant plus first Slavonian Grebe and first Iceland Gull**

**Woodpigeons on the move, a Lesser Scaup in Dorset and 68 Bonxies off Devon**

**The Emsworth Spotshank returns for its 14th winter at Nore Barn and strange behaviour by a Cetti's Warbler at Baffins Pond**

**Clifden Nonpareil moth at Alton, still 4 Butterfly species at Shoreham and two Dragonflies active in Norfolk**

**Wild Clary has a relative called "Hot Lips" starring in many gardens**

In my last post I was wondering when the first of this year's **young Brent** would be seen in England and yesterday (Oct 23) just one was seen among 1050 adults at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) as more Brent arrive daily (another 50 flew west past Selsey also on Oct 23 when Trektellen reported flocks of 2546 and 1852 at two sites in Normandie). Another first in the Brent tribe was a single **Black Brant** which reached Exmouth on Oct 17 and among other seabirds the first **Slavonian Grebe** was reported at Pendower in Cornwall on Oct 23 and the first **Iceland Gull** in Yorkshire on Oct 22.

The first significant **Wood Pigeon movement** of the autumn brought a report of 11,139 birds moving in Yorkshire on Oct 23, and here in the south the high winds brought a count of **68 Bonxies (Great Skuas)** from Hartland Point in Devon on Oct 22. Also on Oct 23 a **Lesser Scaup** arrived on Longham Lake close to Bournemouth and the report included a photo showing the size of the bird in relation to a Tufted Duck - see it [here](#).

On Oct 22 Brian Fellows was delighted to see a **Spotted Redshank** back in the stream at Nore Barn at Emsworth and was convinced by its behaviour that it was the one which has spent much of the last 13 winters here, so is now starting its 14th year of residence, giving bird watchers excellent opportunities of close viewing. Another report that caught my attention came from **Baffins Pond in Portsmouth** where 2 birds were reported showing behaviour which makes me think of a pair of Dunnocks rather than the Cetti's Warblers which they were reported to be. A note appended to the report of the sighting said .. "Two birds calling out at southern end of pond, both waving one wing and hopping around each other in some kind of stand off, videoed it on phone, strange to watch it and

so close you could almost touch them!!!!. " I will be very interested to see the photos.

Turning to insects a **Clifden Nonpareil moth** was seen by day on a window of the W H Smith bookshop in Alton yesterday (Oct 23) by Steve Mansfield and I am providing links both to his photo of it and to the UKMOTHS webpage on the species which not only shows a photo of the moth with its wings open to reveal the beautiful blue of the underwing but which also gives its wingspan, showing it can be very nearly 10 cm across. Steve's own photo (or maybe one taken from the Hantsiow-butterflies website) can be seen [here](#) and the UKMOTHS page can be seen [here](#). Today's entry on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation page tells of **butterflies seen on Oct 24 at Shoreham .. they were 2 Common Blues. 1 Small Copper, several Red Admirals and 2 Clouded Yellows**. At least two species of dragonflies were still on the wing in Norfolk yesterday .. **4 Common Darters and 6 Willow Emeralds**. The latter species began to invade southern England in force from 2009 onward and has a page on the British Dragonflies website [here](#). If you did not see the section on it in **tonight's Autumnwatch TV programme** it will give you a much better grasp of the species than these photos - see it at [here](#) and find the section on Willow Emeralds about 20 minutes into the programme.

To end today I at last found the name of **an eye-catching garden plant** which I am currently seeing in full flower in many gardens. Its species name is **Salvia microphylla**, making it a relative of the Wild Clary which has recently started to appear as a self sown wild plant, but its **cultivar name is 'Hot Lips'** and you will see why when you look at [this photo](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 16 - 22 (WEEK 42 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 22nd October**

#### **A long walk adds 7 new plants to my month list But finds no young among 500 Brent**

This morning the sun shone from a cloudless sky though there was a strong northerly wind so I walked south via Eastoke Corner then back via Mengham Rythe. My first new flower was **Water Pepper** growing in a ditch beside Bound Lane and I then walked east on the south side of the Sea Front road where, between the Coast Guard look out and Eastoke Corner I found a large clump of **Musk Storksbill** in flower and then came on several plants of **Silver Ragwort** still in flower. My intention had been to walk along the Eastoke promenade in the hope of **White Melilot** or **Japanese Rose** in flower but the promenade walkway and the plants growing along its seaward edge had both vanished since I was there earlier in the month as a result of the storms pushing the shingle of the beach towards the houses and, I think, the levelling of the displaced shingle to provide a roadway for the lorries moving the shingle from the Gunner Point area to reinforce the sea defences at the Sandy Point area. Quite a lot of people were walking on the shingle so I joined them and made my way east to the first path leading inland to Southwood Road where I turned west and made my way back to

St Hermans road from which I joined the shore path long the north side of Fishery Creek skirting the Fishery Lane campsite to the Mengham Rythe shore. In this section I not only found **more Cow Parsley (already on my October list) in flower** but also added flowering **Borage** and **Golden Samphire** to that list as well as seeing both Speckled Wood and Red Admiral butterflies.

From the Mengham Rythe seawall I could see some **500 Brent** on the water but with **no first winter birds** among them. Back at home I checked my Diary to see when the young Brent had first been noticed, coming up with these results - last year the first date on which young were seen was October 14, but in 2015 none were mentioned until November 29, and in 2014 the date was October 31 so we should not assume that the Geese have failed to breed this year until we reach December though I am hoping that, once the strong headwinds abate, the families with young which are now hopefully feeding on the coast of the continent will summon up the strength to cross the channel - the fact that Brent are still arriving is confirmed by the latest news from the Dungeness bird observatory on Oct 20 mentioning the passage of 132 Brent.

Returning to my flower theme the Mengham Rythe seawall gave me the yellow flowered **Clematis tangutica** which I have noticed in previous months growing as a garden escape among the Gorse bushes but nothing else new was seen until I was in Salterns Lane where one garden had a brilliant red **Bottlebrush shrub** in flower. For a photo and information use this [link](#) to visit the Gardeners World website. I see this page says that this Australian shrub flowers in our summer but today is the first time I have noticed it and it was looking very fresh. A second plant seen freshly flowering in Salterns Lane was **Honeywort** which normally flowers in the spring but was re-flowering in September as well as now. This plant has flowers of many colours but for a good example see [this link](#). If you think of planting it in your garden beware that it scatters its seeds prolifically and is difficult to eradicate.

I now have 180 plants on my October list but doubt I will reach the 200 mark before we are into November and start again!

## **Sat 21st October**

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

### **Colourful moths now on the wing** **Leeches in our ponds** **Chaffinches arrive in large numbers**

Despite the windy weather a couple of colourful moths have been trapped on the south coast in the past few days. The first of these is called the **Merveille du Jour** which, despite its French name, is native to Britain and its caterpillars feed on Oak tree flowers and leaves before the adult moth, which has a wingspan of 4 to 5 cm, flies in September and October. One of these moths was trapped on Oct 17 by Alan Parker at his clifftop home in the Fairlight area overlooking Rye Harbour nature reserve and he took [this photo of it](#). The other moth, called the **Crimson Speckled**, was found at the Dungeness Power Station on Oct 19 and is a migrant

from the Mediterranean region which does not breed in Britain. You can see a photo and read about it on the [UKMOTHS webpage](#).

Until I read Graeme Lyons latest blog entry I had no idea that more than two **Leech species (Horse Leech and Medicinal Leech)** could be found in our local ponds but Graeme found **seven different species in a recent survey of the Waltham Brooks area** (near Pulborough Brooks). The species which I was most surprised to discover was the **Duck Leech** which can enter a bird's nostrils and has been known to kill baby ducklings (and even a Herring Gull - see [this British Birds article](#)). Here is a link to [Graeme's blog entry/](#)

Among the birds arriving from the continent at the moment are **large numbers of Chaffinches**. Back on Oct 15 I noticed reports of mass movements on the continent (one site out of 28 reporting Chaffinches that day gave the number there as 26,963) and by Oct 19 Portland had around 1000 arriving with another 200 at West Bay in Dorset and 110 at Pennington in Hampshire. Another new arrival was the first **Black Throated Diver** of the winter seen at Dungeness and Selsey Bill on Oct 20. Also maybe a new arrival (but not the first) was a **Bittern** seen to fly into reeds at Pennington (near Lymington) on Oct 19.

### [Thu 19th October](#)

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

### **Two unusual spiders at Rye Harbour** **More Divers and Grebes arriving in the south** **Two Hawkmoths in one hand**

Last Sunday a group of amateur entomologists met at Rye Harbour and spider expert Evan Jones found several unusual species there, two of which caught my attention. The first of these was called an **Ant Spider (Myrmarachne formicaria)** which is classified as one of the Jumping Spiders that does not make a web but disguises itself as an ant in order to get close enough to the ants on which it preys before leaping on its prey. The two photos I have chosen to illustrate this species show its overall disguise and a close up of its face showing the large eyes which it has in common with all the Jumping Spiders - see the antlike body [here](#) and the [large eyes here](#). The second species is called a **Sand Bear (Arctosa perita)** and is a Wolf Spider of the Lycosidae tribe with a colourful body which can be seen [here](#). It lives in sandy areas in which it can dig itself a burrow which it uses both as a silk-lined home and as a pit trap with a trap-door roof where it waits for prey to fall in, but it can also be found hunting its prey on foot in the typical Wolf Spider style.

I have twice recently seen a medium sized Grebe in Langstone Harbour off the Oysterbeds and wondered if it might be a **Black-necked Grebe** but so far only one of these has been reported on the HOS news (off Hill Head on Oct 15). Elsewhere on the south coast one was in Poole Harbour on Oct 8, but presumably moved on as there have been no more reports from that area until Oct 17 when 7 were in Studland Bay and another 3 were in Poole Harbour. Also starting to move south a **Red-throated Diver** was off Selsey on Oct 19 when the

first **Great Northern Diver** for the south was seen at Lundy off the north Devon coast.

Lastly for tonight I was interested in the following photo taken at Portland on Oct 16 showing a **Death's Head Hawkmoth** and a **Silver-striped Hawkmoth** both posing on one human hand. See it [here](#).

### [Wed 18th October](#)

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

#### **Yesterday's long walk around mid-Hayling added 10 to my October flower count**

##### **It also gave me a great show of Stubble Rosegill fungi**

Yesterday a break in the windy weather gave me a good opportunity for a long walk north over the mid-Hayling fields to Daw Lane, then west to the coastal path, south to the Saltmarsh Lane area and back across the Church Fields. My first find was of **Flowering Nutmeg (*Leycesteria formosa*)** in a Church Road garden where it was covered with black berries but also had a single white flower to qualify for my month list - both berries and flowers can be seen in [this internet photo](#). Reaching the roundabout on the Havant Road I joined the field footpath leading to the Maypole Inn and found that all the fields in this area had been newly ploughed leaving no field edge vegetation until I had crossed the northern edge of the first field and reached a small area of waste land at the west end of a couple of isolated houses. Here, as well as a fresh **Broad-leaved Dock**, I found two interesting additions to my list. One was type of Evening Primrose with typical yellow flowers but differing from the Large-flowered species that is common in the Sinah Common area in various respects, most noticeably in having green rather than reddish sepals dangling from the base of the flowers to identify it as **Common Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)** which I have not come across before. The other was my first find for the year of **Apple of Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*)** and I have to admit to cheating in adding it to my list as the three flowers had lost their blue colour but retained sufficient of their structure to be sure of their identity - all the features can be seen in the [Wildflowerfinder page on the species](#).

Moving on across the last field before the Maypole pub there was no trace of the Field Pansies which I have seen here throughout the summer but in their place was a huge display of **Stubble Rosegill fungi** on the bare ground on the west side of the field path in a field which was currently being ploughed. To get a good impression of these fungi see [the first-nature.com webpage on the species](#). Beyond the pub I turned into Daw Lane where a sizeable stretch of the east end of the lane has its northern bank covered with the '**var *Oxyloba***' form of **Greater Periwinkle** whose flowers have narrow propellor like petals (see [this internet photo](#)). As I have found the normal form of *Vinca major* flowering elsewhere recently I was surprised to find just one flower open here but that was enough to qualify for inclusion in my list. After crossing West Lane I took the roadside route created to keep Horses from the road traffic at the West Lane blind bends and in this track I added **Marsh Cudweed** to my list - the Leicestershire Naturespot webpage shows several photos of [this inconspicuous plant](#).

Next stop was on the Coastal Path at the Pill Box where a bench seat gave a great view of Langstone Harbour at high tide but with no birds in sight - later I found at least 100 Brent on what I call the 'midway saltings' some way further south after adding **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** (see [to my list](#)). Turning off the Coastal Path on the track to Saltmarsh Lane I found **Shasta Daisies** flowering as garden escapes and in Higworth Lane another garden escape was the **cultivar version of Viper's Bugloss known as 'Blue Bedder'** (see [an internet image](#)).

En route I noted a third garden in which the Morning Glory creeper was flowering (see illustration on my Oct 14 entry) and back at home I found my October flower list now had 171 entries.

## [Mon 16th October](#)

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

**Mass Movement of Hawfinches to Brittany**  
**Great Grey Shrikes and Snow Buntings now in southern England**  
**13 species of Dragonfly and 16 of Butterflies seen this month**  
**Atlantic storms push Portuguese Man-of-War jellyfish onto our shores**  
**Increasing numbers of Great White Egrets**

On Oct 14 I commented on **a very unusual westerly movement of Hawfinches** in southern England but today I have looked at the Trektellen web site reporting observations across Europe and further afield and this shows **a much more dramatic picture of this mass movement** starting on Oct 12 and increasing to a peak on Oct 15. Hawfinches were being reported in unusual numbers from up to 50 sites (bearing in mind that just 1 or 2 birds were 'unusual' at most sites where the Hawfinch is not normally seen). On Oct 15 38 Trektellen sites recorded unusual numbers of Hawfinch, mostly less than 10 but 17 sites reported more than 10 birds and 3 sites had more than 100, with one of these called **Planguenoual reporting 900 birds**. I found that **Planguenoual is a district on the Brittany coast of France south of the Channel Islands and not far west of the port of St Malo**. Maybe we will learn more about what is going on in the Hawfinch world but at the moment I have the impression that all the Hawfinches of Europe have heard an urgent call to attend the equivalent of a very important Druid festival at their most sacred site in Brittany, and are all attempting to get there without very accurate maps or satnavs.

After a **Red Backed Shrike** turned up at Dungeness on Oct 14 the first **Great Grey Shrike** was seen at Pulborough Brooks on the same day that seven arrived at different sites in the Netherlands and Belgium. Today, Oct 16, a single **Hawfinch** arrived at one of its regular winter sites - Lakeside in Eastleigh - after lots more were reported on the continent on Oct 15. Last month the first **Snow Bunting** was seen in the Netherlands on Sep 12 but I have seen no more reports of this species until Oct 9 when 10 were in the Netherlands followed by one at St Ives in Cornwall on Oct 11.

Today I had a look at the British Dragonfly Society website and was surprised to see that **13 Dragonfly species** have been seen in southern England this month including a late **Emperor** in Cornwall on Oct 3 and several **Common Darters** at

Slimbridge on Oct 15. On Oct 14 Willow Emeralds were still going strong with a count of 28 in Kent after 3 Black Darters were reported in Glamorgan on Oct 12. A similar scan of the Hampshire and Sussex Butterfly reports shows that 16 Butterfly species have been seen during the month with Red Admiral being the most numerous followed by Clouded Yellow, Small Copper, Speckled Wood and the Large and Small Whites. A single Brimstone on the Sussex Downs on Oct 12 was a surprise as was several Meadow Browns still active at Mill Hill, Shoreham, on Oct 15.

One result of storms in the Atlantic has been to push several Portuguese Man-of-war jelly fish onto the west coast of England with some arriving on the Sussex shoreline where Graeme Lyons saw one at Shoreham on Oct 13 but for a more general account of these creatures see this [BBC webpage](#).

Finally for today there seems to be an increasing number of Great White Egrets both in England and on the near continent. On Oct 14 there were 16 at the Dungeness RSPB reserve while on Oct 15 Trektellen had reports from 13 sites in the Netherlands and Belgium with 41 birds at one site and 10 to 13 birds at four other sites.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 9 - 15 (WEEK 41 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 15th October**

#### **Mass Movement of Hawfinches to Brittany**

Yesterday I commented on a very unusual westerly movement of Hawfinches in southern England but today I have looked at the Trektellen web site reporting observations across Europe and further afield and this shows a much more dramatic picture of this mass movement starting on Oct 12 and increasing to a peak on Oct 15. Hawfinches were being reported in unusual numbers from up to 50 sites (bearing in mind that just 1 or 2 birds were 'unusual' at most sites where the Hawfinch is not normally seen). On Oct 15 38 Trektellen sites recorded unusual numbers of Hawfinch, mostly less than 10 but 17 sites reported more than 10 birds and 3 sites had more than 100, with one of these called Planguenoual reporting 900 birds. I found that Planguenoual is a district on the Brittany coast of France south of the Channel Islands and not far west of the port of St Malo. Maybe we will learn more about what is going on in the Hawfinch world but at the moment I have the impression that all the Hawfinches of Europe have heard an urgent call to attend the equivalent of a very important Druid festival at their most sacred site in Brittany, and are all attempting to get there without very accurate maps or satnavs.

### **Sat 14th October**

**Many Hawfinch moving west**  
**A Holly Tree with fresh flowers and no berries**  
**A second find of Morning Glory in flower**

Between Oct 10 and 14 **Hawfinches** were reported moving west at seven sites in Hampshire and Sussex with a peak count of 23 at Rewell Wood near Arundel on Oct 13. 15 seen at Fairmile Bottom in the same general area on Oct 10 may have stayed in the Arundel area to be part of the Rewell Wood total but other sightings on Oct 13 at Sandy Point on Hayling (1 bird), 7 over the Westdean Woods north of Chichester, 6 in the Test Valley near Romsey and 1 at Portland must have been part of a wider movement. Two more reports on Oct 14 were of 11 birds in the Fleet area of north Hampshire and a lone bird at Stubbington near Gosport. Three reports from the **Budds Farm area** of Havant which also caught my eye today (Oct 14) were of **4 Ring Ouzels and 2 Redwings** plus **200 Brent already on the foreshore there.**

My own local walk today added **four flowering plants to my month total, now 161 species.** The most significant was a young **Holly Tree** just opening a good show of fresh white flowers with not a berry in sight. Less surprising were a single flowering plant of **Common Vetch** and several of both **Smooth and Hairy Tare** in the long grass of my local Church Fields. Also seen on the same circuit were a third specimen of **Cow Parsley** in flower near the Newtown House hotel and a second find of **Morning Glory** flowering in a Manor Road was garden where it had obviously been planted and looking like [this](#).

### [Fri 13th October](#)

**Where are the juvenile Brent this year?**

**Migrant birds which are difficult to spot**

**11 species of butterfly seen this week**

**National moth nights run from Oct 12 to 14 this year.**

The first reports of Brent Geese on the English south coast came on Sep 19 this year with 15 flying west past Selsey and another two flying east past the Gosport area after having followed the French coast west to the D Day beaches north of Caen before doing a U-turn in the channel. It makes sense that these first to arrive are adults without young to slow them down but I see that **last year the first mention of juveniles in my diary was on Oct 14** so I will be expecting to hear of them in the near future, followed by news of the first to leave the harbour waters to feed on arable fields and at a later date change to feeding on grassland.

Yesterday I mentioned that both Blackbirds and Song Thrushes cross the channel in large numbers to escape the continental winter and today I noticed that the Sandwich Bay observatory had reported **the arrival of at least 40 Blackbirds on Oct 9** while on Oct 12 an influx of Blackbirds was noticeable by the River Arun south of Arundel. Another species which comes to us from the continent but is not often seen on passage is **Woodcock**. It arrives in sufficient numbers to be worth while organising shoots in the Tournerbury area of Hayling Island (though I have not heard of these in recent years) but on Oct 12 what was almost certainly a newly arrived migrant was put up on Blackfield Common near Calshot by a cyclist on his morning ride to work without the need for the beaters necessary to put up these cryptic and elusive birds for a shoot. Also on Oct 12 another bird not often seen on passage, the **Bearded Tit**, was seen flying in a group of four in the Pennington area near Lymington. And while on the subject of migrant birds I see

that after what I think was the first flock of 21 **Velvet Scoter** arriving this winter on the south coast (off Pett in Rye Bay on Oct 9) a second report of a single bird in Poole Harbour was made on Oct 10.

Warm weather is allowing us to see **a good variety of butterflies in mid October** and a look at the reports of this week's sightings in Sussex and Hampshire show that 11 species have been seen with Red Admiral being particularly numerous (17 seen in Gosport on Oct 12). Another colourful species still on the wing is Small Copper while a single unexpected Brimstone was seen on the Sussex Downs, also on Oct 12, and migrant Clouded Yellows were still crossing the channel to arrive on Eastney Beach in Portsmouth on Oct 12 (Four had reached Penzance in Cornwall on Oct 5).

Each year our national Butterfly Conservation, together with Atropos magazine, organise a national moth night (actually three consecutive nights to allow for the weather) and this year the dates are Oct 12-14. An article in the Daily Telegraph quotes Richard Fox, of Butterfly Conservation, saying .. "A quick check of ivy blossom on a sunny autumn day will reveal bees, hoverflies, butterflies and other insects, all making the most of this seasonal bonanza of nectar. After dark, the pollinator nightshift takes place and a myriad of moths come out to feed. For this year's Moth Night, find some big patches of ivy flowers nearby and go back with a torch after the sun has set. It's a fantastic and easy way to see some of the beautiful moths that are on the wing in autumn."

One Hawkmoth that catches everyone's attention is the Death's Head which has a Skull image on its thorax and one was seen in Folkestone on Oct 5 but the photos of it were not as impressive as this one used by the BBC - see [it here](#). For more info on this moth see [this link](#). Note that you can change the main image show on this web link by clicking on any of the small images at the foot of the page.

## **[Thu 12th October](#)**

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

### **Oregon Grape, known to me as the Tealeaf Plant, is now flowering** **A guide to identifying Ichneumon Wasps** **Fieldfares heading north and Ring Ouzels heading south cross in the New Forest.**

A local walk to enjoy the warm sunshine today added one more species to my October flowering plants - the **Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)**. Although every plant you see will originally have been planted by a gardener it qualifies as being of interest to me as, once planted, it needs no care and is capable of looking after itself for many years as was the case with one example in the Disenters section of the New Lane cemetery in Havant where it had happily survived some 20 years of total neglect but still brightened the scene each autumn with its bright yellow flowers and glossy, rain resistant leaves. If you don't recognize its name have a look at this link to a photo on the internet ([Here](#)). Personally I still call this the Tealeaf Plant with fond memories of regularly emptying the teapot over one just outside the backdoor of the New Forest cottage where I was evacuated during the war...

I occasionally come across insects which I believe to be **Ichneumon Wasps** but do not know how to name them so I am very grateful to Brian Fellows (for publishing a link to) and to Bryan Pinchen (for supplying the link) to a PDF file which should help people like myself to name the species. If you want to see this comprehensive guide to these fascinating wasps go to [Ichneumon species PDF](#).

Many bird species are now on their way to winter quarters and two Thrush species (**Fieldfare and Ring Ouzel**) are currently being seen heading in opposite directions. This came to my notice when, on Oct 11, north bound Fieldfares were seen at Leaden Hall (just south of the B3078 road running across the north of the New Forest from Cadnam to Fordingbridge, not far short of Godshill) and on Oct 12 southbound Ring Ouzels were seen at the same site. Both species have been seen at numerous sites in the past few days (including one Ring Ouzel at Sandy Point on Hayling on Oct 10). As well as these obvious migrants both Blackbirds and Song Thrushes are on the move, but less easy to identify as migrants unless they are seen in large numbers, though Redwings are often identified by the distinctive 'seep' contact calls they make as they fly over at night.

### [Wed 11th October](#)

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

#### **Fatsia japonica - the Castor Oil plant - now flowering**

#### **Waxwing in the Scillies and Stone Curlew wintering in Kent?**

#### **70 mile wide flock of Painted Lady butterflies seen on radar in Colorado**

A walk along the south Hayling shore in today's near gale force wind was not expecting any new flowers - my target was to explore the area called Cockle Warren near Eastoke corner - but included the sight of the first flowers on a garden shrub called **Fatsia japonica** to which those unfamiliar with it can be introduced by this RHS webpage - see [Link](#). It is one of a large group of plants of the Aralia genus from which we get products such as Rice Paper (made from the leaves) and Castor Oil (which can be extracted from its stems). Our common Ivy is a member of the family and it is not difficult to see a similarity between the structure of Fatsia and Ivy flowers (both of which flower in the autumn).

Among current Butterfly news is something that I heard about on BBC News a few days ago concerning the **Painted Lady**. The thing which caught the attention of the media was a report from Colorado in the US of radar screens showing a 70 mile wide image of what was at first thought to be a huge flock of migrating birds but which turned out to be Painted Lady butterflies heading south to hibernate. You can see the BBC report [here](#). Wikipedia tells us that *Vanessa cardui*, the species with which we are familiar, is found on every continent except Antarctica and South America and it is thought the radar image was of this species though it seems that the Americans call it the Cosmopolitan.

This being October many birders will be visiting the **Scilly Isles** and one of them was Matt Eade from Seaford in Sussex. My regular check on his website ([Seafordbirding.blogspot.co.uk](#)) showed that he paid a three day visit to the isles on Oct 5 and saw the first **Waxwing** I have heard of this autumn on St Mary's. I was aware that there are two species of Waxwing - Cedar and Bohemian - but a quick

check showed that the Bohemian Waxwing has a more northerly range and it is the Cedar Waxing which regularly invades the British Isles. For more detail on the differences see [Link](#). While on the Scillies Matt also saw a **Cliff Swallow** and a **Vagrant Emperor dragonfly** - you can read his account in the Oct 5 entry in his blog [Here](#).

For an endpiece tonight I see from the Sandwich Bay observatory website that a **Stone Curlew** which appeared in the Pegwell Bay area of Kent on August 17, presumably on its migration south, was still there on Oct 6, reminding me of one which spent a whole winter on Hayling Island in a field on the south of the large open area of north Hayling fields (between Northwood Farm and Upper Tye Farm) but I have forgotten the date.

## [Tue 10th October](#)

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

### **Both Redwings and Fieldfares are now arriving on the South Coast** **Spoonbill numbers set a new UK record in Poole Harbour** **Bearded Tits and Black Swans are on their winter wanderings**

So far this month I have been 'flower hunting' here on Hayling but I have now started to catch up on South Coast bird news and have already picked up reports of **both Fieldfares and Redwings arriving in serious numbers**. The first Redwing I saw reported was a single bird in Ashdown Forest on Oct 1 and this has been followed by seven more sightings from five different sites in Hampshire and Sussex with the biggest counts coming from Tweseldown Racecourse near Fleet in north Hampshire (168 birds flying north west on Oct 7 and 2630 going the same way on Oct 9). A further report of 16 at Dungeness on Oct 9 hints at a widespread but largely un-noticed influx on that date. Also on Oct 9 came the first report of Fieldfares - 11 flying up the Test valley just north of Romsey.

Oct 9 also brought a **new UK site total for Spoonbills with a total of 75 in Poole Harbour** (in two separate flocks: 35 birds in Brownsea lagoon and another 40 at Shipstal Point near Arne).

The first report of **Bearded Tits moving between reed beds** came from Portland where at least one 'migrant' bird was seen on Oct 8 after a report of 21 seen 'high flying' at Keyhaven that day. For anyone unfamiliar with their life style these birds spend most of their lives in the same reed bed with no view of the outside world but at this time of year, when the juveniles are full grown, nature forces them to seek new homes and mates, and to do this they have to pluck up the courage to set out on lengthy journeys to find suitable places to settle. Prior to setting out they can be seen flying up above their reed bed 'home' to get a first look at the outside world before setting out on this 'voyage into the unknown' - this is commonly known as 'high flying'. A similar process at this time of year sends young **Black Swans** off into the unknown to seek breeding sites and mates and a report of one at the head of Fareham Creek on Oct 7, where the species has not been seen before, may be a sign that the young birds which have been raised at the Riverside Park site on the River Itchen in Southampton (where a peak count of 17 birds was reported on March 31 this year when the resident pair had just

hatched 7 new cygnets and 8 juveniles from last year had come to look at them) are currently exploring the local coast in search of mates and nest sites.

Just one more news item worth a mention today is the first report of **Velvet Scoter** on the south coast - a flock of 21 were in Rye Bay off Pett Level yesterday (Oct 9).

### [Mon 9th October](#)

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

#### **A ride to Gunner Point finds seven more plants in flower including Nottingham Catchfly and Musk Mallow.**

This morning was forecast to be cloudy but dry with a light breeze, and that was right for the outward trip during which I found **Common Comfrey** and **Red Bistort** plus a re-flowering of the **Dark Mullein** near the Golf Course entrance and **Red Hot Pokers** growing outside the Kench houses.

Turning south through the harbour entrance carpark I took the path along the Sailing Club fence to have a look at the sand dune area where I was cheered to find the bright blue of **Sheep's Bit** still flowering (for photo see [Sheep's Bit flowers.](#)) but when I emerged on to the open shore I found a thick mist had hidden all trace of the Isle of Wight and on the way home this mist followed me in the form of an increasing drizzle. This did not start until I had visited the **Nottingham Catchfly** site and found two plants in full flower (for photos see [Nottingham Catchfly flowers.](#)) but as I walked my bike over the shingle at the east end of the Golf Course I suffered the double annoyance of finding the shingle churned up by heavy lorries taking shingle from the western shore to re-inforce the flood defences for the eastern end - they were taking advantage of the low tide - and the onset of the drizzle.

Taking the quickest route home, up the road from the Inn on the Beach to the main Shore Road, I had my most unexpected find of the day - a large plant of **Musk Mallow** in full flower, bringing my October flower count to an encouraging **150 species**. To add to my pleasure when I arrived back at home I noticed that one of the specimens I had brought home last Thursday, the Morning Glory creeper, had opened two new flowers which were rewarding me with the full colour - even better than the photos on the website I used to illustrate them then is this photo at [Morning Glory](#)

### **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 2 - 8 (WEEK 40 OF 2017)**

### [Sun 8th October](#)

**A cycle round Hayling Island adds 15 plant species to my October list bringing the total to 148**

**Two unexpected additions were Wild Privet which usually flowers in June, and commercial Pea flowers**

**I also saw my first large flocks of Wigeon and Brent Goose in Langstone Harbour.**

There was very little wind to hinder my progress this morning and the visibility was excellent but a layer of cloud meant I did not see the sun (though it shone all afternoon when I was back home). Nothing new was seen until I reached the Coastal Path/Billy Line where **Agrimony** had started re-flowering. I was going to check out the Saltmarsh Lane seawall area until I found that the direct approach to it was under water, so I pressed on to the point where the Coastal Path touches the edge of the harbour and here the familiar sound of **Brent Geese** could be heard though a scan of the 500 or so birds on the water closest to me showed them to be **Wigeon** with a similar number of Brent beyond them. Later the **Wigeon** made an impressive mass take off and flew north though though a good half dozen **Great Crested Grebe** were left along with two smaller birds which **may have been Black-necked Grebe** though a search of the HOS website reveals no reports of them in the harbour so far. Also seen here was **Field Scabious** still in flower and by the time I reached the Oyster Beds I had added the following to my month list:- **Hoary Ragwort, Black Knapweed, Self Heal, Perforate St John's Wort, Pepper Saxifrage, and Golden Samphire** (which I see is already past flowering in the Langstone Bridge area). On the Oyster Beds mound I added **Scarlet Pimpernel** and **Lesser Hawkbit**.

Pushing on up the Coastal Path I found plenty of **Greater Knapweed** and one example of **Hedge Bedstraw** flowering near the northern exit from the Oyster Beds but the biggest surprise of the day came as I turned right off the old rail track onto the path to Langstone Bridge. Here a small bush of **Wild Privet**, which normally only flowers in early summer, was topped with many clusters of white flowers.

Nothing more of interest until I reached the first house of Northney village where I was hoping to find several good 'arable weeds' in the corner of the large north Hayling fields. In their place it seemed that, since my last visit here in September, this vast field had been harvested and re-planted with a crop of peas, not for harvesting but for replenishing the nitrogen content of the soil before the field was ready to plant with a future 'cash crop'. These small, white flowered Pea plants had not previously been listed in my index of wild flowers, though I have often seen them. To make up for the absence of the rare Green Nightshade which I have previously found here (including last month) I did some research to discover that the original wild form of Pea is called 'Pisum sativum' and, while I am sure that the seeds sold for the nitrogen enrichment of fields nowadays will have undergone 'genetic enrichment' and will be sold under commercial names, I have listed them in my plant index under the 'English Name' of '**Commercial Field Pea**' with the catchall scientific name '**Pisum sativum**' and become species number 146 in my October list.

My last stop before heading home was North Common and here I added **Goats Rue** and **Strawberry Clover**, bringing my **month total so far to 148**. With much of October still ahead, and a forecast of warmer weather for next week-end, I am expecting the final total to be at least 150 so my hunt goes on!

**[Thu 5th October](#)**

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

**A walk to Mill Rythe not only adds Chicory and Black Bindweed to my flower list but also finds another Cow Parsley re-flowering plus an unexpected Morning Glory creeper in bloom.**

I was not intending to go out plant hunting today but bright afternoon sunshine persuaded me to walk to Mill Rythe where I was confident of adding two flowering plants to my October list (**Chicory** and **Black Bindweed**) but in fact I added 18 species and found a second example of **Cow Parsley** in full flower.

Starting out across the Legion Field towards the footpath following the western edge of the Tournerbury Golf Course all the way to the Mill Rythe schools I found both **White Deadnettle** and **Japanese Honeysuckle**, which I was surprised were not already on my list, before I crossed Tournerbury Lane and made a surprising discovery of a bindweed-like creeper with purple flowers on the pavement outside one of the crowded houses with little in the way of gardens. This turned out to be **Ipomea purpurea**, one of three species of **Morning Glory** listed in Stace's Flora of the British Isles, though Wikipedia lists over 1,000 species world wide which share that name. For more info see [the Finnish Naturegate website](#). Also nearby I found **Short-fruited Willowherb** flowering by an alleyway between the houses.

Beside the road to the Mill Rythe Holiday Camp I found a single flower of **Creeping Cinqufoil** and noted that I had not yet listed **Greater Plantain** as being still in flower. After passing the schools I turned down the farm track alongside the arable field behind the Mill Rythe inlet of Chichester Harbour. The **Chicory** which I was aiming for, and which rewarded me with a blaze of blue in the bright sunshine (see [the Wildflower Finder webpage for photos and info](#)) grows along a narrow waterside footpath which is hidden by bushes which screen it from the large arable field in which I found **Wild Radish**, **Charlock**, **Prickly Sowthistle**, and both **Scented and Scentless Mayweed** plus **Hawkweed Oxtongue** and **Smooth Hawksbeard**. On the seawall I persuaded myself that the drab brown colour of the tiny flowers on **Mugwort** was their natural colour and did not mark them as dead!

Back at home I added one plant, **Lesser Sunflower (*Helianthus petiolaris*)** to my spreadsheet index so that I could include it in my total and also realised that I had omitted to add **Argentinian Vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*)**, thus **bringing my current October total to 133**, which I will hopefully increase next Sunday when I plan to cycle round the whole Island, taking in the whole Billy Line and Northney village.

**Mon 2nd October**

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

**A cycle ride to The Kench and then to Sandy Point on a lovely sunny morning brings my October flower count to 113.**

I started through West Town where, close to the site of the old rail station, **Perennial Wall Rocket** flowers on the north side of Station Road. My route then took me along Park Road and Sinah Lane to Ferry Road where, on Sep 28, just beyond the Golf Course Maintenance site, I had seen two plants of **Cow Parsley** flowering in the roadside grass. Reaching this point I was intending to dismount

and have a close look but today a small group of elderly people had already stopped to chat there so I rode on to the **Bell Heather** site on the Golf Course opposite The Kench (on which the tide was high and had a large flock of Brent on the water with another flock of Oystercatchers roosting on the shore). The Heather was still in flower and I also ticked flowering **Tamarisk** nearby before riding back to look for the **Cow Parsley**, one plant of which had been cut by seasonal roadedge grass cutting but a second plant was undamaged.

I now headed back east for Sandy Point but noted both **Seaside Daisies** and tall **Hollyhocks** flowering just east of Staunton Avenue. When I reached Southwood Road I was hoping for Silver Ragwort flowers but they were all over and the next plant to go on my list was the **Black Horehound** by the road passing the vehicle entrance to Sandy Point. Following the footpath round the edge of the reserve I found the **Western Gorse**, **Red Campion**, and a few remaining flowers of **Marsh Thistle** in the old, overgrown Hospital grounds before emerging on the harbour entrance shore where I listed **Blue Fleabane**, **Sea Spurge**, **Sea Knotgrass**, plus **Guernsey Fleabane** before heading back home along the Eastoke Promenade. Here I missed out on White Melilot and Japanese Rose but did see **Sticky Groundsel** and **Rock Samphire** (plus a display of Shaggy Inkcap fungi on the wide lawn of one of the big blocks of flats). Back at Eastoke Corner I headed up Rails Lane, having no difficulty in seeing that one of the **Thorn Apple** plants in the garden of the house at the Harold Road junction was still flowering as I rode past. Today I will end with a link to the Wildflower Finder page on Thorn Apple though the plant I saw did not have the pure white flowers it shows - they were tinged with a blue colour. And before the link I must mention that the Hayling Islander paper which came through my door today says the Environment Agency have decided to abandon their attempts to repair the South Moors seawall at Langstone and to let the South Moors flood - perhaps we will soon have nesting Avocets there as has happened at the Medmerry breach near Selsey? Coming back to the present here is the [link to the Thorn Apple webpage](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 25 - OCT 1 (WEEK 39 OF 2017)**

### **Thu 28th Sept**

#### **A ride to Gunner Point finds Nottingham Catchfly reflowering plus Cow Parsley, a Dog Rose and two autumn fungi.**

When I was at Sandy Point last Tuesday Keith Turner told me that **Nottingham Catchfly** was re-flowering at its only Hayling site, south of the Golf Course near Gunner Point, so this morning's target was to see it for myself, but before getting there I made two other significant additions to my September list of flowering plants, bring the total to 221 species

The first of the unexpected finds came as I was passing the entrance to the Golf Course Maintenance Centre on the south side of Ferry Road and was a single plant of **Cow Parsley** in full flower, closely followed by a second plant. Then, as

the view of the pool of water between the road and the golf course came into view there was the even more unexpected view of a large **Dog Rose bush covered with at least a dozen fresh flowers**.

Nothing more to get excited about until I was on the south side of the Golf Course, beyond the Pill Box and had reached the first wooden bench where I usually stop for refreshment and just behind which is the small gorse covered hillock on which the **Nottingham Catchfly** can be found flowering in June (I see this year it was out by May 20). Last time I was here there were plenty of dead plants bearing dry wooden seed capsules but today I could at first see no trace of these (they had probably blown away) but a closer look revealed two young plants, their pale green stems and unopen white flower buds making them difficult to spot among the fresh green of the gorse but giving me enough evidence to add 1 to my count. My close look at the gorse also gave me another good find - at the back of the hillock, under the shade of the gorse, was a substantial troop of small, rich brown fungi which I identified as **Lacaria laccata commonly known as 'The Deceiver'**. These reminded me that I had already seen one other easily identified fungus on my way - a tall fresh **Shaggy Inkcap**.

**Wed 27th Sept**

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

**Yesterday I cycled to Sandy Point and found the rare Sea Knotgrass at its most impressive but found no new species for September. Today a local walk added three species to the month list.**

Yesterday I enjoyed a ride to Sandy Point where the area outside the reserve had a great show of the rare **Sea Knotgrass**, filling the hollows of the harbour entrance beach outside the reserve with a great display of tiny white flowers, and several of the regular species - **Blue Fleabane, Sea Rocket and Sea Spurge** - were still flourishing, as were **White Melilot and Sticky Groundsel** as I came back along the Eastoke Promenade. One garden species which has recently begun to flower, the spiky **Yucca**, did go on my list and an accidental meeting with Keith Turner outside the reserve told me that the **Nottingham Catchfly** outside the Golf Course at Gunner Point (which I have never seen flowering after July) is currently having a second flowering which I hope to get on both my September and October lists. Today a short walk through the Elm Close estate gave me second look at some garden escape plants lining the waste ground alongside the southern entrance road to the estate. I am not clear what they are but am pretty well convinced that they must be a member of the Honeysuckle family that I have not come across before, possibly something called **California Honeysuckle**, but to avoid claiming to have identified the species I have added a 'place holder' entry to my spread sheet under the name 'Elm Close Honeysuckle'. That same walk also added two more species to my September list - one was the extremely common species for most of the year - **Hairy Bitter Cress** - and the other a shrub used to create dense hedge hedges and give them a strong scent from small white inconspicuous flowers which is called **Ebbinge's Siverberry**.

Also noticed today was the large '**Daddy-long-legs**' **Tipula maxima**. This one should have been called a Mummy Long Legs as the pointed tip to her abdomen is used for laying her eggs in the ground, which I was not previously aware of.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 18 - 24 (WEEK 38 OF 2017)

### Sun 24th Sept

#### A walk to Hayling Bay brings my September flower list to 214 species including Dwarf Mallow

##### I also see a moribund Hedgehog in the roadside grass.

A walk to the seaside through the Elm Close Estate this morning took me past a motionless Hedgehog in the roadside grass. Assuming it was another road casualty I gave it a gentle poke with my stick, provoking some movement but no attempt to run off. As it was in no immediate danger, and looked as if it might be young and needing to feed up before going into hibernation, I left it where it was in the hope that it would survive. Also in the estate I found Marjoram and Spearmint flowering as garden escapes and the first bright orange berries of Japanese Spindle (*Euonymus japonicus*), and on emerging into South Road found freshly re-flowering Musk Storksbill.

Continuing down Westfield Avenue to Beach Road I turned south to the Fun Fair area and found a big display of Dwarf Mallow on the east side of the road just before reaching the Seafront Road roundabout. This was covered with fresh small white flowers and is something I have not seen anywhere for a couple of years at least when I found it on the New Brighton Road just south of Wensley Gardens in Emsworth - before that it used to be a regular sight in the orchards between Prinsted and Nutbourne but has long vanished from there.

Crossing over to the Beach grassland east of the Funfair where the grass has not been cut for some time I was pleased to find Vipers Bugloss freshly re-flowering and to see a single flower of Pale Flax where Brian Fellows had discovered it in May (and I had found it on Sep 9 so neither of these were new for my September list). Nothing new on the way home but I was pleased to see a single Common Blue butterfly.

### Fri 22nd Sept

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

#### I see my first Brent in Langstone Harbour and add five flowering plant species to my September list.

This morning I cycled north up the Hayling Coastal Path and saw my first Brent Geese of the season on the 'mud islands' off the West Lane fields where the Billy Line comes closest to the water's edge giving an uninterrupted view of the southern part of Langstone Harbour. With the tide not yet fully up the mud islands were not yet covered and no doubt provided an opportunity for the geese to find some eel grass to eat but they also hid some of them from my view so there may have been more than the 30 which I counted. Also here a stream of a similar number of Swallows were flying south but there was nothing else of special interest in the way of birds although I cycled all the way to the old rail bridge before turning back.

The plants which went on my list started with the Common Reeds in the Saltmarsh Lane marsh and I have Brian Fellows to thank for pointing out that these are now flowering when he saw them in Peter Pond at Emsworth on Sep 17. Three more plants were seen in the Oysterbeds area, the most surprising of these was a patch of freshly flowering Travellers Joy (*Clematis vitalba*) which had, I thought, long gone to seed and earned its alternative name of Old Man's Beard but which seemed to be having a second flowering today. Next surprise was to see just one plant of Marsh Cudweed and also in the Oysterbeds I felt

justified in counting **Large Flowered Pink Sorrel (*Oxalis debilis*)** which I have seen often enough flowering in gardens where it had been planted but here it must have arrived by non-human means. The last of today's five plants to go on my list was **Perennial Wall Rocket (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*)** which I saw growing in an unkempt 'garden' on the north side of Station Road in West Town shortly after emerging from the Billy Line. This is not the first time I have considered the large, weedy plants in this 'garden' might be the Perennial version of this species which, in its Annual Wall Rocket version, is very common here on south Hayling, but it was the first time that I stopped to have a close look at it and took a specimen to check out at home.

**Wed 20th Sept**

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

**42 Dark-bellied Brent in Chichester Harbour this morning**

**Maybe 30 Spoonbills in Poole Harbour**

**And a Black-necked Grebe at Eastbourne's West Rise Marsh**

**Now with added evening news .....**

**More reports of Brent arriving and a mass exodus at Sandwich**

**The butterfly season is ending**

**and an alien water weed is choking Pagham Rife**

A short update this morning to pass on the news that **42 Dark-bellied Brent (plus 2 Pale-bellied)** were seen this morning in the Emsworth Channel area of Chichester Harbour between Mill Rytte and Pilsey. This news was posted on the HOS news website by Andy Johnson who was presumably looking from Black Point on Hayling and saw them on the harbour mud.

Other news seen in a brief scan of the internet is that a **Black-necked Grebe** had been seen on the West Rise Marshes at Eastbourne (I think this is the first to reach the South Coast) and that Poole Harbour had a possible total of **30 Spoonbills** if you add to the main flock of 21 at Middlebere reports of 8 on Brownsea Island and 1 at Lytchett Fields.

**Additional news of arriving Brent** comes from John Goodspeed who was told of 20 Brent in the Emsworth Channel on Sep 19 (the day before Andy Johnson reported 42 there this morning). Additional reports of them today are of 250 in the Medmerry inlet at Selsey plus 29 flying west past Selsey Bill. In Hampshire today 14 were seen in Portsmouth Harbour and 5 at Brownwich near Titchfield Haven (these 5 were, I think, later seen at Farlington). In Kent 13 were seen at Reculver on Sep 19, increasing to 15, plus 2 Red-throated Divers, today. While these Brent were arriving **Sandwich reported a mass exodus of other birds** including 100,000 House Martins (in a 3 hour count), 40,000 Swallows and 300 each of Blackcaps and Chiff-chaffs.

**With the butterfly season coming to an end** I have listed all the species seen in Sussex on Sep 20 plus those seen at Gosport on Sep 19 to give the following Wall Brown, Common Blue, Small Copper, Brown Argus, Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma, Small Heath, Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown in Sussex and Clouded Yellow, Large and Small White in the Gosport area.

And to end today's news of interest as seen through my eyes the Selsey blog made me aware of a plant species that was until now not even in my plant index. Previously I was aware of a British native called **Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*)** but today the Selsey website made me aware of **Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*)** which has recently been classified as an invasive

alien and banned from sale in this country. The Selsey website drew attention to it with a comment that **Swans are now having difficulty in swimming on the Pagham Rife** and illustrated the problem with a photograph which you can see [here](#)

**Tue 19th Sept**

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

### **The first Dark-bellied Brent have arrived from the continent**

Today Trektellen reported a group of **four Dark-bellied Brent** nearing the Netherlands border with Belgium but **much more excitingly they also reported two which had flown on ahead past Le Havre to the area of the D Day beaches north of Caen**. After seeing that I found that what I am guessing were **the same two Brent had been seen flying east off Fort Gilkicker** (just west of the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour) as if they knew they had overshot the Solent Harbours and were heading back east. If you think it is unlikely that the two Brent which had only just reached the Netherlands on Sep 16 would have not only reached Le Havre but then flown north to be seen off Portsmouth on Sep 19 you may be right and the two reported off Gilkicker might have been Pale (or Dark) bellied birds coming from Greenland but regardless of their origin **the Selsey report for Sep 19 starts with "the first fifteen Brent Geese of the autumn" flew west past Selsey Bill this morning**. In addition to the 15 flying past Selsey Bill there were also 3 which were seen in Pagham Harbour off Church Norton and in Hampshire one was also seen at Lepe (mouth of Southampton Water).

Another immigrant species that could pass un-noticed is Robin. On Sep 16 the Havant Wildlife Group noticed **a large number of Robins in the bushes at Farlington Marshes** and 15 Robins were seen in Wheelers Bay (Isle of Wight) with 22 seen at St Catherine's Point on Sep 19. Another species just appearing on the south coast is **Siskin**: the first was seen at Selsey on Sep 17 and the first was reported at Portland on Sep 18. A much more uncommon visitor reported by Portland that day was a **Spotted Sandpiper** but they had to make a trip to Abbotsbury to see it (the most recent sighting of this species in the Portland area was back in 1974).

As a footnote I increased my September flower count to 203 today by examining a couple of specimens that I had brought home from yesterday's walk. Today I convinced myself they were **Grey Field Speedwell** and **Canadian Fleabane**, neither of which I had seen previously this month.

**Mon 18th Sept**

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

### **A walk to the Mengham Rythe shore brings my flower count to 201**

#### **Brent Geese seen at two more Netherlands sites today**

#### **Winter wildfowl increase with 70 Wigeon and 40 Shoveler at Pagham and 32**

#### **Little Grebe at Pett.**

This morning I walked to Mengham Rythe sailing club where the tide was high and I could see across to East Head, Pilsey and Emsworth but with no waterfowl in sight. I did however add 5 species to my September flower count bringing the total to 201 including **Greater Celandine**, **Clematis tangutica** (see [here for this late flowering climber](#)), and **Honeywort** (a Mediterranean species which is now being grown in many English gardens with a distinctive appearance shown in [this photo](#)). I have not had time today for a full scan of my wildlife internet sites but was able to find from Trektellen that a few **Brent** were seen today at two Netherlands sites (20 at one and 10 at another). I also saw reports on the SOS website of

increasing numbers of wildfowl at Pagham Harbour (70 Wigeon) and Pett Level (32 Little Grebe) while there seems to have been a significant influx of more than 150 Red Admirals at Portland (all three reports for today)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 11 - 17 (WEEK 37 OF 2017)**

### **Fri 15th Sept**

**First flock of Pale-bellied Brent arrive in Devon but no Dark-bellied reported so far**

**Big increase in winter waterfowl and many passing Grey Phalaropes**

**First Snow Bunting in the Netherlands**

**Four more flowering plants including a Primrose bring my September count to 195**

On Sep 3 a report of 3 Brent (one of them Pale-bellied) flying south through Chichester Harbour suggested that strong winds in the Atlantic might have driven them south while the same strong winds were holding back the migrant Dark-bellied birds. Still no reports of the latter but Sep 8 brought a report of 3 Pale-bellied birds at Newquay in Cornwall and today (Sep 15) what was described as "a flock of Brent" was seen in the north Devon Taw estuary near Barnstable - I assume these were migrant Pale-bellied Brent.

Numbers of other water fowl are now arriving on the south coast with 40 Wigeon and 8 Pintail seen at Selsey today (Sep 15) when Trektellen reported 384 Wigeon and 1003 Pintail at Netherlands sites. Back on Sep 2 Pulborough Brooks had 120 Teal and 30 Shoveler and the first 6 Red-breasted Mergansers were in the Lymington area on Sep 6 with 1 at Rye Harbour on Sep 10. On Sep 11 the first Red-throated Diver was off Portland with another at Christchurch Harbour.

Many other coastal sites have had Grey Phalarope with a peak count of 8 at Abbotsbury in Dorset on Sep 13 but the most local was 1 on Sep 15 in the flooded area east of the Hayling Billy track near the Hayling Oysterbeds. A more unexpected winter visitor was a single Snow Bunting in the Netherlands on Sep 12.

To end today I have increased my September flower count to 195 with Hops, Thorn Apple and Green Alkanet seen yesterday and a single plant of Primroses in an old part of St Mary's churchyard today.

### **Tue 12th Sept**

**A cycle round the Island brings my September flower count to 191**

My main target today was the Green Nightshade in the arable fields at the west end of Northney village but before that I found the first flower on the Butchers Broom growing beside Copse Lane just before reaching the rural industrial units in the Tye Farm area north of Verner Common/Mill Rythe. Branches of this strange plant, with its rigid, prickly leaves that were once used as an abrasive brush for cleaning the wooden blocks on which butchers cut their meat and within the 1980s George Hedley, then farmer of Langstone Dairy Farm, showed me how

he used branches of Butchers Broom tied to long poles to clear spiders webs from the roof space of his cattle barns. If you are not familiar with this plant see [here for a series of photos and other info](#). That account of the plant tells you that it is only found in flower from February to August but I regularly find it in flower from September on. Note that it has separate male and female plants - the female plants have large red berries so do not look for the male flowers (which look like miniature Passion Flowers and which grow in the centre of what look like spiny leaves but are in fact a type of flower stem known as a cladode) on these female plants. To check for flowers hold the top of a plant stem and bend it over to inspect the 'leaves' without getting scratched by the spiny 'leaf points'.

My next stop was at North Common where white flowered **Goats Rue** was still flowering to the left of the track immediately inside the entrance gate from the car park and more could be seen behind the first wooden bench you come to (overlooking what was once the enclosed boating lake of the long gone holiday camp but which now fills and empties with the tide). Also seen from this bench were both **Strawberry Clover and Rosebay Willowherb** to add to my list.

Cycling on towards Langstone Bridge I stopped again where a footpath goes south round the edge of the large arable fields (just before the sharp right hand bend in the road). The corner of the field next to the road is where I expect to find the uncommon **Green Nightshade** which is distinct from the common Black Nightshade. The first sign of the plant (of which I only saw two today) is that it has slightly larger and distinctly paler - almost yellowish - leaves and its stems are always green - Black Nightshade stems are often black, but the decisive feature is the large size of the sepals which more than cover the top of the berries. For a photo see [here](#). Also seen here was **Cockspur Grass and Swine Cress** (as distinct from the much commoner Lesser Swine Cress).

Across the main Havant Road and through the waterside carpark I took the waterside path towards the Hayling Billy track but as soon as I emerged from the initial tree cover I was very pleased to see that the two **Wild Clary** plants were once again freshly flowering on the northside of the path. These, plus **Greater Knapweed** flowering near the northern entrance to the Oysterbeds, brought my September flower count to 191 and a chance to top 200 before the month is out though my main interest in the immediate future will be the arrival of the Brent Geese.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEP 4 - 10 (WEEK 36 OF 2017)**

**[Sat 9th Sept](#)**

**Local walks bring my September flower count up to 182**

**First Fieldfare in the Netherlands and 9 Pink-foot Geese in Yorkshire as**

**Meadow Pipits start to move south**

**144 Little Egrets spend the night at Langstone Pond and 8 Great Egrets**

**seen at Dungeness**

**78 Common Porpoise also seen off Dungeness**

Since my visit to Sandy Point on Sep 5 three local walks and one cycle ride have added another 49 plant species to my month list, bringing the **total so far to 182**. Here are the highlights.

**On Sep 6** I walked north up Church Road and across the fields to the Maypole pub, then south to the Mill Rythe shore before continuing south down the footpath towards Mengeham House and returning home through the new housing served by St Benedict Road. Highlights of this walk were the **Field Pansies** still flowering in the field south of the Maypole pub and the mass of **Chicory** on the Mill Rythe shore - at the Havant Road edge of that shore field I was pleased to find **Black Bindweed** and in the new estate at the southern end of this walk I came on **Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil**.

**On Sep 7** I walked down to the Hayling Bay shore where, before reaching the shore, the sheltered roadside of Webb Lane gave me **two large clumps of Ivy in full flower** and attracting a cloud of insects including one **Volucella zonaria**. On the shore I looked for the two spikes of Autumn Ladies Tresses which I had found on Aug 21 in the grass close to the bare shingle and close to the Beachlands railway terminal. No sign of them but being close to the Beachlands building I followed its weedy edge north towards the Seafront Road, crossing the sandy cycle track which runs east to Eastoke Corner. Turning east to search the area between this cycle track and the road I had gone no more than 150 yards from the Beachlands buildings before I came on something which Brian Fellows had found on May 6 and which I had been looking for ever since - a small patch of **Pale Flax** which I have previously only found in the Oysterbeds area on Hayling Island. One other thing that surprised me in this part of Beachlands was the large amount of escaped **Garden Asparagus** to be found here. One other surprise came on the north side of the Seafront Road as I was heading home - a small patch of **Common Fumitory** at the pavement edge.

**On Sep 8** I made a much smaller extension to a shopping trip to add a roadside garden escape **Lobelia plant** and a much more eye-catching **Passion Flower creeper** (*Passiflora caerulea*) on the fence around some allotments. I also found some **Thale Cress** which I had not already listed this month. If you are not familiar with the fruits of the Passion Flower you can see a photo showing a flower with its large fruits looking like large yellow plums (which can be eaten but are tasteless and full of seeds) [here](#).

Today (**Sep 9**) I got my bike out and rode to Gunner Point and back. My first find was a cluster of freshly flowering **White Champion** growing in the roadside ditch of Ferry Road just east of the Golf Club entrance road. Next came the expected **Bell Heather** still flowering just within the Golf Course opposite the Kench. Turning south at the Ferry roundabout the **Tamarisks** around the sand dunes were in full flower but after turning east south of the Golf Course there was no sign of the many Autumn Ladies Tresses which had been abundant here on Aug 19 - in searching for them however I found quite a few surviving **Sheep's Bit** plants still retaining their bright blue flowers and I also noticed how fresh and bright green were the leaves of the Polypody fern that grows here. The last flowering plant to be added to the month list was was **Thrift** (*Armeria maritima*).

A few items which have caught my eye on the internet start with two entries on Trektellen - the first tells us of [a single Fieldfare](#) in the Netherlands on Sep 4 and the second reports [9 Pinkfoot Geese](#) at Humanby in North Yorkshire on Sep 8. Much more significant for us on the south coast is the [start of the departure of the Meadow Pipits](#) which have spent the summer here. The first report of significant migration came from Portland on Sep 6 when at least 250 moved south and on Sep 7 the count was over 500.

This time of year sees the highest counts of [Little Egrets night roosting at Langstone Pond](#) as those which have nested or fledged there are joined by others on the move from elsewhere in search of their own place to spend the winter. On Sep 1 Peter Raby counted the Egrets arriving to roost from an hour before sunset until it was too dark to see them and recorded 144 coming in but a few years ago when I made similar counts my peak result was over 220. At Dungeness on Sep 3 a count was made of [8 Great White Egrets](#) which is I think the biggest site total for this species so far. Another big total for Dungeness was of [78 Porpoises](#) offshore on Sep 1 but that may have been because the sea was exceptionally calm on that day, making it easier to count them.

## [Tue 5th Sept](#)

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

### **Sandy Point area brings my September plant count up to 133**

### **Baird's Sandpiper in East Sussex as shorebird flocks start to arrive**

### **Late Cuckoo in Dorset, White Storks in Sussex and Goshawks in Hants and Sussex**

On Monday (Sep 4) I cycled to the mouth of Chichester Harbour and added 25 species to my September flower list including [Spanish Broom](#), [Greater Sea Spurrey](#), [Sea Holly](#), [Sea Rocket](#), [Blue Fleabane](#), [Western Gorse](#), [Red Campion](#) and [Marsh Thistle](#). I also included [Ivy](#) in the list when I found a mass of it on the northern fence of the Sandy Point reserve with all the individual flower buds having separated from the tight mass of the undifferentiated flower heads seen last week - they may not have yet opened their flowers to feed the insects but will do so in a very few days. Arriving back at my flat I was surprised to see one open flower head on [White Comfrey](#) in the car park where I keep my bike - this brings my September count to 133.

With most of my plant hunting complete I was able to resume my scanning of the internet and immediately noticed that the number of shorebirds arriving to spend the winter with us had shot up or had started to do so. On Sep 1 a flock of [30 Ringed Plovers](#) had arrived at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight. On Sep 2 Christchurch Harbour had [14 Wigeon](#) and there were [3 Pintail](#), [30 Shovelers](#) and [120 Teal](#) at Pulborough Brooks with [120 Black-tailed Godwits](#) plus [4 Ruff](#) in Pagham Harbour along with a flock of [9 Spotted Redshank](#) (which became 10 on Sep 3). Also in Pagham Harbour on Sep 3 there were [200 Redshank](#) and on Sep 4 Poole Harbour had [328 Dunlin](#).

Other significant counts from Poole Harbour on Sep 2 were of [30 Spoonbills](#) (I think this is the first count of that many there) and there was also a [late Cuckoo](#) there. Even more significant was the arrival of a [Baird's Sandpiper](#) in the Cuckmere area of East Sussex on Sep 3 - this is only the 8th to be seen in Sussex, and the first since 1996. For a photo of the bird see [here](#).

To end today with signs that two species are 'trending' as Buzzards have done during my birding life in Hampshire, going from 'never to be seen east of the New Forest' to an every day sighting (on Sep 1 a flock of 16 in the sky over Firlle on the Sussex Downs was hardly unusual). One of the two species I have in mind is the **White Stork**: on Aug 26 I noted that one had been seen over Bedhampton in Havant and on July 27 I included a link to a paper describing a project to introduce White Storks to the Knepp Estate in Sussex - that project has, I think, been responsible for several Stork sightings over Sussex but recent sightings on the Sussex coast seem to indicate that some Storks are arriving here of their own free will. On Sep 2 two of these Storks were seen at Beachy Head and 2 (maybe the same birds) were seen on the roof of the Rustington ASDA store while on Sep 4 two were seen a few miles further east in a field behind a different ASDA store at Ferring. The second species which is gradually becoming a more frequent sight is **Goshawk** which not long ago could only be seen in the Acres Down area of the New Forest but has recently been seen in Southleigh Forest and at Blackdown on the western border of Sussex but has also been reported from Lepe near Calshot (all these sightings were within the current month of September).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 28 - SEP 3 (WEEK 35 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 3rd Sept**

#### **September plant count starts with 107 species including an unexpected Lesser Calamint** **New address for Sussex Bird sightings**

On Sep 1 I cycled to Sinah Common, then up the Coastal Path (Billy Line) to Langstone Bridge, returning home with a tally of 86 plant species in flower. On Sep 2 I went to my eldest son's 60th birthday party at his home near Bristol where the garden had the first **Enchanter's Nightshade** I have seen this year (not included in my Hayling count!) and the first **Hornet** I have seen this year came to join in our Barbecue (presumably its domestic duties are now over and it is free to roam until the first frosts terminate its life).

Today I was expecting a dry morning so went for a walk round the Church Fields to add to the flower count made on Friday but before reaching the Church I came across a cluster of **Lesser Calamint** plants just outside the entrance to the last house on the east side of St Mary's Road before it reaches the junction with Elm Grove/Church Road. The house does not have a garden, just a concrete parking place delimited by a brick wall on its south side and these **strongly mint scented plants** were growing out of a crevice between the concrete and the brickwall but getting sufficient nutrition to grow 20 cm tall with a 12 cm spike of its distinctive flowers.

In the Church Fields I had another surprise when I found a patch of **Alsike Clover**, the large white flower heads becoming suffused with the red colour which is limited to the base of the flowerhead when young but which spreads upwards with

age. Another unexpected find in the fields were a couple of fresh flowers of otherwise defunct **Salsify** plants. After leaving the Church I crossed to the east side of Church Road and found both **Yellow Corydalis** and **Japanese Knotweed** in full flower in gardens close to Tournerbury Lane.

Tomorrow is forecast to be dry but dull with a moderate south-westerly wind which should blow me and my bike to the Chichester Harbour entrance to pick up a few more plant species but I am not expecting to see any migrant Brent until the following week (around Sep 11) though I see in the HOS sightings that Andy Johnson saw **three Brent fly south through Chichester harbour today**. One of the three was a **Pale-bellied bird** reminding me of the small flock of these which arrived in the north of Langstone Harbour on Sep 10 in 2016 - the strong winds which are currently slowing the Brent coming to us from the east may be pushing on the Pale-bellied birds coming south from Greenland and driving them further east than usual.

The report of possible migrant Brent in Chichester Harbour caused me to click on my Bookmark for the SOS sightings page but I found that **the whole SOS website has been re-vamped** and that to see the recent sightings I had to edit my bookmark to take me to <https://www.sos.org.uk/recent-sightings>. This did not give me any further reports of migrant Brent but did give me an intriguing photo of the roof of the ASDA store at Rustington (just east of the mouth of the River Arun at Littlehampton). Perched on the ridge of the roof were **two White Storks** - you can see the photo [here](#).

**Wed 30th August**

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

### **The Brent will be back soon**

Those **Brent Geese** which, because of old age or other incapacity, stayed with us through the summer will nevertheless have undergone the annual moult which leaves all adults of the species flightless for several weeks in July and August. During the moult they will hide away from predators and from our eyes but when this is complete they will feel the same urge to migrate as the rest of the population and this has given two recent local reports - a lone bird in Emsworth Harbour on Aug 20 and three together on the Pilsey Sands on Aug 24. In past years these re-appearances of summering birds plus mi-identified sightings of other Goose species (assumed to be Brent because the observer is expecting to see the returning migrants at this time) so I tend to ignore such reports unless there is some evidence to confirm the birds as migrants (either the number of birds or their behaviour or the co-incidence of reports from several sites).

In **2013** an isolated report of a single Brent seen from Black Point at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Sep 10 was unlikely to have been a migrant (up to a dozen summering birds are usually in Chichester Harbour and another five or six hide away in Langstone Harbour) but a report of three at a Netherlands site (where the geese do not spend the winter) on Sep 19 was possibly a genuine report of migrants. In **2014** an erroneous report of a large flock of Brent seen on Aug 25 was caused by the presence of at least one of our summering birds having used its post-moult recovery of flight to join a flock of Canada Geese - I think the first migrants reached us on Sep 12 in that year. In **2015** a flock of 100 Brent in Langstone Harbour on Sep 11 were definitely migrants (and a flock of 14

had arrived in the Netherlands on Sep 5). In 2016 an additional possibility was introduced when 10 Pale Bellied Brent turned up in Langstone Harbour close to the South Moors (appropriate for birds which must have arrived over land) - the normal place to see the first migrants that have arrived from the English Channel is the south part of Chichester or Langstone Harbours and they are only likely to land when there is a high tide in the early morning following their overnight flight, allowing them to land at a safe distance from possible land-based predators. These reports from the past few years indicate that the time to look for the first migrants is the second week of September on a day with a morning high tide. During my research on the subject of Brent Goose migration I came on a useful document written from the perspective of an Essex birder but well worth reading by anyone interested in the three Brent species (Dark-bellied, Pale-bellied and Black Brant). At the very end of this document is a map of the route they take between their breeding grounds in Siberia and the British Isles. A link to the document is [here](#).

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 21 - 27 (WEEK 34 OF 2017)

### Sat 26th August

#### A walk round Fishery Creek and Mengham Rythe

#### Common Seal 'Rookery' on Pilsey sands

#### White Stork over Bedhampton, Black Redstart at Titchfield Haven and Red-backed Shrikes at Stubbington and Lymington

#### Honey Buzzards over Beachy Head and Montagu's Harrier at Cuckmere plus 65 Teal at Pennington.

Warm sunshine and a light wind saw me exploring a new route round the local area with no particular target species. I set out for the shore via St Leonards Avenue where I found a Hummingbird Hawkmoth taking refreshment from Red Valerian - this moth is being seen in increasing numbers along the south coast recently with a count of 16 at Dungeness on Aug 22. I then used the footpath from the south end of St Margarets Road to cross Mengham Lane and Selshire Road and head down Bound Lane to the Seafront where I turned east to find a single bush of Common Gorse in full flower. I thought this might be the first of many but despite passing many more on the Mengham Rythe shore I could not find another flower though a bright yellow patch on one Gorse bush there raised my hopes but a closer look showed the colour came from a Clematis tangutica creeper climbing over the bush - for a photo of this garden plant see [here](#).

Before reaching Mengham Rythe I cut round the back of the Eastoke Corner area via St Andrews and Harold Road to cross Rails Lane into St Hermans Road from which I took the footpath which follows the edge of Fishery Creek around the campsites and continues along the Mengham Rythe shore from which you can look across Chichester Harbour to the Pilsey Sands which got a mention in Brian Fellows blog yesterday in connection with the Common Seals that use the sands as a 'rookery' (a term used to indicate the breeding area of a species - not just

Rooks but also colony-forming seabirds and marine mammals. Brian gives a link to the [Chichester Harbour Conservancy website section on Seals](#) but this fails to make the point that we are privileged to have the only breeding colony of Common Seals anywhere on the south coast and that the number in the colony has been increasing annually since the 1980s if not before. In 2009 the Hampshire Wildlife Trust fitted five of the Seals with GPS tracking collars which provided the data for the map of their journeyings shown in [this trace](#) (I suspect that some of the long straight lines which appear to show the Seals crossing land areas are the result of the mapping program 'joining up the dots' where some of the data is missing). The Chichester Harbour website also seems to underestimate numbers in saying that 18 is the maximum number recorded at any one time when reliable evidence from Barry Collins gives a maximum count of 30 on the Pilsey sands on 24 July 2015 and 28 were there on 31 Aug 2014.

For a final source of information on Common Seals see [this pdf from the Mammal Society](#).

A local highlight on Aug 26 was the sighting of a **White Stork over Bedhampton** while on Aug 27 Titchfield Haven had what appears to be the **first immigrant Black Redstart of the winter**. On Aug 25 single **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen at both Stubbington (south of Fareham) and in the Lymington area.

To end today's news a male **Montagu's Harrier** was seen at Cuckmere on Aug 25 and a female flew east over Dungeness on the same day. We may not see those birds but a report of **65 Teal** in the Lymington area on Aug 25 is a sign that we will all be seeing them in the near future.

## **Mon 21st August**

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

**Autumn Hawkbit, Asparagus and Sowbread help to lift my August flower total to 135**

**The first autumn Ospreys reach Thorney Island**

**Marsh Harriers breed for the first time at Titchfield Haven**

**Among our departing migrants a Nightjar stops off on Hayling and the first autumn Merlin is seen at Selsey**

**First signs of Ivy flowering and maybe also Lesser Centaury.**

On a damp morning I walked to the Hayling Beachlands shore to check on a second site for **Autumn Ladies Tresses** near the Beachlands railway station but found just two spikes though the walk was not wasted as I added several more plant species to my August list which I may have previously overlooked, such as **Honeysuckle** and **Japanese Honeysuckle** plus **Autumn Hawkbit** and **Mouse-ear Hawkweed**, to bring the month total so far to 135. Also added today were two which I would not have overlooked had I seen them on previous outings - these were **Garden Asparagus** (not in a garden!) and the **Cyclamen** which goes under the strange name of **Sowbread** because wild pigs are said to enjoy digging up and eating the bulbs. In case you are not familiar with the last two here are photos from the internet: first is [the Asparagus in flower](#) and second [the Sowbread](#). While in the Sinah Common area with its mass of **Gorse bushes** I kept my eyes open for this but could not even re-find the one bush on which I had seen a few flowers on Sept 3 so I have had a look back at my diary for recent years and see that last year I saw my first flowers after the summer 'recess' on

Sep 11, in 2015 the first were seen on Oct 25 and in 2014 the first date was Sep 7 so I should not be expecting to see them until sometime in September at the earliest.

The number of **Ospreys** visiting Britain increases each summer but yesterday (Aug 20) the first departing visitor was seen at Thorney Deeps where one or more usually hang around for several weeks before crossing the channel. What was almost certainly the same bird was seen further south in Chichester Harbour from Black Point on Hayling Island. So regular are Osprey visits to the Thorney Great Deeps in both spring and autumn that artificial nest platforms have been built for them on two of the (now disused) aircraft landing lights but so far none of the passing Ospreys have used them. **A similar scheme to attract Ospreys to nest in Poole Harbour has been launched this year** and you can read about it [here](#). The Dorset scheme has a good chance of success with a report of 8 Ospreys in the Arne area of Poole Harbour on Aug 21.

Last Saturday's Portsmouth NEWS told me that a pair of Marsh Harriers had bred at Titchfield Haven this summer, only the second breeding of the species ever recorded in Hampshire and the first for the Haven. Here is a link to a very similar article in the [Southampton Daily Echo](#). So far I have not discovered when or where the only other Hampshire breeding was recorded.

Two other reports of departing migrants which I saw yesterday came from Sandy Point on Hayling where a **Nightjar** was seen 'flying around' at dusk on Aug 20, and from Selsey where what I think is the first incoming **Merlin** was seen at Marsh Farm on the same day. I assume this was a continental bird arriving to spend the winter here.

On Sunday (Aug 20) I walked to the Saltmarsh Lane seawall in another vain search for Slender Hare's Ear but the outing was not fruitless as both **Hops** and **Ivy** were starting to flower (the Ivy showing tight unopen balls of flower buds). At the seawall I picked one of many **Centaury plants** in order to do some research at home on what to look for in order to separate Lesser from Common Centaury. My previous experience of Lesser Centaury has been on Portsdown Hill where the plants are tiny and the flowers are a deeper red than Common Centaury but when I got out my standard Floras (Clapham, Tutin and Warburg 1975 edition, Clive Stace's New Flora of the British Isles 1997 Second Edition, and Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland by Fitter, Fitter and Blamey published in 2003) I discovered that Lesser Centaury plants can be up to 20 cm tall and, if the plant has branches, they will be at wide angles with the lowest branching from about half way up the main stem to form an open inflorescence. They favour damp grassland near the sea and the flowers are not necessarily of a deeper red than Common Centaury (they can be white). Stace's key says they usually do not have a basal leaf rosette at flowering time but the Fitter's stress that they do have one at flowering. My specimen, which I had pulled up by the roots, had no basal leaves and had 'normal' pale red flowers, had a main stem 10 cm long and a widespread, diffuse inflorescence on two pairs of branches as well as the main stem. I cannot be certain of its specific identity but am guessing that it is Lesser Centaury based on its height and diffuse branched structure plus the complete absence of any basal leaves. If nothing else counting it as an additional species makes up for failing to find the Slender Hare's Ear!!

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 14 - 20 (WEEK 33 OF 2017)

Sat 19th August

### At least 300 Autumn Ladies Tresses flowering at Gunner Point And Japanese Knotweed starting to flower close to Hayling Garage in Church Road.

Despite a strong headwind and the possibility of a sharp shower from the skirts of Hurricane Gert I cycled to Gunner Point this morning in the hope of seeing **Autumn Ladies Tresses** and was amply rewarded without getting wet.

Traffic was busier than usual along the Ferry Road passing The Kench and the carpark of the Ferry Inn was jam-packed with vehicles including lots of Police and Fire Engines which I later discovered were the result of Aug 19 being a "**999 Awareness Day**". I did not stop to find out what was going on but before writing this blog a scan of the internet indicated that this was the third such annual event during which several emergencies were being staged including an explosion on the Hayling Ferry in mid-Channel involving the rescue of casualties and a car engine fire in the car park. One thing which I did see was a vintage double decker bus being used to ferry people throughout the day from the popular Beachlands Amusement Park to and from the Ferry.

Heading south from the Ferry Inn I continued past the Ferry Sailing Club and the sand dunes until the track veered round to head east. Walking over the grass on the seaward side of the main track I came on the first orchids in the grass close to a small area of bare shingle surrounded by grass. At first I saw few orchids looking similar to [this](#) but as I started to count them I found that more appeared with every step I took. I now started to head north to a bench near the Golf Course fence (and in the centre of the area where in late March and April thousands of Green Winged orchids flower) and was surprised that the Ladies Tresses continued to appear until I was within 50 yards of the bench. I stopped counting the spikes when my tally had reached 300 but estimate that the total was probably 500 or more which is more than I would expect to see on Portsdown.

As dark clouds were still threatening to rain on me I rode straight home but later in the day I had to go food shopping and so walked to the Co-Op at the junction Tournerbury Lane and Elm Grove, crossing over Tournerbury Lane to the Hayling Garage on the north side of which an abandoned house has lots of **Japanese Knotweed** growing in its 'garden'. Today, for the first time, this Knotweed was showing incipient flower buds and so has been added to my August count of flowering plants bringing the total to 120.

Wed 16th August

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

### A walk around the Eastoke area of Hayling finds Thorn Apple flowering 39 Black Terns plus 1 White-winged Black Tern in Chichester Harbour Clifden Non-pareil moth lives up to its name

## **Autumn Gentian now flowering in Sussex as Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars go underground to pupate.**

This morning I walked to the bend near the east end of Southwood Road (before the long straight section leading to Sandy Point) to check out an ancient memory of having once seen Autumn Ladies Tresses flowering there in a neglected garden. No such luck today but en route a garden on the west side of Rails Lane (just north of the junction with St Hermans Road) gave me a couple of newly flowering **Thorn Apple plants** which I have never found on Hayling Island before. If you are not familiar with this plant see the photos and botanical description [here](#). To get an idea of the lengthy historical and world-wide reputation this plant has have a look at [this Wikipedia article](#).

Two other things that I noticed while out this morning were my first **Clouded Yellow butterfly**, which I think reflects a general increase in the number currently crossing the channel, and a similar sudden increase in the number of **Sticky Groundsel plants** currently flowering along the landward edge of the shingle in the Eastoke corner area.

Other people's observations which I have picked up from the internet in the past few days start with a report from Barry Collins that he had had a **Clifden Non-pareil moth** in his Leigh Park moth trap on Aug 14 and I see that he is not alone in enjoying the sight of this large moth whose English name says that it is without equal in the moth world - the following write up in the Independent newspaper of another recent sighting will give you a feel for the respect in which moth-enthusiasts hold the species, see [here](#). Much less rare, but equally likely to grip the attention of anyone seeing it at this time of year when it is full grown and making itself visible as it comes out of the camouflage of the food-plant among which it has been hidden and shows itself in the open as it searches for a place in which to pupate underground, is the **Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar** which [you can see here](#). The report which caught my attention (but not this photo) came from Henfield in Sussex on Aug 14.

Also on Aug 14 an impressive flock of **39 Black Terns plus one White-winged Black Tern** were seen by Andy Johnson from Black Point in Chichester Harbour. Another bird sighting which caught my attention was what I think was the first **Yellow-browed Warbler** of the autumn, seen at Fawley on Aug 10.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 7 - 13 (WEEK 32 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 12th August**

#### **A cycle ride around Hayling via the Billy Line and Northney finds Vervain, Black Nightshade and probable Green Nightshade.**

This morning I cycled up the Billy Line from West Town station, making my first stop at the Saltmarsh Lane seawall where I could see no hint of Slender Hare's Ear (which was flowering in 2014 on July 22). My next surprise find came as I was passing the copse at the north end of the West Lane fields - a single plant of **Vervain** but nothing else new until I had passed the Oyster Beds and left the rail track for the path which connects it to Langstone Bridge. Here, just after leaving

the rail track, I saw two plants of what looked very like **Hoary Plantain** in full flower but which I have never seen before away from the chalk of Portsdown and so am dubious of my own judgment. A little further on I stopped to look for the **Wild Clary** where both Brian Fellows and I have seen it in a new site on May 22 and June 15 this year though when I looked for it in July I could only see dead remains of the plants. Today it was again in flower with three flowering spikes where I had only seen two in June so perhaps we will see it here again next year.

Crossing the main road I continued past the Northney Hotel and round the next blind bend, stopping outside the start of the houses to have a look into the big arable field which has a public path running around it. In past years I have found a lot of **Green Nightshade** growing here and am pretty sure I saw two plants today, but they only had flowers, no berries yet and it is these which distinguish Green from Black Nightshade. I could be sure of at least two new plants here - **Black Bindweed** and **Swinecress** (as distinct from Lesser Swinecress which is common everywhere).

**Fri 11th August**

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

### **Red Hemp Nettle found near Lewes after a 30 year search.**

#### **Using the BSBI interactive mapping system to help locate rare plants.**

On Aug 7 Graeme Lyons visited the Sussex Wildlife Trust reserve at Malling Down, just north east of Lewes, to carry out a routine grazing assessment, but while he was there he had a look for **Red Hemp Nettle** (*Galeopsis angustifolia*) which has not been recorded there since 1987. He has looked for it in vain several times in the past but today he found 17 plants in flower and took [this photo of it](#).

To see what else Graeme had to say read his full blog entry [here](#). My interest in his find was that it introduced me to the **interactive map system used by the BSBI** (Botanical Society of the British Isles) which you can access online to discover the location of any rare plant and to see how BSBI records have diminished (or perhaps increased) over the years since 1930.

Before introducing you to the mapping system (very inadequately as I do not understand much of what is involved) I have been experimenting with it for two plant species that have attracted my attention this summer - **Wild Clary** (*Salvia verbeneca*) and **Giant Viper's Bugloss** (*Echium pininana*) - and one cannot expect the BSBI to have records of plants which they would classify as the work of man, nor of 'casuals' which are the result of seeds arriving in an area where the species did not previously occur by non-human means (being carried by animals, wind, water, or unintentionally attached to human vehicles). So before deciding what can be expected of any plant mapping system it would be wise to read how a botanist classifies plants as being 'established' in an area - see [this account of how to determine the 'status' of a plant species given by Wildflowerfinder.org.uk](#). If you now feel qualified to judge what to expect from a plant mapping system why not have a go at using the BSBI system? The first step is to go online to <http://bsbi.org/maps>. This will bring up a map of the British Isles with no plant sites shown because the species (taxon) name has not been entered. To see where Wild Clary is established enter its taxon which is *Salvia verbeneca*. This will show records for the whole of the British Isles in six colour coded bands with pre-1930 as the oldest and 2010 onward as the latest. To see south coast

records move the south coast area to the centre of your screen, revealing the + and - controls at the bottom right of the screen. Now use a combination of the + control and re-positioning of the map to bring the south coast area you are interested in into view. You will probably see that some records are marked with a 2x2km square, others by a 10x10km coloured square, these latter are pre-2000 records which only had a 10km square reference so to tidy up the screen you are seeing look to the top right of the screen and click the control which specifies records for 2000-2009 and 2010 onward. This will bring up a bigger control specifying six different date bands and you should now click the small box to the right of each of the four oldest date bands, thus turning off the records for those bands. Now click anywhere on the screen which is not part of a control, causing the date band control to disappear and you will be left with a neat distribution map including one record in the Havant area which was reported by Brian Fellows several years ago at the north end of Christopher Way.

You will no doubt have had difficulty because you can not see the BSBI map screen while you are reading what I am saying about it so I suggest that before trying to look at the BSBI screen you highlight the previous paragraph of this blog entry and COPY and PASTE it into a non-internet document that will remain static on your screen alongside the BSBI mapping screen - I have WORDPAD for this sort of function but you may have to use something like WORD to keep my blog on your screen alongside the BSBI map screen.

**[Wed 9th August](#)**

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

**Autumn Ladies Tresses flowering at Beachy Head on Aug 9**

**A second Long-tailed Blue has arrived in Sussex**

**Tree Crickets are settling in at Dungeness**

**Water Voles are back in Emsworth with Weasels at Warblington**

**Grayling butterflys can still be found on Hayling Island**

**A new subspecies of Grass snake for Europe makes no difference to us in Britain.**

I am hoping to find **Autumn Ladies Tresses** flowering on Hayling Island before long and was much encouraged to see a photo of them coming into flower on Aug 9 (see [this photo from the "JFC's BIRDING website focussing on Beachy Head](#)). Also from Sussex comes news that the **second Long-tailed Blue butterfly** of the season has flown over from the Continent to be seen at Southwick on Aug 8 (see my blog entry for July 27 if you are not aware of the potential permanent invasion of this country that may result).

Another ongoing invasion of this country which started in August 2015 is that of the Dungeness area by **Tree Crickets** and which I am reminded of by a count of 30 Tree Crickets there on Aug 5. Before 2015 these Tree Crickets had no foothold in Britain but could be found in Jersey. Dungeness also has a colony of **Sickle-bearing Bush-Crickets** which was first recorded in this country (at Hastings) in 2006.

Coming back to matters nearer home I am delighted to see that two **Water Voles** have recently re-appeared in Peter Pond at Emsworth after being unseen since last year. To make up for that absence a **Weasel** has been photographed in Warblington cemetery with this [result](#). Here on Hayling a party of butterfly enthusiasts visited the Sinah area on Aug 6 and, when passing through the narrow section of road between the overgrown pond on the north edge of the Golf

Course and the buildings that were abandoned when the proposal to turn The Kench into yet another marina was turned down (in the 1980s) by the County Council, they saw a single **Grayling** butterfly flying by. I used to see these each summer sunning themselves on the shingle in the gorse of the heath that covers the area south of the Ferry Road opposite the Sinah Warren entrance but was fearing that they were now extinct there. The butterfly hunters not only showed that Graylings can still be found there, but in the same general area found **three lovely Red Underwing moths** which also remind me of the 1980s when one of the duties of Hampshire Wildlife Trust committee members was to deliver the Trust's monthly magazines to members homes. I still remember finding a Red Underwing moth on one Hayling member's house wall in the Sinah Lane area and I will pass on that delight to you with a photo of the moth [here](#).

Finally for today an item of what we might well call **Fake News**. This is something that I came across in the Devon Birding News after it had been on the BBC and in several newspapers all of which were greatly excited that Britain, famed for having just three species of Snake, now had four species. Before saying any more let me make it clear that Devon Birding was trying to expose this 'fake news' for what it was - a scientific study relating to the Grass Snake species (*Natrix natrix*) in relation to Europe as a whole - not to the isolated British Isles. The study distinguishes two sub-species, the true Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) which has a smooth greyish coat, and the Barred Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*) which has dark barred markings along the length of its body. For photos see [here for the True Species](#) and [here for Barred](#). This changes nothing for Grass Snakes in Britain - with very few exceptions they are all of the *helvetica* subspecies.

**[Mon 7th August](#)**

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

**The Tree of Heaven comes with a warning from PLANTLIFE, the Chinese Lacquer Tree comes with a medical 'health and safety warning' but mowing the Langstone South Moors brings unspecified good news plus the find of a Harvest Mouse nest.**

On July 30 the Emsworth Wildlife Diary included an impressive photo, taken by Chris Oakley, of two **Trees of Heaven** growing appropriately in the grounds of the Emsworth Waterside URC Church on Bath Road at the north end of the Town Millpond, but before everyone gets over-enthusiastic about the height, rate of growth, and golden flower petals which rain down from these trees at this time of year I should say that when I was living in Havant one of these trees grew in a neighbour's garden and I was made aware of the reason's why they are regarded by botanists as unwelcome aliens to this country. Those reasons are set out below but before coming to his article I have learnt something new about the species from Chris Oakley's comment that they have sycamore like seeds which my neighbour's tree did not have and further research now tells me that the species is bi-sexual, the Emsworth trees being female and so producing seeds which need to be fertilised by the Havant male tree (unless the Emsworth pair are of opposite sexes).

Now for the argument against these trees as it appeared in the Independent Newspaper in October 2014. To read it in full go to [the article from The Independent](#).

Another tree which one should be wary of planting in your garden is the **Japanese Lacquer Tree** (*Toxicodendron vernicifluum* formerly *Rhus verniciflua*) whose sap

is used to create the Lacquer which coats various items of oriental woodwork that you may have seen on the BBC Antiques Roadshow. If, for some reason, you do want to grow this tree in your garden read [an article from Gardeningknowhow.com](#).

Another reason for being aware of this sap is that it causes a very nasty form of dermatitis and is present in several plant species, especially in the US where it is said to account for 50 million cases of dermatitis annually, particularly among Forestry workers. For more info see [a Wikipedia article](#).

Finally some interesting news from the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Solent Reserves blog which has recently been updated to describe **a massive clearance by volunteers of the Langstone Southmoors Orchid Field during which a Harvest Mouse nest was discovered**, looking as if it had been in use this summer. This blog is all the more welcome for the hint that the management of Southmoors will be enhanced in the near future - details to be announced on this blog.... For the blog entry, including the photo of the Harvest Mouse nest see [the Solent Reserves Blog entry](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 31 - AUG 6 (WEEK 31 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 6th August**

#### **Another strange tale of insect parasitism**

My previous blog resulted from reading about the parasitic insect Gasteruption jaculator on the Dungeness Bird Observatory website and today my interest in insect parasitism has been re-aroused by the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation Society website on which, on Aug 2, Peter Eeles reported his findings during a visit to Pamber Forest where he found **a White Admiral caterpillar that had been parasitised by an Ichneumon insect** which had laid its eggs in the caterpillar. Peter photographed the caterpillar, now carrying incontrovertible evidence that that seven parasite larvae had completed their full term within the caterpillar, eating its flesh, and had then emerged to metamorphose into the adult form of the Cotesia sibyllarum parasite without killing the caterpillar which was still carrying on its normal (?) life as if nothing had happened. Before going any further have a look at Peter's photo of the Caterpillar showing it still feeding on a Honeysuckle leaf with the cocoons in which the Cotesia larvae have completed their change to adult insects still attached to the caterpillar's back - see [evidence for survival of the White Admiral caterpillar](#). Also read this account of Charles Darwin's reaction to how the Cotesia family of Ichneumon parasites treat their prey - [showing that the caterpillars survival was not accidental](#).

A second group of insects which Charles Darwin thought to be one of God's favourites (because he had created so many of them) were the Beetles and one group of these - the **Rove beetles** - gets a mention in the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website on Aug 4 when it was found during a search for Silver-spotted Skippers (the skippers like to land on dry cowpats, the Beetles like to lurk

underneath them). The beetle species in question is [Platydracus stercorarius](#) which has a web-page of its own at [a distinctive Rove beetle](#).

### [Thu 3rd August](#)

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

**My August flower hunt has been hampered by high winds and heavy rain limiting my current total to 88 species including a surprise find of Harebells covering a garden lawn.**

Luckily the first day of the new month was dry and sunny allowing me to find 77 plants in flower during a walk through back roads to the Inn on the Beach and back along the coast. The only newcomer to my year list was [Canadian Golden Rod](#) in a garden and I was surprised to find one bush of what must have been [Common Gorse](#) in flower about a month earlier than expected. This bush had been cut down to ground level and I wonder if the flowering was the plant's response to the prospect of imminent death!

After being confined to barracks yesterday by rain it was good to get out again for a short walk which explored the new route made possible by connecting the recently built housing between the Legion Field and Mengham House with the Mengham shopping centre through the north end of St Margarets Road. This route gave me my first sight of three plants that I have not previously seen on Hayling - the first was [Greater Celandine](#) in Palmerston Road, the next was [Harebell](#) with plants covering the front lawn of one of the St Margarets Road bungalows, suggesting that turf had been imported from Portsdown to create this lawn, and the third was what I call [Wood Avens](#) but others call [Herb Bennet](#) growing at the edge of the Legion Field. Hopefully the sunny but still very windy forecast for tomorrow will allow me to get on my bike and visit the Sandy Point area and perhaps on Sunday to check out the Billy Line and Northney areas.

As a change from my interest in plants my regular browsing of the internet came across a mention of [a parasitic wasp](#) which had been seen at the Dungeness Bird Observatory - to see the original entry go to [Dungeness Bird Observatory News for July 29](#). Both the name of this insect and its elongated shape (designed to be able to lay its eggs in the most difficult to reach places that the larva of the insect species on which it preys will have been laid by their mother) attracted my attention, the more so when I read that this predatory insect flies around with its long abdomen and ovipositor held roughly vertical above its body, not straight out behind it as appears to be the case in the first photo. I then discovered that these features had also caught the attention of a professional writer for the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust who had chosen it as his subject for 'Species of the month' in their monthly magazine. So I will leave you with a link to what he wrote, which I hope will interest some of you, especially if your interest in bees and wasps has already moved you to create a 'Bee Hotel' which may well attract the attention of this strange predator as well as the bee larvae on which it preys. The link is to [GWCT Species of the Month](#).

### [Mon 31st July](#)

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

**I find an Indian Bean Tree flowering near my 'back door' and add a few more flower species which I have overlooked during July bringing the total to 208.**

By chance I took some bottles to the bottle bank en route to the local shops today and that meant going out of my back door rather than the front and along a short stretch of St Mary's Road before re-joining Elm Grove and in that short stretch I found two new plants for my July list. The first was an **Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa bignonioides)**, easily recognizable by its large heart shaped leaves and distinctive flowers (like a multicoloured white Horse Chestnut) - for a photo see [this one from the internet](#).

Not content with that find I crossed the road to find myself looking at a couple of plants of **Canadian Fleabane** standing out from the many examples of Guernsey Fleabane that are common here on Hayling by having greener leaves with less hairs on them and a smaller, more cylindrical, upright overall shape.

Back at home I added to my Spreadsheet two garden plants which I have seen recently, but not included in my July list: the first is what I know as the **Potato Vine (Solanum jasminoides)** - see [for a photo from the internet](#). The second was the well known Tobacco plant (Nicotiana) - see [for a photo](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 24- 30 (WEEK 30 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 30th July**

#### **Three fungi confirm the start of their autumn season and I realise I have overlooked Dyer's Greenweed at Saltmarsh Lane.**

My target this afternoon was to search for **Slender Hare's Ear** behind the Saltmarsh Lane seawall and at the same time to check that there is access on foot to North Shore Road from the shore - the latter proved easy with no climbing over the field gate which is visible from the field over which I would be approaching, when I got there I just followed a well worn unofficial path which took me through an opening that was not visible from a distance. Finding the Slender Hare's Ear defeated me - hopefully the plants will re-appear where I have seen them in past years. While searching for them I had a look at some yellow flowered plants which I had not been able to identify when I was here a month ago, and this time I found that most of the yellow flowers had been re-placed with black pea-pods which, with the linear leaves and upright stance of these bushy plants could only mean that this was a small colony of **Dyer's Greenweed** which I had failed to recognize on my last visit.

Heading home via Havant Park I turned down Staunton Avenue where the broad grass verge close to Richmond Drive had my first Boletus toadstool of the autumn - from its dark brown cap and bright yellow pores (which turned bright blue when I gripped a segment of the cap to turn it over for inspection) I decided this was probably **Boletus erythropus** and at other points on this walk I found several examples of both the Marasmius oreades that I had found yesterday, and also at least two fresh **Field Mushrooms** to confirm that the autumn mushroom season has indeed started.

As I was leaving the Park via Beach Road I added one more plant species, **Fool's Parsley**, to my July list.

[Sat 29th July](#)

**A walk to Mill Rythe adds 11 flowers to my July list including Field Pansy, Chicory and Gallant Soldier before the rain set in.**

Walking north up Church Road to the Havant Road roundabout I noted one garden lawn was covered in the tiny whitish flowers of **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** which I have not seen since the spring and another garden had fresh flowers on a **Flowering Nutmeg aka Himalayan Honeysuckle (Leycesteria formosa)** bush - you will probably be familiar with the look of this but may not recognize the name so here is a [photo from the internet](#).

Continuing north from the roundabout along the overgrown field path to The Mayflower pub on the Havant Road just north of Mill Rythe I was very pleased to find that the cluster of **Field Pansies**, which I had found on the almost bare ground of the path less than 100 yards from the pub when I was last here on May 1, had managed to keep its flowers above the top of the tall grass now covering the ground. Close to the Pansies I had the added pleasure of a pristine **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly accompanied by an equally fresh **Red Admiral**.

Crossing the road outside the pub I walked back south to the access road to the Mill Rythe industrial units but before I reached that I was very surprised to find a single flowering plant of **Gallant Soldier** growing in the roadside grass with **Lesser Stitchwort** nearby. Also here a single plant of **Garlic Mustard** was having a brave attempt at a second flowering. Then, beside the access road, I came on the first **Great Mullein** plants I have seen this month. After making my way through the busy boat works I emerged into the very overgrown waste land along the edge of Mill Rythe bay where the well worn footpath took me through the area where I remember finding **Chicory** flowering several years ago and today I found it was still flourishing, along with a few plants of **Lucerne**. From the muddy shore I followed the broad farm track back to the Havant Road, adding both **Black Mustard** and **Russian Vine** to my list.

Another significant find on this walk was my first sight of **Marasmius oreades toadstools (Fairy Ring Champignon)** which I take as the official opening of the autumn mushroom season. Finally I must admit that my claim to have added 11 species of flowering plant to my month list on this walk is not strictly true - the eleventh species was recorded as **Small-flowered Cranesbill** but only on the evidence of the absence of any long hairs on the flower stalk of a totally dead plant!

[Thu 27th July](#)

**Long-tailed Blue butterflies continue their invasion of England**  
**What provoked a Hedgehog fight in Emsworth?**  
**White Storks join the ranks of forced immigrants to Britain**

Although the first report of the **Long-tailed Blue butterfly** in Britain was in 1859, with the exception of 1945 when 38 sightings were reported, there was less than one sighting each year until 2013 when migrants arrived in five southern counties and bred successfully. This new generation spread even further and survived into

October. I only know of one sighting in 2014 (Hampshire in July) but in 2015 migrants bred and their offspring survived into November.

2016 brought no reports that I know of so one photographed at Hassocks (north of Brighton) on July 23 this year caused some excitement, especially as it was a female on the larval foodplant (Broad leaved everlasting Pea - our common wild Sweet Pea). For more info and photos see [for info on Long-tailed Blue](#). I will be keeping an eye on the Bladder Senna bush which grows beside the path up the east side of The Kench here on Hayling as that is one of this butterfly's larval food plants - photos of its leaves, flowers, and seed pods can be seen at [Bladder Senna bush](#).

For an intriguing account of two **Hedgehogs** fighting in an Emsworth garden see Brian Fellows Emsworth Wildlife Diary - after opening the diary (<http://familyfellows.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>) use the FIND function (CTRL+F) and type .. Hedgehogs brawling .. into the Search Box which appears at the top of your screen. The fight described does not mention the presence of a female and was not over access to food so my guess is that these two males got entangled in the thick shrubbery and could not bypass each other and so were forced into violence as the only way they could each get past the other. Once one had got the other's spines in its mouth and fallen out of the shrubbery it probably did not realize it was free to let go so continued holding on (not biting to wound the other) until exhaustion forced them to let go. For me the most interesting aspect of this story is that it introduced me to the webpage at [Hedgehog information](#). This page describes how a female hog, when willing to mate, attempts to make mating a less prickly procedure. Also of interest to Hedgehog enthusiasts there is an email link at the foot of the page for you to ask questions about Hedgehogs, and a link to a shop selling Hedgehog souvenirs at the top.

On July 23 the SOS website reported a sighting of a White Stork circling over the Knepp estate near Horsham and on July 25 another entry gave a link to details of [a project to introduce Storks to Sussex](#). For details of the project see [White Stork introduction project at Knepp in Sussex](#).

## [Tue 25th July](#)

### **Pepper Saxifrage, Hop Trefoil and Hoary Ragwort now flowering**

This morning I cycled up the Billy Line from West Town station to Langstone Bridge and back, adding eight flowering plant species to my personal year list. My target for this trip was to find **Pepper Saxifrage** in flower in the area north of the Pillbox marking the path to the West Lane bends and south of the Oysterbeds and I found this was by now in full flower though not easy to spot on account of its unobtrusive leaves and flowers. Also newly flowering where the track turns inland to skirt the Oysterbeds area were a few plants of **Pale Flax** which normally flower in June, if not May.

An unexpected newcomer to my list was **Hop Trefoil** whose small cylinder shaped flower clusters were all round my feet in the grass by the bench where I sat down for refreshment at the northern end of my trip, in sight of Langstone Bridge. More widely distributed newcomers along the track were **Teasels** and **Lesser Burdock**

plus what I assumed was **Hoary Ragwort**, on account of its greyish foliage, pointed leaves and in only just starting to flower.

Bird song was minimal but I did hear **Greenfinch** in full voice and heard two **Chiff Chaffs** 'egging each other on'. At the Oysterbeds several **newly fledged Black-headed Gulls** were pestering their parents for food, but there were also periods of near silence. Passing the West Lane fields I was surprised to see a small flock of **Rooks** but there was a strange absence of shore birds and nothing to be seen on the water.

### Mon 24th July

#### Spearmint, Balm and Cockspur Grass newly in flower Conkers, Acorns, Sloes and Blackberries now fruiting

Walking home from the Mengham shops I took the westerly route which follows Mengham Road east to Mengham House, then turns north along the narrow path from which Tournurbury Wood can be seen across fields before turning into new housing and around the back of Mengham Junior School to reach the Legion Field and so reach the shops again in Elm Grove. A garden on Mengham Road gave me my **first flowers of Spearmint** and the new housing behind Mengham Junior School gave me two surprises, one was a single plant of **Cockspur Grass (Echinochloa Crus-Galli)**, the other was my first **Volucella Inanis Hoverfly** giving me close views as it rested on a Ragwort flower head so I could be sure it had the narrow belts and pale yellow background around its abdomen rather than the broader bands and darker colour of *V. zonaria*.

Another new observation on this walk was of fully formed but green **Conkers** on Chestnut Trees and of masses of fully developed **Acorns** on Oaks. I must admit that I have never bothered to learn how to distinguish the **English Pedunculate Oak (Quercus robur)** from the **Sessile Oak (Quercus petraea)** but today I checked the points to look for. I see that English Oak has long stemmed Acorns and short stemmed leaves while Sessile Oak has Acorns with little or no stem but its leaves do have a bare stem between the blade of the leaf and the wood of the tree.

### **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 17 - 23 (WEEK 29 OF 2017)**

### Sun 23rd July

#### Black Nightshade and Sticky Groundsel are newly flowering.

This morning brought sunshine to contrast with the violent showers of yesterday but the wind was still strong from the west so a ride to Gunner Point meant that I would have a tail wind for the homeward journey. I was not expecting any new plants but before I had reached the west end of St Mary's Road the bare earth of a front garden in which the hedge had recently been 'grubbed out' had grown several plants of **Black Nightshade** which were newly in flower (just one day later than my first find of it last year). Before reaching this garden I had passed the site of the Giant Viper's Bugloss which was new to me in April, but which I have since found to be fairly common in south Hayling gardens - this morning I spotted two new spikes lurking behind the shops directly opposite the flats where I now live and later found that the 'originals' in St Mary's Road had been cut down (not

unsurprisingly as their stout tree-like stems protruded into the road and presented a potential traffic hazard).

I saw nothing new until I had rounded the west end of the Sinah Golf Course and reached the west end of the Beachlands car parks where the thin sandy soil along the northern edge of the carpark area had several freshly flowering plants of what I think was **Sticky Groundsel (*Senecio viscosus*)**. In the past I have had difficulty in deciding if the plants I have seen quite commonly in Havant Thicket and in Havant were 'Sticky' or 'Heath Groundsel' and had come to the conclusion they were all **Heath Groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*)** but the plants which I saw today certainly had the greyish, sticky look of the Sticky species and when I checked with my Fitter and Fitter wildflower guide I found their description, which says that Sticky prefers to grow on bare ground by the sea rather than on heathland, and that Sticky starts to flower in July while Heath starts in June, backed the choice of 'Sticky'. However, when I checked the first date on which I had recorded Heath Groundsel last year I found I had seen it on June 4 (agreeing with the Sticky id) but that I had seen it at that date on Sinah Common, equally close to the sea and in the same sandy soil, so I will need a further close look at the plants I saw today!!

My only other observation in the Sinah Common area south of the Golf Course were of fresh green leaves on the Polypody Ferns which surprisingly seem to grow on pure sand (but are presumably based on old buried tree trunks). I assume the fresh green colour and upright stance of these leaves is the result of recent heavy rain.

A quick scan of the internet today told me that the **Dwarf Gorse** which I was looking for at Sandy Point last Friday has attracted attention at Fairlight near Rye Harbour and that **Dodder**, which I rarely see on the Hayling Gorse and have not seen anywhere this year, is also to be found there. I was also intrigued to read Brian Fellows comment on the **white flowered Thistles** (presumably Creeping and Marsh) which are not an uncommon sight everywhere in my experience. Brian seemed to suggest that these might have lost their normal colour as a result of age. I have always looked on these white flowers as a normal colour variation (I think that plants which have white flowers have all their flowers white from when the buds open to when the flowers die) and I thought I would attempt to find a scientific account of the cause but have failed to do so - it would seem that botanists have ducked the question and covered up their ignorance by giving the name 'albiflora' (the latin for white flowered) to the plants which show this variation.

**[Fri 21st July](#)**

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

**A visit to Sandy Point 'corrects' my identification of one plant and 'invents' an id for another.**

This morning I set out on my bike to visit the Sandy Point ex-Hospital grounds where I have in past years found what I thought was **Dwarf Gorse** flowering in July (when Common Gorse has all gone to seed and will not start to flower until mid-August at the earliest). My identification of the species was based on the date of flowering, when what is genuinely Dwarf Gorse (smaller than Common Gorse and with much less rigid 'prickles') can be found in Havant Thicket, and on the

difficulty of accessing the Sandy Point Gorse bushes which are surrounded by a wide sea of Bracken and Brambles, so never subjected to close examination. Today I was determined to find a way to examine the bushes and found a route to one example and was surprised to find that the 'prickles' were much longer and more rigid than I had expected. Making a note of this I returned to the footpath around the outside of the Nature Reserve where I had left my bike and as I was retrieving it I was accosted by the local ecologist, Andy Johnson, who had, to my surprise, remembered my name. When I told him that I had just been looking for the Dwarf Gorse he corrected me and said that this was **Western Gorse** but that Dwarf Gorse did occur here within the Reserve.

By this time we had reached the edge of the shingle alongside the harbour entrance and Andy reminded me of the rare **Sea Knotgrass** which grows in the hollows of the shingle, allowing me to find that species for myself. I also found my first **Blue Fleabane** of the year here before having a look at the half-fenced off area of beach outside the reserve fence where I found a plant that I could not name but which I have tentatively recorded as **Argentine Fleabane (Conyza bilbariensis)** which I have never knowingly seen before.

The features which led me to this identity were the size and structure of the plants (similar to the Guernsey Fleabane which is now to be found in many places) and two features which separated it from that species - one was its extreme hairiness in all parts, the other was the red colour around the perimeter of each flowerhead (technically described as 'red-tipped phyllaries'). One significant feature which I could not account for in the descriptions of Argentine Fleabane was that all the leaves of the plants I saw were firmly adpressed to the rigidly erect stem of the plant, though I did notice that the tips of each long, linear leaf were starting to curl outwards as if, as the plants developed (none of the flowers showed any sign of turning to seed) the leaves might become more lateral. This id is very tentative but I hope is not as downright wrong as my naming of the Dwarf Gorse.

**Tue 18th July**

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

### **Cattle Egrets now breeding in Dorset, Devon and Cheshire as well as Somerset**

#### **The mega rare Amur Falcon re-appears in Cornwall**

The **first Cattle Egrets to breed in Britain did so in 2008** when 2 or 3 pairs nested in Somerset, but although some have visited Britain in subsequent winters no further breeding has been reported until **this year (2017)** when **5 pairs nested in Somerset, 3 pairs in Cheshire** and on July 17 the Dorset Bird Recorder announced that **2 pairs have successfully fledged 4 young at a private site in Dorset** while on July 15 **the Devon Birding site published photographs of a family of two adults and at least one juvenile which have presumably come from a nest in that county.**

A photo of this year's nest site at Burton Mere in Cheshire is a little surprising as it is in a pine tree - see [Cattle Egret nest site](#).

On July 8 I reported news from Cornwall of the second ever sighting of an **Amur Falcon** which should breed in northern China and winter in South Africa. The bird was first seen on the evening of July 6 but flew off on the following morning after being seen by a good crowd of twitchers. An unconfirmed sighting of what seemed to be an exhausted bird, described as dishevelled and regularly stopping on the roadside in front of the car from which it was being watched before flying

into a tree and out of sight, came on July 10, but it seems that the bird has managed to recover its strength and was seen again, still in Cornwall, on July 17 - in the following photo taken that evening, the bird (a first summer female) appears to be fully recovered ... see [the Amur Falcon](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 10 - 16 (WEEK 28 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 15th July**

#### **Great White Egret - a new species for the Langstone-Emsworth shore.**

Following yesterday's headline news of Avocet as a new breeding species at Farlington Marshes (which I see also gets a headline in today's Portsmouth NEWS) Peter Raby today recorded **two Great White Egrets in the saltmarsh off the Warblington shore between Langstone and Emsworth** - as far as I know the first ever sighting of the species in this area which has been my personal bird-watching 'patch' from 1980 to 2016. These two birds were just passing through the area, and the species has been seen at least once at the Thorney Deeps (in 2012), but can be expected to become a more frequent sight in Britain in the same way that Little Egrets have gone from a single bird in Chichester Harbour in 1975 to being now common wherever water and wetlands can be found throughout the British Isles.

I used to believe (with tongue in cheek) that we should be grateful to Saddam Hussein for draining the Iraq Marshes and thus forcing the Little Egrets to seek new homes, inducing a 'pressure wave' among European Egret populations which forced that species to cross the Channel. A scientific paper published in British Birds magazine in 2013 tells a similar story about the Great White Egret, which was by then already becoming a moderately frequent visitor to Britain and had **bred for the first time at Shapwick Heath in Somerset in 2012**. Today a look at the reported sightings of the species in Britain on the Birdguides Website shows sightings at eight sites in seven different counties all on the same day (July 15) - see [the Birdguides recent reports page](#). To get some idea of how numbers in Britain have increased recently see another internet report of a single bird causing excitement when it flew over Lincolnshire in 2006 on [the UK Safari web page](#).

### **Fri 14th July**

#### **Avocet now breeding at Farlington Marshes**

This will be a very brief entry as my only personal news is of six **Swifts** checking the roofs of the taller buildings across the road from the flats where I am now living, under the eaves of which three or four pairs of **House Martins** have nests with young in them, during a brief high speed visit at mid-day yesterday. Hopefully those Swifts will return to nest in those buildings next year ....

Much more significant is the **news from Farlington Marshes** in the Solent Reserves Blog posted on July 12 by the Reserve Warden telling us that **more**

then one pair of Avocets have, for the very first time, nested and hatched young somewhere on the reserve. I think the Solent Reserves blog tells us four pairs have attempted to breed at Farlington this year though the majority of the eggs and young have succumbed to predation by Crows and Buzzards, but at least four juveniles appear in a photo and may survive to adulthood. Have a look at the Solent Reserves page for yourself by visiting [the Solent Reserves blog](#).

The use of Langstone Harbour as a regular wintering site for 50 or more of these birds in recent years will have made an increasing number of Avocets aware of the potential of the site for breeding, and the earlier than usual arrival of some 13 post breeding birds there on July 8 this week suggests that Langstone Harbour is becoming a more popular site for non-breeding Avocets.

This news of another breeding site for Avocets has made me look back at [the history of the species in this country](#) and I find (from an RSPB site aimed at children) that "Avocets used to breed along the coast from Sussex to Yorkshire, but regular taking of adults and eggs for food, egg collecting, taxidermy and other pressures eventually led to their disappearance as a British breeding bird in 1842. There was then a gap of almost 100 years before they bred again, in Ireland in 1938. But, in 1947, four pairs were found breeding at Havergate Island and Minsmere, both in Suffolk and have continued to breed here in increasing numbers ever since".

### [Thu 13th July](#)

#### **First autumn Whinchat and first juvenile Cuckoo on the wing Pantaloone Bee and Flecked General at Rye Harbour**

Recent bird news is of the [first autumn Whinchat](#) back at Rye Harbour yesterday (July 12) when the [first fledged Cuckoo](#) that I am aware of was flying over Pagham Harbour. Another report which caught my eye was of [10 Cattle Egrets](#) at Abbotsbury in Dorset, also on July 12. On the insect front all the [Purple Emperor](#) fans are imminently expecting their 'god' to disappear, but on July 12 there were still 24 of these magnificent butterflies to be seen at the Knepp estate near West Grinstead in Sussex. Armchair worshippers of the species can still enjoy a glimpse of it on last Sunday's Countryfile TV programme by visiting <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b08y72pv/countryfile-northants> - to see this section of the programme copy and paste the preceding address into your internet viewer, then scroll forward 51 minutes to the start of the section on butterflies.

The most interesting report which I read on the internet today (July 13) came from Chris Bentley, the entomologist at Rye Harbour, and reports his sightings of two unusual insects. The first he mentions is the '[Flecked General](#)' (*Stratiomys singularior*), one of the flat-bodied, brightly coloured but weak flighted '[Soldier Flies](#)' of which I found a good photo at [Flecked General](#). The second was a sighting of what he calls a [Pantaloone Bee](#) (*Dasypoda hirtipes*). He includes a photo of one of these Bees on a Common Toadflax flower which you can see in his [Rye Harbour report](#) but I found a more interesting account of the species (plus [Bee Wolves](#)) from Minsmere at [Pantaloone Bee activity at Minsmere](#).

[Mon 10th July](#)

**First flowers of Tansy, Pale Toadflax, Guernsey Fleabane and Stone Parsley  
Plus Blue Globe Thistle brings my July total to 168.**

After a short visit to the Hayling Health Centre after lunch I set out for Sinah Common to see if the **Pale Toadflax** had survived the clearance of the patch of Gorse under which it had been sheltering for years after I discovered it there some ten years or so ago (I understand that there had been no known site for this species on Hayling since the 1930s). Before reaching that area I walked through the carpark behind the Methodist Church at the east end of Hollow Lane where **Guernsey Fleabane** was starting to flower - this species of *Conyza* seems to have ousted the **Canadian Fleabane** which was dominant in southern England forty years ago but over recent years Guernsey Fleabane has usurped its dominance.

Ignoring Common Fleabane with its broad yellow flowers the group of Fleabanes with small Groundsel-like flowers which I am likely to come across nowadays are three. **Commonest is the Guernsey species** which stands around a metre tall, has a greyish, hairy look, and displays its flowers in an inverted pyramid. All its features are illustrated by photos on the website at [Guernsey Fleabane](#). The **Canadian species** is less densely hairy and thus looks greener. It is also more columnar in structure - you can see a similar set of photos of it at [Canadian Fleabane](#). **Blue Fleabane**, a much smaller species with blue flowers, can be found along the Havant to Portsmouth cycleway where it passes Chalkdock (between Broadmarsh and Farlington Marshes) and at the bridge end of the Hayling Billy rail pier at Langstone - for photos from the internet see [Blue Fleabane](#).

Continuing west along Hollow Lane I came on quite a lot of **Stone Parsley** already starting to open its tiny white flowers on a tall structure of almost leafless solid stems - see [Stone Parsley](#).

From the Beachlands roundabout I walked west along the Sea Front road until close to Staunton Avenue where I turned south down an unmade roadway separating the tall buildings I had been passing from a group of individual houses and in this alley way I found a large clump of **Tansy plants** already in flower - for photo see [Tansy in flower](#). From here I continued out onto the open Sinah Common but turned west to follow a track along the outside of the garden fences and soon found one garden from which a cluster of **Blue Globe Thistle (*Echinops bannaticus*)** had escaped and were in fresh flower - see [Blue Globe Thistle](#). Shortly after this the gardens ended and Staunton Avenue came into view and the north end of the last garden fence was swamped with a mass of the strange Nightshade species called '**Cock's Eggs**' (***Salpichroa organifolia***) plants, so called because the flowers look like tiny white chicken eggs.

The **Pale Toadflax** was now in flower - see internet photo at [Pale Toadflax photo](#) - in the ex-Gorse patch at the south east corner of the Mini Golf course (along the northern edge of the patch bordering the public path following the southern boundary of the Mini Golf course) and after that I had only one unexpected find on the way home. That was of a couple of plants of **Moth Mullein** in fresh flower at the pavement edge of Alexandra Ave as I made my way from the Sea Front road back to Hollow Lane. This species is easily distinguished from other Mulleins by

having single flowers on relatively long stalks, as can be seen in the internet photo at [Moth Mullein flowers](#).

My apologies for taking two days between starting to write this blog entry and finally getting it online - my only excuse is TV exhaustion caused by the concurrence of Wimbledon and the Tour de France!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 3 - 9 (WEEK 27 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 9th July**

#### **Autumn bird passage warms up as summer butterflies take wing A colourful moth at Portland and Little Terns thrive at Ferrybridge.**

The first report of post breeding **Avocets** back in Langstone Harbour, where we have come to expect a sizeable flock to spend the winter, came yesterday (July 8) when a flock of 13 settled to roost in the harbour. Also yesterday the male **Ruff** that has been there through the summer was joined by a female, newly back from breeding, and other signs of autumn passage this week include a report on July 6 of **seven Shelduck flying east** over Weymouth, heading for their moulting grounds on the wide sands off the north German coast. Also on July 6 a small flock of **10 Common Sandpipers** dropped in at Sandwich Bay and back on July 2 a flock of **9 Little Ringed Plovers** arrived at Lytchett Fields in the Poole Harbour area. Also on July 6 the first **Black Tern** of the autumn was at Blashford Lakes while the Brading Marsh RSPB Reserve on the Isle of Wight seems to have acquired a new resident **Bittern**, reported there on the first four days of July. Also in the bird news is a statement on the Portland website that the **Little Tern breeding colony** at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) is continuing to increase its breeding success thanks to good management and a great team of volunteers.

The first **Silver Spotted Skipper** and **Brown Hairstreak** of the year were both recorded in Sussex on July 7 while a **Swallowtail** was reported in Devon on the 5th but with no proof that it was a genuine migrant - last year a sighting of a Swallowtail in Emsworth during November led me to discover that at least one firm in Hampshire was apparently making a profitable business out of breeding these and other Butterfly species for release at Weddings, Funerals, and the like - see their commercial website at [Butterflies for sale](#). To end this blog on a more non-commercial note here is a photo of a moth found in the Portland moth traps earlier this month - see [Light Crimson Underwing moth at Portland](#)

### **Sat 8th July**

#### **Golden Samphire, Sea Lavender, and Red Bartsia now flowering Amur Falcon in Cornwall**

On Wednesday (July 5) I cycled round the north of Hayling in uncomfortable heat which had brought **Red Bartsia** ([webpage](#)) into flower on North Common where **Strawberry Clover** was already developing the fruits after which it is named. **Sea Lavender** was out on the Northney saltings and one garden which I passed had flowers on a huge **Woolly Thistle** ([webpage](#)) while on July 6 one of the Three Amigos, whose website has taken me round the world following their Portsmouth

based naval careers, gave me an off duty view of a lovely [Marsh Helleborine](#) on the Welsh coast - see [Mark Cutts photo](#).

Among my other 'first sightings' on my July 5 circuit was [Golden Samphire](#), seen on the west side of Langstone Bridge opposite the road to Northney, but I have to acknowledge that Brian Fellows had seen it in flower in the Emsworth area on June 29. That, plus other plants which I have seen in flower this week, bring my July flower total to 159.

Other firsts for the year which I have picked up from the internet this week include [the second ever British sighting of an Amur Falcon](#) (at Porthgwarra in Cornwall on July 6). Sometimes called an Eastern Red-footed Falcon Wikipedia tells us .. "this species breeds in south-eastern Siberia and Northern China before migrating in large flocks across India and over the Arabian Sea to winter in Southern Africa". The Rare Bird Alert website stresses the rarity of this sighting on July 6 by saying .. "Exceptional news this evening of a female Amur Falcon discovered in Cornwall at Porthgwarra. Only the second British record following the male present in East Yorkshire at Tophill Low from 14th September-15th October 2008 but misidentified as a Red-footed Falcon throughout its stay. Since the first for the Western Palearctic was identified in Italy at Straits of Messina, Sicily on 29th April 1995 there have been further records in Italy (1997 and 1998), Greece (2003), Sweden (2005), Hungary (2006), Azores (2011), Faeroes (2015), Kuwait (2010, 2012, 2015 and 2016), Cyprus (2016) and Romania (2016 and 2017), with three of these between late June and early July." For the Cornwall Birding report, including a video of the tired bird under camera fire from the crowd of twitchers and the time of its disappearance see [the Cornwall Birding webpage](#).

### [Mon 3rd July](#)

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

#### **A short walk brings my wild flower count to 141 including my first Hoary Willowherb, Welled Thistle, Water Figwort and Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil of the year.**

After a morning appointment at the Hayling Health Centre I walked home via the east end of Mengham Lane, then north up a narrow path and through a new housing development to the Legion Field and my flat on Elm Grove. Before reaching the footpath the gardens and roadsides gave me [Rose Campion](#), newly flowering [Montbretia \(Crocsmia\)](#) and [Yellow Corydalis](#) and a late flower on [Ground Elder](#) plus [Greater Periwinkle](#), [Scarlet Pimpernel](#) and [Nipplewort](#). The footpath was lined with masses of [Wood Dock](#) and when I turned into the new housing a pond and ditch created to drain the site, but currently dry, had been planted with wild flowerseed which gave me an unexpected [Welled Thistle](#), [Common Toadflax](#), lots of [Wild Radish](#) and some [Common Fumitory](#). A further footpath along the west end of the Mengham Junior School site gave me [Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil](#), and when that emerged into the Legion Field I found [Water Figwort](#) (with its winged, square stems) flowering in a dry ditch at the end of Hawthorn Grove Road with the tiny white flowers of [Japanese Spindle](#) nearby. Last to go on my list was a single plant of [Hoary Willowherb](#) growing by the pavement of the road taking me back to Elm Grove.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 26 - JULY 2 (WEEK 26 OF 2017)

### Sun 2nd July

#### Two sunny days on Hayling give me 124 flowering plants My finds include a new-to-me Rose and my first Wasp Spider and Marbled White

My search for the plants flowering in the new month took me east to Sandy Point by cycle on Saturday morning, then around the fields behind St Mary's church on foot that afternoon before today's cycle tour of the Sinah area out to Gunner Point this morning. I have now entered my finds in my spreadsheet which gives me a total of **124 plants in flower** including one garden escape Rose cultivar that I have not come across before. As I was turning left from the access road to the Inn on the Beach and the western car parks to follow the Ferry Road towards Gunner Point I noticed a large rose bush, around 8 foot high and at least that wide but almost lost among the gorse and other vegetation on the west side of road I had just come up. A close look showed me that its simple flowers were around 2 inches across and yellow in colour while its leaves were pinnate, and with the help of Google I found a good match in **a cultivar of Rosa xanthina called 'Canary Bird'** on account of its yellow flowers. The internet also gave me numerous photos which agreed with what I had seen and I selected the following image to show you what I saw - see [Rosa xanthina 'Canary Bird'](#) - though what I saw had only a few flowers and they were a paler shade of yellow, perhaps because this is an early flowering cultivar nearing the end of its flowering season. When I am next at this site I will look for the large, dark maroon coloured hips that are a feature of this cultivar.

Other new flowers for the year were **Musk Mallow**, **Rock Samphire**, **Fennell** and **Sea Holly**, while two which have been flowering profusely but are now difficult to find in flower are **Common Gorse** and the **Tree Lupins** at Gunner Point. Two unexpected finds were a tiny cluster of **Bell Heather** plants behind the Beach huts east of the Sinah Common skate park (I have never before seen Bell Heather here other than at the one site on the Golf Course south of the Kench) and another tiny cluster of **Wild Thyme** growing south of the Golf Course. Not yet in flower, but not lost in the clearance of Gorse west of the roadside cafe just north of the Inn on the Beach is the colony of **Pale Toadflax** that has for years had its only Hayling Island site among the Gorse.

Among the butterflies seen on Sinah Common today was a fresh **Marbled White** which gave me a first (by no means the first for the year - they have been on the wing for over a month) but probably blown here from perhaps Portsdown by the north westerly wind. Yesterday I had two spider finds in the grassland behind St Mary's church, firstly of at least two **Wasp Spiders (Argiope bruennichi)** and secondly several **'Nursery Tents' created by Pisaura mirabilis spiders** to provide a

sheltered home for their young to hatch out (for some time the mother spider will have carried her egg sac around with her but that way of life is not practical when lots of tiny spiderlings are free to roam under their own steam so the mother provides them with a roof over their heads and a fixed place where she can guard them).

During the coming weeks I will hopefully find many more interesting species in the rest of Hayling Island as well as continuing to comment on the wildlife reports I see on the internet.

## [Fri 30th June](#)

### Albatross in the North Sea

### Common Fleabane, Golden Samphire, Mugwort, Teazel, Ladies Bedstraw and Chicory start to flower

### Insect news with a focus on caterpillars

On May 19 I reported the first sightings for this year of a **Black Browed Albatross** seen off the Yorkshire coast and said that there had been almost annual sightings of single Albatrosses in British waters since 1860. This week the Rare Bird Alert website tells us that one of these birds has spent the last winter on the German coast but is now moving north, being seen off Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire on June 28 and continuing north past the Scottish border to the Bass Rock area in the mouth of the Firth of Forth on June 30. My guess is that he (?) is once more hoping that he can find a mate among the Gannets nesting on the Bass Rock though he is almost certain to fail to arouse any 'love interest' among them. For last years top Albatross story [read how one landed at Minsmere in July 2016](#). Local bird interest is of a pair of **Pintail** in eclipse plumage back at Farlington Marshes on June 29.

Turning to wild flowers Brian Fellows found **Common Fleabane** and **Golden Samphire** flowering in Emsworth on June 29 before taking a walk round the Hayling Oysterbeds on June 30 where he had the first **Ladies Bedstraw, Teazel, Chicory** and **Mugwort** in flower.

Graeme Lyons latest blog entry has some **interesting caterpillar photos** which can be seen in [his blog entry for June 28](#) but I think that a couple of photos on the Dungeness website for June 29 are equally eye-catching. See [a Puss Moth caterpillar](#) and [a Buff Arches moth](#).

## [Wed 28th June](#)

### Toadlets emerging from ponds and Godwits back from Iceland

### Ring-necked Parakeets in Plymouth, Black Swans in Southampton and a Bottle-nosed Dolphin in Portsmouth Harbour

### Local sites for Purple Emperors plus news of Southern Hawkers, Common Darters and Volucella Hoverflies.

On June 27 the Devon birding news included a mention of **Froglets** leaving the 'Silent Pool' at Chambercombe Manor near Ilfracombe and on June 17 the Christchurch Harbour news mentioned **Natterjack toadlets** leaving their watery birthplace and I thought these were worth a mention in my 'Wildlife News' but I

will leave it up to my readers to decide if they wish to pursue the stories of paranormal goings on at Chambercombe Manor by asking Google what it knows about 'Paranormal activity at Chambercombe Manor'. Here I will revert to wildlife news with a report from Bob Chapman at Blashford where on June 28 he saw a flock of **20 Black-tailed Godwits in full breeding plumage which he considered to have just returned from Iceland.**

While scanning the Devon Bird news I saw that **more than 30 Ring-necked Parakeets had been seen in Plymouth's Central Park** on June 25 and I think this marks a significant increase, which appears to be confirmed by a report in the local press last September saying that the number to be seen in Central Park had grown from 11 in April 2016 to 30 in September 2016 (this included 3 birds with blue rather than green plumage) and the current report shows that numbers are still growing. To read the article in the Plymouth Herald see [here](#). Following the news of a **Black Swan family** with three cygnets recently hatched on Ivy Lake at Chichester I see that the family which has been breeding for several years at Southampton's Riverside Park currently has 5 'well grown' cygnets while Portsmouth Harbour had a **Bottlenosed Dolphin** on its Gosport shore on June 24.

The location of the **Purple Emperor 'assembly point' in Southleigh Forest** has been revealed by Roy Symonds in the June 26 entry on the Hampshire Butterfly website as SU 743 086 (not far north of the Emsworth Common Road opposite the north end of Hollybank Lane). I am not sure of the place where they are regularly seen in Havant Thicket but believe it to be in the Bells Copse area which is in the southwest of that woodland. Among other insect news I see that the first sighting of a **Southern Hawker** dragonfly was on June 14 near Arundel while the first **Common Darter** was reported in Berkshire on June 13.

To end this blog entry here is news of **four members of the Volucella genus of Hoverflies**. The first of the four, **Volucella zonaria**, was seen at Portland on June 17 and can be seen at [here](#). Very similar in appearance is **Volucella inanis** and this can be compared to V. zonaria [here](#). **Volucella Pellucens** is featured [here](#). Finally **Volucella bombylans** was seen in Brook Meadow at Emsworth by Brian Fellows on June 27 and Brian's photo can be seen [here](#).

## Mon 26th June

### Returning shore birds and other bird news

#### My first Prickly Lettuce and Square-stalked Willowherb

plus a possible name for a garden shrub that has been puzzling me for weeks.

Reports of **12 Curlews** in Pagham Harbour on June 23 have been followed by a count of **95 Redshank** at Farlington Marshes on June 24 and **80 Curlew** there on June 25 all indicate that these two species have joined the Green and Common Sandpipers returning from their breeding quarters. Similar news from Norfolk on June 23 is of the first returning **Red-throated Diver** while over in the Netherlands **6 Red-breasted Mergansers** were back today (June 26).

Other bird news features an **Alpine Swift** over Lodmoor (near Weymouth) on June 24 which you can see [in this photo](#). Nearer home on June 24 a pair of **Black**

**Swans** were seen on Ivy Lake at Chichester with three newly hatched cygnets and while thinking of them I remembered that on June 13 Christchurch Harbour reported the hatching of **six Mute Swan cygnets of which three were of the white 'Polish' form** as can be seen [in this photo](#). Still on the same theme the Selsey blog for June 25 has a report from the Drayton Lakes at Chichester where (to quote Owen Mitchell) " I was pleased to see the first **two broods of Pochard with their respective mothers**; hopefully there will be one or two more such broods to follow of this nationally rare breeding bird."

A short walk round the Legion Field and Tournerbury Lane area close to my flat on June 25 found my first flowers on **Prickly Lettuce** and **Square Stalked Willowherb**. It also took me past a garden in Tournerbury Lane where a tall shrub with large yellow flowers and long, glossy pinnate leaves has puzzled me since I first saw it in April. The flowering of the **Bladder Senna** bush on the east side of the Kench which I saw on June 17, and the fact that the Bladder Senna has at least one other species (*Colutea orientalis*) of the same genus which is grown in gardens, has given me some hope that the mystery plant in Tournerbury Lane may be a cultivar of *Colutea orientalis* .....

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 19 - 25 (WEEK 25 OF 2017)**

**[Fri 23rd June](#)**

### **Recent highlights**

Looking through the recent reports while I have been 'offline' I thought this photo [of a Roe Doe with two young Fawns in Pagham Harbour was worth sharing](#). A more unusual sight at Farlington Marshes recently has been [this male Ruff in all his breeding finery](#). The Ruff is very unusual here at this time of year but several other wader species are already starting to return from breeding - not yet back at Emsworth's Nore Barn is **Spotted Redshank** but singles in summer plumage have been seen at the Exe estuary in Devon on June 21 and at Pett Level in Sussex on the 22nd. Other returning waders have been a **Wood Sandpiper at Brading (IoW) on June 16** and a **Common Sandpiper** on the River Arun on June 21 with another at Eastleigh Lakeside on June 23. Several **Green Sandpipers** have been reported since one was at Sandwich Bay on June 9 (where a **Greenshank** was back on June 19). Also possibly returning migrants were 4 **Whimbrel** which flew past Portland on June 19.

The **Elegant Tern** which spent June 7-9 in the Hampshire side of the mouth of Chichester Harbour before moving to Pagham Harbour on June 10 was last seen there on June 20 before arriving at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour on June 21 where it was still to be seen on June 22. Not yet in southern England a count of 331 **Little Gulls** in the Netherlands on June 19 marks their return from breeding in northern Europe. Nearer home the expected evening **screaming parties of Swifts** have been reported since June 18 and on June 17 the first **departing Sand Martins** were seen at Farlington Marshes (and at Eversley in north Hampshire). Reflecting on spring arrivals the Portland website on June 16 said that, based on their ringing totals for the years since 2010 .. "the Willow Warbler was the big winner this spring with a total nearly twice as high as the recent spring average". To see the figures for other spring migrants go to [Portland blog for June 16](#).

To end the bird news I see that a **Woodchat Shrike** was at Abbotsbury in Dorset on June 2 and a **Red-backed Shrike** was seen in Devon on June 5 but the Isle of Wight has had a **Lesser Grey Shrike** in the Bembridge area on June 21 and 22 when this photo was taken by Derek Hale - [Lesser Grey Shrike](#).

Lots of butterflies are currently flying with **Purple Emperor** seemingly having a great season with local sightings from both Havant Thicket and Southleigh Forest while the Knepp Estate near Horsham in Sussex claims a UK record count of 148 seen there on June 22. At the other end of the scale a single **Camberwell Beauty** at Findon (north of Worthing in Sussex) on June 17 is the only report I know of so far this year. An eye-catching **Leopard Moth** was in Barry Collins moth trap in Leigh Park, Havant on both June 19 and 21 and his report included a link to a species summary which you can see at [Leopard Moth details](#). Another unusual moth seen at Portland on June 19 was a [Lunar Hornet Moth](#). Also seen recently Portland on June 17 was [the Hornet Mimic hoverfly \(Volucella zonaria\)](#). The first report of **Glowworms** came from Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight on June 17 and also from Newtown on the Isle of Wight came news of 4 **Wasp Spiders** for which I have two links - the first [is an overview of the Argiope Bruennichi species](#) while the second [shows the size difference between the male and female](#).

## [Thu 22nd June](#)

### **Windows update and Computer Hardware failure take me off-line.**

Last week a major update to my Windows 10 system apparently removed the files which hold this blog and it took me several days to discover where they were. Then on Monday of this week I suffered a major hardware failure in that the 'hub' which connects my system to the internet 'died'. Today Virgin Media replaced the 'hub' and I am at last able to update this blog.

Although there is less wildlife news to report currently than was the case during the peak of the spring migrant season I will need a day or so to catch up with what has been reported on the internet while I was unable to access it so I will limit this update to the above brief explanation of my silence but I must also pass on a comment that I received from Peter Raby concerning the **Starry Clover** which I featured in my last update before disaster struck. Peter pointed out that I was wrong to assume that the plants which he and John Norton found on Browndown during their recent 'Pan Species Listing' effort in the Gosport area were 'casuals' as the species has been established there since at least 1998 when John Norton first pointed it out to Peter. John also tells me of a second rarity which they saw at Browndown - that was **Early Medick (Medicago praecox)**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 12 - JUNE 18 (WEEK 24 OF 2017)**

### [Fri 16th June](#)

**Purple Emperor, Gatekeeper and Heath Fritillary now on the wing**  
**Buff-breasted Sandpiper arrives in Dorset as an Osprey flies south**  
**Starry Clover is a new plant for me and Boletus luridiformis is a colourful**  
**fungus in Waterlooville.**

The first **Purple Emperor** for Sussex this summer was seen on June 15 by Matthew Oates at the wildlife-rich Knepp Estate near Horsham in West Sussex (though one was reported from Surrey on June 11). Another first which we are all likely to see in the near future is the **Gatekeeper (or Hedge Brown)** which first came to my attention on the Reculver (north Kent) blog entry for June 13 but had been seen in both Berkshire and Cambridgeshire on June 1. A third butterfly species which I have only just heard of on the Reculver blog, but which has been on the wing since May 10 (seen in Devon), is the **Heath Fritillary**. I have a special interest in this species as the site where it was seen in north Kent this week is the Blean Woods on the hilltop north of Canterbury, and these woods bordered the playing fields of my school in the late 1940s so the butterfly (and its food plant, **Common Cow-wheat**) were among my personal wildlife 'stars'. For more info about the Heath Fritillary see [the Butterfly Conservation page on the species](#) and for background on the Knepp Castle estate see [a West Sussex countryside re-wilding success story](#).

The birding headline today for me is the arrival on June 15 of a **Buff-Breasted Sandpiper** at the Lytchett Fields bordering Poole Harbour in Dorset. Some years ago I remember watching one of these birds on the Hayling Golf Course but the best I can do to give you a feel for the look of this bird is to provide a link to an American YouTube clip at [American conservation of the Buff-Breasted Sandpiper](#). Another item of bird news that caught my attention today was a report from Sam Smith at Rye Harbour saying that .. "An **Osprey** in flight over the Beach Reserve at 04:30 am was an unexpected record for mid June, the bird headed straight out to sea and eventually disappeared in the early morning haze." I guess this was a young bird with no family attachment to keep it here until its young have fledged but its departure does make me wonder if the Ospreys that have been seen around Poole Harbour since the end of May (initially just one bird but recently two, of which one has a ring showing it is a male hatched at Rutland Water in 2015) are intending to start breeding in Poole Harbour next year??

I'll end today with news a rare species of Clover that was seen in Gosport on June 10 during the Pan Species Listing 'field day'. The species is **Starry Clover** which is described in Stace's Flora as .. "Introduced but naturalised since at least 1804 on shingle at Shoreham in Sussex but seen infrequently as a casual elsewhere in south Britain." The find at Gosport was presumably one of the casual appearances of the species, but for the fullest description we have a lot of information on the British Marine Life Study Society website at [its page on Starry Clover](#). An interesting feature of this plant is that it only develops its striking star shaped calyx segments in its fruiting stage so the flowering clover looks very different from the fruiting stage.

Maybe as a result of recent heavy rain and warm air a large and colourful fungus called **Boletus luridiformis** has appeared in Waterlooville and you can see a photo of one example of this species at [Boletus luridiformis](#).

**Thu 15th June**

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

**A cycle ride round north Hayling on June 14 adds  
Fragrant Agrimony, Goats Rue, Pale Flax, Slender and Milk Thistle plus**

**Rosebay Willowherb to my flower list**  
**while the first Musk Orchids are seen in Sussex and Jellyfish swarms beach**  
**in Devon.**

Cloudless sunshine and a light southerly wind made yesterday's cycle ride up the Billy Trail, across to Northney and home via Daw and West Lanes, a pleasant and rewarding outing. I joined the Billy Line at Saltmarsh Lane and immediately saw lots of **Agrimony** in flower with just one **Bee Orchid** where there used to be up to a hundred (no doubt the unseen 99 spikes are building up their strength underground for a future display). Before reaching the Oysterbeds I stopped to look for Dyer's Greenweed (this was in flower in north Kent on June 10) but saw none though there was plenty of **Pale Flax** and **Rosebay Willowherb** flowering in the stretch preceding the gate to the Oysterbeds carpark. Along the shore path from the carpark to the lagoon hundreds of **Slender Thistles** were in flower and on turning up the slope to the viewpoint above the lagoon I was pleased to find around a dozen **Milk Thistles** in flower. Best of all, at the top of the bank, both **Common Centaury** and **Yellow-wort** were in flower.

Moving on I passed my first **Greater Knapweed** before turning right off the Coastal Path towards the main road, passing two spikes of **Wild Clary** and my first **Hedgerow Cranesbill** before crossing the road and heading for North Common where white flowered **Goats Rue** was just starting to flower. Parking my bike outside the reserve I waded through waist high vegetation to see the Goats Rue before following the regular path north to the edge of the marina pool where the **Fragrant Agrimony** was starting to flower and proving its identity by the strong fragrant smell of a crushed leaf (none of its flowers had yet dropped their petals to reveal the down-turned outer spines which form a 'skirt' round its spiny burs). Before leaving the reserve and riding home I had a close look at several white flowered 'wild roses' and felt confident that I could separate these **Field Roses**, only now starting to flower, from the common Dog Rose which has been out for some time. To learn the differences between the two species have a look at [this website describing the Field Rose](#)

Back at home I found more wild flower news on the internet. In particular I saw that Dyer's Greenweed was flowering at Reculver in north Kent as shown in [this photo taken on June 10](#). Also seen at Reculver on June 11 was [Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea](#). A third flower which I have not yet come across on Hayling is the **Corn Cockle**, and while looking for a suitable photo to use here I came across this story in The Guardian newspaper for August 2014 telling how the Telegraph paper had been accusing the BBC of trying to poison the nature loving gardeners of England by offering free packets of wild-flower seed to its Countryfile viewers - well worth a 'corn-chuckle provoking' read at [Killer episode of BBC Countryfile](#). Also seen in West Sussex on June 10 was [this Musk Orchid](#) and on Saunton Sands in Devon [this mass stranding of Moon and Barrel Jellyfish was photographed](#)

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 5 - JUNE 11 (WEEK 23 OF 2017)**  
**Sun 11th June**

**First White Admiral, White Letter Hairstreak and Small Skipper.**  
**Dark, Great and Moth Mulleins in flower as are Pyramidal, Fly and Lizard**  
**Orchids.**

**9 Brent summering at Fishbourne plus a Green Sandpiper already back**

from breeding.

**Stag Beetles emerge from the woodwork and a dead Hedghog shows the species still exists on Hayling.**

The first **Silver Washed Fritillaries** and **Ringlet** for this summer got a mention in my previous blog and we can now add **Small Skipper** (seen in Sussex on June 7 with [a photo showing the uniform bright orange of its upper surface](#)) and a **White Admiral** (seen in Southwater Forest near Horsham on June 10). Also now appearing are fresh **Small Tortoiseshells** which we can expect to see flying until the first frost of winter whereas we expect the flight period of the White Admiral to be limited to the single month of July, though in several recent years a second generation of White Admirals has been seen in late September, and I have been investigating these differences in the flight time of different species.

We are interested in the time of year at which a particular butterfly species can be seen flying but in fact all our butterflies are present throughout the whole year in one of four stages of development - egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult form. The experience which a particular species has encountered over the years of its existence determines how its year is split up between the four stages: the White Admiral spends around 9 months as a **caterpillar** but a warm dry autumn will allow the caterpillar to feed more and reach the adult stage during the autumn rather than waiting for the spring; the Duke of Burgundy spends nine months as a **Chrysalis** and is unlikely to survive if something causes it to emerge from its chrysalis at a time of year when Cowslips are not available as food for the caterpillars - note that the Holly Blue also spends most of its year as a chrysalis but because its caterpillars can feed on both Holly (in the spring) and Ivy (in the autumn) it can be seen on the wing from early spring to late autumn; the Chalkhill Blue spends most of its year as an **egg**, only hatching in the spring when the Horseshoe Vetch on which it feeds is available - by mid-summer when it has had time to become an adult and to lay the next generation of eggs the Vetch has withered, forcing the egg to wait over winter until a fresh crop of Vetch is available. During all four development stages the insect can be influenced by the environment in which it finds itself, and in the **adult stage** it can respond to changes in the environment by migrating from an inhospitable location to one that may give it a better chance of survival.

Turning to wild flowers **three species of Mullein** have impressed me in the past few days with two of them being seen as I cycled along the south coast of Hayling on June 10 when one of my objectives was to revisit the group of Mulleins that I had seen on June 4 beside the Ferry Road just west of the access road to the Golf Clubhouse - in my blog for that day I said that they were probably Twiggy Mullein, a species I am not familiar with, mainly because I thought it too early for Dark Mullein, but today's visit showed they were **Dark Mullein** and that id was supported by the appearance of a single Dark Mullein planted in the garden around the flats where I now live and seen by me for the first time today. Before reaching the Dark Mulleins I saw my first **Great Mullein** for the year growing on Sinah Common seen from Ferry Road and shouting its identity by both its size (probably three times the height of the Dark Mulleins) and by the greyish/hairy tinge to its leaves. To see these features [have a look at this Wildflowerfinder website page](#) The third species, Moth Mullein, had been seen seen by Brian Fellows in Emsworth on June 7.

Other eye-catching species appearing this week have been the **Pyramidal Orchids** which will be dominant on Portsdown for much of the summer - these were first noted by John Goodspeed as appearing on Milton Common in Portsmouth on June 7 and [a good photo can be seen here](#). A less common orchid was seen at Fairmile Bottom by the A29 northwest of Arundel on June 10 - this was [a Fly Orchid](#). Also getting its first mention this week, though seen at Camber on Rye Bay on June 3, was [a Lizard Orchid](#). Less prestigious, but a significant marker of the change from Spring to Summer, was my first finds of **Restharrow, Hare's Foot Clover, White Melilot, Black Horehound and Rough Chervil** (the second of the three Cow Parsley look-alikes, succeeding Cow Parsley and preceding Hedge Parsley) - these were all seen during my ride to Sandy Point on June 10. Also seen during that ride along the busy Seafront Road, near its junction with Chichester Avenue, was the corpse of a **Hedgehog** - the second corpse seen in this area during the couple of months I have been here.

More reminders of the advancing season came with a report on June 9 from the Sandwich Bay bird observatory in Kent of what they described as the first **Green Sandpiper** to return after its short absence for breeding elsewhere - one or two pairs do breed in Scotland but normally the species breeds further north and is only seen in southern Britain from July to March. Another species not normally seen here in June is the **Brent Goose** but a few of these do stay through the summer so a count of 9 in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour on June 4 was not unexpected, nor was the **summering flock of 142 Mute Swans** seen with them.

The past week has brought several reports of **Stag Beetles** from the Emsworth area and no doubt they are appearing elsewhere after spending from three to seven years underground feeding on rotting wood. To learn more about them go to the website of the People's Trust for Endangered Species about Stag Beetles at [for photos and facts and to discover how you can help save these magnificent Beetles from extinction](#). The 'antlers' of the male immediately identify it but if you see what looks like a female with much smaller 'mandibles' (see both sexes in the photo on the PTES website) but with a black coloured and rough-textured 'shell' - not shiny and with no hint of the rich brown of the male's 'shell' - you are probably looking at a **Lesser Stag Beetle** for which [you can find a photo here](#).

### **Fri 9th June**

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

#### **Black Squirrels in the Portsmouth area.**

#### **News of an Elegant Tern and a potential Quail invasion.**

#### **First Silver Washed Fritillary and Ringlet.**

#### **Scorpion Fly feeding habits and a rare Fiery Clearwing.**

For years there have been occasional sightings of '**Grey Squirrels with all black fur**' in the area north west of Portsmouth and the first such sighting that I have heard of this year comes from the Purbrook Heath area on June 4 via John Goodspeed's website. This spurred me to find out more about these animals but, as in previous years, I have not been able to find any facts on which scientists agree, so here are the 'facts' that I have read on the internet.

The story seems to have started in the Victorian era when the only Squirrels to be found in the British Isles were the Red species until our passion for interfering with nature led to the **introduction of two new species from north America** - the

first to arrive was the **Grey Squirrel** followed by **Eastern Fox Squirrels** which ARKIVE says are very variable in colouration, ranging from reddish-brown to grey or black, often with a white nose and ears, and black forms of this species seem to be **the origin of our Black Squirrels** which are well established in East Anglia after a Victorian landowner introduced them to his estate at Letchworth in Hertfordshire - the first escapee was noted in this area in 1912 but the Black form has since spread as shown on the map of sightings published in the Daily Mirror on 12 March 2015 - see [map of Black Squirrel sightings published in 2015](#). At that time the number of Black Squirrels in Britain was estimated to be at least 25,000. A photo of two of them can be seen at [Black Squirrel photo](#).

Also in the recent news with reports starting on May 25 from Sussex, Hampshire and Dorset are **Quail**. Birders hearing the distinctive 'Wet my lips' calls were at first suspicious that these might be escapes from farms where they are kept to supply restaurants with Quail Eggs, especially as the first was heard by a dog walker in allotments on the northern fringe of Brighton, but the number of reports from a wide area along the south coast at this time of year (when migrants arrive to breed), make genuine migrants the more likely source. If you have never heard these birds have a listen to **recordings available on the Xeno-Canto website** - click the following link which will take you to the first page of information about the selected species, then scroll down to the start of a list of recordings of that species, then select the recording you want to hear by clicking the standard triangle symbol at the start of a line of information describing that recording. The link to the recordings of the selected species is to [recordings of Common Quail calls](#). To use Xeno-Canto to hear recordings of other species scroll up to the top line of the web page and enter the name of your chosen species in the Search Box.

On June 7 an **Elegant Tern** was seen with half a dozen Sandwich Terns in the Fishery Creek area of Chichester Harbour (west of the Sailing Club on Black Point at the harbour mouth). The same bird was seen again off Sandy Point on June 9. This species breeds in dense colonies around the Gulf of California and is very rare anywhere else in the world and can be confused with the slightly commoner Royal Tern but it seems that the bird seen in Chichester Harbour was a known colour ringed individual, one of at least three that have taken up residence in Europe - see [Elegant Terns in western Europe](#).

On June 7 the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website reported the first sighting of a **Silver Washed Fritillary** whose photo can be seen at [Silver Washed Fritillary in St Leonards Forest near Horsham](#). Another first (a **Ringlet**) seen in Sussex on June 6 has its photo at [a Ringlet in Kithurst Meadows on the Downs south of Pulborough Brooks](#). Also seen in Sussex on June 4 was a **Scorpion Fly robbing a spider of its prey** - the original photo is not very clear but this form of piracy is described on the NatureSpot webpage (Life history section) at [Scorpion Fly photos and info](#).

Finally for today a reminder that tomorrow (June 10) will see Graeme Lyons (the Sussex Wildlife Trust Ecologist) attempt a marathon 24 hour challenge to his fellow 'Pan Species Listers' to see the greatest number of species in one day. Before giving details of that here is his Blog entry for June 6, the last day of a visit to Jersey, in which he finds a **Fiery Clearwing** - the rarest of the Clearwings. Read all about it at [Minstrel Bug, Fiery Clearwing and Tawny Loghorn Beetle on Jersey](#). No more rarities in Graeme's latest Blog entry but it does tell you **how you can**

support Wildlife Conservation in Sussex by sponsoring his attempt to see 1000 species in 24 hours on June 10 - see [an attempt to see 1000 species in 24 hours](#).

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 29 - JUNE 4 (WEEK 22 OF 2017)

### Sun 4th June

#### **A ride to the Ferry Inn brings my June flower list to 121 species.**

Today's target was the coastal area west of the Beachlands centre and my starting point was Sinah Common south of Staunton Avenue where I found both **Cock's Eggs** and **Duke of Argylls Teaplant** in flower. Both are members of the Nightshade family, the former getting its name from the small white egg-shaped flowers that can be seen in this photo of [Cock's Eggs \(Salpichroa organifolia\)](#), and you can learn more about the latter from [this webpage about the Duke of Argyll's Teaplant](#). Also starting to flower here was my first plant of **Heath Groundsel** for the year.

Crossing the Common to the sandy ground between the beach huts and the sea I found **Yellow Horned Poppy**, **Sea Bindweed**, **English Stonecrop** and **Sheep's Bit**, all of which have featured recently as firsts for the year, plus **Viper's Bugloss** which was new for the year today and which can be seen at [Viper's Bugloss webpage](#).

Back on Ferry Road to continue west I was taken by surprise by a roadside cluster of plants with large, bright yellow flowers which I did not recognize so I took a sample which enabled me to identify them as [Sulphur Cinquefoil](#). A short distance further on, just west of the approach road into the Golf Course, I came on another cluster of plants which were clearly Mulleins, growing where I had seen them in past years, and I am fairly certain that they are specimens of [Twiggy Mullein](#).

Reaching the northern fringe of the Golf Course south of The Kench a hedge of **Wild Privet** was newly in flower, as were two recent 'firsts' which I had noted on May 25 - **Bell Heather** and garden **Asparagus**. Lacking the energy for the full circuit round the south of the Golf Course I turned for home after ticking off the first **Tree Lupins** that I saw in the harbour entrance carpark.

### Fri 2nd June

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

#### **My June diary starts with 97 flower species plus my first Swifts and a Meadow Brown butterfly.**

Yesterday I walked west from St Mary's Church to the Saltmarsh Lane seawall, then south down the Billy Line to West Town Station and home via Hayling Park and St Mary's Road.

Before reaching the church I found a new 'weed' for the year growing from the pavement and jotted the name **Redshank** on my pad though I see that since that name appeared in my 1997 edition of Stace's Flora (When it was listed as 'Redshank (Persicaria polygonum)' it had already been re-named to 'Redleg (Persicaria maculosa)' in the Fitter & Fitter book printed in 2003. Whatever name you give this species I hope you can recognize it in this [photo](#).

Reaching the Church distinctive 'screams' made me look up to the base of the steeple, which a line of six **Swifts** seemed to be checking out as a potential nest site (perhaps where they bred last year or they themselves hatched). They did not linger here but had given me another tick on my bird year list. The Churchyard also gave me a first for my plant list with a cluster of **Stinking Iris** newly in flower. We are all familiar with the bright orange seeds of this species but a Daily Telegraph article may add to your background info - see [Stinking Iris photo and background info](#).

Emerging from the Churchyard into the open fields which once formed Rook Farm I decided to explore the periphery of the northern section of these fields and was almost immediately rewarded with the bright yellow flowers of **Yellow Meadow Vetchling** - see [photos](#). Nearby was a large cluster of **Salsify flowers** and [here is a photo of the plant in flower](#) but this is not just grown as an attractive flower as it has tap roots looking like those of a Parsnip but with a delicate taste that gives it the name "**Oyster Plant**".

Also in this area **Wild Blackberries** were starting to flower (including those which I can name as **Dewberries**) while among the grass **Field Bindweed** was in flower. A little further on a brown butterfly opened its wings to show me the small patch of orange around it's eye and thus confirm that it was my first **Meadow Brown** - see [Meadow Brown photo](#)

I had now completed the northern circuit and was back on the path connecting the church to Higworth Lane and I took advantage of the picnic bench (presumably provided by the owners of the large caravan park) to pause for a drink and add **Borage** and **Broom** to my flower list. Continuing along the path through the caravans I passed my first **Hedge Bindweed** flowers and when I reached Higworth Lane I found a cluster of **Hedge Woundwort** in flower - for a reminder of this plant see [a webpage about Hedge Woundwort](#). Next came a much less attractive 'first' - **Ground Elder** on the east side of West Lane with a much more exciting 'first' - **Broad Leaved Willowherb** on the west side at the junction with Saltmarsh Lane.

From the Saltmarsh Lane seawall I had the impression that Langstone Harbour had been drained of water by the monthly Neap tide but luckily that had not sucked away the special plants growing on the seawall, principally the **Bastard Cabbage** which was now clothed in it's 'Chianti Bottle shaped' seeds - see [a webpage showing both flowers and seeds](#). Also flowering on the seawall was my first **Lucerne** with its distinctive blue flowers - see [Lucerne flowers](#). Also here I came on my first **Lesser Stitchwort** - see [Lesser Stitchwort](#).

From the seawall I followed the south side of the woodland back to the Billy Line with the incessant rattling accompaniment of **Lesser Whitethroat** song and at what was once West Town station I found the hedge was crammed with flowering plants of both **Bittersweet (aka Woody Nightshade)** and **Japanese Honeysuckle**. In case you are unfamiliar with the latter here is [a photo of the Japanese plant showing how, unlike our native Honeysuckle, which has a single flower cluster at the end of each 'vine', this has smaller clusters of flowers growing from several of the terminal pairs of leaflets](#).

Back at home I found a copy of the June edition of the **Hayling Islander** local free paper in my letter box with the top story on its front page being that Havant Borough Council had refused a planning application for the development of the Rook Farm fields - no doubt a revised application will eventually succeed in

changing the use of these fields from 'Free Public Access', with its implications for wildlife which I have attempted to describe, to 'Commercial Housing Development', with its much needed implications for providing homes for our ever growing human population, but the current decision should give us another year with Skylarks singing over the flower rich grassland (with Havant Borough(?) paying for the maintenance of the pathways through the grass and control of the encroaching scrub).

The morning of June 2 saw me continue my wildflower search with a walk south through the Mengham built-up area to the Hayling Bay beachland. This added a good number of garden flowers (including **Welsh Poppy**, **Dotted Loosestrife**, **French Cranesbill** and **Foxgloves**) but also found my first **Knotgrass**, **Bucks Horn Plantain**, **Red Campion** and **Parsley Water Dropwort** growing in the roadsides. Across the Seafront Road I found **Bird's Foot Trefoil**, **Ox-eye Daisies** and **Sea Kale** and on my way home found both **Opium** and **Oriental Poppies**, **Silver Ragwort** and **Perennial Cornflower** as well as the inevitable **Seaside Daisies** (*Erigeron glaucus*) and I will end with [a photo of this plant in flower](#).

**Mon 29th May**

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

**First Emperor Dragonfly and Ruddy Darter, also first Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper and Silver Studded Blue.**

Hampshire had an early **Emperor Dragonfly** in Botley Woods on May 16 but they are now being seen more widely as the similar Hairy Dragonfly approaches the end of its season in July. The bodies of Hairy Dragonflies are blackish with two coloured spots on each segment while the body of an Emperor lacks the spots and is green on a female and normally blue on a male, both sexes having a bright green thorax. Over on the Isle of Wight the first **Ruddy Darter** was seen on May 25 before any Common Darters have been seen.

Equally significant were the first appearances by **Marbled White** (on Portsdown on May 25) when the first **Large Skipper** was seen in Sussex, followed by the first **Meadow Brown** in Sussex on May 28 and today (May 29) despite light rain in Sussex the first **Silver Studded Blue** was creeping around in the heather!

Among the bird news which has recently caught my eye has been the first appearance in Britain of a female **Red-Necked Phalarope**, seen in Northumberland on May 24 after completing her duties as egg-layer in several nests built by her male partners - egg-laying is her only parental duty - everything else has to be done by the male. Also on May 24 the Selsey website told us that **16 pairs of Little Terns were nesting this year at Church Norton** while here in Langstone Harbour the RSPB Warden (Wez Smith) told Brian Fellows on May 22 that around **40 Little Terns (some 20 pairs) were nesting on the RSPB Islands** out in the harbour.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 22 - 28 (WEEK 21 OF 2017)**

**Sun 28th May**

**A Red Kite 'Rite of Passage' plus Cattle Egret breeding in Lancashire.**

The past week has brought many reports from across the south of England, from Kent to Cornwall, of an exceptional number of young (i.e. two year olds) Red Kites undertaking a long distance grand tour. I was already aware of a general increase in the number and widespread distribution of Red Kite reports when I found the following report for May 24 from Sandwich Bay in Kent .... "everything

was proceeding with its usual decorum (a synonym for boring), when Red Kites started to move up from the south at around 9am. The movement suddenly accelerated at about 9.30 when at one point a kettle of 23 Red Kites and 3 Common Buzzards was circling over the North Stream near the Observatory. The eventual total of 30 Red Kites was comfortably an SBBO record". On May 25th the Cornwall Birding website found a dramatic way of recording what was going on - rather than listing a string of around 30 reports in the conventional way (e.g. the location, number of Kites seen, their behaviour, and the observers name) they put a 'Kite symbol' at the location on a map of Cornwall, giving a clear impression of the number and distribution of reports and providing the additional data relating to each report in a 'pop up panel' activated by clicking any one of the Kite symbols on the map. To give a rough impression of what I am trying to say here is a jpeg image of the map of reports for May 26, generated using the Print Screen button (which I did not know was available on my keyboard!)

#### Copy of Cornwall Birding Red Kite map.

If anyone wants to explore the Cornish data they should visit the original website at [Cornwall Birding website](#). I can't resist quoting Martin Cade of the Portland Bird Observatory on this subject - on May 27 he wrote: ... "There are some that would say Portland's fortunate to avoid the now annual circus of 'plastic' Red Kites undertaking peculiar movements across southern England at this time of year, but such are the numbers involved it was perhaps inevitable that one would eventually stray out to the island. Today's bird gave us quite a shock when it flew close past the car as we were driving down New Road."

Turning to the subject of Cattle Egret breeding in Britain I was aware that a pair had bred in Somerset in 2008 but was not aware of any successful follow-up to this until I read in the RBA web entry for May 23 that a current total of 16 Cattle Egrets in Britain included "a bird on a nest in Cheshire". For details see the RBA news bulletin at [Cattle Egrets breeding at RSPB Burton Mere reserve in Lancashire](#).

To bring the story of the re-colonisation of Britain by members of the 'Egret tribe' up to date since Little Egrets started to breed here (in Poole Harbour) in 1995 I have looked at the breeding reports of other species and find that Spoonbill was the second species to successfully raise young here in 1998 (after a number of failed attempts to do so) followed by Cattle Egrets in 2008 (though there were no more reports of successful breeding by them until the 2017 report with which I began this story). The fourth species to breed in Britain was Great White Egret at Shapwick Heath in Somerset in 2012. Pictures of the Spoonbill colony now established at Holkham in Norfolk can be seen at [Spoonbill colony at Holkham](#) and for pictures of Great White Egrets at Shapwick in Somerset see [Great White Egret video at Shapwick Heath in Somerset](#)

#### Thu 25th May

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

#### **A cycle trip around Hayling Golf Course.**

My target this morning was to see **Nottingham Catchfly** in flower where the Hayling Wildlife Group had seen it last Saturday but as well as finding the best show of this species I have ever seen at this site I actually saw at least six other 'firsts for the year' before I got home.

To find the **Nottingham Catchfly site** look for the wartime Pill Box which is to be found on the south side of the Golf Course fence immediately after rounding the area of Sand Dunes south of the shore carpark alongside the Langstone Harbour entrance. From the Pill Box walk east along a broad track to a cluster of trees on the west side of which is a well used wooden bench south of the track you have come along (Don't be confused by a second bench just beyond the trees). From the bench walk north west and slightly uphill into a small patch of low gorse among which you will find the Catchfly plants which are partly hidden by the gorse but easily picked out by their distinctive shape shown in the photo at [Nottingham Catchfly flowers](#).

Before leaving the Mengham area I had ticked the first white flowers of the **New Zealand Cabbage Plant (*Cordylina australis*)** in at least one garden - for a photo see [New Zealand Cabbage Plant in flower](#) and when I was passing the Kench I was surprised to see **Bell Heather** already flowering in the Golf Course where a garden escape plant of **Asparagus** was also just starting to flower - for a photo see [Asparagus Plant in flower](#).

Turning into the harbour entrance shore carpark I had the impression that this was an exceptionally good year for the **Tree Lupins**, and having followed the path along the fence of the Ferry Sailing Club into the sand dunes behind the Tamarisks I was delighted to see that **Sea Bindweed** was already in flower - see a photo at [Sea Bindweed flowers and leaves](#) - along with my first **Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana*)** for a photo of which see [Sheep's Bit flowering in typical habitat](#). The only other newcomer to these dunes south of the Golf Course was **English Stonecrop** for a photo of which see [English Stonecrop](#).

The only thing to mention on my way home was another group of half a dozen five metre high spikes of Giant Viper's Bugloss growing in the garden of a large house near the junction of Hollow Lane with Beach Road - these 'Martians' really are taking over Hayling Island!!

**[Tue 23rd May](#)**

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

### **Wild Clary on Hayling and Portsea Island plus recent news of birds and bugs.**

On Monday (May 22) Brian Fellows crossed Langstone Bridge to have a look round the Hayling Oysterbeds and almost the first thing he saw was **Wild Clary** in flower followed, near the northern entrance to the Oysterbeds, by **Greater Knapweed** flowering much earlier than expected. As far as I can make out the Clary is a plant which I had stumbled on in October last year and it seems that this species is spreading in the area around Havant with reports of a second site on north Hayling (vaguely mentioned in the HOS Kingfisher magazine for last autumn as being seen during a HOS walk visiting the Oysterbeds area) while Brian has come across a mention of the plant on Facebook as being seen beside the cycle way which follows the Eastern Road down the east shore of Portsea Island. If anyone wants to see the plants at the two sites where I have seen it for myself my directions would be as follows. For the well established Emsworth site go to the northern junction of Christopher Way with New Brighton Road then search the roadside grass on the north side of Christopher Way at the point where a public footpath on the north side of this grass emerges from behind the Christopher Way houses. For the north Hayling site start in the waterside carpark immediately south west of Langstone Bridge and follow the foot path from the

carpark around the south of water/mud between Langstone Bridge and the old railway bridge. Where this path leaves the carpark it goes up and over a hummock under some trees and where it emerges from the shade of those trees look at the north edge of the path where the single spike of Clary is to be seen. For a really dramatic account of what Graeme Lyons (the Pan-Species Lister and Sussex Wildlife Trust ecologist) found today during a visit to the SWT Graffham Common reserve (**two very rare spiders, five fascinating beetles, the first Golden Ringed Dragonfly of the year, a tiny Tortrix moth that is probably new to Sussex, and the Gorse parasite Dodder**) read his blog entry at [an exciting visit to Graffham Common](#).

Recent bird news from Cornwall is of **one Quail, a Bee Eater and a Purple Heron**, while Dartmoor in Devon still has a long staying **Great Grey Shrike** and the Isle of Wight has a more seasonable **Woodchat Shrike**. At Reculver in north Kent a **Stone Curlew** provided the entertainment and in Somerset a **Little Bittern** arrived (in addition to one that has been in the Scillies for several days).

Today Rye Harbour had the first **Poplar Hawkmoth** of the season (see [Poplar Hawkmoth photo](#)). Yesterday the Rye Harbour warden (Barry Yates) posted the following on the SOS website .. "A **Spoonbill** has been around for a few days, but is elusive - seen last evening in pool north of Ternery Pool. But even if you miss that there's so much to see at the moment and **the terns are at last catching lots of Sandeels**. BUT no Yellow Wagtail or Turtle Dove and **the Lapwing have been struggling with the very dry ground (= no worms)**, but it may have rained enough just in time for a late nesting flurry with lots of tumbling, peewitting display yesterday..."

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 15 - 21 (WEEK 20 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 21st May**

#### **A cycle ride to Sandy Point finds my first Small Blue butterfly and Hounds Tongue, Heath Speedwell and lots of Yellow Horned Poppies in flower.**

A short walk to replenish my supply of milk last night found my first **Common Ragwort** flowering from the pavement outside the site where yet more 'retirement flats' are being built. This morning, cycling towards Sandy Point, the first thing I noticed was that there had been a general outburst of flowers on **Common Mallow** before I passed yet another garden dominated by the tall spikes of **Tree Echium (Giant Viper's Bugloss)** - I only saw one other new site for this giant invader during this morning's trip but there it was towering over my first sight of **Tree Mallow** for the year.

Other gardens on the outward trip gave me **Opium Poppy** with its pale mauve flowers and the deep red of a smaller species which I took to be **Common Poppy**. I also noticed a bank of **greyish garden Ragworts starting to flower** - I think these are **cultivars of Silver Ragwort (Senecio cineraria)** - for a general impression see [an example of a Silver Ragwort cultivar](#).

I was about to turn right off Eastoke Avenue into Bosmere Road but thought I would instead turn left down Fisherman's Walk and found that this gives the only public access to the southern shore of Fishery Creek west of Black Point. After scanning this new view of the harbour I continued my normal route down Bosmere Road and along Sandy Point Road and Bracklesham Road to the mouth of Chichester Harbour where **Spanish Broom** was now flowering above the

access road to the Hayling Island Sailing Club at Black Point. Turning south past the Lifeboat Station the old Hospital grounds gave me an unexpected **Small Blue butterfly** and where the shore path goes through the 'public access' section of the Sandy Point nature reserve I found both **Hounds Tongue** and **Heath Speedwell** in flower. For Hound's Tongue (which I have previously only seen within the Reserve) see [a full account of Hound's Tongue](#) and for Heath Speedwell (which I have not seen on Hayling Island before today) see [a full account of Heath Speedwell](#).

Before leaving this fenced off area outside the Sandy Point reserve I added **Sea Spurge (Euphorbia paralias)** to my list and then returned through the Hospital grounds where I persuaded myself that a tiny flash of yellow was my first **Tormentil** but I had no doubts that a bush covered with **Wild Rose flowers** growing beside Sandy Point Road was the genuine article. Heading home along the shore cycleway/footpath I found many examples of **Yellow Horned Poppy** and **Japanese Rose** flowering on the newly re-inforced shingle bank sea defence. Nothing new seen on the way home but looking back through my notes I see I forgot to mention the first flowers of **Field Bindweed** that I saw on the approach road to the Sailing Club and also an isolated example of **Corky-Fruited Water Dropwort** seen in the grass beside Bracklesham Road.

**[Fri 19th May](#)**

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

### **Recent highlights including "What the BBC's Birdwatchers at Rainham Marshes were looking at".**

Apologies for the gap in my diary entries since May 6. Here are a few of the highlights I have missed, starting with a possible answer to what the 'Birdwatchers at Rainham Marshes' (shown many times on BBC TV to fill a short gap preceding News Bulletins) were looking at - my guess is that it was a **Laughing Gull** which was reported by Birdguides as being seen at Rainham Marshes on May 9 - that would be an appropriately named American species to precede these solemn news bulletins....

Next most important 'missed item' for me is the first report for this year of a **Black-browed Albatross** seen off the Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire on May 16 with another sighting there on May 19. One or more of these huge birds from the Southern Ocean has been seen in British waters almost every year from 1860, seemingly hoping to mate with one of our Gannets. The 1860 bird was seen in the Faroes for 34 years until it was shot in 1894 and no doubt others turned up but went unreported in the first half of the 20th Century. We do have 22 records of the species between 1950 and 2007 and since then the number of sightings seems to increase each year with one landing on inland water at Minsmere in 2015 - other sightings in recent years have been off Cornwall, Dorset, and Sussex.

Among other marine visitors this month has been a **Basking Shark** seen at Portland on May 6 while among the more colourful recent visitors there have been two **Golden Orioles**, one of which posed for a photo which you can see at [Golden Oriole posing for ringers at Portland](#). Here on Hayling Island two pairs of **House Martins** have given me a similar thrill by building nests under the eaves of the block of flats in which I now live - this thrill can only be appreciated in the light of the decline of this species in the Havant area from the time of my arrival there

in 1967, when half a dozen pairs nested on our new home, to the total absence of any breeding birds there in 2015.

On April 28 I was able to name the 'Martian Plants' growing in several gardens here on south Hayling as **Tree Echium** or **Giant Viper's Bugloss** but during May I have had to rely on reports from others of the native plants to be found in the Havant area. On May 11 Brian Fellows visited Portsdown and found **Common Spotted Orchid**, **Wild Mignonette**, **Common Gromwell**, **Common Milkwort** and **Kidney Vetch** - earlier, on May 6, he had found **Pale Flax** flowering in the grass beside the Hayling Bay railway - and on May 12 he found the first **Southern Marsh Orchid** flowering in Emsworth's Brook Meadow while on May 2 he had found **Wild Clary** flowering at the Christopher Way site. Rarer plants seen flowering on Portsdown by John Goodspeed on May 18 were **Bastard Toadflax**, **Horseshoe Vetch** and **Early Gentian**. To end this list of flowers here is an unexpected photo from the Devon Birding website of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** said to be imbibing nectar from a **Red Hot Poker** plant - see [Great Spotted Woodpecker drinking nectar](#)

Fourteen species of dragon/damselfly have been reported during May with the first **Emperor** being seen in Hampshire on May 16 and both the **Beautiful** and **Banded Demoiselles** appearing on May 2 and 7 respectively. Despite the variable weather the butterfly species we expect in May have all been seen, including **Glanville Fritillary** on the Isle of Wight as early as May 6 and **Painted Ladies** started to appear along our southern coasts from May 4 though a count of 20 at Dungeness on May 17 is the highest so far (one report of a **Clouded Yellow** in Dorset on Mar 26 was probably a misguided attempt at hibernation?).

**Hummingbird Hawkmoths** have been turning up fairly regularly since the first was reported on Mar 2 and a couple were seen in Devon on May 13 and 18 but the only other Hawkmoths of which I have noticed reports have been an **Eyed** and a **Poplar Hawkmoth** both trapped in East Sussex on May 15. Other eye-catching moths photographed in Sussex have been an Emperor Moth at Seaford on May 9 - see [Emperor Moth](#) - and a Cream-spot Tiger in the Fairlight area near Rye Harbour on May 15 - see [Cream-spot Tiger moth](#)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 1 - 7 (WEEK 18 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 6th May**

**A long walk north to Daw Lane and back down the Coastal Path gives me Willow Warbler song and Bastard Cabbage in flower, bringing my May flower count to 139 species.**

My first find was of **Shining Cranesbill** in a very neglected garden close to the roundabout at the north end of Church Road. After the Mill Rythe schools complex I used the permissive path on the east side of the roadside hedge separating the first field from the pavement of the busy main road, and in this field I noticed **Slender Speedwell** was flowering before I was forced back onto the pavement. After the Mill Rythe road entrance and after passing the Maypole pub I crossed the road, finding that there was a safe pavement on the west side to take me to the Daw Lane turning.

The shaded bank of Daw Lane at this east end was brightened as usual by a ground cover of the flowers of the **less common version of Greater Periwinkle 'var oxyloba'** whose petals are narrow and give the impression of aeroplane propellers - to illustrate this here are links to both the normal form and then to the 'var

oxyloba'. For the normal form the link is to [Greater Periwinkle normal broad petalled flower](#) and for var oxyloba see [narrow petalled var oxyloba flower](#). Much further west, beyond the second gate into the field, I found at least two clumps of **Betony** in the ditch on the north side of the lane. Each clump had a mass of the distinctive basal leaves and a single (hard to spot) flowering stem. To get an impression of what to look for see [Betony flowers](#).

Turning right into West Lane I was looking on the west side of this road for the entrance to the escape route along which horses can get off this busy and narrow road and have a hedge separating them from the cars. When I spotted it and made my own escape I noticed that opposite this gap in the hedge on the west side of the road a large clump of **Horseradish** was flowering on the east side - my first of the year. To see a plant in flower the link is to [Horseradish plant in flower](#). A short walk down the track from the 'West Lane Bends' to the Pillbox beside the Coastal Path brought me to the edge of the harbour and a welcome seat for a rest and sandwich before stating my return journey down the old rail track. After passing through the small 'copse' and emerging onto the long straight 'mid-way' stretch of the track I looked for, and found, **Common Dog Violets** in flower but best of all bird song here included the **faint but unmistakable descending scale of Willow Warbler song**.

Nothing more of interest was found until I spotted a cluster of **Common Figwort** plants that seemed to be dying of drought just as they were opening their first flowers. For information on this plant see [an account of Common Figwort from Finland](#). Also in this area I found **Black Bryony** starting to flower - its large, shiny heart-shaped leaves being much more obvious than its tiny flowers - later its colourful red berries will be the most obvious feature - for a photo use the link to [leaves and flowers of Black Bryony](#).

I now branched off the coastal path onto a narrow 'cliff edge' path following the shore to the 'Saltmarsh Lane marsh' and along this field edge path I added **Red Campion** and **Bittersweet (aka Woody Nightshade)** to my list before reaching the Saltmarsh Lane seawall on which numerous bright yellow flowered crucifer plants were flowering. When these flowers turn to seeds there will be no doubt what to call this recent invader of Britain. See [photos of both flowers and the distinctive 'Chianti Bottle' shaped seeds of Bastard Cabbage](#).

The only other find of any interest (but not new for my month list) was a large bush of **Broom** flowering in the hedge separating the St Mary's Church fields from the Higworth Lane caravan site.

### [Thu 4th May](#)

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

**After visiting Gunner Point and other areas of south Hayling my Wildflower species count for May is now up to 125 and I have sadly today seen my first Hedghog on the island, recently killed on Seagrove Avenue.**

On May 2 I cycled to Gunner Point where I added 25 species to my May list including plenty of **Tree Lupin** (link to [Tree Lupin photos and information](#)). Each year this plant flowers here but is very susceptible to some fungal disease which causes many of the plants to wilt and wither before they have flowered but this year I only saw one casualty of the fungus. I also found many examples of two species that I do not normally find - one was **Yellow Rattle** (link to [Yellow rattle photo](#)), the other is the less well known and easily overlooked **Sea Sandwort** (link to [Sea Sandwort photos and info](#)). Earlier, as I entered the harbour entrance

carpark, I found the expected mass of garden escape 'Snow in Summer' (*Cerastium tomentosum*) plants in flower (link to [photo](#)).

Plenty of *Green Winged orchids* were still flowering and further east, in the Sinah Common area, the *Duke of Argyll's Teapant* was flowering in a garden hedge (link to [photos and info](#)). Also found in full flower on the way home were my first *Ox-eye Daisies*.

On May 3 my outing was limited to a short evening walk down Tournerbury Lane and beside the fields bordering Tournerbury Woods during which I added *White Campion* and *Wild Radish* to my list. This morning my route had to include the Hollow Lane United Reformed Church Polling Station but en route I found two new plants starting to flower in gardens - one was *White Clover*, the other was *Foxglove*. Also opening its flowers for the first time among the Mengham shops was *Purple Toadflax*. At the end of this walk, heading north up Seagrove Avenue from the beach to the Polling Station, I was saddened to see a *dead Hedghog*, recently killed on the road.

**[Mon 1st May](#)**

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

**My May count of flowering plants gets off to a good start with 91 species, including 10 species not seen last month plus one mystery plant still to be identified and included in the total.**

Anticipating rain (which did not materialise) I made an early start with a short walk around the Mengham area which gave me 63 species but only had four surprises. The first of these was *Wood Avens* with its first flower of the year just opening. Next was a garden cultivar of *Bugle* followed by *Wood Dock* which had put up fresh flower shoots. The fourth surprise came just before I reached home with a tree of *Red Horse Chestnut* in full flower.

After lunch I set out on a longer walk heading north up Church Road and across open fields to the Maypole, returning south to Tournerbury Lane. At the start of this walk I looked round St Mary's churchyard where *White Bryony* in flower was a surprise as was *Hairy Garlic*. Further up Church Road *Flowering Nutmeg* (*Leycesteria formosa*) was flowering in a garden and nearing the Maypole Inn as I crossed the wheat fields I was delighted to come across a cluster of *Field Pansies* in flower. Returning south on the main road pavement I spotted two flowering shoots of *Black Medick* and as I turned into the road leading to the Mill Rythe Holiday Camp I found the first flowers of *Cut Leaved Cranesbill*.

Hopefully light winds and some sunshine tomorrow will give me a chance to get on my bike and check out the beach and sand dunes near Gunner Point with more to come later in the week on the Hayling Coastal Path (plus the Daw Lane and Northney areas) plus visits to Mengham Rythe, Black and Sandy Points, and the Hayling Bay shoreline still to come.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 24 - 30 (WEEK 17 OF 2017)**

**[Sat 29th April](#)**

**I discover another site for Giant Viper's Bugloss and read about another member of the Echium family called 'Calamity Jane'.**

This afternoon I walked to the beach and en route came across another garden in which *Tree Viper's Bugloss* was growing and where I had a conversation with the gardener who had watched the growth cycle of these plants over several years. He said that although only one plant grew in the front garden where I had seen it

from the road he had several more in the back garden where I understood that they were self sown and would be difficult to eradicate. They have a three year cycle with only leafy, ground level growth in the first year followed by tall tree like growth and flowering in the second and third years after which they scatter an immense number of seeds before dying, only to be replaced with the first year growth of many self-sown plants in the fourth year. One other fact is that they are very attractive to bees and other pollinating insects.

Also during this walk to the beach I was confronted by my first sight of **Tree Peonies** in flower - for a photo see [Tree Peonies](#) and the background info which I read about these plants tells me that these Peony blossoms were originally grafted on to woody stems by the Chinese more than a thousand years ago and subsequently the technique was developed by the Japanese before the Victorian botanist Robert Fortune brought the first specimens back to Britain between 1843 and 1862 so these are not new comers to this country.

Back at home I read more about another Echimium species which can be found in the Scilly Islands but which is better known for the disastrous affect that it had on South Australian agriculture. This is **Purple Viper's Bugloss** which has been called both Patterson's Curse and Calamity Jane from the unintended effects of its import in the 1880s by one Jane Patterson, newly arrived from Europe, who brought a few seeds into the country to add colour to her new Australian garden but she could only watch helplessly as the weed infested previously productive pastures for miles around. One redeeming feature of this introduction earned the plant the name of Salvation Jane when it was discovered that it could be used as an alternative fodder for cattle in time of drought, though it could not be fed to horses whose simpler digestive system could not eliminate the poisonous alkaloids which it contains. It seems that only now is the Curse of this plant being gradually reduced by the introduction of two species (a leaf-mining moth and a Flea beetle) which feed on the plant.

**[Fri 28th April](#)**

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

**After 14 days searching for their name I can at last feel confident that the plants which I photographed yesterday growing beside St Mary's Road are not from Mars but come from the Canary Islands and are called Giant Vipers Bugloss (Echium pininana).**

My break-through in naming these plants came today after deciding to follow up two clues which I had noticed in my photos - the first was the shape and hairiness of the main stem, the second was the flower structure with the pink flower buds turning blue as they open into trumpet shaped, open mouthed, flowers with protruding stamens. Both characteristics agree with the description of **Viper's Bugloss** and turning to **the account of this family group (Echium) in Stace's flora** I found that it includes the alien species **E. pininana** which matches my mystery plants very well - for the description given on the BBC Plant Finder website see [the BBC webpage on Tree echium \(aka Giant Viper's Bugloss\)](#) In the early 1990s this species seems to have been restricted to the Channel Islands, Cornwall and the Scillies but since then gobal warming has allowed it to be added to the range of plants that can be successfully grown in gardens throughout England though it seems likely that these roadside specimens may be self-sown.

Also seen for the first time today were **Duke of Argyll's Tea Plant** flowering in the hedge of a garden in the Sinah Common area and a couple of plants of **Self Heal** in another garden.

### [Thu 27th April](#)

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

#### **First Spotted Flycatcher of the year in the Arundel area and two Puffins off Portland may breed there. The first Brown-tail moth caterpillars seen on Thorney Island and the first Large White butterfly seen at Brighton.**

Still no progress with identifying the 'plants from Mars' but plenty of bird news in the last two days starting with the arrival of the first **Spotted Flycatcher**, seen in the Arundel area on Apr 27. On Apr 23 the first **Spotted Crake** for southern England this year was reported at Fulking in West Sussex, possibly on its way to breed in France. On Apr 25 a **Bluethroat** was seen briefly at Cuckmere in Sussex and the Auk colony on Pulpit Rock (a rock stack on the Portland Bill coast) had, for the first time, attracted two **Puffins** giving the possibility of their breeding there. Apr 26 started with a flock of **10 Mistle Thrushes** (post-breeding families?) in the New Forest, followed by a **Kentish Plover** at Newhaven and a **Tawny Pipit** at Pagham Ferry. Over on the Isle of Wight a **Pectoral Sandpiper** arrived at Brading Marsh and Portland had its first passing flock of **150 Manx Shearwaters** (have these already returned to their nests on Welsh islands are now setting off on fishing trips?). On Apr 27 a **Cattle Egret** was seen in a field at North Boarhunt (between Wickham and Southwick to the north east of Fareham), a **Wryneck** appeared in a Bexhill garden (perhaps to feed on garden ants), and a lone **Crane** flew in to Bewl Water (south east of Tunbridge Wells).

Insect news on Apr 26 was of the first **Brown-tail moth caterpillars** seen on Thorney Island and the first appearance of a fresh **Large White butterfly** in Brighton.

### [Tue 25th April](#)

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

#### **Nightjar and Wryneck arrive in Britain as Pom Skuas start to move up channel. Small Blue, St Marks Fly and Cockchafers are seen but my interest is gripped by the appearance of visitors from Mars (?) flowering on Hayling Island.**

A short walk around the streets of Mengham this afternoon gave me proof (?) that the astronomers of 1957, as portrayed on TV in the 60th Anniversary of "The Sky at Night", may have been right when they claimed that their fuzzy photos of Mars showed extensive swathes of vegetation around the canals seemingly criss-crossing the face of the planet. The 'proof' (which I do not expect others to agree with) came when I reached the group of tall Yucca-like plants growing opposite 45 St Mary's Road and found they had started to open their flowers, revealing them to be as alien and unexpected as everything else about these plants, thus 'proving' that they were of non-terrestrial origin.

Site of Martian Plants ..... and close-up of newly open flowers.

Close-up of flower buds and hairy stem ..... and current state of flowering. If anyone can name these plants I hope they will let me know (hollinsralph AT gmail.com) and in return I can point them to the Sky at Night anniversary program which can be seen on the IPlayer at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b08nddnb/the-sky-at-night-60th-anniversary-special> though these 'big green men from Mars' do not feature in it though the first of my photos does look like a family group of extra-terrestrials about to cross the road.

Coming back to reality I see that an early **Nightjar** was seen in the New Forest on Apr 22 and a **Wryneck** was in Suffolk on that day while a substantial number of **Pom Skuas** moved up channel on Apr 23 (22 past Splash Point and 23 past Dungeness). Inland a group of lady birders heard 23 different **Nightingales** singing in the Henfield area and in Bournemouth the first two of four **Peregrine eggs** hatched on Apr 24 and on Apr 25 the Chichester Lakes had family groups of **Little Grebes, Canada and Greylag geese** showing off their young.

Turning to insect news the first **Small Blue butterfly** was photographed at Portland on Apr 20 and the first **Brown Argus** was seen at Magdalen Hill Down on Apr 23. The first **Cinnabar Moth** was reported at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 24 while the first **Club Tailed Dragonfly** was in Berkshire on Apr 23. **St Marks Flies** appeared on Apr 24 and **Scorpion Flies** were out in Emsworth on Apr 22. Perhaps less welcome **Cockchafers** came to a Selsey moth trap on Apr 24 and I found one dead on the pavement in Hayling on Apr 24.

Newly flowering plants include **Bittersweet (or Woody) Nightshade, Goat's Beard and Salad Burnet** on Portsdown, **Neapolitan Garlic** (and my Martians) plus **Scarlet Pimpernel, Buck's Horn Plantain, Rowan and Caper Spurge** on Hayling.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 17 - 23 (WEEK 16 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 22nd April**

#### **Recent outings have confirmed the presence of Betony in Daw Lane, found Field Pepperwort and Sea Kale on Hayling Beach and found Greater Celandine flowering near Langstone Bridge.**

On Thursday (Apr 20) I cycled to Daw Lane where a single open flower allowed me to confirm the mystery plants of Tuesday as **Betony** and to add **Meadow Buttercup** to my flower list for the Island. On Friday a walk to the Hayling Bay beach added **Field Pepperwort** to my flower list and found **Sea Kale** newly in flower. It also gave me my first **Wheatears** when I saw five of them among the Beach Huts and on my way to the beach I saw several big **Horse Chestnut trees in full flower** plus **Creeping Buttercup** in a garden.

Today I cycled up the Hayling Coastal Path to Langstone Bridge where **Greater Celandine** was in full flower but there was no sign of the possible Hedgerow Cranesbill which I thought I had seen there on April 7 - I have now corrected this to Dove's Foot Cranesbill which is plentiful here. Also at this site **Ox-eye Daisies** were in bud. Coming home via Northney the only unexpected observation was of **a blue bird's egg lying in the road** - probably stolen from a Blackbird or Dunnock nest by a Magpie but dropped before it could be eaten.

Looking back through the observations collected from the internet today I see that the first two **Bee Eaters** of the summer were seen in London yesterday when the first reported **Montagu's Harrier** was seen in Yorkshire. Today Trektellen listed the

first **Golden Oriole** in the Netherlands along with the first **high counts of Swifts** (416 at one site in the Netherlands) **and Black Terns** (311 off Cap Gris Nez). In southern England RBA reported a total of **11 Black Winged Stilts** on Apr 20 and two more dragonfly species were added to the British Dragonfly Society's list for this year, both recorded in Hampshire - on Apr 18 **30 teneral Common Blue Damselflies** were seen and on Apr 19 the first **Beautiful Demoiselle** was seen.

Two recent blog entries which could be of general interest can be accessed via the following links. The first describes **how ground nesting birds at Farlington Marshes are being helped to survive** by placing spikes on fence posts and by using an appropriate number of cattle to keep the grass at the right height - see [the latest entry of the Solent Reserves blog](#). The second link is to Graeme Lyons latest blog entry about **a rare spider** found at Graffham in Sussex - see [Graeme Lyons and the Lichen Running Spider](#). A final item for today concerns **a Mink trying to catch baby Mallard ducklings** at Reculver on the north Kent coast.

**[Wed 19th April](#)**

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

### **A long walk to the Oysterbeds finds a plant I cannot yet name plus many Whitethroats and a daytime hunting Fox.**

This morning I set out to check on a footpath leading north across the mid-Hayling fields from the roundabout at the north end of Church Road to the Maypole Inn on the main Havant road in the Fleet area of the Island. I had seen this path marked on maps but had never seen anything to prove its existence when driving along the main road but today, on foot, I had no difficulty in finding the finger post showing where the path started nor in following its route across the fields. A subsequent search of the internet seemed to show that these fields between Havant Road and West Lane, south of Daw Lane, were farmed by A D Walter Ltd based at Osier Dell Manor House near the Manor House (which I see is currently for sale) but this business is apparently also involved in recycling.

Walking this footpath I found both **Parsley Water Dropwort** and **Prickly Sowthistle** newly in flower. When I reached the official end of the path at the Maypole Inn I was reluctant to go onto the busy Havant Road (where there is no pavement) to reach Daw Lane so I continued along the field edge west of the pub to Daw Lane where I found **two clumps of another new plant species just coming into flower** but so far I have not been able to name it though its long stalked, pointed-oval basal leaves and a hint of red in the unopen flower buds arranged in well separated circles around a vertical stem suggest that it might be some relative of Betony. Returning to Daw Lane on Apr 20 further inspection of this plant, which now had a single flower fully open, convinced me that **it was definitely Betony**.

From Daw Lane I crossed West Lane and used the field edge route created to separate horses from the motor traffic in this narrow section of the 'West Lane bends' and this brought me to the wartime Pillbox on the Hayling Coastal Path where a bench allowed me to rest and scan the harbour in which very little water was left with the tide at its lowest - the only birds I could see were a few Oystercatchers, Redshanks and Black-headed Gulls. Continuing north towards

the Oysterbeds a party of 'mature birders' were scanning the harbour mud, reminding me of the similar group that currently fill small gaps in the BBC TV schedule, appearing under the title 'Birdwatchers at Rainham Marshes', diligently pointing their binoculars at some unseen bird - I found this particularly appropriate as, while their attention was focussed on the birdless harbour mud I was watching a **Buzzard** soaring high over the trees behind their backs (and remembering the years not so long ago when **Turtle Doves** regularly bred in the these trees). In this area I spotted a reminder of one plant that will soon deserve to go on my list - the first delicate leaves of Pepper Saxifrage (see [Link to the illustration of Pepper Saxifrage used in the Wikipedia page on this plant.](#)

At the Oysterbeds I found a good increase in the number of **Milk Thistle plants** (at least a dozen clusters of basal leaves) and a massive increase in the number of **tiny Forget-me-nots** which, when I was last here, I tried to persuade myself were the less common Changing Forget-me-not though I could not see any significant colour difference between the first and subsequent flowers. For good photos of these two species see [Link to a page illustrating Changing Forget-me-not](#) and compare this to [a photo of Field Forget-me-not.](#)

Starting to head home I had the first of several close encounters with singing but unseen **Common Whitethroats** and two **Lesser Whitethroats** and one **close view of a Fox boldly crossing the Billy Track in broad daylight** - I assume this is a sign that the Fox now has well grown and hungry cubs in its earth. Reaching Saltmarsh Lane I turned off the Coastal Path to make my way home via Brights Lane, Higworth Lane and the Church Fields during which I added two more species to my flower list - **Garden Aquilegia** and **Holly** and in St Mary's Churchyard **Norway Maple** was newly flowering - bringing my count for this month to 138 species.

Back at home my check on the internet brought the following species, reported since Apr 14, to my attention. Starting with the group which I record as 'Animals' I see that a **Mink** was seen in the Cuckmere area of East Sussex on Apr 18 and that **two male Adders were 'dancing'** (each trying to floor the other and so gain the right to mate with a female) at Christchurch Harbour on Apr 16 - see a photo of this at [photo of dancing adders.](#)

Recent bird interest starts with reports of arriving migrants with two **Dotterel** being reported on Dartmoor on Apr 17 and three more arriving in the Folkestone area on Apr 18. Across the Channel the first three **Black Terns** were seen in Belgium on Apr 13 followed by seven in the Netherlands on Apr 17. Over here the first **Arctic Skua** for April was seen at Sandy Point on Apr 17 and the first **Bonxie (Great Skua)** was off Ventnor on Apr 18. Passage **Whimbrel** started to move through at the beginning of April with numbers increasing to 13 at Portland and 31 at Seaford, both reported on Apr 9. Latest report is of 15 at Dungeness on Apr 18. Over land the latest reports of hirundines are of **77 Swallows** at the Lower Test Marshes on Apr 17, **40 House Martins** near Romsey on Apr 17, and **3000 Sand Martins** in Devon on Apr 12. On Apr 17 there were also **3 Red-rumped Swallows** at Lodmoor (Weymouth) and an **Alpine Swift** at Sandwich on Apr 16. There have been nine reports of **Common Swifts** since Apr 1 with a peak of 4 together in the Test Valley on Apr 16. Other bird news includes a report of a **singing Wood Lark**

in Stansted Park and the continuing presence of **Cattle Egrets** in the west country, including 12 in each of Devon and Cornwall on Apr 15 and a reported total of 61 in the UK on Apr 18. Fourteen reports of **Ring Ouzels** have been posted during April with no counts of more than three together in England but Apr 9 and 10 saw 26 in the Netherlands and 10 in Belgium. To end the Bird News juveniles of the following species have all been seen out of their nests - **Mistle and Song Thrushes, Blackbirds and Robins**.

Noteworthy insect reports start with the first **Pearl Bordered Fritillary** in Sussex on Apr 18 (though one was out in Devon on Apr 11) and the count of **Duke of Burgundy** at Noar Hill was up to 7 on Apr 17 after 2 were seen there on Apr 8. The first **Lime Hawkmoth** was seen and photographed at Folkestone on Apr 17 and you can see the photo at [photo of Lime Hawkmoth](#) while the commoner Speckled Yellow moth was photographed in Devon on Apr 19 and can be seen at [photo of Speckled Yellow moth](#). **Hairy Dragonflies** have been seen in Kent on Apr 10 and 19 with an **Azure Damselfly** also in Kent on Apr 16 and a **Broad-bodied Chaser** at Portland on Apr 16.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 10 - 16 (WEEK 15 OF 2017)**

### **Fri 14th April**

#### **A short walk to check on the Musk Storksbill in South Road also finds seven more 'firsts'.**

Heading along St Margaret's Road towards South Road I had another look at the tall exotic plants growing on the north side of the road roughly opposite house number 45. There are four or five of these erect, woody plants, each about 2 metres tall and suggesting that they come from places where Palm trees grow. Each has a woody stem from which many long, thin leaves grow up at an acute angle (each leaf is perhaps a metre long, as thin and pointed as a rapier). Within the angle between the leaf and the central stem what seems to be a multiple flower stem is developing and suggests that it may turn into something like a Foxglove plant (though at the moment the only thing that I have found which resembles it is the initial growth of an American Ragweed Plant). These leaves and flower spikes grow all round the central stem and there may be as many as 100 on each plant (though I have not counted them).

Turning down South Road the first plant of interest was a humble **Nettle** brandishing its horizontal 'catkins' - this is only the second flowering specimen I have seen this year after one outside St Mary's Church on Apr 4. Next to go on my list was another member of the Nettle family - **Pellitory of the Wall** - followed by **Hedge Mustard**. By now I was nearing the south end of the road and was beginning to see examples of the '**Musk Storksbill**' I had come to investigate along the west side of the road. Among them was a fine example of **Common Ramping Fumitory** of which I took a sample along with samples of the Storksbill for identification at home - as expected **the Storksbill did turn out to be the Musk species**, complete with smell of what I assume to be Musk though I could not find a local Musk Ox to check that this 'perfume' is what they emit during their rut!

Heading for home I took a short cut through the Elm Close estate 'bungalow town' which brought me out on Cherrywood Gardens road near the Public Library and in this area I added another three plants to my list. First was the lowly **Lesser Swinecress** which makes up for its lack of colour with a strong scent of Cress, then - outside the Library - a bush of **Wilson's Honeysuckle** was in full flower (See [web page on Wilson's Honeysuckle](#), and finally - outside the Fire Station - minute blue flowers gave me the first **Wall Speedwell** of the year.

Pick of the reports seen on the internet today were of a **Turtle Dove** purring on the north Kent coast at Reculver, where an **Alpine Swift** was also seen briefly. In Sussex the first **Small Heath butterfly** was seen at Mill Hill in the Shoreham area while Hampshire had its second **Wood Warbler** of the year at Manor Farm Country Park at Botley (the first was reported near Basingstoke on Apr 12). On Apr 13 **Subalpine Warblers** were seen at St Lawrence on the Isle of Wight and at Portland (for a photo taken there see [Subalpine Warbler at Portland](#)). Also in Dorset on Apr 13 the **fourth Common Swift of the year** (after a 'heard only' report of one over Chandlers Ford on Apr 1, another over Brockenhurst on Apr 11 and a third near Romsey on Apr 12) was seen over Lytchett Matravers, north of Poole.

To end today's round up of internet news I must mention the arrival of **Little Terns** the first of which was in the Lymington area on Apr 9 with another three at Rye Harbour that day. On Apr 10 two were seen at Selsey with another 26 across the Channel at Cap Gris Nez, and on Apr 12 one was in Poole Harbour. Yesterday (Apr 13) one was in Langstone Harbour after one (maybe the same) was seen off Hill Head.

## [Thu 13th April](#)

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

### **A ride to Gunner Point finds 150 Green-winged Orchids in flower and a second site for Early Forget-me-not plus new clues to identifying Storksills.**

When I last walked round the Hayling Golf Course on Apr 2 I found just one plant of **Green-winged Orchid** had pushed the tips of its leaves above ground so when I saw on Brian Fellow's blog that many of these orchids had been found in flower yesterday (Apr 12) I decided that I must go and have a look at them today. When I arrived there today I saw (without searching) there were at least 150 spikes in flower and also confirmed that, in addition to the main site on the open grass south of the Golf Course fence to the east of the Pillbox, there is a **second substantial colony growing within the Golf Course fence some 300 yards east of the main colony**. Note that Brian Fellows had himself found at least **20 Early Purple Orchids** in the Hollybank Woods on Apr 9

After turning off the Ferry Road into the Gunner Point area, and before reaching the orchids, I found **Oxford Ragwort** flowering at the carpark entrance and in the first part of the Sand Dunes, just beyond the Ferry Sailing Club, a fruitless search for Spring Vetch did find **Early Forget-me-not** in flower with the leaves of Sea Bindweed. Rounding the end of the Dunes I found **Sea Campion** in flower with a single plant of **Sea Radish** in flower. I also noticed that the **Tree Lupins** were

developing their flower buds and that unexpected **Polypody Ferns** were apparently growing in the sand (no doubt on buried wood).

After the orchids I found my first **Common Vetch** and **Bird's Foot Trefoil** in flower, and east of the Golf Course **Ribwort Plantain** was now in flower as were a few plants of **Bur Chervil**.

Nearing home Westfield Avenue had **Hawthorn**, **Elder** and **Horse Chestnut** all in flower to add to the **Lilac** I had seen on the way out. To end my personal flower observations the junction of South Road with Hollow Lane had some extra large specimens of **Storksbill** which I recall finding there some ten years ago when I was as uncertain how to name them as I still am. This uncertainty prompted me to search the internet for help in identifying **Musk Storksbill** (which I think these South Road plants may be) and I found the page here [had useful photos and info](#). While on this subject another page on the subject of Storksbill species that I found helpful is here [and should help with other Storksbill species](#).

Some other reports which have recently appeared on the internet include **another Dragonfly species - Downy Emerald (Cordulia linaenea)** - seen in Gloucestershire on Apr 11, and a gathering of **3000 Sand Martins** around the Exe estuary on Apr 12. Also on Apr 11 a single **Waxwing** was still to be seen in Dorset while Apr 12 brought two first arrival **Wood Warblers** to Christchurch in Dorset and the Basingstoke area of Hampshire. Two recent plant firsts were **Wild Garlic (Ramsons)** on Portsdown on Apr 4 and **Wood Speedwell** in Emsworth on Apr 10 (presumably Germander Speedwell is also currently making its debut). The first **Nightingale song** has also been heard (at Christchurch on Apr 10, the Isle of Wight and at Arundel on Apr 11) and a **Swift** was over Brockenhurst on Apr 11.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 3 - 9 (WEEK 14 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 8th April**

#### **A short walk on Hayling finds Beaked Hawksbeard, Shining Cranesbill, Dove's Foot Cranesbill and a Bay Tree in full flower.**

My own walk this afternoon was centred around the Hayling College area and began with **Beaked Hawksbeard** flowering under a vehicle for sale on the corner of Tournerbury Lane. I then noted yet another example of **Honeywort** flowering in a nearby garden - if you are not familiar with this plant see [Honeywort photo and info](#). From Tournerbury Lane I turned north to follow the path running between the Hayling College playing fields and the Tournerbury Golf Course and all along this path **Speckled Wood** butterflies were active. Coming out on the approach road to Mill Rythe Holiday Village I hoped to find some means of accessing the Mill Rythe shore but it seems that my only chance of doing so is through the Mill Rythe industrial units accessed from the main road. I also noticed the other day that there are plans to develop a large shoreline business area on the northshore of the Mill Rythe/Verner Common area which used to give me winter views of Golden Plover as I followed the shoreline path from Copse Lane to Woodgason Lane.

Walking back down Church Road from the roundabout I did make three additions to my flower list - first was a **Bay Tree** in full flower, then a flowering plant of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** and finally three small flowers on a patch of **Shining Cranesbill**.

Back at home the internet told me that three more butterfly species had responded to the sun - **Grizzled Skippers** began to appear on Butser Hill on Apr 5 with both **Green Hairstreak** and **Small Copper** being seen on the Sussex Downs on Apr 7. The dragonfly season is also underway with the expected **Large Red Damselfly** appearing on Apr 2 and being followed by a **Banded Demoiselle** in Surrey on Apr 6 and then by a **Broad Bodied Chaser** in East Kent today (Apr 8).

## [Fri 7th April](#)

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

**This morning I rode the full length of the Hayling Coastal Path and came home via Northney and Mill Rythe, adding Hoary Cress and Changing Forget-me-not to my flower list under a cloudless sun.**

**Speckled Woods** were sparring with each other under the trees soon after I left West Town Station and **Greater Stitchwort** was flowering among Bluebells as I passed Saltmarsh Lane before I took advantage of a seat with an open view of Langstone Harbour to scan the unruffled high tide. As yesterday some **40 Shelduck** provided the only bird interest on the water but many Black-Headed and Med Gulls were following tractors in at least two fields.

The long straight section of track passing the West Lane fields was lined with the first **Bracken just opening its fronds** and just past the pillbox guarding the path to the West Lane bends I stopped to admire a patch of **Coltsfoot**, now starting to go to seed, and found I was also looking at a small bush of **Broom coming into flower**.

From the North Hayling Halt carpark I followed the shore path to the Oysterbeds and found **several plants of Hoary Cress were already in full flower** and at the foot of the slope up the Oysterbeds 'spoil heap' the **white-lined leaves of one or two Milk Thistles** showed where a few of these plants will again flower this year (though they may be the last to do so at this site).

As the water of the lagoon came into view I saw that a new nesting raft had been moored in the water but was not attracting any interest from the gulls - I guess one reason was that it was still covered in a bright blue tarpaulin sheet and has not yet been covered with shingle. A second reason may be that the gulls already present probably have enough room on the islands for their nests though the floating raft will hopefully attract the **Little Terns** that are still to arrive (if they do not find South Binness more attractive) and its ability to float above the water of the high tides may provide a second chance for either gulls or terns whose first nests are swamped by the inevitable monthly high tides....

At the top of the spoil heap two new benches have just been installed providing good views over the nest islands but when I sat on one the first thing I noticed were the **bright flowers of Changing Forget-me-not** at my feet - while looking at

them I was surprised to see one flowering plant of **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** among them. While here I also saw my first **male Orange-tip** and **Small White** butterflies.

Riding on towards Langstone Bridge I stopped to have my lunch on a bench just before reaching the main road and afterwards, as I reached the pavement of the main road, I glimpsed what I am pretty sure was **Hedgerow Cranesbill** in flower but foolishly did not stop to confirm the id - the spot was a regular site for the species but this would be an early date (last year I did not see the species until May 10). Nothing much of note as I finished my trip but some recent reports on the internet may be of interest.

I see that an early **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Christchurch on Apr 4 and a very early **Whinchat** was at Portland on Apr 1 with what appears to have been the first **passage Whimbrel** on the same day. On Apr 5 Portland also had a **Vagrant Emperor migrant dragonfly** and another **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** (these have been appearing - either from hibernation or migration - since Mar 2). A **Cuckoo** (not the first to arrive) was on the Isle of Wight on Apr 2 and on Apr 6 Sussex had a new species for its county list with a **Blue Rock Thrush** at Beachy Head. Other recent migrant arrivals in Sussex have been **Yellow Wagtail** and **Tree Pipit** on Apr 5 when at least one **Cattle Egret** was still in the county. In Hampshire **the pair of Garganey** that seem to have settled at Fleet Pond celebrated 20 days there on Apr 6 while what seem to be the **last Waxwings still in the south of England** were still eating Mistletoe berries at Bury (south of Pulborough in the Arun valley). Apr 4 brought a 'probable' report of a **Nightingale** at Milton Common in Portsmouth on Apr 4 when Southsea Castle again had **15 Purple Sandpipers**. To end this random roundup of reports that caught my eye we can't omit the sad news of the **Langstone Pond female Swan being savagely killed by dogs** on Apr 1.

### [Wed 5th April](#)

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

#### **This morning I used my bike for a circuit of West Lane, Daw Lane and the southern end of the Billy Line.**

I set off following yesterday's route heading north up Church Road to the roundabout then turning south down Manor Road but instead of turning left down Higworth Lane I turned right along Bright's Lane, then north up West Lane where I soon found **Greater Stitchwort** lining the grassy roadsides. Beyond the wooded area with its few isolated houses a tractor was raking the soil in preparation for sowing this summer's crop and was attracting long lines of **Blackheaded and vocal Med Gulls** while the field edges were yellow with **Charlock**.

Turning into Daw Lane I enjoyed the vibrant blue of my first **Common Dog Violets** set among **more Greater Stitchwort and many Primroses**. Nearing the east end of the lane I parked my bike against a gate into the Stoke Fruit Farm field to the north and saw that the long lines of Poplars which have for years divided this field into north-south strips have all vanished to create a single arable area and making me wonder what this will look like in the summer **if it is again sown with Sunflowers**..... while contemplating the vision of the French Riviera I walked

towards the east end of the lane to admire the bright flowers of the **var Oxyloba Periwinkles** growing on the tall tree-shaded banks.

Back on my bike I returned to West Lane and took the path from the road to the Billy Line. As I turned into this path a **Blackcap** was singing within feet of me though I could not see it. Reaching the harbour shore I turned south past what I call the '**Railway Pear tree**' currently in full flower. This tree grows right beside the old rail tracks and must have been planted by some holidaymaker on his way to West Town station throwing a pear core out of the train window to become today's memorial to those days when steam trains were an integral part of a seaside holiday. A little further south more **Common Dog Violets** lined the track and wide views across Langstone Harbour exposed the absence of any Brent Geese though they did reveal some **30 Shelduck**.

Reaching the Saltmarsh Lane area I took the track to the seawall where a lone **Peacock butterfly** was enjoying the sun and a single plant of **Honesty** was flowering - a photo to illustrate this plant can be seen at [Honesty in flower](#) and another of its seed pods is at [Honesty seed pods](#). Nothing more of interest was seen on my way home.

## [Tue 4th April](#)

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

### **Today I completed my March Spreadsheets and had time for a walk which brought my April plant list up to 72 species.**

This afternoon I walked north past the Church and Hayling College to the roundabout where I turned left beside the road leading to West Town, coming home via Higworth Lane, through the big Caravan Park and across the Church fields back to the Church.

This turned out to be more productive of new plants than I had expected, starting with my first **Sycamore flowers** and **Elder flower buds** but soon revealing a number of plants of **Cornsalalad** (assumed to be *Valerianella locusta*) already flowering at the pavement edge with a big clump of **Ox-eye Daisies** opening their flower buds nearby. Reaching the roundabout I found the trees around its south west side were part of an old wood with a mass of **Butcher's Broom**, **Dog's Mercury**, and **native Bluebells**. At its far side I found **my very first flowers on Cleavers (Goosegrass) for the year** with some **Ground Ivy**. A little further on, outside the Catholic Church, **Nipplewort** was flourishing and across the road a large field of **Oilseed Rape** was solid yellow.

At the end of Higworth Lane I emerged into the static caravanpark where the plots are delimited with trimmed **Hawthorn** hedges which had opening buds and at least one open flower. Nothing more until I was through the Church yard and back on the Church Road pavement where two tall stems of **Common Nettle** offered me the very first flowers (catkins?) I have seen this year.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MARCH 27-APR 2 (WEEK 13 OF 2017)

### Mon 27th March

**Tartarian Honeysuckle now flowering on Sinah Common and Early Forget-me-not with Slender Speedwell at the Ferry roundabout. My backlog of internet reports tells me that Orange Tip, Holly Blue and Speckled Wood have all been seen in Sussex.**

Today I have been re-united with my bicycle thanks to my son having found someone with a small van which he no longer uses and which is the right size to act as a bicycle shed when parked on the car-parking space allocated to the flat I have just moved into! To celebrate I rode to the Ferry Inn and added **Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramossisima*)** which is now flowering with Slender Speedwell on the small roundabout at the west end of Ferry Road (and probably also in the Sandy Point reserve). On my way there I stopped at the junction of Ferry Road with the entrance to the Sinah Gravel Pit lake and found the **Tartarian Honeysuckle** which grows there already had one or two clusters of its pinkish flowers open and near the harbour entrance carpark **Oxford Ragwort** had one flower fully open.

Back at home I discovered that **Orange Tip, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue butterflies** have all been seen in Sussex among other species which include Painted Lady - if you are interested in the detail I suggest you bookmark <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/sightings/> and visit it regularly. On the bird front I see that the expected pair of **Mistle Thrushes are once again nesting** in the Wade Court area at Langstone, there are now **ten active Heron nests** at Langstone Mill Pond where the Mute Swan is being seen regularly on her nest, while at Nore Barn the **Spotted Redshank** was last seen on Mar 16.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MARCH 20-26 (WEEK 12 OF 2017)

### Sun 26th March

**A lovely spring day for a walk to Gunner Point brings my Hayling plant list to 77 species including Spring Beauty, both English and Danish Scurvygrass, Annual Wall Rocket and Eastern Rocket plus the first leaves of Green Winged Orchid and Sea Kale.**

This morning the 9am 'Tweet of the Day' on Radio 4 gave me one essential sound of spring with the **song of the Willow Warbler** and later in the day, as I was walking along Ferry Road south of The Kench, I enjoyed the sight of another essential sign of spring - **the flowers of Spring Beauty (*Claytonia perfoliata*)** which you can enjoy in the online photo at [photo of Spring Beauty](#).

Also seen here, where the water of Langstone Harbour washes the edge of the Kench, was my first sight of **English Scurvygrass** for the year - see [photos and info about English Scurvygrass](#).

A little later, as I was turning into the carpark alongside the entrance to Langstone Harbour, I saw a single flowering plant of **Eastern Rocket (*Sisymbrium orientale*)** and in the Gunner Point area the **first leaves of Sea Kale** could be seen. Further east, south of the Golf Course, I saw my **first Green-Winged Orchid leaves**. Passing the Inn on the Beach a post marking the entrance to the road running east to the Central Beachlands funfair was thickly surrounded with **Danish**

**Scurvygrass** and much more of this was found along the pavement edges of Seafront Road in the Chichester Avenue area where I also found **Annual Wall Rocket** in flower - see [photo of Annual Wall Rocket](#) Also of interest to me was a newly flowering garden plant here called **Honeywort (Cerinthe major)** which you can see at [photo of Honeywort](#).

A very brief scan of the internet this evening told me that the first **Sedge Warbler** had been seen yesterday at Rye Harbour.

### [Tue 21st March](#)

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

#### **Sunny all day added three plant species plus singing Skylark and hunting Kestrel.**

This morning's walk in bright sunshine took me through St Mary's churchyard, where **Yew** was giving off pollen, through the open fields, where a single **Skylark** was singing, to Newtown where an **Italian Alder**, with its single large cones, was draped with catkins. From there I walked through Hayling Park and down Staunton Avenue to Sinah Common, where a **Kestrel** was hunting, then back home along the beach. Just before getting home I found a **male Ash Tree** just opening its flower buds.

### [Mon 20th March](#)

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

#### **Seven more new flowers, including the first flowering Rhododendron and Common Fumitory, bring my south Hayling list to 59 species.**

A short walk to buy something for lunch added **Sweet Alison** to my flowering plant list but rain precluded any further expedition until tea time when a short walk to explore behind my new flat found **Red Valerian** just starting to flower plus **Common Fumitory** in an unkempt garden and a large bush of **Rhododendron ponticum** in full flower (my first for the year) more or less filling another.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MARCH 13-19 (WEEK 11 OF 2017)**

### [Sun 19th March](#)

#### **Another 22 flowering plants go on my Hayling list and I get some evidence (a strong smell of Musk) for the presence of Musk Storksbill while one small tree, covered with yellow foxglove shaped flowers, remains a mystery.**

A longish walk on a dull but dry day took me via Tournerbury Lane and My Lords Pond (the creek running along the south of Tournerbury Woods) to the Mengham Rythe shore, coming home via Fishery Lane and Selsmore Road. In Tournerbury Lane I found **another potential candidate for Musk Storksbill** (large, with no black dots on the petals and with lots of patent glandular hairs) and also **a large shrub/small tree bearing lots of tubular yellow flowers** (reminding me of Foxglove flowers by their size and shape) which, not having access to the internet for a few days, I have been unable to name. Nearby I came on some **Common Whitlowgrass** before heading south on the footpath, which gave me **Butcher's Broom** and **Cow Parsley**, to the Mengham House area where I turned east along Salterns Lane. Here I found the garden version of **Yellow Archangel** just starting

to flower and was very surprised to find a single tall red **Snapdragon (Antirrhinum majus)** in full flower.

Coming out onto the Mengham Rythe shore at very low tide the only bird in sight was a single Mute Swan looking as if it were stranded on the mud waiting for the tide to re-float it but at the far end of this barren shore, whose only plant surprise was a single flowering plant of **Red Clover**, the path taking me inland to Seaview Road had a pleasant surprise in the form of many large **red catkins freshly fallen from Black Poplars** and when I reached Fishery Lane a large **Grey Poplar** was festooned with its grey woolly catkins. Nothing special found on the rest of my walk.

### Sat 18th March

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

#### **30 flowering plant species start my Hayling list and set me a task of proving the 'different looking Storksbill' is or is not Musk Storksill.**

Now installed in my Hayling flat I took a couple of hours to stroll down to the shore and back to start my list of flowering plants seen on the island, finding 30 species of which the most interesting were **Common Storksbill** and what may have been **Musk Storksill** (though I would need both more knowledge and more evidence before being sure of the essential differences between the two!). Another unexpected find was one of the **Pink Sorrels (Oxalis spp)** just starting to flower - again a group of which I need more experience before I can name them with confidence. A species which I have no doubts about, though it is not many years since I had to look carefully to separate it (**White Comfrey**) from Common Comfrey, was soon found growing beside busy Hayling roads. I see that the first record of White Comfrey in Hampshire was not made until 1950 but nowadays it is one of the commonest plants I find in Havant and so it was not surprising to come across it on my first day on Hayling. Also seen in a couple of places was **Green Field Speedwell** and one garden had a bush of **Broom** nearly in full flower with early fresh flowers of **Green Alkanet** nearby. My last entry for this first outing was of large numbers of **Alexanders in full flower**.

### Thu 16th March

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

#### **Rue-leaved Saxifrage flowering in Havant Pallant carpark, Cuckoo Flowers out in a Havant garden and the Langstone Swans start nesting as I prepare to move to Hayling after 50 years in Havant.**

After 49 years and 8 months living in the same house in Havant **I will be moving tomorrow into a flat near St Mary's church on Hayling Island** and will be able to start my personal natural history of the island though I will not be able to continue noting its highlights in this blog until after March 26th when my flat is reconnected to the internet.

To end this chapter of my life I found the first flowering plant of **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** in the Havant Pallant carpark (on the cobbles just inside the entrance

from Beechworth Road) [Rue-leaved Saxifrage photo](#), and when looking in on friends to say goodbye in the afternoon I found wild **Cuckoo Flowers** already flowering in one garden - see [Cuckoo flower photo](#) and saw the **Pen of the Langstone Swan pair sitting on and building up her nest** while her mate was out on the harbour attempting to create a bird exclusion zone several hundred yards in diameter! After passing the pond I called in on Nik Knight and was very surprised (as was he) to find **a single Fritillary already in flower** in his garden - see [Fritillary flower photo](#)

I have not had time for my usual scan of south coast wildlife internet sites today but for those who may have missed them here are some of the reports that caught my eye this week.

On Monday Mar 13 six **Painted Lady butterflies** were seen in Devon and the **Humpback Whale** was still active off the south coast of the county and **300 Sand Martins** were seen on the north coast plus **3 House Martins** on the south coast. A **male Adder** was seen that day at Christchurch Harbour while in Sussex both **Small White and Speckled Wood** butterflies were out and **three Smew** were on the Dungeness RSPB pools and **one House Martin** was seen at Hastings with two more over Southsea plus **two Willow Warblers** elsewhere in Hants but best of all was a **single Yellow Wagtail** at Blashford near Ringwood. In Havant Cemetery I found the first **mass flowering of Early (or Wood) Dog Violets** plus my first sight of a **Chionodoxa (Glory of the Snow) flower**.

Tuesday Mar 14 added **both Alexanders and Oxford Ragwort** flowers to my list with a **mass flowering of Blackthorn**. In Sussex **26 Small Tortoiseshells** were out along Ferring Rithe near Bognor and in Emsworth a very early **Laburnum tree** was in flower (last year I did not see this until May 16) and an early bird in Suffolk was the **first Quail**.

Wednesday Mar 15 brought a **Glossy Ibis** still in Devon and two **Waxwings** still in Hove. The 15th also brought a **Painted Lady** to Gosport while today (Mar 16) the **first Cuckoo** was heard at Selsey. For those more excited by the news that **the Dragonfly season has started** I found a single report of what is presumably a cross channel **Vagrant Emperor** seen at Penlee on the Cornish Coast on Mar 12.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MARCH 6-12 (WEEK 10 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 11th March**

**Influx of Garganey as Woodcock and Bittern leave. Unexpected visitors are Alpine Swift and Baillons Crake plus a Hooded Merganser. Also first reports of Water Vole, Mink and Whirligig Beetles.**

Among at least 9 species of summer visitors that have been seen in Britain during the past few days the one which has caught my attention is **Garganey**. The first to be reported were a pair at Christchurch on Mar 4 followed by a pair at Rye Harbour on the 10th and 3 pairs on the 11th (at Eling on Southampton Water, Splash Point on the Sussex coast and Reculver on the north Kent Coast where a lone male was seen and photographed - see [male Garganey with Mallards at Reculver](#)). Other visitors that will not stay to breed here have been a **Baillons**

**Crake** in Cornwall and an **Alpine Swift** in Ireland, both reported on Mar 10. Also seen on Mar 10 at Dungeness RSPB reserve, was a smart **Hooded Merganser** - see [this presumed escape Hooded Marganser](#).

An unusual series of reports have been of **Bitterns** leaving their winter quarters at dusk - the first of these high flying birds was reported leaving Radipole on the eveing of Mar 9 when another left Swineham in Poole Harbour. On that eveing 2 more left Lodmoor while on Mar 10 one was heard booming at Rye Harbour, presumably staying to breed there. Also presumed leaving are several **Woodcock** with 17 reported today at Harewood Forest near the River Test south east of Andover.

Mar 10 brought the first report of a **Water Vole**, seen on the River Arun near Arundel. On the same day a **MINK** was seen at Exminster in Devon. Still on the theme of water creatures today brought a sighting of **Whirligig Beetles** at Henfield in Sussex.

### [Thu 9th March](#)

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

#### **Singing Whitethroat at Christchurch, Willow Warbler in London and an Osprey in Cheshire while Brimstones, Tortoiseshells, Peacocks, Commas and Red Admirals respond to todays warm sunshine.**

Before listing my own observations I will start with news from the internet of the **first Common Whitethroat of the year** singing at Christchurch today plus the first **Willow Warbler** reported in London and the first **Osprey** seen in Cheshire, both reported on Mar 7 by the RBA website. Still with birds Selsey Bill today recorded **226 Brent flying east** and at least **100 Avocets** on the peninsula as they move from winter quarters to breeding sites. Also today the **Black Redstart** in the Eastoke area of south Hayling was joined by a migrant **White Wagtail**, while on Mar 7 Portland saw **10 Stonechats** arriving from the south. Turning to butterflies the Sussex Butterfly Conservation site lists the following all seen today:- **20 Red Admirals, 15 or more Brimstones, 8 Peacocks, 7 Commas and 6 Small Tortoiseshells.**

Yesterday a walk around Havant found flower buds opening on several **Magnolia trees** and I saw **Cypress Spurge** flowering in at least one garden - see [an internet photo of Cypress Spurge](#). I also found **Danish Scurvygrass** - not much but now in full flower - along the western side of the Petersfield Road near the Bus Stop north of the Havant College playing fields. Today I took a longer walk to Nore Barn and back, starting along the footpath which connects St Faith's Church in Havant with Warblington Church. On the east side of the Billy Track a **Goat Willow** in full flower was attracting many bees and other insects while after passing Lymbourne Road I noticed **Early Dog Violets** flowering. Just after crossing Wade Court Road garden escape **cultivated Forget-me-nots** were showing flower buds which I later found open on a potted version outside Warblington Church - before getting there I found the shiny brown cases of leaf buds on a **Horse Chestnut** were splitting open as I climbed the bridge over the A27.

In the Warblington Cemetery extension I found **Blackthorn** in flower and tightly closed flower buds on **Elder**. While here a **Buzzard** flew over followed by a **female Sparrowhawk** patrolling her territory in a high altitude flap and glide flight. Pressing on through the Warblington Farm fields I took an unofficial route across the fields, leaving the public path half way across Field T (see my map of Warblington Farm [for the Field Letters used in 20 years of a BTO Common Bird Census of the farm](#)) and cutting down the eastern hedge of Field U where **Field Madder** and **Scented Mayweed** were flowering. Turning east along the field edges to Conigar Point I could hear Brent out on the mudflats but was surprised to see a lone Goose (perhaps too old to join the others in their long journey north-eastward) in Field V. This reminded me that Field T had given me my first sight and sound of a single **Skylark** rising from the ground to vanish from sight against the clear blue sky.

Taking the exit onto the shore just east of Conigar Point I headed for Nore Barn past the numerous Teal still lining the outflow channel of the Warblington East Stream. The wood and the saltings to the east gave me just two items - somewhere in the wood a **Blackbird** was singing and the narrow path inside the wood close to the broad track along its north east corner gave me the first opening flower buds of what I believe to be **Neapolitan Garlic**. Heading home up the path leading to Selangor Avenue I had my first glimpse for this year of the **Wild Strawberry** plants but I could not see any sign of flowers. Reaching the A259 I turned west and followed my nose back into Havant with a couple of sightings of what was probably the same male **Brimstone** flying through gardens on the south side of the Emsworth Road.

## [Tue 7th March](#)

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

### **Coltsfoot flowering, Med Gulls on nest islands and Greenfinch singing at the Oysterbeds. Water Rail and Green Sandpiper at Langstone, and Raven croaking and whistling from a central Havant roof.**

This morning, with the tide low, the sun shining and the wind light, I set off to cycle round north Hayling. My first notable observation was of a **Grey Wagtail** by the bridge over the Lymbourne Stream but nothing more until I reached Hayling where a **Greenfinch was singing** from trees just before entering the Oysterbeds area. The nest islands in the lagoon were crowded with **Mediterranean** and Black-headed Gulls plus a **lone Brent Goose** on the water. At a rough estimate there were more than 50 Med Gulls 'reserving' nest sites, their intensely jet black heads making me wonder if the person who decided to name 'Black Headed' gulls had ever seen a Med Gull.

At the road entrance to the Oysterbeds I was delighted to find a great display of **Coltsfoot in flower** at the entrance (now closed off by a concrete barrier) to the old carpark but as I rode on south I could see no sign of English Scurvygrass on the seaward side of the track (I see that last year I did not see it until April 3 at Nore Barn). Nothing else to report until I came on a few Primroses along Daw Lane with a good show of var *Oxyloba* Periwinkles at the main road end of the lane. In Northney a small number of **Rooks** were at their regular nest site in trees across

the road from Northney Farm where I could only see five nests making me wonder if this population is dying out as others in the Havant area have done.

My next notes were made at the **Langstone Mill Pond** where the pair of Swans were being fed in the narrow channel behind the north end of the Mill building. When the feeding ceased the Swans and the crowd of Mallards, Moorhens and Black-headed Gulls dispersed to give me my first sight for this year of the 'tame' **Water Rail** which came within a couple of yards of me searching for left over bread before taking to the water and swimming across to the island. In the pony field north of the pond were more than a hundred Teal and slightly fewer Wigeon plus a single **Green Sandpiper**.

After lunch I walked towards Juniper Square noting the sudden appearance of lots of **Thale Cress** along the pavement edges and in the Square the 'hot spot' for **Lesser Celandines** now had a solid bank of their flowers some 20 yards long. Approaching South Street I came on a small patch of **Grey Field Speedwell** among the mass of **Common Field Speedwell** - the Grey species was easy to pick out by the smaller size and intense blue (with no white) of its flowers. Compare the whitish flowers of the Common species at [Common Field Speedwell](#) with the Grey species at [Grey Field Speedwell](#).

Finally for this short walk I turned from Park Road South into the road passing the entrance to the Multistorey Carpark. Here, passing the entrance to the Care Home (what was the Dolphin Pub), I heard regular croaking noises coming from what seemed to be a Crow perched on the roof gutter of the retirement flats. The bird did not seem to be larger than a Carrion Crow but did have a 'bull necked' look and when the un-Crow-like croaks became a whistling noise I was convinced this must be a **Raven**. Back at home several recordings of Raven calls on the xeno-canto website (<http://www.xeno-canto.org/>) plus the comment that Ravens often imitate the calls of other birds (such as the whistling that I heard) confirmed the id of the bird.

A brief scan of the internet this evening picked out the first report of a **Ring Ouzel (first of the year)** near Shoreham and **two more Wheatears** at Rye Harbour today. Yesterday a **Small Tortoiseshell** was seen at Dungeness and today another was seen in Sussex plus a **Peacock** and the inevitable **Red Admirals**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEBRUARY 27 - MAR 5 (WEEK 09 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 5th March**

The first pair of Garganey in Dorset, a House Martin in Cornwall and a Dotterel in Lincolnshire bring the number of spring migrants in England to ten. Meadow Pipits and Greenfinch are making display flights while Linnets and Yellowhammers have started to sing and Ivy-leaved Toadflax, Field Woundwort, Blue Anemones and Green Hellebore start to flower.

I was expecting today to be too wet to go for a walk, let alone to find new flowers but a short walk into Havant in the morning found a single flower on **Ivy-leaved Toadflax** and encouraged me to get out again when the sun shone in the

afternoon. My route was east along the Emsworth Road where a single plant of **Guernsey Fleabane** was in flower just east of the bridge over the Billy Line and a plant of **Field Woundwort** had fresh flowers by the traffic lights at the junction with Southleigh Road. Turning north I found a **Silk Tassel Bush (*Garrya elliptica*)**, which I first found in February, was still flowering in a garden south of Warblington School and in Havant Cemetery I not only found an increased number of **Early Dog Violet flowers** but also the first flowers of **Blue Anemones**. At the New Lane level crossing at least two plants of **Oxford Ragwort** were showing yellow flower buds which should be open within a week. A quite rare flower that grows in Woodlands Lane running down to Walderton from Stansted is the **Green Hellebore** and this was seen on Mar 4 by the Havant Wildlife Group - for their report and photo see [Havant Wildlife Group report for Mar 4](#). These flowers grow under Hazel Trees on the north side of the lane just before it starts to go steeply downhill into Walderton and are not easily visible from the lane - you need to climb over the earth bank which runs alongside the road. As an indication of its 'rarity' I think the nearest other site for the species in Hampshire is close to Selborne.

Back at home the internet told me that a **House Martin** had been seen in Cornwall and a **Pied Wagtail** had flown in off the sea at Christchurch Harbour (where a pair of **Garganey** had arrived yesterday) while the RBA website had 7 reports of **White Wagtails** in England. That site also had news of the first **Dotterel** seen in Lincolnshire.

On Mar 3 Dungeness reported **a surge of departing Brent Geese** with 2166 seen to fly east that day with a smaller count of just 300 seen on Mar 4 (Dungeness reported the first departing Brent, just 100, on Jan 9 and thousands more must have left since then). Also in the past few days **Yellowhammers** and **Linnets** have started to sing and both **Meadow Pipits** and **Greenfinch** have started their display flights. Locally the **Common Sandpiper** has again been seen near the Gravel Quay at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream.

Just before writing this diary entry I watched Country File on the TV and was intrigued by a short section (starting about 50 minutes into the programme) about a **new type of nest box** in the form of bricks that can be built into the wall of a house and can provide nest spaces for **Swifts** and can also attract other species such as House Sparrows and Blue Tits. As I write the programme is not yet available on the IPlayer but should be by the time you read this - check the BBC1 Schedule for Mar 5 and select the Countryfile programme broadcast at 19:00.

## **Sat 4th March**

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

### **First Swallow and Little Ringed Plover plus a possible Swift arrive in the UK as Hummingbird Hawkmoth and Comma butterfly emerge from hibernation.**

The **first Swallow of the year** was seen in the Cotswolds at Painswick, Gloucestershire on Mar 2. Another first migrant was a **Little Ringed Plover** at Blashford near Ringwood in Hampshire on Mar 4. Also today (Mar 4) **a Swift was reported by a Sussex birder**, seen briefly from a bus between Rottingdean and

Brighton marina. This was not claimed as a definite sighting and the observer says "I was on the bus and the view was transient but everything about the bird was swift-like. I am reporting this in the hope that others may have seen it." So far there are no other sightings and even if there were they would have to be good enough to distinguish which of several Swift species was seen - I think this is too early for a Common Swift but in March 2010 several **Alpine Swifts** reached the UK, including one at Radipole near Weymouth on March 26 - see [Alpine Swift at Lodmoor/Radipole in March 2010](#). Other Swift species found in Europe include Little Swift, Needle-tailed Swift, Pallid Swift, Pacific Swift, and Plain Swift.

Insect firsts of the year are a **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** emerging from hibernation at Portland on Mar 2 and the first **Comma butterfly** seen at Blashford Lakes near Ringwood on Mar 2 (when the sun brought a Red Admiral out in Havant and 7 were seen in Sussex at Crawley).

Other miscellaneous news from the internet is that on Mar 3 the **Humpback Whale** was still feeding in Start Bay on the south Devon coast where it has been since Feb 25. **Reports of departing winter birds** include a couple of Bitterns and a near record count of 296 Pintail flying east past Splash Point in Sussex on Mar 3. Not departing, but **setting a UK record for the length of its stay on the Devon coast (116 days) is the Desert Wheatear** which was still present and singing on Mar 1. Also singing on Mar 1 at Sidlesham near Pagham Harbour was a Yellowhammer.

For those who, like me, were puzzled by reports from Titchfield Haven that the **Common Crane** seen there on Mar 2 was from both the Somerset Levels and from Slimbridge in Gloucestershire (while my guess was that it was part of the mass return from wintering in the Mediterranean area to breed in the Low Countries - among many reports of them on Trektellen I noted one report of 4392 of them at one Belgian site on Mar 3). A little research on Cranes in Britain shows that, after they became extinct in Britain some 400 years ago, a small number made a voluntary return to East Anglia in the late 1970s (and these are still breeding in Britain) while in 2010 a group of conservation organisations set up a breeding programme in the Somerset Levels, collecting eggs from nests in Germany and incubating them in Somerset from where some of the resulting adults have flown up the Severn estuary and established their own colony at Slimbridge. The bird at Titchfield Haven is one of those hatched in Somerset but now based at Slimbridge. If you want to know more about Cranes in Britain see an article written in 2009 at [about the voluntary return to the Norfolk Broads](#) and then see [for the setting up of the managed breeding project in Somerset](#). For the most recent part of this story go to [for the Slimbridge involvement](#).

## **Thu 2nd March**

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

**63 flowering plants found on Mar 1 and 2 including 6 firsts for the year. Portland has a probable migrant Chiff Chaff, Titchfield Haven has a flyover Crane and Mute Swans are nest building at Emsworth.**

The new month gave me my second **singing Blackbird** plus **53 flowering plant species** seen while walking around Havant including **Red Lungwort** planted in the Grove Road conservation area near which the common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) has flowered as a garden escape for years. For a photo of the Red Lungwort see [Red Lungwort](#).

My next notable find was of a clump of **Cowslips in full flower** growing on the south bank of the Havant Bypass about half way between the Lymbourne stream and Wade Court Road. Another good find was my first **Blackthorn in flower** in the southern hedge of the Havant Health Centre where the var *Oxyloba Periwinkle* is flowering. Heading south down Leigh Road I noted **Lenten Rose** Hellebores in flower and when just north of the junction with Eastern Road I spotted a plant which I did not recognize growing in a shaded part of a garden and saw that it was in flower. I took a small branch of it (with samples of both leaves and flowers) home for identification and now believe it to be called **Sweet or Winter Box** (*Sarcococca confusa*) of which you can see a photo at [Sweet Box](#) and read about the species at [Sweet Box](#). My final noteworthy find for Mar 1st was of the **Dawn Redwood tree** which overhangs the Tennis Courts in Havant Park and which is now adorned with spring catkins. This species is now quite common in Parks but was unknown in England until 1949 after it had been re-discovered after thousands of years oblivion in China - another interesting feature is that it is (I think) the only conifer which sheds all its leaves each winter. For more information about this tree see [info about the Dawn Redwood tree](#) and for an interesting Youtube presentation on it see [Youtube presentation about the Dawn Redwood tree](#).

Today I cycled to Emsworth via The Oaks crematorium on Bartons Road where the roadside border of the field west of the Crematorium now had the **first flowers on the Creeping Comfrey** which grows there en masse. For Photos and info see [info about Creeping Comfrey](#).

A quick scan of the internet this evening told me that what was almost certainly the first single **migrant Chiff Chaff and Firecrest** had reached Portland Bill on Feb 28. Another highlight seen today over Titchfield Haven was a single **Common Crane** which I assumed was an off course migrant as good numbers of these have been reported recently in the Low Countries but further reports suggest that it has come from a project at Slimbridge which is no doubt feeling the same springtime migratory urge as those now returning to the near Continent.

## [Mon 27th February](#)

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

### **Sand Martins arrive in Dorset, hungry Sparrowhawks and Roe Bucks with well grown antlers in Devon, plus weed dancing Grebes at Chichester.**

A short walk to Havant Cemetery when the rain stopped this afternoon was rewarded with the first open flower (plus two in bud) on the **Early Dog Violets** under the trees at the east end of the main cemetery. The clump of this species in my own garden has been showing a couple of flowers in bud since Feb 20 but today the cemetery gave me the first open flower. Walking home I enjoyed the

pale pink flowers of a **Camellia** newly open in a neighbour's garden (darker red flowered specimens have been flowering in other Havant gardens since New Years Day).

More significant news was to be found on the internet starting with the arrival of the **first 2 Sand Martin migrants** at Radipole in Dorset on Feb 26, following the arrival of a **Wheatear** in Sussex on Feb 17 and the report of **22 Sandwich Terns** at Ryde on Feb 12. The Devon Bird News reflects a trend I have noticed recently of an **increase in the number of Sparrowhawk sightings** being reported as we near their breeding season for which they need to feed up - today one Devon birder got **three photos of a female Sparrowhawk catching, killing and eating a pigeon in his garden** and I feel all three shots are worth seeing. For the catch see [the chase](#), for the kill see [the kill](#), and for the end of the meal see [the end of the meal](#).

Two more signs of Spring are a report of a '**Weed Dancing**' pair of **Great Crested Grebe** seen today on Ivy Lake at Chichester and a photo taken in Devon of a **Roe Buck with well grown antlers still in velvet** - see [Roe Buck](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEBRUARY 20 - 26 (WEEK 08 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 26th February**

#### **Black Swans now on their nest in Southampton and first report of Newts in a Portsdown garden plus Butterbur flowering at Brook Meadow**

Today the pair of **Black Swans** 'owning' the Southampton Riverside Park nest were seen sitting on it (maybe still preparing it for use - no report of egg laying yet) and this made me check on the dates when the Mute Swans at Langstone settled on their nest last year. The Langstone female was first seen on her nest on Mar 5 but she was not starting to incubate her 9 eggs until Mar 23 and the eggs did not start to hatch until Apr 29 (with all 9 cygnets not being seen until May 1) while the Black Swans, which have very similar incubation periods of 35 to 42 days, hatched their cygnets on Mar 31 so must have started incubating before the end of February. If both species follow the same pattern this year that would suggest that the Langstone Mutes will not start to sit on their eggs until the start of April when the Blacks are hatching their cygnets.

John Goodspeed is the first to report the **return of Newts to a pond** on Portsdown yesterday and the Devon Birding site tells us that the **Humpback Whale** is still in Start Bay today. Still with marine life Brian Fellows reports that on Feb 24 thirteen **Common Seals** were seen in the Thorney Channel area with a puzzling note that on Feb 12 a "**headless young seal**" was seen there. The first puzzle is what is meant by "young" as the peak time for Common Seal pups to be born is June/July though I see they can be born as early as February so this could be a newborn pup. The second puzzle is how it lost its head - maybe through natural causes such as being born deformed or injured in a fight between adult Seals - possibly being hit by the propellor of a boat - or possibly attacked by a human fisherman whose catch was being 'stolen' by Seals.

Turning to happier sightings I was very pleased to see that Brian Fellows found the first **Butterbur starting to flower** in Brook Meadow today and also the first **catkins opening on Osiers**, but best of all was the **first female flowers on Common Alder**, something I must look out for on the Alders at Langstone Mill Pond as I do not recall ever having seen them as they appear in Brian's photo - see [Brian's photo of female catkins/cones on Common Alder](#).

### **Sat 25th February**

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

#### **Danish Scurvygrass and Common Storksbill newly flowering in Havant and a Humpback Whale off South Devon.**

This morning **Common Whitlowgrass** was in full flower in Prince George Street near the entrance to the Waitrose carpark - look on the east side of the road a little north of the carpark entrance and you will see a mass of these tiny flowers on the sterile roadside verge - for a similar scene see [a photo of Common Whitlowgrass](#). Walking north over the rail bridge to the Havant Health Centre (passing lots of **Grape Hyacinths now in flower** on the north side of Mavis Crescent) I found the hedge round the south side of the centre was full of the **var Oxyloba Periwinkles** before continuing north to Crossland Drive from the north side of which I took the underpass to walk south down the west side of Petersfield Road. Before reaching the pedestrian crossing outside Havant College I found several patches of **Danish Scurvygrass** just starting to flower - see [for what the plants will look like in full flower - at the moment they are difficult to spot with none rising above ground level](#). Also seen in this stretch of roadside was a single flower on a lone plant of **Common Storksbill** (my first for the year).

Back at home I found that a **Humpback Whale** has been feeding on a mass of Herring and Mackerel in Start bay (the area off south Devon running up the coast from Start Point - the southernmost point of Devon - to Blackpool as shown on the Google map of [the Start Bay area](#)) from Feb 23 to 25 at least. To counter rumours that the whale may be sick the **British Divers Marine Life Rescue organisation** has issued a statement which you can read at [BDMLR News](#).

In my diary entry for Feb 19th I mentioned that an early Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*) had been seen at Portland and today Portland has made me aware that this insect has a close relative called the **Tapered Drone Fly (*Eristalis pertinax*)** which can be distinguished by a more 'tapered' abdomen and by having whitish front legs - see photo at [Tapered Drone Fly](#). For more details of this species see [Tapered Drone Fly](#).

### **Fri 24th February**

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

#### **The first Ground Ivy in flower but no sign of Marsh Marigolds and no Swans seen on the Budds Farm pools.**

This afternoon I walked down the Billy Line to Budds Farm in the hope of finding **Marsh Marigolds** on the South Moors where the first were in flower on Feb 27 last year - all I saw today were the leaves of half a dozen plants. However I did find one new flower, **Ground Ivy**, near the entrance to the West Mill (in Langstone Mill Lane) where a dozen of these plants were in flower on Feb 10 last year. I see that on Feb 10 last year I also saw the first Yellow Iris in flower in the Wade Court Chinese Water Garden but there was no sign of that today.

The **Budds Farm pools** still had a couple of male Pochard and several Tufted Duck, plus Shoveler and plenty of Teal, but I was surprised that **no Swans** were in sight. Nothing of note seen on the way home though a small party of **Jackdaws** were flying noisily round St Faith's Church, making me wonder if the ongoing work on the building had deprived them of their nest sites.

**Thu 23rd February**

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

**Common Split-Gill found on Portsdown (this fungus has 28,000 different sexes!) and a flock of 14 Choughs in Cornwall. Locally I find 3 newly flowering plants and detect a slight increase in the number of Little Egrets at Langstone.**

The strong wind of Storm Doris kept me indoors this morning but I added to my knowledge of fungi when I investigated John Goodspeed's recent find of **Split-Gill fungus** on wood seen when walking on the Crookhorn Golf Course adjacent to his home on Portsdown. This is a widespread and fairly common species but I was fascinated when I saw that the Wikipedia page on it said that it had **28,000 different sexes** and this led me to a webpage which you can read via the link given below. You may have difficulty, as I do, in understanding the scientific explanation of its sex life but you have to believe the author when he says .. "Interestingly, this fungus has also been known to cause a human mycosis in just a few cases involving immunoincompetent people, especially children. **In one case, the fungus had grown through the soft palate of a child's mouth and was actually forming fruiting bodies (mushrooms) in her sinuses!!!**". The page where I learnt all this is at [Tom Volk on Schizophyllum commune](#).

Also among today's news on the internet I saw that today there were **14 Sandwich Terns** at the mouth of Chichester Harbour and that yesterday a flock of **14 Choughs** was seen at Cape Cornwall near Land's End.

This afternoon I walked to Langstone and back, adding three new flowering plants to my year list. Before seeing the first of these I noted that Common Whitlowgrass was coming into general flowering along the 'lower step' of the pavement on the south side of the Emsworth Road just east of Lymbourn Road in which I spotted my second female flower on the Hazel tree on the eastside at the north end. In the footpath leading south into North Close one of the two Wood Avens flowers which I had seen in bud yesterday now had a fresh open flower. My first new flower of the day came when I emerged from North Close onto Wade Court Road and found that, as I had expected with the strong wind, a few fresh catkins of the tall old Grey Poplar opposite North Close, had been blown to the ground to prove that they were flowering - for a photo of these large, red tinged, catkins see [Grey Poplar catkins](#).

In the pony field north of Wade Court I counted 18 Little Egrets and in the flooded field south of the building another 5 were among the Herons and finally there were 4 more in trees overhanging the pond giving a total of 27 which I think marks a slight increase on the local population as spring approaches. On the pond the Swan pair were patrolling the periphery of their nesting island and around the pond more Alders had opened their catkins.

Leaving the pond area via the narrow path going north up the west side of the Lymbourne stream I paused as I emerged into what I still call Russell's field and scanned the trees to the right of the exit gate in the hope of seeing a few buds of Common Elm flowers which are now a rarity after Dutch Elm disease has killed

off nearly all the mature tree. Today my luck was in and I found one tree in full flower with the added bonus of bright yellow lichen covering the wood of the branches behind the flowers. I cannot find a photo in which the two (Elm flowers and Lichen) appear as I saw them so here is a photo of the Elm flowers - see [Common Elm flowers](#) - followed by one of a yellow lichen species on wood - see [a yellow lichen](#).

At the north end of Russell's field, before emerging onto the Billy trail, I paused to watch a small mixed group of Redwing and Song Thrushes, and among the houses of Rectory Road, immediately before crossing the A27 footbridge, I saw my very first Garden Grape-Hyacinth flower which had escaped from one of the gradens - photo at [Grape Hyacinth plants in flower](#).

**Wed 22nd February**

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

**First Wasp seen in Hampshire with two Bumblebee Queens plus some more background info on the subject of Black Swans. Also a link to a TV documentary about the South Downs presented by an eccentric Anglican Priest.**

Among the HOS news for Feb 20 I see that the **first Common Wasp of the year** was seen at Overton (west of Basingstoke and close to the source of the River Test) with the **first Tree and White-tailed Bumblebee Queens**. The Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*) was new to Britain in 2001 but is now fairly common throughout England and Wales and if you are not familiar with the identification of Bumblebee species see [Common Bumblebee species](#).

Nearer home the flock of 5 **Black Swans** that have been at Emsworth since Jan 27 increased to 6 on Feb 20 and Brian Fellows now agrees with my guess that these are the young of the pair that has bred successfully in Southampton on the banks of the River Itchen since 2015, maybe 2014 (the site is given in the HOS Going Birding pages as Riverside Park but one Southampton Birder refers to it as Cobden Meadows). As with Mute Swans the adults drive their young away from the nest site when they settle to breed anew (the Southampton pair were seen copulating on Feb 7). **Two other scraps of information about Black Swans** start with the following extract from the Selsey blog for Feb 9 last year it reads - "Meanwhile, along the old canal at Chichester Marina our old friend the Black Swan has re-appeared and was busy chasing Mute Swans away, but further on I discovered an open and unguarded Swan's nest with 6 eggs therein; half an hour later it was still unguarded with no swan in the immediate vicinity, so if it has been abandoned or not I don't know, but will monitor with interest." This nest was still abandoned with eggs in it on Mar 11 - my guess is that the resident Black Swan there was a female and laid infertile eggs. Another news item tells us that **Dawlish in Devon**, where the Black Swans were regarded as a tourist attraction and the council paid for the upkeep of the population but recently the funds for this were withdrawn and when the last two females died in 2014 an elderly resident who loved to feed the Swans paid £400 of her own money to replace them.

Last night I watched a BBC 4 documentary about the South Downs Way presented by an eccentric Anglican Priest called Peter Owen-Jones If anyone wants to explore the Sussex landscape and wildlife I strongly recommend this programme which can be seen at [South Downs - Englands Mountains Green](#). Although his dress gives no clue to his regular occupation Peter Owen-Jones is the Anglican Priest in charge of three Churches (Firle, Glynde and Beddingham)

on the east of the River Ouse (flowing between Lewes and Newhaven). You can read more about him at [Peter Owen-Jones](#).

During the film about the South Downs Way we visit **Kingley Vale** (north of Chichester) and meet the current warden of this National Nature Reserve reminding me of the years when **Richard Williamson** was the warden - if anyone else remembers him they might enjoy being reminded of the past by viewing [Richard Williamson](#).

**[Tue 21st February](#)**

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

**My first Blackbird song in Havant plus Cow Parsley and White Comfrey in flower. This morning 80 Avocets dropped off at Pagham Harbour on their way back from winterquarters and yesterday 13 Brimstone butterflies were seen together with the second Wheatear of the year .**

This morning I spotted the leaves of the first two plants of **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** in the East Pallant carpark here in Havant as I was heading to Waitrose, and on the way home with my shopping I found a plant of **White Comfrey in full flower** in the grass of the pathway running north from this car park behind the houses of Beechworth Road. Encouraged by these finds I took a longer walk in the afternoon, starting by heading north up New Lane (where I heard **my first Med Gull calls** - no more reports from the Oysterbeds but, as is their habit on return to the area, they were seen this morning in the fields north of Havant feeding on earthworms before settling down to breed).

From New Lane I turned right into Stanbridge Road and crossed the railway by the footbridge which took me to Southleigh Road where I turned south to the Havant Road, crossing into Pook Lane and continuing south to the harbour shore without any new finds though a mass of Cherry Plum blossom is now out. At Langstone Mill Pond the Swan pair were still showing no signs of nest building and the only bird interest was a low fly-by by a Buzzard over the pony field north of the pond.

The last lap of my walk was the most rewarding. Walking up Wade Lane the Cherry Plum blossom was now widespread and after passing the vehicle entrance to the pony field I found **Cow Parsley in flower** on the east bank of the lane opposite the great display of Sweet Violet flowers on the west bank. After the bypass bridge I turned left into South Close at the far end of which **a Blackbird, perched at the top of a tree, was singing**. Continuing along the path connecting South to North Close I took the footpath north and made my last, very unexpected, find of a plant of **Wood Avens with two flower buds about to open and showing the yellow of the petals**.

News from the internet this evening starts with a report of the second **Wheatear** of the spring at Christchurch Harbour on Feb 20. Also on that day **13 Brimstone Butterflies** were reported from Hampshire and Sussex. Today (Feb 21) a flock of **80 Avocet** were at Pagham Harbour, presumably on their way to breed on the east coast after leaving their winter quarters in the Exe estuary.

Still with today's news Sandwich Bay, which had reported the biggest flock of **Great Crested Grebe (512 birds)** on the sea there since a flock of 604 in Feb 2013, today reported that the flock had grown to 836 birds. Also today a report of **5 Waxwings** at Wakehurst Place in Sussex caught my eye by saying that the birds were feeding on the fruits of a **Paper Handkerchief tree (Davidia involucreta)**, giving me an opportunity to show a photo of the tree and to bemoan

the loss of the only local specimen from the garden of a house at the bend in Shawfield Road which opens off Wade Court Road at its north end. For the photo see [Davidia involucrata](#).

Finally for today Michael Prior (the Stansted Head Forester) tells us via John Goodspeed's website that the first example of a **New Zealand Flatworm** for the local area has recently been found on the Stansted estate. For a photo of this worm see [New Zealand Flatworm](#). This worm was first noticed in Britain in the 1960s and continues to arrive in small numbers in soil around the roots of imported pot plants, and is a potential threat because it grows to 8 inches long and feeds on other worm species but no serious damage to the native population of worms has been detected so far.

### **Mon 20th February**

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

#### **First flowers on three more plants and first report of spring calls from Med Gulls as Avocets return to Titchfield Haven (presumably to breed).**

This morning I found the first flower on a self-sown clump of **Early Dog Violets** in my garden and also on a plant of the **Oxyloba variety of Greater Periwinkle** in Juniper Square - this plant has the large, deep blue flowers of the Greater Periwinkle but its petals are narrow and widely spaced from each other (looking like the blades of an aeroplane propeller). Here are two photos to illustrate the difference - first [the standard Greater Periwinkle](#) and second [the Oxyloba variety](#). The third new flower was seen yesterday but I was not sure of its name until today - it is the common hedging plant called **Cherry Laurel**. It gets its name from its red berries but the flowers that are now starting to open are white candles - see [Cherry Laurel flowers](#).

Perhaps the most significant reports on the internet show that **Avocets** are now returning from their winter quarters to places where they will breed, including Titchfield Haven where none have spent the winter but seven arrived yesterday. Another report that I have been expecting is the first of Med Gull's 'mewing' calls - this came from Christchurch Harbour yesterday though I am certain that the birders who reported large flocks of these gulls at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 17 and 18 will have heard them and were probably made aware of the presence of the Terns by their calls. Two reports showing that winter is not yet over came from Sandwich Bay (where a massive flock of 512 **Great Crested Grebes** were on the sea today) and from the sea off Penzance in Cornwall (where the lone **Pacific Diver** was still to be seen today).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEBRUARY 13 - 19 (WEEK 07 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 19th February**

**Male Yew trees now scattering their pollen, migrant Sandwich Terns arrive at Dungeness and Stonechats fly in at Portland where the first Bottle-nosed Dolphins are seen. Five Butterfly species and a variety of other insects emerge in the warm weather.**

My only personal sign of spring today was **a cloud of pollen when I shook the branch of a Yew tree** in Havant Cemetery but I was more interested to see that my feeling, which I expressed last Tuesday, that **migrant Sandwich Terns** were already back in the English Channel was confirmed by the first reports of these birds at Folkestone and Dungeness on Feb 18.

Also on Feb 18 Portland reported the **first Bottlenose Dolphins of the year** (a pod of 12 off the Bill) and the arrival of **25 migrant Stonechats** plus sightings of the **first Hoverfly (Eristalis tenax - the Drone Fly)** and **Gorse Shield Bugs**. Photos of these, plus a Common Footman moth caterpillar and a 'Noble False Widow' spider, can all be seen on the Portland website entry for Feb 18 ([Portland blog](#)) and you can find out more about False Widow Spiders at [British Arachnological Society website](#).

**Five Butterfly species** have been on the wing during the past week (**Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell** and **Brimstone**) together with a surprising report on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation page of **a Small White apparently spending the winter in a domestic fridge** - see the last entry for Saturday 18 February at [Sussex-Butterflies webpage](#).

Other recent news is that the **Med Gulls are back to nest in Langstone Harbour** (though they normally spend some time feeding in inland fields before settling down on the shingle). The first report of their mass return came on Feb 17 when 100 birds were seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds, followed by a report of 162 there on Feb 18. On Feb 15 there was **another surge of departing Brent** with 395 flying east past Splash Point at Seaford and 460 going east at Dungeness. Feb 17 brought news of a **single Glossy Ibis on the Isle of Wight** but I was more interested in yet another photo by Peter Raby (taken on Feb 16) of the **Curlew Sandpiper** that has been wintering on the Emsworth/Langstone shore. This photo is his clearest yet showing the down-curved bill and the slightly larger size of the Sandpiper in comparison to a straight-billed Dunlin. Peter's photo can be seen at [Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin on the Warblington shore](#). Finally for today here, for those who did not see the **Little Bunting** on Portsdown between Jan 25 and Feb 9, is a great photo of one taken on Feb 17 at Nanjizal near Lands End in Cornwall - [Little Bunting in Cornwall](#).

## **Sat 18th February**

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

**First Alder catkins open at Langstone Pond plus the first Wheatear seen in Sussex and nesting Cormorants at the Chichester Lakes with more spring news to follow.**

A warm, sunny, almost windless morning saw me walking to Langstone pond down Wade Lane with lots of birdsong everywhere. Surprisingly the fields north of Wade Court had **no Little Egrets** - I did not see one anywhere during my walk and assume that the warm sun and the low tide had persuaded them to abandon their winter mode of feeding in inland fields and resume their summer habit of feeding out in the harbours. Also absent from these fields were the **Song Thrushes** which have for some time spent their time feeding in the fields, though two were still present, now perched in trees and singing.

Passing the entrance to the farm buildings I turned to look back towards the Wade Court buildings and to the small tree overhanging the mass of Winter Heliotrope flowers - a creeper plant has climbed this tree and grown a mass of leaves on top of the tree. Today the first white flowers of this **Clematis arandii** creeper were open and a photo of this plant can be seen at [Clematis arandii](#). While I was here and looking up I saw a single **Buzzard** flying over, unusually without harassment from Crows or other birds.

At the southern end of the lane there were more birders than birds - the flood in the pony field had a few Wigeon and Moorhens with singles of Pied and Grey Wagtails but there were plenty of waders and wildfowl around the edges of the distant harbour water. On the Mill Pond **the Swan pair were circling the island on which I expect them to nest** but so far there is no sign of them forcing their way through the reeds to build a nest. Reaching the point at which the seawall path is forced inland behind the Mill building I had my best sight of the walk - **one Common Alder had opened all its catkins** unlike the many others round the pond whose catkins remain tight closed. A good photo of the glorious sight this made, with the catkins reflecting the yellow of the sunshine, can be seen at [Common Alder male catkins with last year's female cones](#).

Among today's news from the internet is a sighting of the **first Wheatear of the year, seen briefly on the hedge of a garden in East Chiltington near Lewes on Feb 17** - the observer says he saw it at a distance of 10 feet and for 20 seconds. Another significant observation was made by the Havant Wildlife Group on their Feb 18 outing to the Chichester Gravel Pits where they found **a small colony of Cormorants on nests in trees near Runcton Lake** - the names of the various lakes can be seen by going to the following link and clicking the + button four times - go to [Map of Chichester Lakes](#). Although I am familiar with the large Cormorant roost on trees in an Ivy Lake island and have often walked the main paths giving views over all the lakes I have never been aware of this nesting colony but I now see that **Jeff Goodridge found active nests there back in May 2012** (Note that Peckhams Copse Lane is the name of the track running north between Runcton Lake and the Caravan Park) Go to Jeff's blog entry, and scroll down to a photo of the Cormorant nests at [Jeff's blog entry](#)

More news of **Butterflies and Moths emerging in the warm weather**, more **Brent** flying east, a **Glossy Ibis** on the Isle of Wight and the **Curlew Sandpiper** still off the Warblington shore, plus **Herring Gulls starting to build nests** on Brighton houses, and the **first flocks of 100+ Med Gulls at the Hayling Oyster Beds** to follow tomorrow....

**[Fri 17th February](#)**

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

**15 pairs of Rooks back at their Emsworth Rookery, a Green Woodpecker yaffling at Nore Barn, Three Corned Leek flowering nearby plus stunning yellow blossom on Mimosa/Acacia dealbata at Warblington and unexpected Ox-eye Daisies in Leigh Park.**

**Chaffinches** are now singing regularly and the wheezing calls of **Greenfinches**, but not their songs, are showing their presence while today I heard the yaffle of a **Green Woodpecker** for the first time and saw **Rooks back at the one remaining Rookery in the Emsworth area** now that their nests in trees by the Pook Lane riding stables and the Brookfield Hotel have long vanished into the past. I could not see any nests in the rookery trees south of Victoria Road but I counted 15

'placeholders' (mostly pairs but some singles) perched in the trees at points where I guess they intend to build their nests.

This morning I was very surprised to find a group of three **Ox-eye Daisies in flower** on the north side of Crossland Drive in Leigh Park and when I had crossed the Petersfield Road and was heading south on the west side of that road I saw several patches of **Danish Scurvygrass leaves** looking large enough to support flowers in the near future. In the afternoon, after visiting the Thorney Little Deeps and cycling along Thornham Lane to Prinsted without finding anything new to report, I headed home via Nore Barn where the first **Three Cornered Leeks (aka Garlic) were in flower** under the hedge of Warblington Road immediately east of Beach Road, showing their strongly triangular stems and the faint green lines running down the outside of the pure white flowers - see the photo at [Three Cornered Leek flowers](#). Just one more stunning new flower seen on the way home - the brilliant yellow of what I call **Mimosa** but which has several other names listed in a web page headed 'Acacia dealbata' which has two excellent photos (the second giving close-up detail of flowers and leaves). This page can be seen at [names and photos of what I call Mimosa](#). I see that Marks and Spencer thought this would be a profitable (for them) Valentine's Day present this year at £50 a go and it is still available from them until Feb 25 - see [names and photos of what I call Mimosa](#). If you want a free viewing of this stunning tree in full flower go to the south end of Castle Avenue at Warblington and look in a garden on the west side of the road.

**Wed 15th February**

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

### **Ivy-leaved Speedwell starts to flower in Havant, Chaffinches sing in Kent and Devon and more Brent fly east.**

This morning, walking to the shops in Havant via Juniper Square, I found **more than 50 Lesser Celandine flowers open** and passing the entrance to the Multi-storey carpark I was delighted to find my first flowering **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** which would have passed un-noticed by anyone not specifically looking for it as I have been doing for a couple of weeks when the ground has been thickly covered with the leaves of this plant. I have chosen two photos from the internet to illustrate, firstly, how easy it is to overlook this species when it is not showing any flowers - see [and imagine a mass of these tiny leaves covering large areas of soil without any of the tiny flowers to attract your attention](#) and, secondly, look at [and see how dramatic a close up of the plant can be](#) when tiny, pale, blue or pinky-lilac flowers add to the effect of the hairiness of the whole plant.

Back at home I found that birders in north Devon and at Reculver in north Kent had re-acted to the **first Chaffinch song of the spring** with much the same excitement as I had to the sight of the Speedwell. In Devon this excitement was expressed in the words .. "Great Tit, Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Song Thrush and Chaffinch all in song" while the Reculver blog expressed it [in this photo](#). Another sign of spring came in Matt Eade's report for Feb 15 of **395 Brent flying east** off Splash Point at Seaford in Sussex.

A Hampshire bird rarity was reported on Feb 14 when **two pairs of Willow Tit** were seen at Preston Oak Hills near the north end of the Candover valley (not far east of the A303 junction with the M3). Also on Feb 14 Peter Raby visited the Langstone South Moors where, in the bay off the mouth of the Langbrook stream, the **2 Long-tailed Ducks** were still present, **Goldeneye** had increased to 4 and

there were also **4 Great Crested Grebes**. I was particularly interested to see that **102 Gadwall** were very nearly as numerous as the **112 Wigeon**.

## **Tue 14th February**

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

### **Frogs have been spawning for a week, Long-tailed Tits are nest building, and maybe migrant Sandwich Terns are already in British waters.**

An entry on the SOS website today tells me that **Long-tailed Tits and Mistle Thrushes are now nesting** in the Brighton area close to the A27 running round the northern fringe of the con-urbation. They were seen in the Ladies Mile Local Nature Reserve, the location of which can be seen on [this map](#). Another sign of spring has been reported in a Cosham garden pond where John Goodspeed tells us that **Frogs started to spawn on Feb 7th**, with 34 clumps there by Feb 11th. As yet no migrant birds have been reported but I suspect that the sudden **increase in the number of Sandwich Terns being reported at coastal sites in the Solent area** (from a peak count of 16 at Bembridge on Jan 16 to 22 at Ryde on Feb 12 when there were 11 in the Hill Head area which had reported none earlier in the winter) indicated the arrival of some early migrants from the south. Over on the continent **the arrival of 33 Common Cranes in Belgium today** (Feb 14) suggests that these are migrants returning from wintering in North Africa (although I am aware that some of these birds spend the winter in the British Isles). Another species possibly returning for the summer is the **Merlin** which first attracted my attention with a report of one over Farlington Marshes on Jan 28, and has since been seen at four coastal sites where it has not been reported earlier in the winter (Ryde on Feb 3, Titchfield Haven on Feb 5, Hastings area on Feb 12 followed by two reports on Feb 13 (at Arundel and Titchfield Haven)).

Other local bird news includes a report of a **Ring-necked Parakeet** on garden bird feeders in Deanlane End (just north of Rowlands Castle) on Feb 12. Following 8 other reports from the Southampton area this year, plus news of an established colony in Plymouth (where 17 birds could be seen on Jan 22 and one pair was said to have a nest there), it does seem that these are now spreading outside the London area.

Today I saw my first **tiny red female flower on a Hazel tree** and **learnt something about Slugs** from Graeme Lyons blog in which he tells us that the single pore which Slugs use for breathing is also used by them for defecation - see [Graeme Lyons latest blog entry](#).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEBRUARY 6 - 12 (WEEK 06 OF 2017)**

### **Sat 11th February**

#### **A chilly walk to Langstone and Budds Farm gives me my first Long-tailed Ducks and Common Sandpiper plus my first Lungwort flowers.**

I was expecting a cloudy but dry walk but as soon as I left the house flakes of snow started to fall which they did throughout the morning driven by a fresh and bitter wind from the north. Despite the chill I came on my first **flowering Lungwort** in the Lymbourne triangle - see [a photo of Common Lungwort](#) - before heading

down Wade Court Road where the pony field north of Wade Court had a cluster of **nine Little Egrets** and the west bank of the muddy lane south of the road had an encouraging display of **24 Sweet Violet flowers** with **half a dozen Cherry Plum flowers** open a little further down the lane.

Reaching Langstone Pond I looked for the Swan pair but could only see one of them (possibly its mate was already preparing its nest though I could see no sign of it). On the water off the pond one very drab **winter plumaged Common Gull** was the only bird to be seen until I reached the Royal Oak and found many more gulls, among them **two Black-headed with fully black head plumage**.

Continuing down Mill Lane I found a large flock of ducks off the mouth of the Langbrook and a quick scan picked out **one male Goldeneye** and **two Long-tailed Ducks** among the many **Wigeon, Mergansers** and **Gadwall**. The spring tide was at its height leaving only a narrow band of weed strewn shingle along the Southmoors shore and this had attracted **three Rock Pipits** before I left the shore to check out the Budds Farm pools on which a couple of **Shelduck** were the only newcomers - possibly here to breed though they have not done so for at least two years. Absent from these pools were the **Mute Swan pair** which I expect to nest despite the unexplained death of the female on her nest last spring.

Back on the shore I walked on towards the Hermitage Stream, off which a single **Great Crested Grebe** was the only bird on the water. Reaching the far end of the shingle I disturbed a lone **Greenshank** from the water's edge, and after climbing onto the higher path to take me up the Brockhampton Stream I was delighted to see a single **Common Sandpiper** fly past me to land and 'bob' on the shingle I had just left (a little later a birder coming down the path beside the Brockhampton told me the Sandpiper had been a regular sight here for a couple of weeks so it will hopefully stay hereabouts).

Back at home, after some warming lunch, the internet told me of **5 Waxwing** newly arrived in Whiteley near Fareham and 7 more still present at Bexhill. Yesterday 9 **Sandwich Terns** were new on the water off Titchfield Haven, increasing to 11 today, making me wonder if these might be early migrants though they are more likely to be birds that have wintered in English waters but are now feeling the urge to migrate and moving from their wintering sites.

To end this update a **colourful fungus** was reported on the Devon birding site with a photo which named it as **Peziza coccinea** and which I would name as **Scarlet Elf Cup (Sarcoscypha coccinea)**. This discrepancy in naming is typical with fungi and is further illustrated by reading the 'First Nature' page (especially the "Taxonomic history section") to which I provide a link following the link to the Devon Birding photo. The Devon Birding photo can be seen at [Devon Birding photo](#). The First Nature page is at [First Nature page](#).

**[Thu 9th February](#)**

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

**More news of Golden Plover (and a Curlew Sandpiper) at Langstone as Med Gulls acquire summer plumage. Spurge Laurel starts to flower in Havant and other spring flowers increase slowly.**

When I reported my sighting of a large flock of **Golden Plover** on the mud off Langstone on Feb 7 I was surprised that they had not been reported by Peter Raby but I now find that Peter's sighting of an even larger flock (541 birds) there on Feb 6 had been 'delayed in transit' and the details can now be seen on Brian Fellows blog entry for Feb 8. Also seen by Peter on Feb 6 was a single **Curlew Sandpiper** which he had seen in the same area on Jan 7, Dec 31 and Nov 20, indicating that it is wintering in this part of Chichester Harbour though none of this species have been reported elsewhere in Hampshire since the last of the autumn passage migrants were seen on the Lymington Marshes on Oct 4.

Also seen off Langstone by Peter on Feb 8 were **2 Med Gulls moulting into their smart black, white and red breeding plumage**. I see that one 'summer plumaged bird' was seen flying past Portland Bill on Feb 6 while today a newly arrived flock of more than 50 Med Gulls was seen at Church Norton. I wonder who will be the first to report their 'mewing' calls which have recently taken over the role of 'heralding the spring' from the Cuckoo - if you are not familiar with this sound use the following link which will bring up a map of Europe, then scroll down to the list of recordings and press the 'play button' on the second entry. The link is to [Med Gull spring calls on the Xeno-canto website](#). While at Langstone Pond on Feb 8 Peter trained his scope on the Bridge Farm fields across the water at Northney and saw **6 Roe Deer** which usually inhabit the large North Hayling fields further south.

My own walk around Havant this morning found only one newly flowering plant (**Spurge Laurel**) in the Grove Road Conservation area at the east end of that road adjacent to the Billy Line and if you do not know what to look for see [but note that the flowers I saw were fewer and less prominent than in this photo](#). No other 'firsts' were seen but I did notice a small increase in the numbers of **Whitlowgrass**, **Lesser Celandines** and the **Lesser Periwinkle** flowers under the hedge separating the HBC 'Plaza' site from the adjacent roundabout and found the two **Creeping Buttercup flowers** not yet fully open by the exit from the pedestrian underpass under the Petersfield Road at the west end of Crossland Drive

Down in Devon the first **Dipper was singing** near Tiverton and in Kent a flock of **64 Corn Buntings** reminded me of the decline in numbers to be seen in Hampshire. The **Little Bunting** was still on Portsdown today and a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was seen at Poole Harbour.

**[Tue 7th February](#)**

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

**My first Golden Plover flock at Langstone plus my first sight of the nesting Herons. Redwings start to move north at Portland and Black-tailed Godwits head for the Avon valley. Also a couple of strange insects in Rye area moth traps and a Pied Wagtail learns how to open the doors into ASDA at Brighton.**

Yesterday (Feb 6) the tide was low all day at Langstone, allowing **Golden Plover**, which had probably been feeding overnight on the fields of Hayling Island, to feel safe roosting on the large expanse of mud off Langstone when they left the fields at dawn. When I arrived in the area towards noon I found a large flock on the mud off the Mill Pond and was able to estimate the flock size as around 250 birds when something put them up (with about 200 Lapwing) to circle the area until they felt safe to land again. Today I was back at the pond but neither Golden Plover nor Lapwing were to be seen though the trees on the west side of the Mill

Pond had a good show of **adult Herons** on the five nests which Peter Raby had seen to be occupied last Saturday (Feb 4) - I could see all five nests from the sluice which takes excess pond water into the harbour. Nearby I counted **14 Little Egrets** in the field north of Wade Court and with two more seen in the Warblington Farm field nearest the main road (where cattle were clustered round a feeder but with no Cattle Egrets at their feet) the total of 16 birds indicates an increase on the winter minimum in the area (though these birds are still showing no sign of starting the nest).

Other news from the internet starts with a couple of late items from Feb 5 when Christchurch Harbour commented on the presence of more **Black-tailed Godwits** than usual that they were probably heading for the Avon valley where recent rain has caused the area around the river to become an attractive wetland feeding area. The second item reported that day was the presence of a **Bottle-nosed Dolphin** within Poole Harbour (which I think is unusual). News for Feb 6 includes a mention of **Redwing starting to fly north over Portland during the night for the first time this year** (I think this implies the start of their spring return migration). Other signs of spring were a report of the **first Reed Bunting song** at Christchurch Harbour, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming and calling in the New Forest and the sight of **two Black Swans copulating** at their now regular breeding site in Southampton's Riverside Park.

Also on Feb 6 the Rye Harbour website had two separate reports of **unusual insects found in moth traps**. The first was from Chris Bentley, the reserve's entomologist, which you can read at [Chris Bentley's find of a tiny beetle which catches its prey with a long sticky tongue](#). If you are not familiar with its much commoner and larger relative see [description of Devil's Coach Horse beetle](#). The second report is from Alan Parker at [Alan Parker's find of an Ichneumon species in his moth trap](#).

Finally here is an unusual report from the SOS website describing **a new skill acquired by Pied Wagtails feeding near the entrance to the ASDA store at Brighton**. It seems that they have learnt to operate the doors into the store by flying at the sensors which detect approaching customers. Not only does this open up new feeding opportunities for the birds but maybe it will give them a warmer place to roost at night. The report from David Harper reads (after a description of Peregrines catching a Pigeon) .. "in Asda, two Pied Wagtails tolerated each other inside the glass foyer. One was an adult male, which sang both inside and out. The other was either a yearling male or a female. Both foraged around the tables. On previous visits I have seen lone individuals foraging in the foyer; they had entered and left either on foot or in flight as people went through the automatic doors. Today revealed that both could open the doors by flying at the sensors."

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JANUARY 30 - FEB 5 (WEEK 05 OF 2017)** **Sun 5th February**

### **Cherry Plum and Whitlowgrass start to flower plus 16 Black-necked Grebe at the Oyster Beds and 11 Cattle Egrets at Radipole.**

The first **Cherry Plum blossom** was seen at Brook Meadow on Feb 2 and I saw my first at Southmoor Lane on Feb 4 (when Nik Knight also saw a first flower in Wade Lane) but my best flower find was of **Common Whitlowgrass** on Feb 5 when I found a total of 10 plants in flower at three sites in Havant. Also of interest

in the local area the number of **Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle** was up to 10 on Feb 4 and the number of **Black-necked Grebes** off the Hayling Oysterbeds was 16 or more on Feb 5 while the lone **Little Bunting** on Portsdown was still being seen on Feb 5 after being first spotted on Feb 1.

The first tentative **Chaffinch song** in Hampshire was reported in the Southampton area on Feb 5 when several **Mistle Thrush** were singing in the West Dean Woods and other bird reports which caught my eye were of **Goshawks displaying** 'somewhere in Sussex' on Feb 3, a lone **Puffin** seen at Selsey on Feb 4, and Mike Wearing saw a **Common Sandpiper** near the Bedhampton Gravel Quay on Feb 4 (not normally a rare bird but the first for this year in the Havant area other than one seen near Budds Farm on Jan 2). At Langstone Mill Pond the number of **active Heron nests** was up to 5 on Feb 4

It would seem that the **Cattle Egrets** have now left Warblington but maybe they have flown west as a roost of 11 was reported from Radipole (near Weymouth) on Feb 4. Over on the continent a total of **15578 White-front Geese** at a Netherlands site indicated a mass arrival from the north but Trektellen also reported **a single White Stork** at a Belgian site on Feb 5, suggesting the first summer migrant moving north.

Feb 3 brought two unusual reports. The first was of an Otter in the Christchurch Harbour area, the second was of a new fungus for Graeme Lyons 'Pan Species' list. Read about his find of **Oak Mazegill** at the Sussex Wildlife Trust nature reserve called 'The Mens' (3 miles east of Petworth on the A272). For Graeme's account of the find see [Graeme Lyons blog entry](#) and to find out more about this fungus see [Details of Oak Mazegill](#). Another account of this fungus can be seen at [More about Oak Mazegill](#).

### **Fri 3rd February**

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

#### **The first Buttercup of the year and the end of a Pilot Whale on a Sussex shore.**

This morning the only wild flower that I knew should be flowering, but was not included in Wednesday's list, was the **Garlic Mustard** which I had seen on Jan 22 growing just off New Lane, so I set off to add that to my February list. It was as I had previously seen it and later in my walk I found two more specimens in flower but before coming across them I made a totally unexpected find of two **Creeping Buttercup** flower buds. My flower book says this normally flowers from May to October but 'can flower sporadically through mild winters.'

As I was not expecting to find more flowers I noted the birds which were singing, starting with the **Song Thrush** that was belting out its song at breakfast time from the trees along the Billy Line running past my garden (I had also heard it last night after sunset). Before I get home I had added **Robin, Dunnock, Blue** and **Great Tit** plus **Collared Dove** and **Wood Pigeon** and the inevitable **Starlings**. Back at home the internet told me that at least one **Chiff Chaff** had been singing.

The most interesting report on the net today came from Fairlight near Rye Harbour where a large corpse, first seen on the shore of Fairlight Cove on Jan 22, but only now identified with the help of marine life experts, was described on Feb 2 at [as a Long-finned Pilot Whale](#). From this I learnt that the species is not a Whale but a large Dolphin, and that it is one of two very similar subspecies - Long-finned and Short-finned Pilot Whales. To find out more see [the Wikipaedia entry about the species](#).

## [Wed 1st February](#)

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

### 53 flowering plants seen on the first of the new month.

Although rain was forecast for this morning it was very light and intermittent so I was able to take a lengthy walk around Havant in the morning and to go out again in the afternoon giving me **an overall total of 53 species** (possibly 54 when I have had a close look at a specimen of Speedwell which I found growing on a brick pillar and which made me think it might be Wall Speedwell though I doubt that is correct).

My best and most unexpected find was of a single plant of **Common Whitlowgrass** holding up a tiny 'candelabra' of minute white flower buds in Waterloo Road and in the nearby Prince George Street carpark the **Grey Alder** overhanging the entrance had fully open catkins. Although not a first for the year I was surprised to see the first flowers on the massive cluster of **Lesser Celandine plants in Juniper Square**. Two species which were my 'firsts for the year' were **Pellitory of the Wall** and **garden Crocuses**. Another pleasant surprise, though I had seen it before, was a single **Camellia bush in full flower**.

At Warblington a thick mist shrouded everything and I saw no Cattle in the fields but I did glimpse two Egret shaped birds flying over and elsewhere at least half a dozen Dunnocks were heard singing with one full throated Wren. On my lawn the Blackbirds were still busy chasing each other and a single Song Thrush was singing nearby.

## [Tue 31st January](#)

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

### Two male Blackbirds chase each other (and one female) around my garden from dawn to dusk for three whole days.

Last Sunday I noticed **three Blackbirds continually chasing each other around my lawn**, occasionally flying up to perch on the garden wall but soon returning to the grass. Two were males, one was a female and I assumed that the two males were contending for the female. On Monday the three were still at it but the female seemed to lose interest and disappeared, disproving my theory that their interest was in capturing her attention as they paid no attention to her absence but continued chasing each other across the ground with a distance of no more than two or three feet between them. Today the males were still at it from around 9 am when I first went out until just after 5pm when it was becoming dark - at times during this third day the female was back with them but showing her lack of interest in their 'game'. I assume that the two males are intent on wearing each other out but without physical contact and that when one of the males gives up the chase she will be happy to pair with the survivor (but will he still have the energy to mate?).

**Wood Larks were singing** in mid-November and on both Dec 22 and 26 as well as throughout January but I have not noticed any reports of **Skylark song** until now when one was heard over the South Moors on Jan 30, maybe in response to continental immigrants invading the territories of local birds or perhaps responding to the increasing temperature which seems to have revived local **Song Thrush song** and to have increased the number of **Dunnock** singing (but not to have persuaded Wrens into regular song) and I normally expect to hear Chaffinch song at the end of January but have only heard one (and that on the TV during the Winter Watch programmes) nor have I heard a Mistle Thrush though I

have seen the Wade Court pair on their territory. Another oddity has been the regular reports of **Serin song** from the lone male at Newhaven. Two first sightings of insects during the past week have been of an **Early Grey moth** at Portland on Jan 28 - for a photo and to get an idea of when they normally start to appear see [Early Grey moth in Hampshire](#). Also on Jan 28 the Butterfly Conservation 'firsts' page told us that **Comma** had become the sixth species to be seen this year when it emerged from hibernation in Kent.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JANUARY 23 - 29 (WEEK 04 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 29th January**

**Top score for this years New Year Bird Race in Sussex was 108 species but Graeme Lyons is already inviting entries for a 'Pan Species 24 hour race to find 1000 species' on June 10.**

Of the **17 teams of Sussex Birders out to raise funds for the Sussex Ornithological Society** this month the team calling themselves the "Splash Pointers" achieved the highest score with 108 species (lowest score was just 35 species seen by "The LBJs ride again"). Also this week **Graeme Lyons (Sussex Wildlife Trust Ecologist and keen 'Pan Species Lister')** has published his plan to persuade Sussex Naturalists to think big and to aim to record 1000 species (including humans as one species) in a midnight to midnight search on June 10th this year. To read the rules of this race see [Rules for the 24 Hour Pan-Species list in June](#). I see that Graeme is hoping to advertise this new competition on the BBC TV Springwatch programme and I can see this race becoming an annual event attracting not only the nation's top naturalists (who may take several years to hit the '1000 species in 24 hours' mark) but also the equivalents of 'The LBJs ride again and again' with their more modest ambitions. **To find out more about 'Pan Species Listing'** (and see that it is not restricted to the top experts of the naturalist community) visit [What Pan Species Listing is all about](#) and for more about the subject put 'Pan Species Listing' into Google.

Excitements of the past week include more **Waxwings in southern counties** (with sightings in Winchester, Basingstoke, Brighton, Crowborough, Heathfield on the A38 in Devon, Bridport in Dorset and Camborne in Cornwall) while nearer home a **Little Bunting** has been among a flock of Reed Buntings on Portsdown, and a family of **5 Black Swans** has appeared in Emsworth Harbour on Jan 27 (after appearing in Fareham Creek on Jan 21, at their probable nest site in Southampton on Dec 12 and in the Langstone area on Nov 13). A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** has been seen at Netley Marsh on Southampton Water, and a **Woodlark** has been singing in Woolmer Forest on the A325 north of Petersfield. Further afield a **Red-flanked Bluetail** has been seen in Glamorgan and what I think is the first mention of a **Twite** for this winter came from the Netherlands on Jan 26.

One Butterfly (a **Speckled Wood**) made its 2017 debut in Devon on Jan 26 and I added **Stinking Hellebore** to my flowering plant list with the usual display along

the north side of Bartons Road just west of the Havant Crematorium (The Oaks). Next to these Hellebores large patches of ground hugging leaves show where **Creeping Comfrey** will soon be flowering (last year I saw it here on Feb 18). On Jan 28, while searching in vain for Coltsfoot at the old carpark for the Hayling Oysterbeds, I was surprised to find two plants of **Small Nettle** close to flowering.

Today I walked down to Langstone Mill Pond where the resident pair of **Mute Swans** were near their nest site after finally chasing off last year's cygnets on Jan 24, and offshore, with the tide high, I was pleased to see **a family group of Brent which included three young**. I was even more pleased, when scanning the pony field south of Wade Court, to see a single **Green Sandpiper** fly in to land beside the flooded area on which half a dozen Wigeon were present and around which an estimated 100 Teal were resting. Also in that field were several **Song Thrushes**, but not the **pair of Mistle Thrushes** which I had seen yesterday in the field north of Wade Court and which I am pretty sure will once again breed here.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JANUARY 16 - 22 (WEEK 03 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 22nd January**

#### **My first real show of Lesser Celandines and salting of the roads brings a show of tiny Danish Scurvygrass leaves plus 12 Sandwich Terns at Black Point.**

This morning I headed for the west side of Petersfield Road between Crossland Drive and Havant College to look for signs of **Danish Scurvygrass** which thrives on the salt spread to keep the roads ice free in this chilly weather but before I got there I had a pleasant surprise at the corner of New Lane and Eastern Road. Here the warm sunshine had brought out **eight Lesser Celandine flowers** to mark the start of their flowering, and this reminded me that I did not mention the similar show of **eight Sweet Violet flowers** found on Jan 20 in the unmade section of Wade Lane south of Wade Court. Also noticeable in this morning's strong sunshine was the response of several large clumps of **Common Field Speedwell flowers** - for some time they have been tentatively half-opening their flowers but today those flowers were fully open creating solid carpets of bright blue. Also seen before reaching Crossland Drive was a single plant of **Garlic Mustard** with two small clusters of tiny white flowers - I am not expecting that to start general flowering for some time yet.

After emerging from the underpass by which I crossed the busy Petersfield Road I walked south keeping an eye on the roadside edge of the grass and in several places I noticed large patches of tiny leaves which will soon develop into plants of **Danish Scurvygrass** thanks to the presence of the rock salt spread to reduce the risk of accidents by reducing the freezing point of water - it also makes roadside environment much more like the seaside habitat where the Scurvygrass grows naturally. It also creates a habitat which encourages the growth of **Buckshorn Plantain**, the leaves of which were much more prominent. To see how the

Scurvygrass will look when it is flowering see [Danish Scurvygrass in flower](#). To see the distinctive shape of the Buckshorn Plantain leaves see [Buckshorn Plantain leaves](#).

Entries on the internet which caught my eye today were of **3 Cattle Egrets seen at Chale Green on the Isle of Wight** (the first seen on the Island this month?), **9 Waxwings in Lewes** (this report includes an excellent photo of one of them - see [Waxwing at Lewes](#)), and an increase in the number of **Sandwich Terns** at the mouth of Chichester Harbour to 12.

### **Sat 21st January**

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

#### **A couple of fungus finds, 59 Barnacle Geese arrive in the Solent and Warblington again has 5 Cattle Egrets.**

My only outing today was a brief walk to South Close (off Wade Court Road just north of the Havant bypass) to collect samples of a fungus which I had seen yesterday but could not identify from my memory of what I had seen. It turned out to be **Gymnopilus penetrans** which I expect to see in the autumn growing in woodland conifer plantations but was apparently growing here on fencing panels. To see what this fungus looks like see [Common Rustgill](#).

While on the subject of fungi I included a reference to Graeme Lyons find of **Cobalt Crust fungus** in my blog entry for Jan 15 and I see that Graeme mentioned two more uncommon fungi in his blog for yesterday (see [Graeme Lyons blog entry for Jan 20](#)). I do not expect to come across the fungus growing on Juniper bushes but will keep an eye open for the **Tripe Fungus** - for more pictures and info on that see [info on Tripe fungus](#).

Today (Jan 21) a flock of **59 Barnacle Geese** was seen in the mouth of Southampton Water off Chilling (between Titchfield Haven and the River Hamble) and I guess this was another flock of wild geese following the flock seen in Christchurch Harbour on Jan 18, which I mentioned yesterday - this flock seems to be the first non-feral flock to reach Hampshire this winter.

Finally for this entry there are two items of news from yesterday (Jan 20). The first is a sighting of **5 Cattle Egrets at Warblington** showing that they still find the cattle on that farm attractive. The second is a sighting of a **Peacock butterfly** in St Leonards Forest (just west of Horsham in Sussex) on Jan 17.

### **Thu 19th January**

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

I spent an hour yesterday evening watching **David Attenborough enthusing over Frogs** and I suspect that some of those reading this blog might be as fascinated as I was by this programme - if so here is the address you should use to see it when you have an hour to spare during the next month -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04g4qm5/natural-world-20142015-10-attenboroughs-fabulous-frogs>

Today a brief walk round Havant encouraged me with the sight of **a second Sweet Violet flower now open in St Faith's churchyard**, seen as I was walking down Homewell Street, but despite a search for the first flowers on Ivy Leaved Speedwell which will soon be out when the air warms up (one flower spike of Thyme-leaved Speedwell is still flowering in my garden and Common Field Speedwell is easy to find) I found nothing new to report.

One interesting report on the SOS website today was [a detailed description of a pair of Mistle Thrushes in a garden near Horsham eating Mistletoe berries and sowing the seeds on tree branches](#) - at this time of year the bare branches of many trees have large growths of Mistletoe on them but I have never seen the process whereby these growths get established so I read with interest the following description ... "Hard weather has emboldened our local pair of Mistle Thrushes. For most of the day they have been taking the berries from the Mistletoe plants in our garden. The pair have a strict routine: forage busily on the fruits for 20 minutes, then find a drink, (which they did every time, and which appears vitally important, despite the ice). They then rest, after which they defaecate! One form of dropping was the familiar avian 'white' version, shot out! The other excretion consisted of a long sticky string (image enclosed), which appeared to be difficult to excrete. In some of the samples I examined the berries appeared undigested, in others the skin only passed out. This cycle was continued throughout the day." Here is a link to the photo of one bird exuding the sticky substance containing the Mistletoe seeds - see [photo of Mistle Thrush perched among Mistletoe berries and exuding a long vertical chain of the seeds](#)

On Jan 16 I commented about [the arrival of 1261 wild Barnacle Geese in the Netherlands](#) and suggested that we might soon see some of them in southern England. Since then [an influx of 40 Barnacles has been reported at Christchurch Harbour on Jan 18](#) though I have no way of telling if these came from the east or from the regular winter flock in the Solway Firth area.

More spring like news from the internet is of [Rooks back at their nests](#) at Reculver on the north Kent coast - 22 Rooks were seen at their rookery on Jan 17 though I doubt they will start nesting for another month (though I see that two [Heron nests at Langstone Mill Pond](#) now have 'interested occupants'). Another species that may have been nesting for some time is [Crossbill](#) - this was brought to my attention by a report of one bird in the New Forest seen ['stripping bark' to line its nest on Jan 16](#). Much less likely to be encountered by most Hampshire birders nowadays is [Willow Tit](#) but the species still has a foothold in north Hampshire and one was heard singing in the Hannington area (between Basingstoke and Kingsclere) on Jan 17. Another common bird which has suffered a serious decline in numbers (from disease) is the [Greenfinch](#) - on Jan 8 Brian Fellows was delighted to see five on his garden feeders in Emsworth and yesterday (Jan 18) a regular roost of around 60 birds was reported in Southampton.

Finally I have news of an apparent increase in the number of [wintering Sandwich Terns](#) with a report of 16 in the Bembridge area of the Isle of Wight on Jan 16. These may well include the 5 seen in Chichester Harbour and the 9 seen at Newtown on the IoW this month.

**[Tue 17th January](#)**

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

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker seen in Stansted yesterday and three more Great Spots drumming today plus Willow Tit song in north Hampshire. More Herring Gulls on potential roof nest sites in Havant where I find my first Silk Tassel bush in flower.**

Today's sunshine attracted me to walk around east Havant starting with a look at the roadside edge of the southern pavement of Emsworth Road between Lymbourne and Wade Court Roads. Here many tiny plants of [Common](#)

**Whitlowgrass** are growing, protected from trampling on the narrow outer ledge of the pavement but showing no sign of flowering so far. The footpath from Wade Court Road to the modern section of Pook Lane running north from the bypass to the 'Green Pond' cross roads (where Southleigh Road starts) added **Duncock song** to the many Robins and at least **one Wren in full song** heard from my garden, and as I was nearing the Emsworth Road one garden had what appeared to be Lesser Periwinkle in flower but I suspect it was a **cultivated variety of Intermediate Periwinkle**.

Crossing the Emsworth Road at the traffic lights I found **Field Woundwort** still flowering at the foot of the metal barrier on the north side of the road and before reaching Warblington School I had my first good find of the day - **six inch long flower tassels covering a shrub of Garrya elliptica (Silk-tassel Bush)** in a roadside garden. If you are not familiar with this distinctive shrub see [RHS page on Garrya elliptica](#). Later in my walk I found another bush in flower.

Heading home along Third Avenue in Denvilles **two pairs of Herring Gulls were noisily staking their claims to rooftop nest sites** on the south side of the road roughly opposite the junction with Fourth Avenue. This reminds me that there is probably much more gull nesting activity starting now at the north end of New Lane, both on the factory rooftops between Downley Road and the railway (best viewed from the footbridge over the railway accessed from the south end of Downley Road) and the factory buildings west of the big Colt factory on the west side of New Lane.

My last stop before reaching home was in Havant Cemetery where I found that the **Holocaust Memorial garden** had been tidied up in preparation for the annual civic Holocaust Commemoration that takes place on January 27 each year (perhaps this year we will also be thinking of future horrors to be inflicted on the world by Donald Trump's inauguration?). One flower blooming in the memorial garden was the **first Christmas Rose (Helleborus niger)** that I have seen. For a photo of this plant see [Christmas Rose flowers](#).

Today's news from the internet started with a sighting yesterday of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in trees across the road from the car park at the east end of the Stansted Main Avenue. Today an even greater rarity among Hampshire birds, a **Willow Tit**, was singing in the Hannington area of north Hampshire between Basingstoke and Kingsclere. Commoner birds of interest today were a **Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming** at Marwell Zoo and two more of them heard at Colden Common on the west side of the Zoo. Also today **all four Cattle Egrets** were still at Warblington.

**[Mon 16th January](#)**

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

**Herring Gull 'paddling' wet grass and my second Goat Willow catkins in Havant, Serin singing in Newhaven and Crested Caracara seen again near Lewes while 1200 Barnacle Geese arrive in the Netherlands.**

After a decidedly damp morning the rain stopped after lunch encouraging me to take a brief walk round Havant durig which I noticed that a second **Goat Willow was opening it's 'Pussy Paw' catkins** in The Twittens, south of East Street. Of more interest was an **adult Herring Gull** on the grass covered mound beside the old Havant Mill Pond east of the traffic lights at the busy junction of Park Road South and Solent Road. This bird was doing something that I had seen it doing several days ago - what I can best describe as 'running on the spot'. It was

**drumming on the grass very rapidly with both feet.** I had heard of this behaviour occurring several years ago in Southampton, also in the rain, and was told that the gulls were causing worms to come to the surface by making them believe that it was raining heavily. Presumably if many gulls have learnt to do this in more than one area, and have continued to do it for several years, the technique must work and must reward the gulls with plenty of worms to eat. To see this technique in practice, and to see that it does bring up worms for the gull to eat, see [You Tube film of a Herring Gull drumming up worms.](#)

Back at home the SOS website caught my attention with news that the male Serin, which was regularly seen in the Newhaven area in December and was heard singing on Dec 24, was singing again today. The SOS website also belatedly reported that the Crested Caracara which had been seen in the Lewes area on Dec 3 was seen again at the nearby Plumpton Agricultural College on Jan 7. If you missed the background info that I supplied in my Blog on Dec 4 I will repeat it here:- "Dec 3 also brought a sighting and photo of a **Crested Caracara** from East Chiltington, a few miles north of Lewes. The photo can be seen at [Crested Caracara photo](#) and information about this species can be found at [Crested Caracara facts.](#)"

There are plenty of feral Barnacle Geese resident in this country but it might be worth keeping an eye lifted for flocks of these geese flying over southern England in the next month or so as **Trektellen today reported the arrival of 1261 wild Barnacles in the Netherlands** where they regularly winter. Wikipedia tells us that there are three separate populations of these geese as follows:

Breeding in eastern Greenland, wintering on the Hebrides of western Scotland and in western Ireland. Population about 40,000.

Breeding on Svalbard, wintering on the Solway Firth on the England/Scotland border. Population about 24,000. Breeding on Novaya Zemlya, wintering in the Netherlands. Population about 130,000.

A new fourth population, derived from the Novaya Zemlya population, has become established since 1975 breeding on the islands and coasts of the Baltic Sea (Estonia, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden), and wintering in the Netherlands. Population about 8,000.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JANUARY 9 - 15 (WEEK 02 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 15th January**

#### **A colourful fungus in Brighton, a lone Swallow at Portland and our first spring migrant fleeing from the frost of Europe.**

With little colour in the local landscape at present I was pleasantly surprised to see photos of a bright **Cobalt Crust fungus** found by Graeme Lyons in a small urban nature reserve in the Brighton area this week. To read Graeme's account of his visit to this Deneway reserve and to see his photo of the fungus go to [Lyons Den blog](#). If you read his full blog entry you will see that 'Pan Species listing' requires Graeme to include 'Human' in the list of species he recorded for the site!

For more on the Cobalt Fungus see [Cobalt Crust fungus 1](#) and [Cobalt Crust fungus 2](#).

Two more recent surprise items of wildlife news came firstly from Portland, where **a lone Swallow flew over on Jan 13** (the first I am aware of anywhere in the UK so far this year), and secondly from East Soar in Devon on Jan 14 where a **single White Wagtail was described as our first spring migrant** (though 'refugee from the frost currently blanketing Europe might be a more accurate description of its status').

Other bird species prominent in recent news start with **Glaucous and Iceland Gulls**. I do not remember hearing of any Glaucous Gulls in southern England until a single juvenile was reported at Cuckmere in East Sussex on Jan 12 and RBA announced a UK total of 51 reported Glaucous and 19 Iceland Gulls for that same day. Another first of the forthcoming spring arrivals was seen at Portland, also on Jan 12 - this time **a lone Manx Shearwater**.

Not firsts, but now arriving on the south coast in increasing numbers, have been **Waxwings**. The first small flock of 20 Waxwing passed north over Folkestone on Jan 8 when another 5 flew over Dungeness. After Sandwich had one on Jan 10 Beachy Head logged 15 on Jan 11 and Dawlish Warren in Devon had 9 on Jan 11. Here at **Warblington** Peter Raby tells us that 4 Cattle Egrets were still present today (Jan 15) and also provides us with a link to his summary of his 2016 sightings along the coast from Emsworth to Langstone - see [Peter Raby's 2016 patch summary](#).

To end today's snippets from the internet I see that the **unusual Stonechat** which has been attracting attention at Dungeness since November has recently lost its identity as a Stejneger's Stonechat as a result of some mistake in analysing the DNA from its droppings - we await a firm statement on what it should now be called.

### [Wed 11th January](#)

#### **Recent highlights from the internet starting with the death of the UK's first Red Footed Booby.**

At least 11 teams of Sussex Birders have now made their **New Year birdraces** with two of the teams seeing more than 100 species (108 and 102 respectively) and listing 137 species among their combined sightings. With 97 species seen Cliff Dean's 'Slow but sure' team is currently third after their 18km footslog around the Fairlight/Rye Bay area but the most interesting part of their report for me was the 'postscript' telling us that **the Red Footed Booby** which was found washed up on the beach at the St Leonards end of the Hastings shore on Sep 3, and then given lots of care at the local RSPCA Mallydams bird rescue site, had been deemed sufficiently recovered by mid-December to be flown back to Little Cayman in the Caribbean but on arrival had suffered a relapse and died on Dec 25th.

Two other bird species currently in the news are Waxwings and Auks. I have previously mentioned that a few **Waxwings** are now entering southern England

and on Jan 8 the numbers started to increase with a flock of 20 at Folkestone, followed today (Jan 11) by 15 over Beachy Head and 9 near Dawlish in Devon. **Mixed flocks of Guillemots and Razorbills** are currently heading west along the Channel with 1051 passing Brighton on Jan 10 and some 700 seen passing Selsey on Jan 11 after 900 Guillemots were seen checking out their nest sites on Berry Head in south Devon on Jan 8. Although not on the same scale the number of **Slavonian Grebes** wintering on the sea off Pagham Harbour reached a peak of 34 on Jan 4 and was recorded as 19 on Jan 8, 20 on Jan 10, and 17 on Jan 11.

Turning to **Butterflies** I see that four species have been seen flying so far this year. The latest was a male **Brimstone** at Southwick (between Brighton and Shoreham) on Jan 10 after several **Red Admirals** had been seen at Sussex sites. Elsewhere in England **Peacocks** had been seen in both Somerset and Wiltshire on Jan 1, and a **Small Tortoiseshell** was seen in Bedfordshire on Jan 4

To end this update there have been several reports of large numbers of **Corvids heading to an unnamed roost site** in the Fair Oak area east of Eastleigh and north east of Southampton airport. Peak numbers reported on the evening of Jan 10 are **6000 Jackdaws, 2000 Rooks and 120 Magpies**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JANUARY 2 - 8 (WEEK 01 OF 2017)**

### **Sun 8th January**

**Bats can be brightly coloured and the number of butterfly species seen in the UK this year is now up to three but the bird flu outbreak has now killed a few wildfowl at both Slimbridge and Abbotsbury.**

My only wildlife observation today was of a **Dunnock singing** near the Pallant car park here in Havant around midday (Dunnock were also heard singing by me on Jan 1 and 3) but a more significant bit of bird news came on the BBC News today and that was of a few **Mute Swans dying of Avian Flu at the Abbotsbury Swannery**. Following up that report the internet tells me that a few other wildfowl have also died at Slimbridge. Other cases of this new epidemic have been reported in England, Scotland and Wales during the past few weeks but it seems to have had more serious impact on the continent as I see that .."800,000 ducks and geese will be culled under measures announced by the French Government to halt the spread of bird flu. The slaughter will take place in the period up to January 20: the strategy is to kill the species most affected by the disease to date."

After updating this blog last night I did not have time to watch the BBC 2 programme on the wildlife of Thailand in full but a quick scan through it on the I Player gave me a glimpse of what seemed to be **an exotically coloured bat** but I failed to find out any details so today I asked Google to show me 'exotically coloured bat species' and it came up with the following photo - see **[Black and Orange bat](#)**. Sadly the website from which this image comes will not allow you to read about the species without signing up (and no doubt paying for the privilege) so I had to get brief details from another site which is selling framed taxidermy specimens to hang on your wall - at least this gives me a name .. **Painted Bat or Painted Woolly Bat** .. and tells me the species is found in Indonesia, roosts in the nests of Weaver Finches, and has a wingspan of 7 3/4 inches. While hunting for

the above details I also came across this photo of the [Giant Golden-Crowned Flying Fox](#) which is the world's largest bat with a wingspan of 5 feet - see [Giant Flying Fox](#).

Also seen on the internet today was news that three Butterfly species have already been seen on the wing in the UK this year - they are [Red Admiral](#) (several), [Peacock](#) (Somerset and Wiltshire) and [Small Tortoiseshell](#) (Bedfordshire). Details of other species will appear as they are reported to Butterfly Conservation on [First butterfly sightings for the UK in 2017](#). Returning to bird news I see [more Waxwings have been entering southern England](#) from the continent before heading north - today's reports are of 5 seen at Dungeness and 1 in the Plymouth area.

## [Sat 7th January](#)

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

### **First Blackbird song and Snowdrop flowers in Havant where a warmer day wakes Ladybirds from their winter sleep.**

During the morning I found [two Ladybirds on the move inside my house and helped them out of windows](#) in the hope that they will find new places to hibernate rather than exhausting their strength wandering around the house where they have little chance of finding food or drink for their spring 'breakfast'. After lunch I too went out for a walk during which I heard my [first Blackbird song of the year](#) and saw my [first Snowdrop flowers](#) in Havant Cemetery.

Back at home internet reports for today told me that [12 Purple Sandpipers](#) had been seen at Southsea Castle (I thought this was a record count for the site but a search of all reports of last year found counts of 11 on Nov 20 and 13 on Nov 23). Also reported today was a count of [200 Pintail at Farlington Marshes](#) but a similar search of last year's reports found counts of 235 there on Dec 16, 175 there on Nov 6 and 222 at Blashford in Jan 2016.

Reports for yesterday (Jan 6) which I had not previously seen included a single [Waxwing](#) passing Overton near Basingtoke and a single [Lesser Spotted Woodpecker](#) on Catherington Down. Nearer Havant [Bearded Tits were heard 'pinging' in the reeds around the Thorney Little Deeps](#). Another website which will be of interest to those wanting to know about the [Bugs and Spiders to be found in Sussex](#) is Graeme Lyons blog - see the entries for Jan 6 and Jan 2 by visiting [Graeme Lyons blog](#).

## [Fri 6th January](#)

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

### **Lesser Celandine and Witch Hazel now in flower and I find my first Redwings at Langstone plus news from the internet.**

A walk to Langstone this afternoon started with the eye-catching first flowers of a [Witch Hazel shrub](#) in a Grove Road garden - for a photo see [Witch Hazel tree flowers](#). Nothing more of interest until I was on my way home from Langstone Pond (where the pair of adult Swans still had four cygnets with them) and was

crossing the pony fields north of Wade Court where a small flock of maybe a dozen mixed Redwing and Song Thrushes were inconspicuously searching the grass - part of a recent invasion of the south coast which brought flocks of 60 to Selsey on Jan 1, another 60 to Milford (near Lymington) on Jan 3, and 30 to Warblington on Jan 4. Interestingly those seen at Selsey also had a good number of Song Thrushes with them. Having failed to see any flowers on the mass of Lesser Celandine leaves in Juniper Square I was delighted to find a single flower bud on the few plants growing on the bank of the Lymbourne stream a short distance south of the A27 bypass - this site often has the first flowers thanks to its sheltered location and to the fact that the water of the stream still retains some of the warmth of the underground spring at the south end of Lymbourne Road. So much for today's plant finds but I was also pleased with more 'first flowers' seen on Jan 4, starting with the Dog's Mercury in Pook Lane before crossing the southern fields of Warblington Farm en route from the Church Path to the shore just east of Conigar Point. The first find here was a clump of Smooth Hawksbeard still covered with flowers, followed by the tiny blue flowers of Field Madder and the daisy like flowers (large) of Scentless Mayweed together with the smaller flower of Scented Mayweed. On the shore there were still a few remnants of Tamarisk flowers. Heading home I found Field Woundwort in flower by the traffic lights on the north side of the Emsworth Road west of the the Southleigh Road junction and just before reaching the Meadowlands junction I was surprised to see the very early stages of Giant Polypore fungus growth on the tree stump where it has flourished for a good many years (though not in January). Finally for that walk I found Perennial Cornflower flourishing in the flower beds of the pub roughly opposite Wade Court Road.

Turning to recent bird news on the internet I see that the regular winter flock of Slavonian Grebes on the sea off Church Norton numbered an exceptional 34 birds on Jan 4 and that a Bittern had been seen at Chichester Ivy Lake on Jan 3. The peak count of 8 Cattle Egrets at Warblington on Jan 2 was repeated on Jan 3, but was down to 5 (with 2 seen across the water at Northney) on Jan 4 and seems to have returned to the Dec 26 count of just 4 on Jan 5 and 6. (Cornwall still holds the record for flock size with a single flock of 17 at Newquay on Jan 1.) Another exceptional count in the Emsworth area was of 76 Pintail along the western shore on Jan 3. On Jan 4 the expected large winter flock of Avocets in the Exe estuary was estimated to 400 on Jan 4 while back in Southsea there were 5 Purple Sandpiper at the Castle. Wintering Sandwich Terns numbered 5 at the mouth of Chichester Harbour on Jan 1 with 7 at Ryde on Jan 2.

Waxwings have been reported in flocks of 200 or more in southern Scotland since last autumn with regular sightings down the east coast to Norfolk but there have been few reports along the south coast until the New Year. Although one had been seen near Basingstoke on Nov 26 a report of 36 at Rye on Jan 4 seems to have marked the start of a small influx all along the south coast on Jan 5 with reports of ones and twos on that day from Burgess Hill in Sussex, Gosport in Hampshire and Plymouth in Devon so its worth keeping an eye open in places where any remaining berries might attract them.

Recent rarities have included an Eastern Black Redstart at Mousehole in Cornwall on Jan 1 and you can find out more about this subspecies at [Eastern](#)

[Black Redstart](#). Another rarity was a [Pine Bunting](#) seen in Shropshire on Jan 1 - for info on this see [Pine Bunting](#). The last bird I will mention here is [Lapland Bunting](#) of which there is a flock of 10 at Reculver on the north Kent coast. To end this update I have just one sighting of a [Red Admiral](#) for this year - one seen at Lavington Common in Sussex on Jan 5.

## [Tue 3rd January](#)

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

**.So far my 2017 species counts number a paltry 47 flowering plants and 43 birds against the 153 bird species reported in Hampshire and Sussex.**

The high spot of a short walk round Havant this morning was a [Kingfisher at the old Havant Mill Pond beside Park Road South opposite Solent Road](#). During the walk I again heard Dunnock song and my first Wren song. After lunch I entered all the Bird species reported during the first three days of the New Year on the HOS 'Going Birding' site into my new 2017 Spreadsheet and found that [137 species had been reported in the county so far this year](#). I then went on to do the same for Sussex, finding 16 species which had not been reported in Hampshire. Some of the 16 were probably not present in Hampshire (Tree Sparrow, Rose Coloured Starling, Bewick's Swan, Kittiwake, Razorbill, Taiga Bean Goose, Tundra Bean Goose, Scaup and Great Skua) but Sussex also reported Dunlin, Canada Goose, Snipe, Little Owl, Meadow Pipit, Starling and White Front Goose which are unlikely to have been absent from Hampshire so I do not regard the totals which I recorded as being a totally accurate account of the species present! One interesting sidelight on all this that the maximum number of [Black-Necked Grebe seen off the Hayling Oysterbeds](#) by Hampshire birders is reported to be 8 but when Bernie Forbes sneaked into the county from Sussex today he recorded 11 of them.