

RALPH HOLLINS WILDLIFE DIARY

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 16 - 22 (WEEK 29 OF 2018)

Wed 18th July 2018

**Today is my 87th Birthday
And as a present to myself
I am ceasing to update this Blog**

Although I am still in reasonably good health both my mental and physical abilities are dwindling with the result that I cannot cover as much ground as I would like and cannot remember the names of common species without searching through reference books and the internet.

So, to quote the Hitchhikers Guide to the Universe, all that remains for me to do now is to say "Goodbye and thanks for all the fish" ... I will not, however be heading into outer space, but will be staying in touch with the internet and will continue to enjoy all your observations and photos for which I must express my sincerest thanks for the reminders they bring of the pleasure I used to get at first hand from the natural world and which I will continue to enjoy at second hand for a few more years.

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 2 - 8 (WEEK 27 OF 2018)

Thu 5th July

**Heat, Football and Month End combine to take me offline
Nevertheless I have recorded 72 flowering plants to start my July list**

I see that it is now ten days since I managed to upload a blog entry. The primary reason for this delay has been heat exhaustion starting with what I thought would be a pleasant walk on June 29 north up Church Road to the Havant Road roundabout, over the field path to the Maypole Inn, returning via the Mill Rythe shore. Church Road gardens gave me **Black Nightshade** and **Flowering Nutmeg** (*Leycesteria formosa* aka **Himalayan Honeysuckle**) - see [photo](#) - and the start of the field path gave me **Great Willowherb** - see [photo](#) - but crossing the two large fields required the stamina of a Cross-Channel swimmer as the 'path' was waist high in weeds and the crops (one of Barley, the other of Broad Beans) were of a similar height.

On the Mill Rythe shore **Common Sea Lavender** was flowering along the tideline and both **Lucerne** and **Chicory** had flowers along the higher ground with **Fleabane**, **Hawkweed** **Ox-tongue**, and **Russian Vine** all found before reaching the school entrance. Most of these are still to be added in July.

June 30 was devoted to rest and recovery as was July 1 but on July 2 a walk to the beach brought my total up to 58 species including **Great Mullein**, **Wood Sage** (which I did not expect on Beachlands) and my first **Prickly Lettuce** flowers - see [webpage](#). One of my last finds was a lovely pink **American Tamarisk** or **Salt Cedar** called **Tamarix Ramosissima** in a small Elm Close garden - see [webpage](#)

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 25 - JULY 1 (WEEK 26 OF 2018)

Mon 25th June

A long, hot walk adds 8 plant species to my flowering list bringing my June total to 155 species

How to buy you own Kookaburra for £500.

Today I walked down to Hayling Bay, then west to Sinah Common, coming home via Hayling Park and along St Mary's Road. The first new plant I saw flowering in Mengham was **Verbena Bonariensis, standing a metre tall in at least one garden - see [here](#). Two more species to look for now are Gatekeeper and the Essex Skipper** (the one with the black tips to its antennae).

I'll end today with **Grey Squirrels** about which I learnt something that surprised me. I was checking when Grey Squirrels were introduced to Britain from America and a piece in the Daily Telegraph told me they arrived here in the 1870s and went on to say that in 2010 a man was fined £5000 for cruelty to animals under the Animal Welfare Act of 2006. It seems he was so angry at Squirrels stealing food he had put out for the birds that he caught and drowned one. Another victim of this act caught several Squirrels and released them at a distance from his garden - in both cases had the Squirrels been shot there would have been no penalty as that is such a kind way to kill them!

My original interest in the Squirrels had been roused by a photo of an **albino Grey Squirrel** which appeared on John Goodspeed's regular weekly Nature Notes posters which he distributes widely in the Portsmouth area and from which I have learnt that there is a population of pure white Squirrels that has been living in the area for ten years or more. I have also heard of a similar population of all black squirrels, growing in number since they were first seen in 1912 and now present in a substantial area of East Anglia. Today I learnt from the Telegraph that these are now thought to be unrelated to the Greys but originated from a menagerie of exotic animals touring East Anglia 100 years ago and now outnumbering the Greys in parts of that area.

Wildlife diary and news for June 11 - 17 (Week 24 of 2018)

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

Fri 15th June

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

Five new plants for my June list

House Martins are nesting just across the road

A White-cheeked Turaco seems to have been resident in the Emsworth area for the past three months

Summer butterflies including Silver Washed Fritillary start to appear

A local walk on Wednesday June 13 added **Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil, Pellitory of the Wall, Common Fumitory, False Acacia, and 'Cocks Eggs' (Salpichroa Organifolia, Sinah Common's special Nightshade)** to my June and year list. Here are photos of both the False Acacia tree which I found a specimen in Hayling Park - see [here](#), - and for the Cocks Eggs (Salpichroa organifolia), which is well

established opposite the southern end of Staunton Avenue, see [here](#). For more information about this plant see [here, but do not eat this plant as it contains poisons](#).

Last summer the House Martins which had a nest under the eaves of the 'Pullingers Interiors' shop across the road opposite the front entrance to my block of flats left me in no doubt as to their presence as they spent much of their time hunting insects round the trees in the car park at the back of my flats and so were visible and audible from my windows. This summer the Martins are back (I have seen them at their nest on four occasions during the past two weeks) but so far they have not been seen from my windows so I guess their eggs have not yet hatched, and as their incubation only takes 16 days I am hoping their nest has not failed.....

Another bird that I am on the look-out for is a **White-cheeked Turaco** which has apparently been in the local area since March and which I was made aware of by the following entry posted on the Selsey Blog on June 12 .. "What appears to be a White-cheeked Turaco was photographed in a garden in Emsworth back in March, and it was photographed again in W Itchenor yesterday. Quite a bird, having seen some pics of it, so thought I'd let you guys know..... in case you get a description of green-bodied, purple-winged, red and white-faced crested pigeon thing! (PH)" In case this description does not remind you of what the species looks like here is a photo taken at random from the internet - see [link](#)

More news of birds that have been seen recently starts with a report of a **Great Bustard** (presumably from the Salisbury Plain re-introduction) seen at the wartime Holmesley airfield in the New Forest some 5 miles north east of Christchurch. Another bird not normally seen on the south coast in June is the **Black Guillemot** but on June 11 one was seen off Littlehampton at the mouth of the River Arun.

To end today we have the more expected news of **the emergence of summer butterflies**. For this I have taken the earliest June dates recorded on the Butterfly Conservation webpage for this year to give the following table.

June 1 - Ringlet in Derbyshire & Black Hairstreak in Oxon
June 2 - Dark Green Fritillary in Sussex
June 3 - Marbled White in Berks
June 6 - White Admiral in Dorset, Silver Studded Blue in Sussex, Large Blue in Soms
June 7 - White Letter Hairstreak in Sussex
June 8 - Grayling in Conwy
June 10 - Silver Washed Fritillary in Herts, Purple Hairstreak in Essex
June 11 - Gatekeeper in Devon
June 13 - High Brown Fritillary in Glams
June 14 - Small Skipper in Sussex

Wildlife diary and news for June 04 - 10 (Week 23 of 2018)

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

[Sun 10th June](#)

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

A walk round the Mengham and Eastoke areas adds 15 flowering plants to my June list

Today I headed for the Mengham sea wall, around the Fishery Lane holiday camp and onto the Eastoke promenade before heading home via the Hayling Bay shore and up Elm Grove. In St Leonards Avenue I found **Common Ragwort** in flower and along the path connecting St Margarets Road to Mengham Lane I found **Square-stalked Willowherb**. The pony fields along the path from Mengham Lane to Salterns Lane added **Corky Fruited Water Dropwort** (see [webpage](#)) and in Salterns Lane **Mock Orange (aka Syringa)** was in full flower - see [Photo](#).

On the Mengham sea wall I found **Wild Carrot, Hogweed and Hemlock** plus a single **Common Lizard** before coming on the colourful garden escape **Clematis tangutica** - see [webpage](#) - covering several Gorse bushes, and nearing the Fishery Lane campsite **Black Horehound** was in flower - see [Photo](#).

Coming out on Southwood Road I found a plant of **Caper Spurge** with flowers and seeds - see [photo](#) close to where I cut through to the Eastoke Promenade, passing a large bush of the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant (Lycium barbarum)** in flower - see [photo](#). Two more new plants seen in the shore grasslands were **Goat's Beard** (see [photo](#)) and **Hop Trefoil** (see [webpage](#)).

[Fri 8th June](#)

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

Twelve new plants in flower added to my June list include American Willowherb, Shining Cranesbill, Scented Mayweed plus Red Bottlebrush and Salvia 'Hot Lips'

Quail flying north up the Test valley and predatory Mink still active in Sussex

**Communal roost of 600 Jackdaws and a few Rooks near Romsey
Swifts start to arrive as Nightingales are feeding young**

A local walk round the Legion Field and Tournerbury Lane area on the warm, sunny evening of June 6 gave me my first **Creeping Buttercup** since January and a tall, narrow leaved Willowherb which met the description of **American Willowherb**. The shrubs around the Legion Field had **Japanese Honeysuckle** and **Field Rose** in flower. At the east end of Hawthorne Grove the roadside grass had a patch of **Scented Mayweed** and turning north up Beech Grove I could not miss the dramatic flowers of the **Red Bottlebrush (Callistemon citrinus)** shrub in one garden (see [photo](#)).

Turning west along Tournerbury Lane I found a new site for **Shining Cranesbill** and back at home I was successful in finding the name of a distinctive garden plant which I have seen in several gardens recently and which I find is a relative of the Wild Clary that has recently established itself here on Hayling. The botanic name is **Salvia microphylla** but which is known to the gardening trade as "**Salvia hot lips**" - have a look at its photo and you will see why - link [here](#). The San Francisco Botanical Garden website gives this background info on the plant ..

"Salvia microphylla (small-leaf sage) is an exuberant evergreen shrub from the Pine-Oak Forests of Mexico with flowers that are entirely red. The cultivar, 'Hot Lips' has flowers that are bi-colored, white with red on the bottom half of the lower lip. It flowers continuously if in full sun, from late summer through fall and can have a spread of six feet. It was first noticed by Dick Turner, in the garden of a housekeeper living in San Miguel de Allende in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, and was brought back as a cutting to the San Francisco Botanical Garden in 1999. Volunteers at the nursery propagated it, and after watching it develop its striking flowers gave it its racy name. Its beauty, hardiness and drought tolerance has made it a winner among growers of Salvia. There are times when some of the individual flowers can be either all white or all red on the same plant. Dick Turner believes this corresponds to the age of the flowering branches."

At the end of recording these and other finds my count of flowering species seen in June stands at 118. While scanning the internet for other wildlife news I noted two current reports of **Mink** from East Sussex - one was attempting to take a wild Rabbit at Cuckmere Haven. Hopefully these Mink no longer pose a significant threat to the Water Vole population.

One report which surprised me was of **a night roost of some 600 Jackdaws**, plus a few Rooks, somewhere in the West Wellow area south of Romsey. At this time of year I would expect the majority of Jackdaws to be breeding so I wonder if this number of non-breeding birds is the result of an imbalance between the numbers of male and female Jackdaws or of a significant shortage of potential nest sites. Another bird species which hardly ever gets a mention in current bird reports and which I have neither seen or heard for two or three months is **Song Thrush**. Another species which has been giving birders concern recently over the low numbers being seen is the **Swift** but several recent reports (e.g 256 flying north up the Test valley in one hour on June 5) seem to show there is not a serious problem with their numbers this summer.

Wildlife diary and news for May 28 - June 03 (Week 22 of 2018)

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

Sun 3rd June

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

This update covers an evening walk over the Church Fields yesterday and a cycle ride to Gunner Point today

At the end of this third day of June my flower count for the month is 105 (23 being first for the year)

Best find yesterday was Basil Thyme in St Mary's churchyard

Best finds today were Bell Heather, Field and Sea Bindweed, Nottingham Catchfly, Sheep's Bit and Heath Groundsel

Notable by their absence were flowers on Gorse and all signs of Green Winged Orchids.

Yesterday evening I walked down St Mary's Road to just beyond South Road, then turned north through the Fathoms Reach housing into the open grassland of the Church Fields before coming home through St Mary's church yard, adding

16 flower species to my month list. On the north side of St Mary's Road the **Giant Viper's Bugloss** went on my list but the **Eastern Rosebud Tree** which I only identified as recently as May 26 had lost all its flowers so failed to make it this month. Walking on along the north side of the road I did find **Creeping Cinquefoil** and **Lesser Trefoil** before turning into the new housing where my first **Feverfew**, **common Honeysuckle** and the **bright yellow Welsh Poppy** were seen. Out in the acres of tall grass covering the uncultivated parts of the Church Fields I added **Common Sorrel** and **Broad-leaved Dock**, and saw many Thistles (none yet in flower). Outside the caravan park the great mass of **Charlock** had mostly gone to seed but still had plenty of flowers. In the churchyard I added my best find - **Basil Thyme** - see [photo](#).

Today my first new flower came as soon as I joined St Mary's Road outside Mengham Infant School - this was the first **Field Bindweed** of the year on the central division of the road. Cycling on west through West Town, I did not need to stop to be sure of the **Perennial Wall Rocket** which I described on May 26, and coming home along Hollow Lane I passed a plant of **Annual Wall Rocket**. From Station Road I turned down St Catherine's Road where I added a single bush of **Spanish Broom** to my list - see [webpage](#). Reaching the entrance to Sinah Gravel Pit from Ferry Road I did stop to see the distinctive pink flowers of **Tartarian Honeysuckle (*Lonicera tartarica*)** on the massive bush of it which confronts you as you turn off Ferry Road. Surprisingly there were no flowers yet but you can see three good photos [here](#) and I'm sure I will see them next time I pass (as I have for at least ten years!). Another plant which has covered this part of Sinah Common with its yellow flowers for the past few months is Common Gorse but today I think I only saw three flowers on the thousands of Gorse bushes I passed!

Reaching the open water of the Kench I added the first flowers of **Privet** to my list, and just after passing a little used gate into the Golf Course I found **Bell Heather** already flowering and further in to the Golf Course I could see the bright yellow of the **Tree Lupins** that are now in full flower. After the crowded car park along the harbour entrance I took the first entrance through the Tamarisks into the foothills of the Sand Dunes where I found the bright blue of **Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana*)** - see [here](#) and was surprised to see the tall skeleton of an **Asparagus** bush with its tiny yellow flowers - see [here](#). Back on the beach after rounding the sand dunes my first new flower was **Restharrow** - see [photo](#) and after that I found at least three plants of **Nottingham Catchfly** - see [webpage](#) poking their heads above some low Gorse bushes near the bench where I usually stop for refreshment. Unlike my recent visits there was not a trace of the Green Winged orchids but after leaving the Golf Course area, on the path between the western beachlands car park and the mini Golf Course, I saw the first flowers on **Heath Groundsel**.

[Fri 1st June](#)

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

**64 Plant Species to start my June list
And a very unexpected 'Dog Vomit' Slime Mould on Wood Chips in Bound Lane**

Today I walked to the Beachlands shore via the Health Centre carpark and Bound Lane, coming home via the Elm Close estate for a look at the large succulent/cactus which I am still unable to name. One of the first new flowers I saw was the white flowers of the **Australian Cabbage Palm (*Cordyline australis*)** - see the [Wildflowerfinder web page](#), but perhaps the most significant was the common **Hedge Woundwort** - see [photo](#).

In the Health Centre car park the biggest of our wild brambles (the '**Himalayan Giant**' - ***Rubus armeniacus***) was in flower - see [photo](#) - as was another 'hedgerow bully', the **Large Bindweed** - see [webpage](#).

Half way down Bound Lane I came on my first **White Bryony** for the year - see [webpage](#) but as I moved in for a close look I found a **much more exciting sight on a patch of wood chips which was a 15 cm squarish bright yellow patch of what looked like vomit**. I foolishly bent down to pick up a small sample and found it to be almost liquid but also revealed that the bright yellow 'skin' covered a pinky brownish inside. Back at home I soon came across a web page ([Link](#)) describing slime moulds in technical terms which did not mean much to me but at the end of the first section my attention was held by the sentence .. "The plasmodium of some slime fungi (*Fuligo*) can grow to the size of a large pizza." I then skipped the next two sections until I came to the heading .. "**Vomit Slime Mold: *Fuligo septica***" .. which told me .. "in its early stages this turns yellowish and feeds on wood chips" By now I was convinced that I had found a name and description of my find despite the somewhat light hearted approach of this scientific article which ends with a series of links such as "GO TO BIOLOGY GEE WHIZ TRIVIA PAGE".

A few more finds on the Beachlands grass and in gardens on my way home, including an unexpected **Marsh Thistle**, gave me a total flower species count of 64 for the day.

[Wed 30th May](#)

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

Summary of recent news from the internet

Bird news since May 19:

On May 19 a **Red-footed Falcon** was seen over Noar Hill in Hampshire and a **Honey Buzzard** over Sandwich on the Kent east coast. The falcon was a 'one off' but the Honey Buzzard was one of many now migrating to northern Europe where they will feed mainly on grubs taken from Bee and Wasp nests. On May 27 Trektellen reported them at 11 sites with peak counts of 79, 68, 37 and 29 at four sites in Belgium and Holland and a map on the Wikipedia page shows that the great majority of them are heading to northern continental Europe. To find out more about the species use this [link to Wikipedia](#) and for an indication of the 11 areas where they may breed in the UK use this [link to an RSPB webpage](#).

On May 24 the RBA (Rare Bird Alert) site said .. "The highlight of the day was the discovery of a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** in East Sussex at Rye Harbour." .. and highlights on the Selsey Blog were, on May 23, a visit by a **Bee Eater** (Photo [here](#).) and a heard but not seen **Golden Oriole** at Church Norton on May 25.

Also on May 24 Dungeness counted **104 Black Terns heading east** and on May 26 a group of **4 Barnacle Geese** were seen heading out to sea from Cuckmere Haven near Beachy Head, helping to confirm the impression expressed on the Portland website on May 22 when what was probably the same group were seen there and were thought to be genuine migrants heading for the Netherlands from eastern Europe which had overshot and were exploring the south coast of Britain.

May 25 brought the news that the first **Little Egret chicks** had hatched in some of the nests at Langstone Mill Pond near Havant. On May 26 Devon Birding reported **792 House Martins** heading north east up the Bristol Channel, seen from Ilfracombe, and on May 27 two **Black Winged Stilts** turned up at Rye Harbour but did not stay. May 28 brought sightings of **Rose Coloured Starlings** at several southern sites ranging from the Pevensey Levels in Sussex to Portland Bill where this photo was taken - see [here](#). A much rarer bird - a **Black-headed Bunting** - was also photographed there that day and can be seen [here](#).

Insect News since May 22

See my entry for May 22 on this blog for first sightings of Dragonflies on May 18 and 21 plus **instructions on how to see photos and other information about all dragonfly species** mentioned there and in today's update. To find similar information and photos of **UK Butterfly species** go to the Home Page of the UK Butterflies website at <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/index.php> (link to it [here](#)) and find the species name you are interested in by searching down the left hand panel in which the names are listed alphabetically within families (names of rare species appear in faint letters). Click on the species name you are interested in and that will take you to a page detailing all aspects of that species. E.g. to find the dates when you are likely to find the adult insect flying click the box saying 'Life Cycle' which will show you the likely dates for each stage of the life cycle and to get an idea of whether the place you found it was likely habitat click the box saying 'Habitat'.

For **similar information about Moths** go to <https://ukmoths.org.uk> (link to it [here](#)) and scroll down to the bottom right area of this home page to find a Quick Search Box in which you enter the species name and then click the Search Button. Here click one of the listed names to be taken to a page showing a photo of the moth plus basic info about it. At the foot of this page you will find more small photos which you can click to see them full size and at the end of these is a map which you can click to get distribution info.

Back to this year's news! On May 23 the very common migrant moth, the **Silver Y**, turned up at Portland and the first **Large Skipper** butterfly was seen at Compton on the IoW. May 23 brought the first **Common Darter** dragonfly out at Cadnam in the New Forest and the much less common **Red Veined Darter** was seen in Somerset.

For me the most interesting insect found in this period was the **Longhorn Beetle** found by the Havant Wildlife Group during a visit to Old Winchester Hill on May 26 and subsequently identified by Brian Fellows as the **Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle** (*Agapanthia villosoviridescens*) which I had never heard of before but is apparently widespread and increasing in moist meadows and

hedgerows in much of England where it is most likely to be found feeding on the flowers of Hogweed and Cow Parsley. It lays its eggs in the hollow stems of Hogweed and various Thistles. For photos of adults and grubs see this [webpage](#). The grubs feed inside the plant stems through the autumn and then pupate, emerging early next year as adults with bodies up to 22mm long, plus antennae of a similar length. Although the adult beetles spend much of their time feeding on flowers they all have wings hidden under the rigid elytra which cover the top of their bodies. When the beetle needs to move (to get to flowers or to search for the opposite sex) the elytra spring apart and are held at 90 degrees to the body, allowing the flexible wings to unfold and carry them through the air.

May 27 brought reports of several new insect species. First was a rare **Lesser Emperor** Dragonfly seen in Somerset. Next came the distinctive **Golden Ringed Dragonfly** in the New Forest where the first **Scarce Blue-tailed Damsel** was also seen. Much more exciting was a report of a **Large White-faced Darter** at Landguard in Suffolk. At first I was puzzled as, while a White Faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia dubia*) appears in the BDS species list the 'Large' species does not but I eventually tracked it down and found that *Leucorrhinia pectoralis* had only been found three times before in the UK (the last sighting being also at Landguard in 2012). Information on this species can be found on Wikipedia - see [here](#).

Just four more species were seen on May 28. The first was the common **Meadow Brown** butterfly seen at Newhaven, the other three were all dragonflies. First of these was the **Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)** seen here in Hampshire at Christchurch - the other two were seen in the Scottish Highlands - the **Northern Emerald and the Black Darter (which is not restricted to the north but can be seen as far south as the New Forest)**.

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APR 23 - 29 (WEEK 17 OF 2018)

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

[Wed 25th April](#)

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

**Three species of dragonfly and three more butterflies now on the wing.
Hirundines start to arrive in force along with the first Pom Skuas (and Bee Eaters may be on their way)**

Three orchid species now flowering and a new issue of British Stamps

As the list of new summer bird migrants starts to tail off so the list of Damsel and Dragonflies gets under way with first sightings of **Hairy Dragonfly** in Kent on Apr 20 and the first **Banded Demoiselle** on Apr 22 following the **Large Red Damsel** on Apr 4 (after a newcomer to Britain - a Marsh Bluetail from Senegale - appeared from a Turtle Tank in Wales on Mar 25). Ignoring the latter species here are photos to remind you what these insect look like: for the Large Red Damsel see

[here](#); for the Banded Demoiselle see [here](#); and for the Hairy Dragonfly see [here](#). For the home page of the British Dragonfly Society giving you access to latest sightings (under 'News & Events') and full id info on all species (under Dragonflies) go to [this page](#).

Butterflies are also increasing in number of species with the first **Wall Brown** aka 'Wall' seen at Portland on Apr 20; the first **Small Copper** at Dungeness on Apr 21; and the first **Dingy Skipper** seen somewhere in Sussex also on Apr 21.

Reminders of what they look like can be found by going to the full list of all British species and clicking on the species name [here](#). While on this page you can also use it to get info on Moth species by clicking on the 'Butterflies and Moths' tab in the page header line and selecting 'A-Z of moths'.

Several people have recently commented on the low numbers of summer migrant birds they have seen so far, particularly the few hirundines, but that now seems to be changing with a report of 400 mixed hirundines over the Blashford lakes on Apr 24. This flock included at least 50 Swifts and on the same day 60 House Martins were seen over the Fishlake reserve on the northern edge of Romsey in the Test Valley. Another bird eagerly anticipated at Selsey by contenders for the crown of 'Pom King' is the **Pomarine Skua** of which the first of the year was reported at Dungeness on Apr 22 with two more reports (which may have been the same bird) on Apr 24 when one was seen at Portland and another at Seaford in Sussex. Not yet seen in Britain is the **Bee Eater** which always attracts a lot of attention when it does arrive - a report on Trektellen of 515 seen in Corsica on Apr 24 suggests that they are on their way.

In addition to the mass of **Green Winged Orchids** now flowering at Gunner Point on Hayling the first five **Early Spider Orchids** were seen at Beachy Head on Apr 22 and on Apr 23 the first **Early Purple Orchids** were flowering in Warnham Nature Reserve at Horsham. For a photo of an Early Purple showing its blotched leaves and woodland habitat [see here](#) and for some of the many names for this species ("Priest's Pintel" was new to me) see [here](#). The Early Spider Orchid is uncommon in Britain but grows on chalk at several south coast sites from Kent to Dorset. The photos I have chosen to illustrate it were taken in France but include one (the last in the series) of an '**Ant-lion**' species that I had not come across before (and am unlikely to do so in England!). For this see [here](#).

While thinking about plants I had another look at the **BSBI News website** (<http://bsbipublicity.blogspot.co.uk/>) and picked out a story about a **new issue of six British Postal Stamps that became available on Apr 19 and illustrate wild species which have been re-introduced to Britain after becoming extinct in the wild**. The species are Osprey, Large Blue butterfly, Beaver, Pool Frog, Sand Lizard and Stinking Hawks-beard (*Crepis foetida*). The last of these has been re-introduced to coastal shingle at Dungeness and Rye Harbour and appears on the £1.55 stamp which you can see [here](#).

[Mon 23rd April](#)

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

This entry covers two days. On Sunday Apr 22 I walked north to Mill Rythe, then followed Manor Road south to Higworth Lane, and came home across the Church fields. On Monday Apr 23 I walked south west to circle Sinah Common and come home from the Beachlands grass.

Sunday gave me ten new plants including Herb Robert, Spotted Medick and Thyme-leaved Speedwell plus my first Swallow and several Speckled Wood butterflies

Monday gave me Wall Speedwell, Ribwort Plantain, Round-leaved Cranesbill and a new site for Early Forget-me-not

On Sunday I took the path north along the west side of Tournerbury Golf Course from Tournerbury Lane to Mill Rythe, along which at least half a dozen **Speckled Wood butterflies** were enjoying the sunshine in which a **Buzzard** glided south and a single **Swallow** flew north. On the ground I noted my first **Lilac** and **Yellow Corydalis** flowers in gardens and **Herb Robert** in several uncultivated places.

On the north side of the roundabout where Church Road and Manor Road start and Havant Road ends the roadside grass had a mass of **Spotted Medick** and I also found my first **Thyme-leaved Speedwell**. Nothing new noted until I turned into Higworth Lane to follow the path through the Caravan Park where trimming of the hedges had caused **Hawthorn bushes to open many of their flowers**. Crossing the Church Fields I found the many buttercups had at last folded down their sepals to allow me to be sure they were **Hairy Buttercups**.

In St Mary's church grounds I was greeted by a **Norway Maple** in full flower and before reaching home I had seen the first of several **Bay Trees** in flower and added **Charlock** and **Prickly Sow-thistle** to my list. I had also noted several **Arum (Lords and Ladies)** unfurling their spikes.

On Monday I walked west to Hayling Park but took a new route around its east and south sides, finding not only a fresh showing of **Annual Mercury** and the delicate catkins of several **Pedunculate Oaks (Quercus Robur)** but also my first **Wall Speedwell** showing its tiny blue spikes of unopen flowers. From the south west corner of the Park I took the exit leading south to Bacon Lane which I followed west to Staunton Ave and then headed south to Sinah Common to walk west through the golden mass of Gorse. Here I found **Ribwort Plantain** in flower before reaching the access road to the Inn on the Beach. Crossing this road just north of the access road to the Mini Golf Course I found several plants of **Round-leaved Cranesbill** in flower, confirming their identity by the broad circle of white in the base of each flower below the pink tips of the petals.

I now followed the boundary of the Mini Golf Course west to the boundary of the real Golf Course where I turned south and then east around the 'Pitch and Putt' course. Along this eastward section much **Thrift** was now in flower and when the gorse closed in on both sides of my path I started to see clumps of **Sea Campion** in flower but saw no sign of the rarer Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) which used to grow here many years ago. I now re-crossed the road to the Inn on the Beach with the intention walking on along the edge of the shingle beach south of the beach huts but before reaching those huts, while still close to the 'bike park' in which young cyclists hone their skills of jumping and balancing on their bikes, I

found a new to me patch of **Early Forget-me-not** in the very short grass at my feet. That was a good find, but the only new plant that I saw before reaching home.

Wildlife diary and news for Apr 16 - 22 (Week 16 of 2018)

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

Sat 21st April

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

This entry covers both a ride up the Billy Line from West Town Station to Langstone Bridge in hot sunshine on Friday, Apr 20, and a ride to the Gunner Point area on a cloudy but dry Saturday.

On Friday the new plants were Greater Stitchwort and English Scurvygrass plus a mass of Oil-seed Rape flowering in the fields and the annual sight of a Pear Tree flowering alongside the old rail line, presumably the result of a Pear core being thrown out of a train window

I also saw my first Orange-tip butterflies and heard the song of a Lesser Whitethroat (sounding very similar to the calls of Whimbrel passing over Langstone Harbour

On Saturday I not only found 40 Green-winged Orchids already in flower but also found Spring Beauty, Early Forget-me-not, Spring Vetch, Bur Chervil and at least five other species

Friday's ride up the Billy Line started with a good show of **Greater Stitchwort** and the expected show of white from **English Scurvygrass** in the saltings as I neared the Oysterbeds. Everywhere there was lots of **Common Dog Violet** and my first sight of **Bracken** standing tall and unfurling its leaves. There was also plenty of Bird song including my first **Lesser Whitethroat** whose repetitive rattle sounded very similar to the distant 'seven whistles' of **Whimbrel** passing over Langstone Harbour at the same time.

Saturday was cooler with no direct sunlight but was more rewarding in the way of flowers starting with a brief glimpse of the orange pink of **Tartar Honeysuckle** as I passed the driveway into the Sinah Gravel Pit (it grows on the west side of the metal archway over the entrance to the area and when in full flower looks like [this photo](#)). I did not stop for this but as I was passing The Kench I was stopped by a sight that I was not expecting here, the first flowers of **Spring Beauty (Claytonia perfoliata)** for which I have found [this photo](#). While looking at these plants growing on the west side of the gateway into the golf course opposite The Kench I noticed some much smaller Forget-me-not type flowers growing less than a couple of inches high around the low wooden stakes designed to stop cars parking on the narrow grass roadside - these were **Early Forget-me-not (Myosotis ramossisima)** which can be seen in [this photo](#). A little further on, before turning off the Ferry Road, I saw a plant of **Bur Chervil** which was already in flower - although of the same family as Cow Parsley the smaller, more compact and yellowish plants with much smaller flowers make it easy to distinguish then - see [this webpage](#).

Only now did I turn into the harbour entrance carpark where I saw just one example of **Hedge Mustard** near the cafe - for a photo see [here](#). My next stop was after passing the sailing club, using the first break in the Tamarisks to reach a sheltered grassy area shielded by Tamarisks on the seaward side and, on the landward side, the first remnants of the sand dunes which build up further south (though attempts to preserve them from erosion by fencing them off with six foot high wire fences have been unable to stop the determined onslaught of holiday makers, principally those seeking secluded places to practice nude sunbathing. Here, in the foothills of the sand dunes, I always look for the tiny **Spring Vetch** (*Vicia lathyroides*) which stands less than an inch high, and today I was successful in finding three flowering plants of which [this photo](#) may give you some idea.

Returning to the open beach I continued round the south-west corner of the Golf Course and headed for a bench, near some small trees close to the Golf Course boundary fence, where I usually stop for refreshment. This bench is in the centre of a large area in which thousands of **Green-winged Orchids** will flower in May but already I was able to count 40 flowering spikes as I approached the bench - see [this webpage](#). Before leaving this area, while still heading east along the southern fence of the Golf Course and before reaching the 'kink' in the fenceline, I saw two flowers growing from the long grass at the foot of the Golf Course fence which gave me the strong impression that they were **Small Scabious** but I reserve judgement as this seems too early for that species. One last new flower of which I have no doubt came much later when I was back in Hollow Lane - this **Annual Wall-Rocket** - see its distinctive flowers and read about the nasty smell of its crushed leaves [here](#).

[Thu 19th April](#)

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

The hot weather of the past few days has produced a good list of notable sightings starting on Apr 16 the **hatching of the first Lapwing chicks** at Pett Level on the shore of Rye Bay. Also that day RBA reported the first **Penduline Tit** of the year in Hertfordshire and **a very fresh Painted Lady** was photographed at Folkestone - link [here](#). This was followed by sightings of **Clouded Yellows** (of which the first was reported in Devon on Apr 7) at Folkestone on Apr 17 and at Portland (with another in Kent) on Apr 18. On Apr 19 the first **Green Hairstreaks** appeared at two sites in Sussex.

On Apr 17 bird news included the first **Turtle Dove** in Sussex, a **Dotterel** in Norfolk and a **Greater Spotted Cuckoo** in Kent (if you want to know what that looks like see [here](#)).

On Apr 18 a male **Golden Oriole** was seen in the Plymouth area and the first **Spotted Flycatcher** was flying in to the Isle of Wight and at dusk Jason Crook watched **48 Black-tailed Godwits** heading high north east over Portsdown Hill towards Iceland. Lastly on Apr 19 the first passage **Wood Sandpiper** was at Pulborough Brooks and **2 Swifts** were seen over Uckfield - not the first which I have as 2 Swifts over Hastings on Mar 29 followed by two over Mersyside on Apr 4 and one over Alresford on Apr 11.

Tue 17th April

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

The past week has seen our harbours emptying of **Brent Geese** (a report of 579 heading east past Seaford Head on Apr 15 was probably the last such count for this spring) and our coastal waters bringing more reports of **Terns** (large numbers of Common and Sandwich Terns are now here and **the first Little and Black Terns** are passing along the coast). At the same time our resident breeding birds are beginning to show signs of getting on with their job - the **first Mallard family of 8 ducklings** has been seen on a Southampton Park lake and **a family of 7 Black Swan cygnets** is now to be seen on the Ivy Lake at Chichester, while the **Mute Swans which had laid 8 Eggs** in an Emsworth nest and lost them all to high tides are already building a second nest near to the first while **the Langstone Mill Pond pair of Swans**, while protected from flooding by the seawall around their pond may have lost one egg to an inquisitive Mallard poking around in the nest before the Pen swan had finished laying her full clutch and settled down to full time incubation (their way of ensuring that all the eggs, which have to be laid one per day, all get the same amount of incubation and thus all hatch out within a day). Back on Apr 12 the **Little Egrets** were already busy with their nests near the North Wall of Pagham Harbour but those intending to nest at Langstone had not started to do so. Now, on April 17, at least 6 nests are already occupied at Langstone and around 10 more pairs are showing a strong interest in acquiring nests.

Other birds of interest have been seen in Devon and Cornwall in the past week including three species of **Heron (Night, Purple and Squacco)** plus **Alpine Swift, Red-rumped Swallow and a Sub-alpine Warbler**. Several Hoopoes have turned up on this side of the Channel (including this one which arrived at Portland on Apr 15 to show off to gathered photographers - see [here](#)) and the list of 'first arrivals' includes the first **Garden Warbler** at Portland on Apr 16 and the first **Black Tern** at Dungeness on Apr 15. Locally our first **Little Tern** was seen passing Sandy Point on Apr 6 after 5 had been seen together at Stokes Bay on that day but the first seen in this country was in Cambridgeshire on Apr 4. Two other unexpected appearances deserve a mention - first is a **Black Kite** seen over Crowborough on Apr 16 and the second was a **Reeve's Pheasant** seen on Graffham Down the same day - see the photo [here](#).

Turning to Insect news there is a late report of the first **Green Veined White** butterfly seen in Sussex on Apr 3 plus two more timely reports of a **Grizzled Skipper** at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 14 and the one we have all been waiting for, **Orange Tip**, which appeared in both Hampshire and Sussex on Apr 14 but was first reported in Somerset on Apr 3. There is also an early report of a **Painted Lady** at Folkestone on Apr 16 (following an isolated sighting of one in Sussex on Mar 6).

Two other insect reports deserve a mention. One comes from Chris Bentley at Rye Harbour and **features a blind, colourless type of Woodlouse which spends its life searching for and eating Ant droppings in the bottom of Ant nests**. Most of us are unlikely to ever see one of these but its good to know they are there to do the equivalent of 'cleaning up after your dog' and in case you do ever see one you

should be grateful to Chris for telling you these creatures are not real ghosts and mean you no harm. You can see Chris' photos with his short article [here](#). The other report comes from the Reculver section of the Kent OS website which reports that on Apr 16 some **20 Black Oil Beetles** were seen along a short section of the North Kent shore. Here is a link to their photo of one of these beetles - see [here](#) - and if your appetite to know more about this group of beetles has been whetted here is a link to a Buglife id guide to [the Oil Beetle life cycle](#).

I started writing this on Apr 17 but did not finish it that day so it is now Apr 18 so I will limit further delays and end with a brief account of this afternoon's walk during which I added the following to my month list of flowers on my way to the southern end of Staunton Ave, then back across the east end of Sinah Common and home via the Elm Close Estate. On my way out I saw **Sweet Alison** and the first flowering of **Garlic Mustard**. In Bacon Lane I found **Yellow Archangel**, then on Sinah Common I added **Doves Foot Cranesbill, Sheep's Sorrel, and lots of Sticky Mouseear**. Back at home, listening to the Channel 4 TV News, I was delighted to hear **live Nightingale song from Kent**, even if the news story concerned the likelihood that when we leave European protection of our countryside house building is very likely to take precedence over the protection of habitat for wildlife that has already been brought to the verge of extinction by human activity..... Another bonus from the TV this evening came at the end of the 'Britain in Bloom' programme on BBC 2 at 6:30 featuring Shrewsbury -almost at the end of the programme we were shown **a live, wild Night Heron** which suddenly appeared in full view on the mass of flowers in a public park.

Wildlife diary and news for Apr 9 - 15 (Week 15 of 2018)

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

Sat 14th April

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

A long walk gives me 12 new flowers, 3 butterflies, Brown Tail moth caterpillars and lots of bird song

On what turned out to be the best day of the spring so far I set out with the limited objective of identifying the **large tree with yellow flower spikes and pinnate leaves** that I had seen yesterday in a garden close to my home but too distant from the nearest access to see clearly. Today I brought my binoculars and the detail that I saw enabled me to name the tree as a Mimosa called **Acacia Dealbata** which I find can grow to a height of around 50ft, much taller than the young Mimosa trees I had seen in Havant in the past. While in the 'Legion Field' from which I had been studying the Mimosa I also found one of the Buttercups which had puzzled me recently by looking like either Bulbous or Hairy Buttercups but not having the downturned sepals which both those species should have and so forcing me reluctantly to decide that they were Meadow Buttercups. Today the sepals were downturned and what's more the whole plant showed the hairiness that allowed me to name it as a **Hairy Buttercup** - I hope that the same will prove to be true of the many Buttercups in the Church Fields and on the Beachlands grass when they have had the same length of time to 'mature'. Before leaving the Legion Field

area and heading south on the rather muddy footpath to the Mengham House area I found two flowering plants of **Wild Radish** (one with white flowers, one with yellow) to add to my list of 'firsts' and nearby I found another first, a **Holly Tree** liberally covered with unopened flower buds - later in this walk I found two more.

At the southern end of the muddy path I came on my first two sheathed spikes of **'Lords and Ladies'** (**Arum maculatum**). No more finds till I was nearing the east end of Salterns Lane and on the roadside grass at the junction with Salterns Close I found a sunlit patch of **Ground Ivy** and outside one of the nearby houses were two flowering specimens of **Snakes Head Fritillary**. Taking the narrow path leading to the Mengham Rythe seawall I found a patch of **Wavy Bittercress** plants.

Nothing new along the seawall but as I was nearing the Fishery Lane Holiday Camp area I noticed incipient flower buds on well grown plants of Hoary Cress and after crossing the neck of land to come out on the Fishery Creek shore I began to see long reddish catkins on the ground but could not see the trees from which they had fallen until I came on a small forest of trees which looked as if they were dead, covered with long grey catkins and having whitish bark similar to, but not having the slender upright stance of a birch. Back at home I soon established that these trees were not dead but were normal for **Aspen trees** which I have never come across before at this stage of their spring flowering. Moving on towards the head of the creek after passing the lake the water's edge below the path I was on became crowded with a mass of white blossom which I assume was **Common Scurvygrass** rather than the English Scurvygrass which is the only species other than Danish Scurvygrass that I have ever come across.

Before leaving the Holiday Camp area I had a close view of a single **Small Tortoiseshell** butterfly to add to the **Peacock** I had seen near the Sailing Club and the assumed **Small White** seen distantly earlier in the day. Trudging home from Eastoke Corner, near the roadside pavement of the Beachlands grassland between Bound Land and Webb Lane, I stopped for a close look at the **many 'nursery tents' of Brown tail moth caterpillars** which up to today had seemed totally lifeless (and too tatty and wind battered to support any life) and saw at least one minute caterpillar moving inside one of the tents. So far there is very little greenery growing on the bushes over which the tents are strewn but I suspect that the coming week of warm weather will see many caterpillars 'rising from the dead' to breakfast of the leaves that are now just starting to grow on these bushes.

Turning north to head home I had one more plant to add to my list, seen in a St Leonard's Avenue garden. I do not know its proper name but call it **'White Garden Oxalis'** as it seems closely related to the Oxalis family and has just started to open the many white flowers which thickly cover the otherwise barren front garden of this house.

[Fri 13th April](#)

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

Wood Warbler at Lodmoor and Wryneck in the Scillies on Apr 10
Swift over Alresford and Brambling singing at Eastleigh on Apr 11
50 Teal competing for a synchronous diving medal at Medmerry on Apr 12
and a Black Swan posing for a beauty prize with seven cygnets at
Chichester on Apr 13
First Large White butterflies seen at Brighton on Apr 11
Honesty flowering on Apr 11 and Cuckoo Flower on Apr 12
Water Vole seen near Pagham Harbour North Wall.

The first **Wryneck** of the spring was reported in the Scillies and the first **Wood Warbler** was at Lodmoor in Dorset, both on Apr 10. The first **Common Swift** had been reported from Merseyside on Apr 4 followed by 2 **Alpine Swifts** at The Lizard in Cornwall on Apr 5 but the first Common Swift in southern counties was not seen until Apr 11 at Itchen Stoke upstream of Alresford. Also on Apr 11 a **Brambling was heard singing** at the Eastleigh Lakes - this is a song I have never heard but as far as I can make out from the Xeno-Canto recordings it consists of repeated single 'wheezing' notes which you might mistake for a Greenfinch.

On Apr 12 **several pairs of Little Egrets were busy nest building** at Pagham Harbour Owl Copse and a flock of **50 Teal at Medmerry were putting on a show of synchronous diving** - the first time I have heard of them as diving but maybe they are getting ready to compete in the next Commonwealth Games? Also on Apr 12 the female **Black Swan which recently hatched 7 cygnets** at the Chichester Lakes was posing for a family photo which you can see [here](#).

The only new butterfly to emerge since my last post has been the **Large White** with two individuals appearing on Apr 11, one at Coldean Woods by the A27 north of Brighton and the other at Ferring, just west of Worthing. Also on Apr 11 I added a couple of flower species to my April list with **Honesty** flowering in St Mary's churchyard and the bright white flowers of **Clematis Armandii** climbing a tree in a South Road garden. Two more species went on my list on Apr 12 with the slender green flower buds of an **Ash tree** bursting out of their knobby black casings and the delicate catkins opening on a **Silver Birch**, while in Emsworth Brian Fellows found the much more attractive flowers of **Cuckoo Flower**. Sadly he did not have the pleasure of seeing the **Water Vole** which was reported from the North Wall of Pagham Harbour that day.

[Tue 10th April](#)

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

The first Nightingales are here and Turtle Doves are crossing the
Mediterranean
Swallows and Martins now being seen in hundreds
Little Egrets return to their nests and Rooks fight a rearguard action against
their decline
Holly Blues and Speckled Woods start to appear along with the first
Bluebells
I find a name for a shrub that has puzzled me for 50 years and a Beaver
takes a stroll along the Kent shoreline.

The first **Nightingale** was singing at Newhaven on Apr 5 and on Apr 9 Trektellen reported that 8 **Turtle Doves** had got past the guns on Malta and had reached Corsica. Other arrivals have been the first migrant **Common Sandpiper** on Portland on Apr 7, a **Savi's Warbler** at Eastbourne on Apr 8, and a **Woodchat Shrike** in the Scillies on Apr 9 (when I heard my first Blackcap 'singing in the rain' here on Hayling).

Also on Apr 9 **75 Swallows** were hawking flies over the Blashford Lakes and on Apr 10 **200 Swallows**, **100 House Martins** and **50 Sand Martins** were over the Brading Marshes on the Isle of Wight with a **Whitethroat** and a **singing Reed Warbler** in the vegetation. On Apr 8, before their numbers started to increase, one birder in Devon watched a **pair of Swallows flying round his garage**, where they have nested for the past 15 years, and concluded that they had reached their journey's end. An even more impressive piece of good news from Emsworth, where **Rook numbers have been declining since the 1980s**, was that four pairs had decided to put up a fight against eviction from the area and had built nests in the Nore Barn wood where they have not nested before. The only other Rookery in Emsworth only has 17 occupied nests this year, reflecting the continued decline. Another bit of news from the local area on Apr 10 is a report of the **first Little Egret returning to the Owl Copse nest site** behind the North Wall of Pagham Harbour - no such news of the expected 30+ Little Egret nests at the Langstone Pond site where the Grey Herons now have a new 12th active nest.

Two new butterfly species are now emerging: sometime last week, around Apr 8, the first Holly Blue was seen in Cosham at the southern foot of Portsdown and today (Apr 10) the first Speckled Wood was flying near Hailsham in Sussex (ignoring one unseasonal report from the London area on Jan 25). Another insect report of **Johann's Bibio**, a species I am not familiar with, came from Chris Bentley at Rye Harbour on Apr 9. For his report and photos click [here](#). For info on the **Colletes bees** which he also mentions see [here](#) - note that the term 'oligolectic' means that the insect only gathers pollen from the named plant.

Today I made a determined effort to find the name of a shrub which has grown in my garden hedge for the 50 years that I lived in Havant and has recently started to flower in other gardens here in Hayling. I have always assumed that the shrub is a species of Laurel, differing from Cherry Laurel only in having blotches of white on its green leaves and in having tiny brown flowers instead of long white flower spikes. For a photo of the standard **Cherry Laurel (Prunus laurocerasus)** see [here](#) and for its red, cherry like but very poisonous berries see [here](#). The plant which has puzzled me for so long is called **Japanese Laurel (Acuba japonica)** and you can read the article which solved my puzzle [here](#).

To end today here is a photo taken on the shoreline of Sandwich Bay of a totally unexpected **Beaver** strolling along the beach - see [here](#).

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 26 - APR 1 (WEEK 13 OF 2018)

Thu 29th March

**First Stone Curlew flies over the Isle of Wight
A Hooded Crow on the Kent Coast near Dover
Canada Goose with 'Angel Wings' in Devon
First Small Copper butterfly reported in Sussex on Mar 14**

The first **Stone Curlew** of the year was reported on Mar 27 flying north east over Lowtherville, part of Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. This brought back vivid memories of my first sighting, many years ago, of this enigmatic bird which flew in to the rubbish dump which then existed between Port Solent and the M275 heading down into Portsmouth. This large brown owl-like bird dominated the sky as it flew low overhead, then vanished from sight as it settled into a heap of rusting car exhausts to rest after its cross channel journey. That day also brings back memories of **seven sunlit Garganey** also resting on the lake at the foot of the rubbish heap after completing the same journey.

Another bird bringing back memories of my schooldays at Canterbury in the late 1940s is the **Hooded Crow** which was a fairly regular winter visitor to the north Kent coast at Whitstable where school friends used to take me to visit their parents and to do a spot of birding. One of these was reported on Mar 26 on the south Kent coast east of Dover.

Coming up to date the Devon Birding Website taught me two things in connection with a report of **a small subspecies of Canada Goose seen on the River Exe flowing through the centre of Exeter on Mar 28 suffering from 'Angel's wing'**. The first thing that I learnt was that this subspecies, which I knew as a 'Cackling Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis minima*)' was added to the British List in 2016 under the name Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) and the second was a description of the Angel's Wing deformity which affects various water birds that are fed with too much white bread - for a fuller description and a photo of the result see [here](#).

With nothing new reported on the Hampshire or Sussex Butterfly Conservation websites I turned to the BC National website's list of first reports of all butterfly species seen this year in Britain (at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/52/first-butterfly-sightings-2018.html>) which included a report of a **Small Copper seen in Sussex on Mar 14** this year which has not been mentioned on the Sussex site. This brings the number of butterfly species seen in Britain so far this year to 9.

Mon 26th March

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

**First Hobby in Hampshire on Mar 25 and another on Mar 26
First fledgling Chaffinch out in Sussex on Mar 25
Today Redwings were singing their 'goodbye' song but no Fieldfares were reported
First Wall Lizards seen at Shoreham Fort
An outburst of butterflies including 30+ Brimstones**

The **first Hobby** to reach Britain this year was seen near the mouth of the Beaulieu River in Hampshire on Mar 25 and another was reported (with slightly less confidence) at Bramshill in north Hampshire on Mar 26 though there have been no reports of any dragonflies for them to eat so far. An RSPB website tells me that they eat small birds as well as insects which may be bad news for the **first fledgling Chaffinch** which left it's nest in the Heathfield area of Sussex on Mar 25.

Yesterday I could find no reports of Redwing - today that has been reversed and no Fieldfares have been seen while some of the **Redwings reported were singing that chattering song** that is only heard when they are about to leave.

A dozen **Wall Lizards** were seen at Shoreham Fort on Mar 26 and one posed for a photo which you can see [here](#).

A slight increase in temperature has brought more butterflies with **a notable increase in the number of Brimstone** on the wing. One report from the Broadwater Warren nature reserve near Crowborough on Mar 26 said that there were so many there that the observer gave up counting after seeing 30 and this outburst even gave Brian Fellows one Brimstone in Brook Meadow at Emsworth.

Wildlife diary and news for Mar 19 - 25 (Week 12 of 2018)

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

Sun 25th March

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

**Redwings have left and Fieldfare are on their way
Brent leaving and Little Gulls arriving
First Swallows in Devon, another Willow Warbler singing and lots of
Chiffchaff now here
A second Common Tern for the year with more on the way
First Grass Snakes seen last week.**

500 Fieldfare were seen near Kingsclere in north Hampshire on Mar 23 and another 140 were seen to the east of Winchester on Mar 25 but the only reports of **Redwing** were of a lone bird at Beachy Head and another at Christchurch Harbour, both on Mar 24, giving the impression that these winter Thrushes are leaving us. A single female **Ring Ouzel** arrived in Devon on Mar 25 following another, also in Devon, on Mar 23.

Also hurrying to leave us are the **Brent Geese** with counts of 1900 passing Seaford on Mar 24 and 2300 seen passing Dungeness on Mar 24 and even more seen there on Mar 25. As the Brent flew east so the number of **Little Gulls** going west increased with 7 at Dungeness on Mar 23 and 31 at Seaford on Mar 24. Also on Mar 24 the second **Common Tern** of the year was flying east past Selsey Bill following the first seen at Seaford on Mar 15. Also on Mar 24 another was at Hayle in Cornwall and another was seen in the Netherlands.

The first two migrant **Willow Warblers** were reported by RBA in the UK on Mar 14 and one was singing at Fleet in north Hampshire on Mar 16 with another singing

in Romsey on Mar 25. Also starting to arrive were **Swallows**. One had been seen in Cornwall on Mar 17 and another was in Dorset on Mar 18 before one appeared at the Blashford Lakes on Mar 20 but we had to wait until Mar 25 for multiple reports with one in Devon backed by two singles in Belgium and Holland. By now Chiffchaffs are widespread.

I will end today with rather vague news on the Solent Reserves website that **Grass Snakes** were out of hibernation at the Hampshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Swanwick Nature Reserve (close to where the M27 crosses the River Hamble) sometime last week.

[Fri 23rd March](#)

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

**Green Alkanet, Garden Forget-me-not and Kerria japonica all go on my flower list and the first Wood Anemones are flowering in Waterlooville
First Tree Pipit of the year and first Ring Ouzel of the month in Dorset
First Common Lizard on the Downs at Lancing.**

A chilly walk to the Hayling Bay shore and back this afternoon rewarded me with my first **Green Alkanet** flowers in Webb Lane (photo can be seen [here.](#)) Also seen was my first **Kerria japonica** which I see has the English name '**Bachelor's Buttons**' (photo [here](#)) and I also saw some cultivated Forget-me-nots, while John Goodspeed has a report of the first **Wood Anemones** seen yesterday in Waterlooville.

The internet today told me of the first **Tree Pipit** seen at the Longham Lakes in Dorset with a **Ring Ouzel** elsewhere in the county - not the first for the year as what may have been wintering birds were reported on Jan 21, Feb 2 and Feb 18.

Other bird news was of the first egg being laid by the **Perigrines** nesting on Chichester Cathedral and of a **lone female Black Swan** at Chichester Marina who has built a nest but has no male partner. Three items of good news were a **Dartford Warbler** at the Farlington Marshes point field and of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming in the Arundel area plus a sighting of a **Willow Tit** in a wood south of the M3 in the Basingstoke area. Not such good news was a report of a **Mink** in the Folkestone area of Kent. Another report of interest was of the first **Common Lizard** on the Sussex Downs above Lancing where three Adders were also out of hibernation.

[Wed 21st March](#)

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

**I find my first Coltsfoot and Greater Periwinkle var oxyloba flowers on a trip up the Billy Line but see no Brent in Langstone Harbour but find a pair of Mute Swans thinking of nesting at the Oysterbeds
Devon reports the first Wood Warbler and the second House Martin of the year**

**A Stoat is seen at Rye Harbour and a Hare at Dungeness
10 Black Swans gather at the Riverside Park in Southampton to celebrate**

their breeding season and the first Mute Swan egg has been laid at Emsworth.

This morning there was no trace of snow anywhere on Hayling, the wind was light, the sun felt warm and Langstone Harbour appeared to be devoid of winter birds (though not yet replaced by summer birds!) as I cycled to Langstone Bridge and back. My route included Daw Lane where, thanks to an unwitting tip-off from Brian Fellows in his Emsworth blog for yesterday, I found the usual display of **Greater Periwinkle var oxyloba** which has so far evaded my monthly flower lists despite my having found the standard Greater Periwinkle in many places since New Year's Day. For those who do not know the difference between var oxyloba and the standard Greater Periwinkle it lies in the shape of the petals - the standard form has broad petals with little separation between them - see this [photo of standard Greater Periwinkls](#) and compare it with the narrow, well separated, petals of [var oxyloba](#) which remind me of aircraft propellor blades.

Daw Lane also had a great display of wild Primroses and when I reached the Oyster Beds I found another personal first for my flower list in around half a dozen **Coltsfoot flowers** around the now closed entrance to the old carpark behind the Esso Garage - these had started to flower in north Kent (at Reculver) on Mar 16. While at the Oysterbeds I rode up onto the mound overlooking the mass of nesting gulls among which I found **a pair of Mute Swans looking very settled (as if thinking of nesting there)** at the northern tip of the southern island. If they do try to nest there on the water line I hope they are aware that the monthly spring tides may well swamp their nest.

Before turning for home I rode to the southern end of Langstone bridge and noted the presence of **no more than 20 Brent Geese** in what I call Texaco Bay (between the road bridge and the remains of the rail bridge) plus a couple of small flocks of Dunlin and a couple of Shoveler. While cycling up and back down the Billy Line I had seen no Brent in Langstone Harbour nor any in the fields leaving me with the impression that the great majority of the Brent have now left, though I am sure that quite a few stragglers will still be seen passing through.

Back at home my daily scan of the internet told me that both a **House Martin** and a **Wood Warbler** had been seen in Devon today though my records show that neither was a first for the year - two House Martins had been seen in Sussex on Mar 8 and I have a more dubious report of a single Wood Warbler in the Isle of Wight on Jan 28. Other reports of some interest were of a **Stoat** at Rye Harbour and a **Hare** at Dungeness (both seen yesterday) while today a total of **10 Black Swans were assembled at Southampton's Riverside Park**. I am not aware of the details of their breeding there beside the River Itchen but I am under the impression that at least one nest has been active for at least five years, and I suspect that all ten of the assembled birds were of the same family. Still on the subject of Swan nests Brian Fellows today saw the first egg in the Mute Swan nest in Peter Pond at Emsworth - both parents and the egg can be seen in Brian's photo which you can see [here](#).

[Tue 20th March](#)

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

**The natural world thrown into confusion by the weather
Magnolia tree flowering on Hayling Island and an oversize 'Ruddy Duck' in
western Australia is reported on BBC News**

**At 4:15 pm today the sun crossed the equator heading north and will
hopefully be bringing us warmer weather.**

Since writing my last blog entry on Mar 18 I have continued to scan the south coast websites for news of spring birds but everywhere I have found reports similar to the pictures of our road traffic trying to get around in the strong winds on icy and snow covered roads - one image that stuck in my mind was a sighting of **a newly arrived Wheatear perched on a snowman** and everywhere birders have been reporting large numbers of **Fieldfares, Redwing and Golden Plover** desperately searching for somewhere where they can be out of the wind and find food. On Mar 17 RBA reported **a moribund Alpine Swift** in the Sheffield area and on Mar 18 they told us that **three Bluethroats** were present, two at Dungeness and one in Suffolk (presumably wind-blown from the continent) while **two Hoopoes** had been seen in Cornwall.

Yesterday (Mar 19) I took a short walk 'round the block' and was very surprised to find a small **Magnolia tree** in one garden had decided to open its first flowers which should have looked like the following photo but the sky was grey with snow and the flowers were bent over and damaged by the wind so this photo from the internet (see [here](#)) only illustrates the shape and colour that I am still waiting to see!.

It seems that the weather, and its effect on birds, is not restricted to England - the BBC News website had this report from Western Australia of **strong winds driving what might be described as a giant Ruddy Duck** out to sea when it was launched to act as an accompaniment to a 'jetty to jetty' swim off Perth. You can read the story and see the 'duck' [here](#).

Hopefully our weather is set to improve following **the sun's crossing of the equator which occurred at 4:15 pm today**. I knew that today was the Spring Equinox but was not aware that astronomers knew the exact moment when the earth's trajectory brought the sun directly above our equator to start warming the northern hemisphere.

Wildlife diary and news for Mar 12 - 18 (Week 11 of 2018)

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

[Sun 18th March](#)

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

**First Willow Warbler in north Hampshire and an escaped Eagle Owl at
Sandy Point**

**Two Hummingbird Hawkmoths come out to see the snow
Hoopoe and Ruddy Duck in Cornwall and Rosefinch in Devon**

The first **Willow Warbler was singing** at Fleet in north Hampshire on Mar 16 and at Sandy Point on Mar 17 a huge escaped **Eagle Owl** appeared in the morning

and was thought to have flown off to escape the barrage of abuse hurled at it by Crows, Magpies and Herring Gulls but re-appeared there at dusk before flying off - no further reports of it.

Two **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** emerged from hibernation in Sussex this week, one at Newhaven on Mar 14 and the other at Brighton on Mar 16.

Today (Mar 18) a **Hoopoe** was reported at St Buryan in Cornwall between Penzance and Lands End. The report said it had been there for three days. Another bird which has not been reported before was a single **Common Rosefinch** seen on a bird feeder in a Plymouth garden on Mar 17 - for a photo of it with a Greenfinch see [here](#). A more interesting sighting at Newlyn in Cornwall on Mar 17 was of a **Ruddy Duck** which I thought had been eradicated from Europe several years ago - if you are not familiar with this saga you can read a summary of it which appeared in The Guardian in 2014 - see [here](#).

[Fri 16th March](#)

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

An early Common Tern and the first migrant Lesser Whitethroat First Coltsfoot flowers in Kent My first singing Blackbirds First Toadspawn in a Portsdown pond

The first **Common Tern** to be reported anywhere in the UK was seen off Splash Point at Seaford in Sussex yesterday (Mar 15). The average date for this species to reach Sussex over the last 10 years is Mar 26 and the earliest arrival for the county since 1960 is Mar 14. Another first arrival in the UK, at Portland on Mar 15, was a **Lesser Whitethroat** though at least four of these birds were seen, presumably wintering, in Sussex during January.

An early plant flowering reported today (Mar 16) was **Coltsfoot** at Reculver in north Kent - that report was published with a photo which can be seen [here](#). Another photo of a spring flower was of **Butterbur** at Brook Meadow (but that had started to flower a month ago on Feb 15) - you can see the current photo, published yesterday by Brian Fellows on the Emsworth Wildlife site, [here](#). Brian's photo also has some **Lesser Celandine flowers** and he reminds us that these flowers have a variable number of petals and that is confirmed by the following web page which gives 8 as the minimum and 13 as the maximum (but also comments that "Petal counting is a sad hobby!"). To see this page click [here](#).

First thing this morning I heard **my first Blackbird song** from my open window and later a hint of sunshine and a moderate wind persuaded me to get on my bike for a ride to Sandy Point during which I heard both Greenfinch and more Blackbird song but saw no new flowers. Back at my computer I saw from John Goodspeed's website that the first **Toad spawn** had been reported yesterday from a Portsdown garden pond.

[Thu 15th March](#)

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

**First two Willow Warblers and several Swallows now in Britain
Seven more Ospreys and the first migrant Whimbrel also reported
Blackbird seen on nest and an interesting photo of Hawfinches displaying
Large Tortoiseshell is a surprise arrival in Sussex.**

The Rare Bird Alert team give their subscribers up to the minute news on rare and newsworthy bird sightings anywhere in the British Isles but they also put a free summary of the highlights on the internet at <http://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/RealData/dailysummary.asp> albeit a day later than they received the news and their summary for yesterday (Mar 14) had this to say about our summer migrant arrivals .. "In addition to many reports of Sand Martins, records of summer migrants included Whimbrel (Bedfordshire), Manx Shearwater (Devon), two Garganey, **two Willow Warblers**, three White Wagtails, six Swallows, seven Ospreys, eight Little Ringed Plovers and 21 Wheatears". The Willow Warblers were the first I had heard of this year while the Whimbrel was the first to be reported as a migrant rather than a wintering bird. RBA had reported the first Swallow (seen in Warwickshire) on Mar 12, with another four on Mar 13, so I cannot claim to be up to date with the news of their arrival.

Other bird news which caught my attention today was of **a Blackbird sitting on its nest** in Brighton and **a Song Thrush collecting wet material from House gutters** with which to construct a solid base for its nest see photo [here](#).. Another **newsworthy photo of two Hawfinch** caught my eye on the Dorset Bird News for Mar 14. The strange pose shown may be part of their spring pairing but it seems to me to be more likely an aggressive confrontation - the photo can be seen [here](#).

By far the **most exciting butterfly sighting** was made today at the Woods Mill HQ of the Sussex Wildlife Trust where Graeme Lyons decided to take a walk around the grounds at midday and had an accidental encounter with a very unexpected insect - a **Large Tortoiseshell butterfly**. For his description of the encounter see [Graeme's Blog](#). For information and photos about the now rare in Britain Large Tortoiseshell see (to read the text of any section of this website click the section header) [here](#).

Wed 14th March

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

First Small White butterflies in Dorset and Sussex and an early Painted Lady is blown to Britain

Lots of Glanville Fritillary caterpillars on the Isle of Wight

Redwing and Fieldfare moving north as more Brent fly east

Photos of male Smew in Sussex, Little Bunting on the Isle of Wight and Snowy Owl in Norfolk.

The first butterfly of 2018 (i.e. one which had not existed in adult form last year but which had only become adult as it over-wintered as a pupa) was a **Small White** of which one was seen in Dorset on Mar 12 and a second was in Sussex on Mar 13. This claim to be the first non-hibernating species seems to be challenged by a report of a **Painted Lady** in Sussex on Mar 6 and I suppose it could have been blown to Britain from North Africa on strong southerly winds but

this 'oddy' was not mentioned on the Sussex Butterfly website and I was only aware of it from Butterfly Conservation national website page which you can access [here](#). That page also made me aware of a very early sighting of a **Speckled Wood** in London on Jan 25.

Other insect news includes a sighting of a **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** in Dorset on Mar 13 - I think this is the third report of this moth for the year, presumably as a result of hibernating in a place where the sun was able to rouse it. More significant were the results of a detailed search of likely locations on the Isle of Wight for **Glanville Fritillary caterpillars** which overwinter in silk 'webs' as shown in this [photo](#). The search located 50 of these webs with a potential population of around 5000 caterpillars. Also on Mar 13 a **Small Tortoiseshell** was seen in North Baddesley and a **Brimstone** in Southampton.

Turning to Bird News two reports from Dungeness on Mar 12 and 13 indicate a speeding up of the departure of Brent Geese - on Mar 12 648 Brent flew east and on Mar 13 a 2 hour count gave another 486. Also on Mar 13 three Merlins were seen to fly in off the channel. The Sandwich Observatory also reported a strong movement, this time northward, of **2250 Redwing** and **111 Fieldfare** on Mar 13.

Finally for today here are three good photos of birds that have been attracting the twitchers. My favourite is the **male Smew** which was briefly on Arlington reservoir in Sussex on Mar 14 - see this [photo](#). The second bird was the **Snowy Owl** that has been on Norfolk which you can see [here](#). The last of these is the **Little Bunting** which has been in a private garden at Brading on the Isle of Wight from Mar 4 to 12 and can be seen [here](#).

Mon 12th March

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

**First Cuckoo in UK plus 2 Ospreys and more Sand Martins and Wheatears
Migrant Robin caught by Gulls at Selsey
Wintering Bitterns now heading home as Mute Swans start nest building
Warmer weather brings out a Slowworm and three Butterfly species.**

Yesterday (Mar 11) the RBA website reported the arrival of the **first Cuckoo of the year in Kent** plus **two Ospreys** somewhere in the UK following the tentative sighting of one at Bewl Water in Sussex on Mar 9. Also in yesterday's news RBA reported a total of **23 Sand Martins** and **15 Wheatears** in the UK while today Trektellen reported **3 more Swallows on the near Continent** though none yet in the UK. Among the migrants which are currently crossing the channel are Robins and the Selsey Blog yesterday for Mar 11 reported how one Robin failed to complete its journey as a result of an unexpected last minute hazard .. the blog described what happened in these words .. "a newly arrived Robin was plucked from the air as it came in at the Bill this morning with a flock of passerines. Initially caught by a Black-headed Gull and fought over with another Black-headed, a Herring Gull then managed to snatch it away." The blog has a photo showing the end of this sad saga which you can see [here](#).

Another sad story comes from Portland on the same day and concerns what may be the last Puffin to be seen in the Portland area. In May 2011 an article on 'Where to watch birds in Dorset' said that the cliffs around Portland .. " support a variety of breeding seabirds, including common guillemots, razorbills **and a few puffins**. Since then sightings of Puffins in the Portland area have diminished to the extent that when Martin Cade (Portland Bird Observatory Warden) heard that a single Puffin had been found today being washed ashore on a Weymouth beach he feared it might be the last to be seen in the area and rushed to see the poor bird and managed to get a photo of the moribund bird which you can see [here](#).

A couple of recent reports from the Isle of Wight have been of **Bitterns seen flying in the Bembridge area**, perhaps indicating that they are becoming restive and thinking of returning to the areas where they hope to breed and confirmation that at least one bird had decided to set out on that journey came from Radipole in Dorset on Mar 10 when a single Bittern was seen flying off at dusk. Local news for today was of the first signs of **nest building by a Mute Swan** at Emsworth and of **35 Rook Nests under construction** near Racton Park Farm (5 miles up the River Ems from where it reaches the sea at Emsworth). That rookery will hopefully survive for a few more years but the number of Rooks to be seen in the Havant area has declined over recent years to the point that there is only one small rookery left (in trees behind a block of council flats on the south side of Victoria Road in Emsworth - I wonder when that will cease to exist?).

Finally for today there has been a good show of butterflies in Sussex responding to the slight increase in temperature. On Mar 11 a total of **eleven Brimstones** were seen plus **singles of Peacock and Red Admiral**. Also reported for the first time was a **Slow Worm** seen with many of the butterflies at the Park Corner Heath woodland butterfly reserve near Uckfield in East Sussex.

Wildlife diary and news for Mar 05 - 11 (Week 10 of 2018)

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

Sun 11th March

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

Adders now emerging at Durlston

Bluethroat in the Lancing area

First Arctic Skua at Portland as Brent Geese continue to leave us I add

Spring Starflower and Cherry Laurel to my March list

I do not normally include Durlston in my regular scan of the internet but a casual visit today told me that three **Adders** were seen on the cliffs there today, presumably having only recently emerged from hibernation. In Sussex a **Bluethroat** was seen today in the Sompting area of Worthing but with no clue as to whether this is the bird that was at Eastbourne from Feb 4 until Feb 17 but has not been reported since. Two more items of bird news today were the sighting of the first **Arctic Skua** for the year at Portland and a report of another **367 Brent heading east past Dungeness** after Folkestone reported 210 going east yesterday.

En route to the shops today I noticed a garden flowerbed with a good show of **Spring Starflower (Tristagme uniflorum)** and on my way home I found the first flowers just starting to open on a **Cherry Laurel** bush, bringing my March flower count to 61 species. If you are unfamiliar with the Spring Starflower see this [webpage](#).

Sat 10th March

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

**Four newly flowering plants bring my March list to 59 Species
First Swallow in Belgium and a Snowy Owl in Norfolk
Several Blackcaps and the first Bullfinch now singing
Peacock flying in Eastbourne and Dippers nesting in Devon
Migrant White Wagtails at Portland with hundreds of Meadow Pipits.**

A short walk to the Hayling Beachlands this morning found the **White Comfrey** in the garden of my flats had recovered from the cold snap sufficiently to open two flowers but a more unexpected new flowering in a nearby garden was **Creeping Comfrey** - for a photo of this see [here](#). Much less surprising were my first finds of **Common Mouse Ear** and **Common Storksbill**.

Back at home the internet (Trekellen) reported the **first Swallow** had reached Belgium today and RBA reported a **Snowy Owl** in Norfolk yesterday (not the first for southern England as one was in the Scillies around Jan 7). Other bird news for today was of a pair of **Dippers nest building** in the River Teign near Newton Abbot in Devon. Other bird news was of **three White Wagtails and hundreds more Meadow Pipits seen at Portland yesterday, and of a male Bullfinch singing in north Hampshire along with several male Blackcaps in various places.**

Following the Red Admiral which re-appeared in Sussex on Mar 8 a **Peacock butterfly was seen in Eastbourne on Mar 9.**

Fri 9th March

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

House Martin and Osprey join the list of summer migrant arrivals Is it possible to distinguish British from Continental Cormorants?

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 16 - MAR 4 (WEEK 09 OF 2018)

Thu 1st March

**First Garganey at Farlington Marshes and first Wheatear in Scotland
A website giving you both future and past weather information**

With snow falling all afternoon here on Hayling Island I sat down at my computer to pick up any late wildlife reports for February and was very surprised to see that **the first Garganey (a pair) had been seen yesterday at Farlington Marshes** and

that a **Wheatear** had been reported in Ayrshire by the Rare Bird Alert (RBA) website.

I have until now relied on the BBC for my **local weather information** (using <https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/po11> for details of what to expect in the Hayling Island, PO11, postcode area) but that only gives information for the future and does not allow you to look back at the temperature, rainfall, and wind speed on earlier days. Today I asked Google to point me to a website which would allow comparison with the past and it came up with the following website (which I have again tailored to the PO11 area) at <https://www.worldweatheronline.com/v2/weather.aspx?q=po11> which does allow you to see not only the forecast for the coming 15 days but also to look at the same information for any one past date.

To try this for yourself copy the above web address and paste it into the address bar on your computer, then press ENTER. To get results for your Post Code enter your Post Code in the box at the top right of the screen and click the symbol at the right hand end of the box. Now click one of the options from 'OUTLOOK' to '1 TO 15 DAYS' to see the forecast. To see past data click 'HISTORY' and then enter the date for which you want the past data (make sure the date is in the past). Hopefully this will work for you - if it does and you like the format of the forecasts add the address to your bookmarks.

[Wed 28th February](#)

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

Frost, Snow and freezing easterly winds send wildlife and its human observers running for cover but before the 'Beast from the East' reached us

...

A falconer's Red-tailed Hawk was seen near Hastings and an Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) at Winchelsea

A rare Ross's Gull from arctic north America was seen at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) and birders from Kent used Euro-tunnel to see a second Ross's Gull in the Netherlands

Also seen near Hastings on Feb 25 were two colourful fungi.

A newly-emerged Bluebottle provokes an interesting comment from Rye Harbour's Insect expert

Normally the last day of each month sees me scurrying round to complete my spreadsheet of wildlife observations for the month that is ending while planning an optimal route for tomorrow's outing to maximize my count of flowering plant species. Today, however, the temperature has not risen above zero and the easterly wind has not dropped below 25 mph and although we have not seen the snow flurries which persisted through yesterday the forecast for tomorrow (Mar 1) shows a midday temperature of -2 with gale force north east winds throughout the afternoon. Hopefully the old weather proverb saying the "March comes in like a Lion but goes out like a Lamb" will still be true

Since my last blog entry I have been made aware of an impressive '**Red-tailed Hawk**' being flown by a Falconer in the Crowhurst area east of Hastings where it

was seen by Cliff Dean on Feb 25. I think this bird is relatively common in North America but this report of one in southern England is the first I am aware of and if you want to be prepared for seeing one have a look at this American website [Here](#). Another bird species to be aware of is the **Alexandrine Parakeet** which was seen in the Winchelsea area of Rye Bay on Feb 23 and initially reported as a Ring-necked Parakeet but the id was subsequently corrected to the larger and far less common Alexandrine species - for photos and info on the latter see [Link](#).

On Feb 21 the Portland website reported the presence at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) of **a very rare visitor from arctic north america (a Ross's Gull)** and I later discovered that birders from Reculver in north Kent had been to see a second bird of the same species at Vlissingen in Belgium (at the mouth of the River Scheldt which flows through Antwerp) on Feb 20. The best website for information on this species seems to be [here](#).

Going back to Cliff Dean's walk in the Crowhurst area on Feb 25 he also saw **two colourful fungi** - for the Scarlet Elfcup see [this photo](#) and for the less common Green Elfcup see [this webpage](#).

Finally for today some information about **Bluebottles** from Chris Bentley, the Rye Harbour entomologist - see [here](#).

Wildlife diary and news for Feb 19 - 25 (Week 08 of 2018)

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

Wed 21st February

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

**Havant has its first Water Vole sighting of the year
Frogspawn and Honey Bees seen in Portsmouth area gardens
The Eastbourne Bluethroat may have left but Hares are in spring mood on
Sussex Downs
Grey Field Speedwell flowering on Hayling where one of the Eastoke Black
Redstarts has started singing
Look out for three races of Jackdaw and read about a possible cause of the
decline in Cuckoos in Britain.**

John Goodspeed's Nature Notes tell us that the **first Water Vole sighting for the Havant area this year** has been reported this week in the stream which flows into the Langbrook Stream at the south east corner of the Havant TESCO store. I guess it was seen from the footpath, following the Langbrook stream south from Solent Road, from which you can get a view of the 'feeder' stream which comes from the Homewell spring (close to St Faith's Church) and flows under the busy road into Havant from the By-pass, and then through the relatively undisturbed grounds of the big office block east of TESCO, to reach the Langbrook. John's Nature Notes also tell us that **Frogspawn** can now be seen in several garden ponds in the Havant/Cosham area where **Honey Bees** have started collecting pollen.

The **Bluethroat** which arrived in the West Marsh Rise area of Eastbourne on Feb 4 and was seen regularly there until Feb 17 has not been seen since and has presumably now left. For me the highspot of the latest news from Sussex is the first report of **three Hares starting to chase each other** around Cissbury Ring on the Downs above Worthing. Here on Hayling Island I added **Grey Field Speedwell** to my February flower list (total now 72) and the HOS bird news tells me that **one of the three Black Redstarts currently to be found along the Eastoke seafront has been heard singing**. I have never heard one singing so I listened to several of the recordings available on Xeno-Canto and will in future be listening for what sounds similar to the first part of a Chaffinch song without the final flourish. To hear the recordings use [this link](#).

To end today I was interested to learn from a HOS report of an 'unusual' Jackdaw seen at Middle Wallop on Feb 21 that **Jackdaws come in three races (Common Jackdaw, Nordic Jackdaw and Russian Jackdaw)** and this report was thought to be of a bird of the Nordic race. In case you see a strange looking Jackdaw have a look at the following paper about them at [this link](#) and for more light reading on **a possible reason for the decline in Cuckoos in Britain** try [this BTO paper](#).

Wildlife diary and news for Feb 12 - 18 (Week 07 of 2018)

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

[Sun 18th February](#)

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

Med Gulls back at nest sites and giving their 'mewing' calls on Feb 16
Feb 17 saw the arrival of a Pine Bunting in north Kent
Chiff-chaffs start to arrive, Blackbirds start to sing and House Sparrows start nest building
Jellyfish bodies and Squid eggs wash up on the Devon shore
This winter's invasion of Parrot Crossbills at last reaches Verwood in Dorset
Beware of Water Buffalo if you go to Eastbourne to see the Bluethroat...

Although the small number of **Cuckoos** which will hopefully still come to Britain this summer are expected to arrive here in mid-April the number of people who will hear them gets fewer each year. I think I am not alone in having ceased to rely on the Cuckoo to tell me that Spring has sprung but I still get the same excitement that I used to get from hearing the first Cuckoo when I hear the **first 'mewing' calls of a Med Gull**. If you are unfamiliar with this call you can hear it by going to the Xeno-Canto website and clicking the 'play button' against the sixth recording in the list you will see when you use the following link (this recording also has prominent Willow Warbler and Chiff-chaff song to add to the feeling that spring is here). To hear this use [this link](#).

I was made aware of their return to the Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 16 when Keith Turner posted his sighting of 42 there and on Feb 17 I cycled there to see and hear them. I see that Peter Raby heard them calling over Langstone village on Feb 17 and on the 18th 79 of these gulls were seen at Pagham. Also seen on

Feb 17 at Reculver on the north Kent coast was a much rarer bird - the first to visit Reculver and a species of which the average number to be seen in Britain is only 1 per year. This was a **Pine Bunting (*Emberiza leucocphalos*)** and the best website on which to find information about it is [here](#).

More reports of **Chiffchaff arrivals at Portland** are based on the birds being seen in places where there had been no previous reports of wintering birds while at Barcombe in Sussex one was singing on Feb 16. Another migrant which has already been reported as overwintering, with sightings on Jan 21 and Feb 2 in the Worthing area, a **Ring Ouzel**, now has a more credible report of a migrant arrival with a drive-by sighting on the roadside going north from Petersfield through the village of Steep by Ted Raynor on Feb 18. Another indisputable sign of spring was the **first Blackbird song** heard by Brian Fellows in Emsworth on the afternoon of Feb 16. Looking out of my own windows here in South Hayling I have recently seen a cluster of House Sparrows investigating the roof of a nearby building as a potential nest site.

A more unexpected report came from the Devon Birding website which, on Feb 15, had pictures of **a Barrel Jellyfish, a clump of Squid Eggs and a ball of Whelk Eggs** all washed up on the shore of the River Exe estuary. These caught my attention because it seemed very early in the year for Jellyfish to be in the English Channel and because, unlike the Whelk Eggs, I have never seen Squid eggs before and if you share my ignorance you can see a photo of a similar cluster [here](#). - this photo was sent to the British Marine Life Study Society in May 2004 with the following request for identification .. "I've recently seen two examples of a creature washed up on Shoreham Beach that I have never seen before, and can't find in my book of seaside flora and fauna. - It's like the head of an old-fashioned string floor mop. The diameter of the 'mop' head is about 25 cm. The densely packed 'strings' are the thickness of an earthworm and about 10 cm long each from the centre of the 'mop'. The colour is a very pretty pale coral pink and white."

To find out more about **species of Squid, Cuttlefish and Octopus that occur in British waters** have a look (after scrolling down to the species descriptions) at [this PDF](#) and to find out about the British Marine Life Study Society, which is based in Shoreham, use this [link](#).

This winter a significant invasion of Parrot Crossbills has reached Britain with the birds gradually moving south from Shetland to East Anglia and on Feb 17 a few reached southern England with a 'probable' report from the Verwood area of Dorset just west of Ringwood in Hampshire. In case more of them reach our south coast area here is a detailed account of them written when they first appeared in Norfolk last November - see [this link](#).

The presence of a **Bluethroat** in the West Rise Marsh area of Eastbourne has become an attraction for birders but they may get a surprise when they visit the area and discover that the local primary school owns some **Water Buffalo** as part of a scheme to bring pre-history to life for the children. You can find out more about this unconventional school from [this website](#) and if you want to see Water Buffalo here in Hampshire visit the website of a farming business near Stockbridge - see [Broughton Water Buffalo website](#).

[Thu 15th February](#)

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

First migrant Chiff-chaff arrives at Portland as the first Bittern leaves and Swans start nest building

Three sightings of Waxwings in north Hampshire

Two more garden plants start to flower

BBC Radio 4 has an interesting programme on Fungi.

A **Chiff-chaff** seen at Portland on Feb 13 may have been the first migrant to arrive though there was no way of being certain - the BTO Bird Track records show the average arrival date at Portland as March 12 so this would be a very early date but I suspect that the bird's behaviour will have influenced the decision to report it as 'giving every indication of being a freshly arrived migrant' (one factor being its feeding behaviour - if it had just finished a Channel crossing it will have been very hungry!). Chiff-chaff is normally the second species to reach us, one day after the first Wheatear though that has not yet been reported.

Another sighting which could mark the departure of a bird that has been wintering here on the south coast was of a **Bittern** seen at Keyhaven near Lymington on Feb 10 and reported as 'flying north'. Not coming or going were the **Mute Swans** on Langstone Mill Pond which had started nest building on Feb 13. Also in the latest news are three reports of **Waxwings**, the first I know of in Hampshire this winter. Two were seen at Bramshill, and one at Hartley Witney, on Feb 11 in an area north of the M3 between Basingstoke and Farnborough where another single bird was seen on Feb 14.

On Feb 12 I took a local walk in the sunshine and added two more flowers to my February list bringing the species count to 70. The first to go on the list was **Garden Lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*)** which you can see [here](#). The second was **Honeywort (*Cerinthe major*)** which can be seen [here](#).

The last wildlife related topic to attract my attention today was **Melvyn Bragg's weekly 'In our time programme' on Radio 4** which is broadcast at 9 am each Thursday morning. **This week the subject was Fungi** and I learnt a lot from the experts discussing the subject. You will have to listen to this 45 minute programme to get all the points that were raised but to encourage you to do so here are a few of those points which were new to me....

The first fact that surprised me was that **we (meaning all land based life forms) owe our lives to fungi**. When our ancestors were in the ocean the ocean currents brought our essential nutrients to us but on dry land we have to gather them from plants (either at first hand from plants and their fruits, or at second hand by eating animals which have fed on plants), and **fungi play a vital role in extending the plant roots to gather and often 'pre-process' the materials that are essential to plant growth**. After we have collected our grain from plant crops we again rely on fungi to enable us to process it into bread and beer.

Several other facets of **the unseen role played by fungi in sustaining 'life on earth'** are due to the ability of fungi to extend their function as 'extenders of plant roots'

by providing an unseen underground 'internet' system which puts different species in touch with each other through the root systems of different plants/species going through a common 'central processing system' provided by the unseen fungus. An example of this occurs when a tree comes under attack by aphids or caterpillars (or some disease) and the fungus is able to forewarn other trees, allowing them time to prepare their defences before the problem reaches them.

Another aspect of this ability of fungi to put plant species in contact with other species is that it enables those Orchid species which have no ability to photosynthesize to obtain the carbon which they cannot generate for themselves from species which can photosynthesize.

Another subject raised towards the end of the programme was **the effect of fungi on humans**. We are all aware that some fungi are poisonous to humans that eat them but the programme suggested that each year at least a million people die from hidden effects of fungi. I could not understand the point being made here - I understood that fungi can kill large numbers of people by depriving them of their food (as in the Irish Potato Famine of the 1850s) but the programme seemed to be saying that millions of deaths which appear to be caused by e.g. tuberculosis are in fact due to fungi within the human body which are the actual cause of our death when our defence mechanisms have been weakened by the cause which appears on our death certificates ...

If you want **to hear the programme for yourself** go to the I-Player at [Link to Radio 4.](#)

[Tue 13th February](#)

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

Hérons and Egyptian Geese have already hatched young Butterflies and Bumblebees are already active

At least one **young Heron had hatched** in the nests at Langstone Mill Pond by Jan 27 and on Feb 12 a pair of **Egyptian Geese** which have been nesting at Crawley in Sussex were seen away from their nest with **a brood of 11 Goslings**. Although I have not seen definite reports of other bird species already nesting (Crossbills are normally January nesters) I did pick up a report of a **female Blackbird collecting nest material** in the Hastings area on Feb 5 and **Feb 14 is traditionally the date on which Rooks return to their Rookeries** and start their nest building - a very noisy video of this can be seen [here](#).

Another sign of Spring comes from the insect world. Butterfly Conservation has already received reports of **Peacock** on the wing on Jan 1 in Norfolk, **Brimstone**, **Small Tortoiseshell and Comma** were all seen on Jan 10 in Sussex, and a **Speckled Wood** was seen in London on Jan 25, not to mention the **Red Admiral** which does not hibernate like the others but takes wing whenever the sun shines!

In addition to Butterflies several moths have visited moth traps and although I no longer record moths a quick scan of reports from the Folkestone area tells me that **Oak Beauty, Spring Usher, Pale Brindled Beauty, The Chestnut, Dark**

Chestnut, and Light Brown Apple Moth were all seen there in January. If you want to see photos and read about any of these species I suggest that you open "<https://www.ukmoths.org.uk/>" in a different tab and use your mouse to switch to that tab where you need to scroll down to the bottom of the first page in that website and use the Quick Search facility to enter the name of one of the species, then click the Search button to see a list of all the available photos of that species (repeating the process for further names) before again using your mouse to return to this tab.

Another aspect of current insect activity to investigate was prompted by an email I received from someone who is not a naturalist but who had come across a reference in a paper saying "As bulbs and Primroses appear so do the first intrepid bumblebees" asking me if I had seen one. My answer was 'not yet' but while out in yesterday's sunshine I spotted a **Queen Bombus terrestris** busily searching the flowers on a Rosemary bush for nectar.

For lots more fascinating information about the life cycle in a Bumble Bee colony it is well worth reading the whole story presented in four different pages on the Bumblebee.org website but before going to that website note that the links at the end of each page to the next stage are not presented with any consistency. When you come to the end of the first page click the link to 'the Bumblebee colony develops'. At the start of the second page the photo of the inside of a bird nest box at a Ferndown School has tiny red numbers within it which relate to the numbered text below the photo (I did not spot the numbers and so was confused by what the numbered text referred to). At the end of this second page click the 'Life cycle stage 3' box, and at the end of that page click the link to 'Males and new queens mate' for the fourth and last stage in the story. Just one more thing to note - because of the multiple links within the Bumblebee website you will have to use the Back Button multiple times to return to this website!! Now, for the link to the start of the story, you should go to the [Bumblebee.org webpage](http://www.bumblebee.org/).

P.S. If you found it hard to navigate through the Bumblebee story without reference to my notes on how to get to each new stage try the technique I suggested for looking at moth photos - i.e. open "<http://www.bumblebee.org/lifecycle.htm>" in a new tab then use your mouse to switch back to this website to check my notes when you come to the end of each Bumblebee page.

Wildlife diary and news for Feb 5 - 11 (Week 06 of 2018)

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

Sat 10th February

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

Identifying Thayers and Caspian Gulls currently to be seen at the Blashford Lakes

Distinguishing Hairy from Sweet Violets

On Jan 28 a juvenile **Thayer's Gull** was seen at the Blashford Lakes and has roosted there nightly up to now. By Feb 4 it was attracting so much attention from

Birders that Bob Chapman reported its presence with the comment that he saw it 'from the comfort of the Goosander Hide to avoid the scrum in the Tern Hide' (which was nearer to the bird). Feb 5 saw the great Lee Evans visiting Blashford to see the bird and on Feb 6 it had drawn Martin Cade from the Portland Observatory to tick it in the Pig fields on Tidpit Down which is just south of Martin Down and which is currently a feeding area for large number of gulls.

The name **Thayer's Gull** was new to me and when I turned to my 1999 Collins Bird Guide I found no mention of the name so I turned to Google where Wikipedia told me that it was a subspecies of **Iceland Gull**, along with **Kumlein's Gull**, but so far there is no agreement among the taxonomists though we have come a long way from the bird books available when I was an active birder in the 1970s and 80s which treated all large gulls as variants of the Herring Gull.

If you want to become familiar with gulls nowadays a good place to start is with the **RSPB Guide to Gulls and Terns** which you can see [here](#). This is a good start but the account of the Iceland Gull does not mention Thayers or Kumleins Gull. For these you have to become a 'Twitcher' and learn from the bird information services and other twitchers, pursuing a learning curve typified by this Birdguides article entitled "**What is a Caspian Gull?**" - see it [here](#).

Turning from birds to plants I see that, along with the butterflies which were seen on Portsdown this week there were also some **Sweet Violets** on the down south of Fort Widley and this reminded me that that area also has a small population of **Hairy Violets** which are worth looking for at this time of year. For photos and descriptive text see [here](#).

Thu 8th February

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

Peacock and Brimstone Butterflies seen yesterday on Portsdown

Blackbirds nesting in Hastings on Feb 5

Worthing has a wintering Ring Ouzel

A Bluethroat arrives at Eastbourne's West Rise Marsh

The Horned Lark at Staines Reservoir is closely related to Shorelarks and

Walthamstow Wetlands has a Little Bunting.

John Goodspeed was out on Portsdown yesterday and saw not only one **Peacock butterfly** on he wing but also **both male and female Brimstones**. Another sign of spring this week was a **female Blackbird gathering nest material** in the St Leonards area of Hastings on Monday (Feb 5) while a few days earlier on Feb 2 Christchurch Harbour reported **song from Reed Bunting, Dunnock and Greenfinch**. In Emsworth Brian Fellows found the first of many **Butterbur** flowers was out in Brook Meadow on Feb 4.

In Eastbourne a **Bluethroat** arrived in the West Rise Marsh area on Feb 4 and was still there on Feb 7 and on Feb 6 a wintering **Ring Ouzel** was seen near the A27 on the Downs above Worthing, confirming a less confident report of one there on Jan 21. For a concise description of the Bluethroat genus see the RSPB page [here](#).

For some time (since its arrival at Staines Reservoir in London on Nov 26 last year) the RBA (Rare Bird Alert) webpage has been reporting what seemed to me to be a **Shore Lark** as a **Horned Lark** and I have at long last got round to sorting out why this is so. I found the answer in a blog entry written by one of the first birders to see the bird at Staines - he made me aware that the **Horned Lark** (an American species known scientifically as *Eremophila alpestris*) has some 42 sub-species of which the Shorelark (*E. a. flava*) is the one commonly seen in the UK as a winter migrant. I learnt these basic facts from a blog entry which you can see [here](#). For another account of this bird with lots of photos see [here](#).

Another bird which has been mentioned regularly on the RBA daily summaries since Jan 19 with its location given as 'London' has been a **Little Bunting**. I have now discovered that it is to be seen in the Walthamstow Wetlands in the Lee Valley in north London. A photo of the bird and instructions on 'How to get there' can be found at [link](#).

[Wed 7th February](#)

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

A walk to Mill Rythe gives me 2 more flowers and 3 new Birds for my month list

My scan of the internet south coast birding sites gives me a February total of 165 bird species so far this month ..

.. including an Australian 'Red-tailed Black Cockatoo'.

With a forecast of a sunny afternoon with a light but chill north wind I walked to Mill Rythe via the path alongside the Tournurbury Golf Course and back along Church Road with little expectation of new flowers for the month but a single **Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*)** in a Church Road garden was an unexpected pleasure (see an internet photo [here](#) and a single specimen of **White Dead Nettle** was a surprise as I would have thought that was already on my list along with the Red Dead Nettle which is flowering everywhere.

More of a surprise was to see three good birds starting with a brightly plumaged **cock Pheasant** on the Golf Course, then a **Kestrel** which flew low over my head from behind me as I walked down the field edge immediately north of the Mill Rythe school, perching on a small tree until I was very nearly below it before flying off again. The third bird was a **Grey Heron** flying towards the harbour. A fourth bird for my list was the first **Great Tit** I have heard singing.

Among the 165 Bird species which my spread sheet tells me I have seen recorded on the internet this month the most un-expected was a **Red-tailed Black Cockatoo** seen at Arundel on Feb 5 causing panic among the other birds there (they probably thought it was some unknown 'raptor from hell' - see this photo to see how it might have given that impression [link](#). I have never heard of this Australian species before but luckily the Sussex observer (Martin Daniel) was able to name it. If you want to see more photos of the species have a look at Richard Waring's blog [here](#).

Wildlife diary and news for Jan 29 - Feb 04 (Week 05 of 2018)

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

[Sun 4th February](#)

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

Seven new flowers include Goat Willow, Cherry Plum, and a very early Passion Flower.

A lovely sunny morning with a chill north east wind made for a good walk starting at St Mary's Church, across the Church Fields to Higworth Lane, then south down Manor Road to the Newtown House Hotel and home via Fathoms Reach and St Mary's Road. Before seeing any new flowers I heard my second **Chaffinch** **prectising its song** in the Churchyard and my first **Skylark** **singing** above the Church fields and at the far side of the fields I found my first **Goat Willow** **flowers** in the overgrown hedge around the Caravan Park and several **Hazel** **catkins** in the hedge lining the path through the Caravans.

Nothing to report from Manor Road but in the path up the southern side of Newtown House (where a monthly car rally had attracted some interesting old vehicles) several more Hazels were waving their catkins and I was pleased to spot a **single tiny red female flower** before cutting into the Fathoms Reach housing which took me south to St Mary's Road where a couple of mature **Common Alders** were brandishing lots of catkins but none were yet open (for future reference I see that this tree has similar male and female catkins with the females being distinctly shorter than the males). While still in the Fathoms Reach housing the wooden fencing around one garden had a real surprise in the form of the first **Passion Flower** creeper already opening its unmistakeable first flower (normally not seen until summer). For a photo of this flower see [here](#). Also growing beside this road (outside the gardens) and looking as if had been there before the houses were built was a single mature flowering **Cherry Plum** tree.

Heading home along St Mary's Road I found both **Thale Cress** (new for the month list) and more **Common Whitlowgrass**. After turning into the final stretch of St Mary's Road I added two more flowers that were first seen last month. One was the **Giant Snowdrop (Galanthus elwesii)** which grows nearly a foot tall and which you can see [here](#). The other was the **Three-cornered Leek (Allium triquetrum)**, with its triangular rather than round flower stem, which you can see [here](#).

[Sat 3rd February](#)

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

Wintering Lesser Whitethroats at five south coast sites
Wintering Black Guillemots in Sussex, Hants and IOW
Signs of Med Gull returning to breed
Increasing bird song
Red Admirals still flying in Sussex and Hants

I have already noted the presence of a **wintering Lesser Whitethroat** at Ventor on the IOW throughout January with a single report of one at Plymouth on Jan 1 but

today the Sussex bird news reports the presence in January of three more at Worthing, Hove and Ringmer (near Lewes).

One **Black Guillemot** has been at Eastbourne throughout January and another has been seen on at least four days off the north east coast of the IOW. There was also an isolated report of one in the mouth of the Beaulieu River on Jan 8, before the first report from the IOW on Jan 19, and I guess these two reports were of the same bird.

Med Gulls have been in short supply for most of January and in my blog for Dec 21 I commented on an isolated report of 410 seen off the South West coast of the IOW that, while small groups of less than 10 of these birds did remain on the south coast the large flocks which breed on the south coast disappear before winter sets in. The RSPB say that many of them stay in Britain but move inland (perhaps to avoid the cold and stormy coastal conditions which drive the Little Egrets inland?). With the approach of spring I see that a flock of 100 was off the east coast of the IOW on Jan 25 and a bigger flock of 400 was in Portland Harbour on Jan 31 but no one has yet reported hearing their 'mewing' calls which seem to have replaced the call of the Cuckoo to announce the official start of spring.

Other signs of spring can be found in **increasing bird song**. On Feb 1 I heard my first Chaffinch song and am expecting to hear Blackbird song at dusk within the next week or so. I see that Peter Raby heard Cetti's Warbler song at Langstone Mill Pond on Jan 29 and Brian Fellows heard a Great Tit at Nore Barn on Jan 30 while the HOS reports included Marsh Tit song at Bramshott in East Hampshire on Jan 31.

Not be outdone by the birdsong **Red Admirals** continue to appear whenever the sun shines, and on Jan 30 a total of five were reported from three Sussex sites with another two seen at Gosport in Hampshire.

Fri 2nd February

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

**Another 11 species for my February plant list Include the first Alexanders plant and Lungwort in flower ..
.. and "Small Leaved Kowhai" is the answer to a year long search for the name of this garden plant of New Zealand origin.**

In a short walk today around the Mengham area where I now live I not only added 11 species to my February flower list, bringing the total to 57, but also found the answer to a puzzle over the name of a plant I found a year ago in a Tournurbury Lane garden. Before reaching Tournurbury Lane I visited Palmerston Road where I had recently found **Common Ramping Fumitory** flowering in allotments outside the grounds of Mengham Junior School and added that to my list along with **Common Ragwort**. I then walked south down St Leonards Avenue where **Red Valerian** and **Hoary Ragwort** were found before turning east along Mengham Lane to the footpath going north to St Margarets Road. At the start of the path one plant of **Alexanders** was starting to open its flowers and will soon look like

[this photo](#). Further up the path the **white flowered Clematis with red sepals and flower stems** (*Clematis texensis*) was still peeping over the wooden fence and can be seen [here](#). In a St Margarets Road garden I was surprised to find a Lungwort plant in flower - see [it here](#). and when I eventually reached Tournerbury Lane I found a single plant of **Nipplewort** still flowering - see it [here](#). When searching for a suitable photo I found that this weed (*Lapsana communis*) is advertised as good food for your pet Tortoise!

In a garden on the north side of Tournerbury Lane I found the plant which has been puzzling me since I arrived on Hayling in March last year was once again flowering and in my blog for Jan 26 you will see that I recognised some similarities to the Bladder Senna Bush and had given this puzzle plant the temporary name **Garden Bladder Senna** while continuing my search for its real name. Seeing it in flower again today I continued searching the internet and, to my delight, came up with a name that not only relates to the look of this puzzle plant but also fits with its flowering period in the first three months of the year rather than the summer and explains the absence of the 'bladder like' seed pods. The name which I now associate with this plant is **Small-leaved Kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*)** which is another member of the great family of pea plants (the Fabaceae) but has the name Kowhai given to it in its New Zealand homeland. I will end today with an internet photo of this plant - see [here](#).

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 15 - 21 (WEEK 03 OF 2018)

Thu 18th January

**Distinguishing Lesser from Greater Spotted Woodpecker drumming
Local decline in Rook numbers
Crocuses starting to flower.**

Great Spotted Woodpeckers started to drum on Jan 10 and today (Jan 18) comes the first report of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming** at Bramshaw near the Cadnam end of the road which runs across the north of the New Forest to Fordingbridge. It is easy enough to distinguish the two species if you can see them, or if you hear the sharp "Chik" call which is only given by the Greater species, but you may feel uncertain which of the two is drumming as the sound can vary with the 'drum' being used (some trees give very different sound from others, and some woodpeckers do not drum on normal trees but use louder sounding 'drums' made of metal). One factor that normally differentiates the two species is the length of each burst of drumming, with the Greater giving shorter and louder bursts than the Lesser which generally gives more prolonged but quieter bursts, but I recommend a visit to the **Xeno-Canto website** where you can listen to many recordings of both species. If you are unfamiliar with this website you will need to enter the name of the species you wish to hear and must enter that name on the first line of the website where it says "Search recordings..." and then click the adjacent Search button. This will take you to a header page for the selected species with a map of its world wide distribution and it is not until you

have scrolled down below this map that you will find the start of what is usually a long list of individual recordings with information about the length of the recording and other information helping you to decide if you want to listen to it - to hear the selected recording just click the 'play button/triangle' at the extreme left of that line.... After hearing as many recordings as you want remember to click the Back Button twice to get back to this blog - to give it a try use [this link](#).

A report on Jan 16 from the Cuckmere area of East Sussex of **500 Rooks** and **700 Jackdaws** reminded me of 'the old days' when the way of distinguishing Rooks from Crows was said to be by the size of the flocks in which you saw them using the rule that "if there's just one then it's a Crow but if there are several then you're looking at Rooks". In the years I have been birding in South East Hampshire I have seen a steady decline in the number of Rooks with none now nesting on the Warblington Farm and with a noticeable decrease in the number of nests in the remaining local Rookeries at Emsworth and Northney on Hayling Island while at the same time flocks of several hundred Crows can be seen throughout the year feeding on the shore between Langstone and Emsworth (and this is backed up by regular reports of similar large flocks being regularly reported from Weston Shore on Southampton Water).

In the light of this local decline the report of 500 Rooks in East Sussex led me to check on the national status of Rooks in Britain and I was surprised to find no concern being expressed about the future of Rooks in this country. I then looked at the 1993 edition of "Birds of Hampshire" which told me that the Rook population of Hampshire (particularly in the South East and the New Forest areas) was already significantly low compared to the rest of Britain. The cause of this difference was not clear but I would think that the scarcity of arable farmland in the New Forest plus the loss of that farmland to the spread of urban development and roads in the south, coupled with changes in farming practice, are major contributors to the loss of food available to the Rooks while the scavenging lifestyle of Crows has probably benefited them from these changes (which have also encouraged the spread of Ravens and Buzzards into our area).

Just one new plant species started to flower this week with the appearance of the **first Crocuses in at least two local gardens on Jan 17**, bringing my month total to 65 species.

[Tue 16th January](#)

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

Three recent south coast rarities - Stilt Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and Hampback Whale

**First Collared Dove song and a report of a Cat stealing Sparrowhawk kill
Miscellaneous news of Brent and Brant Geese
BBC Countryfile features Cranes in Somerset.**

A **Long Billed Dowitcher** has been in north Kent, at the Oare Marshes by the River Swale north west of Faversham, since Jan 1 and a **Stilt Sandpiper** has been on the Hampshire Avon at Cowards Marsh, just north of Christchurch, since Jan 12 while a third south coast rarity has been a **Humpback Whale** seen heading

south from Portland Bill on Jan 14. The sighting was described on the Portland website as follows .. "The Humpback Whale was always distant and, sadly, appeared to be trailing some fishing equipment that included an orange float; it was last watched heading away south off West Cliffs but couldn't be picked up from either Blacknor or the Bill. As far as we know this is only the second Humpback Whale to be recorded in Portland waters - the first being a famous animal that spent most of a summer evening way back in 1991 close inshore at Chesil Cove." A distant photo of the current whale can be seen [here](#). A video (before watching it beware that, when it ends, you must click the Cancel option to avoid seeing other Youtube videos before pressing the Back Arrow to return to this Blog) of a **Stilt Sandpiper** feeding can be seen [here](#) and for a photo of the **Dowitcher** use [this link](#).

A couple of lesser items which I noted in the last few days were the **first Collared Dove song** of the year on Jan 14 and a report in the Sussex bird news for Jan 13 of **a Sparrowhawk making a kill in a Horsham garden and of a cat stealing the prey** before the hawk could start its meal - something I have not heard of before. Sparrowhawks would, I think, normally carry off their prey to a more secluded spot if disturbed but in this case it would seem that the cat had no fear of the hawk and did not give it a chance to do so.

I have already noted on Jan 10 the first positive report from Dungeness of **150 Brent heading east to start their journey back to their breeding grounds** and on Jan 13 I see that another 87 Brent followed them. Another reaction to the changing season was noted at Warblington on Jan 15 when a big flock of 349 Brent which have been in the area for some time **changed from feeding on the eel grass in the harbour to feeding on other land based plants**. In searching for more information about the 'meadows under the sea' on which they have been feeding up to now I came across an article in the BBC Wildlife Magazine which is worth reading and it can be seen [here](#). The word 'propagule' was new to me and I find it is an overall term for "any plant material used for the purpose of plant propagation. In asexual reproduction, a propagule is often a stem cutting. In some plants, a leaf section or a portion of root can be used. In sexual reproduction, a propagule is a seed or spore." Returning to the general subject of Brent Geese I see that the past week brought the first local sighting of a **Black Brant** with one at Farlington Marshes on Jan 9 which is reported to have moved to Warblington on Jan 15. Sadly it is now several years since we have had any local reports of the more colourful **Red Breasted Goose** that was a regular winter visitor to our area and seemed to be a genuine migrant accompanying the Brent - if you are not familiar with it see [this photo](#).

Finally for now if you missed the BBC Countryfile programme last Sunday it is worth looking at it on I Player for the coverage of the introduced **Common Cranes** which are now breeding on the Somerset Levels - use this [link](#).

WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 8 - 14 (WEEK 02 OF 2018)

Sat 13th January

First Comma and Brimstone for the year

Recent Bird news including the re-appearance of those re-introduced Great Bustards

My latest flower finds include Bur Chervil and bring my month count to 60 Peter Raby's fourth year of his "Birds of Warblington and Emsworth."

Since my previous blog entry last Thursday in which I wrote about butterflies brought out by the sunshine on Jan 10 I have seen a lot more reports of them including 'first for the year' sightings of both Brimstone and Comma in Sussex where at least seven Red Admirals were also seen - another Red Admiral was also reported at Lovedean in Hampshire. The ever enthusiastic Sussex Branch of Butterfly Conservation were proud to claim that their county was first to report both Brimstone and Comma, though they do admit that Brimstones were also seen in Hertfordshire and Somerset on Jan 10.

Recent local bird news includes a sighting of a pair of Herons changing brooding duties at one of the Langstone Pond nests but further afield three Great Bustards from the Wiltshire 're-introduction' scheme flew over Ferrybridge at Weymouth on Jan 11 - it seems they have been wintering somewhere on The Fleet where Bird Flu has just started to kill off the Swans. Also on Jan 11 the first report of a Great Grey Shrike came from Mordern Bog in Dorset and a Lesser Yellowlegs was back at Lodmoor. An Emperor Goose was seen at Christchurch Harbour on Jan 12 when the first song from a Corn Bunting was heard near Beachy Head and a flock of 900 Linnets was seen just outside Exeter. Also in the birding news is the achievement of the Sussex Bird-Racing team - the 'Splash Pointers' a team of 3 led by Bob Self - who set off at 3am and ended at 8pm with a total of 123 species. They won this Sussex race last year and look set to do so again this year.

Yesterday a short local walk added three newly flowering garden plant species to my month list. First was a species that I had not seen before, the Giant Snowdrop (*Galanthus elwesii*) standing about 1 foot tall, which I identified by its height and early flowering date and confirmed from the photo on this [webpage](#). Subsequently I saw on John Goodspeed's website that Jill von Westarp had found the first normal Snowdrops in Northney churchyard on Jan 11, a day earlier than my find. My second find on Jan 12 was *Salvia microphylla* ('Hot Lips') which I had discovered last year, and my third was the type of Daffodil which has multiple small flowers on each stem and which I found is normally named as a Jonquil (*Narcissus jonquilla*).

Today I cycled to the Eastoke seafront to look for the Black Redstart which had recently been reported near the Shearwater Court block of flats. No sign of the bird but in exploring an alleyway connecting Southwood Road to the Eastoke Esplanade (now cleared of shingle) I stumbled on two more plants for my list which brought my month total to 60. First of these was no surprise - White Deadnettle - but the second was something that I normally see in June but had failed to do so last year. This was Bur Chervil whose leaves and tiny white flowers are unmistakable and which I confirmed, from the specimen that I took home, had hollow, hairless stems.

Yesterday (Jan 12) I saw from the HOS Bird News that Peter Raby had not only seen the **Cattle Egret** still at Warblington but had also completed his fourth annual edition of **a personal report on the 'Birds of Warblington and Emsworth'** to which he provided a link which I will repeat [here](#). As I have been birding in that area since the early 1980s, providing input to the BTO Common Bird Census of Warblington Farm which Tony Gutteridge started in 1976 and publishing some of my observations on my own website, I am delighted that Peter is continuing to record the birds of this area and especially pleased to see that he now includes maps which delineate the places which he names in the text of his reports.

As my interest in Warblington Farm centred on walking the fields to carry out the census I included in my website a map of the farm giving each field an identifying letter and this map is still available [here](#). Note that this map was created long before Field K became the Cemetery Extension. Other maps of local areas that were of interest to me are also available by using the AREA INDEX and PLACE INDEX starting [here](#).

This year Peter's report adds three species (Wryneck, Great White Egret and Hen Harrier) to those seen in the area and this reminds me that when I started my census work Little Egrets were new to England and chose Thorney Island as their 'invasion beachhead'. Also in those days Buzzards and Ravens were unknown in the area but we expected to see Turtle Doves each year, Grey Partridge regularly visited the farm, Kestrels bred in the Castle Tower and Sparrowhawks in the west end of Nore Barn Woods and Tree Sparrows and Yellowhammers nested on the farm while Rooks nested on trees at the north end of the rural section of Pook Lane before the A25 cut off that southern part of the Lane from the northern section. One other species that deserves a mention is Lesser Spotted Woodpecker which was regularly heard in trees along the Lymbourne Stream and once closely seen by me as I walked north up Wade Lane in a snowstorm and the bird flew close to me heading for the only Oak tree close to the road in the fields north of Wade Court and south of the Bypass. It will be interesting to see what other changes are recorded in the forthcoming years by Peter's future reports.

[Thu 11th January](#)

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

**Sunshine on Jan 10 brings out Butterflies and Birdsong
A wintering Ring Ouzel on Dartmoor and the Lesser Whitethroat still at
Ventnor
Hairy Bittercress now flowering on Hayling and Lesser Stitchwort at
Emsworth
More signs of upchannel passage of Brent at Dungeness**

The sunshine and light wind on Jan 10 brought several reports of **birdsong** starting with **Robin, Wren and Woodpigeon** in Emsworth, a **drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker** at Colden Common (between the M3 and Marwell Zoo) and in Sussex a **Goldfinch** at Crawley, a **Blackcap** at Seaford, and best of all a **Woodlark** on one of the West Sussex Commons. Down in Dorset **six Song Thrushes** were all singing at Christchurch Harbour and the CHOG website

emphasised the feeling that Spring had sprung with a lovely [photo of a male Bullfinch](#) which you can see [here](#).

After a dearth of butterfly news so far this year the sunshine brought out a [Small Tortoiseshell](#), a [Peacock](#), and of course a [Red Admiral](#), all at Portland. It also brought the first entry for the year on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website telling us of [plans to re-introduce the Marsh Fritillary to Hampshire](#), in preparation for which thousands of Marsh Fritillary caterpillars are being raised in captivity at four sites. On Jan 4 some of the larvae at a site near Romsey were found to have emerged from their over-wintering webs about a month earlier than expected and were sun-bathing prior to feeding on the leaves of Devils Bit Scabious (you can see the original of this news, and a photo of one caterpillar, under the heading "10 Jan 2018", [here](#)).

A reminder that we are still in winter came with the news of a [Ring Ouzel](#) seen on Dartmoor today (Jan 11). One had already been reported near Falmouth in Cornwall on Jan 4. Another uncommon winter bird which has been seen regularly at Ventnor since New Year's Day is a [Lesser Whitethroat](#) and it was still there today.

Today I added another species to my January flower list with a substantial patch of [Hairy Bittercress](#) here in South Hayling while Brian Fellows news from Emsworth for yesterday is of at least one plant of [Lesser Stitchwort](#) in flower. Both species were found in carparks, making me wonder what part the warmth from vehicle engines and the gases from their exhausts plays in encouraging the growth and flowering of plants, something that I have noticed by busy roundabouts where vehicles queue with their engines running.

To end today I read on the Dungeness Bird Observatory website .. "[Signs of upchannel passage of Brent Goose continued with 150 moving through](#)" .. so they are now confirming that they believe that a small number of Brent are already on their way back to their breeding grounds (hopefully to make up for the extremely low number of young they managed to raise last year.)

[Wed 10th January](#)

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

**Four more flowers for my January list
Black Redstart seen on south Hayling
A second Red Admiral on the wing.**

Today brought dawn to dusk sunshine and a light wind, tempting me to cycle the full length of the Billy Line up the west coast of Hayling Island and adding four species to my plant list to bring the total to 54 species. First to go on the list was [Hazel](#) with a small tree in the West Town Station car park having all its catkins fully extended. Despite looking for Coltsfoot at the entrance to the old carpark for the Oyster Beds and for Sweet Violet beside the Billy track just north of the vehicle entrance to the gull nesting lagoon there was no sign of either and I had to wait for the track connecting the old rail line to the southern end of Langstone Bridge for my next flower, a single plant of [Common Catsear](#) with two flowers.

The other two species were seen after returning to south Hayling - the best of these was a single plant of **Thale Cress** with its distinctive seed pods and the fourth was **Shepherds Purse** which I had seen before but failed to record.

Yesterday I was deterred from riding back from Sandy Point along the Eastoke Promenade by the shingle which was covering the normal hard surface and in using the Southwood Road alternative route I missed a chance of seeing a **Black Redstart** on the seaward side of the Shearwater Court flats where it was reported that afternoon for the first time this year. In recent years one has been a regular winter visitor to this area - last year one was seen there almost daily from Feb 4 to Mar 18 and I hope it stays for a similar period after the Promenade has been cleared of shingle! For those unfamiliar with the location of Shearwater Court it is not far west of the public carpark opposite the junction of Creek Road with Southbrook Road and the Promenade can be accessed from the carpark (but note that in previous years Black Redstarts have been seen further east along the Promenade nearly to Sandy Point reserve).

Today's sunshine brought the second report (after Brian Fellows Jan 3 sighting in Emsworth) for the year of a **Red Admiral** on the wing, this time at East Dean between Chichester and Midhurst in Sussex. I suspect that I also saw one today in south Hayling but I cannot claim a sighting as all I saw was a butterfly-like object fly out of a garden and disappear behind my head in a matter of two or three seconds.

[Tue 9th January](#)

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

Green Hellebore flowering in Combe Haven (west of Hastings) and Hazel catkins starting to flower on Portsdown.

Identifying our two regular Seal Species

Looking for signs of departing Brent

A Black-tailed Godwit with "Rhynchokinesis" (a flexible bill tip).

Today was the first this year with a very light wind so I cycled to Sandy Point but when I got there it was clear that the recent strong winds had significantly caused the sea to erode the shingle on the beach, washing it out from between the boulders and leaving a much narrowed bank of shingle keeping the sea from flooding into the nature reserve and making it impossible to ride along the Eastoke esplanade cycleway which was covered with shingle washed off the sea defence bank. My ride added just two plant species to my month list, **Stinking Hellebore** in a garden and one or two **Sea Spurge** plants which were still in flower at Sandy Point, bringing the count so far to **50 Species**.

Two more first flowerings (not seen by me) were **Hazel catkins** opening on Portsdown around Jan 6 (photographed by John Goodspeed for his weekly Nature Notes poster) and the much less common **Green Hellebore** flowering in the Coombe Haven area just west of the St Leonards area of Hastings (photographed by Cliff Dean for his Jan 7 entry in his rxbirdwalks blog).

Also coming to my attention from the Rye Harbour website was an entry informing people that the forthcoming meeting of the Iden and District Natural History Society had a change of subject for their Jan 12th meeting from Whales to '[Seal Appeal](#)', illustrating this with a very appealing photo of a Common Seal which you can see [here](#). This aroused my interest in the subject of Seals and I found an excellent web page on the identification of our Common and Grey Seals which you can read [here](#).

Also in the past few days I have been wondering if, despite recent weather conditions, some of our wintering Brent Geese will be starting to leave as they have in previous years. Last year the Dungeness Bird Observatory reported the first flock of 100 Brent heading east on Jan 9 (though the first major departure did not occur until Mar 3 when they reported a count of 2166 heading east). Currently my interest in this subject was aroused by reports from Folkestone of 20 Brent flying east on Jan 7 and 3 more heading east on Jan 8 but this was confused by another report from Folkestone of 37 flying west on Jan 8. On Jan 9 22 Brent were seen flying east past Beachy Head and 7 were flying east past Selsey Bill and also on Jan 9 Folkestone reported 9 Brent flying past but did not give any direction. I am unable to form an opinion as whether any of these reports show any of these geese were intending to leave Britain and so will wait until we see a major movement, maybe in early March?

Finally for today I learnt something new about [Black tailed Godwits](#) in a report on the Sussex Birding website of one seen at Arlington Reservoir (north of Eastbourne) showing an apparently deformed bill though the report described the condition as an example of '[Rhynchokinesis](#)' which is defined as "A form of upper jaw mobility, found in some birds, in which the terminal part of the upper jaw may be raised or lowered independently of the rest of it by the bending of the nasal or premaxillary bones." The accompanying photo showing this can be seen [here](#).

Wildlife diary and news for Jan 1 - 7 (Week 01 of 2018)

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

Sun 7th January

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

Some highlights from the internet for the first week of 2018.

With sunshine all day I got on my bike for the first time this year but only saw one plant ([Cow Parsley](#) still in flower) to add to my list but back at home I have now caught up with the internet after recording details of 183 bird species seen by birders across the south of England and I will use this blog entry to record some of the more interesting ones here.

Starting with the less common species I see that [two Lesser Whitethroats are wintering](#), one being seen several times at Ventnor on the IOW and the other reported just once from Plymouth. Further west in Cornwall a [Ring Ouzel](#) was seen on Jan 4, and in the Scillies a [Snowy Owl](#) has been reported at least twice. Another bird which interested me on account of having seen the species in Kent in the late 1940s is [Hooded Crow](#) of which there has been a report of one at

Studland in Dorset this week. Another species which brings back memories of regular winter sightings on the IBM Lake in Portsmouth when I was working there in the late 1980s is **Smew** and that species was recorded for the first time this winter today (Jan 7) in the Netherlands, hopefully heading our way.

Reports which give the first signs of spring are of a **Song Thrush** in full song at Amberley, just south of Pulborough Brooks, on Jan 5 and of **Dartford Warbler song** at Beachy Head on Jan 2. At Langstone Mill Pond **two Herons were seen mating** on Jan 2, and the appearance of a **Black Swan** off the nearby Royal Oak pub today is probably an indication that that species is now searching for mates and nesting sites.

The low temperatures and strong winds this week have limited butterfly reports to just one sighting of an adult **Red Admiral** flying in Emsworth on Jan 3 but a butterfly enthusiast at Crawley in Sussex who is **monitoring the progress of Red Admiral eggs** laid on Nettles has photographed the first tiny caterpillar which has just emerged from its egg - you can see the four photos of it under the heading Sunday 07 January on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website where the caterpillars presence is to be found by looking for the tiny black dots which are the head of the larva at the front of its pale greenish body - see [link to the website](#).

Finally, if you are interested in mammals you might like to know of the presence of some **50 Common Dolphins** at Brixham in Devon. To read about them and see photos I will provide a link to the Devon Birding website but will leave you to find the relevant entries by using the FIND command (when the website is on your screen type CTRL+F and then enter Dolphin as the word to find in the search box which appears and use the down and up arrows in the box to navigate between all occurrences of the word you have asked to FIND). To bring up the Devon website use [this link](#). You can use the same method to see a couple of photos of Otters but beware that this will also find references to the River Otter.

[Fri 5th January](#)

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

Local walks add 15 flower species to my January list to give 48 species so far

Also seen but not yet in flower were Hazel catkins and fresh leaves of 'Lords and Ladies'.

A short walk on Jan 3 found **Winter Jasmine** and a **Camellia** in flower plus **Mahonia (Oregon Grape)**, **Garden Heather**, **Common Nettle** and **Charlock** as well as the first leaves of **Lords and Ladies (Arum maculatum)**. An even shorter walk on Jan 4 not only found the **Potato Vine (Solanum jasminoides)** that I was expecting but also the first flowers on **Three cornered Leek (Allium triquetrum)** and the last flowers on **Cut-leaved Cranesbill**. Today, with sunnier and less windy weather, I walked to the beach and back, seeing my first **Creeping Buttercup**, **Lesser Hawkbit**, **Scentsless Mayweed** and **Pineappleweed** plus a **Japanese Flowering Quince** with fresh red flowers among its old Quince-like fruits and my first **Wallflowers** to bring my total so far to 48. Also seen, but not yet in flower, was

a good show of Hazel Catkins and on the Beachlands grass a couple of the Black-headed Gulls had well developed face masks.

Mon 1st January

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

Common Ramping Fumitory, Field Forget-me-not and Fool's Parsley are unexpected among 35 flowers on Jan 1

Wood Blewits a good fungal find

Cattle Egret seen again at Warblington with another 4 on the IOW

Lesser Whitethroat at Ventnor

I did not go out until the rain eased around 1pm and did not expect much in the way of wild flowers but was cheered when a walk down Palmerston Road (within a hundred yards of my new home but not previously investigated in the nine months I have been on Hayling as it is a short cul-de-sac leading only to the Mengham Junior School) came up trumps with a thriving plant of **Common Ramping Fumitory** growing up the wire mesh fence at the end of some allotments in the gap between the last house and the school.

Next finds of interest came in the alleyway connecting the south of St Margaret's Road to Mengham Lane where the creeper that I think is called **Clematis texensis** (that has white petalled flowers contrasting with a reddish underside to the flowers and flower stems) grows on the wooden fence, and further down **Ivy** still had some fresh flowers showing their anthers and **Butcher's Broom** had at least one flower among many leaves of Sweet Violet and Alexanders plants that are yet to flower.

Next interest was in Bound Lane where the **Lesser Celandines** now had at least 30 flowers. Crossing onto the Beachlands grass I had a close look at the **hundreds of Brown-tail moth winter tents** in which the caterpillars survive the winter - see a photo [here](#) taken in the early spring when the caterpillars have emerged - at present the hundreds of winter tents show no sign of life and could be mistaken for litter which has been blown onto the branches of the small tree/bush and have stuck to its twigs. The tree concerned is close to the pavement on the south side of the Seafront Road a little west of the Bound Lane junction.

Still on the Beachlands grass I found one plant of **Hairy Buttercup** in flower but reaching the west end of the grass I crossed over the Seafront road and had a much more unexpected find at the foot of the wooden fencing near the Zebra crossing - a good number of **Field Forget-me-not** plants in flower. At the roundabout I turned up Beach Road and soon came to footpath leading back into the housing. Without entering the footpath I found another very unexpected wild flower more or less prostrate on the ground and a close look showed it was a flowering example of **Fool's Parsley!**

Walking on past Westfield Ave I turned into Hollow Lane where the first thing I noticed was a small cluster of medium sized fungi and picking one of them up the

bright 'blue' colour of its underside revealed it to be a **Wood Blewit** - see photo [here](#).

Back at home I checked out my list of finds and found I had 33 flower species to start my January count plus only five bird species including Robin and Wood-Pigeon singing

A quick look at the internet showed me the one **Cattle Egret** was back near Warblington Church with four more at Brading Marsh on the Isle of Wight where a **Lesser Whitethroat** is wintering at Ventnor (seen on Dec 30 and again in Jan 1).

Wildlife diary and news for Dec 25 - 31 (Week 52 of 2017)

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

Sun 31st December

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

Killdeer Plover in the Scillies
Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers with Tit Flocks in Sussex and Hampshire
Red Admirals flying in Hampshire and Sussex
More oiled Birds at Goring
2000+ Guillemots fly west from Dungeness.

Killdeer Plover are a common species in North America but a rarity on this side of the Atlantic so a report of one in the Scillies on Dec 29 gives me an opportunity to learn about the species. For an overall account of the species I went to [this website](#) and for a video of one nesting beside the driveway of a house and reacting to people walking past its nest have a look at [this video \(but cancel a further video after the first\)](#).

Not quite as rare as the Killdeer are **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** so if you want to see one at this time of year you might be lucky if you check out any Tit flocks you come across - two reports (from the Horsham area on Dec 30 and the Lymington area on Dec 31) both came up with sightings of Lesser Spotted tagging along with Tits. Also seen in Hampshire (at Andover rail station on Dec 28) and Sussex (near Haywards Heath on Dec 30) were two more **Red Admiral butterflies**.

Less welcome sightings on the beach at Goring on Dec 30 were of **oiled birds** - one Oystercatcher, one Turnstone and three Sanderling. Not seen there were any of the 2265 Guillemots which flew west from Dungeness on Dec 29 followed by 'several thousand more' on Dec 30.

Fri 29th December

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

Red Admiral and Peacock butterflies flying despite the weather
Warblington has a Cattle Egret and 49 Skylarks
Two Mistle Thrushes singing in Hampshire and a Great Grey Shrike in Dorset.

A **Red Admiral** was flying at Bracklesham yesterday, possibly having been roused by some direct sunshine, and today a **Peacock** was active at Shoreham, more likely to have been roused by human activity such as fetching logs from a garden shed where it had gone into hibernation. I suggest these causes of arousing the two different species because the Peacock does appear to go into true hibernation while the Red Admiral doesn't seem to have the ability to do so and does not choose sites suitable for a long term 'sleep'. If you are interested in the questions raised by this subject have a look at [this website](#).

Since Oct 1 there have been 31 reports of **Cattle Egret** in Hampshire but only two have been from Warblington, one on Nov 7 and the second on Dec 28, seen in a field west of the church. Also on Dec 28 a **flock of 49 Skylarks** was in the arable field north of Conigar Point. This seems to be the first time such a flock has been here this winter - in previous winters a flock would be a regular sight here.

On Dec 28 a **Mistle Thrush was singing** near Sherfield English west of Romsey and on Dec 29 a flock of 10 were seen in the same area. This suggests that the song may have been a response to the incursion of migrants from Europe into an established territory, and the same may be true of the song heard in north Kent on Christmas Day. Also on Dec 28 a **Great Grey Shrike** was in Wareham Forest in Dorset - I think this is the first in Dorset this year but as usual there have been frequent reports from the New Forest (probably of no more than a couple of birds) since Nov 3. Earlier than that one was at Medmerry (near Selsey Bill) in the last week of October.

Thu 28th December

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

**First Song Thrush song
Possible wintering Ring Ouzel in Devon
Cirl Bunting surviving in Devon and Cornwall
Ivy and Lesser Celandine flowering despite the frost.**

Despite the sudden onset of severe winter weather immediately after Christmas yesterday brought reports of the first Woodpecker drumming and Mistle Thrush singing and today I see that the first **two Song Thrushes were singing in the Eastleigh area** while down in Devon a motorist is convinced that he saw a **Ring Ouzel** feeding on a roundabout - the report on the Devon birding website says he drove three times round the roundabout to be sure it was a Ring Ouzel!

Also on the Devon birding news for today is a sighting of **26 Cirl Buntings** at Broadsands near Paignton with a photo of the birds which you can see [here](#). Nowadays these birds can still be seen in Devon and Cornwall but by 1990 changes in agriculture had almost brought them to the point of extinction in Britain and it is interesting to read how an initiative by the European Environment Agency ("High Nature Value Farming"), supported in Britain by the RSPB, has saved the species from extinction here - from a low of just 118 pairs in the UK there are now 862 pairs or more. For an account this project see [here](#).

Finally for today I walked to the South Hayling beach and back but saw no new plants. One thing that I did notice was that **more and more Ivy is now flowering** and a second plant that seems to be defying the weather is the small cluster of **Lesser Celandine flowers** in the roadside ditch outside houses 12 and 14 Bound Lane south of the Mengham shops.

[Tue 26th December](#)

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

**Sussex Butterfly Conservation Christmas Quiz - Worth having a go
Signs of Spring - Woodpecker drumming and Mistle Thrush singing
Lesser Whitethroat in Cornwall on Christmas Eve and 16 Purple Sandpipers
at Southsea Castle on Boxing Day
Field Madder in flower brings my December count to 111.**

When checking the Sussex Butterfly website for news today I accepted their invitation to enter **a Christmas Quiz which was based on photographs of 50 Butterfly species** with two questions relating to each species giving a potential score of 100 if you get all the answers right - my score was 74, mainly because although I could identify the species (with the lamentable exception of Chalkhill Blue!) I got the sex wrong with many species (and made another bloomer in saying that the Painted Lady's annual migration started in the Iberian peninsula rather than North Africa). I strongly recommend that if you have some idle time this week you fill it with this online quiz which will be open for the 12 days of Christmas (Dec 25 to Jan 6 when the Magi arrived to initiate the feast of the Epiphany) - beware that it is likely to take you more than an hour to complete the 100 questions which you have to do to get your score.

To go directly to the Quiz [use this link](#). To go to the Sussex Butterfly main site and find the link to the Quiz there [use this link](#).

I was puzzled by one question in the Quiz - the species concerned was **Marbled White** and having identified it the second question was .. **"The fungal toxins of which grass species is thought to protect both chrysalis and adult from bird predation?"** .. The answer is **Red Fescue** which seems to be an essential food for the caterpillars and whose constituents include a lot of mycotoxins which can cause various diseases to both horses and cattle that eat the grass. It may well be that birds that take butterfly larvae or pupae do possibly die from the poison they ingest and that may deter other birds from eating the caterpillars but other than this indirect form of protection from predation by birds I can't see what justifies the statement that the mycotoxins 'protect the butterfly from predation' unless the presence of the poison in the butterfly gives off some warning smell to the bird.

Also in the recent bird news are reports of both the **first Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming**, heard in the Andover area on Dec 26, and of **Mistle Thrush song** (not the first) heard at Reculver in north Kent on Christmas Day.

Other recent bird news was of a **Lesser Whitethroat** reported to have been seen at St Austell in Cornwall on Christmas Eve. This follows another reported winter

sighting at Lodmoor in Dorset on Dec 2. Nearer home I see that a peak count of **16 Purple Sandpipers** was reported at Southsea Castle on Boxing day.

Finally for today I brought my December flower count to 111 with a very unexpected find of **Field Madder** in flower on the pavement of Kings Road near the roundabout at the junction of Church Road with Havant Road here in south Hayling.