

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 22 - 28 (WEEK 52 OF 2014)

Sun 28 December

### Water Vole feeding in Havant and 48 Avocets at Farlington Marshes

This afternoon I cycled to the road entrance to Farlington Marshes at the Eastern Road roundabout from which I had a good view of what I counted as at least 42 **Avocets** in the rising water near the Eastern Road bridge and as I watched they took off and flew to a small islet near by. Back at home the HOS website had a report from Peter Gammage of 48 there today and I reckon that is the number I saw. On the way home I watched a **Buzzard** being chased by Crows just west of the road bridge over the A27 at the east end of Harts Farm Way and when I got back into Havant I decided it was not worth going out of my way to look for **Water Voles** in the Havant Town Millpond so I did not look from the usual spot by the 'wavy white railings' but went straight into the path leading to South Street along the south of the pond - luckily I stopped long enough to scan the 'burrows' with my binoculars and so **spotted one Vole feeding on the bank immediately below the railings**.

Two things which puzzled me yesterday now have probable answers. The first was concerning the statements that **Peregrine Falcons regularly hunt by night as well as by day**, a fact that was confirmed by an observation on the Devon Birding website of one seen hunting in the streetlights of a Devon roundabout near Exeter (place named as Metcombe) at 9:20 pm on Dec 26. This recalled another observation from some years ago of Black-headed Gulls 'paddling' the grass of a Southampton area roundabout to bring up worms (which think the paddling noise is caused by rain falling and brings them to the surface for a drink or a bath??). Thinking of the gulls reminded me that the majority of **Peregrines prey on coastal species whose behaviour is governed more by the tides** than by the sun, so if their prey is likely to be found at certain stages of the tides which occur as often by night as by day the Peregrines must get used to hunting at night as well as by day.

The second puzzle concerned a report on John Goodspeed's website of a **Speckled Wood butterfly** having been seen on Christmas Day flying around Yoells Copse in the Lovedean/Horndean area. I am pretty sure this observation was not mistaken identity but all the sources of information about this butterfly agree that it should not be seen after the end of October. Today, however, I came across a Wikipedia page which gives a likely answer - it says that **the species has two methods of surviving the winter** - one is as a half grown caterpillar which goes in a form of hibernation and resumes feeding in the spring but the other method is by **over-wintering as a pupa**. A pupa of course is all ready to go (when the reforming of its caterpillar body into a butterfly is complete) when the temperature tells it spring is here. I guess this butterfly came from a **pupa which had been subject to more than usual warming over the past month or so**).

Sat 27 December

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

### A Peregrine fails to make a kill on the Langstone shore

This morning I walked to Nore Barn along the shore from Langstone and came back across the Warblington Farm fields. The first highspot was when I emerged from Wade Lane onto the Langstone shore at the moment when **hundreds of Brent** decided to fly from the fields to the vast area of mud exposed at low tide and a **Peregrine** decided to try to catch its breakfast from among the smaller waders lining the distant water's edge so my arrival coincided with a most impressive sky-full of birds - the Brent made several long lines, each of several hundred geese, as they descended onto the mud apparently unperturbed by the Peregrine; centre-stage was a large, compact flock of what I think were Knot (they looked too large for Dunlin) which were flying at top speed in ever changing directions; and everywhere I looked there were other birds (Grey Plover, Curlew, Teal, Shelduck, etc) making more direct flights to leave the area before the Peregrine turned its attention to them. By following the flock of Knot I soon located the Peregrine and before long it seemed to abandon the attempt to make a kill and gradually rose higher and higher in the sky before disappearing in the direction of Thorney Island. Very soon the sky and the greater part of the mud became birdless except for the large carpet of Brent which, before I had reached the Warblington Castle stream outflow, had decided to return to the fields.

When I got back home I tried to find an answer to the question of **whether the Brent are frightened by the presence of a Peregrine**. It is clear that the majority of their prey are smaller birds but one website said that Peregrines will take 'small geese' and another described how Peregrines nesting on a Church in Exeter are thought to have killed 15 Buzzards, not for food but because they did not like the Buzzards invading their Peregrine nest territory (there is some doubt if the Peregrines were responsible for all 15 Buzzards found dead in the area but there are video clips showing Peregrines attacking Buzzards and easily out manoeuvring the bigger birds). While searching for evidence of their prey species I also learnt that **Peregrines operate by night** as well as by day and take many migrants which fly over by night.

Another question prompted by the sight of the Brent feeding on farm fields concerned the attempts by farmers to deter the geese. I clearly remember fields being defended by **large numbers of gas guns** which would go off at timed intervals in the hope of deterring the geese (and/or pigeon flocks) but these guns seem to have vanished from the fields in recent years.

To return to my walk I saw little along the shore but as the tide rose and I reached the Nore Barn area I found the Wigeon which had been missing from the open shore and among them, in the outflow of the Nore Barn stream, was at least **one pair of Pintail**. In the stream itself the **Spotted Redshank** was looking slightly puzzled by the presence of two Black-tailed Godwits which had left the main flock out on the nearby mud and were exploring up the stream.

One thing that I did notice all along the shore from Langstone now that most of the drifts of up-rooted weed have dispersed was that **a substantial crop of what I believe to be Common Eelgrass (Zostera marina) is growing right up to the high tide mark** and I am wondering if this marks a natural recovery of this important marine plant from its decline back in the 1930s. For more about Eelgrass see

<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/habitats/seagrass> (and forgive the Trusts for their mis-spelling of Wigeon as Widgeon!)

Just one interesting sighting on the way home. Approaching the Old Rectory at Warblington a **Buzzard** took off from the trees east of the Rectory, reminding me that it is some time since I saw one in this area

**Fri 26 December**

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

### **Marsh Marigolds flowering on the South Moors with a Green Sandpiper flying over**

A frosty but almost windless morning gave me a good opportunity to walk off Christmas excesses and the walk turned out to be rewarding with both birds and flowers but before describing that I must mention much shorter walk in yesterday's sunshine. The destination then was the Havant Cemetery where I found a new fungus for the site - **White Coral (*Clavulinopsis cristata*)**, a tiny little 'earth tongue' less than 5 cm tall but showing less than half its height as it came up through thick moss. To see what this species looks like go to

[http://www.mushroomexpert.com/images/nadon/nadon\\_clavulina\\_cristata\\_03.jpg](http://www.mushroomexpert.com/images/nadon/nadon_clavulina_cristata_03.jpg).

Very little else to be seen and notable by their absence were the mass of bright Holly berries showing how hungry the avian continental migrants have become. The sunshine not only rekindled Wood Pigeon song but I also saw a Collared Dove making its display flight.

This morning I set off to walk down the Langbrook Stream path to the South Moors where I made my way across the waterlogged ground to the small pond near the SSE offices where I hoped to put up some Snipe. No luck with the birds but I was very pleased to find two fresh flowers on the **Marsh Marigolds** which had started to flower on Dec 3. A rapid movement in the vicinity of the flowers was hopefully a baby **Frog** showing that these once very common creatures are not yet totally extinct here. While in this area I disturbed a **Kestrel** from its perch and then heard and saw a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** fly over. While on the Moors I heard both **Great Tit** and **Song Thrush** song and put up a **Grey Wagtail** from the ground. Another flower in this area was **Butcher's Broom**.

Next stop was the Budds Farm pools where my first impression was that all the waterfowl had left until I saw the mass of **Teal** and gulls on the circular filtration pools within the sewage works. A scan of the more natural pools showed that more than a dozen species were still present including **Pochard**, **Shoveler** and **Gadwall** with the Mallards and one Cormorant with the Little Egret and Heron hoping for larger prey.

I came back along the shore to Langstone with the tide approaching the high water mark but still leaving a strip of mud which was crammed with birds getting their last meal before the enforced high tide roost and this gave me close views of **Dunlin**, **Turnstone**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Grey Plover**, **Curlew** and **Oystercatcher** among the Brent Geese and Egrets. Two bonus birds were a single **Rock Pipit** on the high tide seaweed and an unexpected **Green Sandpiper** flying over the Moors

and calling to make sure I did not miss it. At the mouth of the Langbrook I added a good number of **Mergansers** and **Shelduck** before being forced inland past the West Mill where the **Japanese Spindle** is now very impressive as the coverings of its many berries split to reveal the bright orange of the fruits, presumably coloured to attract birds to them to scatter the seed.

Langstone Pond was thronged with parents throwing bread to the ducks and Swans for the entertainment of their children but it also gave me some excitement when I spotted the **regular female 'pond Wigeon' had a single male** with her. Also seen in the Langstone area was my first **yellow petalled Welsh Poppy** in a High St garden and the currently **strongly scented Winter Heliotrope** at Wade Court near which there is a good display of **Sulphur Tuft** fungus. At this point a light rain set in...

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 15 - 21 (WEEK 51 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 20 December**

#### **First Daffodils flowering on Hayling**

Despite the strong wind today I cycled round Hayling and enjoying my first sight of a **Camellia** in full flower and being told that the first two **Daffodils** were also out. More mundane floral sightings were of **Vipers Bugloss** and **Fennel** in flower plus a full grown **Rape** plant flowering in the West Hayling fields. Also seen in my garden this morning were more **Hairy Earthtongue** fungi in a new part of the lawn.

Last time I rode past the West Hayling fields was on Dec 16 when I believe I saw a flock of at least **500 Stock Doves** take off in the thick mist. At the time I was dubious because there had, upto that date, been only one report of a large flock of these birds (**91 Stock Dove** at Christchurch Harbour on Dec 13) but there is now increasing evidence that the expected winter flocks are with us. On the same day as my sighting (Dec 16) there was a flock of 450 near Eastbourne and 43 were seen at Crowborough on Dec 17 followed by a flock of 130 at West Dean Woods north of Chichester on Dec 19.

Two reports of interesting winter roosts were in today's web news. At Fleet Pond on Dec 19 John Clark found **125 Magpies** while somewhere in Sussex Martin Kalaher counted up to **28 Ravens** assembling for the night and believes this is the first proof of a Raven communal roost anywhere in Sussex. Although I can't produce the evidence I remember hearing of a huge communal roost in Wales and then being surprised to read of some 400 Ravens (if my memory can be trusted) in a communal roost somewhere near Maiden Castle in Dorset.

### **Fri 19 December**

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

#### **A new orchid species for Britain and other recent news**

My own observations today were limited to seeing a **Green Sandpiper** at Budds Farm pools and seeing that the single **Lesser Celandine** flower which I had first seen by the Lymbourne Stream on Dec 14 had now become two, both on the same plant but with one fully open.

Arriving back home among the Christmas mail in the letterbox was Nigel Johnson's annual summary of his orchid hunting and this told me of a **new orchid species for Britain** found early this year in the Purbeck area of Dorset. The species is called the **Sawfly Orchid (*Ophrys tenthredinifera*)** which is similar to the Bee Orchid but slightly smaller in size and flowering earlier. To see what the plant looks like go to <http://www.first-nature.com/flowers/ophrys-tenthredinifera.php> and to learn more about the Dorset find go to <http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/forums/wildflowers-plants-and-tree-forums/124087-new-uk-species-orchid.html> from which I learnt that only one plant has been found but that it has a chance of 'breeding' and multiplying as the soil is suitable and supports a population of Early Spider Orchids, insects similar to those which fertilise it on the continent exist in the area, and this type of orchid will allow itself to be self-fertilised. One other fact that I learnt from this online discussion is that while there were only 17 species of the genus *Ophrys* known in 1980 that number had increased to 250 species by 2010.

For today's look at December internet reports I have picked out the Insects for which I have just two Butterfly species - **Red Admiral** has 14 appearances between Dec 6 and 16 at sites ranging from Portland in the west to East Dean near Eastbourne and from Emsworth in the south to Overton near Basingstoke in the north. The other species is **Peacock** with just two sightings, both in East Sussex and Dec 13 and 16. A photo of a Small Tortoiseshell appeared on the Sussex website but it was inside a house, clearly disturbed from hibernation. Other types of insect still on the wing included the **Buff-tailed Bumblebee** seen at Selsey on Dec 11 and by myself in Havant today (Dec 19). On Dec 6 I saw a **Long Hoverfly** apparently gathering nectar from a Primula in Warblington Cemetery but close examination showed it to be comatose if not dead and on Dec 3 I found a similarly inactive Harlequin Ladybird on a Ragwort plant in Havant. More interesting was a photo of a Wood Hopper (a species I was not aware of) taken at Fairlight near Hastings on Dec 15 - it was found in a wood pile and was probably hibernating but is of interest as being the first of this species ever to have been recorded in South East England. My final insect of interest this month was the small spider that I found eating a fly on a stone wall at Havant Cemetery on Dec 6 - for a photo and comment see the fifth photo at <http://ralph-hollins.net/HAVCEM.htm#H0612>.

Also seen during the month as the result of draining the water from the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth were the homes of an unusual species of tubeworm which lives in water that is a mixture of fresh and saline. It was first identified in Britain at Weymouth in 1937 but is now widely distributed around our coasts. A paper giving Defra's view of it in Britain says that it is not causing any problems here (see <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1700>) but Wikipedia says it is a serious problem in Australia from which it originates (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficopomatus\\_enigmaticus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficopomatus_enigmaticus))



## Thu 18 December

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficopomatus\\_enigmaticus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficopomatus_enigmaticus)([Link to previous day's entry](#))

### Waxwings in Britain and a small fungus on my lawn

While hanging out some washing in the hope of it being dried by the fresh wind I noticed a tiny strand of black among the grass at my feet and later examination of it showed it to be a fungus which regularly comes up in my garden but normally appears earlier in the autumn. This specimen was just three cm long and less than 5 mm across - you can see what it looks like at its best by going to [http://www.mykoweb.com/CAF/species/Trichoglossum\\_hirsutum.html](http://www.mykoweb.com/CAF/species/Trichoglossum_hirsutum.html). The species is called a **Hairy Earthtongue** or **Trichoglossum hirsutum**.

Back indoors the HOS website had more exciting news of a **Waxwing** having been seen at a Netley Marsh petrol station on the A336 Ringwood Road coming out of Totton. For me this was the first hint that Waxwings might be in this country but a check on the internet led me to a web source at <https://twitter.com/waxwingsuk> which has dozens of reports of the birds with the first of this winter appearing on Orkney on Sep 19 followed by one in West Yorkshire on Oct 4 with a flock of 15 at Cley in Norfolk on Oct 15. By Oct 30 a small flock visited the RSPB HQ at Sandy in Bedfordshire and on Nov 13 there were 30 in Perthshire but before that there had been reports from Sussex on Nov 17 and 19.

Another rarity, **Siberian Chiff-chaff**, seems to have settled in Brook Meadow at Emsworth and helped to prove its identity, already made probable by its overall grey plumage, by responding to a recording of the song of that subspecies - see Peter Raby's report among the HOS news for Dec 17 at [http://www.goingbirding.co.uk/hants/birdnews.asp?date\\_search=8&date=2014-12-17&sort=7&status\\_id=8](http://www.goingbirding.co.uk/hants/birdnews.asp?date_search=8&date=2014-12-17&sort=7&status_id=8) and to listen to recordings of this subspecies go to <http://www.xeno-canto.org/explore?query=Phylloscopus+collybita+tristis>. I also did a quick check on other reports of this bird in Hampshire this winter but only found one definite report of one being caught and ringed at the Fishlake Meadows near Romsey on Oct 28 and 29 with a possible sighting at Titchfield Haven on Nov 15. Over the border in West Sussex two were reported at Steyning sewage works on Dec 16 and there were reports from Dorset of one at Portland on Nov 27, in Poole Harbour on Dec 2 and in the Winspit Valley on Dec 9.

## Wed 17 December

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

### A new way of trying to understand how nature works

I have spent the last hour watching a TV programme about a subject that I cannot (and never will) understand - **Quantum Mechanics** - but the programme persuaded me that without understanding the principles of Quantum Mechanics we may never fully understand how the natural world functions. The programme did not come up with any simple solutions to the questions that it chose to discuss - How birds navigate their migratory journeys; How our sense of smell works; How a tadpole turns into a frog in a very short time; how photosynthesis works; and how evolution

works by making mistakes in replicating DNA during cell division - but it did show that **the rules governing the behaviour of sub-atomic particles could provide answers to many questions that arise in our current thinking and which we currently choose to ignore.**

The programme in question can be seen on the BBC I-Player at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04v85cj/the-secrets-of-quantum-physics-2-let-there-be-life> and I would recommend anyone with an interest in the way the natural world works to watch it.

Returning to simpler matters I have now collected **data for the south of England for the first half of December** and here are some of the observations that caught my eye. On Dec 13 the count of **Red-throated Divers** at Cap Gris-Nez was 431 after counts of 100 had been recorded at Sandwich on Dec 5 and at Dungeness on Dec 13 while the single **Pacific Diver** has been back in the Penzance area of Cornwall (where it has been seen in several recent winters) on several occasions. The flock of **Great Crested Grebes** on the sea off Brownwich (near Titchfield Haven) numbered 143 on Dec 1 and the flock off Dungeness had 750 birds on Dec 13 with another flock of 1434 birds off the Netherlands on Dec 14. The local flock of **Slavonian Grebes** off Pagham Harbour numbered 15 on Dec 6 and that of **Black-necked Grebes** at Studland Bay had 30 birds on Dec 14 and the count in the Falmouth area was 52 on Dec 16.

Single drake **American Wigeon** have been seen at three sites in Devon (maybe the same bird) and 2 females seem to be settled at Newquay in Cornwall while the 'possible but unlikely' female on Langstone Mill Pond is still being seen there intermittently. The sex drive of **Mallards** brought a brood of 8 tiny ducklings to a Dorset site on Dec 2.

A single female **Goshawk** seen at Blackdown near Haslemere on Dec 6 was seen again on Dec 14 and at the other end of the scale of rarity 17 **Common Buzzards** were seen foraging (presumably for worms) on the ground of one Devon field on Dec 16. The **Rough Legged Buzzard** at Jevington near Eastbourne shows no sign of leaving and was still there on Dec 16 and just across the Channel a single **Osprey** was still at Ouistreham (Normandy) on Dec 14. Not December news but from Christmas card news I learnt that the annual ringing of the **Chichester Cathedral Peregrines** was done this year by three generations of the Roberts family - Graham (the West Sussex Ecologist), his 90 year old father, and Graham's son.

An unusual winter wader was a single **Curlew Sandpiper** seen on the Langstone village shore up to Dec 4 and on that day the highest count of 15 **Purple Sandpipers** was seen at Southsea Castle. Another high count was of 11 Ruff at Rye Harbour on Dec 13. Single wintering **Whimbrel** are present in Pagham Harbour and at the top of Southampton Water while the count of **Spotted Redshank** peaked at 9 on the Lymington Marshes on Dec 1. Another high count was of 34 **Greenshank** at Thorney Island on Dec 6 ... to be continued.

**[Tue 16 December](#)**

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

## Huge flock of possible Stock Doves on West Hayling fields

A ride down the Hayling Coastal Path to deliver Christmas Cards started in thick sea mist and I did not expect any bird interest but the West Hayling fields gave me two interesting observations of which the first came as I reached the southern fields which are growing a root crop. Passing the open gateway into this field I saw a **large flock of pigeons** on the ground but they also saw me and as I stopped to have a look they took off as one with a deafening roar of wings - my guess was that there were more than 500 birds in the flock. On the ground my brief glimpse detected no white in the birds and both their 'vertical' take off and subsequent flight looked unlike that of lumbering Wood Pigeons, suggesting that **they might be Stock Doves** though I had no hard evidence of their identity. Back at home I scanned both HOS and SOS websites for other sightings of Stock Doves (which have been unusually absent from local reports so far this winter) and found just one, dated today, from Bernie Forbes who had been on a trip to the Pevensy Levels to see a Richard's Pipit and then on to Eastbourne to see the long staying Rough Legged Buzzard at Jevington (he saw both). While in the Jevington area he found a .. **"Massive flock of 450 Stock Doves feeding with the corvids in the set-a-side fields."** These could not have flown to Hayling to be there around 11am but as I have not heard of their presence before it is possible that they have just arrived from the continent as part of a massive cold weather movement. Hopefully others will resolve the mystery with further reports.

Coming back past the same fields I had an excellent view of a **cock Pheasant**, the first I have seen this month, and when I reached the Langstone area I heard my first **Great Tit song** of this month - I see that two were heard for the first time in Emsworth yesterday.

**Mon 15 December**

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

## Cow Parsley and Lesser Periwinkle on Portsdown and the scent of Winter Heliotrope

This morning the weather was propitious for delivering Christmas Cards in the Portsdown and East Cosham areas so I set out on the long climb from Bedhampton up the hill during which I was rewarded with a single plant of **Cow Parsley** in flower (my third find of this in flower this winter) and given another chance to examine the **Periwinkle flowers** which I had first seen by the roadside near the top of the hill on Nov 18. On that first look at the plants I was able to rule out Greater Periwinkle by the absence of hairs on the leaf edges and calyx segments, leaving Lesser and Intermediate species as possibilities and I opted for Intermediate mainly because I have never seen Lesser in flower at any time other than early spring. Today I paid special attention to the flowers of which there were three good specimens on show. I measured the width across the front of each flower and found none were less than 26 mm nor more than 29mm across which fitted neatly into the 25-30mm range given in Stace's Flora for Lesser and excluded Intermediate for which Stace gives a range of 12-18mm so I now feel confident that these plants, growing in the bottom of a long established hedgerow, are **wild Lesser Periwinkle (Vinca minor)** and not the Intermediate species.



After the steep descent to the southern foot of the hill I headed home along the Havant Road through Drayton and Farlington, passing the **corpse of a Fox** on the road where it leaves the heavily built-up area to have farmland on the southern side. Crossing the roundabout at the southern end of the A3M using the cycleway round its north side I noted a small cluster of **Hemp Agrimony plants in fresh flower** and reaching the east side of the roundabout and heading south towards Harts Farm Way I enjoyed the **strong scent of the Winter Heliotrope plants** on the eastern embankment of the road.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 8 - 14 (WEEK 50 OF 2014)**

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

### **Sun 14 December**

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

#### **First Celandine flower out by Lymbourne stream**

After posting some Christmas Cards this morning I extended my short outing with a walk down the Billy Line to where the Lymbourne Stream emerges from under the Havant bypass and there, just beyond a tree-trunk partially blocking the flow, I found **a single Lesser Celandine flower** which had grown to its full height but had not yet fully opened its petals - this equals my earliest date ever for this flower. On my way down the track I had passed the **Hazel** tree on the east side of the track opposite Grove Road and found that it was **now in full flower with all its catkins open**.

Yesterday (Dec 13) I cycled east to Nutbourne Bay but once again failed to see any Avocets although there were a few Pintail in the bay and en route I had heard **song from both a Blue Tit and a Dunnock** as well as the more expected **Robin, Wren and Collared Dove**. Later I saw that Brian Fellows had also heard **Wood Pigeon song** and realised that I had not heard one for some time which is unusual for this species which seems to be sexually active all round the year. While I was out I also renewed acquaintance with the Nore Barn **Spotshank** and found the strange '**Pond Wigeon**' back on Langstone Mill Pond.

Catching up on December sightings on the Internet I saw that a **Swallow** was still to be seen at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Dec 11 with a late male **Ring Ouzel** at Portland on Dec 4 and a **Hoopoe** there on Dec 3 (but found dead a few days later). A rare **Barred Warbler** first seen at the Bill on Dec 1 was still around on Dec 13 when 70 people came to see it. Also on Dec 1 a **Common Whitethroat** was seen on the Isle of Wight with a flock of Chiff Chaffs. In Sussex two **Weasels** were seen at West Wittering on Dec 7 and a **Snow Bunting** was at Newhaven on Dec 8. Hastings had a **Swallow** on Dec 10 and there was a **probable Iceland Gull** at Newhaven on Dec 11 when continental immigrants seen at Rodmell near Lewes included **100 Blackbirds, 50 Redwing and 30 Song Thrush**. By Dec 14 the flock of **Bewick's Swans** on the R Arun just north of Arundel had reached 15 birds and **two juvenile Whoopers** had just arrived at Barnham (and maybe will be seen at the Chichester lakes before long). A young female **Goshawk** was an unexpected sight at Blackdown near Fernhurst on Dec 6 and was still there on Dec 14 after another had

been reported in the north of the New Forest on Dec 6 - maybe the young from the annual RSPB nest camera show near Lyndhurst are now spreading out? A major Corvid roost just north of the M27 passing Southampton had at least **4,500 Jackdaws** and **1,800 Rooks** on Dec 11 and the traditional **Redwing roost** near Fritham in the New Forest had 3000 birds on Dec 12.

## [Thu 11 December](#)

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

### **Review of late November continued**

I have just finished editing and uploading the results of the regular Cemetery visits which I made this month on December 6 but the only interest which I think you will find in them is the appearance of the **first spring bulb shoots** at St Faith's, the photo of **a small spider Zygiella x-notata** eating a fly on the stone gateway to the Havant Cemetery, and finds of a **Lepista irina toadstool** and **Wild Radish in flower**, both at Warblington. I was surprised to find a spider active at this time of year but my tentative id of it as **Zygiella montana** led me to read that that species takes three years to reach maturity. Subsequently I discovered that the more likely species is probably **Zygiella x-notata** as *Z. montana* is only found on land above 350 metres where the cold slows its development - nevertheless *Z. x-notata* often overwinters and is the only spider to continue spinning webs through the winter. If you come across an orbweb during the winter it will probably have a missing sector which is replaced by a single trigger-line leading to the female in a nearby hideout to tell her when prey gets entangled in the web. For a diagram of this design go [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spider\\_web#mediaviewer/File:Zygiella\\_web.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spider_web#mediaviewer/File:Zygiella_web.jpg). This webpage has arrows on either side leading to other types of web which are well worth a look (moving to the right you will eventually come to a menacing 'Communal Spider Web' and this is followed by an illustration of how caffeine can render a spider incapable of making its usually complex orbweb. The last photo in this series is of a spider called *Platycryptus undatus* which some people might see as a 'cuddly toy' while others would be scared out their wits to come across it in real life.

Returning to **November bird reports** Guillemots started to return to their nesting ledges at Durlston and by Nov 30 there were more than 750 at Berry Head in Devon. A single **Black Guillemot** or 'Tystie' was in Portland Harbour on Nov 26 where it had been seen occasionally for some time. On the south coast **Little Auks** are scarce and normally seen as single birds but on Nov 17 there were 54 at Flamborough with 53 still there two days later.

Many birders have been expecting **Ring-necked Parakeets** to spread along the south coast and the number of reports from Sussex has increased recently - on Nov 15 Matt Farmer reported .. "I think the colonisation of Sussex by them has begun. In the last two weeks I have seen two flocks of ten birds fly over my house in Rusper and on Nov 15 I heard the din of a group in a copse between Rusper and Faygate" Singles have also been seen in Worthing and Hove. Before getting too excited I vividly recall that in the winter of 1974 two of these Parakeets visited my bird table in Havant where they remained for some days but they never came back. Late November has also produced a number of reports of **Little Owls being vocal by**

day - on Nov 26 a pair at Portland were reported as 'currently noisy' and between then and Nov 30 others were heard locally at Warblington and Northney with another heard at Dogmersfield near Fleet in north Hampshire. Many Short-eared Owls have arrived in southern England this autumn but so far I have only seen one report of **Long-eared Owl** (two of them at Dungeness on Nov 23)

A **Hoopoe** has been at Portland from Nov 15 to Nov 30; another was in north Cornwall on Nov 16; another was at Durlston on Nov 26. My only report of **Shorelark** was of one on the north Kent coast (Reculver) on Nov 26. Three **Swallows** were at Portland on Nov 18 and at least ten other birds were seen at sites from Dungeness to Lands End in the period up to Nov 30 (even later one was at Hastings on Dec 10). Just one **House Martin** was reported in the second half of November at Bude in Cornwall on Nov 25. Six **Wheatears** were at Medmerry near Selsey on Nov 18 and one has been at Portland up to Nov 30 when a **Desert Wheatear** was at Porthgwarra in Cornwall and can be seen in a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtMdTxGVojk#t=46>. A late **Ring Ouzel** was at Baggy Point in Devon on Nov 20 but the last was at Portland on Nov 28. On Nov 14 I heard a **Blackbird in full song** here in Havant and another report of song came from Seaford on Nov 19 - these may have been spurred to defend their territories by the number of continental birds arriving (also on Nov 14 I noted two Blackbirds pacing up and down my lawn and presumed they were new arrivals marking out territorial boundaries - some idea of the influx can be seen in reports of 50 arriving at Portland on Nov 16 and 90 at Sandwich on Nov 17). I also heard **full Song Thrush song** at dawn on Nov 18 with repeat performances daily up to Nov 30. Some late departing summer birds were a **Lesser Whitethroat** in Cornwall on Nov 12; a **Common Whitethroat** on the Isle of Wight on Nov 30; and on Nov 19 a **Garden Warbler** in the Scillies with a **Wood Warbler** on the Islands on Nov 22 and **Willow Warblers** being seen there up to Nov 24. A notable Hampshire report was of a **Willow Tit** (now seemingly extinct in the county) calling in a wood near the River Test west of Winchester on Nov 14. Also in Hampshire **Great Grey Shrikes** have been around since at least Nov 1 but of more rarity interest was an **Isabelline Shrike** at Christchurch Harbour on Nov 15 (see its photo at [http://chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2014/November%202014/Isabelline\\_Shrike\\_151114.jpg](http://chog.org.uk/Sightings%20Photos/2014/November%202014/Isabelline_Shrike_151114.jpg)). Dorset also had a **Red-backed Shrike** at Portesham on Nov 10 and 11. To end with there were six reports of **Snow Bunting** along the south coast in the first half of November before one was at Seaford on Nov 20 followed by six more reports in the second half to end with a flock of 21 on the north Kent coast on Nov 29.

## [Tue 9 December](#)

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

### **Review of late November continued**

Before resuming my highlights of November here are my finds for yesterday and this morning. On Nov 8 I took an afternoon walk over Langstone Bridge to add **Common Storks-bill** to my December flower list - plenty still in flower where you leave the Hayling Road pavement south of Langstone Bridge to head towards the Oysterbeds - but my only other new find came as I rejoined the eastern pavement

of the bridge and reached through the white railings to pick a sample of some small white fungi in the grass which I recognized as the 'deadly poisonous' **Clitocybe dealbata**. Checking the id when I got home I found it now has two English names, **Ivory Funnel** and '**Sweating Mushroom**' as anyone who eats it will break out in severe perspiration and has a fair chance of dying. I don't propose to eat it and will use Ivory Funnel for its English name. By the time I was nearing home the sun had set but as I passed under a **Hazel tree** overhanging the continuation of the footpath from Grove Road after crossing the Billy Trail I noticed some extra long catkins and returned to look at them in the morning light today when I could see that at least **11 catkins were fully open** (I think these are my earliest ever.) Also this morning (Dec 9) I found a cluster of large toadstools beside Old Copse Road running through the new housing south of Crossland Drive and west of the New Lane allotments - these were **Shaggy Parasols** which you can see at <http://mushroomhobby.com/Gallery/Lepiota/Chlorophyllum%20molybdites/Chlorophyllum%20molybdites%203.jpg> showing some fully developed specimens (measuring a full 15 cm across the cap). I had considered going a bit further to check the Hermitage Stream in the Stockheath area to see if the regular winter **Green Sandpiper** had returned now that the the flow of water down the stream had diminished but decided against doing so - a wrong choice as I see that Peter Raby went there and found the Sandpiper there at midday.

I can start the second part of my review of late November highlights with an ambiguous report on the Devon county bird news of **43 Spoonbills** at Shipstal Point on the Wytch channel close to the Arne RSPB centre on 24/11 and also 32 at Brownsea Island on the same day. I suspect these were the same birds but there had been a report of 46 at Arne earlier in the month when a family of 1 adult with 3 juveniles had been see at Thorney Island and small numbers have been seen at several other locations in Dorset, Hampshire and Sussex. No news so far of the **Red-breasted Goose** which has been a regular visitor to the south coast since Nov 2006, always accompanying Brent Geese and tending to turn up in Dorset and gradually move east through Hampshire to the Langstone/Chichester Harbour area before flying off with migrant Brent in early spring. In 2012 both the old bird and a first winter were seen, though not together, and in 2013 one was around Thorney Island from January to March and another (almost certainly feral) was seen inland near Henfield in Sussex, associating with Greylags, in both spring and autumn. The 'genuine' bird was at Farlington Marshes from 2012 through to Apr 5 2013 and returned there briefly on Sep 27 before settling in the Lymington area from Oct 13 to Jan 14 2014. Since then the only sighting that might be our genuine returning bird is of one in Somerset on on Dec 6 2014 but I fear that we will not see 'our bird' this winter.

Local excitement at Langstone Mill Pond included what I have called a '**Pond Wigeon**' which I saw there looking very tame on 24/11. Peter Raby told me he had seen it there since around 17/11 and that at first it was very shy and he was toying with the idea that it could be a trans-Atlantic visiting **American Wigeon**. He decided it was an odd female Wigeon though it was strange that it did not associate with the many normal Wigeon in the harbour. In order to determine its id as an American Wigeon it would be necessary to have a close look at its underwing where the 'axillaries' (the feathers of the small area where the wing joins the body) are

'gleaming white' in the American bird but 'vermiculated grey' in our Eurasian bird). One slight hint that it could be an American bird came a few days later when two females of that race were reported at Newquay in Cornwall on Nov 30 and were still there on Dec 7. On Nov 27 Peter Raby also saw two South American **Ringed Teal** on Langstone Pond while on Nov 30 Martin Hampton saw three of them on the pond - these birds have also been seen in Emsworth since Nov 3 when one was on Peter Pond. To see what they look like go to

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x292-ringed-teal-two-peter-12.11.14.jpg>. A more uncommon duck at the Blashford Lakes throughout the second half of November has been a single **Ferruginous Duck** which arrived in Nov 11. Some high numbers of ducks have been 56 **Pintail** at Hook near Warsash on 22/11; 40 **Pochard** on Ivy Lake at Chichester on 15/11; 155 **Shoveler** with 100+ **Gadwall** at Rye Harbour on 28/11; and 75 **Red-breasted Merganser** off the Langbrook Stream at Langstone on 24/11. A final duck species present in good numbers was **Goosander** with 59 at Blashford on 18/11. I must also mention a personal favourite, the **Smew**, of which I have just two records this winter - one at Dungeness on Nov 13 and one at Whitburn on the north east coast on Nov 22.

Among raptors the most unexpected has been the **Rough-legged Buzzard** at Jevington near Eastbourne which arrived on Nov 9 and is still giving good views there on Dec 9 - it seems to be part of an unusual winter influx into the UK after a good breeding season for the species, and that is thought to be the result of good breeding by the rodents such as Lemmings on which it preys - they have also provided easy pickings for the Arctic Foxes and so reduced predation of Brent Goose juveniles... A late **Osprey** was seen in the Scillies on Nov 23 and a **very unexpected Little Bustard** was in Dorset on Nov 18 (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-30094854>) with two more expected sightings of **Great Bustards** in Dorset and Devon respectively on Nov 20 and 24. On Nov 30 a country record count of **730+ Avocets** were in the Exe estuary where the **Black-tailed Godwit** flock was over 1000 in number on Nov 23. A rare **Franklin's Gull** (a three star rarity in my Collins Bird Guide) was at Blashford from Oct 19 to Nov 24 - to see what it looks like in its winter and summer plumages go to [http://www.birdguides.com/taxonassets/061033/061033\\_P002\\_FranklinsGull.png](http://www.birdguides.com/taxonassets/061033/061033_P002_FranklinsGull.png) and <http://www.birdguides.com/i/articles/002624/thumbnail.jpg> respectively. Easier to spot at roost time were the **3500 Lesser Blackbacks** at Blashford on Nov 26.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 1 - 7 (WEEK 49 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 7 December**

#### **Review of late November**

I have only now collected all the November data from the full set of wildlife websites which I monitor on a regular basis (covering the south of England from Kent to the Scillies plus Trektellen for the near continent, RBA (Rare Bird Alert) to give a UK



view of bird rarities, and the British Dragonfly Society site for UK wide Odonata reports) and I will now pick out some of the more interesting sightings in the second half of the month (Nov 17 - 30).

My records are in four groups: A for animals (but also including Fungi); B for birds; I for Insects; and P for Plants. Looking though my Group A I had a close encounter with a **Weasel** at Nutbourne on 26/11 which was my first sighting this year since seeing one on the Langstone South Moors on Feb 1 as last winter's flooding subsided (and I can't recall any reports from others this year). Next notable record came from Berry Head in south Devon where a feeding frenzy of **50+ Common Dolphins** was reported. Of personal interest was a report of three Slug species seen in an Emsworth garden mentioning three different species, one of which (the **Hedgehog Slug**) I had never come across before but which I find is used as the English Name for **Arion intermedius** by a new Id guide to Slugs at [http://www.slugwatch.co.uk/?page\\_id=21](http://www.slugwatch.co.uk/?page_id=21) - maybe the reason that other sources do not use it is because a Google search for 'Hedgehog Slug' returns many links to sites about Hedgehogs and to poisoning Slugs but none to the Arion species. Among my Fungus records I discovered a new to me Waxcap (**Slimy Waxcap or Hygrocybe irrigata** aka *H. unguinosa*) on my lawn on 26/11 and then found another 'new to me' species with a particularly nasty smell in grass alongside Staunton Avenue (south Hayling) on 29/11 - this was **Agaricus placomyces**. My best fungal find came on 24/11 by the footbridge leading from Langstone Mill Lane over the Langbrook stream where it formed a thick jelly like crust over much of the surface of a dead tree overhanging the stream. To see what struck me go to [http://www.aranzadi.eus/fileadmin/images/micologia/Eskaneatuak/09\\_digital/peniophora\\_quercina\\_jmm\\_090125\\_5037057c.jpg](http://www.aranzadi.eus/fileadmin/images/micologia/Eskaneatuak/09_digital/peniophora_quercina_jmm_090125_5037057c.jpg). So much of this fungus grew on the tree that its weight caused the top part of the dead trunk to break off and fall into the stream but it may well be found elsewhere as it has been reported all across Hampshire (go to <http://www.hampshirefungi.org.uk/fungi.php> then enter **Peniophora quercina** into search box and press Enter to see the location of the records on a map of Hampshire. Note that the dramatic thick crust which I saw may have been the result of very wet weather.

Bird interest starts with a count of **38 Red Throated Divers** at Sandwich on 28/11. **Black Throated Divers** have been in short supply with my only record being of 3 in Cornwall Mounts Bay on 29/11 where **8+ Great Northern Divers** made the highest count but more interesting was the return of the lone **Pacific Diver** that has turned up near Lands End for several winters. The expected winter flocks of **Great Crested Grebe** have brought 114 to the Brownwich area on 24/11 with 52 off Hythe in Southampton Water on 20/11. 3 **Slavonian Grebe** were off Pennington on 18/11 but **Black Necked Grebe** numbers reached 51 in the Falmouth inlet on 25/11. Another 34 were off Studland in Dorset on 30/11 but none were in Langstone Harbour during November. I think a **Bittern** at Fishlake Meadows near Romsey was unusual and I guess it was in transit to spend the winter at a coastal site. On 18/11 RBA reported 3 **Cattle Egrets** somewhere in the UK but the only ones I know off have been 2 in the Dungeness and Rye Bay areas on 21/11 and 23/11. Last winter **Glossy Ibis** were widespread in the UK but in our period I only have one report of 1 in Lincolnshire on 18/11.

No time for more tonight but I hope to resume with news of much more numerous **Spoonbills**.

## **Sat 6 December**

### **Sun on frosty ground for my Cemetery visits**

Yesterday (Dec 5) I cycled through Leigh Park to the Staunton Country Park and around Havant Thicket on a dull afternoon with a fresh north wind. My only finds of any interest were single plants of **Ox-eye Daisy** and **Hedge Woundwort** in flower and a troop of **Clouded Agaric (*Clitocybe nebularis*) fungi** to add to my December list but where I stopped for the Hedge Woundwort (at the top of the slope down from the high ground of the Country Park into Hammonds Land Coppice) I had a **puzzling find of a large number of 5cm long 'catkins'** which seemed to have fallen from a cluster of tall conifers growing on either side of the path I was on and which I cannot name as all the foliage was many feet above my head and all I could see where very substantial 'Redwood' type trunks. At first glance the 'catkins' looked similar to those that fall from large old Poplar trees in late spring but as soon as I picked one up its rigidity told me it was not a soft Poplar catkin and close inspection showed rows of hard spoon-shaped structures similar to the wooden 'plates' that are the main components of some pine-cones. Its function as a catkin (I think botanists call them stroboli in pines) was confirmed by particles of yellow pollen still adhering to the internal parts. Back at home I searched my books and the internet and eventually came up with a photo that seemed identical to my specimens but was of a Pine species that is common in the south-east of the USA but does not seem to occur in Britain - this is called the **Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*)**. See the ARKIVE page at <http://www.arkive.org/pinus/pinus-taeda/image-G91138.html> and scroll down to the string of 9 photos of which the last shows the catkins (the small picture to see a larger version). Although I can find no reference to the species occurring in Britain the catkins are very like those that I found and the mature trees shown in the first picture (of the 9) have possible similarities to the trees I was under (though I will have to look at them more closely next time I am there).

Today's outing started with a visit to the Havant Cemetery where I stopped outside the Eastern Road entrance to photograph some lichen on the stonework and noticed that despite the frost several flies were enjoying the reflected warmth from the same stonework though one of them had not been quick enough to avoid the jaws of a small spider that was hunting the stonework (no web seen). Back at home my photo of the spider suggested it was called **Zygiella montana** whose habitat is given as 'tree trunks and stone walls' and which can be found throughout the year (taking three whole years to mature from being a spiderling) - this from Dick Jones Country Life Guide to Spiders of Britain. For a photo see <http://dipode-vie.net/Arachnides/Araneidae/Parazygiella/Vues/Parazygiella%20montana,%204.8mmM,%20Pontresina,%20300708d.jpg>.

My photos that I took here (and at St Faith's Churchyard and Warblington Cemetery) will be on my Cemeteries Page in the next few days but the highlights include a large number of Blackbirds (and at least one Thrush and some smaller birds) rapidly reducing the number of Yew Arils and other berries. At St Faith's the first **spring bulbs were sprouting** and at Warblington I added **Hedge Mustard** and **Wild Radish** to my December flowering plant list and saw my first **Wood Blewitt fungus** while a close look at the open flowers of some **Primrose-like Primulas** found

a **comatose Long Hoverfly** nestling in the petals but I could not be certain if it was still alive.

### **Wed 3 December**

#### **Marsh Marigold, Ragged Robin and Turkish Tutsan go on my flowering plants list**

Despite a brisk north wind the sun was shining when I put on my boots for a walk down the Langbrook Stream, across the South Moors to Budds Farm, then up the Brockhampton and Hermitage Streams to Bedhampton before coming back into Havant with 18 new flowers on my December list to bring the total to 68 species. Before leaving Havant town area I had **Black Medick** on the list and was then surprised to find a dormant **Harlequin Ladybird** seemingly hoping to pass the winter on a Ragwort plant. Joining the Langbrook at Tesco I headed downstream under the A27 and I do recommend a walk through this underpass just to see the magnificent new art work on the far wall commissioned by the owners of the Langstone Technology Park and depicting the many aspects of Havant over the ages from flint tools to the Hayling Billy railway. Emerging from the underpass I soon came on a healthy clump of **Wintercress leaves** suggesting that the flowers may get on my list before the end of this month. I have had the same thought in the past few days in respect of **Lesser Celandines**, and a **Hazel tree** by the Hermitage Stream today had catkins already lengthening and turning yellow and looking likely to join the early flowerers.

My first surprise flower was a single plant of **Ragged Robin** in the first grass of the South Moors and a walk to the north end of the 'orchid field' gave me two plants of **Marsh Marigold** bearing four fresh flowers to add to the five remaining **Yellow Iris** plants still bearing flowers. Next stop was at the Budds Farm pools where the ducks included **5 Pochard**, **12 Shoveler** and **17 Gadwall**. At the top of the steps down to the shore was a large patch of fresh **Shaggy Inkcaps** and on the shore I noted both a single **Great Blackback Gull** and a flock of at least **20 Goldfinch** on the seemingly dead Teasels. Turning up the Brockhampton Stream I came on a very unexpected plant in the form of a fresh **Stone Parsley** plant with many flowers not yet open to show their white colour. Just beyond that several fresh yellow flowers of **Turkish Tutsan** were open and a little further on the many plants of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** were still in flower.

Emerging onto Harts Farm Way I walked west to the Hermitage Stream and outside the old recycling depot I found a healthy plant of **Red Goosefoot**. Joining the streamside path to walk north to Bedhampton I stopped at a bench to eat a Banana and noticed that the nearest tree, a Hazel, was already expanding its catkins though none had yet opened. After passing Bedhampton Mill Pond I was hoping to find Water Crowfoot flowering in the outflow from the Water Company springs but instead I found a very healthy plant of **Cow Parsley** in full flower and a much less eye-catching late spray of **Hedge Bedstraw**. The final stretch through Havant started with **Japanese Honeysuckle** in flower at the junction of Bedhampton and Solent Roads and then gave me **Black Nightshade** and **Redshank** in the ditches outside the new business units on the south side of Solent Way. Opposite the Tesco carpark the rather tatty buildings had been levelled and turned into neatly graded piles of stone in preparation for the new shops (I think including a small Marks & Spencers). Finally I crossed Park Road South and went to look for **Water Voles** in the old Mill Pond but found a team of Council employees noisily trimming

the grass and removing litter from the area around the Water Vole burrows - I hope this does not deter the Voles from staying...

**[Tue 2 December](#)**

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

### **50 wild flower species still flowering in December**

With falling temperatures I have spent the first two days of December searching out those wild flowers that can still be found and have come up with a total of 50 species so far. Most of these were found in a tour of Havant on foot on Dec 1, and on Dec 2 I got on my bike to visit Northney on Hayling and Brook Meadow in Emsworth to find plants I had seen in the last few days of November.

Nothing unexpected in the way of flowers in the Havant area but I did come across two **Jays in Havant cemetery** which I have not seen there before and which seemed to be interested in Yew arils as a substitute for acorns. When these started to arrive in southern England from the continent in mid-September (my first indications of an influx came with reports of 13 over Sandwich on Sep 15, 11 over Hastings on Sep 17 and 15 in the Itchen Valley on Sep 18, there was also a comment that there were 'few acorns this year' from an observer who saw 3 at Blashford on Sep 18). More recently the Emsworth blog had a photo of a Jay holding a Horse Chestnut conker in its bill taken locally on Nov 17, while Martin Hampton had three Jays in his Havant garden on Nov 24 investigating fruit trees in the absence of Oaks. Less unexpected was a **Grey Wagtail** in the concrete channel of the stream running through Havant Park (close to the Bus station) to join the Langbrook Stream. A final unexpected find was of a large cluster of **Glistening Inkcap fungi** within a couple of yards of East Street in Havant in the narrow alleyway going south from the main road a little west of Town Hall Road.

Today my interesting finds were of **Great Mullein** still in flower at the footpath entrance to North Common in Northney, then the **Cow Parsley** flowering opposite the Northney flower tea-rooms. Turning for home I then found **Butcher's Broom** and **Sea Aster** flowering by the roadside, and on the Langstone side of Langstone Bridge **Blue Fleabane** had plenty of flowers as well as the fluffy seed heads which attracted my attention to it. Passing through what I now think of as the source of the Dark Energy which is said to account for most of our universe (this the Darke Engineering depot which has recently moved into the Emsworth Waysides A27 Underpass Site - the number of cars parked inside the area increases every time I go past and they seem to be focussed on what I think is a Gas Pipeline station hidden in the trees near the A259 roundabout but I am puzzled as to what brings so many people there - Google tells me the firm provides "Pipeline, civil engineering, welding and fabrication service for the oil and gas industries") I found that the dead log which had recently supported two **Wrinkled Peach fungi** had gone but the fungi were lying on the ground where it had been.

At Brook Meadow the **Meadowsweet** and **Wild Angelica** plants were still present and flowering and I had a bonus as I rejoined the A259 from the Queen Street junction to find a large patch of freshly flowering **Red Clover** in the roadside grass of the main road.



## Sat 29 November

### My first Cow Parsley in flower and a calling Little Owl, both at Northney

Another great day out in glorious November sunshine! Five hours of gentle pedalling around Hayling and Emsworth gave me 43 bird species, of which the best was my first **Little Owl** this year, heard only from the scrub south of the Langstone Hotel and Northney Marina. If you want to hear the repeated calls which I heard listen to

<http://www.xeno-canto.org/sounds/uploaded/KCUQSGGVJD/steinkaeuzewaldbr.mp3>. To back up this sound when I got home I had a photo of a Little Owl taken by Peter Raby from the Warblington shore between Pook Lane and the Church in a large old tree in the middle field of the three between the two places, and I suspect that bird may be thinking of nesting somewhere on Warblington Farm as they have done since I first joined Tony Gutteridge in his BTO 'Common Bird Census' of the farm in the 1980s. (I guess the Northney bird was a youngster on its travels in search of home of its own and not yet having found it).

Before hearing the Owl I had a good botanic find of the first **Cow Parsley** in flower beside the road passing the Northney Farm Tearooms to add to my first sighting of **Rhododendron Ponticum** in full flower in a south Hayling garden and shortly after that, while cycling north up Staunton Avenue, I came on a cluster of large, dark capped, Agaricus type fungi which, when checking their id back at home, revealed that they had a very unpleasant smell and this helped to confirm their identity as the poisonous species **Agaricus placomyces** which was swiftly consigned to the garden rubbish tip.

Despite the sunshine I saw no butterflies but the Havant Wildlife Group which went to Pulborough Brooks today saw **Brimstone, Peacock, Red Admiral** and several **Darter dragonflies** which may have been Ruddy Darters though the British Dragonfly Society website has not had any reports of these since Sep 28th but has had regular reports of Common Darter up to Nov 28th (and one of a **Southern Hawker** flying in Glamorgan on Nov 27th). Back at Warblington today Peter Raby saw one Red Admiral.

## Thu 27 November

### Brief Dunnock song and more Fungal news

This afternoon I rode to the Stockheath area of Leigh Park to see if the expected Green Sandpiper was back on the Hermitage Stream for his 'winter holiday' but I had not reckoned on the amount of water coming down the stream and making it too deep and turbulent for his comfort so I rode on through the Bidbury Mead area of Bedhampton and came home along the shore from Broadmarsh.

Before getting to Stockheath I had a good and unexpected fungal find in grass under Oak trees at the east end of Crossland Drive where an odd shaped white object caught my eye and turned out to be a **White Helvella fungus** - my first this winter. If you are not familiar with this species have a look at <http://www.first-nature.com/fungi/images/ascomycetes/helvella-crispa3.jpg> - this species has the most battered shape that I know of (though Black Helvella runs it close) and I would like to know what 'survival value' the fungus gets from its shape. Later, by the Brockhampton stream, I found another fungus which is very variable in shape, **Lyophyllum decastes**, which you can see at



[http://files.shroomery.org/files/12-43/139697691-IMG\\_20120929\\_103812.jpg](http://files.shroomery.org/files/12-43/139697691-IMG_20120929_103812.jpg).

This has the English name of **Clustered Domecap** and this find appeared to be of a single, almost flat-topped, deep brown coloured toadstool measuring 10 cm across its cap but when I picked it for a look at its gills and stem I found it had been sheltering a tight cluster of smaller, variously shaped and coloured, 'siblings'. Continuing the fungal theme I had a surprise when I came to the bridge over the Langbrook stream into Mill Lane and found that the dead Elm tree, on which I was hoping to have another look at the **Oak Crust (*Peniophora quercina*)** fungus which I noticed last Monday, was only half the size it had been then - perhaps the weight of the thick gelatinous crust which had then extended to the top of the thin dead trunk had been too much for the rotten wood to carry. All was not lost as much of the Oak Crust remained on the lower trunk where the **Wrinkled Peach** also remained and today there was also a new bright yellow patch of **Velvet Shank** which I have seen on this tree in previous winters - this species seems to require frost to stir it into life and you can learn more about it from

<http://www.mushroomdiary.co.uk/2011/01/velvet-shank/>.

When I got home I remembered that I had collected one floral specimen on this trip which I knew was a **St John's Wort** (the first I had seen in flower this month) but needed to confirm was the common Perforate species (which it was) before recording it. I also remembered that en route I had heard brief bursts of **Duncock song** in two places to add to the list of species heard this month by me and one Sussex birder who had mentioned hearing one in Worthing on Nov 22. While confirming this date I was also reminded of the arrival at Dungeness on Nov 23 of two **Long Eared Owls** to add to the many Short-Eared that have already arrived from the continent. Another item of this week's news that came from Portland on the day of our first frost was that both **Clouded Yellow** and **Red Admiral** butterflies were still on the wing there that day (Nov 24).

### **Wed 26 November**

#### **Close encounter with a Weasel on Nutbourne Bay shore**

This morning I had another look at the whitish Waxcaps that have now formed a ring on my lawn and I now think they should be recorded as **Snowy Waxcap (*Hygrocybe virinea*)** as the possible alternatives are not recorded by the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group. Less doubtful was a fourth Waxcap species which has now appeared on the lawn - this one is small, brownish and very slimy and goes under the name of ***Hygrocybe unguinosa*** and you can see a good likeness at [http://www2.ac-lille.fr/myconord/Photos\\_SMNF/Photos\\_SMNF\\_H/Photos\\_H/Hygrocybe\\_unguinosa\\_01.jpg](http://www2.ac-lille.fr/myconord/Photos_SMNF/Photos_SMNF_H/Photos_H/Hygrocybe_unguinosa_01.jpg). While still on the subject of fungi I found yet another good example of the **Wrinkled Peach fungus (*Rhodotus palmatus*)** later in the day - this time in the Emsworth Waysides Conservation Area at the A27 underpass (see site number 6 on the map at

<http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-waysideslist.htm>). The fungi are on a very dead log just inside the eastern boundary of the site on its southern side - to see them enter the site from Emsworth via the cycle entrance, not the northern pavement entrance. The log is on your left as you enter and the lovely pink caps are the only adornment to the otherwise bare log. In past years I only knew of one site for this fungus (halfway down the southern stretch of Pook Lane) - none have appeared there this year but this autumn I have found fresh specimens at three new sites (Warblington Cemetery Extension; on a dead tree overhanging the

Langbrook Stream no more than a metre down stream from the Langstone Mill Lane footbridge to the South Moors; and now this A27 underpass site).

For today's outing I headed east towards Nutbourne, making my first stop at Nore Barn where I saw both the famous Spotted Redshank and the author of its fame, Brian Fellows. Continuing east along the shore path my next stop was just after passing the Emsworth Sailing Club building where a movement in the mass of seaweed close to the seawall I was on turned out to be a **Rock Pipit** and while stopped there I was able to distinguish a party of **Knot** (portly birds moving sedately along the mud) from the smaller and much faster moving **Dunlin**.

Next stop was at the west end of the Thorney Little Deeps where at first the water seemed devoid of birds but as I scanned it a Fox was probably working through the reeds on the north side with the result that some **30 Tufted Duck** and **5 Pochard** suddenly appeared on the open water - I think these are the first Pochard to be seen there this winter (though not the first in our wider area). Also seen there were a few Reed Buntings (one female seen, others heard). Back on my bike and heading north I stopped again when I saw a single **Dog Rose flower** on one of the bushes lining the eastern side of the track.

Next interest came in a small flock of Chaffinch working their way along the vehicle access track from the Thorney Road, and just before reaching that road I spent some time searching in vain for a **Water Rail** that I could hear persistently calling from the wetland between the NRA Track and the public path through the 'farm'. When I reached Nutbourne Bay the tide was not high enough to have driven off any Avocets that might have been there but a man was walking a terrier dog around the shore line. Rather than leaving immediately I sat on the bench to have some refreshment and before I had finished the man and dog had left and birds had started to arrive for their high tide roost (quite a few Turnstone with some Redshank and a few Lapwing). A short while later I noticed a movement as a small animal emerged from the sea defence rocks and disappeared into the long grass which grows around them. The animal was no more than a couple of metres from me but showed no concern for my presence as it came into the open and showed itself to be a **Weasel**. I watched it searching the area for well over a minute before it vanished.

Other than the Wrinkled Peach fungus at the A27 underpass there was nothing of special interest on the way home along the A259 but I did note the expected Winter Heliotrope flowers by the roadside shortly after passing the Queen Street junction and outside the Doctors Surgery after the town centre roundabout. Now that most deciduous leaves have fallen I also had my first clear view of the Mistletoe high on the tree above me as I passed the Highland Road junction.

**Mon 24 November**

### **A great day out in the Langstone area**

With a forecast of a sunny day with a light northerly breeze after a light overnight frost I set out on a clockwise circuit of the Langstone area which took me nearly five hours to complete but gave some good finds of plants, birds and fungi with new species being added to my personal repertoire in all three groups.

Before setting out a quick look at my lawn found that a third, white, species of Waxcap fungus had joined the numerous Parrot and Meadow Waxcaps. It was tempting to think that the new comer was the Snowy Waxcap but I think, without have checked it out, that it was the **Ivory Waxcap (*Hygrophorous eburneus*)**. Much more exciting was a resupinate fungus which I have never seen before coating the

whole surface of the upper half of a dead tree overhanging the Langbrook stream just downstream from the footbridge which takes you from Mill Lane into the Southmoor area. The first thing that caught my attention on this tree was what I am pretty sure is another growth of **Wrinkled Peach fungus** with two caps growing sideways out of the tree trunk and it was when I used my binoculars to have a closer look at these that I noticed the **extensive jelly like resupinate** clinging to the trunk above the Wrinkled Peach and extending almost to the top of the dead trunk. This was something I had not seen before and it took some searching of my books (nothing obvious there) and then searching of the internet before I came on an image that was identical to my memory of what I had seen on the tree. This image can be seen at

[http://www.aranzadi.eus/fileadmin/images/micologia/Eskaneatuak/09\\_digital/peniophora\\_quercina\\_jmm\\_090125\\_5037057c.jpg](http://www.aranzadi.eus/fileadmin/images/micologia/Eskaneatuak/09_digital/peniophora_quercina_jmm_090125_5037057c.jpg) and is named as **Peniophora quercina**. I am not confident that I have got the exact species but reading its

description at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peniophora\\_quercina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peniophora_quercina) I feel re-assured that I may be right in that the species is found in Britain and can be found on species other than Oak. Further its description fits what I saw and in particular it says that.. "Peniophora quercina produces resupinate fruit bodies which vary in appearance depending on whether they are wet or dry." The recent wet weather and the location of the tree overhanging the Langbrook stream may well have encouraged it to flourish here and to produced a huge display which I have never noticed here before (despite this tree being one that I regularly check for fungi).

Going back to birds I was introduced to another species that I had never seen before when I reached Langstone Pond and found Peter Raby looking at a small duck which I had not seen there before but which Peter told me had been present for about three weeks but on his previous visits had been keeping well away from the many people who constantly walk around the pond. Today it had lost its shyness and was coming within a yard or so of the footpath passing the back of the Mill building and looking very like the photo to be seen at

[http://imgc.artprintimages.com/images/art-print/george-grall-american-wigeon-swims-in-winter-feeding-habitat-on-the-choptank\\_i-G-38-3875-5H2JF00Z.jpg](http://imgc.artprintimages.com/images/art-print/george-grall-american-wigeon-swims-in-winter-feeding-habitat-on-the-choptank_i-G-38-3875-5H2JF00Z.jpg) which is

of a **female American Wigeon**. There were relatively few other birds of interest in the Langstone area but Peter had earlier seen one or more Sandwich Terns and also a **male Goldeneye** just offshore. He also said he was surprised that there were no Mergansers in sight - had he come with me across to the old rail bridge on the other side of Langstone bridge he would have seen a flock of **75 Mergansers** swimming back into the harbour from the mouth of the Langbrook stream.

Continuing west down Mill Lane I found the berries of the **Japanese Spindle** bushes which grow outside the wall of the West Mill as the Langbrook Stream comes into view were at last splitting their green outer skins to reveal the bright orange colour I have been expecting to see for some time, and reaching the west end of the seawall of the South Moors I saw the expected **Rock Pipits** (two of them) on the shingle with just one **Great Crested Grebe** offshore. Before reaching Budds Farm pools I added an unexpected flower to my list with a couple of **Common Vetch** flowers while on the pools the duck included **Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Duck** and **Mallard** as well as **Teal** with the musical accompaniment of **Song Thrush song** and the brief visual image of a **Red Admiral** still on the wing.

Walking home up Southmoor Lane the pavement edge fencing outside the industrial units gave me a very unexpected flower find with a small plant of **Bugloss**

(*Anchusa arvensis* not *Vipers Bugloss*) in flower (I have not found this anywhere in the Havant area before other than outside the Hayling Sailing Club at Black Point and then only in high summer!)

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 17 - 23 (WEEK 47 OF 2014)

Sat 22 November

### Unexpected birds

Looking through internet reports for the past two weeks I have picked out some very unexpected bird sightings. These include two reports of **Great Bustards** seen in Dorset on Nov 9 and 20 but even more unexpected was a report of a **Little Bustard**, also seen in Dorset on Nov 18. As a result of the work of the "Great Bustard Project" to re-establish the species in Britain (where the species became extinct in 1840) Great Bustards are now seen annually as birds which hatched from eggs collected in Russia become mature and fly off from the Wiltshire sites where they have been raised in the hope of becoming an established colony of free flying birds that will regard Britain as their home (the first batch of birds were released at the Wiltshire site in 2003 and more have been released each year with a total of 33 being added this year to those already here). For more info about the project visit <http://greatbustard.org/>. The **Little Bustard** seems to have arrived here of its own accord, probably from Spain where the nearest wild birds can be found. Basic facts about this species can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_bustard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_bustard) and a lot more can be found out from <http://www.arkive.org/little-bustard/tetrax-tetrax/>.

Another uncommon winter visitor of which there have been two sightings this month is **Smew** (in which I have a personal interest as a result of small groups of up to six birds wintering annually on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth between 1984 and 1991 when I was working there and saw them daily). So far this winter one has been at the RSPB Dungeness site on Nov 13 and another has been seen at Whitburn in Co. Durham on Nov 20.

Another duck species of local interest since it was first seen at Farlington Marshes in Nov 1999 before returning in Nov 2000 to the Budds Farm pools where it became a regular feature for the next nine winters, was the Pochard x Ferruginous hybrid commonly known as the '**Fudge Duck**'. Although similar hybrids have been seen in the Langstone Harbour area in subsequent years its last appearance seems to have been in 2010 though I still look for it at Budds Farm. I have been reminded of this by reports of a **true Ferruginous Duck** at Blashford where it arrived on Nov 10.

Sussex has had a couple of unexpected raptors this year, most recently a **Rough-Legged Buzzard** at Jevington (a little north of Eastbourne) from Nov 9 to 21. When I saw the first report of this bird I wondered if it could be a mis-identification of a Common Buzzard but as the list of reporters grew day by day it became clear that the id was correct and a scan through the UK wide Rare Bird Alert (RBA) website showed an unusual number of reports between Oct 3 and Nov 23 with a peak of 20 separate birds spread across the UK on Nov 1 indicating that this was an **influx**

winter (not perhaps quite on the scale of 1974/75 when an overall total of 250 birds were seen in the UK) and I read that **such influxes occur when the previous summer had seen large numbers of Lemmings and other prey**. That ties in with the **apparent increase in Brent numbers** this winter (when there are plenty of Lemmings to be caught the Arctic Foxes do not predate as many juvenile Brent to feed their young). Before leaving this topic of raptor rarities in Sussex I must mention the even more unexpected prolonged visit of a **Short-toed Eagle** to southern England this summer between June 1 and Aug 11 (only the third record of the species in this country). It was first seen in Dorset for one day on June 1, then moved east to Hampshire, spending some ten days in the New Forest before flying on east to spend June 11 to Aug 9 mainly in Ashdown Forest though making several trips back to Hampshire (giving us a local sighting as it crossed the A3 at Clanfield on June 21).

To end this update I have had a look at the Insects that have been seen in the past couple of weeks (Nov 10 - 23), starting with Dragonflies. The Table below gives the last date I am aware of for each species.

Species	Location	Date
Southern Hawker	Cornwall	Nov 18
Common Darter	London	Nov 20
Clouded Yellow	Dorset	Nov 15
Brimstone	Hampshire	Nov 14
Small White	Emsworth	Nov 15
Red Admiral	Sussex	Nov 18
Painted Lady	Dorset	Nov 20
Small Tortoiseshell	Hampshire	Nov 14
Peacock	Emsworth	Nov 19
Common Wasp	Havant	Nov 10
Hornet	Kent	Nov 10

## Thu 20 November

### Recent highlights

I have now heard **prolonged Song Thrush song** soon after sunrise on each of the last three mornings (starting on Nov 18) and have found **Winter Heliotrope starting to flower** both at Wade Court and on the Harts Farm Way roadside on the east bank of the Hermitage Stream. Yesterday I received another bit of local news by email, telling me that **four big Shire Horses had died in the Wade Court fields from poisoning after eating Sycamore seeds**. This threat to horses is apparently spreading and if you want to know more about it go to

<http://www.horseandcountry.tv/news/2014/10/21/surge-cases-deadly-atypical-myopathy>. Another account of the same threat can be found at

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2614078/Horses-die-eating-poison-sycamore-seeds-incurable-illness.html>.



Another email reaching me today described an **exciting interaction seen yesterday (Nov 19) between three Peregrines** over the Horndean area where the A3M emerges from the Waterlooville area. The three were described as a family with one of the three 'screaming its head off'. This interested me as I had just been reading Peter Raby's account of a similar group of three Peregrines over the Langstone Mill Pond area on that same day. Peter describes how he was watching one Peregrine giving a spectacular flying display over the mud when it was 'attacked' by a second Peregrine, starting a minute long aerial fight, after which the two were 'attacked' by a third bird before all three flew off west together. You can read the full account of this on Brian Fellows Emsworth blog for Nov 19 at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>. I guess the two groups of three were different birds, though they may have been the same, and I assume this marks some sort of 'coming of age' ceremony among Peregrines with parents telling their young that they have looked after them for long enough and its time they left home and looked after themselves.

This Peregrine interaction on the Langstone/Warblington shore was also seen by Trevor Carpenter and L J Amey and both Trevor and Peter also saw a **Black Brant and a hybrid Brent/Brant** there. Peter describes the hybrid as 'having white flanks but a grey/brown mantle' and assumes the two (which were keeping each other company, but not associating with the Brent flocks) were the same two which had been seen in Fishery Creek (near the mouth of Chichester Harbour) on Oct 24, especially as they flew off south east from the Langstone area.

Before I had time to post the above on the internet I was distracted by the BBC TV 'Life Story' programme which I would rate as perhaps the greatest achievement of the BBC Natural History unit since its formation in 1957. I had thought that during those 57 years the programmes they have produced had already shown us examples of every type of natural behaviour that our world has to offer and that David Attenborough must by now have passed his peak as the interpreter of what the programmes show us but neither is true. This latest programme showed me four 'behaviours' which I had never heard of before and I would recommend anyone who did not see it to do so on the I Player at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04q1rwy/life-story-5-courtship>.

The first thing that was news to me was the mating behaviour of the male **Japanese Puffer Fish** which prepares a place for his female mate to lay her eggs, and for the young fish which emerge from those eggs to develop until they become independent, by carving out of the sandy seabed what has been described as a huge 'crop circle' by the fanning of his fins. This sequence starts ten minutes (10:00) into the programme and lasts for six and a half minutes (to 16:50). Much of the last ten minutes of the programme shows how this was filmed.

The next sequence that was new to me started at 21:44 and showed two male **Long-tailed Manakins** in Costa Rica performing a lengthy double act of calls and movements designed to attract a female to mate with the senior partner of this double-act with the junior partner content to wait for years until his senior dies before getting his chance to mate. This sequence ends at 25:55 when the scene shifts to a rain-forest in Australia where we watch a **Peacock Jumping Spider** "dicing with death" as he tracks down a female of his species in the hope of trying to mate with her. Whenever he gets close to her she uses her jumping ability to try to kill and eat him but somehow he eventually manages to mate with her. Maybe the effort drains his energy for as soon as they part she 'jumps' him and eats him as a

necessary part of the food intake she needs for the development of the many spiderlings she is now carrying. The eating of the male by the female was not news to me (I think the instinct to do so is possibly true in all spider species) but what was new and fascinating was his use of the 'Peacock-coloured' Fan which he raises and waves at her (like a bull fighter's red cloak) in his attempts to seduce her - perhaps if he had not evolved this technique he might have got away with his life by employing the technique used by several other spider species of catching a prey item prior to approaching her and offering it to her to occupy her with eating it while he gets on with the mating (and hopefully gets away before she finishes eating it). Next the film returns to the Flame Bower Bird we had first seen before the Puffer Fish sequences and at 33:08 we switch to **a beautiful forest scene in Japan and to a troop of Japanese Macaques** whose dominant male is at the end of his period of dominance - there are great shots of his eyes closing and of mischief among his not-so-faithful females before we once more return to the **Flame Bower Bird** and at 37:50 I saw the last of the four behaviours which were new to me - this time it was the **ability of the Bower Bird to control the size of the pupils in his eyes** to dramatic effect. Before the programme ends we have a great sequence demonstrating the **life-long love between a pair of Waved Albatross** in the Antarctic (great stuff but hardly news!)

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

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

**My first autumn Song Thrush song precedes a glorious day on Portsdown which may have added a new plant species to my repertoire**

This morning I cycled up Portsdown from Bedhampton and got as far as the hilltop roundabout above the Q A Hospital before returning home with a list of 48 wild plants seen in flower, including 9 that were new to my current month list and brought the total species on that list to 132 (compared with the 191 seen last month)

The two top finds today were **Ploughman's Spikenard** in fresh flower at Fort Widley and what I think is **Intermediate Periwinkle** in the hedge bottom just uphill from where the exit road from Fort Purbook rejoins the Portsdown Hill road. I will refer this find to Martin Rand as the species is not mentioned in the Hants Flora but I suspect he will regard the find as being the result of a garden throw-out.

Before setting out on this trip I was cleaning my teeth at around 8am when I heard at least **three minutes of full throated Song Thrush song** coming from the trees beside the Billy Line behind my house. Last Friday I reported having heard a Song Thrush making first attempts at song on Nov 10 but this morning's outburst a week later is the only other song I have heard from this species though I did have full Blackbird song on Nov 14.

On return from Portsdown today, after having some lunch, I went out again to collect samples of Greater Periwinkle in flower and Lesser Periwinkle leaves to compare with my Portsdown find and on my way home via Wade Court I had a further exciting find of **six flowerheads of Winter Heliotrope** already open in the large bed of leaves alongside Wade Lane where it passes the entrances to Wade Court.

If anyone is interested my evidence for thinking I found Intermediate Periwinkle today is that the Portsdown specimens not only have much smaller leaves and flowers than the Greater Periwinkle but also differ from the Greater in having no hairs on the leaf edges or the calyx lobes. They also differ from the Lesser

Periwinkle I find each spring in having paler flowers (though not so pale as the almost white flowers seen planted in some gardens) and also in flowering at this date which I think is not unusual for some garden specimens. The leaf size is near the figure which divides Lesser from Intermediate. All in all there is a good case for saying my find is of the Intermediate species which I have never seen in the wild before and which does not get a mention in the Hants Flora ....

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 10 - 16 (WEEK 46 OF 2014)**

### **Fri 14 November**

#### **Cemeteries Pages now updated plus a trip to Nutbourne Bay**

I have now selected 27 of the 66 photos I took last Monday when visiting the **Havant and Warblington Cemeteries plus St Faith's Churchyard** and have uploaded them, with appropriate text, to this website. To see them (or my reports for any of the previous 26 months back to August 2012) go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and select the link to the month you want to see.

The main points of interest in this month's visits were (at Havant) the first appearance of the **Ivy Berries** which will provide food for birds during the winter plus the **continued activity of the big Wasp Nest** despite the very diminished supply of nectar from the Ivy flowers on which they have been feeding. At Warblington I found examples of **Jew's Ear fungus, Honey Fungus, Yellow Stainer fungus and fresh specimens of the Wrinkled Peach** with several wild flowers still looking fresh in the 'Natural Burial area'. St Faith's Churchyard had little interest after close mowing had removed all colour from the grass (not only the lovely Sweet Violets but even the innocent Daisies) in preparation for Remembrance Day solemnity.

Luckily the wild birds have not been hushed out of respect for the humans who have died in the wars of the past 100 years and glorious sunshine today brought at least **one Blackbird into full song** as I was returning from my visit to Nutbourne - two days earlier at Warblington I had heard a **Song Thrush** brushing up its repertoire.

Two other highlights of today's cycle ride to Nutbourne Bay were the very unexpected sight of **a Kingfisher hovering high above the shallow water at the edge of the bay and making several dives into the water**, presumably attracted by the presence of small fish pushed in by the tide which was near its high point at the time. The second excitement came as I was returning through Brook Meadow at Esmworth and not only found **Common Comfrey** and **Wild Angelica** still in flower but also enjoyed a stand of four plants of **Meadowsweet in fresh flower**.

### **Wed 12 November**

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

#### **A day to remember**

Where were you at five past four this afternoon?

Although my memory for many things is fading in old age there are some things I can recall vividly. One was the moment 45 years ago that **Neill Armstrong stepped onto the Moon**; another was the morning of **September 11 in 2001** when I arrived at the Hayling Island Tourist Information Centre to deliver the weekly Wildlife News poster but found the staff crowded into their back office where I joined them to watch the destruction of the 'Twin Towers' on TV; less dramatic but perhaps even more significant for my understanding of the place of humanity in the universe was to see the photo of the infinitesimally small planet Earth taken from the **Voyager Space Probe as it became the first human construct to leave our Solar System** on 25 August 2012; and today, **at five past four this afternoon**, I watched the people responsible for the Rosetta space project react to the news that their lander had successfully touched down on Comet 67P and, after a journey of 6.4 billion kilometres, had succeeded in reaching the target at which it had been aimed ten years ago. Hopefully its instruments will provide answers to those fundamental questions (to which the only current answer is "42") about how organic matter arrived on Earth to initiate our evolution, and where the water on which that life depends came from (it could not have been present on the initially red-hot planet).

If you want to see the 'pale blue dot' photo of earth taken by the Voyager probe go to

<http://www.universetoday.com/104729/10-historic-moments-in-voyagers-journey-to-interstellar-space/>.

I only saw the moment of landing by chance as it was shown on the BBC News Channel without prior notice of the exact time just after I had arrived home from visiting the Warblington Cemetery to have another look at some fungi which were too small to identify when I was there last Monday but which are now easily identifiable as **Honey Fungus** (and their photos will be included in my Cemetery Pages update before the end of this week). If you want to see a summary of the Rosetta Project so far go to

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-28640783> .

We are now well into the season for fungi and my cemetery visits last Monday (Nov 10) not only gave me a find of Honey Fungus but also my first **Jelly (or Jew's) Ear** and found fresh specimens of the **Wrinkled Peach** that had been there a month ago. Also at Warblington were some good examples of the large, white capped and pink gilled **Yellow Stainer fungi** which look as if they would be excellent to eat but which are spurned by experienced mushroom hunters because of the yellow colour which appears in their pure white caps if they are cut or bruised (eating them is not lethal but causes severe stomach upsets in most people). On the preceding Saturday (Nov 8) the Havant Wildlife Group went on **a fungal foray to Havant Thicket** with Rosemary Webb as their expert and they found 34 species including several large species such as the **Fly Agaric, Slippery Jack** and **Giant Funnel**; some smaller but colourful species such as the **Amethyst Deceiver, Mycena pura, Yellow Brain** and the **Yellow Stagshorn**; and also a more uncommon species which grows out of fall pine cones and is called the **Earpick Fungus** which you can see at <http://www.first-nature.com/fungi/auriscalpium-vulgare.php>. One other delightful find of a superb display of **22 Fly Agarics** in the flower beds on the south side of Havant Rail Station forecourt (which I mentioned in my Diary entry for Nov 1 when there were only a dozen specimens) was apparently eliminated by Havant Council

in their attempt to remove all colour from the town in keeping with their view that Remembrance Day should be as colourless and joyless as possible (in order to achieve this they also mowed all flowering plants such as the developing show of **Sweet Violets** from St Faith's churchyard).

## **Mon 10 November**

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

Last Saturday (Nov 8) I walked down to Langstone Pond at high tide time and was surprised to find the pony field north of the pond had become a lake which was overflowing the seawall path (the tide was preventing the flap, through which excess water from the field is supposed to drain into the harbour, from opening). Luckily my boots allowed me to get through and then pause at the field gate to count **35 Egrets** huddled on higher ground in the field which they now preferred to the trees around the pond as their high tide roost. This was one sign that they had moved into winter mode - another was that two or three latecomers which joined them while I was there came from inland, where they prefer to feed in winter, rather than the harbour.

On Sunday (Nov 9) the sun was shining and the wind had dropped, making a walk to Nore Barn very pleasant. My route took me down Pook Lane where I found the very first of next year's **Dog's Mercury** plants already pushing up among the remnants of this year's crop, and among them I found three on which the flowers were sufficiently well developed (tassels more than 1 cm long) for me to record as 'in flower'. Reaching the shore I turned east along the shore and among the mass of Wigeon in the outflow of the Warblington stream I was delighted to find my very first male **Pintail** (I know they have been round since the beginning of October) but not so pleased to find that the field behind Conigar Point had a good show of growing winter wheat but no sign of the 'weeds' that attract me to it - nor were there any of the small birds (Skylarks, Linnets, etc) that are usually there in the winter. The next field inland, also growing winter wheat, had plenty of bigger birds - some 200 Brent.

When I reached Nore Barn the tide was already too high for the Spotted Redshank to be present but there was an interesting new object in the sky, a form of model helicopter being very accurately controlled by someone on the beach. He could send it up perhaps 200 feet, then hold it motionless in the clear blue sky before sending it in sweeping arcs out over the water. It seemed to me that, if equipped with a camera, it would make an excellent addition to the equipment of the bird photographers as I don't think its noise would scare the birds providing it kept at a reasonable height above them.

Coming back into Havant I noticed another cluster of a plant that has been puzzling me this autumn. I first commented on it back on September 13 when I saw it growing beside the footpath going east from Wade Court Road. On that occasion I decided, on the shape and size of the plants (particularly their zig-zag stems) that it must be **Wavy Bittercress** but since then I have come across identical looking plants in at least half a dozen locations but have not seen the normally much commoner **Hairy Bittercress** anywhere and it seems unlikely that the two species would have changed their relative frequency of occurrence so dramatically between spring and autumn (and also changed their preferred habitat - in spring



Wavy Bittercress likes to grow around the damp edges of permanent puddles in woodland rides whereas Hairy Bittercress normally grows in dry places).

I am aware of three features which distinguish the two species from each other. One is the 'wavy stems' which usually go together with larger plant size to indicate the Wavy species. A second feature is the number of stamens in each flower (6 for Wavy and 4 for Hairy) but this requires some care to determine and is not an easy characteristic to use in the field. The third feature is that with Hairy Bittercress the seed pods noticeably 'overtop' (grow higher than) the flowers whereas the seed pods of Wavy do not overtop the flowers to any noticeable degree and today I looked at this characteristic and found that all the plants had pods noticeably taller than the flowers so I am now retracting all claims to have seen Wavy Bittercress this autumn and have hopefully learnt another lesson to take all relevant factors into account when naming a species and to allow for the vagaries of climate, season and habitat which may cause some features of the plant (but not all) to be abnormal in unusual circumstances.

Today (Nov 10) I visited the three local cemeteries in which I check up on the wildlife once a month to obtain photos for my Cemetery Pages but before setting out this morning I noticed two changes to the bird life in my garden. One change was the presence of a **Chaffinch** at one of my seed feeders but the more noticeable change was that **two Blackbirds**, newly arrived overnight, were pacing up and down the lawn to establish invisible boundaries between their proposed winter territories. Leaving them to get on with it I set off for the Havant Cemetery where what was probably another newly arrived bird, a Mistle Thrush, flew over making its rattling call. The two other features noted here were the first **Ivy showing incipient berries** to feed the birds in winter and the effective absence of the flowers which have been providing nectar for insects in the autumn. Having said that the second feature was that the **Wasp nest** in the 'Dissenters' section was still very active.

Before heading home I went to St Faith's churchyard where the noticeable feature was a result of Remembrance Day - the Borough, which looks after the 'gardening' of the area now that the churchyard is closed for burials, had done its best to make the churchyard look like a war zone by close mowing the whole area to ensure that no living things were growing to take away the theme of death. For me the worst aspect of this was that the fresh **Sweet Violet** flowers, which had been rapidly increasing in number since the first opened on Oct 25, had been totally eliminated.

I had a much more rewarding visit to the Warblington Cemetery in the afternoon but will leave the details of what I found until I write the Cemeteries page (giving me time to identify a very attractive new fungus that I found!) One other fungus which I found for the first time this autumn was a **Jew's Ear** and I got a lot more photos of interest than had been possible at St Faith's!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR NOV 3 - 9 (WEEK 45 OF 2014)**

**Thu 6 November**

**Winter flowering Dog Roses on Hayling**

A cycle ride down the Hayling Coastal Path to Sinah Common today found the three wild flowers that I was expecting (**Greater Knapweed**, **Cock's Eggs** and **Pale Toadflax**) but also gave me one totally unexpected species - **Dog Rose** - in flower on three separate bushes. I have been hoping to see these flowers near the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at Langstone where they used to be a regular sight in early winter in past years but I have not seen them there for a couple of years since the bushes on which they grew were cleared and I have seen them at North Common on Hayling but I do not recall seeing them on Sinah Common.

Other flowers seen on Sinah Common today for the first time this November were **Weld**, **Sea Campion**, **Feverfew** and **Thrift** (just two fresh flowers among thousands of dead husks). Other than flowers the grass verges to Staunton Avenue had a couple of large **Boletus** toadstools which I am pretty sure were **Boletus luridus** - see [http://i1.treknature.com/photos/8060/img\\_3836.jpg](http://i1.treknature.com/photos/8060/img_3836.jpg).

Also seen on the way home was a flock of up to **1000 Brent on the West Hayling Fields**, the major part of which is either newly ploughed (in the north) or growing a root crop (in the south) leaving only a relatively small central area with a crop of grass or corn for the geese. On my way south when the tide was at its highest these geese had been out in the harbour - maybe something had scared them off the field?

News from the internet for today included the **highest Woodpigeon count so far from the Aldershot area** - 37,900 over in three hours - and the first report of **Little Auk** on the Sussex coast (just two on Widewater Lagoon in the Worthing area). Seen today at Farlington Marshes was a **Dartford Warbler** in the Hay Field (east side) and a flock of **8 Avocet** in Broom Channel (west side) which seems to be the first report of more than one at the Marshes this autumn and which ties in with news from Devon of the **first big arrival of Avocets at the Exe estuary yesterday (158+)**. Still with today's news Sandwich had a flock of **6 Pinkfoot Geese** and the first substantial flock (only 17) of **Redpoll** for the winter.

Yesterday's reports (Nov 5) include a count of **4 Water Voles** in the Havant Town Mill Pond and what I think is the **first local Merganser** off the Royal Oak at Langstone (where there were also **8 Sandwich Terns**). Also yesterday came the **first report of Brent on the Warblington Farm fields**.

## Wed 5 November

### My first sight of Brent on the North Hayling fields

A cycle ride round north Hayling yesterday (Nov 4) gave me **my first sight of several hundred Brent on fields** at Northney (at Bridge Farm and the fields south of North Common). It also brought my November flower list up to 102 species with a big, showy, **Great Mullein** at North Common, the **Strawberry Tree** at Northney Church and a single **Golden Samphire** still in flower close to the roadside around 'Texaco Bay'. During the trip I saw several **Red Admirals** to be added to the insects seen elsewhere and reported on the internet - see below. I didn't get out today but I feel sure there will be many more interesting reports from others.

Today's (Nov 5) reports on the internet include lots more sightings of **Woodpigeons** but the item that caught my eye came from the north east coast where several sites saw big flocks of **Little Auks** (max 1376 at Whitburn followed by 980 at Flamborough), reminding me of the only one I ever saw on the IBM Lake at Cosham. Down in Devon there were still **5 Snow Buntings** at Baggy Point where 6 had been seen on Nov 4. In Hampshire the evening count of **Goosander** at Blashford leapt from counts of around 20 (which have been present since Sep 7) to 55 this afternoon. Two **House Martins** were seen at Brownwich near Titchfield Haven.

News for Nov 4 starts with the fifth report of a **Great Grey Shrike** in the New Forest (first was seen on Oct 27 and I guess that more than one bird is present - the latest sighting was at Ogdens Purlieu near South Gorley and yesterday one was seen at Harvest Slade Bottom - north of Burley but south of the A31 - while the bird in Sussex was still at Iping Common. Other raptors in our area were an **Osprey** at Nursling Mill (north of Totton) and four **Short Eared Owls** (one on Thorney, one at the Severals near Church Norton and two at Burpham near Arundel). Another was seen at Portland where they also saw **3 Swallows**, **20 Black Redstarts**, and **12,500 Wood Pigeons** with **185 Stock Doves**. Sussex added its second ever **Red Flanked Bluetail** to its records at Hastings but it was only seen by one or two people as it was quickly chased off by an angry Robin. An equivalent insect rarity was seen at Camber on Rye Bay - a tiny **Money Spider** which had made its way across the Atlantic to be one of very few to be recorded in Britain - for photos and a description go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/11/4/a-long-way-from-home.html>.

Other insect sightings yesterday included a **Painted Lady** with several **Red Admirals** and **Clouded Yellows** at Portland plus (in Sussex) 19 Red Admirals and single **Speckled Wood** and **Clouded Yellow**. The list of dragonflies included a **Southern Hawker** at Pagham Harbour, a **Brown Hawker** in Nottinghamshire, and two **Black Darters** in Norfolk plus more than one **Common Darter**. Hampshire had a single **Comma** in Itchen Wood.

## Mon 3 November

### Another seven wild flowers for the month list

By going out of my way on this morning's shopping trip I found **Soapwort** still flowering by the Park Road rail bridge and also spotted a single cluster of flowers on a **Privet** hedge and when the sun came out briefly in the afternoon a short cycle trip to the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes found the expected **Blue Fleabane** with **Common Toadflax**, **Yellow-wort** and **Large-flowered Evening Primrose** in flower bringing my November count to 93 species in flower. On the way home I was surprised when what I think was a **Bank Vole** ran out onto the cycleway but noticed my approach and vanished at high speed.

Among the latest insect news on the internet I see that a **Volucella zonaria** hoverfly was seen on Havant rail station last week and a photo can be seen on John Goodspeed's weekly Nature Notes poster which you can download by going to <http://www.havantnature.net/wildlifenews.html> and selecting the November 2nd download. An even more unusual insect photo of a **Picture-Winged Fly** can be seen on the Rye Bay website either by going to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/> and looking at

the entry for Nov 3 (you can see a larger image by right-clicking the photo and selecting 'Open image in a new tab' then switching to that new tab) - use the link <http://www.rxwildlife.info/>. For a description of the 'Funny Walk' of the male see the text on the original tab. Still with insects the British Dragonfly Soc latest sightings reports **two Southern Hawkers** and **one Common Darter** seen in the New Forest yesterday (Nov 2)

The Trektellen website reports what I think is the first **Little Auk** of the winter at Spurn Head on the Yorkshire coast today while over in the Netherlands one site reported **4,165 Bramblings** (go to <http://trektellen.nl/opmerkelijk.asp?site=08&taal=2&land=1>) Yesterday the RBA site reported a total of **17 Rough-legged Buzzards** in the UK (with 20 on Nov 1). Finally the Christchurch Harbour has good photos of a **Lapland Bunting** which spent the day there - go to <http://chog.org.uk/> and look at the sightings for Nov 2.

Brian Fellows has an unusual bit of bird news today with the sight of male Ringed Teal which arrived on Peter Pond at Emsworth today. For his photo go to <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> but Brian also points out that the same bird appeared on BBC South Today in one of the photos shown while Acker Bilk's death was being celebrated by a record of him playing 'Stranger on the shore' - the photo in this case was taken by Harry Harman and you can see it on the IPlayer by going to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04n5ty8/south-today-03112014> - after starting the video scroll forward for 24 minutes 16 seconds.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 27 - NOV 2 (WEEK 44 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 2 November**

#### **A very wet walk adds 23 species to my November wild flower list**

Within a few minutes of leaving home this morning the heavens opened but luckily I was well equipped (except for the over-trousers!) and the rain had eased by the time I reached my first new flower - a cheering **Musk Mallow** - and my spirits rose even more on spotting my first **Sweet Violets** for the month in Mill Lane at Langstone.

Out on the South Moors I added **Tufted Water Speedwell**, **Meadow Buttercup** and **Yellow Iris** before crossing the boundary stream into the 'orchid field' where both **Meadowsweet** and **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort** had single fresh plants with flowers in addition to the last two flowers of **Devils-bit Scabious**.

Up on Budds Mound I found several of the **Rosy Stubblegill (*Volvariella speciosa*) fungi** which usually occur here and later in my walk I came on at least half-a-dozen other species but could only name **Sulphur Tuft** and **Bolbitius vitellinus** - when the rain ceases I hope to go out equipped with a collecting basket for samples to be identified at home!

A more unexpected new flower on Budds Mound was **Chicory** - possibly given a free ride here by a Havant Borough vehicle which had come from the Warblington Cemetery Extension where there is a great mass of 'wild flower seed' sown Chicory. Following the Brockhampton Stream up the west side of Budds Farm I

came on the oddly abundant patch of **Doves Foot Cranesbill** and also found **Scarlet Pimpernel** in flower with a lone example of **Hedge Woundwort** still in flower.

Coming back into Havant via Bedhampton Mill I was surprised by a new flowering of **Chalk-Stream Water Crowfoot** in the overflow channel of the Water Company springs before finding new growth of **Black Nightshade** and **Red Goosefoot** enjoying the 'gardening' outside the new business units at the west end of Solent Road. Crossing Park Road South I failed to see the Water Voles in the Town Mill Pond but did find **Water Figwort** in full flower and a few last flowers on the **Water Cress**. Three plants which are on my list but which I have not mentioned so far were **Wild Carrot**, **Wood Avens** and **Hemp Agrimony** bringing my November total so far to 86 species.

My regular scan of the internet before writing this (and so before all the reports will have been published) showed that more insects were on the wing in yesterday's sun. In addition to the **Holly Blue** at Brook Meadow another was seen at Worthing along with **1 Comma** and **1 Painted Lady** while in Aytesbury Copse (south of Wickham in the Meon Valley) **4 Clouded Yellows** and **3 Red Admirals** were **egg-laying**. Further west there were more Clouded Yellows and several **Hummingbird Hawkmoths** at Portland. Turning to Dragonflies **Common Darters** were numerous in Kent and Norfolk, one **Migrant Hawker** was seen in Norfolk, at least **6 Willow Emeralds** were still flying in Kent and Essex and a lone **Common Blue** was seen in Kent.

Bird news for Nov 2 included a flock of **85 Fieldfare + 17 Blackbirds + 11 Redwing** at Furze Hill just north of Ringwood (suggesting they are starting to reach us from the south via Germany and France to supplement the large flocks arriving on our east coast) and another **25 Fieldfares** were seen near Basingstoke.

Summer birds still with us on Nov 1 included **5 Swallows** and **2 House Martins** at Dungeness and **4 Wheatears** at Portland where 2 more **Short-eared Owls** arrived with 3 more **Black Redstarts**. Locally Langstone Harbour had its first **Goldeneye** of the winter on Nov 1. Yesterday I passed on news of a **Water Pipit** at Pagham Harbour and today I see that 6 of them were also seen in the Kent Stour Valley on Nov 1 together with **27 Fieldfare** and **86 Redwing**. Also in Kent Dungeness reported **50 Tree Sparrows**, **51 Pomarine Skuas** and **156 Stock Doves** on Nov 1.

## Sat 1 November

### A good start to my November wild flower list and Fly Agaric fungi at Havant Rail Station

The sun shone all day to give me **65 wild plants in flower** around Havant and Emsworth plus a few good fungi of which the smartest were a show of **12 Fly Agarics** in prime condition in a flower bed on the south side of the Rail Station Forecourt above the steps leading down into the shopping area. Other impressive fungi were a troop of large Agarics in Havant Cemetery (possibly Wood Mushrooms), and my first Amanita (*A. rubescens*, The Blusher) of the season and my first Russula (probably *R. xerampelina*), both in Beacon Square at Emsworth. The day began with a pristine **Red Admiral butterfly** warming itself on my house wall in full sun and sheltered from the wind but the only other insect sighting which



I noted was of the still **very active Wasp nest** in the Dissenters section of Havant Cemetery which I had first noticed in mid October.

Among the wild flowers which deserve a mention were fresh **Wavy Bittercress** (something I do not normally see in autumn but have come across several time recently), a single pristine spike of **Buddleia** flowers among thousands that are long dead, and both **Field Madder** and **Field Woundwort** by the Havant to Emsworth roadside.

Among today's reports on the internet that caught my eye were of two **Pintail** in the Old Boating Lake on Hayling North Common and of three **Short-eared Owls** mobbing a Buzzard over Sinah Common to the south of the Island. There is also a report of a **Redstart** in the Sandy Point area which I assume to be a Black Redstart hopefully intending to stay the winter. Pagham Harbour produced a very unexpected **Water Pipit** (with a photo to confirm the id) while Selsey Bill reported **13 Red-breasted Merganser** and **14 Razorbill** heading west towards us.

I see that Barry Collins found **20 Clouded Yellow butterflies** plus 11 Red Admirals and 1 Comma on Thorney Island yesterday (Oct 31) while elsewhere in Sussex both Holly Blue, Small White and Brimstone were seen. So far today's news is all from Hampshire where a fresh female Holly Blue was photographed at Brook Meadow in Emsworth and many Red Admirals plus one Brimstone were seen in the Warsash/Hook area.

The build up of **Great White Egrets on the near continent** continues - today there were 37 reports in the 'remarkable/unusual' category with 11 sites reporting counts in double figures (peak count of 23 at a site in Belgium). Trektellen also shows us that **Fieldfares have now reached England in force** - five sites report counts over 1000 with the peak being 7501 in the Manchester area, furthest south today was a flock of 243 in Wiltshire. **A more unexpected 'mass migrant' seems to be Bullfinch** which has 36 reports with the peak counts being in England (32 in Devon and 37 in Gloucestershire) The Durlston site also reports an unusually large number passing but with no accurate count)

## **Fri 31 October**

### **Two Red Kites cheer a long journey and two Male Pochard greet my return**

Yesterday I accompanied my son on a trip to visit my daughter in Surrey and en route I had excellent views of two low flying **Red Kites**, the first I have seen this year. Returning home in the evening I found an email telling me of a **dead Bottle-nosed Dolphin washed up at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream** on the west side of Langstone village and today I have been given a link to a website with a photo of the unfortunate animal - see <http://www.orcaweb.org.uk/news/bottlenose-dolphin-stranding-in-langstone-harbour>. Although the photo shows no obvious injury I am told by someone who saw it that there were marks of blood around the mouth.

This morning I found that the single **Sweet Violet flower** which had opened in St Faith's Churchyard a week ago on Oct 25 had today increased to three and also in Havant this afternoon I watched two **Water Voles** in the Havant Town Mill Pond

(just below the wavy white fencing) and got the impression that one was being chased away by a bigger Vole.

A late afternoon trip down to Langstone Pond this afternoon when the tide was up found an impressive display of wader flocks cycling above the Northney saltings which were still above the water level. I would have needed a telescope to be sure of the different species but I am pretty sure that there were a lot of **Golden Plover** and I had no difficulty in naming the large number of Brent Geese which were close to the Langstone shore nor the Mute Swan family of which the parents and at least two cygnets were on the pond with one more of the cygnets asserting its independence by standing alone right outside the Royal Oak.

I continued west down Mill Lane to the mouth of the Langbrook stream where there was just one bird on the water - a **lone juvenile Brent** which I rather suspect was another orphan which had lost its parents and maybe was destined to die without their company. Further west along the South Moors shore was another large flock of Brent on the water with at least one **Rock Pipit** on the shore (I suspect that the newly arrived flock of 10 Rock Pipits I saw there on Oct 25 has now dispersed). A brief look at the Budds Farm pools gave me a good view of **two male Pochard** - my first of the winter but almost certainly the same two seen here on Oct 27 by John Goodspeed.

## **Tue 28 October**

### **Portsdown via Purbrook gives me Stinking Mayweed, Orpine and a possible Ring Ouzel**

With another morning of bright sunshine from a cloudless sky I decided to try approaching Portsdown from the north via Purbrook Heath and Pigeon House Lane. One objective was to see if **Chamomile** was still to be found flowering on the Purbrook Heath playing fields but I was disappointed to find no trace of it (though it is late in the year) and I was also disappointed to find that a scruffy line of Hawthorns close to the first footbridge over the Hermitage Stream upstream of Barn Croft Way in Leigh Park were in the course of being grubbed out to give a better view of the massive overground pipeline which crosses the stream here (I don't know the function of the pipe but in more than one previous winter when I have come here to watch a **Green Sandpiper** in the stream I have also enjoyed seeing **out of season Hawthorn blossom**). To make up for the absence of both I had an unexpected sighting of a **Jay** flying upstream here, possibly one of many continental birds that have invaded us this winter (I saw another singleton on Hayling yesterday). Turning west on Purbrook Way I had another unexpected sighting while still in Leigh Park when I passed a small tree planted by the roadside and noticed that the small square of soil from which it was growing was adorned with a cluster of **tall, fresh Magpie fungi**.

After Purbrook Heath I cycled on through the Southwick Woods and where the road emerges from the woods, just before passing Broomfield House, I stopped at a field gate from which a footpath led west outside the edge of the wood. What had caught my eye was a great show of arable weeds in the field so I thought I would stop and see what I could find. Immediately inside the gate was the first **Orpine** I have seen this year and around it where the leaves of what, by the presence of tendrils at the

point of their leaves, must have been **Bush Vetch** though there were no flowers. Moving out into the field I found hundreds of **Mayweed-like plants** with many flowers and I collected a couple of specimens for later identification, putting them in my haversack - opening the bag a couple of hours later the plants identified themselves by the very strong unpleasant smell with which they had responded to my rough treatment of them as **Anthemis cotula** or **Stinking Chamomile**.

Cycling on I crossed the ford of the Wallington River and soon dismounted to complete the long uphill climb past Pigeon House Farm to the top of Portsdown, and nearing the farm a **Blackbird-like bird** flew over me making a prolonged alarm call unlike that of a normal Blackbird (and this was not normal Blackbird habitat). Back at home I used the Xeno-Canto website to listen to a recording of a **Ring Ouzel alarm call** which was much more like what I heard on the hillside - where a Blackbird has a sharp 'Chick, Chick, Chick' call this was a lower pitched 'Tucc, Tucc, Tucc' and I believe I can honestly claim to have heard one of the hundreds of Ring Ouzels that are currently moving south through England. If anyone is unfamiliar with the Xeno Canto site go to <http://www.xeno-canto.org/> and enter the name of any bird species in the Search Box on the top line and you will be shown a list of all the recordings of the species (in this case 85 recordings with a total duration of 1 hour 26 minutes 11 seconds). For each recording much relevant info is shown and when you have found one that is what you are looking for you just click that entry in the list to hear the recording.

Before reaching the hill top I found both **Ribbed** and **White Melilot** in flower plus a plant of **Field Scabious** to which I added **Small Scabious** and **Burnet Saxifrage** in the carpark area west of Fort Widley where I stopped for rest and refreshment before the downhill return to Havant.

My regular scan of the internet told me that today a **Pallas' Warbler** had trned up at Church Norton and that another **Great Grey Shrike** had been seen, this time at Iping Common while another flock of **11,000 Wood Pigeon** had been seen passing over Southampton.

Yesterday's news started with a sighting by John Goodspeed of two male **Pochard** on the Budds Farm pools here in Havant while at Christchurch Harbour a **Stone Curlew** had been seen in flight. Further afield a **Hoopoe** had been seen in Suffolk (probably the one shown on Autumnwatch this evening). 11 butterfly species had been seen in Hampshire and Sussex in yesterday's sunshine and among those not already mentioned by me yesterday there were two **Holly Blues** at Eastleigh, a **Wall Brown** at Cuckmere and two **Small Tortoiseshells** at Castle Hill near Lewes. At Durlston the previous night's moth catch had included a **Convolvulus Hawkmoth** - for a good photo of this large moth (wingspan 10 cm) see <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-2w9cgRrqOc4/Tn0MtNOAW3I/AAAAAAAAARHE/qapejB2nZT8/s1600/DSCN5034ConvolvulusHawkB.jpg>.

## **Mon 27 October**

### **A sunny morning on Hayling plus the return of the Gosport Ring-billed Gull**

This morning I cycled down the Hayling Coastal Path for a look round the Sinah area where a good show of wild flowers included the **Pale Toadflax** behind the

Sunset Cafe, many examples of **Vipers Bugloss**, and a hedge of **Cock's Eggs** which has survived recent mowing of the many plants that had spread out across the Common. **Gorse flowers** now cover many of the bushes and a surprise find was of fresh **Honeysuckle flowers** on just one of the bushes. These are only a few prominent plants which are now in flower and with the warm southerly winds and little rain forecast to last until Nov 3 I should get a high count of species flowering in November before the winds start to come from the north!

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the morning was the number of butterflies that were on the wing. On the way south I only saw one **Red Admiral** and one **Speckled Wood** but as the temperature rose towards midday I saw a couple more Red Admirals and a medium sized dragonfly (probably a **Migrant Hawker**) on Sinah Common, while the journey home gave me a definite **Comma** and **Clouded Yellow** plus a much paler yellow species that could have been a Brimstone plus several fast flying but distant 'unidentified flying butterflies'. Reports to the British Dragonfly Society have been of a **Southern Hawker in Essex** yesterday, and on Oct 25 Gloucestershire had **50 Common Darters 'en masse'** plus two **Southern Hawkers**.

Back at home the internet told me that the first **Waxwing** that I have heard of had reached Belgium on Oct 26 and that on Oct 23 a **Yellow Billed Cuckoo** had arrived at Porthgwarra near Lands End in Cornwall and had stayed until Oct 24 at least - for a very good photo of it see

[https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5599/15431531357\\_660bcca94d\\_b.jpg](https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5599/15431531357_660bcca94d_b.jpg).

Nearer to home a **Swallow** was still flying in Brighton today and what I think is the first **Great Grey Shrike to reach the New Forest area** was seen on Ibsley Common near Ringwood. Yesterday (Oct 26) brought the first report of what I assume is the regular winter **Ring-billed Gull** back at the Gosport 'Cockle Pond' and at the west end of Portsdown a flock of 15 **Fieldfare** were seen in the Southwick area. Further afield on Oct 26 the winter grebe flock off Studland Beach in Dorset had increased to **12 Black-necked** and **1 Slavonian**. Also on the 26th there were still two **Wheatears** at Medmerry near Selsey and two **Great Northern Divers** off Selsey Bill while Dungeness reported a total of **259 Little Gulls passing west**.

To correct the report of a Purple Heron at Hersey on the Isle of Wight which I mentioned yesterday I gather the bird is now thought to be just a dark plumaged young Grey Heron.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 20 - 26 (WEEK 43 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 26 October**

#### **A good day for wild flowers plus some local bird news**

This morning I walked down the Langbrook stream to the South moors, seeing five different **Grey Wagtails** and just missing a **Kingfisher** flying downstream as did so. Also worth a mention was the sight of a dozen juicy looking **Yellow-flowered Strawberry fruit** (but only one yellow flower) seen a few yards after crossing the Technology Park approach road. Looking north from that road a patch of **Water Speedwell** was still in flower and the smaller flowered **Tufted Water Speedwell** was also out on the Moors.

Today's target was to see if any **Snipe** had returned to the small pondlet at the north end of the Orchid field now that standing water had started to appear in the hollows so I crossed the newly wet drainage stream (in which a good show of **Yellow Iris** were still flowering and made my way to that pondlet area. On a dry patch before reaching it five **Devils Bit Scabious** plants were still in flower and what appeared to be a **Bank Vole** shot away from under my feet but no Snipe were heard or seen. Almost as good was to see several plants of **Marsh Marigold** had just put up fresh leaves in promise of flowering next month as they did last year and even more surprising was to find one plant of **Lesser Stitchwort** in full flower (also nearby was flowering Common Mouse-ear which could possibly be mistaken for the Stitchwort - also seen here were several fresh plants of **Marsh Horsetail** with at least one having its black fertile cone tip). Re-crossing the drainage ditch on leaving the Orchid area I found yet another surprise waiting for me on the dry side - a bright yellow **Bolbitius vitellinus toadstool** growing from a cowpat to add to the many tiny orange cup fungi (probably *Coprobria granulata*) seen on most of the other cowpats. To see the Bolbitius go to

[https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4110/5031196668\\_0a1a7342c8\\_z.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4110/5031196668_0a1a7342c8_z.jpg) and for the Coprobria go to

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/pictures/data/8/76Coprobiagranulataoncowdung.JPG>.

Next stop was the Budds Farm pools where I had a lengthy chat with a couple of other birders (one of whom was fairly certain he had recently seen a Ring Ousel at the Emsworth Marina) but I saw nothing new in the way of birds before I walked on along the Budds Farm shore to come home up the Brockhampton Stream and along Solent Road to have another look for Water Voles in the Havant Town Mill Pond (no luck). What I did see on the way home was a good list of fresh flowers (especially lots of **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** lining the Brockhampton Stream beside which there was also one bush of **Lesser Burdock** covered with fresh flowers). Other unexpected single flowers were on **Hemlock, Teasel** and **Common Vetch**.

So much for my own observations but before starting to write this account I had a quick look though local internet sites for other news and the following caught my eye:-

Seen today (Oct 26)

The first **Rock Pipit** was back on the Emsworth shore, and also in Emsworth Chris Oakley got an excellent and very unexpected photo of a large and dramatic female **Ichneumon Rhyssa persuasoria** which I learn is also known as a 'Sabre Wasp' - for the photo see

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x324-sabre-wasp-hamp-f-26.10.14.jpg> and for background info see

<http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/sabre-wasp> - note that this source says it is most often seen in July and August but this is when adults are active mating and egg-laying. At this time of year, and with a new housing development nearby, it is possible that this one's mother drilled into a growing conifer last summer (maybe even the year before?) and laid an egg in some beetle grub inside which the Ichneumon egg turned into a grub of its own species and set about eating the



Beetle grub but doing so in such a way that the beetle remained alive long enough to continue provide food for the Ichneumon until its larval development was complete, at which point the beetle dies and the Ichneumon emerges from its corpse still inside the conifer wood and starts to drill its way out. Between the start and end of this larval stage the conifer tree may well have been cut down and turned into furniture (by luck the saw blades missed the grubs within the wood) which is bought to furnish one of the new houses. With a little more luck the young Ichneumon, having emerged inside the new house, manages to get out through a window to provide a good photo opportunity before finding somewhere to hide away until it can find a mate next summer.. this may sound very unlikely but it does occur and an entry in the 'WildaboutBritain' message group shows that it can occur in two species (the Rhyssa Ichneumon and the even larger Horntail Sawfly (Urocerus gigas)

Also seen today was a **Great Grey Shrike** in the Woolmer area near Petersfield while a ringer in Sussex caught and ringed a **Willow Warbler** on the date in which the latest of this species had been previously recorded in Sussex.

Seen yesterday (Oct 25):

**Clouded Yellows** were seen in Emsworth and Pevensy, while **Migrant Hawker** and **Red Admiral** were seen in the Itchenor area.

East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour) recorded a **Great Grey Shrike**, an incoming **Short Eared Owl** and a **Black Redstart** plus a flock of 8 **Great Crested Grebes** in the harbour.

A **Brambling** was seen at Sinah Gravel Pit on Hayling and four **Red Kites** flew over Cosham

The Hersey nature reserve on the north east shore of the Isle of Wight had a **Purple Heron**

Christchurch Harbour had an influx of four **Purple Sandpipers** and recorded both **Red-throated Diver** and **Velvet Scoter** while further west there was a **Long-tailed Duck** at Radipole.

**Sat 25 October**

### **11 Rock Pipits and a Merganser back on South Moors shore**

A shopping trip into Havant this morning gave me a personal bonus in the form of the first winter **Sweet Violet flower** under the big Yew in St Faith's churchyard. Back at home I got out my bike for a ride to Budds Farm where a **Cetti's Warbler** was singing and half a dozen **male Shovelers** looked as if they had completed their moult into spring plumage. A pair of Wigeon were on the water for the first time and eight Gadwall were present but I only saw two Teal and even Coot were in short supply. Interestingly the **two adult Swans** seemed to have lost their six cygnets which suggested that the youngsters had acquired the power of flight and this would tie in with the absence of the complete Swan family from Langstone pond this week and with the sight of two adult Swans in flight over Chichester Harbour

earlier this week (I assume the adults complete their moult at the same time as the cygnets).

A walk round the top of Budds Mound gave me my first cluster of **Shaggy Ink Caps** and two similar fungal species (a single large Coprinus species similar to, but not, a Magpie Funus and a cluster of what may have been Common Ink Caps) but almost no birds out in the harbour with the tide at its highest. The height of the tide and the thick cover of seaweed on the narrow strip of exposed shingle along the South Moors shore suggested that I might see my first Rock Pipit of the winter if I took that route home and when I was about halfway long the seaweed stretch a **Rock Pipit** did take flight to give me a tick. Before I got to the far end I had put up **ten of these Pipits**, all proving their id by overall dark brown plumage, quiet call notes and low flight (though as one was flying past me to get to the safety of the far end of the shore it spotted an insect flying at my eye-level and flew up to grab it before dropping back to sea level again). The eleventh bird was more dubious and was seen among vegetation on the inside of the seawall.

Reaching the Langbrook Stream Mouth I scanned some 50 Brent scattered across it and so picked out my first **Red-breasted Merganser** of the winter (the first report of one returning was from Selsey on Oct 3, which reminds me that the first **Goldeneye** of the winter was reported on Oct 22 at Blashford and the first **Long-tailed Duck** was at Flamborough Head on Oct 19).

Nothing more of interest seen by me today but having mentioned the fungi I saw on Budds Mound today I can add a fine troop of **Yellow-stainers** seen earlier this week in the roadside grass of Southleigh Road immediately west of the Horndean Road in north Emsworth. Also worth looking out for as they have been on view at Durlston this month, and have been found in the recent past in a Cosham garden, is the **Red Cage Fungus** which is described at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clathrus\\_ruber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clathrus_ruber). The Durlston report says that the fungus was deliberately introduced there by Victorians and has become established there (the same origin might well apply to the Cosham site)

## [Fri 24 October](#)

### **Insects enjoying October**

Most of us have seen **Common Darter** or **Migrant Hawker** Dragonflies during October but a check on the species reported to the British Dragonfly Society during the month shows that 10 species have been seen so far with the biggest surprise being the expansion in both range and numbers of the **Willow Emerald Damselfly** which was a rare migrant until 2009 when it began to arrive in numbers in Norfolk, Essex and Kent as well its initial colony in Suffolk. For photos and basic info go to <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/species/willow-emerald-damselfly>. It gets first mention here as it is the latest species to be reported so far - a single male seen in Norfolk on Oct 24 with other reports through the month and a count of over 100 at a Suffolk site on Sep 30. The species extended its range into Surrey on Sep 22 and has been on the wing since June 26.

Other species seen during the month (with the last date I am aware of) have been:- **Migrant Hawker (19), Brown Hawker (19), Common Darter (19), Common Blue**

Damsel (19), Southern Hawker (18), Ruddy Darter (11), Black Darter (11), Red Veined Darter (4), and Four Spotted Chaser (3).

Probably the most frequently seen butterfly during the month has been the **Red Admiral** with the **Clouded Yellow** being next most frequent. Other species seen during the month have been **Large** and **Small White**, **Speckled Wood**, **Peacock** and **Comma** plus the occasional **Brimstone** and **Painted Lady**. Not seen since the first week of the month have been **Meadow Brown**, **Wall Brown**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Brown Hairstreak**, **Brown Argus** and **Common Blue** but Oct 20 brought fresh specimens of both **Small Copper** and **Holly Blue**. In a different category trans-Atlantic migrant **Monarchs** were seen on the Cornish and Devon coasts between Oct 2 and 10.

I can't comment on the majority of moth records but **Humming Bird Hawk-moths** always attract attention and one of these was still seen in Andover on Aug 21 - this species does successfully hibernate in southern England and is recorded by "moth-ers" under the 'Bradley and Fletcher' number 1984. I mention this because species number 1985 (a much rarer and more beautiful insect) is the **Oleander Hawk-moth** which was recorded at Durlston during October. For a photo go to <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?bf=1985>.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 13 - 19 (WEEK 42 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 19 October**

#### **Fungi on my lawn and at Nore Barn where an orphan Brent Goose has joined the show**

Today's objective was to look for arable weeds in the Conigar Point field of Warblington Farm but when I got there the fields had been ploughed, harrowed and possibly sown (maybe with autumn wheat) and the only interest for me was to hear a **Skylark in full song** before I moved on to Nore Barn where the tide was still high though falling. After waiting some time waiting for the hoped for arrival of the winter resident Spotted Redshank I saw an Egret fly in to fish in the stream but when I went to see if the Spotted Redshank had also arrived I saw something much more unexpected - a **single unaccompanied juvenile Brent** which had been hiding in the saltings but which headed out into the stream outflow when I disturbed it. I hope it survives on its own as, while walking back to Langstone along the shore, I found the body of another dead juvenile washed up in the tideline.

Before leaving Nore Barn Wood I found several **Parasol Mushrooms** which had only just sprung up - only one of them had fully opened but it had already been kicked over. Also while on the shore here I watched six **Skylarks** coming in from the sea and elsewhere on my walk I noticed an increase in the number of local **Chaffinches** - almost certainly migrants which have already arrived and dispersed. Passing Warblington Church I kept an eye open for **Redwings** on the Yew trees but none were seen despite **27 reports of them in Hampshire since Oct 6**, five reports being of flocks of over 500 birds and the peak count being 1831. The surprise this autumn has been the **absence of Fieldfares** - the very first two Fieldfares to be

reported in Hampshire were not seen until today and the picture is the same on the Continent to judge by today's reports on Trektellen - just two Fieldfares reported in the Netherlands and one in Belgium as compared to 27 reports today of **Ring Ouzel** (peak count of 28 in Surrey at Leith Hill), 5 reports of **Blackbirds** (including counts of 1003 and 279 at two sites in the Netherlands), a report of 5560 **Song Thrush** at one Netherlands site, 9267 **Redwing** at another Netherlands site, and 13 reports of **Mistle Thrush** with a peak count of 187 plus three other counts of more than 100.

Back at home the sun was shining so before lunch I got out my camera to record the fungi which had started to appear on my lawn yesterday - nothing unusual other than their sudden appearance.

A group of Parrot Waxcaps and two Meadow Waxcaps

A tiny *Mycena fibula* and a lone *Mycena swartzii*

### [Fri 17 October](#)

#### **Purple Sandpipers back at Southsea Castle and a new disease killing Frogs, Toads and Newts**

First my apologies for failing to update my Cemetery Pages before I claimed to have done so - the Havant and Warblington pages are now online but the news for St Faith's churchyard is still held back while I try to establish the id of a small fly with a black thorax and an orange abdomen - the only decent match I can find so far is called **Hemydya vittata** (see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/hemyda-vittata>) but that is a woodland species that was first seen in Britain in the 1950s and is still uncommon. If I can't find a better match I will publish my photo alongside one of that species and leave you to decide!

Local news which I have just read is of **Purple Sandpipers** back at Southsea Castle - one seen on Oct 15 and two seen in Oct 17. Not local but hitting the BBC headlines today is of **a new disease killing off Frogs** in Spain - the new feature this time is that it affects Newts and Toads as well as Frogs. No reports of it in Britain so far by I doubt we will escape its ravages. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-29649273>

### [Thu 16 October](#)

#### **My pages for the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries now updated for October**

My last diary update included photos of two good fungi seen at Warblington Cemetery on Oct 14 but I now have the full news of both these cemetery visits online using the links at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> (though details for St Faiths church yard need another day to complete). The Havant Cemetery news now includes finds of a '**new to me**' **Woodlouse species** said to be common in gardens though I was not aware of it and I now have a full description of it from the website of a friendly pest controller. Also at Havant I was surprised to find myself standing above **a very active Wasp nest** and have included a link to the **new local conservation group** for the two cemeteries in the hope that a few new members will join their 'two hours a month' work force - in case competition urges you on I have a photo of a new 'wild flower seedbed' created by the 'next door' allotment holders.

On my way home from Warblington on Oct 14 with the tide high I counted **82 Little Egrets** in the Langstone Pond trees and was amused by **three Mapies enjoying a game of 'catch me if you can' with a Fox** in the adjacent Pony field. Next day (15th) I watched a **similar contest between a Water Vole and a family of Moorhens** in the Havant Town Millpond - in this case one Moorhen scored a direct hit with its beak on the Vole's back sending it scurrying for cover in the Watercress. My only observation today (16th) was of a **Comma butterfly** enjoying the warm sunshine in my garden.

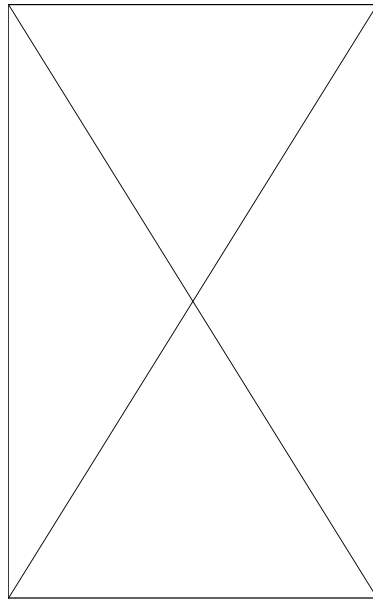
## Tue 14 October

### Redwings return and Fungi increase

Today (Oct 14) brought the **first substantial flocks of Redwing** to Hampshire with 552 seen at Timsbury in the Test valley north of Romsey and 373 at Whitehill north of Petersfield in East Hampshire. Another 20 were seen at Barcombe near Lewes in Sussex with further sightings of 5 at Blashford and Frimley in south west and north east Hampshire respectively - before writing this I think I saw a similar small group over Havant today (15th) but did not hear the distinctive contact call. Other interesting reports have been of a single **Swift** on the 14th over Newick in East Sussex (where a lone Swallow spent last winter at the local sewage works), and of the **first Snow Bunting** of the winter at Pett on Rye Bay on Oct 13 and less dramatic but more local news of a **Yellow Browed Warbler at Selsey** on Oct 13 (the first I know of was at Portland on Sep 21 and the first Hampshire report was of one 'heard only' at Sway near Lymington on Oct 13 though there was an anonymous report of one seen near Basingstoke on Sep 16 but not refound). Coastal reports have included sightings of **Red-breasted Mergansers** (2 at Dungeness on Oct 11 noted as first of the winter there although Selsey had 3 on Oct 8 and 1 on Oct 12 but these may have been summering in the Solent harbours). Other signs of more to come have been single **Red-throated Divers** at Christchurch Harbour on Oct 8 and at Selsey on Oct 8 plus a **Great Northern Diver** at Portland on Oct 8 and at Milford near Lymington on Oct 9.

My own observations on Oct 14 have been at the local Havant Cemeteries where I have collect 108 photos that now need to be turned into my monthly web pages. Among my observations were of two new fungi - **Brown Roll-rim (*Paxillus involutus*)** and **Wrinkled Peach (*Rhodotus palmatus*)** - of which my photos are shown below. Insects of interest were a **very active Wasp Nest** with Wasps streaming in and out of a large hole in the ground to feed on the Ivy flowers on one of which I found an unexpected relative of the Wood Lice which is called **Porcellio scaber** - this one is similar in size and colour to a Wood Louse but has a large set of 'antlers' on its head and twin tails at the back end. I could not get a decent photo so suggest you look it up on the internet (and follow the link back to the 'main Woodlice page' at the end) at [http://www.the-piedpiper.co.uk/th11c\(2\).htm](http://www.the-piedpiper.co.uk/th11c(2).htm). If you like the style of these pages (written by a Pest Controller) try selecting Flies, Bees, Ants, Ladybirds and Bats from <http://www.the-piedpiper.co.uk/>





Brown Roll-rim fungus in Warblington Cemetery with a shot of the underside of another specimen showing the inrolled rim

The pretty Wrinkled Peach and its setting on what is presumably a dead young Elm tree

To end this update I now have an expert opinion from Martin Rand on the Goosefoot plant of which I included photos at the end of my previous update. I asked Martin if this could be the rare *Chenopodium hybridum* and he replied that it was more likely to be the commoner **Red Goosefoot (*Chenopodium rubrum*)**. I had ruled this out as I could see no hint of red on either stem or flowers but I now see the absence of red is not unusual though it may develop as the plant matures.

**Mon 13 October**

### **Alien Wildlife invading Britain**

The latest entry dated Oct 12 in Brian Fellows Emsworth Wildlife Blog (<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>) describes Chris Oakley's encounter with a **Western Conifer Seed Bug** in the newly developed Redlands Grove/Hampshire Farm site which lies north east of the roundabout where the north end of New Brighton Road coming north from Emsworth Rail Station meets the east end of Southleigh Road coming east from the Denvilles area of Havant and the south end of Redlands Lane coming downhill from Long Copse Lane bordering the Hollybank Woods. The fourth road from this roundabout leads into Westbourne past the 'Wren Centre' which is also part of the original Hampshire Farm and has long been the home of a number of small industrial units. Chris Oakley finds lots of wildlife interest in the open ground beyond the current housing development and he has set up a website describing it at <http://www.hampshirefarm.co.uk/>. This is well worth a visit to hear the Nightingale song which welcomes you to its home page and as you visit the other pages you will find some excellent photos, especially of Dragonflies, but for an outsider such as my self it lacks any clue as to how you access the wildlife areas without annoying the residents - do you approach though the new housing? is there anywhere to park? in which direction should you walk to the best wildlife spots and are there any no go areas?

Brian publishes the news of the **Western Conifer Seed Bug** under the heading **Rare Bug?** and I can perhaps shed some light on the extent of its rarity as both I and

John Goodspeed have both found this insect in our houses in the last few years and I expect others will do so, with early October being the favourite time for newly mature adults to take wing in search of new places to settle. The species originated in the USA and reached Europe in 1999 among a cargo of timber shipped from the USA to northern Italy. It rapidly spread across northern Europe, reaching France in 2006 and then flying across the channel to arrive in Weymouth in the autumn of 2007. It is now widely established in Britain and is augmented by new migrants from the continent each autumn. With an average body length of 2cm and a very distinctive appearance you are unlikely to overlook this species which is quite harmless to humans but is a serious pest to conifer nurseries where the insects feed on the tree seeds (without leaving any visible sign of their work). For photos and lots of information go to

[http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/Leptoglossus\\_occidentalis.pdf](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/Leptoglossus_occidentalis.pdf)

With the subject of **alien invaders** in mind my ears pricked up when I heard it mentioned in the BBC News today. Following this up by a visit to the BBC News website (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-28896634>) I found they focused on **Terrapins** (long established in many of our ponds), **Aesculapian Snakes** (now thought to be breeding in the Regents Park Canal), **Skunks** (breeding in the Forest of Dean along with **Wild Boar** that can also be found on the Sussex/Kent border), **Eagle Owls**, **Wallabies**, **Beavers**, **Ring-necked Parakeets**, and **Yellow-tailed Scorpions** which can all be found in Britain along with one or two **Racoons** - including one in East Sussex - (of which there is a substantial population near Berlin where they eat Heron eggs). Also feared by Beekeepers is the **Asian Hornet** which invades Bee Hives to eat their honey. Last in the list on the BBC News website is the **Quagga Mussel** which takes top billing in a similar article in the Independent newspaper and if you read their article at

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/quagga-mussels-most-dangerous-alien-species-found-in-reservoir-near-heathrow-airport-9789069.html> you will find the threat from these Mussels is followed by a list of five more unwanted alien species. Top of this list is the **Grey Squirrel**, followed by **Japanese Knotweed**, the **North American Signal Crayfish**, **Giant Hogweed**, and the **Killer Shrimp** about which they comment .. "These crustaceans were first spotted in the UK in 2010 and are too small (3mm to 30mm in size) to easily eradicate. **They prey on native shrimp species and have been known to kill simply for fun**".

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR OCT 6 - 12 (WEEK 41 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 11 October**

#### **Thursday's mystery tree is named and photographed**

With a sunny and almost windless evening I decided to have another go at naming the mystery tree seen on Thursday and in so doing so I pricked my finger on a 10cm long thorn which clinched the tree's id as a **Honey Locust (Gleditsia triacanthos)** which does appear in Alan Mitchell's Guide to the Trees of Britain and so removes the improbability of a tropical species growing in a Havant garden. Mitchell says that the species arrived in Britain from the Mid-western USA around 1700 and is infrequent but does occur in some gardens in Southern Britain. My photos of it appear below including one of the fearsome thorn which I had not noticed until I went to collect a further leaf specimen from a gloomy area next to the

garden fence and experienced a sharp prick in a finger tip of my hand holding the secateurs intended to cut the leaf off.

The best shot I could get of the *Gleditzia triacanthos* tree

The fearsome thorn plus the leaf it was intended to protect from browsing animals. Before reaching the *Gleditzia* I revisited and photographed the Cork Oak and the Strawberry Tree mentioned on Thursday and here are my photos of them.

An overview shot of the Cork Oak in Pine Grove and a closer view of its magnificent bark

A section of the Strawberry Tree with its clusters of small white bell shaped flowers and its attractive but inedible Strawberry-like fruits

Before visiting the trees I took a couple of pictures of an impressive weed standing 50cm tall in the flower bed outside the block of Council Flats beside the Emsworth Road immediately east of Bellair Road. I believe this weed may be what is known as **Maple Leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium hybridum*)** which, according to the Hants Flora, is 'very rare' and only occurs in enriched soils - its rarity may be illustrated by my not having seen the species before and the flower bed certainly has 'enriched soil' but this is just my guess. Two other features which support this identification are its height (the species can grow to a metre tall) and the absence of 'mealiness' on its leaves.

A general view of what may be Maple Leaved Goosefoot

A closer view showing leaf shapes (largest leaves are 8cm long and 6cm across)

## Fri 10 October

### Juvenile Brent Geese in Langstone Harbour this morning

This morning I cycled to Budds Farm but found nothing newsworthy there though I did hear a **Cetti's Warbler** and saw a **double Rainbow** during a shower. After leaving the viewing bench I headed along the shore past the Budds Farm fence which has recently been replaced after being knocked down during last winter's storms and found the fence had stood up to a battering during last night's high tide though masses of seaweed had been piled up against it. This time the damage had been inflicted on the wooden steps down which you climb to access that stretch of the beach - they were still usable but had been lifted out of their normal setting by wave action scouring under their foundations.

Around **300 Brent Geese** were feeding along this stretch of beach and among them were the **first few families with young** with one family seemingly having a brood of four juveniles though most had only two. These are the first juveniles I have seen reported this autumn other than a few which moved west past Christchurch Harbour on Oct 5 and 6. With the Brent were plenty of **Wigeon**, a party of ten **Turnstone** and one **Grey Plover** plus a few Oystercatchers. On the sewage outfall was a large flock of Redshank with a single **Sandwich Tern** perched on the green triangle which marks the presence of the outfall when that is submerged at high tide.

Back in Havant I had just reached the wavy white fencing round the old Town Millpond opposite Solent Road when one **Water Vole** came boldly out of its tunnel and swam away to be lost to sight while what must have been another unseen Vole caused a disturbance to the Water Cress it was presumably eating.

[Thu 9 October](#)

### Some interesting trees in Havant gardens

This morning I took a short walk round the Bellair Road area off East St on the east side of the Billy Trail in search of some interesting trees. Turning right from Bellair Road into Oaklands Road I then took the first right into Pine Grove to have a look at the magnificent **Cork Oak** in the garden on your left as the road turns left. This is a mature tree and the crevices in its deep bark (from which the bottle corks were once carved) look like those in an Antarctic ice field which has been subjected to strong geological pressure - well worth a visit.

Returning to Oaklands Road I back-tracked to take the first right again into Connaught Road where a tall lone **Ginkgo (aka Maidenhair) tree** is the first tree that you come to - if you are not aware how ancient and long lived this species is it is said to be "the sole survivor of an ancient group of trees that date back to beyond the time of the dinosaurs. The Maidenhair tree remains virtually unchanged today and represents the only living bridge between 'higher' and 'lower' plants (between ferns and conifers). Maidenhair trees can be extremely long-lived, the oldest recorded individual being 3,500 years old." For a photo of its uniquely shaped leaves see <https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/7990/Ginkgo-biloba/Details>. Next interest came after turning left into Montgomery Road where, half way along on the southern side, a superb **Strawberry Tree** overhangs a garage entrance - at the moment the tree has a great display of white bell shaped flowers with plenty of ripe 'Strawberry' fruit among the flower clusters.

My route took me straight ahead past Bellair Road but I could easily see that a short way down on its west side was a good specimen of a **Locust (Robinia pseudo-acacia)** tree. Nearing the dead end of Montgomery Road, still on its southern side, was **a strange tree which I had noticed on my last visit here and which I was re-visiting in the hope of collecting evidence with which to name it** but I am still not much the wiser though I do now have two possible candidate names. There is a high fence round the garden in which it grows (the last house before the dead end of the road) and all I can see of the tree is that it is at least 5 metres tall and has a sinuous trunk with many much divided fan shaped leaves, some of which hang down outside the fence (allowing me to cut one off). To give you an idea of what I am talking about go to

[http://www.ntbg.org/plants/plant\\_details.php?rid=912&plantid=3945](http://www.ntbg.org/plants/plant_details.php?rid=912&plantid=3945). The top picture on the left of the screen is an enlargement of one of the smaller photos below it so to see what I mean by a 'sinuous trunk' click the small picture labelled Trunk and it will appear enlarged in the top position, then to see the strange fan shaped leaves click the lower picture labelled Leaves which will show leaves looking almost identical in pattern but considerably larger than my specimen which is only 17 cm long where the description section of the webpage says the leaves are 30 to 50 cm long - what's more both the primary divisions (pinnae) and the secondary divisions (pinnules) are not strictly opposite each other although they give the initial impression of being so.

The tree illustrated on the above website is a tropical species called the **Flame Tree (Delonix regia)** on account of its brilliant red flowers and so unlikely to be found in

England. Failing to find any other species with similar leaves in my Google searches I asked Martin Rand if he could suggest an alternative and he recommended that I try **an Albizia species known as Silk Trees** but none I have come across so far offers a better match than the Flame Tree so I have now put my search for a name on hold.

To return home I used the unofficial exit from the dead end of Montgomery Road into the Hayling Billy Trail but above the near vertical drop into the old rail cutting I collected one more tree specimen which seems easier to identify as a **Smooth Arizona Cypress (Cupressus glabra)** which is a species I was previously unfamiliar with.

**Wed 8 October**

### **Seals in the Solent Harbours and other recent news**

I have long been aware that there is a growing local colony of Common (aka Harbour) Seals which can often be seen hauled out on Pilsey Sands in Chichester Harbour and on Sword Sands in Langstone Harbour - Sword Sands are off the Eastern Road/Tangier Road junction at the point where the harbour entrance channel divides into the Langstone Channel heading up past the Oyster Beds and the Broom Channel heading for the Eastern Road Bridge. My interest in this '**Solent Seal Colony**' (the only breeding colony anywhere on the English South Coast) was revived by news of a Common Seal in the water off Nore Barn at Emsworth on Oct 5 when it was seen by Doug Outram (reported by Brian Fellows in his Oct 7 entry on <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>) and my research shows that:-

**The number of Seals** based in the two harbours (Chichester and Langstone) is officially given by both Langstone Harbour Board and Chichester Harbour Conservancy as around 25 Seals but the number has been growing in recent years and 28 were seen on the Pilsey Sands on 31 Aug 2014 (when there were probably a few more on the Sword Sands or elsewhere round the harbours)

Proof of local breeding can be seen in a video taken in Chichester Harbour in November 2013 of a mother with a pup on

<http://www.makingwavesproject.org.uk/2013/11/seal-pups-in-chichester-harbour/>

The reason why this number of Seals is not seen more often or in greater numbers is that **the individuals which belong to the colony roam over a considerable area** in search of food and generally operate as individuals rather than as groups. Proof of this came from a project to fit five of them with GPS tracking devices in 2009 and a map showing where they went can be seen on

<http://www.portsmouth-canoe-club.org/resources/seals> which shows them roaming west to the head of Southampton Water, south to the north and east shores of the Isle of Wight and east to at least Selsey Bill.

In addition to all the Common Seals in the Solent area a few **Grey Seals** also turn up from time to time and a photo on the Portsmouth Canoe Club website shows that the Greys can be distinguished by their 'long noses' - the Common Seals have more 'friendly' faces with 'snub noses'. So far as I know any Grey Seals are lone wanderers from the Atlantic Coast where they are the predominant species although they also breed on the East Coast - for more info on where to see them go to <http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/uk/seal-watching.html#cr>

**Turning from Seals to Butterflies** we are rapidly coming to the end of the butterfly season and so I have been looking at what species are still being seen in October. Surprisingly, thanks to the warm weather of the first five days of the month, sixteen



species have been seen in Hampshire and Sussex and these are (with their strategies for over wintering):-

Clouded Yellow - Migrant but at least one colony overwinters at Christchurch where it attempts to continue its summer cycle of egg, larva and imago

Large White - Large White

Brown Hairstreak - Egg

Small Copper - Caterpillar

Brown Argus - Caterpillar

Common Blue - Caterpillar

Red Admiral - Partial Migrant but some Caterpillars now survive

Painted Lady - Migrant

Small Tortoiseshell - Hibernates as an adult and so can be seen in any month when disturbed from sleep.

Peacock - As Small Tortoiseshell

Comma - As Small Tortoiseshell

Speckled Wood - Can be found as either Caterpillar or Chrysalis in any winter month

Wall Brown - Caterpillar

Meadow Brown - Caterpillar

One other factor to take into account is that all those species which overwinter as adults know that **if they are to produce young in the following year they must not mate until they emerge from hibernation** (as they have no means of preventing the fertilised eggs from developing in their bodies while they are 'asleep' and so being wasted as the source of next years caterpillars). This fact was emphasised recently on the Sussex Butterfly website when one inexperienced observer was **puzzled by seeing a female butterfly respond to the presence of a male by flattening her wings and curving her abdomen up in what he thought was a mating position**. He was puzzled when the male took no interest but this was explained by a more experienced observer who said this was actually a 'go away' signal to the male to avoid pre-hibernation mating.

One other feature of these species which over-winter as adults is the **long autumn period over which they emerge as adults**. I personally have seen a clearly newly-emerged adult Comma on a frosty morning in early November with one of its wings having failed to expand as a result of the frost. Theory says that its parents were hatched in the autumn of the previous year and would not have survived to mate much later than July or August, so what caused the egg/larva/chrysalis cycle to be extended from August until November? Whatever these factors are they presumably affect individuals in widely different ways because species such as Comma (which go into hibernation after at most a week or so of feeding after their initial emergence) can be seen erratically through a period of several months from August to (in my case) November. I guess the main factors must be the availability of food during the caterpillar stage and perhaps periods of low temperature during the chrysalis stage.....

**Mon 6 October**

### **My recent sightings and some comments on other people's reports**

Today's rain and wind give me an opportunity to review what I have seen during the first five days of October when searching for the wild plants that are still in flower or starting to re-flower. My search has produced a list of 161 species so far and here are my comments on those that I found most interesting.

**Surprises:** The first came as I was walking along the southern side of Elmleigh Road past Havant Police Station and a patch of white blossom caught my eye on the recently trimmed Hawthorn hedge beside me - a search found just five clusters of **fresh Hawthorn flowers**, presumably encouraged by the trimming allowing light to reach previously hidden buds. My reason for walking there was to cross the Park Road North road bridge over the railway to see if there were any flowers remaining on the **Soapwort** which has been seen there in previous years and was present on Sep 1 this year when one or two flower heads had managed to push through the brambles that were choking the area. On this visit the brambles had been partially cut back and the surprise was to see the mass of fresh flowers that had resulted, flowering well after the end of their normal season. These two unexpected finds came on Oct 3 and were followed by three more on Oct 5. The first of these was a large fresh plant of **Green Amaranth (aka Pigweed)** found beside the track across the harvested North Hayling arable fields shortly after I had left Northney churchyard to head west to Stoke village. The second find on this walk was growing on the bank of the Lymbourne Stream where it passes the lake and Chinese Garden within Wade Court - this was a pleasant smelling (Apple scented) mint with three spikes of whitish flowers and is known as **Round-leaved Mint (Mentha suaveolens)**. This has been present here in previous years but this is the first time I have seen it this year. An even more unexpected find came shortly after when on the stretch of the Hayling Billy trail north of the A27 - here, as with the Hawthorn, a flash of white at ground level caught my eye and showed me **fresh Holly flowers** on two branches at ground level.

A further surprise both for the time of year and the locations has been to find **Wavy Bitter Cress** in at least half a dozen dry locations where I would not expect it, such as beside the footpath connecting Wade Court Road to Pook Lane within fifty metres of the Wade Court Road. Two other out of season (but in correct habitat) finds have been of **Ragged Robin** and **Yellow Iris** both flowering on the South Moors when looking for, and finding, expected **Devils Bit Scabious**. Another discovery with the aid of my nose has been of a number of places where the shrub known as **Ebbinge's Siverberry (Eleagnus ebbingei)** has been planted and is now flowering to attract attention by its strong scent to an otherwise dull green shrub. One of the many places where you should be able to smell and then see it is south of Bosmere School as you are climbing the steps to the foot bridge to cross the busy A27 at the Langstone Roundabout - when a strong scent hits you look for a mass of dull green leaves on a shrub growing to well above the steps with tiny trumpet shaped flowers appearing shyly from behind the leaves - should you lift one of the leaves you will find the underside is white.

More expected good finds have been on the Warblington Farm shore fields at Conigar Point where **Field Woundwort, Field Madder, Common Fumitory** and **Round-leaved Fluellen** were all to be found since the Sweet Corn crop has been harvested - still to come there should be Field Pansy and Dwarf Spurge with an eventual build up of wintering Skylarks (just two present when I was there). Also in that area the field which you cross from the kissing gate out of Nore Barn Wood added **Pepper Saxifrage** and **Pale Persicaria** while the shore at the east end of Nore Barn Wood had an unexpected display (though I had been prepared for it by Brian Fellows photos) of both **Greater and Lesser Sea Spurrey**. Brian says he has difficulty in separating these two though my personal rules for 'first glance recognition' seem to work - Lesser Sea Spurrey usually appears as a compact

plant on bare ground and has its relatively bright blue flowers all sitting within an 'island' of green foliage while Greater appears as individual almost white, larger, flowers coming up through other vegetation with no impression of the plant to which these flowers belong.

Over Langstone Bridge at Northney I revisited last month's finds of **Green Nightshade** and **Basil Thyme**, refinding both with the addition of a lot more Green Nightshade in the now harvested small field immediately east of Bridge Farm - here the contrast between the soft light green leaves of the Green species and the darker, blacker, leaves of the Black Nightshade was greater than on my previous visits. Also in this field I came on a lone white capped Fungus which I expected would be the Stubble Rosegill species that is not uncommon in harvested fields but clearly it was not this species so I took it home for identification and am pretty sure it was **Lepiota excoriata** after seeing its pure white spore print and reading that, unlike most fungi, it is not associated with trees but often turns up on roadsides (nowadays it will be found on Google under the name *Macrolepiota excoriata* indicating that it is related to the Parasol Mushrooms). Before leaving the subject of interesting plant finds I must mention that the **Thorn Apple** flowers can still be seen at Havant Rail Station and that a short walk from that flower bed into Havant Park will find **Fiddle Dock** in flower under the Dawn Redwood tree alongside the Tennis Courts.

While out on one of my walks I met Tony Gutteridge who told me he had just had an unexpected butterfly, a **Common Blue**, in his Havant garden (probably wind blown from Portsdown) and while I was on my walk to Northney I encountered a couple of **Clouded Yellows** and one each of **Speckled Wood**, **Large White**, **Peacock** and **Red Admiral** and a quick look at the Hants and Sussex Butterfly sites has shown that all the following species have been seen in the first week of October. In addition to my list Hants has had **Small Copper**, **Meadow Brown** and **Brown Argus** while Sussex has also had **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Wall Brown**, **Small White** and a probable **Holly Blue**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEPT 22 - 28 (WEEK 39 OF 2014)**

### **Thu 25 September**

#### **99 Egrets roost at Langstone Pond last night and a walk to the Langstone South Moors this morning**

After a rather wet and windy day yesterday the sun came out and the wind died down in the evening when the low tide just before sunset made it ideal for a **count of the Egrets coming to roost at Langstone Pond**. My last count on Aug 28 had given me a total of 227 birds but that was at the time when I expect the peak count of the year and I was not expecting anything like that number this time but when I totted up my list of arrivals I was very pleased to see that the **total was at least 99** (seen between 6pm and 7.15pm - nearly 20 minutes after sunset) and I am pretty sure that if I had stayed longer I would have seen at least 100. On this occasion no Swallows came to roost in the reeds but there was a more or less continuous flow of hirundines going north over head.

This morning the sunshine was more or less unbroken and the wind light so I decided to walk via the Langbrook Stream and the South Moors to Budds Farm. On the South Moors I was pleased to see my first autumn re-flowering of **Ragged Robin** and a good show of at least a dozen **Yellow Iris** flowers to confirm that the single flower seen distantly across the Budds Farm pools on Sep 14 was genuine. A walk round the 'orchid field', which is now open to cattle grazing, found the **Devils Bit Scabious** that I was hoping for and also gave me my first **Araneus quadratus spider** of the autumn - this is an orb web spider slightly larger than the common **Araneus diadematus** Garden Spider and is distinguished by four prominent dots forming a square on top of its abdomen. Nearby I also found another **Mesembrina meridiana Noon fly** resting on a cowpat.

Heading for Budds Farm I sat briefly on the bench under the power lines where Mike Collins had been lucky enough to see a Wryneck on Sep 20 and Peter Gammage had seen it again next day. No such luck for me but when I reached Southmoor Lane I came on freshly flowering **Pellitory of the Wall** before I climbed Budds Mound to have a look at the pools where I was hoping for an early **Pochard** (no luck today but last year one was seen here on Sept 4 though the first winter flock was not seen until late December). I did have one unexpected sighting here when a dozen **Wigeon** flew in and settled on the water but the only other thing that caught my attention here was the annual mowing of the rough grass on top of the mound.

On the way home I found **Lesser Burdock** in flower and when back among the busy mid-day traffic in Havant I watched a **Water Vole** calmly eating its lunch in the Dolphin Pool below the wavy white railings along Park Road South

## Mon 22 September

### Many Brent and Wigeon already in our harbours

**Wigeon** began to return in numbers on Sept 6 when there were 20 on the Wicor shore of Portsmouth Harbour and 35 at Farlington Marshes increasing to 200 in Langstone Harbour on Sep 7 and 200 in Pagham Harbort on Sep 14, then to 620 in Portsmouth Harbour on Sept 15 so I was a bit late in seeing my first flock of 40 at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream on my way down the Billy Line this morning. At the Oysterbeds the tide was already well up and hundreds of Oystercatchers had already come in to roost while the bushes were alive with smaller birds and one very hopeful birder told me he was looking for a **Tree Sparrow** among them after hearing that one had been seen here 8 days ago - maybe there is hope that we will see them again this winter as I see that 595 of them were seen at Spurn Point in Yorkshire (mouth of the Humber River) on Aug 31. While talking to this birder I spotted **a large flock of Brent** out in the harbour but they were too distant to count so I carried on south and looked again from the 'mid-way' spot where there is an interpretation board beside the track (approx SU 713011). From the newly installed and very comfortable seat here I could see the Brent strung out in a line at right-angles to my line of sight so I was able to get a pretty accurate **count of 323 which I rounded up to 350** to allow for those inevitably missed where the birds were crowded together with those nearest masking others behind them. While I was doing this Andy Johnson was counting a similar but **even larger flock in Chichester Harbour and coming to a total of at least 425** there (including one Pale-bellied Bird).

The only other birds I could see on Langstone Harbour were 10 Great Crested Grebe.

Arriving at the Gunner Point area there was no special bird interest but I did spot a fresh **Small Copper** butterfly and later a single **Clouded Yellow** and was impressed by the displays of **Pale Toadflax** and **Cock's Eggs flowers**. When I started homeward up Staunton Avenue a noisy Great Spotted Woodpecker attracted my attention as it flew south at tree top height. That was my last note for this very pleasant trip.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEPT 15 - 21 (WEEK 38 OF 2014)**

**Sun 21 September**

### **An unusual insect seen in Havant Thicket**

This morning I cycled to Havant Thicket, not expecting anything unusual but keeping an eye open for a possible second brood White Admiral butterfly after three had been seen last Monday (Sep 15) at Walter's Copse, Newtown on the Isle of Wight. The only butterflies seen today were a good many Speckled Wood but after stopping to note that Goldenrod and Wood Sage were still in flower a large winged insect caught my eye on nearby vegetation and stayed in view for long enough for me to focus my binoculars on it. I thought it was a species that I had seen before but I could not name it on the spot though I had no difficulty in doing so when I got back to my computer and checked out the 'Lacewings and Scorpion Flies' gallery on the home page of <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/>. Scrolling down to the Scorpionflies I immediately recognised that what I had seen was the **Common Scorpion Fly (*Panorpa communis*)** and you can discover more about this very ancient insect family (with a history going back 250 million years and thought to be ancestors of all our butterflies and many other insects) by visiting <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecoptera> which has an interesting section on their mating. For pictures and info directly related to the insect that I saw go to <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/scorpion-fly>. The pictures may give you the impression that this is a dangerous insect armed with a pickaxe-like 'beak' and a scorpion-like sting in its tail but it presents no danger to humans - the beak is used like a drinking straw to suck up juices from already dead insect prey (which it often steals from spider webs) and the bulbous red object at the end of the male's body is a 'genital capsule' (the female has a less conspicuous 'ovipositor' at the end of her body - as she lays her eggs in soil she does not need a 'saw' to pierce a plant stem).

Among the plants still in flower were **Ling** and **Cross-leaved Heath**, plus **Dwarf Gorse** and **Devil's Bit Scabious**. Bird interest came from several **Jays** in different places while out on the Gipsies Plain grassland a couple of young men were probably in search of '**Magic Mushrooms**'

Among the bird interest recently reported on the internet I see a **Black-necked Grebe** was seen off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 14 (not the first as others had been seen earlier - one arrived at Longham Lakes adjacent to Poole in Dorset on Sep 6 and is still there and two more were in Studland Bay on Sep 15 while a summer plumage bird was at Rye Harbour on July 8, a juvenile was at Dungeness on Aug 21, and here in Hampshire one was in Southampton Water on Aug 28). A **Grey Phalarope** (probably the first of several on autumn passage) was seen off



Hengistbury Head (Christchurch Harbour) on Sep 15 after what was said to be a juvenile **Red-necked Phalarope** had been at Dungeness on Aug 27 and 28. Two reports which surprised me were of **380 Avocet** already at Brownsea in Poole Harbour on Sep 11 and of a large scale easterly (into the wind) movement of **House Martins** reported at many south coast sites (including Warblington) over several days with a **peak count of 14,000** passing over Christchurch Harbour on Sep 13. Also from Poole Harbour was the only report I have seen this year of a **White-winged Black Tern** on Sep 10 (normal **Black Terns** continued to move west since July with peak counts of 11 from Rye Harbour on Aug 26 and Cornwall on Aug 28)

One bird arriving in England since Sep 1 (when one flew in off the sea at Selsey Bill) has been the **Short-eared Owl**. By Sep 4 two were hunting the West Sussex Downs near Steyning and another was at Cuckmere near Beachy Head on Sep 9. They have become regular arrivals at Portland since Sep 6. So far none have been reported in Hampshire but we have had local interest with a **Red-backed Shrike** at Sandy Point on Hayling from Sep 6 until Sep 20 at least. Sandy Point also had a single passing **Tree Sparrow** on Sep 17 after one had been seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 14 (when 5 were seen at Titchfield Haven). Also fairly local was a report which seemed to mark the end of this year's successful breeding season for **Bee Eaters** at Wydcombe near St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight - this latest report was of 12 birds flying towards Brading which sounds to me like the breeding pair, their four fledglings, and a group of half a dozen 'helpers', all departing together.

Finally I must point you to Brian Fellows Emsworth website for a story worthy of comparison with the most exciting TV reality programs such as 'Helicopter Heroes' - see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> and scroll down to the entry for Sept 20 headed '**Swan rescue on Canoe Lake**'.

### **Fri 19 September**

#### **My Cemetery Pages now updated and I rediscover *Eleagnus ebbingei***

My visits to the Havant Cemeteries earlier this week gave me 102 photos from which I have now selected 30 and have uploaded them to my Cemetery Pages with relevant text to indicate what can be seen there this month - to see them (and their monthly equivalents for the past couple of years) go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and click on the top (latest) link to each of the three pages (St Faith's churchyard/Havant Cemetery/Warblington Cemetery). After completing this update there was still time for an evening walk to Langstone Pond and I chose to go via Juniper Square, then over the footbridge crossing the A27 at the Langstone Roundabout and on along the foot path through the Langstone housing, then across the Billy Trail and Russell's Field which brings you to the shore by the Royal Oak. The first interest came in the path connecting Grove Road to Juniper Square where a new plant had appeared - this was a garden escape called (I think) **American Galingale (*Cyperus eragrostis*)**. I have long been familiar with this along the fence line marking the eastern edge of Juniper Square where I was reluctant to say it was an escape but now it appears that it has arrived at this new site by non-human means and can be regarded as 'wild'. Next point of interest came when I was south of Bosmere School and climbing the steps to the footbridge which crosses the A27. What caught my attention here was a strong,

pleasant scent coming from a roadside (planted) shrub which flowers at this time of year. It is an 'artificial' hybrid of two species of *Elaeagnus* (aka Silverberry or Oleaster) and is called ***Elaeagnus ebbingei*** (sometimes listed as *Elaeagnus x ebbingei*). The best introduction to this plant that I have found so far is <http://www.pfaf.org/user/cmspage.aspx?pageid=61> but this begins with photos of the fruit (which I have never noticed) and you have to scroll down to find a photo of the tiny white, trumpet shaped, flowers peepng out among a mass of leathery green leaves with silvery white undersides. So if your nose is assailed by a strong, pleasant, scent in the near future this may be its origin.

On checking this update before uploading it the above link returned a "Service Unavailable" message - if that happens to you try

<http://www.chewvalleytrees.co.uk/products/detail/elaegagnus-x-ebbingei/4> which has no photo of the flowers and says the species flowers from December to March. Nothing special on Langstone Pond (though both Teal and Shoveler were present) but the Pony Field north of the Pond had at least three **Mistle Thrush** among the Starlings and Wood Pigeons. I guess this is the family of Mistle Thrushes that has bred in the Wade Court area in several recent years (including this one) though the birds could be new comers as 'winter thrushes' are beginning to be noticed on the continent as they start to flock and move west to avoid the coming winter weather. With several recent reports of Mistle Thrush flocks seen in Hampshire this month and the first report of Redwing seen passing through the Wild Grounds at Gosport yesterday I have compiled the following table of Thrush sightings using reports from both southern England and the near Continent (taken from Trektellen)

Two other species which have already started to move into England recently have been **Robins** (unspecified increase in numbers noted in many places) and **Jays**, with three noted by Barry Collins at the southern end of Thorney Island on Sep 18 and Cliff Dean reporting 12 heading north east over Pett Level on Sep 18 and a similar number at a Hastings coastal site on Sep 17. Cliff added the comment .. "The 2012 irruption began about this time of year". Near the East Hampshire border 8 Jays were seen at Blackdown on Sep 16 and in the Pulborough area 'A light but noticeable movement of Jays, ten seen in two hours, was reported on Sep 14.

### **Wed 17 September**

#### **Second generation of White Admirals seen on the Isle of Wight**

I spent Monday and Tuesday visiting the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries to gather material for my monthly Wildlife Posters which are displayed at those cemeteries. Today I have been editing the material and will soon have my photos and comments on the Cemeteries page of my website - minor highlights have been an out of season **Early Dog Violet** flowering at Havant where a more timely **Agaricus type fungus** was possibly *A. placomyces* and an unidentified insect on a Field Scabious flower turned out to be **a mating pair of Helophilus hoverflies** when I enlarged the photo - the genus was obvious from the 'footballer's striped jerseys' on the thorax but I could not see enough detail to determine which of the three species was concerned - almost certainly *H. pendulus* but my investigation led me to a useful website contrasting the features of all three species (see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/content/id-guide-helophilus>). I also found that the same website has very comprehensive photo galleries to help with the identification of many branches of wildlife - go to <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/> and then click on any of the long list of Species Galleries shown.

At Warblington my most interesting find was of the large and very distinctive **Noon Fly (*Mesembrina meridiana*)** which is found in association with cattle as the female lays her eggs in cowpats. I was also interested to see that young Oak Trees planted in the Natural Burial area, and newly released from the Tulley Tubes which protected their initial growth, had a white mildew covering their leaves and I suspect that this is the **Oak Powdery Mildew (*Erysiphe alphitoides*)** which originally attacked Mango and Rubber Trees in the Southern Hemisphere but which has been spreading through European countries since 1907. Luckily it is not fatal to the trees but it does inhibit their ability to photosynthesise, thus slowing their growth. It seems to favour young rather than mature trees and has been potentially found on recently planted Oaks in Brook Meadow at Emsworth as well as at Warblington. Other odds and ends that have caught my attention over the past few days include the relatively unusual appearance of the **second generation of White Admiral butterflies** at Walters Copse, Newtown, on the Isle of Wight (three fresh specimens seen there on Sep 15). The Brading area of the IoW was also in the news on Sep 16 when **a flock of 12 Bee Eaters** flew over (presumably some of them came from the successful nesting at Wydcombe (near St Catherine's Point) where four chicks were recently fledged by a pair plus 'adult helpers'.

A visit to Graeme Lyons blog gave me sight of a photo of a plant which I have never seen but have long hoped to discover in Southleigh Forest (north of the Emsworth Common Road passing the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth). The plant is **Coralroot** and was found and photographed by Graeme in the New Forest on Sept 15. The association with Southleigh Forest comes from a find of it there by Katherine Hearn (now National Specialist in Plants and Soils with the National Trust) when she was visiting her parents who then lived on the southern edge of the Hollybank Woods - that find was probably made around 1990!. If you go to <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> you will see that he also found **Chaffweed** which has also been found locally - John Norton told me where to see it in Havant Thicket a few years ago. In his previous blog entry Graeme also introduced me to a **Tooth Fungus** which I had not previously heard of - the Orchard Tooth.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEPT 8 - 14 (WEEK 37 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 13 September**

#### **More reports of migrant Brent sightings**

My sighting of 11 **newly arrived Brent** in Langstone Harbour yesterday has been topped by a flock of 21 at Rye Harbour this morning (13th) with 3 seen at Pennington near Lymington and 1 flying west past Portland. Other reports seen on the internet today relate to yesterday (12th) and are of 3 on the Ryde Sands (Isle of Wight) and 3 at Christchurch Harbour. I suspect that all these early arrivals are heading for the west coast of France and that it will be some time before birds begin to settle on our south coast.

My own observations today were noted as I walked along the shore from Langstone to Nore Barn at Emsworth and returned via the Warblington Farm fields. My first note was made at Wade Lane at Langstone where fresh leaves were appearing in the large patch of Winter Heliotrope though it may well be two months before I record the first flowers which appear just after the first frost of the winter.

Further down the Lane the huge tree stump opposite the gate into the Pony Field was still providing sustenance for a well established bracket fungus which I think is **Ganoderma applanatum (Artists Fungus)** though it may be the commoner **G. adpersum**. Along the shore the tide was very low and there were few birds to be seen though I noted a small flock of around 25 Teal settled on the bank of the Castle Stream outflow. Just after passing the point where this stream emerges from its underground pipe I noticed that someone (presumably Dog Walkers) had removed the rather rickety style which allowed (unofficial) access into the westmost of the shore arable fields and had cut the barbed wire of the fence to allow entry into the field for those prepared to get down on hands and knees. With some difficulty I got through into the field in the hope of finding fresh arable weeds along the edge of the Sweetcorn crop and was soon rewarded with my first **Field Madder** and **Round-leaved Fluellen** flowers for September (Also here were freshly re-flowering **Field Woundwort** plants). Nothing else new here nor in the next field to the east from which I emerged by the easier outlet onto the beach.

From the Nore Barn wood I took the field path back to Havant. The dried up pond in the first field added **Pale Persicaria** to my list and in the second, much bigger, field where the Sweetcorn crop was being harvested I noted a lot of **Pineappleweed**. After the farm the road connecting Church Lane to Wade Lane gave me a single **Giant Puffball** which had no attachment to the soil and may have arrived here from anywhere. Just one more new flower, and the least expected, came from the side of the path from Wade Court Road to the Billy Line - this was **Wavy Bittercress**.

## [Fri 12 September](#)

### **First migrant Brent back in Langstone Harbour?**

This morning I cycled down the Hayling Billy line and **I have good reason to claim that at least 11 of the 16 Brent which I saw were migrants and their arrival is supported by four reported sightings yesterday** - the first was of 4 Dark Bellied Birds at Sandwich, the second was from Dungeness stating .. "the first Brent Geese of the autumn flew by", the third was of one at Ouistreham in Normandy on the French coast (possibly a summering bird), and the fourth of 7 Pale Bellied birds on the Yorkshire coast (per RBA).

My first sighting this morning was at Langstone where **5 Brent were at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream**, an unlikely place to see newly arrived migrants which are normally wary of close contact with human activity and usually prefer the more remote south east part of the harbour. Although no one has reported more than 4 summering birds (if we ignore the two very dubious reports of 15 at Broadmarsh on Aug 8 and of 30 seen from Langstone Bridge on Aug 24) I assumed these 5 were all summering birds which traditionally come out of hiding to welcome the first migrants.

Pressing on south I found **five more Brent** feeding on the exposed harbour floor (the tide was only just starting to rise) well away from the shore some 3 km south of the Oysterbeds and thought it very unlikely that these were the same five seen at Langstone (nearly 4 km to the north) and after spotting these I spotted **another group of 7 Brent** about 1 km further south (off Saltmarsh Lane). When I reached the Saltmarsh Lane seawall I found that the 7 had become 11 but as I could not see the last five I assumed they had now flown south to join up with the 7 (that would be



expected if these eleven were all part of the same migrant flock which had become separated in flight and were keen to get back together).

No more sightings and when I eventually returned north the tide had risen and the birds were not to be seen (I did see two Brent but had no idea if they were newcomers or summering birds). Other sightings noted today were of a **Sparrowhawk** flying east over the Oysterbeds area and of my first September sighting of **freshly re-flowering Honeysuckle**.

### **Thu 11 September**

#### **Ivy flowers open to feed autumn insects**

Walking back from South Street in Havant via The Twittens and its continuation path to Town Hall Road this afternoon I was surprised to find several bushes of **Ivy with open flowers attracting insects** (including what I think was one *Volucella inanis* - only seen flying away from the Ivy and giving the impression it was smaller than *V. zonaria*).

Later I rode to Emsworth and back, and going along the Emsworth Road in Havant I found the **huge display of Giant Polypore** on the north side of the road just east of the Meadowlands turning was even more impressive than when I last saw it (the tree stump on which it is growing is now hidden by grass so the fungus appears to be growing from the earth). On my way back I found a troop of what appeared to be **Wood Mushrooms** (from the specimen I collected) but looking badly in need of some rain! A little later, in Swallow Close (Denvilles) I found two more small and dried fungi which seem to be **Boletus piperatus**.

### **Tue 9 September**

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

#### **Gorse Spider Mites invade Hayling Island**

On Sunday I rode around South Hayling and found a number of **Gorse Bushes** in the area south of Staunton Avenue and east of the Inn on the Beach were **covered with masses of glistening white silk** similar to that shown in a series of photos on the ISpot website - see

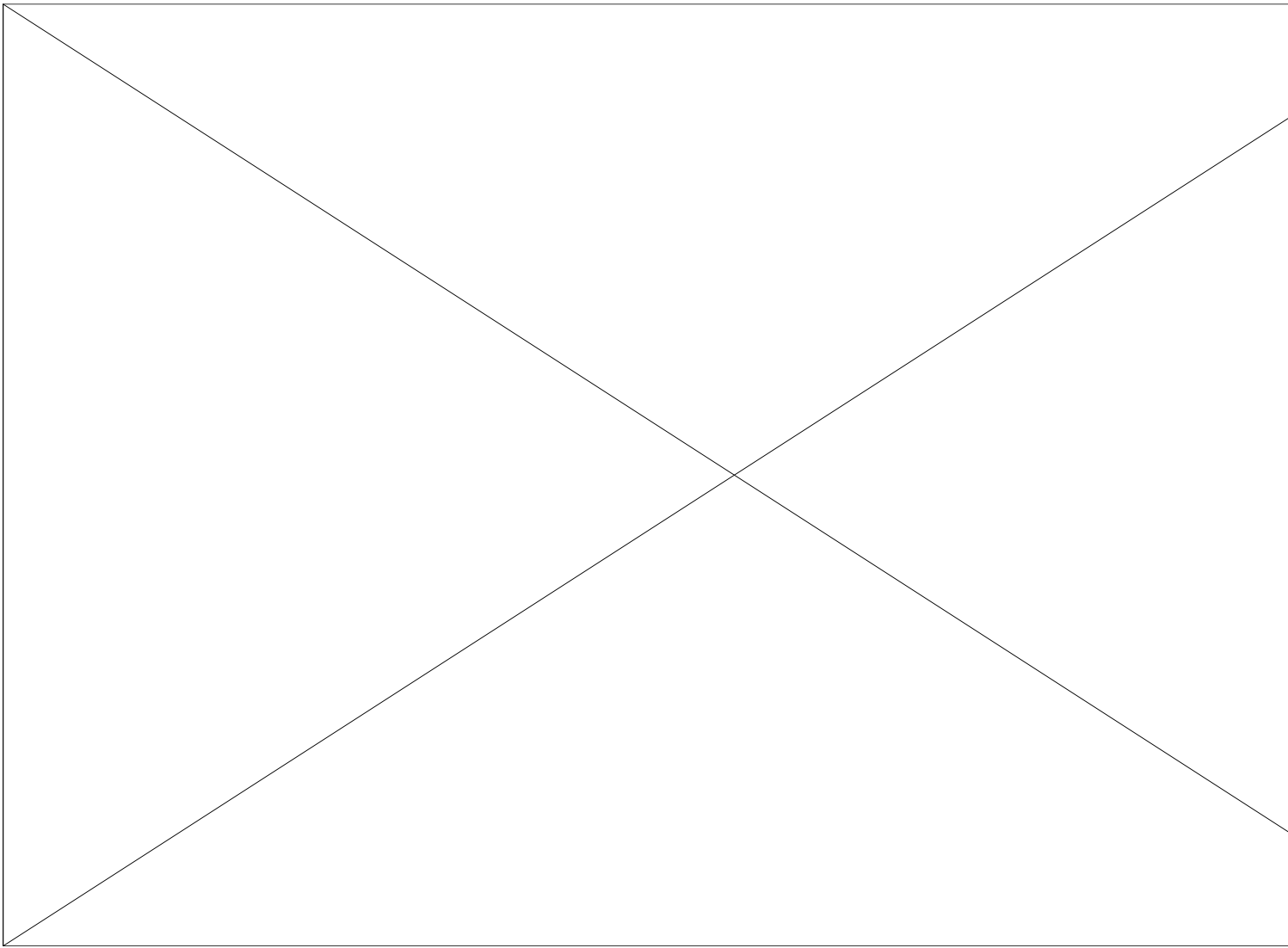
<http://www.ispotnature.org/species-dictionaries/uksi/Tetranychus%20linterarius>.

The locations where the webs were found were widely spread across the southern half of the British Isles from Suffolk to Kilkenny with the majority in central southern coastal counties and they appear to have been found in the past five years.

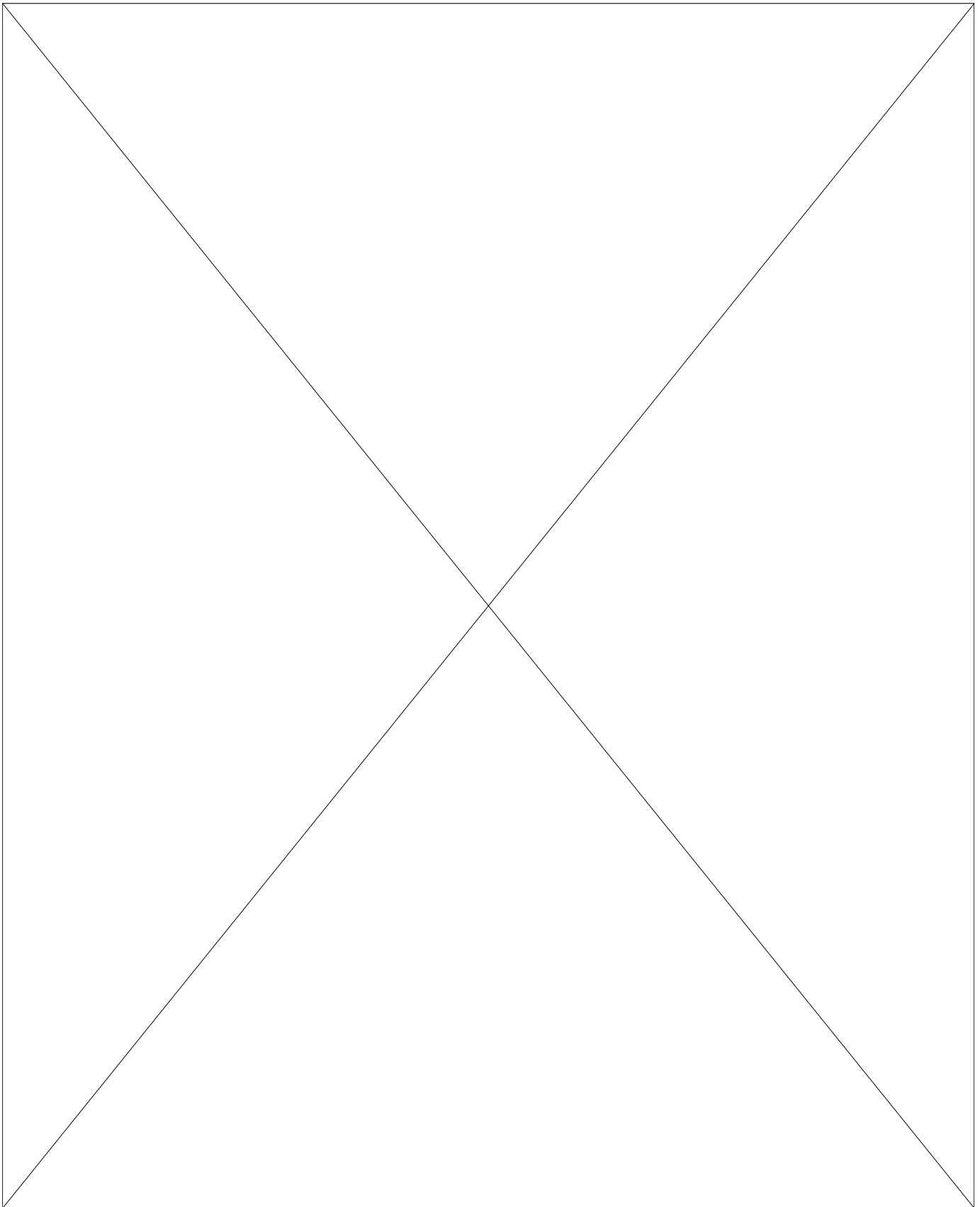
The webs which I saw showed no signs of having any inhabitants but my first impression was that they had been created by one of the **many moth species whose caterpillars create similar tents** in which they live in large communities, using their shelter (and the warmth generated by large numbers of caterpillars crowded together) to enable them to overwinter as caterpillars. The notorious Brown Tail moth is just one species which follows this life style but (having seen these quite recently near Farlington Marshes) I was pretty sure that this was a different species but could not find a match among the many species listed as feeding on Gorse or living in communal tents.

Luckily my search was soon re-directed to the correct target when I received an **email from Alistair Martin with two attached photos** which he had taken in the Sandy Point reserve, also on Sunday - his photos are shown below and reveal that the **inhabitants are minute reddish mites**.





The first of Alistair Martin's photos



The second of Alistair Martin's photos showing an aspect of the mites behaviour not revealed by any other source I know of.

These mites are said to be of European origin but have in recent years been introduced to both New Zealand and the USA as a biological control on the spread of Gorse which is a major problem for sheep farmers, drastically reducing the available grass and difficult to control by other means.

For further information on the mite species concerned see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetranychus\\_lintearius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetranychus_lintearius).

Turning to a very different subject many of you will have been enjoying the glorious 'Harvest Moon' filling the sky for the past few nights and **for those wanting to know the phase of the moon and the time at which it rises and sets** on a particular day you should visit <http://www.timeanddate.com/moon/uk/portsmouth>. I think you can get times for other places than Portsmouth by using the Search Box to enter a different City or Country.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR SEPT 1 - 7 (WEEK 36 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 7 September**

#### **A ride around Hayling discovers the presence of a Red-backed Shrike at Sandy Point**

Today I set out to see what Hayling had to offer in the way of flowering plants that I have not already seen elsewhere this month. My route was down the west side along the Coastal Path but not taking my usual route to the Ferry Inn and Gunner Point - instead I took the path down the east end of the Golf Course and then followed the shore east to Sandy Point coming back up the east side of the Island, taking in the Mengham Rythe Sailing Club shore before heading for Northney and home.

My first flowering plant was a **Tomato** seen by the Coastal Path before reaching the Oyster Beds and this was followed by more expected **Pepper Saxifrage** plants by the stretch south of the Stoke Bay area. Further south I came on 17 **Great Crested Grebes** but little else in the way of birds.

Reaching the Hayling Bay shore I was amazed by the 'tent city' that has sprung up between the Golf Club and the Inn on the Beach but this did not stop my finding **Pale Toadflax** still in flower plus re-flowering of **Thrift** and **Sea Campion**. Further east, south of Staunton Avenue, the usual mass display of **Cock's Eggs** (Hayling's speciality Nighshade species) was enhanced by very fresh specimens of both **Common Blue** and **Small Copper** butterflies. Also here I found fresh **Hare's Foot Clover**. Between the Fun Fair and Sandy Point areas of shingle gave me **Yellow Horned Poppy**, **Seaside Daisy (Erigeron glaucus)**, **Sea Rocket (Cakile maritima)** and **Sea Radish** and when I reached Sandy Point I was surprised to see a mass of **Bell Heather** still in flower around a single **Gorse bush** which was already in full flower (not a single flower on all the other bushes). Here I stopped to chat to a birder armed with a telescope who told me that Andy Johnson had found a **Red-backed Shrike** in the reserve a couple of days ago and that it was still here this morning but not in view at the moment. When I got home a check on the RBA website showed me that three of these Shrikes had been seen in the UK on Aug 29 increasing to nine yesterday but I have to content myself with memories of one seen years ago in the Fort Nelson carpark on Portsdown where it was gorging on Great Green Bush-Crickets. Still in the Sandy Point area I found at least one plant of **Sea Spurge** still flowering and plenty of **Dwarf Gorse** in the old Hospital Grounds where there was also one plant of **Red Campion** in flower.

I took my lunch break sitting on the roof of a wartime pillbox facing Mengham Rithe and while there I was baffled by the identity of a small party of birds which came from the north-east over Chichester Harbour and gave the impression that their next stop was Spain. Before I saw them I heard their calls which I did not recognize but which reminded me of Whimbrel only in so far as they consisted of rapid repetitions of the same high pitched note. As they came over head my impression was of a large Tern like species with long thin wings which propelled them rapidly and very directly with little flexing. My final observation was the the rear of the body was long and thin (in keeping with the rest of the body and the long thin wings). I think the colour was white or at least pale overall. So far I have no idea what they were!

Just one addition to the flower list on the way home along Copse Lane in the Tye area where I stopped to check a large and healthy bush of **Butcher's Broom**, finding my first September flowers on it (my earliest this year was on a bush in the Staunton Country Park on Aug 27).

### Fri 5 September

#### More wild flowers for my September list

On Tuesday I headed east to Emsworth and the Thorney west Deeps, adding **Wild Angelica** in Brook Meadow, **Gallant Soldier** where Queen Street meets the A259, and **Slender Hare's Ear** opposite the end of the Great Deeps. Coming back past the Little Deeps I had excellent views of a female **Marsh Harrier** hunting over the far end and putting up some twenty Teal. Stopping off at the Nore Barn picnic table I walked onto the saltings to add **Sea Wormwood**, **Sea Blite** and **Sea Purslane** plus **Grass-leaved Orache** to the list. Nearly home I stopped by the Lymbourne Triangle wild flower area to find **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** and the last flowers on **Danewort** and back at home I identified a small Puff-ball I had collected from the A27 underpass 'wayside' as **Vascellum pratense** or the **Meadow Puffball**.

On Wednesday I rode west along Harts Farm Way to find **Hairy Vetchling** still flowering and to come on my first plant of **White Melilot** for the year (usually much more easy to find). By the cycleway passing Chalk Dock lake I not only found **Blue Fleabane** but also a couple of late examples of **Common Centaury**. As I had time after heading back to Havant I diverted south through the Langstone housing to find lots of **Least Yellow Sorrel** coming back into flower before crossing Langstone Bridge and turning east towards Northney. Here the regularly mown cluster of **Basil Thyme** still had a few flowers and the corn field edge had plenty of **Green Nightshade** (none of the possible Leafy-fruited species seen today). In North Common I found both blue and white flowered forms of **Goat's Rue** freshly re-flowering and the last flowers of **Rosebay Willowherb**. On the way home I found **Wild Celery** still flowering in the roadside ditch at Northney and nearing home on the Billy Trail **Lesser Water Parsnip** was still flowering in the Lymbourne stream and **White Bryony** beside the track.

Thursday was devoted to domestic duties but today (Friday) I set out for Portsdown after reading on John Goodspeed's website that Richard Jones (Portsdown nature warden) had recently found **Venus' Looking-glass** and an 'exotic' umbellifer called **Bullwort (Ammi majus)** in the 'Top Field' which is accessed from the hilltop roundabout carpark. Several years ago I had myself found Venus's Looking-glass here but I had never heard of Bullwort (which I read is an uncommon plant in

England - not mentioned in the Hants Flora - which is native to the Mediterranean area - for more info see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ammi\\_majus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ammi_majus)).

Rather than using the route through Farlington which I described on Aug 30 I took the road from Bedhampton over the A3M bridge and found that after the bridge the gradient was easy enough for me to cycle relatively easily (though I used the pavement to avoid the road traffic!). In the Fort Purbrook area I kept to the pavement and in so doing found several examples of **Common Calamint**. Reaching the London Road I found the **Sickle Medick** and other plants mentioned on Aug 30 and my first new find was growing behind the 'Burger Bar' in the Viewpoint carpark - this was a **white flowered version of Dark Mullein** and as I pressed on to the 'Top Field' I was able to note roadside **Lucerne, Harebells** and **Autumn Ladies Tresses** without stopping.

The 'Top Field' is a triangular area with its point at the hilltop roundabout with its sides (each around 500 metres long) delimited by the roads running west to Fort Southwick and north west to Southwick village and its base (250 metres long) being the fence of the Qinetiq Defence Research site with its simulated warships and their Radar. It is now part of the Portsdown nature conservation area and is no longer farmed but has a substantial fence around it to allow grazing by cattle (though that has not yet begun) but there is no restriction on public access other than you have to enter through a stout wooden gate which can only be reached through the carpark and along a rough path crossing the area around the base of the tall electricity pylon which dominates the skyline here. This area around the pylon has seemingly been sown with a strange mixture of 'wildflower seed' collected from worldwide sources including many garden centres where strange variations of garden plants have been bred to defy identification using standard Floras. To make things even more interesting the pylon has recently been painted and a mist of grey-blue paint has fallen on the plants below, changing the colour of their leaves and flowers....

Other than a short incursion into the Top Field where I found nothing significant I spent my time wandering round this Botanists Nightmare area where I enjoyed a great variety of size and colour in **Poppy flowers** (especially a large pale pink petalled example) and could identify a few species such as **Field Pansy, Field Forget-me-not, Watted Thistle, Bladder Campion** and **Rape** plus a large plant of **Green Amaranth** (my first for the year). Among these I suddenly found my self looking down at a small very upright plant topped by two tiny star-shaped mauvish blue flowers giving a good impersonation of the **Venus' Looking Glass** which I was hoping for but I felt uncomfortable about recording it as that species though it was not until I got home that I discovered what was worrying me - both Francis Rose and Fitter and Fitter emphasise that this species never opens its flowers other than in direct sunlight which was not the case today yet both flowers were fully open..... As I could only see the one plant I could not take it home for further examination though I do feel justified in adding one to my flower list as I had seen a unique species, even if it was a synthetic one. Another plant which attracted my attention but which I could not name did allow me to take a branch without diminishing its presence and on reflection I am pretty sure it is **Annual Mercury** which has gone to seed causing its soft looking flowers to become extremely hard and bristly seeds on plants which have lost their normal upright stance and have become enlarged and very 'floppy' in this strange environment (possibly enhanced by a strong dose of



pylon paint!). One other plant of which I took a sample home is almost certainly **Common Ramping Fumitory**.

Heading for home I was on the side of the road closest to Fort Widley and so was able to confirm that the roadside grass bank immediately east of the entrance road to the Mill Lane carpark has an excellent display of **Autumn Ladies Tresses** while the almost bare chalk of the area below the Mill Lane turn-round area still had a couple of minute, deep red, **Lesser Centaury** flowers. Nothing more seen on the way home but when I unloaded my bicycle basket of its collection of flower specimens I was reminded that on the way out, in the Bidbury Mead area of Bedhampton, I had collected a sample of **a large Vetch type plant of probable garden origin**. I had taken one of many branches of a plant creeping up an old tree stump and my specimen branch had several rigid side branches each bearing some dozen pairs of small leaflets ending in a single leaflet (no terminal tendrils). From the axils of a few of these leaves were spikes of well spaced bright red flowers reminiscent of large Common Vetch flowers. The nearest match I can find in my flower books is **Crown Vetch** which has similar leaves but very different flowers (devotees of 'something entirely different' might like to visit a web blog to which I was introduced when searching for images of Crown Vetch - see <http://teesdaleway.wordpress.com/author/sueantrobus/>). While this species remains un-named I did find a flowering plant of **Greater Celandine** nearby.

## Mon 1 September

### 111 wild flowers, including two surprises, to start my September list

Despite occasional drizzle today I made two walks around Havant in search of wild flowers, finding a total of 111 though I had to revisit Havant cemetery on the following morning before I could name one of my finds with confidence.

My morning walk took me south through Juniper Square then back up Park Road South past the old Town Mill Pond and St Faith's Church. In Juniper Square **Small Flowered Cranesbill** was still flowering as were **Water Figwort** and **Hybrid Water Speedwell** in the Mill Pond (no Water Voles seen there). St Faith's churchyard gave me several re-flowering **Ox-eye Daisies** plus the expected **Burnet Saxifrage** and **Vervain**. I also listed **Sowbread** (which I only recently discovered to be the English name for the small Cyclamen plants that are widely established in this country) and my first **Autumn Hawkbit** which I am pretty sure I overlooked last month.

After lunch I headed for Havant Station via Waterloo Road where both **Sweet Alison** and **Caucasian Stonecrop** can be seen flowering in small front gardens that have had no care from the residents in a good few years. The station flower bed gave me a good dozen flowering plants of **Thorn Apple** before I continued into Havant Park and found the expected **Fiddle Docks** flowering - less expected here was a patch of **Marsh Cudweed**. From the Park I headed for Havant Cemetery, adding **Pellitory of the Wall** and **Oxford Ragwort** near the Level Crossing. Looking over the Cemetery wall into the Allotments I saw **Russian Comfrey** and plenty of **Weasels Snout** while among the graves I found **Wood Avens** among a number of other species including the **Duke of Argyll's Tea Plant** before making an unexpected discovery of what I thought was **some form of Hawkweed** but could not name without further research ... for a brief introduction to the problems of identifying the 10,000 or more species in this group see

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hieracium>

After consulting my books a second visit on Tuesday morning confirmed my guess that this was probably **Hieracium subaudum** though it differed from Stace's description of the species in having a basal rosette of leaves when it was flowering and in the lower stem leaves not having stems. If anyone wants to see it and offer a better id the plant stands erect 80cm tall in a grave in the main cemetery just north of the entrance into the St Faith's section.

After leaving the cemetery I walked north up New Lane, then west along Crossland Drive before heading south along the Petersfield Road. At the roundabout I continued along Park Road North and just before reaching the railway bridge I had a big surprise in finding (among the brambles to the east of the pavement I was on) a mass of the **Bouncing Bett form of Soapwort** which I have seen here in past years but which I thought had vanished this year. Earlier in this section of the walk I had been surprised to find **Wall Speedwell** and after crossing the rail bridge I found the expected **Borage** flowering where I entered Havant Park

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 25 - 31 (WEEK 35 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 31 August**

#### **Marsh Mallow and Alsike Clover round off my personal list of wild flowers**

This afternoon I cycled to Nutbourne and then down the west shore of the Cobnor Peninsula nearly as far as Cobnor Point and found the **Marsh Mallow flowers** I was expecting and on the way back found one example of **Alsike Clover** in flower in the grassy meadows south of Nutbourne Bay giving me a final score of 243 wild flower species seen during August. While on Cobnor I found three more examples of Gorse beginning to re-flower.

Also seen on Cobnor was my first **Whinchat** of the year with a Wheatear nearby and the di-syllabic calls of an unseen Willow Warbler in the trees. Back in Havant a mass of **Giant Polypore** had appeared on old tree stump on the north side of Emsworth Road just east of the Meadowlands turning (well before reaching the traffic lights at the Southleigh Road junction).

### **Sat 30 August**

#### **Sickle Medick still flourishing on Portsdown where I add 17 species to my August flower list**

This afternoon I set off into a moderate headwind for Portsdown to avoid the ignominy of having an August flower list that did not include Autumn Ladies Tresses. A couple of hours later I was back at home with 17 new species on my list including the only plants of **Sickle Medick** to be found in Hampshire (a species that I thought was by now extinct in the county).

First stop was at Broadmarsh where I found nothing new but was pleased to find **Hairy Vetchling** still flowering on the old rubbish tip 'mountain' (another species for which I think this is the only Hampshire site) and to find **Hemlock** starting an autumn 're-flowering'.

My route up Portsdown was along the Havant Road following the foot of the hill past St Andrews church in Farlington then turning up hill on Gillman Road which comes out on the Portsdown Hill Road opposite Fort Purbrook. The last section of this route added **Ploughman's Spikenard, Common Figwort and Lucerne** to my list as well as showing me that individual flower buds can now be seen in the rapidly

expanding Ivy flower buds. Over the Hill Road the track running parallel to the Hill Road gave me a close encounter with a Fox Cub and added **Canadian Golden Rod and Ribbed Melilot** to the list.

At the hill top I crossed to the south side of the road to have a look at the grassy slope below the carpark where my first find was a **Harebell** before I was surprised to find a single tall specimen of **Autumn Ladies Tresses** all on its own in the middle of the mown grass (later I found another half dozen in the mown grass along the northern edge of the slip road for southbound traffic). Before reaching this slip road I came on something that I was not expecting until well into September - the **first two flowers on a Gorse Bush** as that starts re-flowering after a lengthy summer break.

Across the slip road I headed for the London Road, adding **Squinancywort and Dwarf Thistle** before crossing the bridge over the London Road and turning downhill beside the short slip road to the London Road. At the end of this slip road there is a bright yellow concrete box holding salt for the road when it is frozen in winter. Immediately uphill from this box is a profuse growth of the bright yellow flowered **Sickle Medick** whose homeland is East Anglia and immediately downhill from it (on the 'nose' of chalk) is a large 'forest' of **Autumn Gentians** just starting to flower. One final find here was **Horseshoe Vetch**.

Feeling satisfied with my finds I turned for home, freewheeling down the long slope into Bedhampton where I turned off the direct route into Havant to head for Bedhampton Mill from where I turned back to follow the path through the Water Company springs area which gave me two aggressive aliens - **Himalayan Balsam** was already on my list but **Japanese Knotweed** was not. Also missing from my list, though I have seen it often enough during the month in both its Red and White flowered forms, was **Red Valerian** which brought my total to 241 species (and if I have the energy I may add at least one more tomorrow if I get to the Cobnor Peninsula to see Marsh Mallow).

**Thu 28 August**

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

### **227 Egrets roost at Langstone and three more flowering plant species**

A combination of low tide at sunset and an evening without rain made this evening a good one for counting the egrets flying in to roost in the trees around Langstone Pond and the end of August is the time of year when I expect the highest count of the year (for reasons which I do not understand other than that this year's young are now on the wing though the increase in the count is far more than would be accounted for by that alone). Several years ago I recorded my highest ever count of 228 at this time of year so I was not unduly surprised that my highest count so far for this year (132 birds on Aug 1) had risen to **227 this evening**.

These counts are by no means guaranteed to be precisely accurate but for anyone who doubts that they are reasonably accurate I will describe how I arrive at them and then leave the doubters to make their own counts!. Having chosen a day on which low tide co-incides with sunset (encouraging the birds to stay out fishing until darkness forces them to fly in to roost at a time which can be predicted by time of sunset) I plan to arrive at the pond an hour before sunset and spend some time counting the birds already in the trees - an operation made difficult by the lack of a single viewpoint and by the foliage on the trees plus the fact that the birds do not remain static. When I feel I have a best estimate of the number already present (tonight that was 50) I move to the place where I can get the best view of birds flying

in and that is at the north end of the fencing separating the seawall path from the pony field north of the pond.

Once there I wait patiently, jotting down the numbers seen flying in while ignoring the many internal movements within the roost area and deducting the number which leave the roost - maybe in the hope of a late supper or perhaps in search of a less crowded roost elsewhere (the nearest being on Thorney Island).

Nothing much happens until just before sunset but the final difficulty in getting an accurate count is that the birds continue to arrive until it is too dark to see them - tonight I gave up about 25 minutes after sunset, having seen 123 birds come in after sunset. Despite the frustration of knowing that my count is probably an underestimate part of the reason for making it is the aerial display given by the majority of the arrivals which come in well above treetop height until they are over the pond when they change from rather laboured straight and level flight and go into near vertical spiral dive, pulling out just in time to make a high speed dash into a tree (no wonder that they often have second thoughts and move later to what they think is a better place to spend the night).

Earlier in the day I had cycled via the Havant crematorium to Hollybank Woods in the hope of finding new flowering plants but only added one to my list - a single fresh flower on a **Greater Celandine** plant in the roadside grass outside one of the big houses on the south side of the road just west of the Crematorium. Later, en route to Langstone Pond, I added two more just off Southbrook Road in Langstone - half a dozen flowers **Least Yellow Sorrel** and one freshly flowering **Foxglove** bringing my August count to 224 species in flower.

**Wed 27 August**

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

### **A great day out despite the weather**

According to the weather forecast today was the only rain free day of the week but when I stepped out of doors after lunch a light drizzle was falling but that did not stop me carrying on with my plan to visit Havant Thicket where I could be pretty sure of seeing **Devils Bit Scabious** which was still not in my list of plants flowering in August.

First entries on my notepad were of fungi, not flowers - one very fresh specimen of a **Field Mushroom** and a couple of examples of **Fairy Ring Toadstools (Marasmius oreades)**, the first of their kind that I have found this autumn. Nothing more until I reached Havant Thicket where I found a good clump of **Devils Bit Scabious** now in full flower.

As the rain seemed to be increasing I turned for home but on re-entering Hammonds Land Coppice (on the southern fringe of the Gipsies Plain) the rain had stopped and so I took the first track on my right giving me my first sight of a fenced off area of woodland with '**Woodland Pasture**' inscribed on the gate - no cattle in it today but it was interesting to see an attempt to revive this traditional practice which may well result in the revival of a lost woodland flora in the future. On reaching the track heading north along the Long Avenue I crossed over and kept heading west until I found I was at the west end of the Lake. Here I parked my bike against the fence forming the boundary of the rough meadow which stretches south to housing along Middle Park Way and took a short ramble around the nearest part of this meadow and in so doing added both **Sneezewort** and the wild **Yellow Loosestrife** to my year list, also finding both **Pepper Saxifrage** and **Wild Angelica**. Back on my bike I cycled along the southern edge of the lake on which **White Water Lilies** were



in flower, then walked up the steep hill which enabled me to spot a first flower on a bush of **Butcher's Broom**.

Emerging from the Staunton Country Park the Leigh Park roadside gave me **Fat Hen** just opening its flowers and led me to the footbridge over the railway at Havant Station. Not expecting anything new I had a quick look at the small flower bed at the west end of the station buildings and found **13 Thorn apple** plants with developing (not yet open) flowers. Altogether I had seen seven newly flowering plants where I had only expected one.

**Mon 25 August**

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

### **Slugs, bugs and a Water Vole**

When the rain eventually stopped this evening I took a short walk to the old Havant Town Millpond (across the main road into Havant from Tesco) in the hope of seeing a Water Vole but before reaching it I found the path to it from the Parchment housing had several Slugs and Snails on it. The slugs were quite large, at least 10cm long, were dark coloured throughout (both body and 'foot') and had a very prominent breathing pore on the right side of the body near the head and I believe they were **Black Slugs (Arion ater)**. After looking at them I stopped again as I reached the pavement of the main road to have a close look at a small insect which had apparently fallen off an overhanging tree and landed on its back in a puddle where it was attracting my attention by its struggles to right itself. When it did so I could see it was probably a Shieldbug with distinctive thorn-like projections at its 'shoulders' which enabled me to identify it as **Picromerus bidens or the Spiked Shieldbug**. You can find excellent photos and info at

[http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Pentatomidae/picromerus\\_bidens.html](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Pentatomidae/picromerus_bidens.html).

After these unexpected sightings I had a look at the pond and immediately saw a single **Water Vole** swimming through a thin surface coating of weed (like an ice-breaker making its way through pack ice) to the southern shore of the pond alongside the path down which I had just come.

Earlier in the day I looked at the HOS website entries for Aug 24 and was very surprised to see that someone had reported seeing **a flock of 30 Brent Geese close to Langstone Bridge**. As I have seen no other reports of early migrants (they are usually first reported by Dungeness), and as I don't expect them to reach Langstone Harbour until the second week in September, I wondered what could persuade anyone to mistake Canada Geese (which I assume they were) for Brent. Furthermore this was the second recent report of a flock of Brent in Langstone Harbour this month (a flock of 15 were reported by a different observer off Broadmarsh on Aug 8). Both could have been plain mistakes but in checking for any further reports I found one which may contain the cause of the error - on June 28 three Brent were seen in Portsmouth Harbour (and up to 4 Brent are certainly summering in the harbours this year) in company with 13 Canada Geese so I conclude that some summering Brent have joined flocks of Canadas which are currently regaining the power of flight as they complete their moult (as have the Brent). I presume that in both cases the observer focussed on a distant Brent and assumed that the birds with it were also Brent. Hopefully these reports will not spread a rumour that 'the Brent are back'.



## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 18 - 24 (WEEK 34 OF 2014)

Sat 23 August

### Mystery plants on Hayling Island plus my Cemetery pages updated for August

Before coming to the mystery plants a reminder that I have updated my Cemeteries page with the finds of this month's visits and you can see the results by visiting <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and following the links to each of the cemeteries - the items which were of most interest to me were: for St Faiths the discovery of **Red Oak acorns**; for Havant a **Flesh Fly** and a **Dock Bug**; and for Warblington a **Dark Mullein plant** and **Dance Flies**.

Back on Aug 11 I visited the Northney area of Hayling Island and found two interesting plants which I could not identify with any confidence and this evening I had another look at them, coming to the conclusion that I have found an unusual form of **Basil Thyme** as a result of repeated mowing, and of **two (not one) Nightshade species**, with none of the three appearing in the comprehensive list of plants in Pete Durnell's 'Wildlife of Hayling' and with only one of the three being recorded in the Hampshire Flora for that area.

The first of the three to be encountered as you turn west from the south end of Langstone Bridge was found on the north side of the road to Northney roughly half way between the bridge and the informal roadside parking area opposite Bridge Farm. What I saw on my first visit was a dense circle of plants (about 35 cm in diameter) with what seemed to be individual plants standing around 15 cm high and bearing 'Skullcap type' flowers strongly resembling those of Basil Thyme in both shape and colour. They were growing on very well drained sand-like soil forming the side of a ditch which is probably important in helping to drain the area when the road here is subject to very occasional flooding by exceptional high tides. After the first visit I concluded these might be a garden escape but on the second visit I took another sample which included the base of a hefty square stem with sides measuring 6mm and covered in the dense woolly hairs which are also found on the small fresh growths, forcing me to conclude that one or more original plants had been subjected to the roadside mowing of this area, forcing many new plants to grow outward from the original rootstock. After examining the characteristics of all the plants in the Dead-Nettle group I am forced to conclude that this mystery plant is in fact **Basil Thyme** as I can find no other that agrees with the characteristics of this one from the absence of scent, the flower shape and colour (especially the white mottling of the mauve colour of the three-part lower lip), the leaf shape and the woolly hairness. The unusually hefty base of what was the main stem and the way the current flowering stems are growing around it seems to be a response to regular mowing (perhaps over several years). The approximate location is SU 722041.

The other plants were found at two locations on the edge of the recently harvested corn field whose north east corner is close to the westmost houses of Northney Village - one location is SU 7268-0378 which is where the field edge public path starts alongside the village recreation ground, the other is at another entrance to the field at SU 7250-0378. At both sites some of the 'weeds' had been damaged by the harvesting machinery but I was able to find both **Black Nightshade** and what I thought was **Green Nightshade** at both. It was only after getting home and examining the specimens that I had collected that I realised that I might have found

two different species, both **Green (Solanum physalifolium)** and **Leafy-fruited Nightshade (S. Sarachoides)**. Surprisingly Green Nightshade is not included in the Hants Flora while Leafy-fruited is not in Fitter and Fitter, indicating that both are very uncommon. I was previously aware of Green Nightshade having been shown it many years ago in (I think) Gosport but I had never come across Leafy-fruited until searching the Hants Flora for the Green species but only finding Leafy-fruited which I read had been abundant further south in these same North Hayling fields back in 1962 and 1975.

The **differences between the two species** are in the extent to which the calyx segments cover the fruit and I found that one of my collected specimens the calyx left half the fruit exposed (correct for Green) while the other had the whole fruit covered (correct for Leafy-fruited). A second difference is that Leafy-fruited has wholly green 'berries' but Green has its green berries mottled with brown which I could not detect in either specimen (this may be because the fruits are not yet fully developed - so a third visit is called for!). A third difference is that Leafy-fruited is a slightly larger plant and my specimen with the fully covered fruit did appear to be larger. My evidence for having discovered both of these species is hardly sufficient to warrant a confident report for inclusion in the next Hants Flora but it is sufficient for me to justify claiming an additional species in my personal count of plants seen flowering this month, bringing the total to 212 with another week of the month to go.

## Thu 21 August

### Brown-tail Moth caterpillars and both Yellow and Grey Wagtails

This morning's sunshine made for a pleasant cycle ride to the Eastern Road entrance to Farlington Marshes where I added **Small Scabious** to my flower list and found a great mass of silk tents created by very young **Brown-tail Moth caterpillars** on the hedge separating the approach road to the Marshes from the A27 sliproad. A few years ago these silk tents were a common and widespread sight in the Portsmouth area and could be seen from August to May or June of the next year but I cannot recall seeing any during the first half of this year and so was surprised to see such a mass of them in one short stretch of hedgerow. I read that the moth lays its eggs in early August and so the caterpillars will only just be starting on their life cycle which starts with the construction of a communal silk tent in which they will live for the rest of this year, feeding avidly at first but going into a state of diapause (hibernation) when their food runs out in the winter. When leaves appear on the trees in spring they will resume feeding and will probably move and create new tents as they exhaust the available food in one area.

On my way home I collected a sample of a **Storksbill** plant which was much larger than others which were flowering despite roadside grass mowing. With its flower heads held up on 15cm long stalks and with large spreading leaves I wondered if it might be an example of **Musk Storksbill** which I have only found in past years at two places near the south Hayling seafront but the twice pinnate leaves of my sample showed that it was the common plant - the Musk species has much more solid leaves that are only once pinnate. I did however bring my August count of flowering species up to 210 by noticing that I had not so far included re-flowering plants of **Oxford Ragwort**

Back at home my scan of the internet showed that the southward movement of **Yellow Wagtails** is now well underway. Back on Aug 13 just one was seen on the Pevensy Levels, on Aug 17 3 were at Pulborough Brooks, and on Aug 19

numbers increased to bring 16 to the Brighton area. Aug 20 brought a wave of sightings - 22 at Brownwich near Titchfield Haven, 15 at Arundel, 5 at Farlington Marshes and 7 with cattle at Warblington. Another local sighting was of a single Grey Wagtail back on the Lymbourne Stream beside the Billy Trail in the Havant area - hopefully one or two will winter on this stream after two bred on the Langbrook stream a month or so ago.

Not quite so local was a sighting of a Ring-necked Parakeet in Fareham today - Trevor Carpenter who saw it says it is his sixth sighting of the species in the same part of Fareham since July 17 and a search of other sightings reported on the HOS website shows that one flew south over Bishops Waltham on June 22 and one was seen in Gosport on June 23 before one was seen in Fareham (not by Trevor) on June 28. My guess is that these are all sightings of the same bird, probably escaping overcrowding in the London area, and that it has remained in Fareham until today. Interestingly Trevor noted that all his sightings were in the early morning and this reminded me of one which was thought to be nesting in the roof of a house on the Portsdown hillside above Farlington - I could not remember the year but could remember that the only reported sightings of it were by a milkman delivering to the house soon after dawn. To try to discover the year in which this happened I looked through my copies of the Hampshire Bird Reports starting arbitrarily with 2000 and I was surprised to find reports of sightings in every year up to 2012 (2013 report not yet published) with a comment each year to the effect that 'this marks the long anticipated invasion of Hampshire by this species' but the nearest we have got to that so far came in 2007 when there were 35 records while the biggest 'flock' was of 8 birds (which immediately broke up) in 2008.

Year	Date	Place	Comment
2000	July 5	Southampton Portswood	1
2000	July 25	Southampton St Denys	1
2000	Sep 16	Lymington	1 on garden fence
2000	Sep 30	Lymington	1 on Maize stbble
2000	Oct 12	Hurst Beach	1
2001	Feb 17	Eversley	1 over East
2001	Mar 19-21	Petersfield	1
2001	Apr 7	Titchfield Haven	1
2001	May 16	Yateley	1
2001	July 6	Farnboough	1
2001	July 7	Chandlers Ford	2
2001	July 13	Eversley	1
2001	July 19	West Hayling shore	1 probable only
2001	Sep 16	Buriton	1

2002	Dec 21	Sway	1
2003	Aug 8	Broadmarsh	1
2003	Sep 7	Farlington Marshes	1
2003	Nov 13	Winchester	1
2004	Apr 26	Sway	3 over SW
2004	May 6	Eastleigh Lakeside	1
2004	July 23	Milford	1
2005	Mar 13	Locks Heath	1
2005	Aug 10	Hill Lane Southampton	1
2005	Sep 25	Dunmow Hill Fleet	1
2006	Jan 22	Lymington/Hurst	1
2006	Jan 26	Old Basing	1
2006	Feb 7	Old Cemetery Southampton	1
2006	Aug 6	Titchfield Haven	1
2006	Oct 27	Romsey	1
2006	Oct 29	Eversley Cross	1
2007	Jan 1 - Nov 5	10+ locations	35 records of 11 individuals
2008	Jan 29 - Dec 14	8+ locations	20 records of 10 individuals
2009	Jan 4 - Nov 22	4 locations	4 records incl 1 of an escape
2010	June 5	Lymington	1
2010	July 22	Northam Southampton	1
2010	Nov 21	Greatham	8 over
2010	Nov 22	Alton	1
2010	Nov 23	Warnford	2
2010	Dec 3	Petersfield	2
2011	Jan 29 - Dec 30	4 locations	9 reports incl two of 2 birds
2012	Jan 1 - Mar 18	3 locations	4 reports

### Wed 20 August

#### Mushrooms, Mullet and Moth Mullein

A sunny morning found me cycling east to Brook Meadow in Emsworth passing some large white Mushrooms on the grass verge of the Emsworth Road in Havant.

I collected these on my way home and found that both they and another cluster found beside the A259 where I left it to take the underpass back into Havant were **Agaricus bitorquis**, my first real Mushrooms of the autumn.

Emsworth added **Wild Angelica** to my plant list, flowering in Brook Meadow, and then gave me a close view of many **Grey Mullet** in shallow water at the north end of the Slipper Mill pond. Reaching the Thorney seawall I found a lorry parked on the track, having come through the old 'NRA' track from the Thorney Road - presumably this marks the start of some work on the seawall. As I rode south past the Little Deeps I found I was following a **Clouded Yellow butterfly**, possibly marking a decision by this species to abandon its attempt to reach the North Pole this year and to head south to muster a new generation for another attempt next year.

At the Great Deeps I found 15 plants of **Slender Hare's Ear** (some still flowering) but only spotted one **Pointed Snail**. Both Deeps were almost bereft of birds but I see that Barry Collins watched an **Osprey** catch and eat a fish in the Nutbourne channel today. Leaving the area by the NRA track (cleared of vegetation and with the gates wide open at both ends) I stopped to have a look at a bird perched on the overhead wires going south to Thorney village - my binoculars confirmed that it was my first **Turtle Dove** of the year though in very dowdy plumage.

Turning for home at Prinsted I made a diversion down the short track leading to the field footpath heading west but only went as far as the gate marking the start of the path. Here a cluster of 11 **Moth Mullein** plants justified my decision to divert though they were on the south side of the track, not in the farmyard entrance on the north side where various exotic plants have appeared in past years though there were unidentified leaves growing by the farmyard entrance reminding me of something seen there in the past but not recalling its name!

On the way home I made another diversion down Warblington Road in Emsworth for a circuit of Nore Barn but my only notable sighting there was of **four juvenile Shelduck** out on the mud with no adult chaperone.

Back in my own garden I had a surprise when I found that a single **Sweet Violet** plant was opening a flower and this evening my scan of the internet showed me that the **Bee Eater nest** at Wydcombe in the south of the Isle of Wight had **three fledglings** in it on Aug 15 - I see from Brian Fellows blog that there is now a fourth chick.

**Tue 19 August**

### **My recent observations**

This morning I saw the first full size autumnal Spider orb web in my garden - the circular web measured some 30 cm across and one side of it was attached to a dense Bay tree while the other was fastened to a clothes line by a single strand some 150 cm long making the whole structure a tremendous feat of engineering achieved by the unaided spider during the previous night. I did not see the spider but it was doubtless hidden beneath one of the Bay tree leaves with one foot on one of the web's 'anchor ropes', the vibration of which would tell the spider when prey became caught in the web. I'm pretty sure the spider will have been a **Garden Cross Spider (Araneus diadematus)**. Going back to have another look for the spider after lunch I found all trace of the web had vanished - perhaps a bird had flown into it. If the Spider is still present I expect it to make another web tonight but if it is attached to the clothes line again will depend on the wind - the only way the spider can connect its web to such a distant object is to pay out a line of its web silk into the wind and hope the sticky end of the thread is blown onto something rigid enough to



hold it. The spider then makes its way along the single thread, paying out a second line as it goes - if the spider reaches the far end it tightens both threads and comes back paying out a third thread to complete a pretty strong 'guy rope'. For a much fuller and more authoritative account of orb web construction see [http://ednieuw.home.xs4all.nl/Spiders/Info/Construction\\_of\\_a\\_web.html](http://ednieuw.home.xs4all.nl/Spiders/Info/Construction_of_a_web.html). If you are interested in spiders use the 'Back Home' link at the end of this account of web construction to go to the start of what is a pretty complete account of everything to do with spiders.

Going back to Sunday evening (Aug 17) I made a short cycle ride down the Billy trail to Langstone Pond and where the track comes out from under the East St bridge heading south I found a large pile of wood chips on the east side and collected samples of some toadstools growing on the pile - back at home these checked out as **Wood Mushrooms** by size, colour, gill form and the substantial fleshy ring on each stem plus the dark brown spore print. Further north under the trees on the east side of the line I passed a colourful cluster of what I have always assumed to be garden escape **Cyclamens** which can be seen fairly commonly at this time of year. While checking the toadstools I also investigated the various species of Cyclamen and discovered that the ones most commonly seen have been 'naturalised' in Britain since 1778 although they do not get a mention in the official Hants Flora. I also found that they have the English name of '**Sowbread**' (indicating that pigs turned out in woods enjoy eating the corms).

On Monday (Aug 18) I walked down the Langbrook stream and when alongside the gardens of the 'Mallards' housing I spoke to one of the garden owners who told me that he had seen a **Kingfisher** perched on his bridge across the stream that morning and this reminds me that Bill Bishop, owner of the West Mill house at the end of Langstone Mill Lane, had told John Goodspeed that he had, in the week ending Aug 10, seen **adult and young Water Voles** in the southern stretch of the Langbrook which runs around his property, considerably further south than the many sightings recorded north of The Mallards. When I was in the Southmoor area on Aug 18 I watched a Kestrel, attracted by its calls, harrying a Buzzard and driving it back east away from the Moors which are Kestrel territory. Later I heard my first autumn **Chiff-chaff song** from the Budds Farm area. Also on this walk I saw a number of Common Wasps which are now becoming fairly common - and that reminds me that my attempts to learn about a Wasp-like species recently seen by Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow in Emsworth has introduced me to a new section of the Wasp family known as **Pollen Wasps** as, unlike the majority of the Wasps which provide insect food for their young, these collect pollen, ingesting it to carry it back to their nest where they regurgitate it into the cells in which they have laid their eggs for the sustenance of their larvae when the eggs hatch. I learnt about this when investigating a species called **Ceramius lusitanicus** which Brian very tentatively named as the possible id of the species he had seen without checking that in the description of that species in the Insect book he was using the locality in which this species is to be found is given as 'SW' which is defined on page 4 of the book as meaning South West Europe west of Nice which ties in with the species name 'lusitanicus' which refers to a Roman province on the west coast of Spain - see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusitania> - the species is not found in Britain but is widespread in desert areas around the Mediterranean.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 11 - 17 (WEEK 33 OF 2014)

Sun 17 August

### Cemetery visits during the past week

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the past week were devoted to visiting the **Havant and Warblington Cemeteries** followed by **St Faith's Churchyard** in Havant, and Friday and Saturday were spent editing the photos and writing up an account of what I had seen to go on the Cemeteries page of this website. That is now done and you can see the results by going to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and using the links to the relevant sections of the pages - and if you wish to compare what I saw this month with that seen in previous months you only have to scroll down.

On Tuesday my walk round the Havant Cemetery failed to find any of the **Wasp Spiders** that I had seen last month but I did see a passing **Clouded Yellow butterfly** and was able to photograph a mature **Flesh Fly (*Sarcophaga carnaria*)** posing on a patch of white Lichen and while checking its identity I was reminded that this species differs from most other flies in that it does not lay eggs but gives birth to live offspring (maggots) thus giving them the best chance of completing their larval growth before the flesh on which they have been feeding becomes too rotten to be nutritious or is consumed by other, larger, carrion feeders. It is worth having a look at a superb close-up photo of the species if only to see the 'sucker pads' on its feet which are not unique to this species but which enable all flies to ignore gravity and land and walk about on any surface, be it wall or ceiling - see

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/65645208@N05/7184574284/in/photostream/>.

Another insect which I caught on film was a **Dock Bug (*Coreus marginatus*)** which is one of the **Squash Bugs** and if you want to see the differences between the various groups of bugs that can be found in Britain the Amateur Entomologists' Society has an excellent webpage on this subject at

<http://www.amentoc.org/insects/fact-files/orders/hemiptera-heteroptera.html>. For more info on the **Dock Bug** see

[http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/coreus\\_marginatus.html](http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/coreus_marginatus.html) and be sure to scroll down to the photos of the colourful nymph stages of its development.

For other observations in the Havant Cemetery see

<http://ralph-hollins.net/HAVCEM.htm#H1208>.

Wednesday's visit was to Warblington Cemetery where it was good to see that some of the **Chicory seed sown in the Wild Flower area** had produced its own seed which had blown across the peripheral roadway and established its own natural offspring but I was even more pleased to see that a plant of **Dark Mullein** which had presumably arrived in the old cemetery from airborne seed back in August 2012 had re-appeared in the same place this year. The only insects to rouse my interest during this visit were the tiny (midge like) black flies which I found on a Bristly Oxtongue flower and which I believe to be called **Dance Flies**. Although seen on a flowerhead I understand they have no interest in the pollen from the flower but are actually minute carnivores, feeding on insects of their own size or smaller. They get their name because when the males feel the urge to mate they catch a small prey item and hold it uneaten in their mouths while performing an aerial dance intended to attract the attention of passing females. If a female is interested the male gives her the food and then mates with her while she is eating it.

A couple of other observations while at Warblington were of a **Buzzard** flying low over the Farmyard and Cemetery extension, and of a noisy juvenile **Green Woodpecker** heard several times in the old Cemetery, probably hatched from a nest in one of the older trees within the Cemetery. Also seen around Havant during the week was the fifth example of an **Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa bignonioides)** that I have found recently in Havant - this is a large and mature specimen growing above the access road into the Council Office (Plaza) carpark and while it is not currently in flower the leaf shape and the many long bean pods dangling among the leaves clearly identify it. Other additions to my August total of flowering wild plants, bringing the total to 200, were **Annual Wall Rocket, Borage, and Caucasian Stonecrop** (this last seen in a Waterloo Road garden).

On Thursday I walked round St Faith's churchyard in Havant and the first thing that attracted my attention was a **Ladybird** on the brown wood of the church noticeboard facing West Street. I then noticed several more Ladybirds on the adjacent Lime tree and while watching one of these I found I had a **Wasp** in the same camera shot which I have published although I am not certain of the identity of either though I suspect that it was a **Common Wasp** and a **Harlequin Ladybird**.

In the absence of interesting plants I photographed several examples of **churchyard lichens** but before leaving I did discover a collection of **Acorns which had fallen from the young Red Oak** before they were fully developed. As I have not seen acorns on this tree before I guess it is only now reaching the age at which it is mature enough to reproduce.

## Mon 11 August

### More wild flowers and a Redlegged Partridge on North Hayling plus Burnet Saxifrage in Havant

This morning I walked around the north Hayling fields between Bridge Farm and Northney Church in search of 'arable weeds' and found several including two which I could not positively identify plus my first **Red-legged Partridge** of the year. Later in the day I found **Burnet Saxifrage** starting to flower in St Faith's churchyard back in Havant, bringing my August flowering plant count to 191.

The first new wild flower came just after turning left from Langstone Bridge towards Northney and just before reaching the waterside unofficial layby opposite Bridge Farm. On the far side of the small ditch running alongside the roadside pavement was a low circular patch of plants about 30 cms across and not much more than 10 cms high. As this was in an area that had been recently mown the plants may have been less high than if they had been left to grow naturally but there was no doubt that the flowers belonged to the Skullcap family and their colour (deep blue with white markings on the three pronged lower lip) was reminiscent of Basil Thyme but they were clearly not that. The leaf shape was similar to that shown in Fitter and Fitter for Whorled Clary but all the leaves were stalked and I have been unable to find a match for all features of the plants so my current best guess is that they are related to a commercial garden flower called **Scutellaria drummondii** (see <http://www.sbs.utexas.edu/bio406d/images/pics/lam/Scutellaria%20drummondii%20flowers2.jpg>)

Taking the path which starts alongside the driveway to Bridge Farm and then connects with the path running from the Texaco Garage behind Bridge Farm I turned east towards Northney village but before reaching the road into the village I checked out an entrance to the big wheat field and found what I think is **Green**

**Nightshade** on account of its abundance of patent hairs, quite a few of them gland tipped, but the flowers were only just starting to open and I would need to see the plant when its berries are starting to develop to confirm the id. A little further east, at the start of the path heading for Northney Church, another patch had a much better example of normal **Black Nightshade** with its stems clothed in sparse addressed hairs. Here was also **Pale Persicaria**.

A long walk via Northney Church and then east across the open fields to the southern end of the housing between the main road passing the Oysterbeds area and the open fields gave me no new plants but I did watch an impressive display of aerobatics by a Chinook helicopter over the old Thorney airfield (and got a bit wet in a ten minute downpour).

Heading north along the footpath along the east side of the housing across the main Hayling road from the Oysterbeds, and then across the pony fields south of Bridge Farm, gave me a fresh **Holly Blue** (now attached to Ivy rather than Holly, causing me to notice that the tiny **buds which will become Ivy flowers are starting to expand** to form the spherical flowers that will attract insects in the autumn). Also here I had a close view of a **Southern Hawker dragonfly** at rest and then a brief view of the first **Red-legged Partridge** I have seen this year. After that it was just a question of struggling across Langstone Bridge in the teeth of the current 'hurricane' before I could get home after a four hour walk!

After a much needed lunch and rest I visited St Faith's churchyard where, as I had hoped, **Burnet Saxifrage** was just starting to flower, bringing my August plant count to 191.

After writing my entry for last Saturday in which I mentioned Rose Sawfly larvae and gave a link to the Naturespot website for pictures of these larvae I had another look at the Rose bushes after Sunday's rain and was surprised to see an **adult Rose Sawfly** (with its distinctive yellow body) on one of the plants - an image of this adult can also be seen on the same webpage for which I gave a link in Saturday's entry.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR AUG 4 - 10 (WEEK 32 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 9 August**

#### **Fewer Sparrows in my garden where Rose Sawfly larvae are rampant**

Recently the local **House Sparrows** have emptied my seed feeder by the time I get out in the garden each morning despite my having filled it on the previous evening in anticipation of their early breakfasting but this morning the feeder was still full, causing me to assume that the local 'House Sparrows' had set out on their annual summer holiday and become what I call 'Corn Sparrows' enjoying the left over grain in the harvested fields - later in the day a few did visit the feeder but it was by no means empty this evening.

Also in my garden during the last few days something has stripped the upper leaves from one of the Rose bushes and today I got round to identifying the culprits as larvae of the **Rose Sawfly (Arge ochropus)** which you can see at <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/rose-sawfly>. These are small but when you do spot them they are distinctive in apparently having no back legs so that their tail ends do not grip the leaf but curl away from it. They make their presence known by eating everything but the mid-rib of each leaf.

After breakfast I walked down Wade Lane to call on Nik Knight who had told me that the nowadays uncommon arable weed, **Spreading Hedge Parsley**, was



flowering in his garden where it has appeared in several recent years. On my way there I found that the massive ground covering display of Sharp-leaved Fluellen in the Lymbourne Road Triangle conservation area was still flowering and as I was passing through North Close I spotted a fourth flowering tree of **Catalpa bignonoides (Indian Bean Tree)** to add to the three I had found around Havant and mention on July 16. This was in one of the gardens which back onto the Lymbourne stream and was close to another tree which I have not been able to identify despite the huge size of its leaves.

After visiting Nik Knight I continued down the narrow final section of Wade Lane where the large stump of a once big tree (roughly opposite the gate into the Wade Court south pony field) had my second autumn toadstool - a freshly fruiting **Ganoderma adspersum** (see [http://www.mushroomtable.com/wild/images/ganoderma\\_adspersum.jpg](http://www.mushroomtable.com/wild/images/ganoderma_adspersum.jpg))

At Langstone Pond with the tide at its highest there was an impressive display of Little Egrets sitting out the tide and attracting a lot of attention from passers by, even outdoing the Swan family with their five cygnets. I headed on across the South Moors seawall where I saw three Clouded Yellow butterflies before reaching the Budds Farm pools on which the Swan family with six cygnets were still present. Heading home up Southmoor Lane I noted **Storksbill** was re-flowering before turning into Brookside Road and making a much more unexpected plant find - on the close shaven grass bank of the southern side, just behind a green metal phone junction box, was a tight cluster of four plants of **Hoary Plaintain** in full fresh flower. The surprise lay in finding this species away from its normal chalk downland habitat. Just one more surprise plant find came as I turned from Park Road South into the one way street by which cars exit the multi-storey carpark. On the bend of this road junction, where the soil just inside the pavement has been recently churned up, two rather scruffy plants of **Creeping Yellow Cress** were newly flowering.

## **Fri 8 August**

### **Havant Thicket brings my August wild flower list up to 179 and gives me my first autumn toadstool plus a dead Mole.**

This morning I headed for Havant Thicket where one of the first things I saw was my **first autumn 'toadstool'**, a large Boletus type growing under an Oak tree which I think was a **Yellow Cracking Bolete (Leccinum crocipodium)** looking very similar to that shown at

[http://www.delbosquealacocina.com/imagenes/excursiones/2011/mas2011/Leccinum\\_crocipodium.jpg](http://www.delbosquealacocina.com/imagenes/excursiones/2011/mas2011/Leccinum_crocipodium.jpg). One feature of my find which did not match the descriptions is that they say the pores under the cap are 'minute' whereas some pores on my specimen were around 1mm across. For me this marks the start of the autumn fungus season and I expect that after this coming weekend's heavy rain a lot more will appear.

Another unexpected find was a **dead Mole** lying out on the surface of one of the main tracks and my guess is that it died of hunger after the hot dry weather has 'dried up' the supply of earthworms which are its main diet. The dry ground makes it difficult for the worms to move through the soil and I understand that it is normal for many types of earthworm to react to these conditions by going into a state of suspended animation called 'aestivation' (the summer equivalent of hibernation) - see <http://www.psu.edu/dept/nkbiology/naturetrail/speciespages/earthworms.htm>.



This would tie in with the the mole activity reported by Brian Fellows on Aug 7 (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>) What Brian saw at Brook Meadow was one or more Moles actively digging new tunnels and I interpret this as showing that the Mole had detected that the rate at which worms were entering its previous tunnels was dropping off and had reacted by moving to a new area of damper soil where the worms had not yet detected the drying up of the soil (which I suspect has been speeded up by recent cutting of the thick vegetation, allowing the hot sun to exert a greater drying of the ground)

Of the twelve new flowering plants found for my August list **Goldenrod**, **Dwarf Gorse** and **Cross-leaved Heath** were expected but I was disappointed in not finding Devil's Bit Scabious in flower - a few of the plants were already showing a blue tinge to their flower heads but could not be said to be in flower yet. To balance this disappointment I was very pleased to find the colony of **Lesser Skullcap** which was a new discovery for me on July 11 was still flourishing and also to add **Montbretia (Crocsmia)** flowering as an escape in several places.

### Thu 7 August

#### **More Water Voles in Havant and a general outburst of autumn Robin song as the first Wheat fields are harvested .**

Yesterday (Aug 6) I made an evening outing to the Bedhampton area to add two water plants to my flowering list where the overflow from the Water Works enters the Hermitage Stream. One was **Indian Balsam** (also known as Policeman's Helmet or Himalayan Balsam) which I was expecting, the other was **Purple Loosestrife**. Continuing towards Bedhampton Mill I passed below the **Mulberry tree** which grows in the Portsmouth Water Company site but whose branches droop over the public path allowing me to pick one of the ripe black fruits which was delicious to eat! In the pony field by Bedhampton Mill Pond one plant of **Vervain** was still flowering for my August list but nothing else was added to it until until I was back in Havant at the remnant of the Havant Town Mill Pond across Park Road South from Tesco.

In the pond both **Water Cress** and **Hybrid Water Speedwell** were still flowering and while noting them I had a clear view of a large **Water Vole** which had climbed to the top of the grassy mound to have a supper of grass. The head and ears of this vole had convinced me that it was a Water Vole but I was surprised how long its tail was, and as I had heard from Nik Knight that he had on the previous day retrieved a long **dead Brown Rat** from this pond I did double check on the length of Water Vole tails before recording this as a Vole. I guess this large and long-tailed vole was a full adult and as Nik Knight had seen three Voles in the pond on Aug 5 I assume he saw a family group and that I was seeing one of the adults (Nik also saw a fourth Vole in the nearby Langbrook stream and I think this record of four separate Voles in the same area, plus the many records collected by people living by the stream at 13 separate points downstream along the Langbrook (excluding the Town Mill Pond and one further site on the Langbrook which I have been told of), indicate that the **Water Vole population along that stream is considerably bigger than that recorded at Brook Meadow in Emsworth** where no more than two Voles have been seen together so far this year).

This morning I cycled down the Hayling Coastal Path and around the Gunner Point area, adding just six flowering plant species for August but seeing that the first two **Wheat fields alongside West Lane had already been harvested** (a reminder that the

first Brent Geese will be back in Langstone Harbour in little more than a month's time). Another reminder of autumn was **Robin song heard in at least ten separate places**, now general after a first tentative attempt heard by me on July 29. The harvested fields were also a reminder of the outburst of wild flowers we can expect as the light gets through to the rich soil of arable fields (provided that some rain falls on them!). One sign of this autumn second flowering seen in the Gunner Point area was a small outburst of **new flowers on Thrift** though the result of a lengthy cycle ride today was just six new species for August though they did include **Pale Toadflax** and **Cocks Eggs** which I could not have seen without visiting south Hayling. My August count of flowering plants now stands at 167.

## Tue 5 August

### My August wildflower count now up to 153 and one of my favourite moths emerges in Havant.

Yesterday (Aug 4) my bike took me round north Hayling where the Coastal Path (Billy Line) is once more open after a path upgrade to the section from the start (opposite the Texaco garage at Langstone bridge) down to the Oysterbeds area. Here I added **Wild Basil, Marjoram** and **Greater Knapweed** to the plant list for the month before moving to North Common where the Fragrant Agrimony was over but a great mass of **Strawberry Clover** was impressive.

Back at home I found a very exciting email awaiting - this came from Christopher Evans who lives in the Grove Road/South Street area and had found a most impressive moth waiting on his window for him to photograph it. I had no difficulty in identifying it as a **Red Underwing** which you can see at

<http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2452.php>. I am pretty sure this moth had only emerged from its chrysalis a few hours before Christopher saw it and that it will have spent the day 'drying out' on his window but when evening came it will have flown off to explore its new world during the night, and next morning will have found somewhere to spend the day where it is much more difficult to spot - such as on a tree trunk with its forewings closed to hide the red underwings. The last time I saw one was several years ago when it was unmissable on the whitewashed wall of a south Hayling house but before that I remember being on holiday in Wales and visiting a nature reserve where the warden had a specialist collection of the half dozen or so look alike species ( of which Red Underwing is the only common species) - ever since I have been looking for these beautiful moths so it is good to know they can be found in Havant!

Today I had another email asking for help in identifying **a caterpillar which had been found on Portsdown** in the Fort Nelson area and this took much longer to name. While it had a very distinctive colour pattern I could find no obvious match in the illustrations in my Caterpillar book but I am aware that caterpillars of the same species can vary widely in both colour and pattern of markings both with age and with their environment. One thing was obvious - this was what I call a 'looper' and the Americans call an 'Inch Worm' because it lacks legs along the greater part of its body and has only the three pairs which all caterpillars have at the head end and around three pairs of sucker-like prolegs under the tail end. When it wants to move forward it clasps whatever is under its front legs, raises its body into a 'loop' by letting go with its rear legs, bringing them forward to a point immediately behind the fore legs and when they have a firm grip it stretches its body forward as far as it can before repeating the process to 'inch' forward. Some species use this ability to

disguise themselves as a 'twig', gripping a branch with the rear legs and holding the body rigid at an angle to the branch. These loopers all belong to the big family of moths called Geometers and I eventually found a match for this Portsdown caterpillar in a species called the **Lime Speck Pug** which you can see at <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2532> - if you want to see what the moth looks like click one of the two left hand thumbnails below the main picture and if you want to see one of the colour variations to be found in the caterpillar click the third thumbnail.

My own outing today took me the Thorney Island where I found the very first flowering plants of **Slender Hare's Ear** (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*) which you can see by clicking the 'Photos' tab at <http://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/index.php?q=node/1817>. While in that same area opposite the west end of the Great Deeps I also found half a dozen of the **Pointed Snails** of which I had only found one or two examples on recent visits there (photos at <http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/species.asp?ID=62>) and I also added **Spiny Rest-harrow** to my August plant list. Before leaving I had a fly by from a **Clouded Yellow** butterfly and on the Little Deeps I saw the **Swan pair with four cygnets** that presumably come from the Oyster Quay 'Stilt Houses' pond. Back at the A259 where traffic from Queen Street joins it there was a good show of **Gallant Soldier** in flower (see <http://blog-imgs-46.fc2.com/1/2/1/121312131213/1545.jpg>) and by cycling to the Westbourne end of Lummley Mill Lane I saw what is probably my last single flower of **Skullcap** for this year (see [http://www.altnature.com/images/skullcapl\\_2.jpg](http://www.altnature.com/images/skullcapl_2.jpg)). After adding another five species to my August plant list I got back home with the total standing at 153.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 28 - AUG 3 (WEEK 31 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 3 August**

#### **Water Vole still in Havant Town Mill Pond, 14 more flowers for August and a pretty moth on the East Pallant fence.**

Yesterday (Aug 2) I was busy until early evening when I went for a short walk round the town. Although keeping an eye lifted for Swifts I was not expecting to see one now that July has ended so I walked south through Juniper Square, then north up the main road into Havant from the A27 and back via St Faith's church area.

Several common plants including **Hedge Woundwort**, **Hedge Bindweed** and **Green Alkanet** went on my August list together with **Small Flowered Cranesbill** before I got to the A27 roundabout where both **Guernsey Fleabane** and **Canadian Fleabane** were growing under the pedestrian flyover but the best sighting was of a plump **Water Vole** swimming along the channel of the Mill Pond which runs north below the white wavy metal fencing. Shortly after I spotted it the Vole climbed out of the water and vanished into the first proper tunnel that I have seen here, giving me the impression that one or more Voles have taken up permanent residence in this pond where they have been seen since Jan 23 this year and I think in previous years. On my way home I came from South Street to East Street via The Twittens which allowed me to add the **Californian Flannel Bush** (*Fremontodendron californicum*) whose large yellow flowers overhang the private carpark on the south side of this

street from an East Street garden. If you are unfamiliar with this shrub see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7TySQ85JRA>.

My only observation today came by chance as I stopped to talk to a passing neighbour as he was heading for Waitrose from which I was returning. On the wooden fence beside us I noticed a small whitish moth and when I got home I glanced through my general book of insects which has a fair selection of moths illustrated and spotted one, the Grey Chi, that seemed a perfect visual match. Luckily I double checked with the Hants Moths website and found this is a species of northern moorlands which is very unlikely to be found in Hampshire but a little further searching of this website found what I think is an excellent match for the visual appearance, the date and the location all of which you can confirm at <http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk/species/2293.php>. The species is called **Marbled Beauty** (*Cryphia domestica*).

### **Sat 2 August**

#### **A good start to August - 108 plant species in flower and 132 Egrets roosting at Langstone**

My search to find what plants were in flower in this new month took me to the Budds Farm area, up onto the Broadmarsh mountain, and on as far as the eastern entrance of Farlington Marshes and gave me a good list of species (including the **Hairy Vetchling** at Broadmarsh) but the only thing that I had not seen previously in July was the **first signs of berries developing on Ivy**. Another feature of this trip was **a triple encounter with two long distance walkers on the 60 mile Emsworth to Milford Solent Way**. I first saw them on the South Moors seawall, then overtook them on Harts Farm Way, and finally wished them well when they overtook me as I was about to turn back from the Farlington Marshes.

After lunch I made a shorter foray to tick off **Fiddle Dock** in Havant Park plus **Small Toadflax** at the Rail station and a number of species in the Havant Cemetery and New Lane allotments - one addition to my July list for Havant Cemetery was flowers on **Japanese Spindle**.

With propitious weather and tide I went to Langstone Pond to make a **night roost count of the Little Egrets**, recording a total of **132** compared to 85 on June 18 and 95 on July 16. The Swans were there with their 5 cygnets but I could not spot the Tufted Duck or any of her 7 ducklings which had been there on July 20. I also added five species to day's plant list with **Lax-flowered Sea Lavender, Gipsywort, Wild Celery, Pineappleweed**, and one huge specimen of **Water Dock**.

On a personal note I was surprised and delighted to be accosted by someone who surely wins the prize for the length of time he has been aware of me without my having been aware of him. He told me that he first noticed me in the 1970s cycling past him on my way to work at IBM when he was waiting for a bus to school, then a few years later he got a job at IBM at the Cosham site where I was then working, and since then he has often seen me cycling past his home in Havant only a couple of streets from where I live.

### **Thu 31 July**

#### **Recent news and things I have learnt from it**

The most significant bird news of the past week is of the start of the great autumn getaway by the species which have spent the breeding season in our latitudes. **Sand Martins** were among the first to leave in numbers with birds seen heading out to sea from Kent, Sussex and Dorset in the first week of July, and I suspect that all



our adult Cuckoos are long gone as are many failed breeders of various species, but on July 26 Portland reported a sudden increase in the number of **Willow Warblers** heading south from the Bill from the occasional single to 50 and to 125 on July 27 with daily counts of around 100 since then. Sedge Warblers were the second most numerous species (max 25) passing through Portland on July 26 and 27, along with smaller numbers of **Yellow Wagtails, Wheatears, Tree Pipits** and singles of **Spotted and Pied Flycatcher, Garden Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler**. This start of autumn passage was also seen at other coastal sites including Seaford in Sussex which recorded more than 20 **Common Whitethroats** (and 2 Lesser) on July 25. A reminder the urge to migrate in autumn does not normally see the birds taking the shortest route to their destination came on July 25 when the first **Aquatic Warbler** of the year was reported in Britain at Poole Harbour and this led me to an interesting article about the route taken by this species to get from wetlands in Poland to wintering grounds in west Africa - see <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/casestudy/24>.

While still on the subject of migrant birds the Christchurch Harbour web site told us of one baby Sand Martin that never got to the starting line for its journey south - on July 24 it reported .. "Yesterday, there was much commotion around a rather **gruesome event in the Hengistbury Sand Martin colony**, when an Adder leant over the edge of the cliff and plucked a youngster from its burrow, which was then swallowed over a 5-minute period". Still on this subject this is the first summer of all the 47 years I have lived in the same house in Havant that I have **not seen a single House Martin** overhead - for the first few years four or five pairs nested on the north side of the house but when they ceased to do that they could still be heard and seen collecting insects (for young in nearby nests) above the trees of the Hayling Billy line which runs past the end of our garden - this year I have not seen any over the central Havant area though they can still be seen occasionally over the Budds Farm pools. And finally I have reason to believe that at least one and maybe three pairs of **Swifts** have nested in Manor Close here in Havant this summer. I did not see any here until June 22 when a single bird flew over my garden at midday and at dusk. Since then I have taken a walk just before sunset on most evenings around the area from which I can see the sky above the Manor Close houses where they have nested in the past and have seen from one to six Swifts flying over though never actually entering a house. My reasoning is that there is nothing other than young in nests to cause them to fly over this area each day for at least five weeks and my guess was that these evening flights were for the purpose of gathering a good mouthful of insects as food for a youngster in the nest and this seems to tie in with the numbers seen - on July 5 I recorded my peak count of 6 birds which I interpreted as both parents of three pairs working to meet a peak demand for food shortly after young had hatched in all three nests, since then numbers have dropped but there were still three to be seen on July 27 with one still present at 20:15 on July 31. While there will almost certainly be occasional sightings of Swifts heading south (perhaps after late breeding in Scotland) into September I note that a large flock of around 1000 Swifts was seen over Beachy Head on July 27 which I take to be the 'end of season' date for birds breeding in the south of England. Reports from Brian Fellows in Emsworth indicate a similar pattern of Swift breeding activity there with a few more birds (max 12 reported). Before leaving the bird news we must mention the pair of **Bee Eaters** that have just hatched chicks in a nest on the National Trust's property at Wydcome (around 4 km



north of St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight). This appears to be only the sixth Bee Eater breeding attempt in the UK after one in Scotland in 1920, one near Lewes in Sussex in 1955, one in Durham in 2002, one in Hereford in 2005 and one in Dorset in 2006 - young successfully fledged from just two of these attempts. News of the Wydcombe nest reached Derek Hale on July 19 and it seems that the news of successful breeding was released to the press on July 28 when the adults started feeding the newly hatched young. The other rare birds in the news recently have been the pair of **Black-winged Stilts** which hatched three chicks in a nest at Medmerry (the newly created wetland between Selsey and the Witterings) on June 13/14 and which still had all three young (now fledged) on July 31 when they moved from Medmerry to the Sidlesham Ferry pool, making it much easier to see them. Another rarity which is unlikely to be seen by others was a **Black-winged Pratincole** seen in the Cuckmere valley (near Beachy Head) on the morning of July 30 by just one birder (Kris Gillam) before it flew off towards Eastbourne.

Recent Insect News has as its highlight (for me at any rate) the re-appearance on July 29 of at least two female **Wasp Spiders** in the rough grassland of the St Faith's section of the Havant New Lane Cemetery. After last year's adults (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/HAVCEM.htm#H1609>) came to the end of their natural life span the grass in the St Faith's area was left unstrimmed through the winter to give the young spiderlings every chance of survival and this week's discovery shows that two females have survived the winter - hopefully one or more males have also survived to continue the population.

Butterfly lovers can hopefully look forward to seeing an increasing number of **Clouded Yellows** in the coming month. A minor influx of these migrants seems to have started on July 15 with ten reports over the next ten days including a peak on July 25 when 7 were seen at at Devon site, 9 at Edburton in Sussex north of the Downs and 'many' at Medmerry on the Sussex coast. Three less common species seen recently have been a **Long-tailed Blue** at Magdalen Hill Down (Winchester) on July 27 (presumably a migrant), a **Large Tortoiseshell** on the Isle of Wight on July 13, and a **Camberwell Beauty** seen flying north through Whitehill in East Hants on July 26. Another possible rarity was seen at Titchfield Haven on July 23 by Heather Mills who got a clear photo of a Dragonfly with markings that did not match any of the regular British species but did show features that would be valid for the rare migrant **Lesser Emperor** (of which there has only been one report so far this year - seen on the north Kent coast on June 8). Heather sent her photo to the British Dragonfly Society but has just received their opinion in an email which says .. "Sadly your photograph shows a **very elderly female Emperor Dragonfly Anax imperator that has dulled severely with age, but also acquired male colouring near the top of the abdomen** that is still quite bright. Blue-form females that resemble male colouring are not all that unusual". The subject of dragonflies changing colour with age (and ambient temperature) was raised on Brian Fellows' website on July 12 when he published a photo taken by Chris Oakley at Emsworth showing **what appeared to be a male Emperor in the act of egg-laying!** I'll end this batch of insect oddities with a photo of a perfectly normal **Lappet Moth** in its 'Dead Leaf' camouflage - this was taken by Graeme Lyons, ecologist for the Sussex Wildlife Trust and appeared on Graeme's website on July 17 - see [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-h\\_hbj14iSrQ/U8gYQFfP2SI/AAAAAAAAAEzU/ZE8E3i7Mhj0/s1600/DSCN4314.JPG](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-h_hbj14iSrQ/U8gYQFfP2SI/AAAAAAAAAEzU/ZE8E3i7Mhj0/s1600/DSCN4314.JPG).

**Wildlife diary and news for July 21 - 27 (Week 30 of 2014)**

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 21 - 27 (WEEK 30 OF 2014)

Thu 24 July

### It's too late for pessimism

I guess we are all aware that the growing human population, the changing climate, and the exhaustion of the natural resources on which human civilisation depends, make it certain that the way of life that we in developed countries have come to expect cannot continue for much longer, certainly not beyond the end of the current century.

While many of you were watching the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games I was watching a BBC 4 programme listed as "Our Planet from the Air" which held me transfixed for 90 minutes as it described the development of the Earth from the origin of life to the present day against a seamless background of superb aerial photography and with a single woman commenting on what we were seeing.

Inevitably critics will disagree with some of the programme's facts and conclusions but no one can disagree with the message that unless human beings as a whole change their ways they will suffer major disasters within the lifetime of those now alive. What happened to the inhabitants of Easter Island in the Pacific, who went on cutting down the trees on the island until it became barren and could not support its human population, should be a lesson to us to put the survival of the human race before the needs of individual nations, businesses and individuals.

Toward the end of the programme I was puzzled by the use of the phrase "It is too late for pessimism" which I think was being used to dislodge the opinion of the great majority of people who believe that there is nothing they can do to influence the course of events - in its place we were encouraged to be optimistic and were presented with reasons to hope that rational thought and international co-operation to implement its conclusions would enable humanity to survive

I think this programme should be compulsory watching for all the world's youth as they come to the end of their formal education, and for every politician before they are allowed to put themselves up for election, and as a start I hope that everyone who reads what I have written will watch the programme at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04bdtqt/our-planet-from-the-air-home> If nothing else it includes some stunning photography.

Tue 22 July

### Thorney Deeps and Hayling Saltmarsh in search of Slender Hare's Ear

In 2012 I found a good show of **Slender Hare's Ear** plants on July 25 just behind the seawall of Hayling's Saltmarsh (accessed by a track crossing the Coastal Path from Saltmarsh Lane on the southern edge of the West Lane fields) so today's objective was to see if I could refind them in a year when most plants are flowering earlier than usual. I had already had an abortive look for them on the seawall of the Langstone South Moors last Sunday and today I searched the two other local sites

where I have seen the species - one is the west end of the Thorney Great Deeps, the other is the Saltmarsh site - but I found no sign of them at either place though I did record other finds.

**Slender Hare's Ear (*Bupleuun tenuissimum*)** is a yellow flowered umbellifer whose nearest relative is the wild Parsnip which can be over a metre tall with yellow umbels 10 cm across but the plant I was looking for is much less easy to spot, especially when growing in grass, as it has similar wiry green stems and minute flower umbels (see

[http://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/sites/www.brc.ac.uk.plantatlas/files/images/Bupleuun\\_tenuissimum\\_Seasalter\\_Kent\\_LR Rooney\\_2.jpg](http://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/sites/www.brc.ac.uk.plantatlas/files/images/Bupleuun_tenuissimum_Seasalter_Kent_LR Rooney_2.jpg) and

[http://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/sites/www.brc.ac.uk.plantatlas/files/images/Bupleuun\\_tenuissimum\\_Seasalter\\_Kent\\_LR Rooney\\_1.jpg](http://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/sites/www.brc.ac.uk.plantatlas/files/images/Bupleuun_tenuissimum_Seasalter_Kent_LR Rooney_1.jpg))

One success I did have on the seawall at the Thorney Great Deeps was to find a single example of the **Pointed Snail (*Cochlicella acuta*)** demonstrating that it was alive by clinging to a plant stem perhaps 30 cm above ground as in the photo at [http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/images/big/Cochlicella\\_acuta2.jpg](http://www.habitas.org.uk/molluscireland/images/big/Cochlicella_acuta2.jpg) and over the water of the Deeps **my first Hawker type dragonfly** of the year was patrolling its beat. Two other insects seen here on a Wild Carrot flower umbel were a very distinctive but **uncommon Hoverfly** called ***Chrysotoxum bicinctum*** (see

<https://sites.google.com/site/natureguideuk/home/hoverflies/chrysotoxum/chrysotoxum-bicinctum>) and a **female Ichneumon** with a black body and six red legs for which the nearest match I can find is ***Pimpla rufipes*** (see

<http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/pimpla-rufipes>). Nearby I spotted a very small version of what I think will within a month grow to be the large and distinctively marked **orb web spider *Araneus quadratus*** (see

<http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/four-spotted-orb-weaver>). This spider can be very variable in colour but in this case it was of the pale green colour shown in the photo. As I cycled back along the A259 past the entrance to Queen St in Emsworth I believe I saw in the roadside gutter the **Shaggy Soldier plant** which I had first seen on July 9, now substantially larger and still in flower.

Passing Langstone Pond on my way to Hayling I had close views of the **family of seven tiny Tufted Ducklings** which Peter Raby had seen two days before. The ducklings get their food from the bottom of the pond and are for ever diving, then popping up again like corks (getting pecked at by whatever other waterfowl they surface close to but suffering no damage that I could see). Also seen at the pond, close to the site of this year's Swan nest, was my first sight of **Gipsywort in flower** - Brian Fellows had seen it by the River Ems on July 18. On Hayling Island my only notable find was of the first plants of **Pepper Saxifrage in flower** (on the east side of the Coastal Path not far north of the path to the West Lane bends). Further south I had a close look for flowers on **Black Bryony** which I have somehow missed this year - proof of that came when I found several plants already bearing large, still green, berries but no flowers.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 14 - 20 (WEEK 29 OF 2014)**

**Sat 19 July**

**Cemetery pages updated for July**

Last Tuesday I made my monthly visits to Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and to St Faith's Churchyard, taking 88 photos of which 36 can now be seen on my Cemeteries Pages (click the link at the head of this page). The items which I found most interesting were the discovery of a 'new to me' **Umbrella Liverwort** at St Faith's Church where I also found my first **Black Nightshade** of the year in flower and saw a **Harlequin Ladybird larva** on a **Lime Tree leaf**, leading me to discover that Harlequins only reached this country in 2004, and that Lime Trees are the most likely place to find them. At Havant Cemetery I found a **Walnut tree already carrying at good crop of nuts** and, looking over the wall into the New Lane Allotments, found that the **Weasels Snout plants** which have been struggling to survive along the New Lane fence line are still thriving on the Allotment 'rubbish heaps'. At Warblington I came across **Caucasian Stonecrop** in flower and took a photo of the vicious spines which protect the leaves of **Prickly Lettuce** from browsing animals.

At home I found a full grown **Harvestman** (Spider) earlier than expected and am still seeing a few **Swifts flying over their Manor Close presumed nest sites shortly after sunset** - my guess is that these are the mates of other parent Swifts spending the night in their nests with their young that must be now near to fledging.

### Wed 16 July

#### Egret night roost count at Langstone Pond

This evening the weather was fine and a higher than usual tide in the early afternoon was followed by an extra low one just before sunset - this combination means that the Egrets which have been unable to fish earlier in the day will stay out until impending darkness forces them to head for their night roost, compressing the period during which they arrive at the trees into a short period around sunset. I arrived at the pond at 20:15 and could see just 10 Egrets (I think all juveniles) already in the trees. Nothing much happened for the first half-hour or so, but **when I left at 21:22 (a good ten minutes after sunset) my count of birds settled in the trees had reached 95.**

Other birds seen while I was there started with the **Swan family (the pair still had five well grown cygnets** from the original seven which hatched on May 4, not having lost any since June 10). In the pony field north of the pond I watched a 'tribe' of at least **10 Magpies** and out on the mud I was surprised to see the smart adult **Scandinavian Lesser Blackback** which has been here since at least June 18. Less surprising was the continuing presence of at least two juvenile Grey Herons. The air above me was continuously busy with passing Swallows and at one point a substantial flock of perhaps 100 Starlings seemed to be looking for somewhere to spend the night but did not stay here.

With time to kill before arriving at the pond I made a roundabout journey via Second Avenue in Denvilles where I confirmed (by leaf shape) that **the tree which I had said on July 4 was a Foxglove Tree was in fact an Indian Bean Tree** after my recent discovery of that species in a Beechworth Road garden (see July 14). Later, as I was heading down Wade Court Road towards the pond, I was also able to see that there is a third tree of this species currently in flower in North Close.

### Tue 15 July

#### Around the Havant Cemeteries

Today I made my monthly tour of the local cemeteries (photos should be on my Cemeteries page by the week-end) starting with the Havant Cemetery where a peep over the wall into the New Lane allotments gave me an encouraging view of a



large cluster of **Weasels Snout plants** in flower in an uncultivated area. Nearby, within the cemetery, the **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** was in full flower while out among the graves one of the two **Walnut trees** had a good show of developing nuts. In the St Faith's area, where the grasses and wild flowers will not be mown until the autumn, Gatekeeper butterflies were abundant and I got a good photo of a **Syrphus ribesii hoverfly** (and a fuzzy shot of a fresh Green-veined White). Among the wild flowers here were a patch of **Field Scabious** and one fresh shoot of **Common Toadflax**. Moving into the Dissenters area I got a good photo of a **fresh Cinnabar Moth** but looked in vain for early Wasp Spiders.

Moving to St Faith's Churchyard one of my first finds was a **Harlequin Ladybird larva** on a Lime tree leaf - by the solid orange 'bars' down the sides of its otherwise black back. Walking down Homewell Street I was pleased to see a single plant of **Vervain** still flowering close to the west wall of the graveyard with **Red Dead Nettle starting to re-flower** in the roadside gutter. Turning into the path along the south of the graveyard I found **Wall Lettuce** in full flower at the foot of the Homewell House wall and moving on past the large cluster of **Polypody Fern** I got a photo of the small patch of wall where a leak from the gutter of the 'Old House at Home' has supported the growth of **five different Ferns - Maidenhair Spleenwort, Black Spleenwort, Wall Rue, Harts Tongue**, and a species with larger fronds (not yet bearing any sporangia to aid identification) which looks like a **baby Male Fern**.

Moving round to the north side of the church building the area west of the main church door, which is shaded from sunlight and paved with bricks to carry off rain water, had a large patch of a plant that I had never noticed before - this is a common species of **Liverwort called Marchantia polymorpha or the 'Umbrella Liverwort'** and if you visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marchantia\\_polymorpha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marchantia_polymorpha) and click on the picture to enlarge it (beware - after doing this you will have to press the BACK button twice to return here) you will see the 'umbrellas' which caught my attention and which show that it is a female plant in the process of reproduction. To end my visit I went to the south side of the church and, under the east end of the newly refurbished Dewhurst memorial bench, found a plant of **Black Nightshade in flower** (my first of the season).

After lunch I went to the Warblington cemetery where the wildflower seed sown area of the extension is now in full flower but the great variety of species seen there in previous years has been suppressed by a huge mass of flowering **Chicory and Wild Carrot** - the only other plant maintaining a noticeable presence is the bright yellow **Corn Marigold**. Moving to the old cemetery my only new find was of **Caucasian Stonecrop** in flower.

A couple of other sightings made today but unrelated to the cemeteries, are of **three Swifts still circling over the Manor Close area** at 09:30 in the morning and of a single **Holly Blue**, the first for some time, seen on my way home in the afternoon. Both Hampshire and Sussex reported their first summer brood Holly Blues on July 13.

**Mon 14 July**

### **Review of recent reports - Part 2**

Before continuing my review some details of my trip today along the cycleway past Farlington Marshes and down the Eastern Road to Milton Common. For me the highlights were three unexpected 'firsts' - **Michaelmas Daisies, Sharp-leaved Mint, and Stinking Tutsan (Hypericum hircinum)** of which one large 'bush' was growing beside the cycleway as I passed the 'Slip Field' near the eastern entrance to



Farlington Marshes. The other two plants were growing together beside the Eastern Road not far south of the bridge over Ports Creek. Also seen in flower for the first time were **White Melilot and Tansy** while in the 'jungle' around the Milton Lakes the highly invasive **Himalayan Giant Brambles** already had edible fruit. Two other plants that were seen in full flower for the first time were **Teazels and Upright Hedge Parsley**. A final comment about the '**closure**' of **Farlington Marshes** for sea wall repairs - the normal car-park and entrance for those arriving from the Eastern Road are closed to the public and I would imagine that you would be barred from the western seawall but there was nothing to stop people entering via the eastern and central gates, nor from the part of the reserve north of the A27, and I would imagine that you can still visit the reserve building and eastern end of 'the bushes' area, and may be able to walk down the eastern seawall to the Deeps and maybe get into the Point Field.

One other discovery was made last night when I walked round the block looking for Swifts - I also used my binoculars to take a close look at a tree in a local garden which has been puzzling me (you can see it from the East Pallant road passing the public carpark if you look north up the path between the houses in Beechworth and Fairfield Roads - it is in a Beechworth Road garden but currently unmissable on account of its great mass of whitish flowers and large, heart-shaped, yellowish-green leaves). This is an **Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa bignonioides)** which is well illustrated at

<http://www.deepdale-trees.co.uk/trees/2013/09-Catalpa-bignonioides.html> though that has no photo of the long 'bean pods' which hang from the tree long after it has shed its leaves. I think there is another example in a garden at North Close off Wade Court Road, and I fear I may have mistaken a prime example of it in a garden at the junction of First and Second Avenues in Denvilles which on July 4 I said was a Foxglove Tree.

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**Kingfisher**. When a Kingfisher was seen flying over Dolphin Quay in Emsworth on July 4 it was assumed to be a local bird and people went looking for it so I wrote to Brian Fellows describing the breeding strategy of the species which results in many youngsters wandering our waterways at this time of year with no fixed abode. This is described in

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/k/kingfisher/nesting.aspx> which tells us that a pair of Kingfishers raise 7 young in their tunnel nest but very soon after these young emerge from the nest their parents drive them out of their territory and set about raising another brood - many of these inexperienced young birds die during their wanderings and those that reach the coast have no reason to stop there. If in doubt if you are looking at a young bird check the colour of their feet (adults are orange, young are black) and if you get a close look see if the bill has the white tip of a juvenile. After the Emsworth report I noticed several reports of Kingfishers in unexpected places, including one which flew into mist nets at Sandwich Bay where there are no resident birds.

**Departure of summer migrants**. As early as June 21 Portland noted the first two Sand Martins heading south out to sea and by July 4 Sandwich Bay had a mass of 400 Sand Martins making their way south. Also on July 4 Dungeness had 2 Yellow Wagtails on their way south. Hopefully we will not begin to notice any mass departures until we get into August though by then many adult Cuckoos will have left.

**Shrikes.** A Red Backed Shrike was seen at Pig Bush in the New Forest on July 5 but has not been re-found. Two other Shrike species were seen in southern England in June - a Woodchat Shrike was on Lundy Island and a Great Grey Shrike was reported on the Lizard in Cornwall on June 27.

**Hooded Crow.** One was in Dorset (mainly around Portland) from June 13 to July 8 at least.

**Corn Bunting.** I have the impression that these are making a comeback after seemingly getting close to vanishing from Hampshire with reports of singing birds at two sites (Ashley Warren and Ladle Hill) in addition to Martin Down. They are certainly flourishing in Sussex with a peak count of 30 singing males on Steep Down at Lancing on June 22 and 3 were heard in the East Lavant area near Chichester on June 17.

**Escapees.** A Mynah Bird was among Starlings at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth on June 26 and a Northern Bobwhite (looking somewhat like a Red-legged Partridge) was photographed at Brixham in Devon on July 9 - see

[http://www.devonbirds.org/images/library/gallery/mike\\_langman/2013/Bobwhite\\_Brixham\\_050714.jpg](http://www.devonbirds.org/images/library/gallery/mike_langman/2013/Bobwhite_Brixham_050714.jpg).

**Emperor dragonfly.** A photo on Brian Fellows Emsworth Wildlife website on July 12 appeared to show a male dragonfly egg-laying as if it were a female and Brian pointed out that the green of a female's abdomen can turn blue in warm weather. This led me to have a look at Steve Brooks Dragonfly field guide in which he says that not only can a female change colour in warm weather but the abdomen of a male .. "can show reversible temperature dependent colour change, being dirty greyish-green during darkness and below around 10 degrees Centigrade, but this transformation is unlikely to occur except at night."

**To be continued.** I hope to resume this summary tomorrow evening

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JULY 7 - 13 (WEEK 28 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 13 July**

#### **Review of recent reports - Part 1**

I learn a lot and derive much interest from regularly scanning a list of some 20 websites which report wildlife observation along the south coast from Kent to Cornwall. As I work through them I extract observations which I find interesting and/or which mark the progress of the seasons. After doing what research I can to understand the significance of the reported observation I then record the significant details of each observation in a spreadsheet in which they are sequenced by species and date. Unusually I am currently up to date with this data gathering process and am hoping that a summary of the data I have gathered for the first half of July will be of interest to others.

My spreadsheet is arranged in four main sections - 1. What I call 'Animals' but which is effectively anything (including Fungi) which does not fit into the other three sections. 2. Birds. 3. Insects 4. Plants. Within each section each species has a sequence number based on the order in which the species appeared in the textbooks that I used when I first began recording wildlife many years ago. One other factor which may confuse some people with specialist knowledge is that the less common species are often lumped together in groups such as 'Uncommon spiders' or 'Beetle Species Various' or 'Bug Species Various'. For this review I will

work through what I have in my spreadsheet and will stop when I run out of time, hopefully to continue from where I left off at a future date.

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**Beavers.** Most people will be aware that there has been a re-introduction of Beavers to Scotland but until this month I was not aware that three Beavers had been living wild in the River Otter in south Devon for at least two years (after almost certainly escaping from captivity at Escot House in Ottery St Mary). Read about this and DEFRA's plans to recapture them at <http://www.creamteabirding.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/leave-our-beavers-alone-sign-petition.html>.

**Harvest Mice.** I suspect that these tiny creatures are more common than most people think and a photo of one taken at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on July 4 backed up other signs of their presence there (abandoned nests) over several years - see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x419-harvest-mouse-bm-MP-04.06.14.jpg> and <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x435-harvest-mouse-bm-b-16.06.14.jpg>. Many years ago I read of their presence at Titchfield Haven where they built a nest in reeds and the mice regularly swam to and from dry land. This morning I came across a reference to one being caught on Portsdown in 2012 (Go to <http://www.portsdown.hampshire.org.uk/placesvar/topfield.htm> and use the 'Find function' (CTRL + F) to search for 'Harvest Mouse'}

**Grey Mullet.** The first report of these for this summer came from the North Wall of Pagham Harbour on July 11 - I expect to hear of them at Emsworth very soon. One source tells me .. "Mullet spawn inshore, in open water, during the spring and summer. They choose cool water in which to breed, so the southern British coast is the limit that they will tolerate to breed." I take this to mean that if the water in the English Channel becomes warmer they will no longer come this far south. Another source says .. "Only a proportion of the stock is believed to breed in any year. Thicklipped mullet are thought to spawn on alternate years."

**Black-browed Albatross.** A brief sighting of one heading east past Portland on July 5 was followed by a 'probable' distant sighting of one off Worthing on the same day. Such a sighting is unlikely to be repeated in the English Channel but it is by no means the only sighting recorded around the British Isles - listen to the Tweet of the Day at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b02tycf8> for the story of a disoriented individual who was first seen among Gannets on the Bass Rock in 1967 and was seen in another Shetland Gannet colony in several years up to 1976.

**Glossy Ibis.** One or two have been seen regularly in the Christchurch area at Cowards Marsh and in the harbour throughout June and the first half of July.

**Summering Brent Geese.** Up to four birds have been seen in various parts of the Langstone Harbour area ranging from the saltings off Northney Marina (just into Chichester Harbour) down to the Kench. This is not unexpected but a single report of three in the north west corner of Portsmouth Harbour (near Peewit Island) on June 28 suggests that these summering birds occasionally take flight before they are grounded by moult.

**Wigeon.** The last report of Wigeon in Hampshire that I am aware of was of one on Woolmer Pond on June 1. The first to return were a party of 9 in Christchurch Harbour on July 10.

**Short-toed Eagle.** One has been entertaining the twitchers in Sussex and Hampshire since it was first reported in Ashdown Forest on June 10. On June 13 it was seen in the New Forest near Hatchet Pond in the Beaulieu area, since when it has been moving between the two counties with the latest report on July 12 being back at Hatchet Pond (a second report on the same day came from Ashdown Forest and I suspect one of the sightings was incorrect). In this month of sightings the only report of it taking prey was on July 1 when it caught a Snake in the Pigbush area of the New Forest (near Beaulieu Road Station). For photos taken in Ashdown Forest go to <http://jfcbirding.blogspot.co.uk/> and FIND (CTRL+F) '22 June'. For further info go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short-toed\\_snake\\_eagle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short-toed_snake_eagle) which has a picture of the 'short toes' and tells us that the first British record was in Oct 1999 in the Scillies but another source - <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2646135/Birds-feather-Hundreds-twitcher-s-flock-sighting-rare-short-toed-eagle-UK-lost-way.html> - says that the 1999 sighting was in Jersey with one in the Scillies in 2011. This Daily Mail report indicates that the bird seen in Sussex and Hants arrived in Britain on June 2 at Morden Bog in Dorset - again this differs from the finder's account which can be seen under the May 31 sightings on <http://dorsetbirds.blogspot.co.uk/search?updated-max=2014-06-10T23:31:00%2B01:00&max-results=31>.

**Osprey.** Reports of single birds over Dorset on June 11 and Cornwall on June 12 were probably of late migrant arrivals but two, maybe three, over Poole Harbour on July 9 were probably birds already heading south.

**Chichester Peregrines.** The Chichester Cathedral website tells us that .. "Chichester Cathedral has a pair of peregrine falcons who have been nesting in the Cathedral turrets since 2001. In this time they have raised 46 chicks together! This year - two new peregrines have claimed the nest site.." and on July 3 the inexperienced young parent birds proved they were up to the job when one male and one female took to the air.

**Black Winged Stilts.** The first reported sighting of a Stilt at Medmerry was made on April 29 with two seen there on May 17. By May 21 the birds appeared to be nesting and Pete Hughes (now warden of Pagham Harbour and the new Medmerry reserve) was asking for volunteers to mount a round the clock watch on their nest. Despite fears that the nest would be inundated by the rising water level it survived and two chicks hatched on June 13 and a third chick was present on June 14. On June 19 the parents moved the three chicks from the nest site out onto the shore where they were usually hidden in creeks and gullies and for the best part of a month the only evidence that at least one youngster was still alive was provided by sightings of the parents driving off potential threats to the family. The latest news that I have seen comes from the Selsey Blog which tells us that on July 9 one chick was seen and was getting close to fledging while another sighting of one youngster was made on July 13.

**Returning waders.** As early as June 20 Sandwich reported an influx of post-breeding Lapwing and by July 4 there were 116 of them back at the Blashford Lakes. This is just one of many species of wader already back on the south coast and by July 12 the Rye Harbour website was reporting .. "Wader highlights this morning included at least 12 Greenshank, 3 Golden Plover, 2 Grey Plover, 8 Sanderling, 55 Dunlin and 20 Turnstone. Several Green and Common Sandpipers were on Ternery Pool and Harbour Farm pools. And the Red-breasted Merganser was at the Quarry" These are not the only wader species now back - also on July 12 there was a Little Stint at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool with a Ruff there on June 21, a Curlew Sandpiper was at Medmerry by June 14, and the first two Spotted Redshank were at the Exe estuary in Devon on June 20 where returning Redshank already numbered 85. The first Greenshank was back at Farlington Marshes on June 29 while Green Sandpipers have been seen at many sites since one was at Titchfield Haven on June 20. Passing Wood Sandpipers have been seen since June 9 when one was at Lidsey near Bognor Regis and Common Sandpipers started to appear on June 23 (one at Blashford)

**Black Tern.** This is a species that has long attracted my interest so I noted the first mention of one passing along the Netherlands coast on July 8, just two days before the first was seen at Dungeness.

**Ring-necked Parakeet.** I suspect I am not the only one to wonder when the concentration of these birds in London and along the north Kent coast will spread out into the rest of southern England. This year hints have come from Dawlish Warren in Devon where one was said to have been in the area for five weeks before June 16. In Hampshire one was seen flying south on June 22 over Bishops Waltham with what was probably the same bird over Gosport for 30 minutes on June 23. Maybe it stayed around to be seen again flying north over Fareham on June 28. Two others were seen chasing each other around over Hailsham on June 25.

**Swifts.** June is traditionally the month in which non-breeding young Swifts revisit the place where they hatched in order to find potential nest sites for themselves in future years (you can read a fuller account of their breeding at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/s/swift/nesting.aspx>). Small flocks of low flying birds have been seen over several sites including Emsworth (where up to 9 birds were seen between June 20 and 25) and Havant (where up to 6 were seen between June 22 and July 5). I have been watching the Manor Close area of Havant each evening just before dusk, when I think parent birds return to their nests for the night and after the non-breeding young ceased visiting on July 5 I have seen at least one bird over the area around 9pm with three seen together tonight (July 13)

**To be continued.** I hope to resume this summary tomorrow evening

**[Fri 11 July](#)**

### **A ride around Havant Thicket**

Before describing today's outing I must mention that a short walk around my home area yesterday evening recorded a single glimpse of a **Swift** flying fairly high over



the Manor Close area before disappearing into the distance so I cannot be sure if it returned later to spend the night with its young in a Manor Close nest or was heading elsewhere. While out I had my first sight for this year of a **Black Nightshade** plant - no flowers or even buds so far so it did not increase my July count though a single plant of **Thale Cress** did go on the list.

Today I rode to the Leigh Park Gardens and on round Havant Thicket with two objectives in mind - one was to look for wild **Goldenrod** (which I found in bud but not yet flowering, so not counted) and the other was to see if the **Dwarf Gorse** was yet in flower, which it was. Other more unexpected finds started with the discovery of a new-to-me site for **Lesser Skullcap** with at least one plant in flower. Much more eye-catching was my first stand of **Betony** and several clumps of **Cross-leaved Heath** plus my first **Yellow Pimpernel** for the month. Plants that were already out when I was last here in June, but have not seen elsewhere in July, were **Marsh Woundwort** and **Bog Pimpernel**. One uninspiring addition to my list was **Marsh Cudweed** and two which I was surprised to see I had not recorded earlier in the month were **Foxglove** and **Silverweed**. In all today's find brought my count of species flowering in July to 244.

## Wed 9 July

### My last two outings

My notes show that on July 7 I made a trip down the Hayling Coastal path and around the Gunner Point area while on July 9 I headed for the Thorney Deeps, getting as far as Nutbourne before returning home. Excitement on July 6 was to see two adult **Herring Gulls** (probably from nests on the New Lane industrial buildings beside the railway) and a small flock of Black-headed Gulls descend on my lawn after I had thrown out half a loaf of bread which had gone mouldy in the heat. That evening my dusk visit to Manor Close found just one **Swift** after a definite sighting of six together on July 5 - my observations indicate that six birds visited the nest area nightly from June 28 to July 5 with just one on July 6 and 7 and with none seen thereafter. On July 8 the excitement was restricted to adding Annual Mercury to my wild flower list for the month.

Setting out for Hayling on July 7 I found **Lesser Water Parsnip (*Berula erecta*)** newly flowering in the Lymbourne Stream just before the stream turns away from the Billy Trail towards Langstone Pond, and noted that the two most prominent songsters still to be heard (aside from Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves) were Song Thrush and Blackcap.

Over on Hayling I had to bypass the Oysterbeds as the top section of the Coastal Path is once more closed until August for further resurfacing. Joining it at the Esso Garage I found no new flowers for the July list (other than a few remaining Pale Flax), but at the 'mid-way saltings' (off the West Lane fields) I confirmed that the large Agrimony plants were **Fragrant Agrimony** and had an unexpected sighting of **four summering Brent Geese** together out on the saltings.

At the Kench the **Bladder Senna** bush was in full flower as was the **Bell Heather** on the Golf Course. The hot dry weather had ended the flowering of many species seen last month but I did find the lovely **Sea Bindweed** and at least one fresh plant

of **Rose Campion**. The only first for me was **Fennel** and one surprise in the drought was a flowering plant of **Lesser Sea-Spurrey**.

On July 9 I found a single plant of **Shaggy Soldier** flowering beside the A259 in Emsworth and then found my first **Spiny Restharrow** and **Sea Plantain** on the Thorney seawall where I also found just one live **Pointed Snail**. On the spoil heap of soil from the demolition of Thornham House I spotted **Garden Lobelia** flowering where no gardener had planted it and among the sea defence rocks at Prinsted Bay **Prickly Lettuce** was flowering.

In Farm Lane at Nutbourne I looked in vain for the Narrow-leaved Ragwort was has flowered here in several recent years but I did find another yellow flowered plant which I did not recognize so I collected a sample to look at later - I have been unable to identify it but am hoping to get a name from Martin Rand (the south Hampshire Plant Recorder) - my efforts indicated that the flowers and seeds might be those of **Great Yellow-Cress (Rorippa amphibia)** but the leaves do not fit that plant and suggest a *Sisymbrium* species (one of the Rockets).

While in Farm Lane I found my first example of a **Wetted Thistle** in flower and then, with no expectation of success, I went into the Nutbourne orchards to look for Dwarf Mallow (once a regular here but now unknown to me anywhere locally) and was rewarded with 'something entirely different' - the large hoverfly **Volucella inanis** which is only slightly smaller than *V. zonaria* but is easily differentiated by the narrow (not broad) black bands across its yellow abdomen.

At the end of July 9 my count of wild flower species seen flowering this month had risen to 227.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 30 - JULY 6 (WEEK 27 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 5 July**

#### **My July list of flowering wild flowers tops 200**

A short ride to the Farlington Marshes eastern entrance this evening added six species to my July list of wild flowers bringing the total to 206. Admittedly one of these (Bristly Oxtongue) was an oversight from the previous days but the other five were genuine 'firsts'.

First to go on the list was **Narrow-leaved Pepperwort** which I had already looked for at its regular site on the very dry ground beside the Langstone roundabout - tonight I noticed one healthy plant growing some way from where I usually see the species. Next was **Hoary Ragwort**, also found close to the Langstone roundabout (to be sure I brought a specimen home for a close examination which met all the requirements of the key in my Flora). After this came my expected target of **Knotted Hedge-Parsley** growing in the close mown roadside grass of Southmoor Lane.

By now my list had reached 200 but I pressed on to the Farlington entrance 'just in case' and was rewarded with **Dark Mullein** right outside that entrance and with a patch of **Balm** alongside the Sliproad to the A27 westbound. Not counted (already on the list) were Upright Hedge Parsley, Golden Samphire and Danewort all flowering near the reserve entrance and also not counted was a specimen I brought

home from Broadmarsh which I did not recognize at first sight but which turned out to be more Goat's Rue.

## Fri 4 July

### 196 wild flower species and an outburst of fungi seen locally in July

Since I claimed to have found around **140 wild flower species on July 1** I have visited several more local sites and have also entered the species found into my computer to give an accurate count of **196 species (excluding grasses) seen in the first four hot days of July** during which I have visited North Hayling and Portsdown as well as additional sites in Havant. Sunset of each day has seen me on Fairfield Road to watch the return of the **local Swifts to their nest sites and I am now confident that three pairs are breeding this year**. As a surprise extra local observation John Sawtell pointed me to **a large outburst of fungi** on a very nutritious diet of fresh soil and wood chips provided for them by the builder of the new houses on the Warblington School playing fields. My best guess at the identity of these fungi is **Agrocybe praecox** which is a late spring to autumn species of the right proportions with tall straight stems having a prominent ring near the top, a broad cap with a central 'hump' (or umbo), and a very dark brown spore print. I collected two of the largest specimens (which happened to be joined at the base of their stems - technically known as being 'tufted', a feature mentioned as occasional in some descriptions) and the largest had a stem 14cm tall and a cap 9 cm across. These measurements are bigger than the 9cm stem and 6cm cap given in my books but I think this can be attributed to the abnormally rich diet which they are feeding on - many of the specimens in the mass present are well within the normal measurements. This is not one of the species normally associated with wood chips but there is plenty of nutritious soil (their normal diet) in the substrate. My thanks to John for discovering this rich find of fungi and for reminding me that fungi can be found throughout the year, not just in autumn (a period of rain in high summer can bring many surprise finds - I recall a huge crop of fairly uncommon **Dog Stinkhorns** which I once came across in a bed of normally dry pine needles in Havant Thicket after the Fire Brigade had been called to a fire and had deluged the area with water).

Before coming to some of the flowers seen since my July 1 list I must mention a couple of **flowering trees**. One that is now nearly over, leaving a golden dust on the pavement of Beechworth Road on the bend next to Glenhurst School, is the **'Tree of Heaven'** whose foliage and flowers can be seen at

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/plants/plant\\_finder/plant\\_pages/1650.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/plants/plant_finder/plant_pages/1650.shtml). This piece encourages gardeners to plant the species but since then opinion against planting has been expressed in the media - see

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/sep/17/ruralaffairs.theobserver>. The second tree caught me by surprise in the Devilles area as I turned into Second Avenue from First Avenue and saw a glorious display of purplish flowers on a **Foxglove Tree (Paulownia tomentosa)** - to know what to look for see

[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-2Rp2UFoT13I/T9Op4Ee2GHI/AAAAAAAAADQg/eDkBJZICzKE/s1600/p\\_SAM\\_0666.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-2Rp2UFoT13I/T9Op4Ee2GHI/AAAAAAAAADQg/eDkBJZICzKE/s1600/p_SAM_0666.jpg).

On July 2 my search for wild flowers continued with a visit to north Hayling where the **Twiggy Mullein** was still flowering as were the **Milk Thistles** at the Oyster Beds. Also seen here was a lone plant of **Stone Parsley** with its flowers open among many that were not flowering - I also read the notices of a further three week

closure of the northern section of the Coastal Path starting on July 7. July 3 saw me make an evening visit to the north pier of the old Langstone railway bridge where I found a clump of **Tansy** getting close to flowering but did not record it - the best addition to my list found there was **Blue Fleabane** which was surrounded by the mass of **Narrow Leaved Birdsfoot** which I have not found elsewhere in Havant. Heading home via Pook Lane I found my first **Upright Hedge Parsley** flowering at the Emsworth A27 Underpass along with the **Field Woundwort** now established in the roadside 'gutter' there. Continuing over the Southleigh Road level crossing and through Denvilles I came to the Havant Cemetery where the **Duke of Argyll's Teaplant** was still flowering while **Field Scabious** was new. Outside the New Lane allotments I thought I was lucky in finding one plant of **Weasels Snout** in flower until I turned my bike south for home and found that here too the roadside gutter was providing a home for several more plants that have been ousted from the allotments.

Today I had an appointment at the Q A Hospital for an annual eye check (no problems found) after which I climbed **Portsmouth** to add another dozen plants to the list - by far the best was **Lesser Centaury** which seems to be having an unusually good year with many clusters of these tiny, bright red, flowers. Also seen were my first **Hemp Agrimony**, **Pale St John's Wort**, **Burnet Saxifrage** and **Canadian Golden Rod** plus other plants that have probably been in flower for some time (**Musk Thistle**, **Common Gromwell** and **Squinancywort**).

## Tue 1 July

### At least 140 wild plants in flower on the first day of July

A lengthy circular walk via the South Moors to Broadmarsh and back via Bedhampton Mill, plus an evening cycle ride to Langstone Pond, enabled me to record around 140 wild plants in flower for the month of July as well as my first Gatekeeper and summer brood Commas.

The list started well with **Creeping Jenny** newly flowering in my own garden where it has been established as a 'weed' for many years. Outside Bosmere School what I assume to be **Guernsey Fleabane** was just starting to flower but the specimen I brought home awaits checking (I'm pretty sure it's not Canadian Fleabane). Next plant of interest was **Mugwort** of which I found specimens in two places starting to open their dark brown flowers which contrast with the silky white bud we have seen for some time, making it look as if the plant was already dying back rather than just starting to flower.

Entering the path beside the Langbrook Stream from the Technology Park approach road I checked for flowers on the **Yellow Flowered Strawberries** and found a few but was surprised to also find several fairly large red fruit. Further downstream I was delighted to see tall plants of **Purple Loosestrife** in full flower (possibly planted but none the less evocative to see). Coming out onto the South Moors I found **Marsh Ragwort** newly in flower and some unexpected **Large Bittercress** plus a **Clover that I have so far been unable to identify with confidence**- the relatively small flowerhead is a pinkish white in colour at the end of a leafless flower stalk nearly 20 cm long and the leaves are oval (almost round) and are 25mm across.

At Budds Farm Pools a flock of **50 Coots** (with others scattered around) was unexpected and there was more than one brood of **Tufted Ducklings** and all six cygnets with their parents but no visible Shelduck. On Budds Farm shore I had two surprises - one was a leisurely fly-over by a **Hobby**, the other was to find a plant of



**Sea Rocket** (*Cakile maritima*) in flower (I expect to find this at Black Point at the mouth of Chichester Harbour, not on the north shore of the harbours).

In the mouth of the Hermitage Stream I found **8 Swans to start a summer moult flock** there, and heading up the Brockhampton Stream I found the **Turkish Tutsan** in flower as a reminder of the wooden sailing boat which had long ago tied up there at the end of its final journey, marked by the creation of a flower garden on the bank of the stream. Turning west along Harts Farm Way I added **Fool's Parsley** to my list before climbing the Broadmarsh Mountain to find the largest and most widespread show of **Hairy Vetchling** that I have seen there.

Heading north over the old playing fields a single flowering plant of **Stinking Iris** was unexpected and my **first two Gatekeepers** were a good tick. At Bedhampton Mill the expected **Vervain** was in flower and a **pair of Swans had a single cygnet** on the Mill Pool. Where the path narrows and heads past a Water Company building (before coming to the place where excess water from the 'springs' flows under the path and into the Hermitage Stream) a **large-leaved tree overhangs the path** and looking up at the leaves I could see a hint of the scene shown in the photo of a **Silkmoth caterpillar eating Mulberry leaves** (but ignoring the Mulberry fruit which humans enjoy) - see

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e5/Silkworm\\_mulberry\\_tree\\_zetarra\\_marugatze\\_arbolean3.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e5/Silkworm_mulberry_tree_zetarra_marugatze_arbolean3.JPG). The fruits on this Bedhampton tree were at a very early stage but later on in past years I have eaten the fruit when cycling to work (don't expect to see the caterpillars on this tree!).

At the place where the excess water flows into the main stream a lot of **Himalayan Balsam** and some **Brooklime** were flowering. Reaching the vehicle entrance to the Water Company site another surprise awaited me - the first flowers of **Old Man's Beard** (aka **Travellers Joy**) were draped over the fence of what was Jerome's Farm but is now marked out for 'development'. Nearby plants of **Prickly Lettuce** were close to opening their flowers.

Back in Havant the 'Dolphin Pool' added **Water Figwort** and **hybrid Water Speedwell** to my flowering list while the Homewell pool area gave me **Wall Lettuce**, **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** and **White Stonecrop**. As a bonus when very nearly home a **large Sparrowhawk** (presumably a female) flew lazily east over Manor Close as if marking out her territorial boundaries

After lengthy rest and refreshment (and watching Nadal being knocked out of Wimbledon) I made a short cycle trip around Langstone which added both **Round** and **Sharp-leaved Fluellen** plus **Danewort** to my July flowering list while the Langstone seawall gave me both **Common** and **Lax-flowered Sea Lavender** and the footpath heading north from Southbrook Road added **Least Yellow Sorrel** - the final entry on the list being the **Russian Comfrey** still flowering by the Billy Trail immediately south of the A27 underpass.

### Mon 30 June

#### Nesting Swifts in Havant and Lapwings back on the Langstone shore

On June 23 I saw two Swifts flying low over houses in Manor Close where they have regularly nested in recent years. **On at least five evenings since then I have seen five (maybe six) Swifts giving a tremendous aerobatic display for about ten minutes at sunset** over and around these same houses, seemingly getting lower and lower as the light faded. My impression has been that these are the parents of chicks in 'nests' in these houses, one of each pair will have been with the chick during the day, coming out in the evening to join its partner in a flight to gather



insects for the youngster before both parents enter the nest when the light fails - this is speculation on my part but each evening as the light fails I have seen all the birds getting lower and lower before they disappear. If they were going to sleep on the wing, as they do for the rest of the year, I would expect to see at least some of them climbing high into the air at the end of their evening performance.

The only new flowers seen by me in the past week have been **Lax-flowered Sea Lavender** on the shore at Langstone and **Round-leaved Fluellen** on some bare ground where shrubs have been removed from a roadside planting at the junction of the Emsworth Road and the Meadowlands cul de sac here in Havant. This evening, while making a brief cycle circuit around Langstone, I saw the **first two Lapwings** back on the shore where there were also the **first two juvenile Black-Headed Gulls**. Out in the remaining water channel at low tide I saw four **Grey Herons** and am pretty sure that three of them, that were closer to each other than adult Herons would normally fish, were juveniles at last out of the nests by the pond. Another unexpected bird was a smart adult **Scandinavian Lesser Blackback** (maybe the same bird that I saw when counting the Egret roost on June 18).

A couple of snippets from the Internet that are of local interest are a sighting of a **Purple Emperor** in Havant Thicket on June 29 (photo at <http://hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/images/upload/thumbnails/53b080412dc92.jpg>) which has led to multiple further sightings there, while from Northney on Hayling there is news of three juveniles in a **Barn Owl nest** plus a sighting of at least one parent out hunting.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 23 - 29 (WEEK 26 OF 2014)**

### **Thu 26 June**

#### **Twiggy Mullein and Fragrant Agrimony flowering on Hayling's North Common.**

On Tuesday I was uncertain if the Fragrant Agrimony 'look-alike' which I found near the 'mid-way' point when cycling down the Hayling Coastal Path was the genuine species so today I went to North Common at Northney to look for the plants which have been established there for some years. When I got there I found a good cluster of the **Fragrant Agrimony** and was able to see what Stace means by giving 'abundant sessile glands on the underside of the leaves' as one of the id features (the midribs of the leaves looked as if they had a severe case of botanic measles!).

Before reaching the Agrimony I had seen that the **white-flowered Goat's Rue** just inside (and to the left) of the entrance gate to the Common was now in flower and after the Agrimony I had a look at the densely overgrown area on the landward side of the path. Here I could see my first find of **Shasta Daisies** but also **a tall yellow spike of Mullein flowers** to which I eventually forced my way through the Brambles and Teazels for a closer look. It was a tall plant nearing two metres in height and with no branching of the inflorescence. None of the many leaves on the basal part of the stem had a petiole (leaf-stem) and all the relatively small yellow flowers were borne singly and had no noticeable stems. I could see a mass of both violet and white hairs within the flower that I brought home but by the time I got the crumpled remains of the flower under my microscope I could only see two (not five) anthers and could not be sure of their original orientation. One other part of the flower (I think the calyx of a second flower specimen) showed a dense mass of stalked

glands but I cannot be sure where they came from! From this hotch-potch on evidence I feel pretty sure that **the only likely candidate is Twiggy Mullein** but again I need another visit to the site to feel sure. I am at least sure that this was not Moth Mullein (the flowers were small and unstalked) and not Dark Mullein (which would have had some stalked leaves) nor Pyramidal (inflorescence was unbranched), nor Broussa (which has white hairs only in the flower).

Going on towards the east end of the site I found the second stand of Goat's Rue had mostly white flowers but included a few blue spikes so the loss of the blue-flowered plants at the OysterBeds site does not mean they are lost to Hayling Island but the **total absence of House Martins** around the houses on the old Holiday Camp site convinced me that these birds have abandoned this site.

On the way home I found **Wild Celery** in flower both near the Langstone Hotel on the Island and at Langstone Pond on the mainland where the very first buds of **Lax-flowered Sea Lavender** were opening. Also at the pond I could see no sign of juvenile Grey Herons in their nests.

## Tue 24 June

### A hot day on Hayling.

Today I rode down the Billy Line to the Gunner Point area, making one diversion to have a look at the Saltmarsh Lane seawall, and was rewarded with seven (possibly eight) new flowers plus a noisy Stonechat family and three Dragonfly species.

Nothing exciting until I was past the Stoke Bay area and the track had come alongside the beach. Here, just before the large pond on the inland side of the track, a blaze of bright yellow announced the first of several finds of **Dyers Greenweed** and nearby I found **Black Horehound** in fresh flower. Some way further on, by what I call the 'Midway Point' where there is a seat and a wildlife interpretation board, my first **Field Scabious** was in flower and there was a stand of tall **Agrimony** plants whose leaves had a noticeable scent and the burs below each flower were slightly down-turned but not sufficiently to convince me that this was the Fragrant species. When I got a leaf specimen under the microscope I could not see the 'abundant sessile glands' on the underside of the leaves so I will wait to claim this in flower until I have checked one of the known specimens to be found at North Common on Hayling.

Next stop was on the Saltmarsh Lane seawall where I was able to confirm that **Bastard Cabbage** has continued to spread and has effectively taken over the whole sea wall, its only competition being an increased number of **Lucerne** plants. In the low lying area behind the seawall there was another good stand of Dyers Greenweed.

Reaching the Sinah Common area I began to see Dragonflies, though the only one that allowed me a good view was a male **Black-tailed Skimmer**. Another was almost certainly a **Southern Hawker** and a third might have been a **Common Darter** though if it was I would have expected it to show itself better! On the Common north of the Sinah Lake **Wood Sage** was coming into flower (another first for me) but I could not see any of the **Sand Spurrey** that Brian Fellows found here a year or so ago (there

was plenty of it in the Sand Dunes at the west end of the Golf Course where I first saw it on June 10). Also in the harbour entrance area I saw my first **Yellow Horned Poppies** and when I got round to the area south of the Golf Course I not only heard and saw a family of three **Stonechats** on the blockhouse but, a little further east, found the remains of three clumps of **Nottingham Catchfly** (now gone to seed) which I must have missed on June 10.

Nearing the 'roadside cafe' north of the Inn on the Beach quite a few plants of **Pale Toadflax** were flowering in the usual place but I could find no trace of the **Proliferous Pink** of which I found just one flowering stem on June 10. Just before leaving Sinah Common to head up Staunton Avenue I found the first few flowers of **Cocks Eggs** - next time I come I expect to find thousands!

## Mon 23 June

### A cycle ride round Havant Thicket plus good news of Swifts in Havant and Marsh Orchids on the South Moors.

This morning I set off on my bike for Havant Thicket but as I turned out of my home road I had the unexpected sight of **two Swifts flying back and forth among the roof-tops of Manor Close where they have regularly nested in past years** (at least one house there has a Swift nest box but I am not sure if it is used). Taking this sighting with my observations of single Swifts flying low over my own garden yesterday - one around mid-day, the other just before sunset - and sightings on May 18 and 19 (5 weeks ago) of two Swifts flying low over my garden as if prospecting for a nest, strongly suggests that that one pair has bred in Havant this year. Relevant facts are that the incubation period for Swifts is 19 or 20 days (3 weeks) and that the parents are rarely seen around the nest during incubation (and even when the eggs have hatched the young birds have the ability to go into 'suspended animation' for several days of bad weather when their parents may be driven far from the nest by storms) so a period of five weeks is about right to allow for nest building, incubation, and the early development of the young - maybe they are now big enough to require both parents to collect food for them.

Back to Havant Thicket - first notable sighting was of **Marsh Woundwort** in flower alongside a **Field Rose** bush covered in flowers, both firsts for me. My target for this visit was to see **Silver Washed Fritillaries**, which I did in three separate places, and **White Admirals**, of which I had one definite but extremely brief sighting as a large jet black shape with prominent white markings shot past me. Two other flying insects went onto my notepad - one was unmistakably the large, white belted, hoverfly **Volucella pellucens** hovering at head height below trees, the other was of a large dragonfly seemingly patrolling a hedgerow (but disappearing before I could get off my bike for a close look. The jizz suggested **Southern Hawker** but these normally do not appear until July and I have not heard of any locally though a check on the national Dragonfly reports shows the first was seen on June 13, three on June 14 but then none till June 20 with two on June 21 and one on June 22 (most of these seen emerging from the water or in 'immature plumage'). In one area of wet ground I had the pleasure of finding two or three large patches of **Bog Pimperel** in full flower with a cluster of small upright flowerless plants nearby which I am pretty sure were **Lesser Skullcap** which I have found in this area in the past but which

does not flower until well into July. One other first flower for me was **Heath Bedstraw**.

Back at home I found an email from Nigel Johnson giving the result of the Langstone **South Moor orchid count** made by the Havant Wildlife Group last Saturday. I expected a good count but was very pleased to see that **the total of 10,690 plants was the highest since counts started in 1995** when the count was 6763. Counts up to 2009 never exceeded the 1995 figure but were usually in the range 1367 to 5614 (with a low of just 333 in one year when cattle ate most of the plants before they could be counted). After the 2009 count the area was fenced off to control grazing by cattle and the 2010 count leapt up to 9234 but has not exceeded that until this year. Many different factors influence the number of orchids that appear but I would not like to suggest that the inundation of the whole area by sea-water which occurred this year in January is the reason for the increased count. When this year's orchids have finished flowering and the cattle are let back I will be interested to see if they find the tall, coarse vegetation that currently surrounds the orchids attracts them to graze there when there is plenty of 'normal' grass for them in other parts of the overall area - if they decide to opt out of grazing the orchid area and it is not mown mechanically I suspect next year's count will not be as good as this one.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 16 - 22 (WEEK 25 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 22 June**

#### **More new flowers and the first red Holly Berries.**

Yesterday evening (June 21) I cycled down the Billy Line to the north pier of the old rail bridge, arriving at high tide on a quiet sunny evening. Both **Eyebright** and **Wild Parsnip** were newly in flower and I collected a specimen of a plant with flowers similar to, but almost certainly not, Common Bird's-foot-Trefoil. Back at home the small leaves, long lower stems and small number of flowers per head (1, 2, or at most 4 with multiple flowers above each other, not in a semi-circle) showed this to be **Lotus glaber (Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-Trefoil)**. Plenty of other flowers, but nothing else new, on this pleasant spot.

This morning a walk round the Havant Cemetery area gave me my first **Large-flowered Evening Primrose** and **Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea** in flower with, at the New Lane allotments, a single freshly flowering (but not first - I had already seen a very early specimen flowering here on Apr 28 but no more until now) plant of **Weasel's Snout (Misopates orontium)**. The most surprising find today was in a garden hedge as I was walking home - a **Holly Tree with bright red berries on every branch!**

In the late afternoon when it was no longer unbearably hot I got on my bike to check on the **Wall Lettuce** outside Homewell House here in Havant and found first flowers opening on eight of the plants.

### **Fri 20 June**

#### **Proof the Water Voles are breeding in the Langbrook stream**

This afternoon I walked to the Langstone South Moors to have a look at the **Southern Marsh Orchids** and en route down the Langbrook Stream path I got into

conversation with a man who owns one of the streamside properties and is a keen gardener so spends a lot of time by the stream. He told me that he frequently sees **Water Voles** and that quite recently he saw one in company with a much smaller individual which must have been a youngster born nearby - recent sightings up and down the stream between Langstone and the Havant Tesco store show that there is a good established colony of Water Voles living in the stream but I think this is the **first definite proof of breeding there**. He also told me that deep scratches in a large wooden log, plus well worn tracks leading up the steep bank between the stream path and the Technology Park, had made him wonder if there were Badgers in the area....

In the 'orchid field' there was a **good crop of orchids** and we will maybe get an official count after tomorrow's annual survey by Wildlife Trust members but they will find it difficult to get an accurate count because of the mass of other vegetation hiding many of the orchids, and because of the difficulty of walking through the vegetation which hides a very uneven ground surface on which it is difficult to walk in a straight line while counting the orchids!

Two new first flowers for my year list seen among the orchids were **Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil** and what I believe to be **Common Marsh Bedstraw**. Elsewhere on today's walk I saw flowers on **Fool's Water Cress** and **Enchanter's Nightshade**. At the Budds Farm pools I was very pleased to see **both Swans with all six cygnets** which I last saw here on May 12 - in the past six weeks I have visited the pools several time but the mother swan and her cygnets have been out of sight on each visit though the male Swan was always in view. Another welcome sight today was a **single Shelduck**, hopefully a sign that it has a mate still on a nest there.

Yesterday I cycled to the Thorney Deeps west where the Swan pair that have been sitting on a nest on the Great Deeps were off the nest when I arrived but came back to it with no great enthusiasm - I got the feeling that it may be a failed first attempt at breeding. To offset that there was a **Swan family with four tiny cygnets** on the Little Deeps - I would guess the babies were at most two or three days old and must have hatched there. Also seen here were my **first Small Skipper** and a single unexpected Marbled White plus my **first Red Rattle** with a couple of open flowers. Back at home I also had an unexpected find while cutting a hedge - hidden in the branches was a **Buff-tip moth** doing its imitation of a twig that has been cut at both ends.

## [Wed 18 June](#)

### **First Egret night roost count of the year at Langstone pond**

Fine weather combined with a very low tide at sunset (21:20) and with many of the juvenile Egrets now becoming independent of their parents suggested that when I arrived at the pond an hour before sunset most of the adults would be out fishing, giving me a chance to count them as they flew back to roost when the light became too dim for easy fishing.

On arrival I attempted to count the birds already present and I recorded 55 birds of which I estimated that at least 40 were green-legged juveniles. For the next hour there was two way traffic with some birds flying out (for a late supper, for exercise of young wings, or to join a teen age party on the mud close to the seawall - at one stage a group of seven juveniles could be seen wandering around each other, occasionally stabbing at possible prey items) while others were coming back from more serious fishing trips. Most of the juveniles had returned to the trees before sunset but in the ten minutes after sunset until I left the arrival rate increased to give



a surge of 20 new arrivals and a **final best estimate of 85 as the number by then in the roost**. No doubt there were a few late-comers after I left (when it was becoming dark and no birds had been seen for several minutes I closed my count and got on my bike only for three late comers to fly in - they were recorded but any later arrivals will have been ignored).

Although I did not count them methodically I noticed that while at least two juvenile **Grey Herons** were still in the 'top nest' at least two more juveniles were perched on branches distant from any nests having presumably made short flights to get there. The most noticeable thing about the adult Herons was the number that flew off on night fishing trips at random intervals - I think I saw at least six which would tie in with the presence of three active nests with all six parents now free of the requirement to stay and guard their offspring.

On June 17 the CHOG (Christchurch Harbour) website said .. "**Returning waders are steadily increasing in numbers** with 41 Lapwing, 10 Redshank and 5 Curlew around today". Here at Langstone I saw none of these (bar one Curlew) but one **Sheduck** and one adult **Lesser Blackback** with bright yellow legs and a shiny black back (so not British race) were strangers searching for food amongst the Herring and Black-headed Gulls just off the seawall. In the pond area two **Reed Warblers** were still chuntering away and I was surprised to hear a **Reed Bunting** making its pathetic attempt at singing for at least ten minutes. With song likely to diminish from now on I noted the species I heard on the way down Wade Lane as Song Thrush, Blackbird, Chiff-Chaff, Wren, Chaffinch and Stock Dove (Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves are still singing regularly as are Blackcaps, Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats)

## Tue 17 June

### A ride to Farlington Marshes

This morning I found **Goats Rue** in flower at Farlington Marshes, seen in the 'North East Slip Field' from the cycleway not far from the track which goes north from the main reserve to the section north of the A27. (For a map naming the features of the reserve see

<http://solentreserves.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/farlington-marshes-map-2.jpg> ).

Other new flowers seen near the Eastern Road roundabout were **Vervain** and **Small Scabious** while at other points along the cycleway I found my first **Fleabane** and **Ribbed Melilot** in flower. Crossing over onto the old Broadmarsh Playing fields at the west end of Harts Farm Way I found the usual mass of **Creeping Yellow Cress** was already in flower and along the cycleway passing the Chalk Dock area plenty of **Self-Heal** was newly out (Brian Fellows had seen this yesterday in Emsworth) along with lots of **Yellow-wort** and **Common Centaury**.

Before heading west and seeing the plants mentioned above I had been up the Broadmarsh 'mountain' and found a new site for the rare **Hairy Vetchling** near the south-west corner of the peripheral path in addition to an increase in the amount flowering on the eastern section of the path. While up there I collected a couple of specimens of **Tare** using my personal means of separating **Hairy** from **Smooth** by the flower colour (To my eyes Hairy flowers are white, Smooth are blue) and I was pleased to see that the more official means of separating them agreed with me!

The most reliable difference is seen by looking at the seed pods - Hairy pods are hairy and black when mature, Smooth are hairless and brown. In the course of checking these specimens I also learnt the Smooth Tare rarely has more than two

flowers on a stem but Hairy can have a much larger cluster. A further difference is in the tendrils which grow at the end of the leaves and help the plant to climb - Smooth Tare has unbranched tendrils, Hairy has branched tendrils.

One thing that I forgot to mention yesterday is that I have now posted the results of my recent visits to the Warblington and Havant Cemeteries and to St Faith's Churchyard - to see them go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and use the links provided to visit the individual sites.

## Mon 16 June

### Sad news for Langstone Harbour's wildlife enthusiasts

Today I cycled to the Hayling Oysterbeds and enjoyed the fine weather and a good list of newly flowering plants but all the pleasure of the day was dimmed when I reached my destination and was told that **Dave Billet had died last Saturday**, leaving Rosemary in a weakened but still indomitable state.

Those who did not know Dave may not be aware of the essential, but 'behind the scenes', part that he, with Rosemary's strong support, played in the development of wildlife conservation principles and practices (regular wader counts being but one example) that we now take for granted. There is much more detail about the 'Portsmouth Group' of birders, of which he was a leading light in the 1950s, in 'Birds of Hampshire' - still the prime record of the county's avifauna during the past century - which tells us that the Farlington Marshes reserve would never have come into being had it not been for Dave's enthusiasm and determination and that they would not be the place they are today without the habitat management regime he helped to design and personally implemented. The photo of the Portsmouth Group facing page 42 of Birds of Hampshire shows a 'bulldog-like' Dave dominating the seven other members of the group, and his determination to never give up had already been shown during the war when he sailed through life threatening seas and temperatures on ships carrying vital supplies to Russia. The same determination was still with him when he confronted a 'marsh cowboy' at Farlington and received a chestful of shotgun pellets leaving him helpless on the ground where he would probably have died had not Rosemary come searching for him.

Setting aside my thoughts of past times and turning to my notepad I see that my day started with a parade, on the telegraph wires outside my bedroom window, of the **family of Goldfinches** which nested in the garden of the house across the road from mine. After breakfast I walked into Havant to replenish supplies of bird-seed for the many House Sparrows, now fully fledged but still regularly visiting and emptying the seed feeder in my front garden (normally they would have left town for the country by now and become what I call 'Corn Sparrows' working the field edges for natural seeds). On my way to the shops I added both **Opium Poppy** and **Knotgrass** to my first flowers list and later, as I headed for the Oysterbeds, I was very pleased to see my first **Musk Mallow** and **Weld** in flower plus the **Perforate St John's Wort** which Brian Fellows had already seen in Emsworth yesterday. On Hayling I had a further look for **Goat's Rue** in the carpark behind the Esso Garage but could not find a single plant. Moving to the shore of Stoke Bay I immediately saw a **juvenile Black-headed Gull** flying with no family support nearby and within the tideline vegetation were flowering plants of **Bittersweet Nightshade** which I was pretty sure were the 'var marinum' which grows like these on the shingle but on checking Stace's Flora I see he says they should be 'procumbent'

while these were fully erect, but maybe forced up by the great mass of surrounding vegetation.

Moving to the lagoon I found Chris Cockburn with a companion that I did not recognize and was told by Chris that he had just seen **a large jellyfish sail past his lagoon watchpoint**. Matching Chris's description of colour and size of what he saw I think this may have been one of the **Barrel Jellyfish** that have been reported from West Country beaches for the past month or so - to find out more put 'Barrel Jellyfish' into Google!

Since my last visit the **Milk Thistles** have started to flower and while I could not see a great increase in numbers over recent years they have definitely started to spread over a larger area and look as if they are there to stay. One first flower seen here was **Common Centaury** accompanied by what was probably a newly emerged Small Tortoiseshell. Back on the Billy Line I spotted my first **Greater Knapweed** in flower among the bright blue of much **Tufted Vetch** which has been out for a week or so. Back on Langstone Bridge I noted my first **Strawberry Clover** in flower and at Langstone Pond the 'top nest' in the Holm Oak was inhabited by **three very large juvenile Herons**.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 9 - 15 (WEEK 24 OF 2014)**

**Tue 10 June**

### **June flowers on Hayling Island**

A ride to the south Hayling shore had one minor potential problem caused by the temporary closure of the top section of the coastal path for re-surfacing but when I got to Texaco garage where I would normally turn onto the Billy Trail I found there was a pavement beside the main road all the way to the Esso garage where I did re-join the old rail track so I did not have to contend with the holiday traffic on the road.

Before reaching the rail track I diverted into the carpark behind the Esso garage to see how the **Goats Rue** was coming on but could not spot a single plant (those on North Common are well grown though not yet flowering - I hope this does not mean that we have lost this site for this uncommon plant). Turning south I had only got as far as the gate through which horses come onto the track from the local stables when I saw an addition to the trackside flora helping to compensate for the potential loss of the Goat's Rue. Opposite that gate and for some distance down the seaward side of the track there was a great swathe of pale blue flowers showing where **Pale Flax** (which has been present in small, inconspicuous, numbers in past years) has suddenly multiplied to the point at which it is currently unmissable. A little further down, where the track comes close to the beach shingle, mounds of white **Sea Kale** flowers matched the white horses out on the windswept harbour at high tide.

I have already omitted one first flower seen by myself today and by Brian Fellows yesterday - that is **Field Bindweed** the flowers of which are variably either white or pink striped. Last year I conducted a personal survey of **Large Bindweed** flowers (not the Field or Hedge species) after finding several of the Large flowers in Havant

cemetery and on Portsdown were prominently pink-striped down the outside of the flower trumpet, something that I had thought was an indicator of the rare **Hairy Bindweed** (which I have only come across in one roadside location near Fishbourne church) but I now realise that it is a relatively common feature of Large Bindweed. This year it seems that I will be looking at the trumpets of **Field Bindweed** to see if Brian's discovery that that species can also have pink streaking down the outside of its trumpets is a common feature that I have previously overlooked!

Back to today on the Hayling Coastal Path the only other note that I made on the way south was of what I assume was **Bastard Cabbage** flowering on the Saltmarsh Lane seawall - I did not divert to check for the very distinctive 'chianti bottle' shaped seeds of Bastard cabbage but assumed that is what I could see from the track as Bastard Cabbage has been the dominant (and only) yellow flowered crucifer on that stretch of sea wall for at least a couple of years.

Next flowering plant to go on my list was a mass of **Viper's Bugloss** among the gorse north of the Lake on Sinah Common. Next was **Bladder Senna** whose yellow flowers were out on the east shore of the Kench, and next (on the Golf Course south of the Kench) was flowering **Bell Heather** which always surprises me by the early date at which it appears compared to the other heathers.

Turning into the harbour entrance carpark I immediately had **Tree Lupin** and **Hare's Foot Clover** in flower before taking the path around the fence of the Hayling Ferry Sailing Club which brings you into the sand dune habitat behind the Tamarisks. Here I found one of my major targets for the day - **Sea Bindweed** - and with three more 'firsts for the year' - **Sheep's Bit**, **Sand Spurrey** and **Sea Clover** (the last two were brand new to my personal list of what can be found in the Gunner Point area).

Coming round into the open area south of the Golf Course I could hear **Meadow Pipit song** (but no Skylark) and the ground was densely covered with the pink of **English Stonecrop** (not a first for the year). One lovely addition to my year list here was **Rose Campion** (*Lychnis coronaria*) which is technically a garden escape but which was described by Pete Durnell in his *Wildlife of Hayling* (published in 2001) as having its only established wild site in Hampshire here on Hayling. Each year since then there seems to me more of this lovely flower growing here and today there was such a large solid block of it in one place that I fear it may soon have to be 'controlled'.

Moving east from Gunner Point to the area between the 'mini golf course' north of the Inn on the Beach I found another plant dominating the gorse - at first I did not recognize it as the flowers are not yet open and the plants seemed taller than anything I had previously seen there but eventually I realised that this must be **Heath Groundsel**. Even further east, just beyond the line of Staunton Avenue, I stopped to have a look for one of Hayling's rarities - the plant originally identified as **Childing Pink** but later re-classified to **Proliferous Pink**. Not too long ago a hundred or more of these tiny red gems could be found in one small area and an effort was made to clear gorse from that area but that conservation effort has not been maintained and today I found just one stem with two tiny flowers and I fear that

none will be seen next year though seeds may remain in the ground waiting to be given a further chance to bloom sometime in the future.

On the way home I still managed to see my first **Stinking Iris** flower and my first **Common Toadflax**. I also took a quick look at Northney Common where two areas of Goat's Rue are looking healthy and getting close to flowering. Also seen there, in the eastern bay fronting the new houses which replaced the holiday camp, I counted **13 adult Shelduck**, maybe a party gathering to make their way to their moult grounds off the north German coast. Nearby a **Lesser Whitethroat** was still urgently singing for a mate... Finally, passing Langstone Pond, I found the **male Swan with five remaining cygnets** stridently defending the youngsters from many passing dogs - the Swans were close to the nest site but on the public path side making for much confrontation. I did not stop to search but I could not see the mother Swan but I expect she was nearby as when Peter Raby saw the family back at the pond yesterday he did not comment on her absence though he did not positively confirm her presence.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JUNE 2 - 8 (WEEK 23 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 8 June**

#### **A glorious June day on Portsdown**

The weather this morning was ideal for an attempt to climb Portsdown on my bike and a quick check of my local street map showed a good route to avoid the steepest and most dangerous section to an elderly cyclist (the steep and narrow main road up from Bedhampton via the bridge over the A3M to Fort Purbrook). This alternative route took me along the path over the Hermitage Stream (on which a pair of **Swans with two very young cygnets** was an unexpected surprise) and through the Waterworks to old Bedhampton, across the big roundabout at the A3M junction and on along the Havant Road into Farlington where, just beyond St Andrew's Church, I turned uphill along Gillman Road to come out on Portsdown Hill Road opposite the road junction at Fort Purbrook. Although this last road was too steep for me to cycle up it had the advantage of being traffic free and, for much of its length, running through grassy countryside above which Skylarks were singing and beside which chalk downland flowers were plentiful (this large area of grassland covers a couple of huge water reservoirs supplying Portsmouth). It also had the bonus, just before reaching the main hill road, of having a bench with a magnificent view out across Portsmouth Harbour and along the Solent to the Needles - most such views make one very aware of the mass of housing in the immediate Portsmouth area whereas this view emphasised the tree covered land, the large area of water, and the distant shores where the signs of human activity were not obvious.

A couple of personal first flowers seen here were the yellow flowered **Meadow Vetchling** and a mass of **Bladder Campion**. There was also a mass second (or long



delayed) flowering of **Crosswort** and further proof of how widespread **Round-leaved Cranesbill** has now become.

Crossing over into the Fort Purbook area I followed the path which runs uphill, parallel to the main road but hidden from it, through thousands of **Pyramidal orchids** but with the occasional other newly flowering species including **Rosebay Willowherb**, **Lesser Scabious**, **Tufted Vetch**, and the tall **Perennial Sow-thistle** (*Sonchus arvensis*). Also seen here, as well as Common Blue butterflies, were several **Small Blues** and one example of **Knapweed Broomrape**.

At the top of the hill I crossed over to the south facing grassland where a mass of **Sainfoin** which has probably been flowering for a month gave me my first sight of it. Also in this area around the London Road I saw my first **Wild Thyme**, **Rest Harrow**, **Hoary Plantain**, **Fairy Flax**, **Squinancywort**, **Harebells** and **Hedge Bedstraw**. A short diversion down the sliproad as if to join the northbound London Road failed to show me any sign of the Sickie Medick which may be found here again later in the summer but it did give me a single first flyby **Marbled White** butterfly - this species has not yet been reported on the Hants website, nor the national one, but one was seen near Lewes in Sussex yesterday (June 7). After this I rode on to Fort Widley, arriving there two hours after setting out. Just one further flower was added to my firsts here - a couple of flowers of **Lucerne** - before the faster downhill trip home for which I felt safe in keeping to the main road and which took just under one hour.

## Sat 7 June

### Broadmarsh mountain still has its rarity

After heavy rain in the morning warm sun filled the afternoon sending me to check out Budds Farm pools and the Broadmarsh 'mountain'. Along the cyclepath north of the Langstone Technology Park tall plants of **Stone Parsley** were full grown (I first saw some yesterday) but it will be well over a month before they start to flower and at Budds Farm pools I was moderately surprised to see a single male **Shoveler** and to see a **pure white juvenile Mallard** among a family of normal plumage - this must be the youngster that caught my eye several weeks back when it was perhaps a day old and skittering over the water in **bright yellow down** when its siblings were in normal camouflage brown.

On top of the Broadmarsh mountain there is still a tremendous show of **Grass Vetchling** and **Common Vetch** but a fairly long walk, which gave me my first **Meadow Brown** butterfly and both **Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted orchids** to add to the dozen or so **Bee orchids** seen on my last visit, eventually found a fair number of plants (not yet flowering) of the **Hairy Vetchling** (*Lathyrus hirsutus*) which has its only foothold in Hampshire here. The plants seem to have moved from the north-east sector of the mountain top to the east side around SU 70346-05518. To find them turn off Harts Farm Way onto the road leading to Broadmarsh Slipway but immediately after the entrance height barrier turn left and follow the path uphill. Coming out into the open grassland turn left and follow a path along the edge of the trees and then across a grass 'bay' in the trees (this is where plants could be found last year) until the peripheral path you are on turns right to continue south down the east side of the hilltop area. Initially you will have a large triangular area of grass on your left but soon the trees will once more form the edge of the path and after a very short distance a clump of Blackthorn will protrude into the path and it is opposite this Blackthorn that I started to find the Hairy Vetchling plants in the thick mass of

grass and vetch close to the path (they are scattered to the south of this point). Once you have seen one you will have no difficulty in separating it from the Common Vetch by its long, broad, flat leaves and (when it starts to flower) by its larger two tone flowers.

In the morning a short walk around Havant had given me my first sight of **Buddleia** in flower plus my first flowering **Hawkweed Oxtongue** before finding that the **Fiddle Dock plants** near the Tennis Courts in Havant Park had recovered from mowing and had pushed up their flower stems.

**Fri 6 June**

### **Havant Thicket yesterday and Warblington today**

Yesterday (June 5) I cycled round Havant Thicket in lovely weather but did not see much that was newsworthy but after watching Springwatch on the TV last night and then walking round the Warblington area today I have several items that might interest whoever reads this blog.

Starting with yesterdays visit to Havant Thicket it was of personal significance in that it was my first visit there since I got rid of my car a month ago and so it was confirmation that the Thicket is within cycling distance from home and can be accessed via minor roads in Havant and then through Leigh Park Gardens with no need to cycle on busy roads with fast traffic. The first wildlife interest was a **close view of a Roe buck** which stood motionless less than 20 metres from the track I was following in Hammonds Land Coppice (the woodland immediately north of Leigh Park Gardens and south of the Gipsies Plain grassland). Coming out of the woodland the first gateway on my right had its usual large clump of what I have always thought of as wild **Yellow Loosestrife** just starting to flower and I picked a couple of the flowers to confirm its id - what I was expecting was to see a line of bright orange colour along the outside of each sepal section but what I found was that the sepals were green and this shows the plants to be **Dotted Loosestrife**, a cultivated form. Maybe I misremembered the id of these plants but they certainly did not have the orange colour which I clearly remember seeing on Loosestrife plants growing on the islands in the IBM Lake at North Harbour in Portsmouth when I worked there.

My next note is of the large number of **Common Spotted Orchids** flowering on either side of what I call the 'Yellow Brick Road' - the main vehicle track leading west from the entrance opposite Castle Road in Rowlands Castle to Bells Copse near the A3M. Another freshly flowering plant which I don't think I have seen so far this year was **Lesser Spearwort**. As expected there were plenty of **Brimstone butterflies** on the wing, both male and female, but surprisingly I only saw one **Speckled Wood** and one **Large Skipper** (my first for the year). When passing the Gipsies Plain I had a good scan for **Lapwing**, which I hope are still breeding there as they were last year, but saw none.

Today's walk set out through Juniper Square in Havant to take the path through the centre of the Langstone new housing, and just before this crosses Southbrook Road for the second time I had my first sight of the **Least Yellow Sorrel (Oxalis exilis)** flowers for which this is my only known local site. Further south along this path I noticed my first flowering plant of **Square Stalked Willowherb**.

The strong onshore wind at Langstone Pond meant that any Egrets or Herons in the nests were keeping a low profile and so the fact that I could not see a single Grey Heron did not necessarily mean that they had all flown..... Further east with the tide low I saw a single **Shelduck** feeding - maybe a failed local breeder back

from a local nest? Over the shore fields of Warblington farm a single **Kestrel** hovered briefly - maybe it does have young to feed in Warblington Castle tower. And in the field immediately east of the Cemetery extension (the Ibis field) I saw a single **Mistle Thrush** which I hope has also raised a family nearby.

An unexpected sighting came as I was about to exit the east end of the big central Sweetcorn field. Glancing down to the hardbaked earth of the path I saw a large caterpillar rapidly crossing it and some checking when I got home backed my on-the-spot identification of it as a **Drinker Moth larva**. My caterpillar book says the eggs of this moth are laid on grass in August and after autumn feeding the caterpillars hibernate then feed more in Spring before pupating in June in a 'boat-shaped, yellowish-white cocoon' attached to a grass stem. Photos of the Caterpillar and the moth can be seen at

[http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Europe/United\\_Kingdom/England/Northumberland/Blyth/photo654894.htm](http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Europe/United_Kingdom/England/Northumberland/Blyth/photo654894.htm) and <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=5313>.

Nothing more seen today but in case you did not see Springwatch on TV last night it included something which really surprised me - **a detailed account of how a member of the BTO has been running a study of Blackbirds in the Norfolk village of Holt and purports to have shown that 73 different Blackbirds have been seen during a three hour watch on just one garden in the village at this time of year** (when one would expect to Blackbird population to be small and static, just local breeding birds with no migrants passing through). Slightly less surprising the ringer claims to have caught and ringed 450 different Blackbirds in the one garden (where he lives) during the past seven years and to have given each bird a unique combination of four rings (one being the standard BTO metal ring, the other three being coloured plastic rings - not sure how many colours are used). To see the evidence for this go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0461smq/springwatch-2014-episode-8> and scroll in for 10 minutes 48 seconds to the start of this story.

One more item that I think is well worth watching comes from the 'Unsprung' programme following Springwatch and shows **a large moth which is male on one side of its body and female on the other** resulting in different colours for each wing and different antennae types (as is normal in the two sexes of this species). To see this go to

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0461spb/springwatch-unsprung-2014-episode-8> and scroll in for 11 minutes 18 seconds.

Finally, after reading about Brian Fellows visit to Titchfield Haven yesterday, I was reminded of something that I read about as being seen at the Haven back in January 2007 but which I have not heard of since (though I expect it occurs there and elsewhere). This was an account of **Havest Mice nesting in the reeds and having to swim to get to and from dry land areas**. I think Harvest Mice are not rarities (though rarely seen) and that their nests have been found locally at Brook Meadow in Emsworth but I am interested to know if swimming is a skill which they can all practice if the habitat demands it. This thought was also spurred by another item in the Springwatch programme showing **a Badger deliberately swimming out to one of the islands** at the Minsmere RSPB reserve to eat gull eggs.

## Tue 3 June

### Brookweed and Sea Clover among plants flowering at Warblington Farm

Warm afternoon sunshine made a pleasant setting for a visit to a couple of 'wetland' sites on Warblington Farm. After securing my bike in the old cemetery I walked along the path towards Emsworth but as soon as I was past the end of the

cemetery I climbed the wooden fence into the marshy SSSI field running down to the shore between the central stream of the farm and the cemetery - this is not a field with public access but I have permission to visit dating from the 20 years over which I had access to the whole farm to carry out a bird survey.

Within a few yards I was into rushes and rough grass coming up above my knees and with anything but level ground (thanks to the cattle and the wet soil) hidden under the vegetation. Despite several times coming near to falling over I enjoyed the hundreds of flowering plants of **Ragged Robin** (at least three of them pure white) which appeared above the Rushes, and the many other plants lurking below the surface. The main species I was looking for was **Southern Marsh Orchid** of which I saw less than 50 (I can recall counts of up to 800 here) but I also came on several large patches of **Large Bittercress**, my first **Brooklime** and **Brookweed** flowers, with glimpses of **Tufted Forget-me-not** and the leaves of Creeping Jenny. At the seaward end, where the stream runs into a large reed-bed, the land rises and becomes short grass turf interspersed with many winding channels in which salt and fresh water intermingle - this is the habitat in which the **Brookweed** flourishes. On the short turf **Subterranean Clover** can be found among masses of **Sea Milkwort** and lots of **Celery-leaved Buttercup** - later Wild Celery will also flower here.

After making my wayback to the public path I headed for Nore Barn noting the presence of a **Reed Warbler** in the hedge running east along the south side of the large arable field newly planted with Sweetcorn (just east of the stream crossing) - another Reed Warbler was making its presence known in equally unlikely habitat at the west end of Nore Barn Wood. My objective was the extreme south east field of the farm in which the eastern stream gathers in a pond inside the seawall, flowing out into the Nore Barn channel when low tides open the flap in the 'pipe' under the seawall. My aim was to get to the inside of the seawall between it and the pond and here, as expected, I found plenty of **Sea Clover** in flower (if you don't spot its half dozen other clumps on this seawall you can't miss the metre-square patch growing on and around the concrete of the outlet 'pipe'). Sea Clover is not eye-catching as its flowers are small and white (much less obvious than normal White Clover) but when you do spot it you can confirm its identity by seeing that the flower heads stand well above the topmost pair of leaves on the stem. As a bonus, as I was leaving this end field, I found my first flowering plant of **Rough Chervil** at the foot of the hedge on my left.

**Mon 2 June**

### **A revenge visit to Northney Common with my secateurs is rewarded with Common Spotted Orchids**

A recent visit to Northney Common brought blood streaming down my face after an encounter with a tall Dog Rose bush whose hefty thorns caught me unexpectedly in the scalp as I was looking down to find a safe route along a muddy path above which the Rose was arching. Today I arrived at the site armed with secateurs to wreak my revenge on the rose but found that the path had recently been cleared of all danger - the secateurs still came in handy in for clearing another path from which dog walkers had recently been turned back by brambles. My thanks to the presumed conservation volunteers who had used bow saws to lay low the thorns which had wounded me and I hope my small contribution in cutting back brambles along the path out to the Marina entrance will be some help in their work in keeping the site open for public enjoyment!.



The first thing I noticed in North Common was that the leaves of Goats Rue were now standing tall in the grass west of the entrance path though there was no sign of flowers yet. Turning off the main path to visit the area behind the houses and the 'Owl box' my best find was wild **Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*)** already showing the yellow colour of its opening flowers among the huge mass of Pepper Saxifrage leaves. Also prominent here were some tall, yellow-flowered cultivated Iris plants (not our smaller wild Yellow Flag) which seem to be the same as those on the outer sea wall of the old Holiday Camp boating lake.

I had now come to the end of the mown paths in the area behind the houses but decided to continue through the lush undergrowth in the hope of reaching the path along the southern end of the marina basin (which I did) and almost immediately I discovered a very healthy **Common Spotted Orchid** flowering hidden in the 'weeds'. After getting back to the main path I turned north along the path to the Marina entrance channel and this is where I started cutting brambles but also began to hear regular calls from a **Cuckoo** somewhere near the Northney Farm while out over Swear Deep, once I got through to the sea wall, I heard and watched at least two **Little Terns** fishing. Also on that northern sea wall were lots more of the tall, yellow-flowered, cultivated **Iris plants** together with a lot of **Russian Comfrey** and a single **Bee Orchid**. Along the path out to this area I found my first **Great Bindweed** flowers of the year and back by the main track I found a mass of Cranesbill 'bushes' with very small flowers of the right colour for Small-flowered Cranesbill and my hand lens showed no long hairs on the flower pedicels showing that despite the size of the 'bushes' these were **Small-flowered Cranesbill**.

Two more plant finds on the way home were first, in the roadside ditch on the left when approaching the Langstone Hotel from Northney, plants of **Sea Aster** were flowering surprisingly early. My second find came after passing the hotel and was the first **Sea Lavender** which I have seen in flower.

Passing Langstone pond I could see an adult Heron in the 'top nest' in the Holm Oak tree but no juveniles in the lower nest in which the three large juveniles are usually standing. This left me thinking that maybe they had flown at last but as I was going up Wade Court Road I met Peter Raby who had spent some time at the pond with his telescope and camera and was able to tell me that not only were the **three large Heron juveniles still in the nest** but that there were (I think) **four small juveniles in the upper nest** but also at least **one youngster in a third nest** which is much more difficult to see.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 26 - JUNE 1 (WEEK 22 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 1 June**

#### **Grass Vetchling, Bee and Pyramidal Orchids at Broadmarsh and the first Bristly Ox-tongue flowers**

Having read of other peoples recent finds of **Bee, Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted Orchids**, and of **Grass Vetchling** back on May 17, I set out to find these for myself this morning. The most likely place to find them was Broadmarsh and I was successful in finding all except Common Spotted Orchids there but I made up for that with the first flowers on **Bristly Ox-tongue**. Also flowering today were Yellow-wort, Creeping and Spear Thistles which have all been seen previously but



have not yet started regular daily flowering. Among the more interesting plant finds by other people this week was **Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*)** on Milton Common in Southsea on May 28 and **Early Gentian** on Portsdown (above Paulsgrove Chalk Pit) on May 26 - neither was a new site for these rare plants .

Among bird reports from others I noticed a sighting of **16 Red Kites** drifting east over Eastbourne yesterday and another sighting of **14 Kites** going west over Horsham a couple of hours earlier (so probably two different groups). Maybe these were migrants from the continent? Another sighting that caught my attention came from the farmland west of Titchfield Haven where Tony Tindale saw a tractor ploughing a field in which a Lapwing was sitting on its nest. In 'the good old days' I remember hearing how a ploughman would frequently move the eggs of a Lapwing when they were in the path of the plough (and the Lapwing would adapt to the move and resume sitting on the eggs in their new location). Tony does not tell us what happened as the plough got closer to the nest and I wondered if there was more on this story on the **Three Amigos blog** but so far no further news - however I did discover that **the blog has just moved to a new host site** and for those who follow the birding adventures of these three they should switch their bookmark to the new address - see <http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/amigo2/>. The first entry on this site has a current photo in which you can see all three 'amigos' (Tony Tindale, Mark Cutts and Steve Copsey). The new site also has a link back to the old site where you can see all their previous postings

Another of my bookmarks which I have just had to change is for **Hampshire Butterfly News** which is now to be found in a revised and improved format at <http://hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/news.php>

**Sat 31 May**

### **Male Common Tern fails to seduce a female at Thorney Deeps**

A cycle ride to Nutbourne via the Thorney Deeps and back via Westbourne this morning gave me a good list of finds after which I found the heads of both male and female Stag Beetles, their bodies taken to feed Magpies, on my lawn.

The first interest on my morning ride came at the Thorney Little Deeps where I heard my first **Cuckoo** for the year. Down at the Great Deeps I found a Swan sitting on a nest on the small island close to the gate in the military fence with her mate on the Deeps nearby but far more interesting was the **behaviour of a pair of Common Terns** to which I was attracted by the persistent calls of the female from her perch on a post in the water. Close by, what must have been the male of the pair was flying round and diving to catch fish. I soon saw him come up with a sizeable fish about as long as his beak in which he carried the fish to the female and gave it to her. She swallowed the offering and the male returned to fishing while she continued her calling. In a short time I saw the male catch three more fish and give them to her. When he caught a fourth fish he did not take it to her directly but flew to a patch of level shore and made it clear that he wanted her to come and get her fish from a place where he had a much better chance of mating with her than on the post which had room for one bird only. She refused to respond so he ate the fish himself and then flew off in disgust at her lack of co-operation.

I now cycled back north to the NRA track where there was much **Cetti's Warbler** song. As I manoeuvred my bike through the narrow entrance to the track Barry Collins arrived on his bike and pointed out that in addition to the loud song from two parent birds there was also a lot of 'ticking' coming from juvenile Cetti's nearby. Barry also told me he had recently been birding in China at a location near Beijing where he had seen around **200 Yellow-browed Warblers** and a **Siberian Ruby-throat** (see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi1wVPnFq\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi1wVPnFq_g)) among many other good birds which made the trip a highlight of his birding life.

While on Thorney Island I added **Corky-fruited Water Dropwort**, **Hop Trefoil** and **Greater Sea-Spurrey** to my wildflower year list and enjoyed Meadow Pipit song. The Prinsted seafront gave me my first **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** of the year and possibly my first **Painted Lady** though it did not stop for positive identification. Somewhere in this area I also spotted a **Corn Cockerle** in flower.

Heading home from Nutbourne Bay through Southbourne I watched a **House Martin** circling houses north of the railway as if it were nesting there though I did not see a nest or more than one bird! From Westbourne I rode south down Westbourne Avenue in Emsworth and then west along the Havant Road bringing me back to the A27 Underpass where I stopped to add three more flowers to my year list - **Creeping Cinquefoil**, **Field Woundwort** and the **Clustered Clover** for which this appears to be the only site in south-east Hampshire - when I first found it here a good many years ago there were only one or two plants but today it was the dominant species over quite a large area of poor and shallow soil above the tarmac of the old South Coast Trunk Road.

After a rest and some lunch I went into my garden to mow the lawn before the rain forecast for next week, and the grass gave me two more items of interest. The first was the dark, conical shape of a **Blackening Waxcap fungus**, the second was the gruesome sight of the **bodiless heads of a male and female Stag Beetle**. I can make a good guess as to how these beetles came to lose their bodies as Magpies are regular visitors to my lawn at this time of year searching for food for young in their nest and some years ago I watched one catch a Stag Beetle, kill it, and fly off with the body leaving the inedible head on on the lawn. In that case and today the muscles in the head continued to function for hours after loss of the body causing both the 'antlers' and the antennae to move, albeit slowly. A photo of the heads can be seen at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x452-stag-beetle-heads-RH-31.05.14.jpg>.

**Thu 29 May**

### **250 Southern Marsh Orchids flowering on Langstone South Moors**

A walk to Budds Farm via the South Moors and back via Langstone Mill Pond this morning added ten flowering plant species to my personal year list and discovered that the **Langstone Swan family still have five cygnets** in the Langbrook stream. The warm but cloudy weather allowed me to see several flying insects, including my first **Common Blue butterfly**, resting on plants rather than flying.

My principal objective was to see how the **Southern Marsh Orchids** were faring on the South Moors and a single circuit of the 'Orchid Field' found 244 of them flowering, many of them with most of their flowers now open - it looks as if the annual count of them by the Havant Wildlife Group on June 21 should record a good total undiminished by the flooding of the area by the sea in January. A good omen was my find of **one orchid flowering outside the 'field'**, near the cattle entrance to the southern part of the Moors south of the public path from Mill Lane to Southmoor Lane.

While still in Havant I found my first flowers on **Weld, Hoary Willowherb**, and the now omnipresent **Himalyan Giant Brambles** with **Water Figwort** flowering in the Langbrook Stream just south of the A27. In the South Moors area I found my first **Tufted Forget-me-not** in flower along with **Large Bittercress, Lesser Trefoil, Smooth Tare, Marsh and Slender Thistle** while the sea wall added **Sea Beet** to the list. Not yet in flower lots of Meadowsweet was in bud and two flowering garden plants (Woodruff and Solomons Seal) indicated that wild versions of both could probably be found in local woodland habitat.

On the South Moors the expected **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Cetti's Warbler** were singing and I had close views of an **adult Fox**, while down near the sea wall at least one **Meadow Pipit** was present and a large flock of recently fledged **Starlings** were feeding with a **Skylark** singing overhead. At the Budds Farm Pools a good number of **House Martins** were feeding on flying insects with several Swallows and at least one Swift. A **pair of Shelduck** were seen, presumably not currently nesting, but the Swan family were not seen though one adult was present. The only unexpected species there was a British race **Lesser Blackback Gull**. Over at Langstone Pond some juvenile Herons were still in their nest and I am pretty sure that I saw two juvenile Egrets in one nest already clothed in white feathers. On the pond one **Tufted Duck pair** was present and the pony fields north of Wade Court had a pair of adult Song Thrushes searching for worms.

**Mon 26 May**

### **European Bee-eaters**

Since May 16 I have seen eight reports of **Bee Eaters** in southern England and I have the impression that sightings of this species are becoming more frequent. After checking up on the available information my tentative conclusion is that there is no reason to expect Bee-eaters to move into Britain in the same way that Little Egrets have done and that the increase in reports is mainly a function of an increase in the use of the internet to report sightings of a species that has always been adventurous, roaming a huge part of the world, regularly breeding throughout Europe (even as far north as Sweden and Finland) before flying south to the Equator and beyond in the winter. Some things that I did not know about these birds are that they occasionally practice polygamy and regularly have a team of juvenile helpers to assist with raising their young, also that (in addition to bashing the heads of insects they have caught against a branch to kill them) they 'wipe the bottoms of their prey against the branch to provoke them into stinging the branch' to get rid of poison before eating the insect. Two good sources of information are

<http://www.arkive.org/european-bee-eater/merops-apiaster/> and  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bee-eaters\\_in\\_Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bee-eaters_in_Britain)

To give some idea of the frequency with which they are seen in England here is a rather boring and certainly incomplete list of sightings that I am aware of. On May 16 there was a party of 9 in the Scillies with at least one more in Cornwall; a single was at Dungeness on May 17; a party of them flew over the Pulborough Brooks area on May 18 when one was seen and heard at Acres Down in the New Forest; another single was at Dungeness on May 19 and 5 were in the Beachy Head area on May 20. Checking Hampshire records I see that when the Birds of Hampshire was published in 1993 there were only two county records - one in August 1979 and one in August 1981 - while a search of HOS records from January 2000 to the present gives just three more - one going north over Hayling Island in May 2012, one over Titchfield Haven in July 2012 and one at Marchwood on Southampton Water in May 2013. Sussex also had at least two at Shoreham in June 2005 and they can still be seen at

<http://www.sos.org.uk/images/stories/SxBR2005/2005-09.jpg>. Also in Sussex one was at Seaford in Aug 2013 after one had been seen at Church Norton in May 2013 (Photo at

[http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com\\_jobline4/logo/050-\(3\).jpg](http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com_jobline4/logo/050-(3).jpg) ).

In June 2012 one was seen on the Downs north of Newhaven (where it caught a Bee above a field of poppies) while a week earlier a group of five were seen from a garden north of Bexhill and maybe the same five were near Tunbridge Wells next day. Another 11 Sussex sightings are listed going back to April 2011 (5 older records go back to one at Eastbourne in June 1875)

Sussex butterfly enthusiasts are currently celebrating the addition of a new species to the list of those that can be regarded as resident in the county after a batch of continental **Swallowtails** (as distinct from the sub-species *Papilio machaon britannicus* which is resident in the Norfolk Fens) have emerged (from eggs laid last summer by migrants from the continent) after surviving the winter in Sussex. The degree of their enthusiasm can be gauged by the banner celebrating this event which you can see at

[http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/Swallowtail\\_Banner.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/Swallowtail_Banner.jpg). So far five adult butterflies have been seen and the time table of their sightings, as recorded on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website is as follows:-

On May 18 the first announcement read ... "Last year's great summer weather encouraged Continental Swallowtails to cross The Channel and visit Sussex. Sussex Butterfly Conservation asked the people of Sussex to look out for these distinctive caterpillars in their gardens. We were amazed to discover that Swallowtails had laid eggs on carrots and fennel and their caterpillars (the first reported in the county since the 1940's) were munching away in gardens and allotments. With the kind co-operation of the gardeners we were able to track the caterpillar's progress and tracked them as they pupated in their chosen habitats - an unprecedented opportunity. We've monitored 13 pupae at sites across the county for the past 9 months. This weekend we were privileged to witness the first of these Swallowtails emerging - a truly magnificent sight as they took to the Sussex skies. Could this be the first step in the colonisation of Sussex by Continental Swallowtails? There must be many more pupae out there that we don't

know about so keep your eyes peeled over the coming weeks and let us know if you see any of these beautiful butterflies in Sussex."

On May 19 we were told ... "Two more Swallowtails reported in Sussex. The first at Peacehaven and the second, a female, up on Chanctonbury Ring and seen heading east. Our observations over the winter has proved that Continental Swallowtails can survive in Southern England so there may be many more emerging over the next few weeks in both the countryside and urban areas."

On May 21 we read ... "A fourth Sussex Swallowtail is on the loose. This individual was one which we were monitoring at its chosen site in one of the private gardens which was lucky enough to be visited by egg laying females in 2013."

On May 23 ... "A fifth Sussex Swallowtail has emerged. Number 5 was originally found as a caterpillar in a garden near Eastbourne last August. However, it had been taken indoors for some time where it pupated and we feared that this warm and dry environment could have dessicated the pupae. It was moved back outdoors (in a kid's mesh butterfly cage) where the chrysalis enjoyed the lovely British winter. Yesterday we were thrilled to discover it had made it through OK!"

No more Swallowtail reports so far but I see that yesterday brought the first Sussex sighting of a **Large Skipper** for this year at Isfield (by the Sussex Ouse just upstream of Lewes) - nationally one had been seen in Devon on May 17.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 19 - 25 (WEEK 21 OF 2014)**

### Wed 21 May

#### Recent local news

I find that a couple of newly flowering plants seen in the Hayling Oyster Beds area a week ago (on May 15) have not been mentioned in my notes, nor by anyone else that I am aware of, so I will put that right now. Perhaps most important of these was the **Dames Violet (*Hesperis matronalis*)** growing at the foot of the north end of the 'earth mound' which overlooks the nesting islands in the lagoon. As these plants grow in an area most people visiting the area are unlikely to see, and where the cluster of perhaps 20 plants to be seen a few years ago has been reduced to just one by encroaching bramble growth, I hope that mentioning the presence of this species will attract some conservation effort to a reduction of the brambles so that we can continue to see these impressive and uncommon plants in future years. To see what this plant looks like go to

<http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/D/DamesViolet/DamesViolet.htm> and scroll down through several photos but be aware that the flowers can be either violet or white and the only specimen I could see this year was white. To find it go to the bench at the highest point of the 'earth mound' and then walk as directly as possible towards the Billy Line without entering the trees, but keeping close to them - you should see the white flowers sticking up through the brambles as you reach the bottom of the fairly steep slope down the mound.

From the Oysterbeds I rode on south until near the south end of the narrow channel which is the southern extension of the bay used by windsurfers and other visitors who park by it. Here, before reaching the shingle beach, I found my first **Pale Flax** in flower in better numbers than usual. Turning back north I found my first **Common Comfrey** flowering on the seaward side of the rail track not far north of the carpark.



Should anyone think of going to look for these plants be aware that you will not be able to use the normal route from Langstone Bridge via the shore of 'Texaco Bay' to the Oysterbeds from May 19 until June 9 at the earliest - see <http://www.havant.gov.uk/cycle-paths-and-cycleways/hayling-billy-trail>.

Today's news is that the **Sweetbriar Roses** are now flowering at the southern end of the carpark below the Havant Arts Centre (west side of the old council car park nearest Grove Road). My normal way of identifying Sweetbriar is, when I see some particular bright pink wild roses, to pick and crush some leaves - if they smell of Apple then I take the rose to be Sweetbriar but today I used my hand lens to check more of the diagnostic features. First (no need for a lens) was to check the thorns on the stems leading to the flowers - where other wild roses have quite a lot of hefty thorns (either hooked or straight) the Sweetbriar is said to have thorns of varying size down to the small hairlike versions which are called 'acicles'. On the plants I examined today the most noticeable thing was the small number of widely spaced thorns. Another diagnostic is that where the other Roses can have a lot of hairs on the underside of their leaves Sweetbriars only have hairs on the midrib of the leaf underside.

Turning east of the Billy Trail to go past the Lymbourne Triangle conservation area, I came on my first **Hedge Woundwort** with a full flowerhead of still unopen buds but my objective was to look at a tree in North Close road (off Wade Court Road). Taking the side path which connects the path I was on to North Close I turned left as I came out into North Close and crossed that road to the hedge of the house on the bend to look at a mature tree with multiple semi-erect trunks and with long (10 cm) seed pods dangling from where last years flowers had been. My interest in it was that I have long thought this was a '**Judas Tree**' (on account of these pods and its general features) but I see that the name Judas Tree is also given to the '**Eastern Redbud**' trees which I mentioned at the end of my May 19 diary entry. As there are no such seed pods on the two specimens mentioned there (in Havant Park and in my neighbour's garden) I am currently trying to work out if the difference between this old mature tree in North Close and the apparently much younger specimens found earlier is purely one of age or if they are different species of the Cercis genus.

When out on the walk described above I met a neighbour who had been walking his dog past Langstone Pond and who told me that he had seen what he took to be a family group of birds walking over the now disused Swan nest. He described the birds as being dark plumaged with no markings that he noticed except for their bills which he said (in the case of what he took to be the parent) were long, red and curved - the younger birds had similar bills but smaller and without the red colour. I hope there are other sightings with better descriptions as **these birds could be a family group of Water Rails** (there have been previous sightings of a Water Rail in this area in the past two or three months).

**[Mon 19 May](#)**

**[My monthly cemetery wildlife updates are now available \(including evidence of witchcraft in Havant\)](#)**

Before getting round to the possibility of witchcraft being practiced at Havant rail station here are my personal sightings for the last two days. Yesterday an evening

cycle ride to the Broadmarsh area gave me my first **White Clover**, **Black Knapweed** and **Common Figwort** flowers for the year and today **two Swifts** flew over my garden on their ceaseless journey which may take them several hundred kilometres each day even when nesting. A more interesting find in my garden (actually on a window sill exposed to the full heat of the sun) was a small, colourful and slightly hairy caterpillar which fits the image of a **Lackey Moth caterpillar** which you can see at <http://ukmoths.org.uk/show.php?id=2893>. My caterpillar matched the colour pattern in the web photo but was just under 20mm long (the mature specimen shown would be around 45mm but my example will have hatched in April and will not be full sized until late June when it pupates). What intrigues me about this find is that it should be part of a colony based in a silk tent (like that of the Brown-tail moth) in perhaps a Hawthorn tree with evidence of their foraging around it. So how did this lone specimen arrive on my window sill? My best guess is that it was brought here unintentionally by one of the builders currently re-roofing my house - it might have got onto his clothes before he arrived here, then fallen off while he was on the scaffolding above the window.

For the last few days I have been busy preparing my **monthly reports on wildlife in the Havant and Warblington cemeteries plus St Faith's churchyard** in central Havant and you can see these by going to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and selecting links to the May 14 entries for each of the three sites. The Warblington report has little of general interest until you come to the last two photos of graves, the first being that of an "acclaimed nature writer" called F H Atkins (but writing as F St Mars) who died in 1921 but one at least of his books ('The Way of the Wild') can still be downloaded from the internet. The Havant report also has little of interest but when walking from that cemetery to St Faith's Church by way of Havant Rail station and Havant Park I passed two things which I have recorded at the end of the St Faith's churchyard report to which you can go directly by <http://ralph-hollins.net/SFCEM.htm#F1405>. The first is **a large umbellifer growing in a small flowerbed within the Rail station**. I did not recognize the plant but found a close match for it in **Masterwort (Pseucedanum ostruthium)** which does not occur as a wild plant in Hampshire but is cultivated and its seeds can be bought on the internet where I found this page advertising them for purposes of witchcraft - see [http://www.alchemy-works.com/peucedanum\\_ostruthium.html](http://www.alchemy-works.com/peucedanum_ostruthium.html). Now you may not associate Havant rail station with being a temple of witchcraft but over the last few years this same flowerbed has grown plants of **Thorn Apple (Datura stramonium)** which is also associated with the magic arts and is thought to be the origin of the plant which appears in the Harry Potter books under the name of 'Devil's Snare'. The Wikipedia entry for Datura stramonium includes .. "It is also a powerful hallucinogen and deliriant, which is used spiritually for the intense visions it produces. However, the tropane alkaloids which are responsible for both the medicinal and hallucinogenic properties are fatally toxic in only slightly higher amounts than the medicinal dosage, and careless use often results in hospitalizations and deaths." So, with evidence of magic practices extending back over several years, maybe we should be worried about what goes on in this railway station after midnight.

The second unusual find was made in Havant Park and is, I believe, a flowering tree which I have not come across before called **Eastern Redbud (Cercis**

canadensis) which I subsequently found to be growing in a neighbour's garden. My photos of this are also in the St Faith's churchyard report.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 12 - 18 (WEEK 20 OF 2014)

### Tue 13 May

#### Three more first flowers and a Goldcrest

A brief walk this morning took me to Havant Cemetery but before I got there I saw my first **Foxglove** in flower in a New Lane garden. In the cemetery the Council had cleared the regular paths in both the St Faith's and Dissenters section (plus an overall mowing of the Borough cemetery area) - this selective mowing allowed me to find two more 'first flowers' for the year - **Lesser Stitchwort** and the white flowered **Hairy Tare**. Also here a few plants of **Yellow Rattle** were starting to flower. While I was in the St Faith's section I also heard snatches of **Goldcrest song** coming from one of the Yew trees and was able to get views of this tiny bird as it worked it's way round the branches. In the past I have found Goldcrest nests in Yew trees at Warblington Church (and seen the result of Magpies finding a nest there and pulling it to pieces) but I have never seen these birds in Havant cemetery and could see no sign of a nest - the regular snatches of song coming from the bird suggested that it might still be seeking a mate - its breeding season is recorded as April to June so it is not too late!

On my way home I found two more newly flowering plants - **Goatsbeard** and Salsify (the first of these being my first for the year)

On Sunday I ended by saying I would include some recent bird news in my next entry, but failed to do so yesterday, so I will add a few comments here starting with **Turtle Doves** of which there have been very few reports this spring but to prove they are not yet extinct there was a photo of a pair together on a Sussex garden bird table which you can see at

[http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com\\_jobline4/logo/280414-1-sussex-orni.jpg](http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com_jobline4/logo/280414-1-sussex-orni.jpg). This was taken on Apr 28 and since then I have only seen six reports for the birds, all of singles other than one of a pair in Sussex on May 9 and another of 4 birds at Martin Down in Hampshire on May 11. Luckily the majority of these reports have been dated since May 8 so there is plenty of time for a better picture to emerge. The same is true of **Nightjar** which have so far only been reported at three Hampshire sites, all in the New Forest and all since May 4. None have been reported yet in Sussex. Both **Swifts** and **Cuckoos** seem to be present in good numbers but **Spotted Flycatcher** reports are still worryingly low with just 9 reports so far in Hampshire, the first being in the Itchen Valley on May 6 - Peter Gammage gave us some encouragement by seeing 6 of them on Hayling Island all on May 10. Sussex has had six reports with the first at Newhaven on May 7 and the highest count being 10 on the Manhood peninsula (Selsey Blog area) on May 10. Portland has had the highest numbers with a total of 66 present on May 10.

### Mon 12 May

#### Lots of interest in a walk to Budds Farm including my first Wild Rose in flower

This morning I set out to walk to Budds Farm with two objectives in mind - the first was to check out the Langbrook stream for the Water Voles which have been seen by others and the second was to see if any of the South Moors Marsh Orchids were showing signs of flowering following Brian Fellows find at Fishbourne on May 9 (see his photo at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x471-s-marsh-orchid-fishb-09.05.14.jpg>) but my walk gave me a great deal more interest than just the answers to these two questions.

My first bonus came before I was anywhere near the Langbrook. I was in The Twittens road running between East and South Streets and was passing the small private carpark on the south side of the road when I saw a bold splash of yellow flowers coming from a Grove Road garden whose wall backs onto this carpark. I have seen this colour before and last year found out what the plant was called - **Fremontodenron californicum** or the **California Flannel Bush**. To see what this plant looks like go to <http://www.malvaceae.info/Genera/Fremontodendreae/Fremontodendreae.php> and to read about the American General and Plant Hunter after whom it is named go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_C.\\_Fr%C3%A9mont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Fr%C3%A9mont).

Next stop was in Solent Road close to Tesco's on the bridge over the Langbrook Stream. Looking down into the stream a movement made me aware that I was already looking at a **Water Vole** which rapidly made off down stream into cover. If, like me, you are not familiar with signs of the presence of Water Voles the BBC has got Chris Packham to show us what to look for in a video at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European\\_Water\\_Vole#p01f9kzw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European_Water_Vole#p01f9kzw) which is well worth watching.

As I moved off to walk down the streamside path to the Water Wheel I was again stopped in my tracks as I turned from the bridge onto the path. Here, on the relatively bare bank of the stream abutting the bridge, were half a dozen or more plants of **Round-leaved Cranesbill** which is listed as Rare in the Hants Flora and which, until I found it in St Faith's Churchyard as recently as May 1, I had only seen on south Hayling.

Reaching the barrier at the southern end of this path section I heard a sharp bird call coming from the stream and looked down to see a **Grey Wagtail** fly off downstream past the Water Wheel and then saw a second Grey Wagtail fly off into the sidestream running through the grounds of the office block towards the Homewell Spring. This second Wagtail did not go far but seemed to be searching for food along the stream and this, coupled with the presence of two birds, suggested they must be nesting and probably had young needing food - the fast running stream and the presence of bridges make an ideal breeding site for them.

I did not stop again until some way down stream where it passes the houses of Brookmead Way (off Langbrook Close) and the attraction here were newly flowering **Comfrey plants**, though the pale blue flowers (see <http://pics.davesgarden.com/pics/2004/04/27/branka/07e075.jpg>) told me they were the Hidecote Blue garden variety. Coming out onto the South Moor I was greeted by another 'first for the year' but this time a genuine wild flower **Silverweed**.

Now came the time to check for the presence of **Southern Marsh Orchids** among the dense ground vegetation of the Orchid Field which makes it impossible to cover the whole area. I limited my search to a single circular path around the more likely areas of slightly higher ground where the orchid bulbs would have been subject to a less prolonged immersion in water (including a period when sea water covered them before the more recent heavy rain) and found minimal 'signs of life' - three flowering 'Ragged Robin' plants in flower and about a dozen Marsh Orchid plants with leaves only with at most three or four showing some signs of developing a flower spike though none with any hint of flower buds. A different sign of life here was the regular song of a Lesser Whitethroat with occasional bursts from a Cetti's Warbler. Also seen here were a few *Bolbitius vitellinus* (Yellow Cowpat Toadstools).

Leaving the South Moors and reaching the metal height barrier at the south end of Southmoor Lane a Fox emerged from the dense hedge on my left as if coming to greet me, then changed its mind, turned tail and disappeared. Turning my attention back to the road uphill to the viewing point for Budds Farm Pools I glanced at the vegetation to my right and saw the gem of the day - a single **Dog Rose flower** fully open and in perfect condition - despite being conscious that they should be showing by now I have not seen even a single wild rose bud anywhere else. From the view point I had another surprise - **the mother Swan who has been nesting here had a healthy brood of six cygnets out on the water with her**. Another surprise was in the grass at the entrance to the viewing point and was what looked to be a pure **blue flowered Dove's Foot Cranesbill** - so far I have had no luck in finding any confirmation that this is possible or in finding a similar species which does have blue flowers.

Walking back along the shore to Langstone (past the Japanese Rosebush growing just inside the seawall which is now covered with some 50 roses) yet another surprise in the Langbrook Stream at the end of Mill Lane. There on the water were what I think must have been the **Swan family (now with only six cygnets)** from Langstone Mill Pond - for many years it was the family's regular practice to leave the pond and come here almost as soon as they hatched, and as there was no sign of them on the pond when I got there I think it very likely that they have resumed the practice and are benefitting from it at least as far as the supply of weed for the cygnets is concerned. The disadvantage is that when the tide is low they have to move downstream into the harbour.

Just three more observations on the way home. First at the pond the **Hérons** seemed to be still in residence though I could only see two adults near the nests. Second, in the pony fields north of Wade Court I had a good view of an **adult Mistle Thrush collecting worms** brought to the surface by recent rain and helping to confirm that the Mistle Thrush which has been occasionally seen in this area in recent months has succeeded in raising a family. Third, the **Russian Comfrey** growing by the Billy Trail near the bypass is now in flower.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAY 5 - 11 (WEEK 19 OF 2014)**

**Sun 11 May**

### **Roundup of recent news**



In my last entry (May 7) I said I was unable to name some tiny plants growing on top of the wall of the East Pallant carpark and had asked for help from Martin Rand (south Hants BSBI recorder) who said my photos were inadequate for a confident id but suggested that they might be of **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** which grows in abundance in the car park. Returning for a second look it was clear that he was right and that I had been put off by the minimal form of these plants whose only nutriment came from bricks.

I still have two other puzzle plants in Havant. I came on one when walking through Havant Park on the eastern side path passing the Tennis Courts. Here, below the massive old Plane Trees, a relatively tiny tree was covered in bright purple/mauve blossom which is almost certainly that of the **Eastern Redbud tree (Cercis canadensis)** which you can see at

<http://www.arkive.org/eastern-redbud/cercis-canadensis/image-G117557.html>.

This link takes you to a photo of the distinctively shaped and coloured flowers which grow in clusters similar to those of Cherries. To enlarge the photo of the leaves just click on it and for further info search the webpage. I think that puzzle is solved but the second is still outstanding and I would welcome any help in resolving it. The puzzle plant is a large umbellifer growing in Havant Rail Station only a short distance from the Redbud tree (go to the exit from Havant Park and into the Station forecourt then continue past the motorbike parking shed on your left and stop just beyond it where you see a small flowerbed behind the metal railings (immediately west of the end of the station building). In recent years this flowerbed has grown several of the poisonous Thorn Apple plants (*Datura stramonium*) but this time my interest is in a big umbellifer of which there are nine separate plants at different stages of development. Those nearest maturity stand well over 1 metre tall, have large (more than 10 cm across at maturity) umbels with unopen white flowers, and very distinctive doubly ternate leaves (see illustration at <http://www.pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Peucedanum+ostruthium> ). One area in which these plants differ from the description in Stace and other Floras is in the bracts and bracteole of the flower umbels - Stace says there are none (or very few) of these but on the most mature of these plants I could see that there was at least one bracteole below some of the terminal umbels while from the base of the main umbel a dense array of long thread-like bracts (some seemingly forked at their ends) emerged as is found in Wild Carrot umbels. So while almost everything suggests these are **Masterwort (Peucedanum ostruthium)** plants they may be something entirely different. None of the three *Peucedanum* species are recorded in the Hants Flora as being found in Hampshire but *P. officinale* is mentioned as being found in Kent and *P. palustre* in Sussex and I think cultivated versions are available to gardeners. A further puzzle is why this tiny flowerbed acts as home to such unusual plants - for those aware of the 'Portchester Postman' accused of introducing Field Cow-Wheat to Portsdown Hill from the Isle of Wight I am wondering if there is a similar individual working under the pseudonym of the 'Havant Station Porter'?

Other **plants in the news** this week are ...

Sainfoin: flowering at Durlston on May 7

Pale Flax: flowering at Durlston on May 9

Yellow-wort: flowering at Durlston on May 5

Yellow Rattle: flowering at Durlston and elsewhere on May 6

Adder's Tongue Fern: flowering at Durlston on May 6

Bush Vetch: flowering at Emsworth (Lumley) on May 7

Ragged Robin: flowering at Emsworth on May 8

Moschatel: flowering at Woods Mill(Sussex) on May 8

Among the Insect news to catch my attention was a report of the first **Cinnabar Moth** of the year on Butser Hill on May 6 and a photo of a **Puss Moth** which can be seen at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/storage/Puss%20Moth%20Rye%206.5.14.jpg>.

**Newly emerged butterflies** have been

Adonis Blue: first seen in Dorset on May 4 and in Sussex on May 5

Common Blue: first seen in Sussex on May 2 (one had been reported in Dorset on Apr 11)

Pearl Bordered Fritillary: General emergence in Sussex at Rewell Woods on May 3 after an early report on Apr 16

While still on the subject of Insects it seems that the first **Cockchafers** have been emerging starting with a report of them in Alresford on May 5 followed by sightings in Emsworth on May 6. While these May Bugs are large and impressive I was more impressed by a photo of a **Rhombic Leatherbug** which you can see at

<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-oqEJTNLPC9M/U2UWP5MMwTI/AAAAAAAAEjM/HiKdkXiOcel/s1600/DSCN3467.JPG>. This was taken by Graeme Lyons at Climping on

the Sussex Coast near Littlehampton and if you read his blog entry at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/rhombic-leatherbug.html> you can also see a cute little jumping spider he found in the sand dunes. If

you are still interested go to his complete blog at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/> and you will see that he has now seen 5057 species and that his latest finds include this fairly common fly

(**Rhingia campestris**) and a much less attractive spider called **Xysticus audax**.

I have no time today to do justice to the recent bird news but will give you a hint of the major up channel passage which took place this week, plus an insight into the dedication of some birders to their 'calling', by pointing you to the blog of Ewan Urquhart who you may already know of from his past contributions to the SOS website giving the results of his regular WeBS counts at West Wittering or from his popular book on Stonechats. I now know a lot more about him from his blog and in particular admire his endurance in completing a 15 hour non-stop seawatch at Splash Point near Seaford on Sunday May 4th - read all about it at

<http://blackaudibirding.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/pom-my-soul-5th-may-2014.html>

and don't stop until the end where there is a complete list of what he saw.

I hope to bring you more bird news tomorrow!

### [Wed 7 May](#)

#### **Eastern Rocket new for Havant (?) plus my first flowering Willowherb (and all seven Cygnets flourishing at Langstone).**

Yesterday Brian Fellows found a **white flowered wild Geranium** (probably Dove's Foot Cranesbill) on Thorney Island and this encouraged me to walk round to Havant Bus Station where for several consecutive years several white flowered Geranium plants have appeared on a tiny scrap of waste land where the plants are

nourished by the exhaust fumes of parked buses. Sure enough these flowers were there today (at the back of the station in its south west corner) but the real surprise of the day came as I turned into the Bus Station, coming from the main road and turning in where the buses come out. Here several plants of **Eastern Rocket** (*Sysymbrium orientale*) were well grown and had the distinctive leaves and seed pods, plus some fresh flowers, to make me confident in the id - this is, as far as I am aware, a new species for Havant Town (I have only seen it near the Ferry Inn on south Hayling).

On my way home I collected a specimen of some tiny plants growing on top of the wall separating the East Pallant road from the public carpark but found I could not name them and so have sent them to Martin Rand, the South Hants BSBI Plant Recorder with a plea for help. This was not the end of my botanic excitement for the day as I later found my **first flowering Willowherb of the year** - as might be expected it was Broad-leaved Willowherb but by co-incidence it had pure white flowers.

I also visited Langstone pond and found **all seven cygnets with their parents**, feeding avidly on weed on the far side of the pond from the seawall. While there I checked the Grey Herons and saw at least two well grown young in their usual nest with two adults positioned in separate places nearby - and later saw a third adult in the pony field north of the pond, so maybe there are two active nesting pairs with an unknown number of young.

### Mon 5 May

#### **Large slug on town pavement, my first Swifts over Budds Farm and all seven Langstone cygnets feeding within arms length of an appreciative audience.**

A walk through Havant town to Budds Farm and back via Langstone Pond gave me plenty of Bank Holiday entertainment with an unexpected start on the pavement close to Waitrose. On the Pallant pavement below the window of what used to be Tallullahs store I only just avoided treading on a live slug making its way across the pavement stretched out to a length of 8 or 10 cm and fairly well camouflaged with a mottled grey-white pattern. I'm pretty sure it was a **Yellow Slug** (*Limax flavus*) which you can see at [http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow\\_slug.jpg](http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/178/456/yellow_slug.jpg) on a web site created by Defra to help name slugs of significance to farmers and gardeners (<http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/adlib/defra/content.aspx?id=178456>) but it is by no means comprehensive and I see it does not mention the **Spanish Slug** which was in the press last year as being about to destroy the work of every British gardener (read about that at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/9791458/Millions-of-killer-slugs-set-to-take-over-gardens.html>). Going back to my sighting I see that *Limax flavus* is mostly associated with houses and gardens - being known to venture indoors, especially cellars, after dark. I suppose that gives some credibility to its presence near the old buildings in central Havant!

Reaching Park Road South I found the first **Burnet Roses** flowering in the hedge immediately north of the wavy white railings above the old Town Mill Pond where I paused as usual to look for Water Voles - nothing seen today but yesterday I noticed Vole sized circular holes in the thick grass at the water's edge, presumably made as a Vole pushes its way through the vegetation. As I continued to walk down

the Langbrook stream I met someone, Adele Mallows, with a dedicated interest (and more patience than I have!) in locating Water Voles along the Langbrook Stream and her camera has captured proof of their current presence at two points. One is the unlikely section of the stream where it runs along the east side of the Tesco store (and has virtually no vegetation) where she has more than once seen Voles openly moving about while crowds of shoppers and workers hurry along the busy path (these Voles must have a base with more cover, probably in the section of stream running across the grounds of the adjacent office block). The second place that Adele has had regular Vole sightings is where the Langbrook Stream flows past the gardens of houses in Langbrook Close (the next road off the main Langstone Road south of the approach road to the Langstone Technology Park) - the grid ref is approx SU 7143-0558.

Coming out onto the South Moor nature reserve I noticed a well grown Teazel plant with a bright red beetle on it - going closer for a better look I caused the beetle to disappear into the centre of the plant but I had a good enough look to be fairly certain this was a red-headed Cardinal Beetle (see a photo at [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-zwFE2fglLg/Tc\\_E9b2nD4I/AAAAAAAAACY8/ImBE78CdZIU/s640/IMG\\_5918.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-zwFE2fglLg/Tc_E9b2nD4I/AAAAAAAAACY8/ImBE78CdZIU/s640/IMG_5918.jpg)). Out on the moors I saw my first Celery-leaved Buttercup in flower - earlier I had seen both the pure white and the purple flowered versions of the Potato Vine (*Solanum jasminoides*) newly flowering in a couple of streamside gardens. For images of these flowers see <http://www.winrownurseries.co.uk/Winrowimages/Solanum%20Crispum%20Glasnevin.jpg> and <http://www.roselandhouse.co.uk/climbers/solanumjasminoidesalbum.JPG>.

At Budds Farm there were two Shelduck present today among the usual suspects plus one eye-catching canary yellow Mallard duckling on the water among a family of more conventionally camouflaged ducklings. While there I had two bonus sightings - one of my first two Swifts of the year (50 were reported over Romsey today) and the other (to which my attention was drawn by the voluble complaints of two Crows) of what I think must have been a Marsh Harrier flying straight and level westward. I could see no distinctive colour markings to an overall grey-brown plumage but the long straight tail and long thin 'square-tipped' wings made a Harrier species likely with Marsh Harrier being the most likely hereabouts.

A couple of calling Whimbrel took off from the South Moor shore and a Skylark was unexpectedly singing above the moors. In Mill Lane I found Hairy Garlic in flower and confirmed the id by the hairy leaf edges - this was in the unkempt bank to the west of the entrance to Fern House which has an unmissable exhibition of gardening on the east of the entrance (the Neapolitan Garlic which I found flowering on Apr 26 was to the east of the 'garden show')

My last stop was at Langstone Mill Pond where I found the Swan nest deserted (one unhatched egg left in it) but the complete live family encouraging all seven cygnets to feed within touching distance of a large group of admirers gathered at the main 'duck feeding' point by the seawall interpretation board. Although there was no weed in sight the mother swan was stirring up tiny food items from the floor of the pond by her vigorous paddling, the cygnets were circling her and presumably getting food from the water while the male swan was in close

attendance as guard behind them. Nearby both adult and juvenile Herons were still present at their tree-top nests (I still am not sure how many nests and families are involved - my impression is that two adult and three fully grown young are present but moving between two, maybe three, nests).

Two items from the internet caught my attention today. One was the first report of a **Nightjar**, seen?/heard? in the New Forest (Denny Wood) at 18:30 on May 4. The second is news of a **major passage of Pomarine Skuas** up channel today starting with six small groups passing Hurst Beach (west end of the Solent) and totalling 20 birds. 74 were logged passing Selsey Bill and a total of 102 went past Splash Point on the west side of Beachy Head (no news yet from Dungeness).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 28 - MAY 4 (WEEK 18 OF 2014)**

**Sun 4 May**

### **Swans hatch 7 out of 8 eggs at Langstone.**

For several days I have been making regular trips to Langstone Pond to check on the Swans nest and on May 2 I was rewarded with the sight of a single Cygnet in the nest. During the course of May 3 more cygnets hatched and the last news I had was of six cygnets having been photographed in the nest but the culmination came this morning when the crowd of watchers saw **seven cygnets and one unhatched egg** while the mother Swan went to the water's edge for a drink. As I write it is 48 hours since the first cygnet emerged and in that time it has had neither food nor drink, and if the mother waits for the last egg to hatch before taking her family onto the water she could prejudice the survival of the first born. I think there is a good chance that this last egg will not hatch so I hope she abandons the nest before today is over, and also that there is suitable baby food (water weed) nearby on the pond (there is none in sight near the nest but there must be something other than bread or the parents would not have chosen to nest here). I also hope that the several local Foxes do not take any of the young as they explore the pond and find their food.

Also seen at the pond this morning were one adult and at least one young Heron, and Peter Raby tells me that he has already seen **young in at least one of the Egret nests**. At the pondside near the Swan nest one plant of **Common Wintercress** was starting to show its mustard yellow flowers and glossy green leaves. This suggested that there might be more new flowers over on the Hayling Billy rail bridgehead (where chalk used to build the embankment gives a different habitat for plants). Sure enough I found my first **Sea Sandwort** in flower and while there I heard the unique chattering of **Little Terns** and saw two of them (my first this year) fishing off the mouth of the Langbrook stream (hovering and plunging from a good height). Heading back up the Billy Line I hoped to add another first flower whose buds I have seen getting closer to opening over several days. This is the large clump of **Russian Comfrey** growing on the stream side of the track south of the bypass tunnel and just north of the last tree. It differs from Common Comfrey in preferring dry to wet habitat and in having purplish rather than creamy or pinkish flowers. It also lacks the distinguishing feature of Common Comfrey, the continuation of the ridges along each leaf stem down the stem as far as the next lower leaf (this lack is not absolute, but Russian Comfrey has this feature in a much



reduced form). Although none of the flowers is yet fully open they are showing quite enough colour to justify a tick. Back in my Havant garden I had another personal first for the year with a young **Slow-worm** sheltering under a small plastic water-dish put on the ground for birds.

One bird which I have not yet seen is the **Common Swift** but reports are getting numerous and flock sizes increasing - on May 3 there were 20 over Farlington Marshes (that was the highest count out of 31 reports in Hampshire since the first was seen on Apr 14 though 20 were also seen at Romsey on Apr 30). Much bigger numbers can be expected soon - on Apr 30 a French site reported a flock of 65 and on May 3 one Belgian site reported 1000 while a Netherlands site reported a count of 3523 that day.

Butterfly news includes the first **Common Blue** seen near Lewes in Sussex on May 2 (first in Hampshire was at Noar Hill on May 5). The first **Glanville Fritillary** was seen on the Isle of Wight on Apr 29 and the first **Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary** was in Devon on Apr 30. There is also evidence of **migrant butterflies** arriving from the continent - a Painted Lady was seen to fly in off the sea at Sandwich on back on Apr 22 (I'm pretty sure this was not the first to arrive this year but was the first to be caught in the act) and others seen with Red Admirals on the Sussex coast on Apr 30 were confidently claimed as migrants.

## Thu 1 May

### A good start to May with local wild flowers.

A couple of local outings around Havant today gave me a list of at least 68 wild flower species including a new species, **Round-leaved Cranesbill**, for St Faith's Churchyard. In yesterday's sunshine I did even better with ten 'first flowers' and a toadstool that I could identify with some certainty, **Agrocybe dura**.

Starting with yesterday's outing, a cycle ride to the Broadmarsh cycleway, my first note was of a single **Shelduck** at Budds Farm pools, probable the mate of a bird that is hopefully now sitting on a nest down a rabbit hole close to the pools. While there I found a large clump of **Borage** in full flower beside the car parking on top of the mound and from over the harbour I heard a Whimbrel calling on its way north to breed. Beside the Brockhampton stream I came on a patch of **Changing Forget-me-not** (the first I have noticed though it must have been flowering for some time) and as I headed west along Harts Farm Way I began to notice roadside flowers of **Salsify**. A detour down to the shore carpark at the west end of the road found a large patch of **Rosy Garlic** just opening its flowers. Nothing more of interest until I reached my turn-round point at the east entrance to Farlington Marshes where both **Wild Mignonette** and **Hemlock Water Dropwort** were newly flowering. On the way home I stopped where Harts Farm Way reaches the motorway junction roundabout and here, on the traffic island where you can cross to the old playing fields, the first **Common Poppies** were flowering. Among them were some yellowy-brown mushroom like toadstools which I thought I recognized and whose dimensions and spore-print identified as **Agrocybe dura**. Crossing to the playing fields roadside I found my first **Common Wintercress (Barbarea vulgaris)** - not the pinnate-leaved Early Wintercress which I found in Havant last Monday - and on the way home I passed my first flowering **Bird's-foot Trefoil**. This was not the last of my

'firsts' yesterday as when walking through Havant Park later I found **Water Dock** flowering in the canalised channel of the Lavant/Langbrook stream and then found a self-sown **Greater Celandine** in flower.

Today, despite the dull and damp weather, I took a walk to see what flowers could go on my May list. My species count was close to 70 but only one excited me and this was seen in St Faith's churchyard opposite the Robin Hood pub. I have been deterred from claiming to have seen **Round-leaved Cranesbill** in the past as it is listed as 'Rare' in the Hants Flora and many of its features could apply to a large form of the very common Dove's Foot Cranesbill, so I took a good specimen of this plant home for careful checking although it looked very different to other specimens of Dove's Foot Cranesbill - in particular the white internal centre to its flowers as well as its size and robustness. At home I extracted a petal from a flower and confirmed that the petals have a long white 'claw' at their base which the common species lacks (and it is this white claw which provides the white internal centre to the flower) but the clincher to identification as Round-leaved Cranesbill was the presence of a dense clothing of glandular hairs around the lower part of the stem section which I had brought home. It's presence here in Havant (rather than its known locations on south Hayling) may indicate that the species is extending its range. One other, much more dubious, observation this morning came as I passed the new white railings above the Park Road South pond. This is where **Water Voles** have been seen in the recent past, though not since Apr 7. Naturally I was keeping an eye out for one and in the northern channel of water entering the pond (close below the white rails) I noticed a clump of tall leaves growing from the water's edge was shaking as if an animal was eating their bases, and at the same time waves were spreading over the visible water as if a substantial animal was at work. The disturbance could have been caused by, say, a pair of Moorhens having an argument but I neither heard nor saw the cause of the disturbance and this would agree with the suggestion that it was caused by a Vole emerging from an unseen tunnel, collecting its family some lunch, then taking it back into the tunnel. I hope someone gets better proof than this that the Voles are still there!

## [Tue 29 April](#)

### **Still no change at Langstone Pond but Honey Buzzard and Montagu's Harrier are in the news**

Another trip to Langstone Pond today found the **Swan** still sitting and without the presence of her mate (who will probably be in attendance when hatching is imminent). There were still young in the **Heron's nest** but at least one of them is looking larger than an adult - when I first turned my bins on the nest the youngster was standing up with its side towards me, giving the impression of the huge grey flanks of an Elephant! Also nothing new to be seen at the Oysterbeds.

Yesterday a walk to Havant Cemetery gave me a little more excitement with my first sight of **Early Wintercress** (the pinnate leaved species) at the New Lane Level Crossing plus what I thought was a new site for **Perennial Wall Rocket**, replacing the large colony that has disappeared from the railway land around the foot of the now disused Signal Box at the Level Crossing. The two new clusters of Wall Rocket plants were growing from the foot of the metal fencing around the vehicle storage

yard at the corner of New Lane and Eastern Road and looked much bigger than the **Annual Wall Rocket** plants I have seen elsewhere. Not being certain of their id I re-visited the site this morning and collected a couple of samples which turned out to be at the upper limit of Annual Wall Rocket dimensions and which proved that is what they are by being relatively hairy on the base of the stems. Two other newly flowering species here in Havant on Monday were **Pellitory of the Wall** and **Cockspur Thorn** (in Havant Cemetery).

Among the much more interesting news from the internet is a first sighting of a **Brown Argus butterfly** on Apr 26 in Sussex and a first **Small Blue** for the south coast seen on the Isle of Wight on Apr 24 - there had been an earlier sighting of one in Wales on Apr 21. The bird news which I have picked out for mention starts with a photo of the **Collared Pratincole** frequenting north Devon in recent days - this photo was taken at Northam Burrows on Apr 27 and can be seen at [http://www.devonbirds.org/images/library/dbn/public/collared\\_pratincole\\_5503\\_0.jpg](http://www.devonbirds.org/images/library/dbn/public/collared_pratincole_5503_0.jpg). Less of a close up is a video of a **Montagu's Harrier** hunting in Cornwall on the same day (Apr 27) [Before watching this note (a) if the link takes you to a video of a Spider attacking a Butterfly press the 'Previous Video' button top right of the video screen and (b) if the Back Button also takes you to the Spider video press the Back button again to get back here] - to see it go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37WAYZvv098&list=UUSIMONyCbPjx0R3UCMvDcbA> and watch in full screen mode! Another raptor which may well be back in the New Forest by now (but news of it is not likely to be broadcast!) is the **Honey Buzzard** which was reported passing through at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 27 and at the Exminster Marshes in Devon on Apr 28 (when singles were reported at two Netherlands sites with another seen in Belgium on Apr 27 and singles at six sites in the Low Countries on Apr 26 plus another five sites on Apr 26)

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 21 - 27 (WEEK 17 OF 2014)**

### **Sat 26 April**

#### **My first House Martin but others saw a Turtle Dove and Spotted Flycatchers**

The highlights of my day were a single **House Martin** at Budds Farm and the first flowers on **Neapolitan Garlic** beside Mill Lane in Langstone while missing out on the first **Turtle Dove** to reach Hampshire (seen today at Martin Down) and the first two **Spotted Flycatchers** seen yesterday at Portland. The Flycatchers seem to be the first for the British Isles but the Turtle Dove is at least the third to get here after one reported on the Isle of Wight on Apr 11 and another at Sandwich on Apr 21. Another bird that caught my attention on the RBA website was a **Red-backed Shrike** in Lincolnshire on Apr 23 and this sent me to check the status in Britain of this once common breeding species. I thought they had not bred in the UK for a good few years (Birds of Hampshire gives the last breeding in Hampshire as in 1984) but the internet tells me that at least one pair have resumed breeding on Dartmoor and have been there since 2010 - see <https://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=2909> and while on that page check out what Birdguides had to say about the **decline of the Little Terns** via the link at the foot of the page. While on the subject of Shrikes I see that a **Woodchat Shrike** was on the Scillies on Apr 20 and 21 (and is probably still around) while the

winter **Great Greys** (seemingly at least two in the New Forest area) which were being reported daily up to Apr 15 thereafter vanished.

A couple of other good spring passage waders in the local news have been **Wood Sandpiper** with so far just one appearance in the UK (at Farlington Marshes on Apr 24) while Sussex has had just one visit from a **Curlew Sandpiper** at Pagham Harbour on Apr 22.

## Fri 25 April

### Insect news

The first **Small Heath** to be reported in Sussex was seen at Mill Hill (Shoreham) on Apr 22 but a check on the national Butterfly Conservation site told me that one had been seen in Surrey on Apr 16 and while on that site I found that a **Small Blue** had been out on Apr 21 in Glamorgan (I think the person who reported both Small and Common Blue as being seen at Warsash on Apr 13 was deceived by Holly Blues). Also first for Sussex this year was a **Wood White** at Plaistow on Apr 24 (although they had been seen on the Surrey side of the border on Apr 13). Still in Sussex a **Painted Lady** was seen at the National Trust Frog Firle site (Alfriston near Eastbourne) on Apr 22 but I guess this had managed to hibernate like one that appeared in Wales on Feb 7 and a **Clouded Yellow** seen at Folkestone on Apr 11 (I wonder if this species is setting up a permanent colony in Sussex as they have done in Bournemouth?).

A number of other insects which are new on the scene have had their photos posted on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website, including a **Green Tiger Beetle** (see [http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg\\_images/GreenTigerBeetleAbbots210414MMLrg.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg_images/GreenTigerBeetleAbbots210414MMLrg.jpg)), a **Flesh Fly** ([http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg\\_images/FleshFlyBarnesWood220414JBLrg.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg_images/FleshFlyBarnesWood220414JBLrg.jpg)), **Orange Laydybirds** (<http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/OrangeLadybirdsAbbots180414MM.jpg>), an **Oak Eggar moth caterpillar** ([http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg\\_images/OakEggarCatNewPound230414JDavisLrg.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg_images/OakEggarCatNewPound230414JDavisLrg.jpg)) and a **pair of adult Emperor Moths** ([http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg\\_images/EmperorMothpairingSpringheadHill220414NHLrg.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg_images/EmperorMothpairingSpringheadHill220414NHLrg.jpg))

## Thu 24 April

### More migrant news

Still no change at Langstone Pond in the Swan and Heron nests but a roundabout route to the shops this morning gave me my first sight of fresh flowers on **Hedge Mustard** and **Cut-leaved Cranesbill** plus more examples of **Red Clover** which is starting to become common again. I also see from Brian Fellows website that the bright flowers of **Yellow Pimpernel** are now out in Hollybank Woods and that **Wild Clary** is near to flowering in Emsworth. While cutting my lawn in this afternoon's sunshine a **Peacock**, an **Orange Tip**, and several **White butterflies** with at least one **Bee Fly** kept me company and I several times heard the calls of a **Green**

**Woodpecker** with a couple of bursts of **Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming** that I have not heard before in this section of the Billy Trail trees.

Continuing my round up of recent news from the internet which I began yesterday there have been several reports of **Common Crane** in Sussex at Rye Harbour, in the Arun valley, and in the Worthing and Barnham areas - I assume these are passage birds wandering off course from their normal route to breed in Scandinavia though they may be forerunners of a population that will settle in England like those already established in Norfolk. Several other sightings in Dorset around Chard seem to be rebels refusing to play along with a plan to force them to settle in Somerset (see details of this project at <http://www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk/project>). Another interesting vagrant seen in Devon on Apr 21 was a Pratincole species (probably **Collared Pratincole**) which re-appeared briefly at Northam Burrows on the north Devon coast but has not so far been seen again. In south Devon, at Dawlish Warren, a male **Kentish Plover** provided similar brief excitement on Apr 18.

As well as the **Whimbrel** and **Bar-tailed Godwits** now heading east up the English Channel two current species attract a lot of local interest. One is the **Little Tern** which seems to be nearing the end of its years as a regular breeding bird along the south coast. The only report of them at the Hayling Oyster Beds so far is of 7 fishing there on Apr 18 after an anonymous report of 22 briefly in Langstone Harbour (the only other reports of more than 10 from English sites so far is of 21 at Dungeness on Apr 16, 16 in the Lymington area on Apr 21, and 12 at Selsey on Apr 22). A suggestion that they are giving us the cold shoulder is a report of more than 271 at 5 Netherlands sites on Apr 21. **Black Terns** ceased to breed in England around 1850 but still pass along our shores and there have been four reports of singles since Apr 16 (but well over 100 could be seen in the Netherlands on Apr 19 and 20). The other seabird arousing interest in southern seawatchers is the **Pomarine Skua** and the first of these was seen at Portland on Apr 15 and at Selsey on Apr 19.

Although not a sea bird the **Turtle Dove** also arouses interest as a species seemingly on the edge of extinction here in England - so far I have seen just two reports: one was reported on the Isle of Wight on Apr 11 and another at Sandwich on Apr 21 and in this case continental reports are equally scarce, just three singles seen so far. To end today's selection on a more cheerful note I have seen 16 reports of **Swifts** since the first on Apr 12 (at Portland and the Isle of Wight) None of the English reports have been of more than 2 birds but on Apr 21 a flock of 32 were seen in the Netherlands.

### [Wed 23 April](#)

#### **A roundup of migrant news**

My personal news for this week so far has as its highlights the sight of **two young Herons violently exercising their wings** in their Langstone Mill Pond nest on Apr 22 and on that same visit clearly saw **8 eggs in the Swan nest**. I visited the pond again today but have no further news though I had previously been to the Thorney Deeps and heard my first **Sedge Warblers** in full song and seen my first fully open **Elder flowerhead** in Pook Lane.



At home I sorted the 430 records I have gleaned from the internet in the past couple of weeks into species sequence, then went through them noting records which might be of general interest and picked out a few for mention here.

Starting with the Animal (as opposed to Bird, Insect and Flower) records I saw that **Mink** have been reported in the Arun Valley (and at Folkestone) so they have not yet been eliminated as predators of other wildlife. Another species that does not often get reported is the **Medicinal Leech** which got a mention at the Dungeness RSPB site - I assume they can still be found in the New Forest and I suspect they still occur in the pond within the Cams Hall Golf Course alongside Fareham Creek (the only site I know for them in the Portsmouth area).

One of the more unexpected seabird sightings has been of a **White-billed Diver** off Beachy Head and you can see a detail account of this (with photos) at <http://beachyheadbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>. Less unexpected are reports from both Dungeness (RSPB) and Rye Harbour of up to four **Black-necked Grebes in summer plumage** which may indicate that they are breeding there. Nearer home Peter Raby has estimated that there are at least 31 and possibly 36 active **Little Egret nests** at Langstone Mill Pond where at least one **Grey Heron pair** have a nest with three juveniles on the verge of fledging (although a pair almost certainly nested there last year this is the first year that I have been aware of them having joined the Egrets which have definitely been nesting there since 2008)

It would seem that we are very near to seeing the **last migrant Brent Geese** here on the south coast. One indication that the flow is drying up are the following four reports of 674 passing Dungeness on Apr 17, 129 passing Lepe at the mouth of Southampton Water on Apr 19, 45 passing Selsey on Apr 22 (when 10, probably of French origin, passed St Catherine's Point on the IoW), and just 3 flew east past Stokes Bay (Gosport) on Apr 23.

A report of a female **Blue-winged Teal** at Sandwich on Apr 22 emphasised the rarity of the species there, saying it was only the second ever to be seen there and the first had been seen in April 1970. I had been aware that both **Blue-winged** and **Green-winged Teal** are occasionally reported in Britain and Google told me they are two separate North American species with the Green-winged (*Anas carolinensis*) being regarded by some as a subspecies of our common Teal (*Anas crecca*) which it closely resembles until you see the vertical white bar on its flank immediately in front of the closed wing. The Blue-winged species (*Anas discors*) does not look like our common Teal but when I went to check on the differences between Green- and Blue-winged in my first edition (1999) Collins Bird Guide I found the Blue but could not find any mention of the Green-winged (which was then presumably not regarded as separate from *Anas crecca*). If you want to see this confusion from the American viewpoint go to <http://birdweb.org/birdweb/family/anatidae> and click on the photos of Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, then read the text for each species. As far as current British records are concerned I think the Sandwich record is the first Blue-winged to be seen over here this year but the Green-winged has been in the news since one was in the Avon Causeway area of the Hampshire Avon from Jan 1 to Feb 3 with further sightings of one at Blashford from Apr 6 to 8.

My records have a lot more of interest but I do not have time to do them justice tonight so will continue tomorrow!

## Mon 21 April

### 500 Green Winged Orchids at Gunner Point on Hayling

A beautiful start to the Bank Holiday found me at Langstone Pond where both **Reed Warbler** and **Reed Bunting** were singing and at least **two young Herons** were visible in their nest among the many Egret nests. The **Swan was still sitting tight** on her nest (in which I was assured there were eight eggs) with the male Swan nearby. I was on my way to south Hayling but while still in Langstone I noticed a lot more flowers on the **Lesser Sea Spurrey** lining the foot of the buildings along the raised path going south from the High Street to the Ship Inn.

Heading down the Hayling Coastal Path I must have passed more than **half a dozen Common** and **one Lesser Whitethroat** singing from the trackside bushes which also had a good show of well developed **Bracken**. Also seen were many white **butterflies**, a couple of Orange Tips and one Brimstone (which reminds me that the Sussex Butterfly Conservation webpage today has news of **Wall Browns**, **Small Copper**, **Small Heath**, and **Duke of Burgundy** seen in the county over the past week-end plus an early **Pearl Bordered Fritillary** seen at the east end of the South Downs on Apr 16).

Reaching the Ferry Inn roundabout I found **Early Forget-me-nots** in flower for the first time along with **Bur Chervil** and a huge mass of **Spring Beauty**. On the south side of the Golf Course more than one **Meadow Pipit** was singing above a display of at least **500 Green Winged Orchids** among which was one substantial patch of white-flowered **Subterranean Clover**. Also seen here were the first flowers of **Sea Radish** and flower buds on the **Tree Lupins** plus flowers of **Thrift** and **Sea Campion**.

### **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 14 - 20 (WEEK 16 OF 2014)**

## Sun 20 April

### Southleigh Forest has a new mountain range

On Friday (Apr 18) of this week I cycled to North Common on Hayling Island and was surprised to see that two new mountain peaks had appeared on the northern skyline just to the east of a new stone feature which must be the entrance to the new Havant Crematorium so the mountain peaks (which were earth rather than stone coloured) must be the result of recent addition to the landfill site on the north side of the Emsworth Common Road where it passes the west end of the Hollybank Woods. I was the more surprised as I thought the landfill site there had been 'closed' for some time. The only observations made on North Common itself were of my first passage **Whimbrel** flying east low over the Marina pool, large patches of **Common Spike Rush** flowering in the grass land west of the path leading from the carpark to the North Common shire, and my first sight of tiny **Brown Tail moth caterpillars** sunning themselves on their web.

Back in Havant on Good Friday I had a look at the **Langstone Swan nest** as this was the earliest date by my calculations that her cygnets could start to hatch - no

proof of this happening but her behaviour on the nest suggested she might be aware of some activity in the nest - she was sitting up and restlessly moving her head around and poking at the nest in a way I have not seen before, and I thought her wings might be slightly spread to cover a chick. The male Swan was also in attendance (recently he has often been out of sight when I visit the pond). Also noted in Havant was my first sight of **Wild Garlic (Ramsons)** in flower by the Billy Trail at the back of Fairfield School and the first flower on a **Welsh Poppy**.

On Saturday (Apr 19) I found the shell of a **Blackbird egg** on my front lawn, presumably evidence of hatching, and then watched a **Holly Blue** butterfly fly over. Later I cycled to Broadmarsh and on to the east entrance to Farlington Marshes, outside which I used my Secateurs to remove Brambles growing over the new colony of **Danewort** that I noticed there last summer. Cycling back along the cycleway I found **Beaked Hawksbeard** in flower for the first time and saw my first **Common Vetch** flowers plus my first **Ribwort Plantain** and **Rosa Rugosa (Japanese Rose)**. Not yet in flower but standing full grown were a couple of **Slender Thistle** plants and from the old Broadmarsh playing field bushes came the song of my first **Common Whitethroat**.

In today's rain I have stayed at home getting up to date with recent news from the internet, among which were some surprising dragonfly observations. At this date all I would expect to have emerged are the **Large Red Damselflies** (which have been out since Apr 2) but in fact another six species have been seen on the wing. First was the **Beautiful Demoiselle** (normally appearing at the end of May) which was seen near Christchurch on Apr 3, next came the **Broad Bodied Chaser** on Apr 11 in Devon (with one at Fishbourne near Chichester on Apr 15 though not expected until early May), and then the full sized **Hairy Dragonfly** in the Rye area on Apr 13 (for its photo see [http://www.rxwildlife.info/storage/Hairy%20Dragonfly%20Rye%2013.4.14.jpg?\\_](http://www.rxwildlife.info/storage/Hairy%20Dragonfly%20Rye%2013.4.14.jpg?_)) - this is not expected until early May. The latest first sightings have been of the **Azure Damselfly** at Rye on Apr 15 (normally mid-May) and the **Variable Damselfly** in Bedfordshire on Apr 16 (rather than late May). For all reports see <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/latest-sightings>.

Among other insect sightings was a report of a **parasitic wasp which kills Ladybirds** that I was not aware of - read about it at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/4/14/pepp-level-parasite.html> or read the full horror story at <http://www.thatishizarre.com/2011/09/bizarre-insects-dinocampus-coccinellae.html>. You can also learn of a large early **spring Cranefly** and other insects seen at Rye Harbour from <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/4/17/some-spring-invertebrates.html>.

A couple more butterflies which have recently appeared are the **Small Copper** (first seen at Durlston on Mar 29) and the **Wall Brown** (first in Devon on Mar 26) - though neither has been reported in either Hampshire or Sussex so far. In Surrey the first **Wood White** was seen on Apr 17 and in the west country **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** were first seen on Apr 15

**[Thu 17 April](#)**

## My Cemetery Visit pages have been updated

Last Tuesday I made my monthly visits to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and to St Faith's Churchyard in central Havant to record the wildlife that visitors can expect to find there. My discoveries will eventually (after the Easter Holiday) appear on the Cemetery Notice Boards but they are already available online via <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> or via the link at the foot of the Homepage of the St Faith's Church website at <http://www.stfaith.com/>. As I have now been making these visits for more than a year any visit to these pages will give you access to a panorama of what may be found at each site throughout the year.

For me the highlight at **Havant Cemetery** was the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant** in full flower and I would recommend anyone not familiar with the plant to take this chance of seeing it at its best. My photos can do no more than give you a hint of what to look for and to see the 'real thing' go to the Eastern Road entry and walk north past the small building to the wall beyond which are the Allotments, then turn left and walk to the west wall above which this 'magic plant' hangs down in a large curtain of wiry stems, each clothed in the small green leaves and tiny blue flowers shown in my close-up. If you look over the wall you can see the thick Wisteria-like creeper vine climbing the trees from which the curtain of flowering stems cascades.

The health-giving properties of this plant are said to lie in its orange berries but I have only seen a few of them on this plant and for me the magic lies in the flowers. I have read that the claims for it being a source of long life and good health go back more than 200 years to the discovery of a village in Mongolia where all the inhabitants lived to be 100 years old and were unusually free of illness - it was thought that this was the result of this vine growing over the village well and dropping its berries into the water which everyone drank.

The highspot of my **Warblington Cemetery** visit (other than the **Hobby** which flew over and which I mentioned in my previous diary entry) was the discovery of **Wall Speedwell** which I photographed but had to enlarge more than usual for the flowers to be visible (a Daisy is included in the photo to indicate the scale). I had come across this plant in flower more than a week before in a Havant roadside but had not recognised it at the time as my mental image of Wall Speedwell was based on finding it in previous years in stony places where it appeared as a tiny but upright plant with one or two tiny blue flowers at the top of the stem whereas the plants in Havant and here were fully concealed by the surrounding grass and all that could be seen at first glance were the tiny, upward facing, intense blue flowers. One common feature uniting these and past plants was that it was impossible to touch the plant, let alone try to pick a specimen, without the flower falling off. This left me with specimens of this year's finds which had none of the upright, sparsely clothed, stems that I was expecting but with coiled, compressed stems from which the only feature that was obvious was the overall intense hairiness of both leaves and stems. Eventually I was forced to the conclusion that this year's finds must be Wall Speedwell and seeing it in two separate places at Warblington helped to confirm that it was a common plant and thus almost certainly the common and widespread Wall Speedwell. The photo of a single **Germander Speedwell** flower which I also included in the Warblington Cemetery page was not intended to deceive but I realised after publishing it that it gives the impression that the flower is associated

with the vast mass of **Corn Chamomile type leaves** that cover the Wildflower Seed sown area in the Natural Burial area - how easily the camera deceives the innocent eye!

On that subject I was interested to hear the TV Gardening presenter Christine Walkden (who has been Rob Cowan's studio guest this week on the Radio 3 'Essential Classics' morning programme) express the opinion which I strongly share that **photographing nature instantly takes the 'life' out of the subject being photographed** and removes the endless variation to be seen second by second as you watch a living creature. This is most easily shown when being asked to identify a fungus from a single photograph - to the person who took the photo it will remind them of their memory bank surrounding the finding of the fungus which includes their impressions of the site, the size of the fungus, its smell and feel, and the multiple views from above, below and all round which make up the human perception rather than the sterile and often distorted camera view.

One other place which I visited this week on my way to the Havant shops was the **Gazebo** to be found in the East Pallant carpark against the wall separating the public carpark from that of the Bear Hotel. The gate into the small walled garden is normally locked but on this occasion it was open to the public and I was stunned to find that the two western quadrants of the walkway surrounding the central feature were populated with many thousands of the normally rare **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** plants, each so small and tenuous that many visitors walking round would not be aware that they were trampling on a bed of wild flowers, let alone of their rarity (they were not planted and do not get a mention on the wooden panels on the walls which 'interpret' the planting of this old fashioned garden and explain the Gazebo's purpose). If the gate (the one near the back of the East St houses, not the grille under the Gazebo) is open when you are in the area do take a look round but tread with care!.

[Tue 15 April](#)

### **Spring is bursting out**

Family visitors have taken precedence over other things in the past few days and I have lost the battle to keep up with the amazing outburst of wildlife news generated by the wonderful weather but in case any of the following is new to you here are some of the observations that have surprised me recently.

Both butterflies and dragonflies have produced an unexpected number of early records. I was expecting to see records of **Large Red Damselflies** and they have been widely reported since March 28 but I was not expecting to hear of **Beautiful Demoiselle** in both Hampshire and Sussex on Apr 3 and 11 (normal emergence at end May), nor of **Hairy Dragonfly** (seen at Rye and in Essex on Apr 13 and 15 rather than in early May), nor **Broad-bodied Chaser** (seen in Devon on Apr 11 and at Fishbourne in Sussex on Apr 15 rather than early May).

A dozen butterfly species have become regular in the reports I see before the last few days which have brought sightings of **Dingy** and **Grizzled Skippers**, **Green Hairstreak**, and even **Duke of Burgundy** (one at Noar Hill on Apr 9) with one of two early **Small Coppers** being in a garden close to Emsworth (Hermitage area) on Apr



12. Both **Clouded Yellow** and **Painted Lady** have been seen but I am not expecting a mass invasion in the near future - similarly there have been several reports of **Humming-bird Hawkmoths** which I assume to have hibernated.

Both **Early Purple** and **Green-winged Orchids** have been seen in flower in Hampshire and Sussex (plus the expected **Early Spider Orchids** at Durlston) and you don't have to go to special sites to see **Lilac** and **Laburnum** flowers but I have yet to come across **Common Vetch** and **Wood Speedwell** which are out in Emsworth though I have been surprised to find lots of tiny **Wall Speedwell** in flower around Havant following the general flowering of **Germander Speedwell**. Another flower which surprised me by its exuberance in Havant Cemetery yesterday is the **Duke of Argyll's Teapant** whose photo will appear on my Cemetery page before long.

I cannot do justice to bird migrants here but must mention my personal delight, when at the Warblington Cemetery this morning, to watch a **Hobby** circling in a thermal high above me, giving its impression of being a large Swift, and of hearing my first **Lesser Whitethroat** when I visited the Hayling Oysterbeds on Apr 13. Despite the suggestion in my last diary entry that **Nightingales** would be heard at Marlpit Lane, Pulborough Brooks seems to be the only reliable site for them at the moment (5 singing there on Apr 11) and they remain less numerous than the flock of **10 Black-winged Stilts** which invaded Brading Marshes (Isle of Wight) on Apr 12 but have not been seen since!

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR APRIL 7 - 13 (WEEK 15 OF 2014)**

**Thu 10 April**

### **Now is the time for Nightingales at Marlpit Lane**

With a major surge in bird migrant arrivals over the past two days now is the time to check on which species have not yet been seen in southern England and, leaving out the uncommon species such as **Honey Buzzard, Stone Curlew, Quail, Wood Warbler**, and **Montagu's Harrier**, the species of which I have still to spot first reports are **Wood Sandpiper, Pomarine Skua, Turtle Dove, Nightjar, Swift** and **Spotted Flycatcher**.

The list of species which I feel should be seen within ten miles of Havant before this coming week-end is out must include several that have already been seen elsewhere - **Cuckoo, Common and Lesser Whitethroat, Little Tern, Whinchat**, and the two species that make a trip to Marlpit Lane (between Woodmancote and Funtington off the 'back route' to Chichester) worth while at this time of year, **Nightingale** and **Turtle Dove**. If you are lucky you might also find a **Nightjar** at Havant Ticket (they usually arrive a long time before they announce their presence by churring). Along the the calls of passing **Whimbrel** is very likely to be heard (today, Apr 10, a German site reported 190 and a Belgian site had 27).

Three websites that caught my eye today were the BTO national migration blog at [http://btomigrationblog.blogspot.co.uk/?dm\\_i=NXN,2AMGO,3GJW16,8HZCL,0](http://btomigrationblog.blogspot.co.uk/?dm_i=NXN,2AMGO,3GJW16,8HZCL,0) which suggests that migrant arrivals are still slow but my impression is that **the last two days have seen an 'unblocking of the flood gates'** - one indication of this is an

entry on the SOS website dated Apr 9 which says .."We're at our holiday home near migration hot spot Pointe de Grave on the west coast of France. Yesterday thousand of swallows and nearly as many sand martins passed through heading north - see the count details on

[http://www.migration.net/index.php?m\\_id=112&frmSite=9&graph=synthesis&action=list](http://www.migration.net/index.php?m_id=112&frmSite=9&graph=synthesis&action=list) Counts up to yesterday have been very small - this is the first big wave."

The second site that interested me was the local HWT Solent Reserves blog at <http://solentreserves.wordpress.com/2014/04/09/a-peacock-and-the-admiral/>

which has a photo of a **Common Spotted Orchid in bud** and tells me that the female **Orange Tip butterflies which are currently laying eggs on Cuckooflower plants** take care to lay no more than one egg per plant as **their caterpillars are carnivorous!**

Another site you might be interested in seeing is Graeme Lyons blog which not only has **a photo of an uncommon Aphid species** but also tells us that those dedicated '**Pan Species Listers**' who already have life lists numbered in thousands will soon have their own dedicated website - to find out more see Graeme's blog at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/truffle-shuffle.html>.

### Wed 9 April

#### A walk round the Paulsgrove Chalkpit area gives me my first Holly Blue

The visibility from Portsdown Hill was as good as I can ever remember in this mornings sunshine - from my parking spot immediately west of Fort Southwick I could make out every building at the Fawley Oil Refinery and the Power Station. During my walk I saw my personal first **Holly Blue** and **Speckled Wood** butterflies and my first **Annual Wall Rocket** and **Sanicle** plus a lot of what I assume was **Glaucous Sedge** (not yet checked) but the best show was put on by a **pair of Buzzards** that seemed to be intending to nest at the east end of the Chalk Pit and kept soaring and hovering over that area (I thought it was only Rough-legged Buzzards that hovered!). I did not see anything of the Peregrines or the Ravens that nested here last year but did get a short view of a **female Sparrowhawk soaring** (with well rounded wings and tail) over the east end of the pit.

Back at home I saw reports of the **first Common Whitethroats** in Hampshire and Dorset yesterday (Apr 8) (with another at Sandwich today where the **first Nightingale was singing**). I also noticed a report of the first **Tree Pipit** at Christchurch today but have a feeling that I did not note the date of the first to be seen nationally (the earliest I have is one near Verwood in Dorset on Mar 30. Nearer home the first **Little Tern** was at Selsey Bill and a **Cuckoo** was heard at the new Medmerry reserve (by Pete Hughes, removing the doubts about the validity of some 'first Cuckoo' reports such as the one in Dorset on Mar 12).

### Tue 8 April

#### More migrant arrivals (including Lesser Whitethroat and Common Tern)) and my first Beaked Hawk's-beard, Bugle and Broom

To deal first with news from the internet I see that the first **Lesser Whitethroat** was heard rattling today near Henfield and what I am taking as the first **three Common Terns** were at the Blashford Lakes (one had been reported in Nottinghamshire on

Mar 19 with another loner at Splash Point in Sussex on Mar 28). Yesterday there was a general appearance of **singing Willow Warblers** (with at least two in Hampshire) and Hampshire's three **Little Terns** at Lymington on Apr 6 were supported by one more at Ferrybridge (Weymouth) on Apr 7.

My own news for today comes from a cycle ride to the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes and back in the late afternoon sunshine, during which I had my first view of a **Beaked Hawksbeard** plant just about to open its flowers and also of several **Ox-eye Daisies** with open flowers. Another first on this trip was quite a lot of **Bugle** in flower and one bush of **Broom** covered with open flowers. Also seen was my first bold display of **Cowslips** in flower and my second show of both **Scarlet Pimpernel** and **Dove's Foot Cranesbill**.

Of significant local interest was an email from Nik Knight telling me that at least one **Water Vole** was still to be seen on the Havant Mill Pond (across Park Road South from the Solent Road junction) where he saw it yesterday morning (Apr 7) before visiting Langstone Pond in the afternoon and capturing a photo of a **Water Rail** swimming across the narrow channel just north of the Swan nest.

## Mon 7 April

### The first Little Terns arrive in the Lymington area

The first three **Little Terns** were seen yesterday (Apr 6) over the Normandy Marshes while in Gloucestershire an early **Black Tern** was seen. Dorset was also in the news with a **Red-rumped Swallow** on Apr 5. More hirundines were in Hampshire today (Apr 7) with **200 Sand Martins**, **10 Swallows** and **10 House Martins** all over Alresford Pond, indicating that House Martins are now becoming more numerous (the first was in Lincolnshire on Apr 4, and the second at Exmouth on Apr 5).

The first **Early Purple Orchid**, seen in the West Dean Woods north of Chichester, was also out yesterday (Apr 6) following the usual first Orchid (**Early Spider**) flowering at Durlston on Apr 2. The moth-men have also had something worth seeing in East Sussex - a female **Emperor Moth** photographed on Apr 6 - see <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/moths/E-F/EmpMothFrogFirle060414BE.jpg>. I thought we had come to the end of the period of shoreline strandings after storms but a photo taken at Dungeness on Apr 5 shows part of some **500 Sea Mice** cast up there in relatively calm weather - see <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/4/5/sea-mice-stranding.html>

Turning to my own finds today during a walk via Langstone Pond to Warblington Church and back I see they included 49 wild flower species, but only 25 Birds and no insects. A sample of one 'weed' of which I saw quite a lot by the footpath through 'new Langstone' was brought home for checking and proved to be **Wavy Bittercress** and one first for me beside the same path was my first flowering 'Lords and Ladies' which Brian Fellows had seen in Emsworth yesterday - later I also caught up with Brian by finding a single Wood Avens flower and some Pendulous Sedge, both at Warblington. In the Pook Lane area the one or two flowers of **Shining Cranesbill** seen on Apr 5 had become 20 and the small patch of Wild Garlic leaves beside the path from Pook to Wade Lane now had closed flower buds. Trees were doing well

with my first open **Horse Chestnut candles** and flowers on Field Maple and Oak trees.

While passing Langstone Pond area I tried to count all the Egrets which might be part of the nesting colony and arrived at a total of 58. Back at home I checked out a fresh colony of a dozen small toadstools which have recently appeared on the lawn, deciding they were Deceivers (*Laccaria laccata*).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 31 - APRIL 6 (WEEK 14 OF 2014)**

**Sat 5 April**

### **New flowers every day despite the drizzle**

Yesterday the sun came out in the late afternoon when the tide was high and it felt as if summer had come as I cycled along the Langstone shore listening to the **calls of two Sandwich Terns** unexpectedly fishing close inshore. To add to this pleasure I found the first two flowers on **Shining Cranesbill** in the Pook Lane garden gateway of the house at the north foot of the bridge over the bypass. Today my new flower was **Yellow Flag** in the Wade Court garden pond (where the purple flowers of **Honesty** had appeared two days earlier) as I passed on my way to the OysterBeds where I was not so impressed by the appearance at the north end of the lagoon of a huge white stone carving of an Oyster. Despite the drizzle which dampened my circuit of north Hayling the ride was brightened by fresh flowers all the way (including one **field full of yellow Rape**).

Back at home this evening other new flowers were reported - **Ramsons (Wild Garlic)** had been giving off its scent at Durlston on Apr 1 and the tiny flowers of **Early Spider Orchids** were first seen there on the 2nd - **Crosswort** was first seen on Portsdown on April 3 and today (Apr 5) the first **Germander Speedwell** was out at Durlston while yesterday brought the first **Thyme-leaved Speedwell** flower to my lawn and today brought **Wood Avens** out of a short hibernation at Emsworth (I last saw it in flower on Feb 2)

Both **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** arrived in Portsmouth on Apr 1st (at the IBM Lake and Milton Common respectively) but a Reed Warbler had been in the Kent Stour valley on Mar 30 and Sedge Warblers have been reported since Mar 26 while the **House Martin** seen at Titchfield today had been preceded by several others with the first that I know of on Scilly on Mar 10 and another at Durlston on Mar 16. What seems to be today's genuine first was a **Pied Flycatcher** in Devon.

What seemed to be a really early Butterfly was a **Grizzled Skipper** at Mill Hill, Shoreham, on Apr 1 and I see this is recorded as the national first for the species. Also seen in Sussex on Apr 1 was a **Holly Blue** but that is recorded nationally as appearing on March 8 in Dorset (and both Hampshire and Durlston had sightings on Mar 16). Another Apr 1 sighting in Sussex of a **Green-veined White** had been beaten by one in Oxfordshire on Mar 15 while Sussex had its first **Large White** on Mar 9. I cannot keep up with the moth records but I was surprised a a photo of a day flying **Pyrausta nigrata** taken at Mill Hill in Sussex on Apr 1 - see

[http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/moths/P-Q/Pyrausta\\_nigrataMillHill010414CK.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/species/moths/P-Q/Pyrausta_nigrataMillHill010414CK.jpg).

Two final news items of personal interest to me were the appearance in my own garden (backing on to the Billy Trail rail line) of a **healthy adult Fox at lunchtime on Apr 4** - it made a full circuit of the back-garden, popped over the wall to do the same next door, then came back for a second go before 'getting back on the train'! I wonder if it was a **Vixen which now has cubs** demanding food - this is about the time the cubs start to first appear out in the open.

The other news is of **Water Voles in Havant**. A week or so ago someone cleared some of the floating rubbish which had virtually blocked the exit from the pond, where they have been seen, into the Langbrook Stream and I have seen no sign of them in the pond for some time. This week their escape from the pond back into the Langbrook Stream seems to have been confirmed by a sighting of one on Apr 2 in the Langbrook just north of the 'Mill Wheel' by the bypass.

### Thu 3 April

#### My first Swallow

Before my own sightings today I must draw your attention to the only **April Fool** report which I came across this year and which I thought was well crafted if unlikely to fool anyone. The author was Dave Ilman and the location was Pagham Harbour and the sighting was supported with an excellent photo. For info on this visitor to Pagham see <http://www.oiseaux-birds.com/card-grey-winged-blackbird.html>

The entry which Dave posted on the SOS bird site read ...

"An early morning trip to Pagham North Wall, and the path was almost completely obstructed by a veritable forest of tripods bearing telescopes and lenses of immodest length. The reason for the clamor was the presence, extraordinary to relate, of an **Asiatic White-winged Blackbird**. Certainly an amazing first for Pagham. The warm spring sunshine had brought out birders in their multitudes, who unable quite to comprehend what they were seeing, stood around in a silent slack-jawed stupor, apart from when they spoke. We were fortunate enough to have in our midst the eminent Norwegian ornithologist, Professor Olaf Pirol, who was delighted to be able to confirm the identification. What was causing the greatest excitement however, was the fact that this bird possesses the unique colour morph of having entirely black wings. This adult male bird, as you will see from my photo, bears only superficial resemblance to our own native species. An adult male, it is very confiding, and readily descended to nibble at my breakfast of Battenberg cake (pink bits only) This is an absolute must-see. For **Dave's excellent photo** see [http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com\\_jobline4/logo/img\\_1307.jpg](http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com_jobline4/logo/img_1307.jpg)

My own day (today) started with a ride to **Langstone Pond** where the female Swan was obligingly taking her daily break to stretch her wings, have a good wash, and hopefully get some breakfast. This allowed Peter Raby and myself to see there were definitely six and probably seven eggs in the nest though the male Swan was nowhere to be seen. Also seen on this ride were my **first flowers** on **Garlic Mustard** and on **Honesty** and as I rode home I passed my **first singing Blackcap**.



After collecting new glasses from Specsavers I rode off to Thorney Island where my **first Swallow** of the year was feeding down wind of the Thornham Lane sewage works. Also seen hereabouts were **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Peacock**, **Brimstone** and my first **Orange Tip** but I had no luck at the Great Deeps Landing Lights where both the **artificial Osprey nests** are still awaiting tenants.

## Mon 31 Mar

### Recent spring sightings by others

First reports of migrant birds that I have not previously reported start with CUCKOO (reported at various places on Mar 15, 21, 25, 27, 30, and 31), HOBBY (one in Cornwall on Mar 25 and another on the IoW on Mar 29), WHINCHAT (one in Dorset on Mar 20 and one in Cambs on Mar 26), SEDGE WARBLER (reported on RBA on Mar 26 and singing at both Farlington Marshes and Pagham Harbour on Mar 30, also on Mar 26 the first incoming COMMON SANDPIPER was seen at Portland, COMMON REDSTART (on RBA on Mar 25, at Portland on Mar 29 and singing in the New Forest on Mar 30). Not in the same category was the first Spotted Crake in Lancashire on Mar 31.

Turning to butterflies Mar 29 brought first sightings of GREEN VEINED WHITE at Seaford and WALL BROWN at Brighton plus a host of new ORANGE TIPS. A mature PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARY caterpillar was found near Arundel on Mar 26 looking as if it should be on the wing before the end of April. Another early insect report was of two Nursery Tent Spiders at Emsworth on March 30

On Mar 31 Brian Fellows found the first open Holly Flowers in Emsworth and I think I heard on the radio that Early Gentians were already in flower somewhere so it might be worth visiting their Portsdown Hill site (though I don't think any were seen there last spring.)

Finally I wonder how many of you know what a 'Tiungulin' is and does. I was led to discover this by Cliff Dean's latest blog entry in which he came across an Oil Beetle species when walking near Rye Bay on Mar 30. You can see his photo of what he thinks is a Black Oil Beetle at

<http://rxbirdwalks.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/p1170109.jpg?w=450> and learn about other species of the group from John Walters (ex-Hayling Islander who now lives in Devon) at <http://johnwalters.co.uk/research/oil-beetle-identification.php>.

Don't spend too much time on these adult Oil Beetles as their young are the 'Tiungulins' which have the interesting life style - to start it off the mother beetle lays up to 1000 eggs, usually in 2-3 burrows dug into the soil near to where there are solitary bees are digging their own nest burrows. Having hatched out, the baby Tiungulin climbs the nearest flower stem and waits for one of the bees to visit it. A solitary bee collecting nectar and pollen for its own nest may unwittingly become covered in the oil beetle larvae, secured to the Bee's fur by their specially-adapted hooked feet. Once inside the bee's nest, the tiungulin disembarks and begins to feed on the bee's eggs and the store of pollen and nectar. The larva develops in the bee burrow until it emerges as an adult oil beetle ready to mate and start the whole cycle again. More info and photos of the Tiungulins can be seen at

<http://lennatur.com/files/u1/BuglifeOilBeetleGuide2013.pdf>

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 24 - 30 (WEEK 13 OF 2014)

Sat 29 Mar

### Larch Rose, 300 Marsh Marigolds, and more excitement at Langstone Pond

My first delight on this lovely sunny morning was to see my first **Larch Roses** among the fresh green leaves of a tree in a Grove Road garden as I walked down the passage to Juniper Square - if you are not familiar with this early stage of the female Larch cone see

[http://www.floralimages.co.uk/images//larix\\_decidua\\_334.jpg](http://www.floralimages.co.uk/images//larix_decidua_334.jpg). Continuing south through the Langstone housing I spotted my first, single, **sheathed Arum Lily spathe** before I reached the pond where I was unexpectedly greeted by Peter Raby who had first made me aware of the Grey Herons nesting here and had also surprised me with news of a **female Goosander** seen on the pond on Mar 21 and on the nearby harbour on both Mar 22 and 24 - this morning he had the same bird back on the pond, adding another tick to my personal year list. After that extra excitement here we went to have another look at the Grey Herons, seeing more nest building activity (and one mating) at the southern nest and at least two birds gathering nest sticks in the adjacent pony field. By chance a couple who were not bird watchers were visiting the pond and they firmly supported Peter's impression that at least one pair of Heron's nested here last year - they clearly remembered seeing two adults and a juvenile at the pond edge together.

Next destination for me was the South Moors and Budds Farm but before getting there I was stopped as soon as I had crossed the main Hayling road by a flower colour that I did not recognize (see [http://www.plantlife.org.uk/images/uploads/Danish-scurvy-grass-\(c\)-Tico-under-Creative-Commons-BY-NC-ND.jpg](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/images/uploads/Danish-scurvy-grass-(c)-Tico-under-Creative-Commons-BY-NC-ND.jpg)) but which was a normal form of Danish Scurvygrass though one I have never seen before. A few yards further on, beside the footpath joining the main road to Mill Lane, I found the annual show of **Snakes Head Fritillary blossoms** was in full swing, supported today by the appearance of a male **Small White butterfly** (later I saw another, two Peacocks, a Brimstone and at least two Dotted Bee-Flies, all before I got to Budds Farm).

Out on the South Moors I had another look in the orchid field and this time counted well over **200 Marsh Marigold flowers** before getting to the Budds Farm pools where the only new comers were two pairs of Canada Geese. I did not expect to see anything new on the way home but the Southmoor Lane roadside gave me my first **Norway Maple blossom** and **White Campion flowers** (which Brian Fellows had seen flowering on Mar 21). Outside the Apollo factory in Brookside Road I found two more spring 'firsts' - **Scarlet Pimpernel** and a **Cornsalad plant** in flower.

In the evening the internet gave me news from Devon of two very early butterflies, **Clouded Yellow** and **Wall Brown**, seen on March 26 while on Mar 27 a full grown **Pearl Bordered Fritillary caterpillar** was seen in Rewell Wood near Arundel promising to be on the wing in the third week of April. Further east on Mar 29 Rye Harbour had a photo of the first tiny **Brown-tail moth caterpillar** to come out of its hibernation tent (see <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/29/brown-tail-moth.html>). Yesterday the south of England seems to have had its first **Common Tern** at Splash Point in

Sussex and today the Isle of Wight had both a **Hobby** and a **Ring Ouzel** (both of which have been reported elsewhere earlier).

## Fri 28 Mar

### Excitement at Langstone Pond

An email reached me this morning to say that the Langstone Mill Pond Swans now have 7 eggs in their nest which the maximum clutch normally laid by a Swan (thought one authority says they can lay 12) so I went down there to check on the status of both **Swans, Egrets**, and the pair of **Grey Herons** that are giving every appearance of nesting there for the first time ever.

Before going to look at the Swan nest I rested my bike against the handrail of the bridge over the sluice (which can be used to let water out of the pond directly into the harbour through the seawall) while I had a look at the Heron Nest which I had eventually spotted last Tuesday. At first I could only see the one Heron standing upright on top of the Holm Oak but just at that moment a second Heron flew low over the head of the first and landed in a tree almost next to it. This attracted my attention to where it had landed and **I realised that in that tree there was a substantial nest already built and having another Heron sitting in it**. As I watched the bird that had flown in took off but came back again within a few minutes, I think carrying another stick for the nest (thus repeating the 'stick exchange ceremony' which had been observed when the first nest was being built.

So **we now have two Heron pairs nesting at the pond where there has never been a traditional Heronry** (there is a suggestion that there was one nest last year, though with no conclusive evidence). **If you want to follow the progress of these nests (and look for others in future) this is how I suggest you locate the two that are known**

....

Go to the sluice gate with its wooden bridge and handrail forming part of the open seawall and walk onto the concrete area which projects into the pond on the right (north) side of the sluice. From here look across the pond and pick out the tallest tree on the far side (if it I think a Poplar which has not yet put out its leaves). Now look to the right of this tallest tree and pick out the next tallest which is an Ivy covered Oak. Between these two tall trees pick the only two evergreens (Holm Oaks). **The right hand Holm Oak** has the first Heron nest hidden in its upper foliage (usually with the female out of sight and the male of that pair standing erect in its top branches so that his head stands out above the tree top. To find the second nest look at the second (left hand) Holm Oak and you will see that a still leafless Alder, with roots close to the tallest Poplar, has fallen sideways until its top branches now obscure the top branches of the left hand Holm Oak. **The second Heron nest is a substantial affair in the top branches of this Alder** but will be obscured when the Alder leaves emerge.

## Thu 27 Mar

First English Scurvygrass flowering at Emsworth along with first Common Dog Violets plus reports of several migrant arrivals

Cycling to Langstone Pond and Nore Barn this afternoon my own sightings included the 'presumed nesting' Grey Heron still on its Holm Oak tree-top at the pond (where Peter Raby has watched it guarding and defending a seemingly sitting mate since at least Mar 17, though the actual nest is hidden in the leaves of the tree), and the number of Egrets claiming nest sites had risen to 8 (plus one green legged juvenile from last year). Heading on towards Emsworth I stopped off at the Conigar Point stubble field where I was surprised to find around 50 plants of Field Pansy in flower (one of them with 32 flowers on it) plus a good show of both Common Fumitory and Field Woundwort in flower. In the Nore Barn woodland one good clump of Greater Stichtwort was in flower plus my first sight of English Scurvygrass out on the saltings. Heading home up the muddy path which leads north to the A259 Havant Road I added my first Common Dog Violets and Wild Strawberry flowers plus half a dozen fertile cones of Great Horsetail.

New bird migrant arrivals which I have learnt of from the internet include ...

<="" font="">House Martins at the Scillies (on Mar 10), at Portland (on Mar 14), at Bembridge, IoW, (on Mar 23), and Titchfield Haven (on Mar 26)

<="" font="">Willow Warbler at Pagham Harbour (on Mar 16), at Lodmoor (on Mar 23), and at Eastleigh (on Mar 25)

<="" font="">Arctic Tern at Portland (on Mar 24)

<="" font="">Common Redstart reported anonymously by RBA (on Mar 21)

<="" font="">Hobby and Common Whitethroat reported anonymously by RBA (both on Mar 22)

<="" font="">Nightingale and Cuckoo reported anonymously by RBA (both on Mar 25)

<="" font="">Cuckoos had been dubiously reported in Dorset (on both Mar 12 and 15)

<="" font="">Sedge Warbler reported anonymously by RBA (on Mar 26)

Other news from the internet includes the first Green Veined White in Oxfordshire on Mar 15 and a second Orange Tip in north Hampshire on Mar 21 (after the first in Fareham on Mar 16)

A more unusual sighting was of a Magpie seizing and carrying off (presumably to eat) one of two Weasels in the north of Pagham Harbour on Mar 25.

A more normal first was the first boom of a Bittern heard at Dungeness on Mar 26 - another first that day was of a White Stork flying over Hurtpierpoint in Sussex (doubling back to make sure it had the right destination before seemingly landing (as it is said to have done last year)

One bird we have missed this winter is the apparently wild Red-breasted Goose that has wintered on the south coast for several years but maybe it has been here managing to evade being seen - this is based on a single sighting of one in Poole Harbour on Mar 24 .. "flying off with a departing flock of Brent"??? and if you missed that bird have a look at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x509-peregrines-mating-chi-26.03.14.jpg>

**Tue 25 Mar**

## Interesting encounters with Robins, Egrets and Herons

This has been a damp and fairly dismal day but I managed to have an **interesting encounter with two Robins** while passing through St Faith's churchyard in Havant before lunch and, before tea when the rain had eased, to **see the Grey Heron which Peter Raby believes is nesting at Langstone Pond**.

At the church in the morning I happened to sit briefly on a bench in the churchyard and as I sat down a rather tatty looking **Robin landed at my feet** with a tiny green caterpillar in its bill and with its red breast seemingly plucked to provide bedding for young in a nest. Literally seconds later **a second Robin, much better dressed, flew down as if attacking the first bird**, which immediately took flight without being physically attacked by the second bird. The second bird then came straight to my feet, ran below me under the bench and then flew up to perch on the back of the bench close to my shoulders, first one side of me then on the other. Having failed to elicit any food from me it appeared to lose interest and flew off.

I assume that the Robins were a pair and that someone regularly feeds them from this bench, and I interpreted the first bird's behaviour to be that of a 'hen-pecked housewife' with the second playing the role of a 'male chauvinist' intent on running his family with an iron discipline but I will go there again with some bird food and see what more I can learn ....

A bonus seen on my way to the Church came in Twittens Way at the back of what used to be Filarinski's shop - a large plant of **Herb Robert** covered with colourful flowers growing out of brickwork.

In yesterday's notes I described how I had read of Peter Raby's **further evidence for suggesting that a pair of Grey Herons are nesting in a tree at Langstone pond**, and I included a link to his photo of the Heron pair perched on top of the tree in which he believes they have an active nest, so this evening I went to the pond, **identified the tree shown in the photo** (which I had wrongly named as a 'Willow' when it is in fact a Holm Oak) and **found an adult Heron standing proudly at the top of the tree** where the upper of the two appears in yesterday's photo. Furthermore after watching this bird for some time **it threw its head back in the Crane-like gesture** which Peter describes.

Before spotting 'Peter's tree' I had seen a different Heron coming in to roost lower down on a tree beside the Lymbourne stream slightly north of the northern boundary of the pond area and in my experience whenever I visit the pond all round the year **there are usually up to three Herons resting there** and during my dusk visits to count the roosting Egrets I usually see **one or more Herons fly off towards Hayling**, seemingly to go fishing at a time when I would have thought it too dark to spot their prey - of course they may not be after fish as Herons will eat almost anything that moves (I have seen them swallow both Moorhen and Dabchick) and maybe these night hunters are after mice or rats ....

I also know that Herons, while regularly prepared to tolerate the close proximity of others of their species when temporarily prevented from fishing by tide, wind or weather (you have probably seen a **'seige of herons'** at places like Farlington Marshes) they can be extremely aggressive if another heron tries to muscle in on



the fishing beat 'owned' by the bird that regularly fishes there - I well remember hearing how a 'beat owner', after several warnings to a juvenile with no beat of its own, to 'keep off', chased the youngster away, landed beside it and **clamped the offender's head in its powerful bill then squeezed until the victim's skull split**, ensuring it did not repeat the offence. With this story in mind, and recalling Peter's account of how the presumed nesting bird at Langstone had menaced a Crow which came too near its 'nest', I was surprised today, shortly after identifying the nest site and watching the nest owner throwing its head back, to **see a dozen Egrets land on the 'nest tree' in close proximity to the Heron on the tree top** (the nearest Egret seemed to be within striking distance of the Heron's beak) yet neither Heron nor Egrets seemed to take any notice of the others' presence. - I await the outcome of this saga with great interest.

Having succeeded in finding the Heron and presumed nest which Peter has been watching I did not stay long and did not make a careful count of the Egrets present but am certain it is still increasing - there were definitely **more than 40 Egrets in the area**.

**Mon 24 Mar**

### **Sussex side of Hollybank Woods and a surprise on a Havant pavement plus three more surprises at Langstone Pond**

This morning I made my first visit for this year to the Sussex side of the Hollybank Woods (north of Emsworth) to check on the progress of the **Early Purple Orchids** and other woodland plants which flourish in the damp south east corner of the woodland which is watered by the small stream which here acts as the county boundary between Hampshire and Sussex. Before reaching the target area you have to walk for nearly 1 kilometre through woodland and have to cross the county boundary stream which in the past has involved a balancing exercise on tree-trunk sized logs dropped into the steep sided deep channel cut by the stream through slippery clay. This year, thanks to the large volume of water which has recently gouged out the steep sides, the crossing was easier (though the wet clay made the descent slippery) and the volume of water at the bottom was minimal so that if you did slip it would not be into deep water.

The usual birds were heard with Nuthatches being especially noisy and one Great Spotted Woodpecker giving me a start when it drummed on a particularly resonant branch only a few feet above my head. On the way back I enjoyed **prolonged Mistle Thrush song** and enjoyed good views of a Jay but I did not spot any Buzzards soaring over.

Reaching the damp part of the wood I very soon saw **my first Wood Anemones** among the many Primroses and Celandines. Early Dog Violets were numerous and I even found **a pure white one** (I have found these here in previous years but at later dates when I am pretty sure they were Common Dog Violets). A good number of the **Early Purple Orchid plants were well developed** with quite large, but still sheathed, flower spikes - ominously for the future of the colony I saw two in which the tip of the sheathed spike had been bitten off, presumably by Deer.

Later in the day I took a brief walk to the Havant Cemetery and back, noting that the **catkins on the young Hornbeam tree were now open** and, on the way back, finding some large Bitter Cress plants of which I took a sample home and found that these did have the six stamened flowers to prove they were **Wavy Bitter Cress** - as extra proof I noticed, on putting the sample plant into a jar of water under a bright desk lamp, that the stems were covered with hairs which glistened in the light.

Although most of the **Wigeon** seem to have left the Langstone/Chichester Harbour area I see there were still 50 at the Lower Test Marshes today. On the Isle of Wight a **House Martin** was seen at Bembridge yesterday and today Portland had the first two **Arctic Tern** that I have heard of and Poole Harbour had an intriguing sighting of a **Red Breasted Goose** which 'flew off with Brent' (the only sightings of this colourful species so far this winter seem to have been of escapes from captivity associating with Greylags or Canada Geese but maybe we have had a genuine migrant which has wintered further west (or south) than usual but is now passing through on its way back to Russia). A vagrant **Black Kite** was seen heading north over Dungeness yesterday

Locally Peter Raby had a very exciting morning at Langstone Mill Pond with an **Osprey** flying over on its way north carrying a fish which it had presumably caught in the harbour. On the pond he was able to see that the **Swan's nest now has five eggs** and most interesting of all he managed to get a **photo of two Herons on the top of a Willow Tree in which he seems pretty confident that they have a nest**. On my recent visits there I have been trying to spot these Herons but have assumed that if they were nesting it would be in a tall mature tree such as an oak or pine so I have not been looking for them in the trees of the type shown in his photo (see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x5111-grey-herons-nest-lmpt-24.03.14.jpg>). Checking on other people's views on the nesting habits of Herons the first document produced by Google on the subject (see <http://www.wildaboutdevon.co.uk/fact-file-grey-heron/>) agreed with my pre-conceptions (though it did mention that .. "there have been rare observations of heron nests found on the ground" .. which shows that they are flexible in their habits, but when I first read about this in the past I read that this was on a Scottish island where there were plenty of fish but no trees). Another strange aspect of this nest is that I have not heard any of the continuous noise which is usually reported by people monitoring Heronries - a video made by Bill Oddie and the BBC is worth watching at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Grey\\_Heron#p0087nnj](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Grey_Heron#p0087nnj).

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 17 - 23 (WEEK 12 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 23 Mar**

#### **Rue-leaved Saxifrage now flowering in Havant as the first Whitethroat reaches Britain**

This morning I had a very pleasant cycle ride through Denvilles to Emsworth and back though the start was slightly marred by the **corpse of a Tawny Owl** on the road outside Warblington School and I was greatly surprised, when I arrived at the far end of **Glenleigh Park road** where I was hoping to see Shining Cranesbill among the rough ground on what was (when I last visited) the very rough fields of a market garden, to find I was entering **a large new housing estate with several houses**

apparently ready for occupation. The main entrance to this new estate (called 'Manor Farm') is via Fifth Avenue but I rode on up Southleigh Road to the Locks Farm area where the ancient hedge bank is now thickly clothed with **Greater Stitchwort** as well as the **Lesser Periwinkle** that still reminds me of the sort of flower rich bank that I walked past on my way to my first school in the 1930s.....

Passing Southleigh Farm I watched a Buzzard fly north from the roadside trees but found no fresh flowers though I did find **new leaves of Wild Garlic (Ramsons)** for the first time. Back at home I did better when I went to stock up on supplies for my lunch - en route to Waitrose I took the route through the Pallant carpark and found **Rue-leaved Saxifrage had started to flower** at the foot of the tall street lamp on the south side of the carpark (and on my way home found another plant of it flowering at the west end of an eye-catching patch of flowering Whitlowgrass on the foot of the wall by the pavement of the road passing the carpark). Another sign of spring flowering was seen in the Church Hall private carpark where both **Yellow Corydalis** and **Ivy-leaved Toadflax** had resumed their almost year-round flowering.

Back at my computer I saw on the RBA website entry for yesterday (Mar 22) that ... "Scarcity highlights included two Hoopoes, two Yellow-browed Warblers and a White Stork, with the **common Spring migrants list including a Hobby, a Redstart (yesterday), a Whitethroat,** a Yellow Wagtail, two Willow Warblers, three Ring Ouzels, **11 Ospreys** (nine of which were on breeding grounds) and 25 Garganey." Nearer home I saw that a **Long-tailed Duck** was once more on Langstone Harbour (seen by Tim Doran off Broadmarsh) while **at Langstone Pond Martin Hampton had .. "amazing views of an amazingly confident Water Rail clambering around the Swan's nest"** - this observation follows hard on the heels of what I said on Mar 21 about the 'current window of opportunity for seeing Water Rails when they are in unfamiliar (to them) places as they make one day stop-offs between their night flights from winter to spring sites'.

Also relevant to Andy Johnson's report of an **Iberian Chiffchaff** at Sandy Point (Hayling) on Mar 19 (and to the regular reports of birds singing both Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler songs) is an interesting comment from Owen Mitchell in the Selsey Blog entry (<http://selseybirder.blogspot.co.uk/>) for Mar 22. And if you want to learn **how the Nazis treated 'Jewish' Carrier Pigeons during the war** see Cliff Dean's latest piece <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2014/03/21/reich-doves/>. The last thing which caught my attention today was a photo on the Reculver (Kent) bird website to which I have given my own title of **"The Little Owl's Social Club"** after my poor eyesight eventually detected that there were two, not one, Owls in the photo - see <http://www.kentos.org.uk/Reculver/images/litow0314.jpg>

## **Fri 21 Mar**

### **Three newly flowering plants on south Hayling where the only Brent Goose I saw was carved in stonee**

My own outing today was a walk around the South Hayling Golf Course after driving down from Havant. My first sighting was of a **Comma Butterfly** which hurtled by me on the brisk wind but managed to soak up some sun by landing on the sunlit side of a telegraph post which shielded it from the wind. A little further on the Kench came into view with not a single bird to be seen - that is until I checked a block of white

stone at the roadside nearest the water which turned out to be a good **stone carving of a Brent Goose** newly erected to mark the Shipwrights Way long distance path from the Alice Holt Forest near Farnham to Portsmouth Dockyard - for more on this path see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2602>.

Reaching the roundabout just before the Ferry Inn I found what looked like **wild Wallflowers** (but, unlike those probably now flowering on the walls of Portchester Castle) are almost certainly the result of planting some years ago among the Alexanders and other semi-wild plants now flowering on the north side of the Ferry Road. On the south side of the road just east of the roundabout I did find one new plant worth ticking - **Eastern Rocket in flower** - and in the harbour entrance channel there was a single Common Gull.

Under the Tamarisks growing on the Sand Dunes I noticed a very few young plants of **Spring Beauty were starting to flower** but by far the majority seemed to be a long way off flowering, and after turning along the south fence of the Golf Course I did not hear a single Skylark and only a couple of tentative bursts from a Meadow Pipit. It was not until I reached my 'turn round point' south of Staunton Avenue that I added my third new flower for the year - a single flower of what I assume to be **Dove's Foot Cranesbill** though of the large form which I always think might be **Round Leaved Cranesbill**. Actually right opposite Staunton Avenue across Ferry Road was the usual display of garden 'chuck out' flowers of **Ipheion (Tristagma uniflorum)** but as yet no sign of the 'Cocks Eggs' that will abound here later. One more sighting before getting back to the car was of a single **Small Tortoiseshell**.

Although I saw no Brent today there was still a flock of 470 in the east Solent off Chilling and news from Portland of **two Water Rails being caught in ringers nets** tells us that these birds are now leaving their winter quarters to head back to the places where they will breed, giving us that short window of opportunity when they may land anywhere at the end of each overnight flight and in being unfamiliar with the local vegetation they lose their 'cloak of invisibility' and give us a chance to see them.

Also seen at Portland today was a single **Hoopoe** with its photo being on show among today's 'tweets'. Without a photo the presence of a newly arrived **Little Stint** at Rye Harbour gets a mention and the RX website also added to my knowledge of Bee species with news (and a photo) of an **Ashy Mining Bee (Andrena cineraria)** - see <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/21/dungeness.html>. While still on the subject of insects Graeme Lyons introduced me to yet another **new species of Ladybird** which he found in an East Sussex wood. A literal translation of its Latin Name would have us call it the '**Magnificent Ladybird**' - have a look at Graeme's piece and see what you think - go to <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/does-my-bum-look-big-in-this.html>.

For me the most exciting thing seen on the internet today was a lengthy and close up video of a Bottlenosed Dolphin taken in Newlyn Harbour (and seen on the Cornwall Birding website) - to see it go to <http://www.youtube.com/embed/mrQwZBKBXck?list=UUSIMONyCbPjx0R3UCMvDcb>  
[A](#)

[Thu 20 Mar](#)

**First Mallard ducklings and Coot chicks at Arundel plus recognising the songs of Siberian and Iberian Chiffchaff**

A bit of spring news which I must have missed when it was first broadcast on the SOS website is that **both Mallard and Coot had hatched at least one brood** at Arundel on Mar 14 but less expected was news of an **Iberian Chiffchaff** at Sandy Point on Hayling yesterday.

Brushing up on my own very limited knowledge of how to recognize an **Iberian Chiffchaff** I came on a very useful YouTube site which I recommend - go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2hulMxZEPc>. For comparison with the **Siberian Chiffchaff** try the Youtube clip I suggested on Mar 13 which is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxmkXOvQI-U>, and to master the basics of **separating a Chiffchaff from a Willow Warbler** try <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDIDVHegos0> which covers all the points including showing you what is meant by Primary Projection.

Another thing which I learnt from Youtube today is that **you can eat the Giant Butterbur plants** that we have growing by the Langbrook stream and which I mentioned on Mar 8. It was in the news again today when it got a mention on the RX website as a result of there being a good colony of it at Westfield near Hastings which is described at <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/20/giant-butterbur.html> and it was there that I got the link to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJigcO6GGi4> (which also gave me the name 'Bog Rhubarb' for the Butterbur)

Among today's other news I see that Hampshire had its first **Large Tortoiseshell**, seen yesterday in the Popham area south of Basingstoke and reported with the comment that it had hibernated in a house rather than arriving as a migrant from the continent (First of the year had already been seen in Sussex on Mar 12)

[Wed 19 Mar](#)

**Egrets now starting to nest at Langstone, a Red-backed Shrike seen in Hampshire and the first Common Tern arrives in Nottingham**

A visit to Langstone Pond this morning left me confused as to whether the female Swan is serious about nesting as she was once more off her nest and I could see no eggs in it (though the bottom of the nest had been ruffled up as if to keep some eggs warm though I felt pretty sure that there were none). What I found much more interesting was that **two Egrets were apparently already constructing nests** near the top of two trees seen from outside the back gate of the Mill House. A further sign of intention to nest was shown by the presence of around 15 more Egrets low on the trees along the west side of the pond - they won't nest that low down but with a couple of hours to go before high tide they would normally have been out fishing and furthermore they were occasionally having noisy quarrels among themselves.

Much more exciting news today came from the Nursling area north west of Southampton where a **Red Backed Shrike** was seen. This may be a passage bird en route to breed somewhere in Scandinavia but since all the sightings in England



in the past 25 years seem to have been of post-breeding autumn passage birds I thought I should enquire further as to what this bird might be intending and these enquiries have told me the following... Regular breeding in England seems to have ceased in 1988 when the last pair nested in East Anglia but there have been sporadic attempts to nest since then and in particular a pair has bred successfully on Dartmoor in 2010, 2011 and 2013 (they did try in 2012 but seem to have been defeated by the weather). So today's sighting could be a further sign that the species is not only here to make a further attempt to breed but maybe this is a youngster hatched on Dartmoor that will find a mate and this year will nest in Hampshire.

An incidental result of today's inquiries was that I found myself using [a website that I have often heard praised for the wealth of bird song recordings](#) it offers but have never personally consulted. Having done so I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to know how to recognise a bird by its song - to use it all you have to do is to go to <http://www.xeno-canto.org/> then enter the name of a bird species in the Search Box on the top line of the page, then click the Search Button, and you will be presented with a list of recordings (with details of where they were made, how long they are, etc) and all you have to do to hear the recording is to click the button in the left hand margin of the page against the recording you are interested in. There are several other facilities on offer but I will leave you to explore them!

I made a further outing after lunch, going first to Budds Farm where I found the female of the resident Swan pair there on the nest which she used last year - in the small reedbed straight ahead on the viewing bench above the pools. Not yet present were the two pairs of Shelduck that have seemingly bred there in recent years and I could see no sign of any Canada Geese so far. I came home along Mill Lane at Langstone seeing, thanks to a tip-off from John Goodspeed, that several plants of [Glory of the Snow \(Chionodoxa forbesii\)](#) are now flowering under a blanket of bramble growth. If you want to know what to look for go to [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/75/Chionodoxa\\_forbesii04.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/75/Chionodoxa_forbesii04.jpg) but if you want to see these colourful flowers go west down Mill Lane until just past the entrance to the West Mill then look on your left for a clump of white flowered Summer Snowflake plants. The bright blue and white flowered Chionodoxa are partially hidden under the nearby brambles but you should have no difficulty in finding them and it would appear they are establishing a colony as, in addition to one or two large plants with around a dozen flowers each there are two much smaller single flowered plants this year.

Just to add the location of [today's Common Tern sighting](#) - it was seen at the Attenborough Nature Reserve by the River Trent where it passes the City of Nottingham - an odd place to make its debut for the year.

[Tue 18 Mar](#)

### **First Orange Tip see in Fareham, British scorpions, and minature plants in a Havant carpark**

Other than the constant sound of Chiff Chaff song as migrants move north up the Hayling Billy line past my house and the first hint of a tiny white flowerbud on the Rue-leaved Saxifrage plants in Havant's East Pallant carpark seen on my way to

the shops, I have little to report today of my own observation but thanks to John Goodspeed I do have news of what may be the **first Orange Tip butterfly** to have emerged in England this spring - all I know is that one was seen in Fareham on Mar 16 and reported to John. Also seen on Sunday Mar 16 in my own garden was the first **Bee Fly (*Bombylius major*)** that I have seen this year though one was reported in Folkestone on Mar 8, and also in my garden that day the first '**Good Friday Grass**' (***Luzula campestris* or Field Wood-rush**) was just starting to flower.

Also seen mentioned on the internet today (from sand dunes in Northumberland) was a species of wildlife which I did not know could be found in the British Isles and which has extended my knowledge of what can be found here in two respects. I'd better start with a link to the source of my information at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/dune.html>

which has a photo looking like some sort of **Scorpion** and text which I did not read carefully enough so that my first impression that this was a genuine species of Scorpion (of which I now understand there are no native species here although one species (***Euscorpium flavicaudis* or the European yellow-tailed scorpion**) managed to set up a colony in Sheerness Dockyard on the Isle of Sheppey sometime in the 19th Century and has since spread so that there are now .." thought to be as many as 13,000 European yellow tailed scorpions in the UK and they mainly live in cracks in bricks and masonry on sunny, south facing walls in isolated spots such as docks, railway stations and disused buildings" around the London area.

Having improved my knowledge of Scorpions in this country I turned my attention to **Pseudoscorpions** and discovered that 27 species of these can be found in Britain and that while they do not have a poisonous sting in their tails they do grasp and pierce their prey with their hefty pincers before injecting poison through those same pincers. To learn more start by visiting

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/bugs-and-habitats/pseudoscorpions>

You may not wish to devote much time to Scorpions but if you are ever in the **Havant East Pallant carpark** (adjoining the carpark of the Bear Hotel) do go over to its south west corner where it abuts on a strange 17th Century building known as '**The Gazebo**'. Along the north side of this building there is a pavement which is rarely trodden on and which is therefore an excellent site for finding an uncommon plant called the **Rue-leaved Saxifrage** (to learn the unusual shape of its minute basal leaves see

[http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/S/Saxifrage\(RueLeaved\)/Saxifrage\(RueLeaved\) 2011 04 08 HardrawHut Hawes 052p3.jpg](http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/S/Saxifrage(RueLeaved)/Saxifrage(RueLeaved) 2011 04 08 HardrawHut Hawes 052p3.jpg). These plants will soon be

flowering in several places around the carpark and the untrodden foot of the pavement wall outside the carpark, but be aware that this is not the only miniature wildflower taking advantage of this site - at the moment parts of the pavement are neatly divided into white lined squares where **Common Whitlowgrass** has grown between the paving bricks (see

[http://www.british-wild-flowers.co.uk/00%20John%20Crellin/Whitlow-grass,-Com](http://www.british-wild-flowers.co.uk/00%20John%20Crellin/Whitlow-grass,-Common.jpg)

[mon.jpg](http://www.british-wild-flowers.co.uk/00%20John%20Crellin/Whitlow-grass,-Common.jpg)) as have quite a few plants of **Thale Cress** (see

[http://tuebingen.mpg.de/uploads/RTEmagicC\\_Arabidopsis\\_02.jpg.jpg](http://tuebingen.mpg.de/uploads/RTEmagicC_Arabidopsis_02.jpg.jpg))

**Mon 17 Mar**

## Possible signs of breeding at Havant Thicket, Langstone Pond and Brook Meadow

This morning I took a walk round the Gipsies Plain fields south of Havant Thicket in search of evidence that Lapwing will breed there again this year and was pleased to see **four Lapwing** in the field west of the point where the path through Hammonds Land Coppice emerges from the woods and heads for the road junction leading down into Rowlands Castle. I think it very likely the Lapwing will breed here despite having deserted so many farm fields in the south of England but the birds were not actively displaying as I would have expected.

Several Skylarks were singing over these fields and three or four Meadow Pipits flew north but the only two observations which I thought worth recording were of just two butterflies - one Brimstone and one Red Admiral - and a clear sighting of one **Jay** allowing me at long last to add it to my year list, bringing the total to just 82 before I start to add summer migrants.

I see from Brian Fellows blog that Peter Raby was at **Langstone Pond** this morning and confirms the impression that I had yesterday that the **female Swan is now firmly settled on her nest** and Peter also noticed definite signs that a few of the **Egrets are now thinking of nesting** but I remain unconvinced that a pair of **Grey Herons have a nest there** though I will be delighted if he is proved right. The evidence for nesting which Peter puts forward today is .. "Grey Heron observed on its usual tree rearranging sticks, raising all its feathers in alarm to a Carrion Crow that ventured too close and carrying out Stork-like display of tossing head up and back. It will only be a matter of time when chicks will be seen." Against this no actual nest has been seen, nor have two birds shown signs of being paired, while no Grey Herons have been known to nest here in the past...so this is why I feel I can go no further than talk of possible signs of breeding and I also feel it necessary to show similar caution towards a photo of two Small Tortoiseshell butterflies shown in Brian Fellow's blog with the title "**Small Tortoiseshells mating on Brook Meadow**" when the rear butterfly of the pair is facing the wrong way for successful copulation.

An unusual bird observation recorded on the Brighton town seafront yesterday was the **headless corpse of a Woodcock**, thought to be the work of a local Peregrine. No new migrant species have come to my attention today but I see that I should qualify my statement yesterday that Christchurch Harbour had the **first migrant Willow Warbler** - I now see that another reached Church Norton on the same day (Mar 16). Another observation that I am pleased to see is of **four Willow Tits still to be found in the Facombe area** of north Hampshire (probably not seen there earlier because of flooded roads (on Feb 22 two other pairs were seen west of the A34 in the Highclere area). To end today I see from the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website that the **first Bluebells were flowering** in the Wisborough Green area on Mar 16.

**WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 10 - 16 (WEEK 11 OF 2014)**

**Sun 16 Mar**

## Cemeteries, Ground Ivy and overwintering Dragonflies.

I have now finished editing the results of my visits last Thursday to the local cemeteries and they are now online via the links at <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> but the only photo which may be of general interest is of a **Small Tortoiseshell** which allowed me a close view that can be seen at <http://ralph-hollins.net/HC201403136.jpg> unless you share my sense of the incongruous - see <http://ralph-hollins.net/WC2014031312.jpg> which I have mentally titled "The Woebegone Woollen Womble".

A cycle ride yesterday from Havant west to the eastern entrance to Farlington Marshes found a couple of hundred Brent along the north shore of Langstone Harbour and a good show of **Ground Ivy flowers** beside the cycleway below the A27 plus one healthy clump of **Lungwort** which I assumed was the normal garden escape but which had narrowish leaves and which I suppose deserves checking for the **faint possibility that this is the native Narrow-leaved Lungwort** which is relatively common in the New Forest and in the north east of the Isle of Wight but not so far recorded east of Southampton Water. Langstone Harbour is in easy range of wind-blown seed from the Isle of Wight and if we accept the 'conspiracy theory' which has the 'Portchester Postman' planting Field Cow-Wheat on Portsdown and take into account last year's find of a new site for Danewort only 20 metres from this Lungwort the plant's identity is worth checking. It is easy to find: go about 20 metres east along the cycleway from the Farlington Marshes eastern gate and you will find a wooden gate giving access to a stream outlet into the harbour - the gate is further marked by an erroneous cycleway sign saying the you are just 2 miles from Chichester - and you will find the Lungwort flowering at the foot of the small gate. The leaves looked narrower than usual to me but the essential check which I will make next time I am passing is to check the inflorescence area for 'very few or no stalked glands and leaves hispid on the upperside'. If the basal leaves are narrow and taper into the leaf stalk then the plant is either Narrow-Leaved or 'Mawson's Blue' (in which case there will be lots of stalked glands). Easier to be sure of as I went back along the harbourside cycleway were the many flowering plants of Ground Ivy and one bush of **Broom showing unopen but yellow flowerbuds**.

Today I once more went to Langstone Pond at midday and this time found the **Swan firmly on her nest** (no chance of seeing if any eggs had been laid) with her mate enthusiastically pecking the legs of the many passers by. From Langstone I rode along the beach and up Pook Lane to check the **Emsworth Wayside A27 Underpass site**, finding a fresh flowering plant of **Field Woundwort** on the triangle of short grass between the old 'South Coast Trunk Road' and the new pedestrian/cycle route - in the short moss just before the 'Trunk Road' is blocked by the new A27 what looked like a sprinkling of minute white confetti was yet more Whitlowgrass.

Turning to the news from the internet for the past two days I was very surprised to see that this **unusually mild winter has allowed at least two individual dragonflies to survive as adults** which I thought never happened in the British Isles. The two reports which appear on <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/latest-sightings> were both 'seen from car' reports (one on Feb 27 in the Thames valley and the other on Mar 7 in Wiltshire) but I have no reason to doubt that the sightings were of adult

dragonflies (probably Aeshna species) and this spurred me to make a Google search for Dragonflies overwintering as adults and this produced a species called **Sympecma fusca which regularly overwinters in Germany** (said to occur in Bavaria (120 km east of Frankfurt) and on the same latitude as south Belgium. For more on this species (given the English name of **Common Winter Damselfly**) see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sympecma\\_fusca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sympecma_fusca). There is just **one British record of this species** seen in Wales on Dec 21 in 2008 - to see the detail go to <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/sightings-late-2008> and use CTRL +END to go to the last record on that page. There seems very little chance that the insects seen this winter and described as Aeshna species were examples of the much smaller Winter Damselfly.

Before leaving the subject of insects I see that on Mar 15 the **first Large White** (a female) that I had heard of was seen in the Crawley Down area of Sussex feeding on Daphne odora but on checking the national 'first sightings' I see that Butterfly Conservation had **the first as seen in Dorset on Mar 7**.

The other report which caught my attention was in Brian Fellows Emsworth blog in which he gives an account of the Havant Wildlife Group's Saturday outing in the Staunton Country Park (the southern part of Havant Thicket). In addition to seeing a **Speckled Wood butterfly** Ros Norton, the walk leader, says .. "We heard drumming from greater spotted woodpeckers and some of us **heard a lesser spotted woodpecker**." .. and this led me to discover **a super video of a Lesser Spotted drumming** at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMD3fM7CFeA>, reminding me of past times when Lesser Spots were a regular sound and sight in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth.

Other news from yesterday (Mar 15) was of the **first Little Ringed Plover** of the year at Titchfield (not the first to reach Britain as RBA reported one seen in Carmarthenshire on Mar 11 as the second to reach us). One species that was reported by RBA as the first to reach Britain on Mar 15 was a **Garden Warbler** (no location given). At least **three Hoopoes have been in Britain since Mar 10** and were still here on Mar 15 - one in Cornwall between Penzance and Land's End, another on Lundy and the third in Scotland. Back on Mar 14 there were already **more than 40 Sand Martins in the Exe estuary** and on the 15th **Rye Harbour had at least 80 Sandwich Terns**. Today (Mar 16) brought news of the **first Willow Warbler at Christchurch Harbour** - this seems to be the first migrant to reach Britain though one may have tried to winter here as one was reported at Sidlesham Sewage Works (Pagham area) on Jan 4 and another was reported in Belgium on Mar 6.

To end with a bit of **unusual bird news from Devon** starting with a report of seeing a **colourful Reeve's Pheasant** (to see one go to <http://www.arkive.org/reevess-pheasant/syrmaticus-reevesii/>). The presence of this unusual game bird was then explained by another birder who said .. "The local very large Bury shoot has been putting down about half a dozen Reeve Pheasants for the past 3 years, apparently **if someone shoots one they have to pay for a round of drinks to all those on the shoot**."

**Fri 14 Mar**

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



## **Ground Ivy flowers found in Pook Lane with Horse Chestnut leaves emerging. Also news of an uncommon fungus at Midhurst and a Bluethroat in Holland**

I spent most of the day sorting out and writing up the 77 photos taken yesterday in the Havant Cemeteries but I did take a break for short cycle ride during which, in Pook Lane, I added **Ground Ivy flowers** to my year list and also noted, while crossing the A27 footbridge, that **Horse Chestnut leaves** were emerging from their sticky buds (actually first noticed yesterday on a tree in Havant Park opposite the Bus station). Reaching Langstone Pond I found both Swans on the water with no eggs in the nest and also found no Teal left in the flooded pony field north of the pond.

Back at home I saw that Graeme Lyons had been told of an **unusual fungus** (**Geotropa sumneriana**) growing under Cedar trees in Midhurst - see Graeme's blog at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/kinder-egg-of-dead.html> or, for more on this fungus which does not feature in my books, see <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/cedar-cup>.

The only bird news which caught my eye came from the Netherlands and was a report of a **Bluethroat** seen yesterday (Mar 13) - the colour of the throat spot was not stated but would only indicate if the bird came from northern Europe (red) or southern (white). What I did find interesting was an article describing how it was this species that first (back in 1880) made Cley in Norfolk into the birding Mecca that it now is (or was until a presumed bird strike brought an American military helicopter crashing down there in January this year). For the 1880 story see <http://www.birdsofbritain.co.uk/bird-guide/bluethroat.asp> and for one version of the helicopter crash story see <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/norfolk-helicopter-crash-investigation-launched-into-how-safest-ever-us-aircraft-came-down-in-cley-marshland-killing-four-9045188.html> (I still think the birds roosting in the marsh brought the helicopter down in protest at having their sleep disturbed in this way on a chill January night).

### **Thu 13 Mar**

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

### **Nothing much seen during my Cemetery visits but Wood Anemones and Cowslips seen by others plus a Large Tortoiseshell and a possible early Cuckoo**

Today I made my regular monthly visits to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries plus St Faith's Churchyard to take photos which will soon appear on my Cemeteries Page but for the moment the only reference I will make to that concerns an entry seen on John Goodspeed's website about possible confusion between White Comfrey and white flowered forms of Common Comfrey. In the past I had to admit to confusing the two but I now use the shape of the calyx teeth as the main point of separation between the species. **White Comfrey**, which is currently starting to flower in Havant, has short triangular calyx teeth as in this photo (See <http://ralph-hollins.net/SF43.jpg>) while **Common Comfrey**, which is generally not as

pure a white in colour, has much longer and thinner teeth (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/SF43a.jpg>).

Perhaps the most exciting discovery which I saw reported on the internet today was a very unexpected butterfly, a **Large Tortoiseshell**, seen basking on bracken in woods close to Rye yesterday (Mar 12) but others might be more excited about the first report of a **Cuckoo** (heard only, also yesterday, near Wimborne in Dorset). Perhaps a more reliable bird report was of the first **Tree Pipit**, also yesterday and in Pembrokeshire, while Portland had a **Little Ringed Plover** today though I am not clear as to whether it was the first for the year.

First flowers, seen today, were **Wood Anemones** at Idsworth to the north of Rowlands Castle, and **Cowslips** at Durlston. Also seen at Durlston were both **Small** and **Great Bloody Nosed Beetles** and a **Violet Oil Beetle** - there was also a **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** at Rye town though yesterday I reported the first being seen at Folkestone on Mar 8. On Portsdown the first official Butterfly transect count of the season recorded **45 Brimstones**, **6 Small Tortoiseshells**, **3 Peacocks** and **1 Comma**.

Local news for today was of a **Wheatear on the Langstone South Moors** and a passing **Goosander** just offshore while down in Southsea a pair of **Sparrowhawks were nest building** in Kingston Cemetery

A couple of bits of background info concern, firstly, the **calls and song of a Siberian Chiff-chaff** - listen to a lengthy recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxmkXOvQI-U>. The other snippet comes from Devon where **the same ringed Brent Goose has been seen at the Exe estuary for the past 18 winters** (and has also been recorded on passage in the Wadden Sea coast of the Netherlands and Germany).

## Wed 12 Mar

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

### Meadow Pipit song at Gunner Point

Today I cycled to Gunner Point in pleasant sunshine but the most exciting observation I made was my **first Meadow Pipit song**, together with Skylark song, on the beach south of the Golf Course. Two other new finds along the north side of the Golf Course were the **first pink flowers open on the Tartarian Honeysuckle** and the first growth of **Bur Chervil plants** (no hint of flowers but the soft lacy green foliage is an attraction in its own right). One Chiff Chaff was singing in the Sinah Lake area and one male Brimstone was a slight surprise flying over the dry ground south of the Golf Course.

A welcome sound as I set off from my house was the twittering of Goldfinch - a pair normally nests in a garden across the road from my house and it sounded as if they were back to breed but when I reached **Langstone Pond the Swan was off her nest** (where she had been snugly settled last night) and I could see there were no eggs. Around 50 Teal were still on the flood in the Wade Court south pony field and the first of several Brent flocks, each of between 20 and 50 birds (all seemingly in pairs), were on the shore here and down the west shore of Hayling.

Yesterday I forgot to mention that as I was walking past Havant Park in the morning while the grass was still dewy, I watched **a handsome breeding pair of Herring Gulls standing sided by side and 'running on the spot'**. I have heard of Black-headed Gulls doing this in rainy weather in order to bring worms to the surface (the pattering of the feet is supposed to sound like raindrops and this is said to bring up the worms) but it seemed an odd way for these gulls to get their breakfast ((I would have been less surprised to see them stealing scraps of food from under the feet of the pedestrians in Havant, especially as this was Market Day.

Today's news for twitchers was of the arrival of a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** in Pembrokeshire (for info about this species see <http://www.arkive.org/great-spotted-cuckoo/clamator-glandarius/>) while locally the **Chichester Peregrines** marked the start of their breeding season with an aerial display round the cathedral spire by the female and three males (presumably the adults trying to get rid of last year's remaining young). Also at Chichester at least one **Swallow** and one **Sand Martin** were seen over Ivy Lake with a male **Scaup** in the water. A couple of days earlier (Mar 9) I see that there was a **male Ring Ouzel** at Pulborough Brooks, a reeling **Grasshopper Warbler** in Yorkshire and a very early **Wryneck** in Pembrokeshire.

As well as many butterfly and moth sightings in the past few days I was interested to see that the **first Bee Fly** of the spring had been seen at Folkestone on Mar 8 (and that they called it a Dark-edged Bee Fly which apparently is the proper name for *Bombylius major*). The month of March has duly brought a few reports of **Boxing Hares** from the Rye area but none locally - these animals seem to get fewer each year. A final 'spring first' for today is news of **Woodcock roding at dusk** on Mar 11 in north Hampshire (Pamber Forest).

**[Tue 11 Mar](#)**

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

### **Unusual shellfish washed up by recent storms.**

Last Tuesday (Mar 4) Brian Fellows included in his Blog a couple of **photos of unusual shellfish** which had been taken on the beach at Goring (west end of the Worthing shoreline). One was of a cluster of **Goose Barnacles**, which I have heard of, but the other was of something called **a Chiton** which I had not come across before and I have just got round to learning what it might be.

To understand what I am talking about first have a look at the **Chiton photo** which Brian included in his blog - see it at <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x530-chiton-goring-RT-04.03.14.jpg>. The creature in this photo, although it appears to have multiple shells plus a lot of unprotected pink flesh is all one organism which lives on rocky surfaces well below the low tide mark and its life style is somewhat similar to that of a limpet in that it uses a muscular foot to crawl around on the seabed scraping plant material off the rocks for its food. The word Chiton defines a 'phylum' of 600 or more species which have developed a body that is armoured with shell but is not constrained to living with a rigid shell - instead each creature has eight separate 'plates' of shell (you can only see four of the plates in the photo) which are held together with a

'girdle' of muscular flesh, and this allows the creature to remain protected by the shells when crawling over uneven surfaces, or even to curl up into a ball like a Woodlouse.

Without storms of the force which washed this specimen onto the beach the shells of these creatures do not appear on the shore until the creature is dead and its fleshy girdle has rotted away, freeing the eight separate plates to drift away individually, and as they all have a similar shape the plates are often called 'butterfly shells' when seen on the shore.

Although there is a great deal of variety in the looks of different species of Chiton (some are brightly coloured and the shape of the shell plates also varies) I think the creature in Brian's photo looked a lot different before it was bashed about by the storm - maybe more like the one illustrated in another photo I have found which has the pink fleshy girdle protected and made less conspicuous by a thick coating of bristle-like hairs - see

<http://sharon-taxonomy2009-p3.wikispaces.com/file/view/chiton/100593395/chiton>

For more info on Chitons see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiton>. I did not get any idea of size from this Wikipedia page but my Country Life Guide to the Seashore and shallow seas of Britain and Europe describes six species which are common around our coasts and they are all in the size range 1 cm to 2.5 cm long.

The other photo from Goring beach was of a cluster of **Goose Barnacles** which are another type of shellfish which we normally only see after a storm. To get an idea of the large colonies which they form see an example washed up on a Cornish beach at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p32lyWEPLLE> or for a rather gruesome video of a colony still alive and 'gasping for breath' (actually trying to sieve food out of the sea water in which the creatures normally live) see

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukKoondqrXw>. After seeing that scene of dying Barnacles I suggest that you have a look at another video which gives you lots of useful information without harming any of the creatures involved! This time see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOowgyYQ-VA>.

To end with a round up of observations that caught my eye in **today's internet reports**. Sussex had a **Ring Ouzel** at Pulborough today and a **Wheatear** on the cliffs at Newhaven yesterday; go to the Portland website

([http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa\\_latestnews.htm](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm)) for an excellent **photo of a Wheatear** above the Mar 10 entry and a photo which should help you to identify a **Red-necked Grebe** above Mar 9; on Mar 10 John Goodspeed saw **Water Boatmen active in his garden pond** for the first time while on the same day Brian Fellows saw .. "lots of tiny creatures - **possibly Whirligig Beetles** - darting around in the calm water at the edge of the river Ems .. (seen from the south bridge in Brook Meadow at Emsworth). Further afield the last two paras of the RBA website entry for Mar 10 say .. "Reports of summer migrants included **Yellow Wagtail** in Hampshire, **House Martins** on Isles of Scilly, **Ring Ouzel** in Devon as well as widespread reports of **Wheatears** and a handful of **Sand Martins**. There were also **Hoopoes** in Cornwall, Devon, Kent and Co Cork."

**Mon 10 Mar**

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

## **Sunset at Langstone Pond finds Egrets coming to roost and the Swan settled on her nest.**

This evening I cycled to Langstone Pond for the first of the **Egret night roost counts** I hope to make this year and saw **32 Egrets arrive** and settle in trees around the pond but although I stayed till 20 minutes after sunset (at 6pm) it was still quite light when I left and on my way home I passed at least two Egrets still hoping to find food in the pony field north of Wade Court.

While at the pond I watched around 300 Brent fly out from Warblington Farm fields to spend the night on the harbour off Langstone Mill with at least 30 Teal. On the pond, very close to the Mill house, **the Swan was firmly settled on a nest** in full view of everyone walking along the seawall path but I do not know if she has started laying any eggs (she may just find the nest is a warm place to spend the night!).

Today's news from the internet includes the arrival of the **first Yellow Wagtail** at the entrance to Langstone Harbour this morning plus a real **deluge of butterfly sightings** during the past few days. The first hint of this was a report from Barry Collins of a cycle ride he made around Stansted Forest yesterday during which, as well as a good selection of birds, he logged .. "**53 male brimstones, six small tortoiseshells, eight peacocks and four commas.**" I then turned from the Sussex bird site to the Hampshire county butterfly site and listed the total number of insects reported for Mar 9: they were **192 Brimstones, 41 Small Tortoiseshells, 30 Peacocks, 12 Commas, 1 Red Admiral, 1 Speckled Wood, and one Hummingbird Hawkmoth** (newly out of hibernation) plus one or two Orange Underwing day flying moths. Almost as many butterflies were seen on Mar 8 with a similar pattern of sightings in Sussex as in Hampshire - a bonus in Sussex was the sighting of **60 or more Wall Lizards** active around Fort Shoreham.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR MAR 3 - 9 (WEEK 10 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 9 Mar**

#### **Hairy Violets flowering on Portsdown. Also a Garganey at Titchfield, Lapwings starting to display and I learn about Pirate Spiders.**

My objective today was to learn how to distinguish Hairy Violets from Sweet Violets, both of which are currently flowering on Portsdown. I had been up in the area below Fort Widley a couple of days ago and felt pretty confident that I had seen both species but back at home I began to doubt my identification so today I took along my hand lens and a plastic sack with which to get down on the still damp ground to check the significant features. I already knew that **Sweet Violets** have runners (Stolons) connecting their roots into a tight cluster where each **Hairy Violet** lives in isolation from the others so a tightly connected patch of largish plants with deep violet flowers is definitely a clump of Sweet Violets (even though I can't smell their



scent) and I had assumed that two unconnected, smaller plants with paler blue flowers were almost certainly Hairy - but could the smaller, isolated plants be just 'babies' which had not yet had time to start forming a clump, and could the paler blue flowers be a natural variation similar to the shades of pink to be seen in Sweet Violets at Nore Barn Wood in Emsworth? So today I determined to discover what the flower books meant by saying that if you look at the leaf stems and under the leaves of Hairy Violets you will find 'spreading hairs' where a Sweet Violet leaf will sometimes have no hairs and if there are any they will be 'patent hairs'. I was already aware the 'patent' meant sticking 'rigidly straight up' and what I discovered was that spreading hairs looked a bit like those on an old fashioned shaving brush (or my throat if I have not shaved for a week) and that the area of the Hairy Violet leaf underside near the top of the leaf stem had a thick clump of these soft, whitish hairs that were not rigid but curved out slightly away from the thickest part of the clump. So I now feel confident in saying that **Hairy Violets have been flowering on Portsdown for several days.**

Today's other notable sighting on Portsdown was a real **outburst of male Brimstone butterflies** (I must have seen around a dozen plus one other species which I am pretty sure was a Red Admiral). I see that the Brook Meadow site in Emsworth recorded **Comma, Small Tortoiseshell** and **Peacock** today as well as Brimstones.

Another response to the warm sunshine was reported today from Sandwich Bay, but I am sure has been seen all across the south of England, and that was the wild, noisy **display flights of Lapwing** reminding me to have a look at the Gipsy's Plain grassland at Havant Thicket to see if Lapwings will breed there again this year - one place where we can be pretty sure to see them is Farlington Marshes and that reminds me that yesterday's issue of THE NEWS (Portsmouth local paper) had an article on Farlington Marshes (in the Weekend section) which gave me my first chance to see a photo of its relatively new warden, Steve Wiltshire.

More exciting for local birders was the arrival of a **drake Garganey** at the Posbrook flood (north end of Titchfield Haven area). Inland a **smart adult Spoonbill** arrived at Pulborough Brooks offering a good alternative to Sussex birders to a trip to Cuckmere Haven where a young bird has been present since the end of January (there was also another today in the Lymington area). Another good bird appeared on the Isle of Wight today - the very **first migrant Swallow** seen over the Medina River near Cowes - and if you miss that a **Glossy Ibis** was seen in the Adgestone area. As might be expected several Wheatear arrived on the south coast today and at least one flock of 220 Brent was seen heading east off Hastings as more Cranes were arriving at 21 sites on the near continent (one of them reported 1248 birds). Back in Dorset I see a **Stonechat was heard singing** at Durlston.

And to finish with I have to thank Graeme Lyons once again for introducing me to a group of creatures that I was not aware of - **Pirate Spiders** that spend their lives pretending to be prey in another spider's web but killing and eating the owner of the web when it comes to collect its dinner. If you want to follow up this lead you can see Graeme's latest blog update at

<http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/eroquest.html>.

To see what the European members of this family of spiders look like (to me they seem to have been in a car crash during which they have been rammed from

behind and have ended up covered with unsightly blemishes (tubercles)) go to <http://www.jorgenlissner.dk/Mimetidae.aspx> and click any of the photos to enlarge them (try first with the second photo down the list)

## Sat 8 Mar

### First Marsh Marigolds and Langstone's botanic inheritance from IBM. Also the year's first Holly Blue at Portland.

Today's objective was to confirm if the path alongside the Langbrook Stream south of the Langstone Technology Park was once again passable after the recent floods and, if so, could I see the early spring specialities of the area which are the Marsh Marigolds in the South Moors Orchid Meadow and the two unusual examples of Butterbur found on the banks of the Langbrook just north of the gate into the Southmoor Nature Reserve area. With some difficulty I just managed to reach all three target plants but for those not familiar with them the background to their presence here needs some explanation. Most people are probably familiar with the **Common Butterbur** plants to be seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth and at other wetland sites across England but many people do not know that those plants are all male but manage to thrive without female assistance by means of 'vegetative reproduction'. When IBM acquired the land for their new factory in Havant around 1960 they hired a firm of ecological consultations to manage the areas not required for building in a way that would minimise opposition from the growing ranks of wildlife conservationists and they decided to use the wetland beside the stream to introduce two Butterbur species that were not previously present in the area. One were the **females of Common Butterbur**, the other was a very different looking member of the same family called **Giant Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*)** (or possibly White Butterbur (*Petasites albus*) - I have been told the plants are *P.japonicus* but they are not specially giant and are white flowered so I don't think the photo of **White Butterbur** I have found will mislead you as a good representation of what these plants look like). To recognize the difference between male and female Butterbur see

<http://friendsofchorltonmeadows.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/plant-which-is-appearing-and-coming.html> which has a photo of the **compact flowerheads of the male plants above and the much taller and thinner plants of females** below. To see the white flowered species go to <http://www.uksafari.com/butterbur.htm> where it is the righthand of four pictures which you can click to enlarge. Although not stated I think the first photo is of male Butterbur and the second is of females.

At the time when these unusual plants were introduced I can remember enjoying an early spring display of at least 600 Marsh Marigold plants in flower on the land that is now mainly covered by the Southern Electricity call centre. Today that species has become a greater rarity than the Butterburs and after wading the length of the waterlogged 'orchid field' I found just one plant of Marsh Marigold bearing just found small flowers....

Reaching the Budds Farm pools I heard just one Chiff Chaff singing and in addition to the waterfowl seen on my previous visit on Feb 28 there were two Foxes and one pair of Canada Geese. For those interested in the Havant **Water Voles** one was again grazing of the pondside grass just below the busy road into havant as I passed by in the early afternoon

Moving on to today's news from the internet I see that the **first normal Speckled Wood butterfly** of the year (excluding the two 'unnatural' emergences in Hampshire

on Jan 11 and 20) was seen in the Milton area of Portsmouth by Ashley Whitlock yesterday (Mar 7), while at Portland the very **first Holly Blue of the year** was seen today (Mar 8). Turning to bird news for yesterday I see the **first Drumming Snipe** was heard in Hampshire and nationally RBA report the **first three Garganeys** (2 in Gloucs and 1 in London), a single **Wheatear** in Argyll and **more Sand Martins** in Gloucester and London while in the Netherlands a flock (presumably migrant) of **29 Great White Egrets** was seen and in Germany **1350 Cranes** were seen arriving. Down near Rye Bay the **first three Slow Worms** were seen today and here in Botley Wood there is a report of **much Frogspawn** (Michael Prior recently said the same of Stansted Forest)

**Fri 7 Mar**

**My first Hawthorn blossom and Greater Stitchwort plus a hint that Havant's Water Voles are settling down to raise a family**

The **Water Vole** sighting was my first excitement of the day and came by chance as I was walking into Havant and looked over the wavy white railings to find the furry face of a Vole staring back at me from what appeared to be the mouth of a tunnel (though it could have been just a round hole which it had pushed through a heap of vegetation and grass clippings - what was odd about it was that the mouth of the tunnel seemed to be pointing vertically upward, not sideways just above or below the water level. Maybe these voles are just learning the art of tunnel making, but if they are thinking about the subject that could well mean, especially at this time of year, they are feeling the need to build accommodation for their first family of young. When the Voles were first seen on Aug 28 last year I assumed they were youngsters which had been evicted from their own birthplace to make room for another clutch of siblings and if so they must be at least six or seven months old and therefore now overdue to raise their own youngsters.

On my way home from this outing I decided to go north over the rail bridge and to come home via the station footbridge and so pass through Mavis Cresecent where I had seen a mass of garden escape **Grape Hyacinths** pushing up under a hedge - as expected these were now in flower and so were added to my year list but before reaching them I had a more exciting find of my **first Hawthorn flowers** in a hedge close to the roundabout at the northern foot of the bridge over the railway.

Back at home for lunch I was treated to the sight of a **male Brimstone butterfly** loitering with intent in my garden, inspiring me to get out again on my bike to find two more flowers which I expected to be out by now in the warm sunshine. First was **Greater Stitchwort**, five of whose white flowers were found on the the roadside grass bank at the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh roads in the Denvilles area (along with the Lesser Periwinkles) and to end the day I had a look in the Havant Cemetery where I counted 17 lovely blue, bell shaped flowers on the 'self sown' patch of Blue Anemones (*Anemone appenina* - not the commonly cultivated *Anemone blanda*) which are close to being swamped by coarse grass and nettles. At the moment the flowers are similar to large Harebells in both size and colour but the flowers will expand to resemble pale blue verions of our wild Wood Anemone (see

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/pictures/showphoto.php/photo/76923/ppuser/22545>).

Back at home I scanned the internet for other people's spring sightings to find that I had missed the first sighting of an **Osprey** which flew over Farlington Marshes on Mar 4 (today the second of the year was heading north over the New Forest.

Another exciting report which I was slow to spot was of the first **Ring Ouzel**, seen in Devon on Mar 5. Mar 6 saw **Ringed Plovers displaying** at Reculver in north Kent, while just over the Channel in Belgium the first **Willow Warbler** was reported that day. Back in Sussex, also on Mar 6, the first **Common Lizard** was looking sprightly when Neil Hulme photographed it in Rewell Wood near Arundel (see <http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/images/CommonLizardRewellWood060314NH.jpg>)

I see that Bob Chapman was back visiting the Langstone South Moors this morning and managed to see **all five regular grebe species** in that area (I was especially pleased to see that he calls the site the 'Southmoors' as I have always done rather than the politically correct 'Southmoor Reserve'.) I see from the Devon Birding site that there is a further challenge to birders beyond ticking the five grebe species at one site - forget about rarities such as Pied-billed Grebe and have a look at <http://www.devonbirds.org/images/cache/37f4f7dc76ea84e64adc996351f15159.jpg> and be very proud if you can honestly say that you have ever seen a Dabchick doing what this one is doing - standing on its own two feet other than when it is on its nest.

**Thu 6 Mar**

### **Seven singing Blackbirds and Five fresh Coltsfoot flowers**

This afternoon I got on my bike for a circuit of North Hayling during which I heard seven different Blackbirds in full song - interestingly I only heard one Song Thrush during the trip - they have presumably settled down to waiting for their chicks to hatch whereas the Blackbirds are still courting mates and marking out territories. The other high spot of my day came as I was leaving the Oyster Beds and as usual I had a look in the entrance to the carpark behind the garage as this is a regular spot for seeing **Coltsfoot flowers** at this time of year and today I was not disappointed, seen five bright yellow flowers - my first of the spring.

**Daw Lane** is another good place for wild flowers but today the only additions to its banks were some Primroses and a good show of the distinctive blue flowers of the 'var Oxyloba' Great Periwinkles towards the east end.

A look round **Northney Common** before heading back over the Bridge showed one Swan in the back of the Marina area where a pair will probably breed again. Also around the north shore of the Island were a few Shelduck and some nervous looking Brent, presumably just passing through (I was amused to see the whole flock take to their wings when a Grey Heron flew low over them). One bird conspicuous by its absence was Lapwing and also seemingly now departed are all the Wigeon though there are still plenty of Teal around. Another sign of the times comes from Portland by way of a **photo showing two Black-necked Grebes in what looks like full breeding plumage** with bright orange ear-tufts and jet black body plumage - go to [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa\\_latestnews.htm](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm) and look above the diary entry for Mar 5

This evening's browse through the internet picked up a significant sighting which I missed on Mar 1 - that was when **the first lone Wheatear** appeared in the New Forest but with southerly winds forecast I anticipate a mass arrival this week end.

Also clearly now arriving are Chiff-chaffs while Portland has started to report the arrival of **'Alba' Wagtails** (almost certainly some of them continental White Wagtails) as well as the first few **Meadow Pipits heading north**.

One internet posting which had me puzzled was on the Rye Bay website on Mar 2 (see



<http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/2/ibis-showing-well-but-no-sign-of-emu.html>) This refers to a report of a Glossy Ibis in a specific field at Dungeness. To cut a long story short some visitors to the Hayling Ferry area of Hayling Island will remember that as you turned to enter the shore carpark, with the cafe on your right, there used to be some half-hidden buildings on your left occupied by a firm of Environmental Consultants called Emu Ltd and I am pretty sure that this same firm has a similar establishment at Dungeness and that their sign board was being used to indicate where to look for the Ibis!

Just a couple more **insect sightings** (omitting the many reports of early butterflies which continue to pour in). First comes from Brian Banks and reports **four Bumblebee species** already seen in his Northiam garden (not far north of Hastings) - they are *Bombus lapidarius*, *B. terrestris*, *B. pratorum* and *B. hypnorum* but if you want to know more go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/6/spring.html>. Also from the Rye Bay area comes a sighting of a **very rare 13-Spot Ladybird** (*Hippodamia tredecimpunctata*) and for this go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/3/5/13-spot-ladybird-at-pebsham.html>.

## Tue 4 Mar

### My first Chiff-chaff song and other things seen on a walk to Nore Barn and back

The catkins were fully extended on the tall **Grey Poplar tree** at the junction of Wade Court Road with the path leading from central Havant to Pook Lane and Warblington - this tree always flowers much earlier than others of its species. Nothing more of note until I was over the A27 and saw two **Mistle Thrushes** fly into tall trees beside Pook Lane south of the bypass. Around Warblington Farm I saw a **Kestrel** fly west from the Castle tower and in the field east of Church Lane a gathering of **Rooks** were probing the mud churned up by the cattle. Continuing along the path to Nore Barn I failed to see the **Chiff-chaff** in the hedge following the Castle stream but then heard it in

## Sun 2 Mar

**full song** at the top of one of the Alders beside the stream. Looking north into the 'Ibis field' I had a good view of a **Fox** sunbathing on the grass bank at the foot of the northern hedge of the field while at the southern end of the field I spent some time looking for what I thought, by its calls, was a Redwing but when it showed itself it was a Song Thrush.

Turning south from Field M (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/warblington.htm>) on my map of the farm, used over the years when carrying out the BTO Common Bird Survey which required ten visits to each field during each spring, and crossing Field T into Field V, I put up less than ten **Skylarks** (none singing in defence of territory) but did enjoy the pink breast of a sunlit **Linnet** singing in the hedge. Among the flowers noted was one plant of **Field Pansy** which I did not expect.

At Nore Barn the tide was rising and there was a good number of both **Brent** and **Teal** but **no Wigeon** that I could see nor any waders other than the **Spotshank** and one Oystercatcher. Also present were what looked like a pair of **Swans** except that one was an adult and the other a last year's cygnet (Mum still keeping an eye on her offspring from the Emsworth Millpond litter nest??).

Rather than go home along the shore I took what I call the 'Selangor Avenue' path up the eastern border of Warblington Farm and along it I heard what I guess passes



for song among **Long-tailed Tits** - a rapid high pitched trill quite distinct from the lower pitched contact call 'rattle'. While listening to this I also heard the mournful piping which I am pretty sure came from a **Bullfinch** but I never saw the bird and so have still not got it on my year list. The sunlit bank on the east side of this path also had a lot of **Wild Strawberry leaves** but none of the plants were yet in flower.

After splashing through one remaining deep puddle in the path I came out on the A259 Emsworth to Havant road which I crossed to come home along the pavement but on the north side at the crossing point my eye was caught by some tiny, bright white flowers which turned out to be **Common Whitlowgrass** among a mass of other wild flowers including **Danish Scurvygrass**. Further along this pavement I saw my first good show of **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** flowers - still small and inconspicuous but not needing a magnifying glass to pick them out! Further along still, just before entering the underpass below the A27, the sunlit northern bank had a good show of **Spotted Medick** dotted with its bright yellow flowers. Just one more discovery before I got home - outside the 'Wheelwright's Arms' I found my very first flowering plant of **Thale Cress**.

Turning to things which have recently caught my eye on the internet I will start with the summer migrants that will soon be with us. I recently mentioned that three **Sand Martins** had been seen at Weymouth on Feb 25 and I see that one more was seen near Exmouth on Feb 28 when the very first **Common Tern** was seen half way along the north coast of Spain. Another bird arriving for the summer on the continent, but not here, is the **White Stork** of which 34 were seen in Belgium on Feb 26 and 1 in the Netherlands on Mar 1.

A couple of Whimbrel reports seem to be of passage, not wintering, birds - one was heard calling in Langstone Harbour on Feb 27 and another was seen passing Worthing on Mar 2 (along with a distant **Manx Shearwater** - another of these flew past Portland on that same day).

Before leaving bird news we have two local newcomers in the shape of two **Glossy Ibis** which have been in the Lidsey area (by the railway from Barnham to Bognor) from Mar 2 to 4, plus news that the **Spoonbill** thought to have flown from Farlington Marshes on Mar 3 was back there on Mar 4. In East Sussex on Mar 3 a group of **24 Avocet** arrived at Rye Harbour where there have been none during the winter but where some are expected to breed (though these may be just passing through heading for East Anglia). Already breeding are the **Herons** at Christchurch Harbour where there are now three active nests - the **first chick hatched** in one on Mar 3 when the third nest had only just had its first two eggs laid. A different sort of bird info relating to the recent seabird wreck comes from the Devon bird news which has a quote saying .. "It is thought **Puffin** have been particularly affected because they dive mostly in the upper 30m of the sea so the extreme turbulence/turbidity due to the storms will have seriously hampered their ability to feed. Another possible factor is the later moult of Puffin compared to other auks, many may well have dropped all their primaries and been flightless as the storms rolled in." A different angle on a difference between Puffins, Penguins and Guillemots comes from the **BBC 4 TV programme on 'Bones'** that I have just been watching - I highly recommend watching this programme on iPlayer if you have not seen it tonight - the link is

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b03x3zfs/Secrets\\_of\\_Bones\\_Into\\_the\\_Air/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b03x3zfs/Secrets_of_Bones_Into_the_Air/).

The programme makes the point that the **Guillemot** is the only bird to be successful both in the air and under water.

Also tonight I see that, in addition to the **early sightings of Butterflies** which continue to pour in (including a female **Small White** at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on March 1 when a **Painted Lady** - presumed to have hibernated - was seen at Christchurch Harbour) **early moths are beginning to be seen**. Portland has reported both **Early Grey** and **Hebrew Character** being trapped on Mar 3 (a normal date for both to emerge). For photos and background info on the Early Grey see

<http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/speciesData.php?taxonNum=2243> and for the Hebrew Character see

<http://www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk/speciesData.php?taxonNum=2190>

Finally, while you are at your computer, two other 'recommended watches' come from the Rye Harbour site. The first gives **good advice on handling Frogspawn** to avoid spreading disease to more Frogs - see

<http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/2014/02/all-you-need-to-know-about-frog-spawn/>.

The second gives **an insight into the difficulties of managing a nature reserve which has rare wild flowers and lots of Rabbits** wanting to eat the plants - see <http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/2014/03/bad-rabbit-good-rabbit/>.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 24 - MAR 2 (WEEK 09 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 2 Mar**

#### **Four new flowers and the first Water Vole plus a Small White butterfly at Emsworth**

A brief walk to Langstone this morning added **Field Pennycress**, **Thyme-leaved Speedwell**, **English Elm**, **Flowering Currant** and the garden flowers **Clematis armandii** and **Cherry Laurel** to my flowering list for the year. A few plants of the **Pennycress** were just starting to flower in Juniper Square and can be seen if you enter the Square from Grove Road then turn left to walk alongside the fence for a couple of yards until you come to the kerb beyond which several vehicles are usually parked. I think the Speedwell was nearby but it will soon be appearing widely in short grass such as my garden lawn. The **Elm flowers** were out on trees just east of the gate taking you from Russell's Field (west of the Lymbourne stream) into the narrow path leading to the shore between Langstone Mill and the Royal Oak - very soon there should be more of these flowers overhanging the Langbrook Stream just south of Langstone Mill Lane. The **Flowering Currant flowers** were seen on the Lower Grove Road side of the drainage ditch alongside the Billy Trail north of the Havant By-pass and a couple of individual flowers of a **Cherry Laurel** 'candle' were open on the east side of the carpark further up the Billy Trail before you come to East Street. The **Clematis armandii** is flowering high in the top of a tree growing in the garden fence area on your left as you come north out of the unmade narrow part of Wade Lane and are passing the Wade Court area - all you can see of them are a mass or pure white flowers in the treetop.

Back at home I read that the first **Water-vole** of the year had been seen yesterday (Mar 1) at Brook Meadow in Emsworth - it, and any others that have survived the winter there, will of course have been semi-active right though the winter (normally they spend most of the time in their tunnels eating vegetation they have gathered during brief forays into the outside world but recently those tunnels will almost

certainly have been flooded, forcing the Voles to find accommodation above ground, perhaps under thick bushes). In Havant Water Voles were seen in the 'Dolphin pool' on Jan 23.

I have already mentioned, on Feb 28, that at least one presumed migrant **Sandwich Tern** had been seen at Rye Harbour on Feb 27 and I now see that a 'small arrival' of these birds was seen there on Mar 1 (maybe these were birds that have been wintering on the south coast, but they have definitely now got the message that it is time to head for their breeding sites). Another sign of spring passage has been reported on the continent where **White Storks** had started to arrive (34 were seen in Belgium on Feb 26 and one was in the Netherlands on Mar 1). By no means associated with Spring was a report dated Feb 15 I found interesting on an RSPB website for Cliffe Pools (aka Northward Hill) on the north Kent coast some 5 km downstream from Gravesend (just before the Thames broadens out). This indicates a single flock of **5,500 Black-tailed Godwit** was counted there from a single photograph on Feb 15 - here in Hampshire I do not think the peak flock in the Avon valley has ever exceeded 5,000 and 4,000 would be exceptional.

Again no firsts among current butterfly sightings but Mar 1 brought a **Painted Lady** sighting at Christchurch Harbour, three more **Small Tortoiseshells** and six **Brimstones** in Hampshire and a single female **Small White** (photographed at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on Mar 1). Small Whites are not expected to emerge before April but this year one had already been seen on Hayling Island on Feb 10 while Sandwich Bay reported one which 'flew into a house' on Jan 20 - as the Small White overwinters as a chrysalis it is likely that early emergence implies a prolonged high ambient temperature though that could be the result of the insect pupating in e.g. an unused room of a house which became heated when it was brought into use in early spring.

### Fri 28 Feb

#### Male Long-tailed Duck seen from Budds Mound, Field Forget-me-not in flower, and I search for a body in Havant Cemetery

This morning I cycled to Budds Farm where the number of both Pochard and Teal had dropped but all the usual suspects (except the pair of Swans) were present. I then had a look over the harbour from the top of the mound and found there was very little to be seen of the islands at the high point of the tide (supposedly only 4.9 metres but seemingly well over 5.0 metres). One benefit of the high water was that it brought birds close in and I found myself looking down from the Mound onto a group of 5 **Goldeneye**, including one male, and a larger group of Mergansers in front of which was a distinctive male **Long-tailed Duck**.

Heading back up Southmoor Lane I noted that all the **Cherry Plum trees** at the southern end were fully covered with blossom (as were those lining Harts Farm Way just west of the Hermitage Stream bridge) and several **Blackthorn** are now in full flower. A short diversion down the path by the Brockhampton stream failed to produce a Kingfisher so I returned to Harts Farm Way and went on to the Broadmarsh Slipway where I found that the shore path west had been fenced off as a result of storm damage to the seawall (it is only the section alongside the carparks and boat park that is closed). As I turned to ride back I realised that the occupants of the car parked by the slipway were Martin and Margaret Baggs and as Martin in the past monitored the Heronry in Oldpark Wood (across the Fishbourne

Channel from Chichester Marina) I was able to confirm just how noisy and violent a Heronry can be at the start of the breeding season - the report of possible Heron courtship and nesting at Langstone Pond, which I mentioned on Feb 25, is unlikely to pass un-noticed if true!

As we were talking I noticed a party of walkers making their way along the shore in front of Budds Farm and saw that the tide was right up to the Budds Farm fence (as it must have been the other day when it washed out the concrete bases of the fence post and laid the wire mesh fence flat on the ground). This suggests that next Sunday and Monday, when the forecast high tide is 5.1 metres, it will be impossible to walk along that shore. Before I had finished chatting to Martin and Margaret the walkers reached the slipway and told me that there were places on the South Moors seawall where the water was already overtopping the battered seawall so it will be interesting to see what the Moors look like after the coming week-end.

Cycling on along the cycleway to the Portsmouth Eastern Road I enjoyed the sunshine but saw just two wild flowers - one plant of **Cow Parsley** and one of fresh **Hogweed** with a lovely pink-tinged flower umbel. I thought that was all I would see but reaching the Apollo Fire Detector factory, just before the Langstone Technology Park, a half-seen minute patch of blue caused me to slam on the brakes and dismount to discover a very small plant of **Field Forget-me-not** with several clusters of bright blue flowers, each flower no more than 2 mm across.

Before lunch I walked round to Waitrose for essential supplies and while there I was accosted by Chris Evans, a member of the Conservation Volunteers who look after the Havant Cemetery. He told me that while working there last Tuesday the **dead body of an un-identified animal** had been found in the grass. It looked vaguely like a cat and the only prominent feature Chris could recall was that it had extra-long incisor teeth. He thought it might be the body of some exotic animal illegally imported into this country, and dumped when it died. At the time I could not think of any British wild animal fitting the description and likely to be found in this part of England but later a thought came to mind when I recalled something seen beside the Billy Trail in the Langstone area in the 1970s when the trackside vegetation was cut back by a man with an old fashioned Scythe. Un-noticed by the scyther there was a **Stoat** in the long grass, probably having just made a kill which it refused to abandon to anyone. So the Stoat stood guard over its prey, snarling defiance to the world (see photo - not of that particular Stoat - at

<http://cdn1.arkive.org/media/0C/0C8919D6-0EF3-4BB4-A953-421147248D83/Presentation.Large/Stoat-showing-teeth.jpg>) and suffered the penalty of having its throat unintentionally cut by the scythe. I happened to come along just after its death and saw the animal with its snarling face unchanged by the fact it was now dead. The photo shows a Stoat showing its lower teeth but the one I saw had its upper lip drawn back showing the upper teeth also bared in a really vicious snarl of defiance. My over-excited imagination now suggests that a Stoat had been crossing New Lane when a car drove at it. The Stoat, defiant as ever, did not run from the car but stood its ground, snarling its defiance. After its inevitable death the driver of the car, feeling guilty at having killed the animal, picked up the corpse and thought that he would at least give his victim 'a Christian burial' and hurled it after the wall into the cemetery.....

To end today there is news that a **Spoonbill was at Farlington Marshes** on both Feb 27 and 28 but has now flown east over Hayling. More significant is a post from Bary



Yates, warden of Rye Harbour, to say that the **first two Sandwich Terns of the spring were seen at Rye Harbour today** (Feb 28)

**Thu 27 Feb**

### **First Sand Martins of the year seen at Weymouth**

Today I have nothing to report of my own observations but when scanning the internet this evening I saw that there was a report on the Dorset Birds website (<http://dorsetbirds.blogspot.co.uk/>) that three **Sand Martins** had been seen at Weymouth last Tuesday (Feb 25) and I cannot refrain from passing on this news (I also heard a hint on the radio today that the weather is going to improve next week).

Another sign of spring comes from Brian Fellows who saw the **first two hoverflies** that I have heard of this year - **Episyrphus balteatus** (the 'Marmelade Fly') of which he captured a good image which you can see at

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x536-hover-fly-marmelade-26.02.14.jpg> and the **Drone Fly** (*Eristalis tenax*) to be seen at

<http://www.glaucus.org.uk/Hoverfly017.jpg>. I was already aware that Drone flies regularly hibernate and can be seen early in the spring but I was not aware that the Marmelade Flies did so and so I tried to find out more about their life cycle and I find that even the Natural History Museum website is cagey on the subject saying ..

"The spring generation is thought to arise from overwintering adults, and may be absent following a cold winter." As this has been the opposite of a cold winter I assume this insect has overwintered in this country but if our population were to be killed off by a cold winter they would soon be back here as they regular long-distance migrants in massive numbers. This is nevertheless a very early sighting - an RSPB webpage indicates that they are rarely seen in Britain before May and the 'Encyclopaedia of Life' says .. "There are sometimes two generations of fly per year in the UK - one in late spring, the other from mid-summer to early autumn. The spring generation is thought to arise from overwintering adults, and may be absent following a cold winter."

Another facet of spring in the insect world comes from Portland where Feb 26 found **three different species of Shield Bug** out and about with photographs to prove it (have a look above the entry for Feb 26 at

[http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa\\_latestnews.htm](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm)). The species are Green, Gorse and Hairy Shieldbugs (Hairy is a new name for Sloe Shieldbug)

One more 'first for the year' in the bird world is a report of **Redwing song** (usually not heard until the birds gather in large flocks prior to their return migration) heard today (Feb 27) in East Sussex. Perhaps more significant is news from both Portland and Sandwich Bay that **spring passage of Lesser Blackback Gulls** has now started - at Portland this was first noticed on Feb 24 but Sandwich did not report it until today (Feb 27)

**Wed 26 Feb**

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

### **South Hayling and back**

My hope for today was to find **Early Forget-me-not** and to see the first signs of the **Green-winged Orchids** in the Gunner Point area - I succeeded in the latter but failed with the first objective, though my search for the Forget-me-nots gave me an unexpected discovery.

Early Forget-me-not is, as the name implies, an early spring flower but this year many flowers are out earlier than usual leading me to be over-optimistic in looking



for it today (last year I did not see it until the first week in April). Nevertheless the grass of the roundabout near the Ferry Inn was full of another flower that I do not recall seeing there before - **Slender Speedwell** This is a plant that I used to think of as an occasional rarity but which I see has recently become a major problem on a par with moss for those responsible for maintaining short grass in good condition and it now has its own page on the Royal Horticultural Society website (<http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advicesearch/profile.aspx?pid=326>). The species was brought here from Turkey in the early 19th century and used as an addition to rock gardens. As it rarely sets seed it was not thought likely to spread but it soon began to appear in lawns leading to the discovery that the smallest section of a plant is able to take root and establish a new clump - mowing the lawn was the last thing to do if you wanted to eradicate it as the mower chopped each plant into small sections and 'broadcast' them over the lawn. Even if you take care not to do this the RHS advice includes the following - "Nesting birds can spread speedwell while gathering moss from the lawn to line their nests".

Before getting to south Hayling my trip down the old Billy Line gave me four interesting observations of which the first came at the Oysterbeds where I counted **46 Med Gulls** on the north island (no doubt that was an underestimate of the number already claiming nest sites).

Next was my first sighting of a **Little Tern** - don't get too excited as this Tern was made of stone and from the angle at which I first saw it was not recognizable as a bird. This chunk of gleaming white stone stands beside the old rail track just after you have passed the path to the bends in West Lane and is the idea of those promoting the 'Shipwright's Way' - a 50 mile path from the Alice Holt Forest area near Farnham to Portsmouth Dockyard (supposed the route along which the Oaks for building Britain's answer to the Spanish Armada were brought to be turned into warships). For a full description of the route, of which the first section near Farnham was opened in March 2011, see

<http://www.walkingclub.org.uk/long-distance-path/shipwrights-way/index.shtml>.

More interesting to me was to find, in the harbour-edge copse a little further south, that the **wild Primroses** were now beginning to flower but further south again I found that recent storms, which have scattered debris all over the track, have actually eroded all the land which used to separate the railway from the sea so that if you take one step off the rail track you fall onto the shore.....

My final observation concerns **Brent Geese**. There were plenty of them all along the Langstone Harbour shore but (even on my return trip when the tide was at its lowest) not one on the Hayling fields where they have been grazing in many hundreds every day since Christmas if not before.

So what has changed? My guess is that, with the end of the severe storms and the arrival of warmer, drier weather, the Brent that have been here through the winter and have discovered what the Hayling fields have to offer in the way of food, and that it is safe to come ashore and eat it, have left to start the journey back to their breeding grounds but have been replaced with others engaged in the same migration but starting from further west and/or south. These new birds maybe flew in last night and have had no chance to explore the land around the harbour.

I also believe that today's change of the birds is not the first such change for this year. Some birds, particularly families with young from last year, will remain here until the last possible moment but others (such as those that were juveniles in the previous winter but did not pair and breed last summer) will be keen to get back and

to start new families while others (such as those which have perhaps lost their young or their mates in the storms - especially if they were wintering on the west facing shores of the Bay of Biscay - will want to cut their losses and be eager to take advantage of the change in the weather.

Information about the movements that I am suggesting is hard to come by but here is a list of observations of Brent flying east in a way that suggests they are migrating which tends to support my view of a fluid migration pattern with individual birds setting off at dates ranging from Jan 1 to early May. This year January movements were - 362 Brent past Dungeness on Jan 1; another 200 on Jan 4; 93 on Jan 8 and 50 on Jan 20 (only seen in the Rye Harbour area). In February Dungeness recorded 238 on Feb 3 and 140 on Feb 18 (33 had been seen passing Selsey on Feb 17); another movement took place on Feb 23 and 24 recorded as 59 past Beachy Head on Feb 23 and 90 past Folkestone on Feb 24 when 80 were seen passing Selsey).

**Tue 25 Feb**

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

### **Slender Speedwell flowering in St Faith's churchyard and more reports from yesterday's sunshine**

Although there was a fair amount of sunshine today I only made one short foray around Havant in the afternoon but that was rewarded with my first find of **Slender Speedwell** flowering in St Faith's churchyard where the flowers of Ivy Leaved Speedwell are becoming more prominent and several of the hundreds of White Comfrey plants are showing flower buds.

Scanning the internet this evening I see that yesterday's sunshine brought the first **Reed Bunting song** of the year at Langstone Pond with **5 Chiffchaffs singing** at the Eastleigh Sewage works while **a pair of Herring Gulls were playing with nest material** on a Portsmouth factory roof. Over in Sussex **four Small Tortoiseshells** and **four Brimstones** were on the wing (a single Clouded Yellow was also reported but until I hear expert confirmation of that I suspect that what was seen was actually another Brimstone though the national Butterfly Conservation website does report a Painted Lady sighting in Wales on Feb 7). For me the most interesting observation from yesterday is also in the unproven category - **a pair of Grey Herons were seen displaying to each other on what might have been a nest** at Langstone Pond and I will certainly be looking for a nest on my next visits to the pond. At the moment Langstone Pond has a unique claim to fame in being the only site where Little Egrets nest without the pond having ever been a Heronry with Grey Herons nesting. With Grey Herons regular to be seen in the trees there it would be very interesting if the Herons also nested there (it is my impression that Grey Herons only nest in places where they have nested 'since time immemorial' but I have no evidence to say that no new Heronries have been established in recent years). Among today's reported sightings the only one that caught my attention was yet another sighting of that **Swallow at Newick**... To end this update I see that there was a mass of **Frogspawn** in an Emsworth garden pond yesterday but no date on which it first appeared was given so the current local 'first' which I reported recently (in Lovedean on Feb 21) may have been beaten by this Emsworth garden and by others in Cosham and on Portsdown where spawn has also been reported by John Goodspeed.

**Mon 24 Feb**

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

## A great show of Green Hellebore flowering at Walderton plus at least three singing Mistle Thrushes

A glorious sunny morning and a light southerly wind saw me cycling to Aldsworth Pond, then up the Ems valley to Walderton, then back through Stansted.

A small increase in the number of **Lesser Periwinkle flowers** at Locks Farm was the only excitement on the way to Westbourne and on to Aldsworth Pond where a **singing Mistle Thrush** more than made up for the presence of **three pairs of Canada Goose preparing to nest**. Also on the water were a few Tufted Duck, one male Gadwall and some Coot and Moorhens.

Aldsworth House had another surprise - **not a single rook or rook's nest** to be seen (though I did hear one bird). Beyond the house, taking the short cut to Racton, **Skylark song was continuous** and reaching the end of the high ground above the Ems valley it was a delight to see the silvery line of the river snaking its way south, filling the normally dry channel without flooding the roads. Earlier, just after passing Westbourne Primary School, I had been impressed by the force of the water coming (at right angles to the normal line of flow) from the Deep Springs pumping station by Foxbury Lane into the stream coming south from Aldsworth Pond - today the westbound water from the real River Ems was shooting across the south bound stream with the force of one of the most powerful pumps we have recently been seeing on TV. (For those unfamiliar with the route by which the River Ems reaches Emsworth the normal flow of the river is interrupted by a pumping station at Walderton which diverts most of the water into a storage reservoir on higher ground west of the village to be distributed by gravity feed to consumers in that area - the bed of the Ems south of Walderton is normally dry from Walderton down to the outskirts of Westbourne where the Deep Springs pumping station brings up the water which flows through Emsworth but re-routes it from its natural channel to the east of Westbourne into the Aldsworth Pond channel running west of Westbourne). Down in the Ems valley at the Racton road junction there was no sign of any **Butterbur plants** but **a good many Rooks**, but no nests, were in the trees around Racton Park Farm. Continuing north to Walderton a large flock of gulls in a flooded field vanished as a **Buzzard** appeared overhead and at this point I began the long climb up Woodlands Lane where a flowering plant of **Spurge Laurel** and lots of Dog's Mercury were some compensation for the effort but much more pleasure was to come.

When the uphill struggle was finally over I leant my bike against a large mature oak on the north side of the lane and walked back through the 'avenue' of Hazel trees bordering the field edge looking for **Green Hellebore** plants - I thought I might be too early for them but in fact they were at their peak and I found around 50 plants in total though less than half were mature enough to have flowers though those which did made a magnificent display and more than justified my effort in making this trip. Nothing more of great interest (other than a distant view of what I took to be a brand new wooden framework for railway station close to the east side of Stansted House) until I reached the Irongate Cottages at the west end of the track across the Stansted East Park - here another **Mistle Thrush** was singing and yet another was heard near the Stansted Lodge house where you reach the Forestside road. (I see three more were logged among today's Hampshire bird sightings - two at Eastleigh and one at Gosport - checking the Sussex sightings I see the **Newick Swallow** was still present).

To end the trip my very first 'full blooded' Blackbird song was heard as I was coming down New Lane into Havant.

## WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 17 - 23 (WEEK 08 OF 2014)

### Sun 23 Feb

#### A link to a wildlife website with a difference (reporting a coach crash in 1834).

Before the promised link here is some recent local news starting with a sighting on Feb 23 of a **Barn Owl** seen at 03:30 am flying alongside the west bound A27 Havant bypass just before the link road to the A3M (so possibly the bird came from Old Bedhampton or the industrial buildings along Harts Farm Way)

Not local, but of interest to Hants birders who fear that every year will bring the extinction of the **Willow Tit** in Hampshire, is a report on Feb 22 of two pairs on territory in a remote rural area in the extreme north west of the county west of the A34 and south of Highclere.

Also on Feb 22 there was yet another **Swallow** sighting in Sussex, this time at the Beeding Brooks beside the River Adur. The 'wintering' bird at Newick (a little east of Haywards Heath) has been reported there on Feb 3, 8, 10, and 16 while on Feb 9 one was seen at Fishbourne near Chichester. As there is no conflict in the dates, and with Fishbourne being only 35 miles west of Newick (and Beeding only 15 miles away), and remembering that Swallows in Africa may well now be on their way back north, I suspect there is only one Swallow in Sussex and that it is thinking that it should now be making a long distance flight but does not know in which direction.

One other bird worth mentioning is **Long Tailed Tit** - a pair were known to be nest building at Christchurch Harbour yesterday (Feb 22).

Turning to butterflies I see that the past three days (mainly yesterday) brought the following reports (including those already noted by myself, Brian Fellows and John Goodspeed):- **7 Brimstones, 4 Peacocks, 10 Small Tortoiseshells and 2 Red Admirals**

Yesterday also brought the second report of a **basking Adder** and Feb 21 brought the news I have been waiting for - the first **Frogspawn** in a Lovedean garden north of Waterlooville.

Now for the website with **news of the 1834 coach crash.....**

For a wildlife website with a difference (today's entry describes a fatal coach crash on London Bridge in 1834) visit <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/>.

The author is Cliff Dean, a retired teacher who lives in the village of Pett on the Sussex shore of Rye Bay and whose blog derives the RXLAND of its title from the

registration letters of the fishing boats operating in the Rye Bay area - for a much more complete definition of RXLAND go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/about/> (www.rxwildlife.info is the home page of a 'community blog' for all the wildlife organisations in the area). For a photo of Cliff go to <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/about-cliff-dean/> and if you scroll down you will find three more photos that summarise the main aspects of his approach to writing a blog.

The first is that, as a good teacher, he does not explain the points he is trying to put across but gives hints which, if you follow them up, will fix his message more firmly in your mind. So the second photo, in which Cliff is looking up at some unseen bird in front of a foreign looking building, has a clue to what he is trying to express in its title .. 'Homage to John Gooders' .. but nowadays many birders will not have heard of John Gooders so the first thing I did was to Google that name, leading me to an obituary at

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jun/30/john-gooders-obituary-ornithologist> which told me how important John was to modern popular ornithology (and that he was for 10 years chairman of The Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve) and that he died in May 2010. For a second clue I right-clicked on Cliff's photo and saw that the name under which that photo was originally saved indicated that it was taken in 2010 in Anatolia (maybe on the day that John died).

The second aspect of Cliff's blog which I find attractive is shown in the next photo as you scroll down, his ability to capture a quirky link between the human and the 'built environment' and also, in the fourth photo, the same link between humanity and the natural environment.

Cliff's blog is not restricted to birding and you never know what will appear in the next of his posts which often appear at the rate of one or two a week - his interests range from birding to the ancient history (and modern politics) of the RX landscape, to modern art and foreign travel (focussing on both the people and the cityscapes he visits), and wherever he goes his eye picks out the odd and quirky things that appear in the photographs which form a major element of his output.

Today (Feb 23) he describes a walk he led across a waterlogged Romney Marsh in which few birds were seen (and are often only mentioned using the BTO codes used in reporting survey results) but after trudging through miles of muddy fields they came on a memorial to one **Sir William Cosway who .. "who had the misfortune to be flung from the roof of a coach as it crossed London Bridge."** Here you must know that any red text in Cliff's blog is a link to more information so I clicked on Sir William Cosway and was presented with a mass of text from the 1834 issues of The Spectator magazine. The story Cliff was pointing us to was at least as fascinating as any Dickens novel but was difficult to read (the old print being very blurred) so I have copied it out in a modern typeface below....

"The Criterion, Brighton coach, which starts from Three Nuns in Aldgate, was overturned on Saturday afternoon with fatal consequences.

Sir William Cosway, a gentleman of property in Kent, and the opponent of Sir E. Knatchbull at the last election, overtook the coach as it was going down Gracechurch Street and seated himself on the box by the driver. As the coach was going over London Bridge the horses took fright at a dray which the man who drove it persisted in keeping in the middle of the road. In endeavouring to check the horses the pole of the coach was broken and, knocking against the legs of the



leaders, rendered them quite unmanageable. The driver exerted himself in vain to stop them, and a man who was desired by the coachman to keep off, seized the reins of the horses just as they reached Stone's End in the Borough and clung to them till the coach was suddenly overset.

Sir William Cosway was in the act of creeping over the top of the coach to the back with the intention of getting off behind just at the time of the overset and the unfortunate gentleman was thrown off with such violence that his brains were literally dashed out....."

I mentioned in the last paragraph of my diary entry for last Friday (<http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2102>) two other interesting items that I found in Cliff's blog, one being a view on the government's handling of the recent floods, the other being Cliff's own comments on a recent art exhibition in Brighton. Another angle on his interest in art can be found among the rag-bag of subjects covered in this entry from last September at

<http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/walland-marsh-again/>

## Sat 22 Feb

### My first butterfly of the year and my first Skylark song

With the promise of daylong sunshine I set out, as soon as a few domestic chores were complete, on a walk with two objectives - the first was to check the Havant Cemetery for **Early Dog Violets**, the second was to see the 'pink' **Sweet Violets** at Nore Barn which Brian Fellows had photographed last Wednesday (Feb 19). I had no difficulty in achieving both objectives, plus the bonus of seeing **my first butterfly of the year (a male Brimstone)** and returned home with 38 bird species and 35 flowering plants on my notepad.

**Early Dog Violets** had started to flower in my own garden as early as Feb 8 but none had so far been seen in their local stronghold, Havant Cemetery, where they will soon cover large areas of the ground at the east end, so my first stop was there and at least 20 flowers were waiting to greet me. Larger, more colourful and more unexpected was a cluster of **Anemone blanda** flowers (for photo see [http://webassets.rhs.org.uk/content/Media/Images/Plants/Anemone\\_blanda\\_LW?width=510](http://webassets.rhs.org.uk/content/Media/Images/Plants/Anemone_blanda_LW?width=510)) but I did not spend long here, pressing on over the railway footbridge into the Denvilles area where the male **Brimstone** butterfly was seen beside the railway (last Wednesday I wrote of the very early butterfly sightings everywhere this year - 12 Brimstones, 1 Small White, 11 Peacocks, 29 Red Admirals, 12 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Commas and 2 Speckled Woods with Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshell being seen on Jan 1 and 2 respectively). While still among the Denvilles gardens I spotted another early garden flower - a cultivated form of the 'Loddon Lily' (*Leucojum aestivum* also known as **Summer Snowflake**).

My route took me next down Church Lane at Warblington where the sharp calls of a Kestrel drew my attention to the silhouette of the bird perched on the Castle Tower in which it will probably be nesting. Other than yet another fresh flowering plant of Cow Parsley by the roadside here there was nothing more to note until I reached the point where the 'Church Path' (from Warblington Church to Emsworth) crosses the Castle stream - here a wintering **Chiffchaff** was working the hedgerow.

Beyond the stream I diverged from the path when a little over halfway across the 'big arable field', heading south through the large gap in the hedge, across the next field and so into the 'Conigar Point' field above which I was treated to my first **full Skylark song** of the year. Looking up to try to spot the songster I saw at least **nine**

**Larks** (only a couple singing) but I also saw a tight flock of **Stock Doves** (I estimated 50 birds) and then noticed a **Kestrel** hovering over the field. The varied show of flowers seen in this field earlier in the winter has pretty well come to an end but I did spot one large patch of fresh green which turned out to be **Lesser Swinecress** which rewarded me, not with any flowers, but with its extremely pungent smell of Cress.

Out on the shore it did not take long to reach Nore Barn and my first impression was that all the winter birds had left - just three Black-headed Gulls were all I could see with my unaided eyes. Using my binoculars from a point near the east end of the wood there were in fact plenty of Wigeon, a few Teal and Swans, plus the regular Spotted Redshank taking a rest from seeking food in the stream while the tide was still low. Best of all I distantly saw **two male Pintails** though too far off to be certain whether they had females with them.

Before heading home I checked the many English Scurvygrass plants in the saltings but found no hint of flower buds so I returned to the wood here there was a substantial show of the **Sweet Violets with pinkish flowers** (for Brian Fellows' photo of one see

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x543-sweet-violet-pink-nore-19.02.14.jpg>)

Back at Langstone Pond there were once again a good crowd of 21 Little Egrets in the Wade Court south meadow but surprisingly the pond failed to give me a single Heron or Coot.

## Fri 21 Feb

### Alexanders flowering on Portsdown and Blackthorn at the South Moors where there is severe storm damage

Yesterday (Feb 20) I made a brief visit to Portsdown and found a dozen plants of **Alexanders** in flower beside the London Road coming up the hill where it passes the entrance to the Cliffdale Gardens caravan site. Each year a few mature plants can be found in flower with many more leafy plants showing no sign of flowering and I assume this is a function of the species being a biennial and that only those plants which have survived their first year undamaged are ready to flower at this early date in their second year. The only other thing noted on this very windy afternoon was much activity in the Rookery on the west side of the caravan site - it always amazes me how the nests, built using beaks only, are able to survive storm force winds in the topmost twigs of the trees while the partners of the sitting birds enjoy riding the winds and have no difficulty in coming in to land on the moving branches.

Today I cycled down to Langstone and then along the South Moors shore, coming back up the Brockhampton stream to the cycleway along Harts Farm Way. Plenty of Teal and Moorhen were in the field south of Wade Court with one Fox curled up and attempting to dry out in the sunshine, the Swan pair on the pond showed no interest in nesting and the only change from my last visit was on the mud where what I am fairly sure were a dozen or so **Golden Plover** could be seen but all the Lapwing had moved elsewhere.

A **Blackbird** was singing at the west end of Mill Lane reminding me that the first thing I saw when I drew my bedroom curtains this morning was a male Blackbird perched on top of a telephone pole in my garden facing across the road to keep a watchful eye on the shrubbery of the house opposite where I am sure his mate is

sitting on a nest. That in turn reminded me that yesterday a more unusual visitor landed on the wall separating my back garden from a neighbour's which has a fish pond - you may have guessed that the visitor was a **Heron**.

Reaching the South Moors seawall, which has survived the battering of wind and wave until now, I was not too surprised to find three or four large holes in the path where the waves have 'tunnelled' under the seawall and sucked out the soil supporting the path behind the wall - this has happened in several places in past winters but this time there was also another form of damage which I have not seen before resulting in the break up of the concrete and brick work forming the wall itself. The first example of this was a section of the wall some ten or twelve feet long and two or three feet high which had been torn from the wall and carried several yards down the beach. Just beyond that I came on half a dozen hefty concrete 'beams', each more than six feet long, which had once formed a continuous top to the wall but which had been split by the waves and rotated through ninety degrees so that they no longer opposed the waves but allowed the water to rush past them over the path and down into the moors. Unless a much more powerful defensive wall is built the next storm is very likely to break through the remainder of the concrete wall and wash away the earth bank which now carries the path and thus reunite the 'moors' SSSI with the tidal harbour - as I understand it the boundaries of the SSSI here and the similar one east of Warblington cemetery are both based on old maps of the harbours prior to the building of artificial sea walls - this winter has caused substantial damage to those walls at both sites.

With the tide low many Brent were feeding on the exposed weed but there was a shortage of other wildfowl and waders on the shore. Numbers were also substantially down on the Budds Farm pools where I saw only 6 Gadwall, 8 Pochard, 12 Tufted Duck with very few Teal and Coot though a Cormorant in full breeding plumage and the Swan pair were still present (but no Canada Geese or Shelduck). Continuing along the shore to the mouth of the Hermitage Stream I came on more wave damage which I have not seen in previous winters - about half the wire mesh fence marking the boundary between the shore and the Budds Farm property had been laid flat on the ground as the waves had 'dug up' the underground concrete attached to the base of each metal post holding up the fence.

Heading up the Brockhampton Stream and making a perfunctory detour across the 'bridge to nowhere' over the stream I was surprised, despite the stream water being low (to match the low tide) that my presence on the bridge put the **Kingfisher** to flight from its perch on the Budds Farm emergency overflow flap in the stream bank. At this point light rain began to fall so I headed for home.

With my emphasis on storm damage today and the nationwide news of flooding, I will end by passing on a link (which I picked up from Cliff Dean's website) to an article by George Monbiot which appeared in The Guardian back on Jan 14 and which in essence says that lowland flooding is only to be expected so long as the Government pays out millions to encourage farmers to clear trees from uplands to create more open country to produce more food (animals and crops). Read the article for yourself at <http://www.monbiot.com/2014/01/13/drowning-in-money/> and if he is not already one of your favourites do check out Cliff Dean at <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/>. I see that his subject today is Syria, yesterday he was concerned with birds around his home area near Rye Bay, and before that came the entry from which I took my link re flooding, before that he turned his

camera on colourful flotsam and he often introduces me to a world of art through entries such as

<http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/subversive-design-in-brighton/> (if you follow this link be aware that entries in red on his website are links so if you are of a prudish disposition do not click on 'Venus with penis')

**Wed 19 Feb**

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

Since my last update on Sunday I have made two short outings but have also spent some time at my computer reading about other peoples news. To deal with my own news first a short cycle ride yesterday (Feb 18) gave me a significant botanic find when I came across the first wild flowers of **Lesser Periwinkle** on the ancient hedge bank which runs round the northeast quadrant of the junction of East Leigh road with Southliegh Road in the Locks Farm area of Denvilles - it also gave me some very wet trousers as I was caught in an unexpected heavy rain storm!. Today a walk west along the north side of the railway to where it crosses the Hermitage Stream in the Brockhampton area, then home along Solent Road past Tesco, found two mature plants of **White Comfrey** covered with flowers, found a mass of garden escapee **Grape Hyacinth** plants in bud, and heard another **Mistle Thrush** singing near Bosmere school as well as at least three **Chaffinches** singing in different places.

The first news item to catch my attention came from Butterfly Conservation via the BBC News and seemed designed to convince us that our butterflies were unexpectedly thriving. If anyone wants to see the BBC's interpretation of this news they should visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/26242496> which will at least brighten your day with a superb photo of a **Small Tortoiseshell** which is one of three species said to have increased in numbers during the hot second half of last year's summer, the other two being the **Meadow Brown** and the **Holly Blue**. While not wishing to decry any good news about butterflies my first re-action was that the gains made as a result of good weather last year may currently be being lost by the weather we are currently experiencing. The adverse impact of wet, mild weather at this time of year is acknowledged in the press release, but is not quantified, and the unusually large number of butterfly sightings which I have seen reported already this year has caused me to assume that each of these early emergences represents another loss to the number which will successfully breed this year (and each 'failed parent' of course represents the loss of not one but tens if not hundreds of offspring that we will not see flying this year).

The number of butterflies that have emerged too early to breed is of course far greater than the number of sightings reported on the websites I visit, and I do not always record everything that I see, but to give some feel for the extent of the problem here are the number of sightings I have recorded so far this year. To date I have heard of 12 Brimstones, 1 Small White, 11 Peacocks, 29 Red Admirals, 12 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Commas and 2 Speckled Woods. To these must be added those that will emerge in the remainder of February and most of March during which the weather conditions will not favour successful breeding.

To add to the gloom caused by the weather two of the species mentioned as having done well last summer (Small Tortoiseshell and Holly Blue) have their own problems which may hit them during the coming year. Before 1998 **Small Tortoiseshell** was among the commonest of our butterflies but in that year a small fly called **Sturmia bella** appeared in this country for the first time and has since had



a dramatic effect on the butterfly's numbers. The fly has the habit of laying its eggs in the bodies of caterpillars (preferring Small Tortoiseshells) and the larvae which hatch from these eggs eat the caterpillar from inside, timing the meal so that the fly larva is mature and emerges just at the point when the caterpillar dies. Maybe last summer's increase in the number of Tortoiseshells was an indication that *Sturmia bella* has suffered a setback but I have not heard any news of this and must assume that this coming year will once again see the Tortoiseshell population hit by this parasite. Turning to the **Holly Blue** this has for many years suffered from a similar predator - to quote the UK Butterflies website .. "This species is renowned for fluctuating wildly in numbers, forming a predictable cycle over a few years, believed to be caused by parasitism from the wasp **Listrodomus nyctemerus** whose sole host is the Holly Blue. The wasp lays its eggs in Holly Blue larvae, with a single adult wasp eventually emerging from the Holly Blue pupa'. The cycle occurs as the diminution of butterflies results in less food for the wasp until its numbers also diminish allowing the butterflies to once again increase.

To end these thoughts on the future of our butterflies with something more cheerful a photo on the Sussex Butterfly Conservation website shows that the life cycle of butterflies manages to complete its annual round in many cases without most of us being aware of it. Have a look at

[http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg\\_images/WallLarvaHighandOver170214B  
ELrg.jpg](http://www.sussex-butterflies.org.uk/lrg_images/WallLarvaHighandOver170214BELrg.jpg) to see a Wall Brown caterpillar munching away at a grass blade while keeping a very low profile thanks to some excellent camouflage.

For those who are more excited by bird news here are two items from today's local news. Firstly a sign of spring seen at Farlington Marshes where a **Bittern** was seen by Tim Doran to drop into the reeds north of the reserve building - I take this as a sign of spring as I am not aware of any Bitterns spending the winter at Farlington and so assume this to be a bird on its way back to a distant breeding site.

The other bit of local news comes from Andy Johnson at the mouth of Chichester Harbour where this morning he saw an unprecedented number of **18 Slavonian Grebes**. This species is normally only seen in very small numbers in the Solent Harbours but this month there were 6 in Langstone Harbour on Feb 2, increasing to 7 on Feb 16, 9 on Feb 17 and now 18 in Chichester Harbour. Further west in Cornwall the Falmouth area today had more than 37 Black Throated and 42+ Great Northern Divers but I doubt the Slavonian Grebes will hit that sort of number.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 10 - 16 (WEEK 07 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 16 Feb**

#### **Havant Cemeteries and my first Med Gulls and Slavonian Grebe of the year**

Since my previous diary entry last Monday the only day on which the sun shone was Thursday (Feb 13) and I devoted that to making my monthly visits to Havant and Warblington Cemeteries and to St Faith's churchyard in Havant. My accounts of what I found at these sites is now online and you can see them via my Cemeteries page (go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm>). At Havant Cemetery **Yew trees were releasing pollen** and **Herring Gulls** returning to nest on



the West Leigh Industrial Estate factory rooves could be heard 'chuckling' overhead. At St Faith's half a dozen **more Herring gulls** seemed to be prospecting town centre rooves as nest sites and the old stone wall south of the churchyard had acquired what seemed to be unmistakable **Wavy Bitter Cress** (four serpentine flower stems each around 10cm long) except that the one flower which I checked had only four, not six, stamens and the leaves lacked the conspicuous pubescence require by Stace's key to separate out the Wavy species. Interestingly a Bitter Cress growing in my front garden has the same very long and wavy flower stems with the same absence of hairs. Nothing newsworthy at Warblington though a couple of **Common Gulls** in an adjacent field were looking very smart in their breeding plumage.

Today's sunshine found me walking to the Hayling Oysterbeds, starting down Wade Court Road where a **Mistle Thrush was in full song**. In the field south of Wade Court **two Foxes** were enjoying the sun and each other's company and on the pond the **Swan pair** were side by side on the water, both with wings half-raised in the 'busking' position, clearly ready to defend the pond as their territory (later I watched four Swans fly west from Emsworth but they carried on over Langstone Bridge).

The tide was approaching high but there was still a slippery coating of weed (possibly Eel Grass) on the exposed seabed and as I reached Langstone Bridge an estimated **600 Brent** flew from Hayling fields to feed on it now that the rising water was driving any last humans away and the water was lifting the weed off the seabed, making it easier for Goose bills to grab it.

At the Oyster Beds **Med Gulls** could be heard in the air and seen on the already crowded island (some seemingly in full spring plumage) but I did not spend long here before crossing the road near the garage to head back home along the path along the west side of the north Hayling fields and across the pony paddocks to the Texaco garage.

As I reached the south end of Langstone bridge I already had a good list of 44 bird species for the day and I was not expecting anything more but my luck was in and I had close views of a single **Slavonian Grebe** only about 20 meters from the bridge, bringing my yearlist to 82 species (including the Med Gulls).

**Mon 10 Feb**

### **Langstone Pond Swan starting to nest**

A quick cycle ride to Langstone Pond at midday today was intended to check on the number of Egrets present now that the wind had dropped from gale force but gave me an unexpected view of the female **Swan settling into what is presumably going to be this spring's nest site**. She has chosen a spot among the reeds on the island close to the seawall path just before you emerge from the shelter of the Mill building. My **interest in the number of Egrets** had been started by the dramatic increase in the numbers roosting there during the recent period of gale force winds - in January the number to be seen is usually 1 or 2 with a maximum of 9 but this year I found 19 present on Feb 1, 20 on Feb 4 and 33 on Feb 7 while on Feb 9 Peter Raby found 46 there in mid-morning. I initially thought that the increase to 19 and 20 might be an indication of birds arriving early to claim nest sites but all the

sightings have been of birds on or near the ground with none up in the trees and I suspect the birds were there purely to find shelter from the winds which would have made it uncomfortable for the birds at exposed sites such as Farlington Marshes and the Oysterbeds. The absence of the birds today seemed to confirm this - with lighter winds the Egrets were probably glad to get back to fishing to fill their hungry bodies after forced starvation.

Back on Feb 8 after seeing the first Early Dog Violets in my own garden I went to the Havant Cemetery where a massive display of them can be expected before long - I found none flowering there then but I did notice something about **Yew trees** which I have not yet commented on - it appeared that the strong winds had already stripped the male flowers on several of the Yew trees of their pollen - the pollen sacs appeared to be empty and shaking the branches, which usually encourages them to give off a cloud of pollen at this time of year, had no effect but a close look at one branch showed something I have not seen before - the globular pollen sacs were empty but still attached to the opening of these sacs were flowers in the form that can be seen in the picture at

<http://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/showimage/183781/#b>. Having found this site with a picture of the male flowers in their prime I searched it for a picture of female flowers (male and female flowers occur on different trees) and I found this one at [http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/Y/Yew/Yew\\_2009\\_10\\_05\\_LinnysHawMineralLine\\_040p1.jpg](http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/Y/Yew/Yew_2009_10_05_LinnysHawMineralLine_040p1.jpg) which shows examples of female flowers at various stages of development. Just above the lowest of the bright red arils is what looks similar to an acorn and this is how the female nut starts out. Below it we can see the red, sweet tasting, aril at two stage of development and to the right of the topmost aril we can see what is left after a bird has picked off a mature aril. For a lot more about Yews go to <http://wildflowerfinder.org.uk/Flowers/Y/Yew/Yew.htm> and scroll through all the photos and on through the text about the poisons it employs.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR FEB 3 - 9 (WEEK 06 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 9 Feb**

#### **Havant to the old Broadmarsh playing fields**

This morning I walked west from Havant along Solent Road and past Bedhampton Mill, then over the old Broadmarsh playing fields to the roundabout at the west end of Harts Farm Way, coming back along that road and the cycleway into Havant. Reaching what remains of the old Havant Town Mill pond I found someone looking in vain for the Water Voles that are probably still resident in this **rubbish coated pond**. With the recent investment by Havant Borough in decorative metal fencing between the pavement of Park Road South and the pond I wondered why the Borough had not gone a little further in improving the quality of the environment here and if others feel the removal of **this eyesore** is worth a small investment by the Borough it would seem that the person to persuade is Peter Vince (HBC Operational Services Manager) - for the definition of his responsibilities go to [http://www.havant.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HBC%20meet%20the%20joint%20management%20team%20-%20Sept%2013\\_0.pdf](http://www.havant.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HBC%20meet%20the%20joint%20management%20team%20-%20Sept%2013_0.pdf) and search for his name (using CTRL + F, then enter Peter Vince)

Further west along Solent Road (opposite the Tesco Garage) I came on my second sighting of a large patch of **Sticky Mouse-ear** just opening its flowers plus several plants of **Oxford Ragwort** starting its early spring flowering. Next significant find was in the water rushing out of the Portsmouth Water Springs site into the Hermitage Stream. Despite the force of the water the long strands of **Stream Water Crowfoot** (*Ranunculus penicillatus*) were already stretching to the water surface and opening their flowers.

My next note was of garden flowers planted outside the newly rebuilt house (which burnt down a couple of years ago) near the entrance to Bedhampton Mill - these were the first **Winter Aconite** flowers I have seen this spring. Nothing else until I had crossed the A27 and the water-logged ex-playing fields to reach the west end of Harts Farm Way where the carpet of **Storks-bill** flowers on the traffic island was much diminished but to balance that the number of **Cherry Plum** trees now flowering further east on both sides of Harts Farm Way had increased, as had the number of **Danish Scurvygrass** plants flowering on the central reservation of Park Road South when I got back to Havant - also found on the east side of the road was yet another plant of **Cow Parsley** in flower.

Back in my own garden I found seven flowers of wild **Early** or **Wood Dog Violet** were open where I had seen the first two yesterday.

**Fri 7 Feb**

### **Langstone Pond, Budds Farm and the Brockhampton Stream**

Today's sunshine made this afternoon's walk very pleasant despite the strong, chill west wind. Heading first for Langstone Pond down Wade Court Road the first thing I saw as I emerged from the A27 underpass into Wade Lane was a **Buzzard** high over the fields to my left, making the most of the wind to soar effortlessly on rigid wings above the pine trees between Wade and Pook Lanes in which a pair of Buzzards nested a few years ago. A little further on, in the pony field immediately north of Wade Court, I counted **27 Little Egrets** sheltering from the wind and hoping for food from the droppings of three ponies in the field. This was a significant increase on the 20 that were here last Tuesday, and the 27 increased to 33 when I found 6 more south of Wade Court. Close to the Wade Court driveway entrance two plants of **Cow Parsley** were newly in flower and in the south field, as well as the Teal, Wigeon and Moorhen, a **Fox** was curled up in the sunshine by some brambles enjoying a much better sleep than he can have had for several days and nights in a waterlogged earth.

Among the birds just off shore were three Greenshank but nothing else unusual. On the Pond **both adult Swans were present** - last year's cygnets have not been with them for some time but there were no signs of nesting yet. Continuing west across the Hayling road I kept a look out for the fungus which John Goodspeed had seen last Monday by the path connecting the main road to Mill Lane and I found a single **Sulphur Tuft**. At the far end of the lane, on a tree overhanging Langbrook stream, there was a small cluster of **Velvet Shank** and one other white capped fungus that I think is a *Pleurotus* species.

The South Moors shore was almost devoid of birds but nearing Budds Mound I found a few Brent and Wigeon plus a small group of Turnstone. Up on the Mound the normal collection of Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, etc were present and a few yards up Southmoor Lane **one Cherry Plum tree** was opening a full set of flowers.

On the west side of Budds Farm another **Buzzard** seemed to be searching the rough grass in the sewage works for a meal while further up the Brockhampton Stream I disturbed a **Kingfisher** from its regular high tide perch on the heavy metal flap which lets excess 'sewage' enter the stream. It was now clouding over and nothing more of interest was seen on the way home.

### Wed 5 Feb

#### Signs of spring

On Feb 3 Cliff Dean heard his first **Chiff Chaff song** of the year at the Fairlight sewage works near Hastings and in reporting it on the Rye Bay website he started by making a comment on a relatively recent change to the birder's calendar, saying .. "For some years in this area, **the Chiffchaff's traditional role of Harbinger of Spring has been usurped by Mediterranean Gulls**, whose yelping calls should be heard within the next ten days". Others will probably have different signals which tell them that spring is here but I agree with Cliff that there is something magical about hearing the first Med Gull call, especially when it comes from a clear blue sky in which the bird's pure white plumage makes it almost invisible.

Cliff also says that Chiff Chaffs like to winter in sewage works which .. "tend to be warm and supportive of small insects" .. and this remark sent me searching recent Hampshire Bird Reports to see when our local sewage works at Budds Farm was last a hot spot for these birds in the winter. In 1999 20 were at Budds Farm on Jan 3 and in 2000 there were 11 there on Jan 14, but (while I have not searched each year since then) modernisation of the works since then seems to have eliminated this wintering population though several can still be found at the Eastleigh sewage works on the banks of the River Itchen. Confirmation that the decline of the population at Budds Farm started soon after 1998 comes from Hampshire County Council - see

<http://www.hants.gov.uk/environment/mineralsandwastelocalplan/plan/minerals9-23.html> which tells us that planning permission for modernisation of the works was granted in Oct 1998.

Another 'nature conservation role' for sewage works has been demonstrated this winter by the Newick sewage works just east of Haywards Heath in east Sussex which has hosted a single **Swallow** for most of January (Jan 2 to 19) and which has just re-appeared there on Feb 3

Bird nesting is already under way for some species and active nests can now be seen at most Heronries with Christchurch Harbour being the first to report activity at two nests on Jan 18. Two other species for which nesting activity has already been reported, though you won't see them in Hampshire, are Fulmar (back on cliffs east of Hastings on Jan 13) and Guillemots (crowding nest ledges on cliffs at Durlston since Jan 25 though I think it will be some time before they start egg laying). A much commoner species of which I saw a newly finished nest complete with overhead 'roof' when cycling the Hayling Coastal path last Sunday (Feb 2) is Magpie and I still have strong suspicions that the recent absence of female Blackbirds is because they are already sitting on nests.

[Tue 4 Feb](#)

### Havant to Nore Barn and back on a sunny morning

Before coming to today's outing I should mention that, on Feb 2, I cycled down to south Hayling in the hope of finding Early Forget-me-not in flower after seeing that it had started to flower at Durlston on Jan 28. I searched the grass of the roundabout by the Ferry Inn but saw no sign of it though I did add **Sea Mouse Ear** and **Autumn Hawkbit** to my 2014 plant list. Calling in at the Oyster Beds on my way south I added **Black-throated Diver** to my bird year list thanks to being shown it through the scope of a birder who was there with Chris Cockburn - the same birder had been watching a distant Merlin perched on South Binness island but could not re-find it for me.

Today I walked to Nore Barn and back taking a circuitous route through Havant and down the main road to Langstone before going east along the shore to Nore Barn, then up the path to Selangor Avenue and home along the main Emsworth to Havant road. In Havant I found a massive patch of Ivy-leaved Speedwell with many plants with buds but none with open flowers. Beside the Hayling Road one plant of Cow Parsley was in flower and at Langstone Pond I saw the first **Common Alder catkins** had started to open. In the field north of the pond there were again **18 Little Egrets** (with 2 more seen at the pond making a total of 20), but more exciting than the Egrets was the presence in the field of a single **Mistle Thrush** which has hopefully returned to this traditional territory to breed.

Off the marshy SSSI field east of Warblington Cemetery I found one of the large flocks of **Knot** which have recently appeared in the area and so can now add that to my year list, bringing the total to 79 species. In the field behind Conigar Point I was surprised to find several large, old plants of **Field Pansy** each bearing several fresh flowers but not surprised to find substantial flocks of **Skylark** and **Linnet** still present.

In the Nore Barn area the tide was starting to push up bringing me the **Spotted Redshank** plus one **Greenshank** and one **Redshank**. Around the water's edge were plenty of **Teal** and **Wigeon** plus a single pair of **Pintail** and in the southeast farm field there were some 40 **Brent**. As I was nearing the east end of the wood the noise of crows just above the trees sent me hurrying out into the open in time to see the **Buzzard** they had been harrying.

Out in the small area of saltings the English Scurvygrass had grown a lot since my last visit and Sweet Violets were now flowering on the north edge of the woods but as I started up the path towards Selangor Ave I found the usual big display of Great Horsetails had almost vanished to make way for this year's new crop. Further up this path one large pool presented a problem for anyone unable to cope with water well above their ankles but within ten yards of the exit gate onto the A259 a patch of **Dog's Mercury** had many male flowers.

The 'Emsworth Wayside' patch immediately before the A27 underpass once more provided interest with my first sight of **Sticky Mouse-ear** (with white showing in the many unopen buds) and of **Spotted Medick** (with bright yellow flowers hiding among many large, heavily spotted leaves). Still present by the northern roadside kerb was the **Fleabane** that had me puzzled in late December (see <http://ralph-hollins.net/Diary.htm#2912>) and I am now more convinced it is a hybrid with Canadian Fleabane though today the flowers strongly reminded me of Ploughman's Spikenard.



On the last stage of my walk (along the Emsworth Road in Havant) I still found two surprises - one was **Green Alkanet** in flower, the other a single flower of **Wood Avens**

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 27 - FEB 2 (WEEK 05 OF 2014)**

**Sat 1 Feb**

### **45 wild flower species flowering on the first day of February**

With a forecast of sunshine all morning I set out early on foot to see how many plant species could be said to be in flower and ended the day (after making a second expedition by bike in the afternoon when the sun was still shining) with 45 species on my notepad which also recorded 26 bird species and a Weasel.

My first objective was the Havant Cemetery and among the five flowers seen on the way there were **Rape** and **Common Fumitory** in the ground disturbed by the building of the new houses on the Warblington School Playing fields. After going over the level crossing I spent a few minutes searching the many plants of **Pellitory of the Wall** which line the foot of the old buildings north of the level crossing until I found one which still had fresh flowers. Within the cemetery the first thing I saw was my first fully open **Daffodil** surrounded by **Snowdrops** and **Croci** all of which I include in my count as, despite having been planted in the past they do not receive any gardeners care in order to survive from year to year. Also in this category was my first flowering **Primrose** to which the only other plant added here was **Annual Mercury** growing in the allotments and seen over the cemetery wall.

Back over the level crossing I turned west along Waterloo Road to tick off the **Common Whitlowgrass** and the **Grey Alder** in the adjacent carpark. Continuing through the Station forecourt into Havant Park I added the **Dawn Redwood** catkins before moving south to St Faith's churchyard which gave me **Sweet Violet**, **Red Deadnettle** and **Daisy**. The Twittens Way and Grove Road area gave me fresh **Sun Spurge** and **Petty Spurge** plus a **Lesser Celandine** in one garden and a single blue flower of **Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*)** on a wall.

The Juniper Square area had just one **Yellow Flowered Strawberry** to offer with many nearly open buds on a **Cherry Plum** tree and crossing Park Road South added **Danish Scurvygrass** and **Spear Thistle** before going under the A27 alongside the Langbrook stream to find **Hazel Catkins** and **White Deadnettle** along the cycleway.

On the corner of Southmoor Lane one plant of **Common Storksbill** had a flower while at the south end the single flowering **Goat Willow** was covered with Pussy Paws. On Budds Mound I paused for a rest while watching the Pochard, Shoveler, Gadwall etc before setting out along the South Moors seawall with the waves breaking over it - surprisingly the sea had not driven off the **Rock Pipits** of which two got up from a small section of shingle still above the rising water. Turning inland beside the Langbrook Stream I stopped to chat to someone just before reaching the bridge over the stream and while doing so I had a glimpse of a **Weasel** scurrying across the grass between two clumps of bramble. Surprisingly the flood created by the high tides a month ago has drained away and it looked as if it should be possible to walk across the Moors from Mill Lane to Southmoor Lane - it also

seemed that this high tide was not going to come over the footway of the bridge to Mill Lane though it was within six inches of doing so

At the east end of Mill Lane, just beyond the entrance to Harbourside, the **Mimosa tree** was in glorious yellow flower (not counted as wild!) and at Langstone Mill Pond the Common Alders had not yet opened their catkins. North of the pond the flooded meadow was crowded with birds, among them a surprising count of **19 Little Egrets**, considerably more than the 7 to 10 birds which I regard as the local winter population so maybe we are already seeing Egrets returning here to breed.

Back at home a good lunch and a short rest found me eager to add to my flower count so I got out my bike to head for Pook Lane where I added **Dog's Mercury** after seeing **Field Woundwort** at the Emsworth/Southleigh Road junction. The Warblington area gave me **Cow Parsley, Gorse** and **Field Madder** before a circuit of the Horndean and Southleigh Roads added a surprise find of **Herb Robert** and the junction of Southleigh and East Leigh Roads gave good promise of the Lesser Periwinkle and Greater Stitchwort flowers that always appear there earlier than elsewhere, though not this early!

**Fri 31 Jan**

### **BBC News says Bat Populations are increasing**

Yesterday I heard this news on BBC radio and today I followed it up with a Google search which directed me to the following three web pages which give more detail on the story. First is a fuller version of the news as printed in The Guardian - see <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jan/30/european-bat-population-rises>. This tells me that figures gathered from nine European countries for the period 1993 to 2011 showed that the total number of bats in Europe seems to show a 40% increase. The counts were obtained by checking known winter hibernation sites and summer roosts. No species are mentioned as showing a significant decline while both Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats seem to have shown the greatest increase, followed by Daubenton's with a moderate increase. This is to be seen in the context of very significant declines in all species during the second half of the 20th century and the better figures in recent years follow the introduction of laws in the 1980s to protect Bats.

More detail comes from the Bat Conservation Trust - see [http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/species\\_population\\_trends.html](http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/species_population_trends.html). This adds two more species to those showing increasing populations, Natterer's and Common Pipistrelle.

A third website worth visiting is at <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/mammals/bats/session6/> and this describes some of the continuing threats to bat populations and some of the ways in which human action can help

**Tue 28 Jan**

### **Dawn Redwood catkins, Turkish Tutsan and my first Chiff Chaff**

Yesterday I cycled west through Havant Park to the Bedhampton area, finding the **Dawn Redwood tree** which overhangs the tennis courts in Havant Park had fully open catkins and seeing a pretty display of Snowdrops and Sweet Violets in the churchyard of St Thomas at Bedhampton but little else of interest. Also in the churchyard I watched a female Blackbird searching dead leaves for food and this reminded me of the **current imbalance between male and female Blackbirds** in my observations - back on Jan 20 I remarked on this when I found three male Blackbirds in St Faith's churchyard (and have two males regularly visiting my garden) but have had very few sightings of females for a couple of weeks and am wondering if this is because the females are all sitting on nests.

Another thing noticed on this trip was the great torrent of water pouring down the Hermitage Stream and this turned my thoughts to the **damage done to wildlife habitat by recent flooding** (both coastal by tidal surges and everywhere by excess rainfall). Locally we seem to have escaped permanent damage at Brook Meadow in Emsworth and may even have benefitted by flooding of the Langstone South Moors but that is probably not the case everywhere. Back in December I see that the RSPB launched a special appeal to repair damage to their Snettisham reserve in Norfolk (though the costs incurred there were mainly to infrastructure - hides and walkways - needed by humans rather than by the wildlife) but in January they launched a further appeal for £300,000 to restore habitat - in particular to drain seawater from what had been shallow fresh water pools around which many birds nested on wet grassland. It is not just the east coast which has suffered habitat damage and currently the spotlight is on the Somerset Levels where there is a concentration of nature reserves, including Shapwick Heath (possibly the only British breeding site for Great White Egrets) and Ham Wall (where Little Bitterns have bred). Elsewhere in that area Marsh Harriers are new breeders for Somerset but while these rarities attract a lot of interest the major affect of habitat loss is suffered by the commoner and much more numerous species which will have to find new homes and may fail to breed in the coming year.

Today I cycled west towards Broadmarsh but first headed for Budds Farm only to find when I reached the foot of Budds Mound that the road up it was being re-surfaced and all traffic had been stopped during this process so I pressed on along the shore and up the Brockhampton stream to pause on the first bridge over it where I disturbed an Egret but not the Kingfisher I had hoped for. An unexpected surprise here was to see the bright yellow flowers of **Turkish Tutsan** already open on the bush overhanging the stream (the only image I can find of the flowers on this hedge-like shrub are at [http://www.societe-phs.com/phototheque/images/image/Hypericum%20xylosteifolium%20IMG\\_1540.JPG](http://www.societe-phs.com/phototheque/images/image/Hypericum%20xylosteifolium%20IMG_1540.JPG) ). Just before reaching Harts Farm Way a single call made me check the trees above my head and discover my first **Chiff Chaff** of the year bringing my bird yearlist count to 77.

Nothing special in the Broadmarsh area but heading home along the cycleway I stopped where Harts Farm Way meets the A27 traffic and here, on the traffic island between the two lanes of Harts Farm Way, I again found the 'yellow daisy' which had puzzled me on Jan 11. On this occasion I collected a specimen and back at home I decided it must be **Catsear** but with its flowers on very short stems (less than 10 cm high) as a result of mowing. Further east I again found the single tree of

**Cherry Plum** in flower (and for anyone intending to dump rubbish at the 'Amenity Site' I confirmed that the entrance has moved some 50 metres east and it would appear that a queue of vehicles on the road is now a thing of the past)

Back in Havant I spent some time gazing at the old Town Mill Pond where I had a clear sighting of a **Water Vole** on Jan 23 - this time I detected several movements and ripples in the water which could have been caused by a Vole but had no definite sighting.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 20 - 26 (WEEK 04 OF 2014)**

**Sat 25 Jan**

### **A walk along the shore to Nore Barn and back through Warblington Farm**

This morning's walk was in sunshine and before I reached the shore at Langstone I had heard six bird species singing (including **Song Thrush** and **Chaffinch**) and seen **Spurge Laurel** and **Croci** in flower with the white 'candles' of **Cherry Laurel flower buds** showing on many of these shrubs. On my lawn two **Grey Squirrels** had been very active and as I walked down Wade Lane a **Kestrel** had swept in to perch in a tree overlooking the pony fields north of Wade Court.

Along the shore birds were few as the tide was very low but **Shelduck** were strung out on or near the water all the way from Langstone Bridge to the Conigar Point area and I reckon that there were at least 100 which is what we usually see at this time of year. Flying south over Warblington Farm and on over Hayling was a small flock of a dozen **Canada Geese** and this movement confirms what I thought when I saw 25 of them on the South Moors flood last Thursday - that these birds are now on the move to their nest sites.

After rounding Conigar Point I went into the field behind it where lots of **Field Woundwort** and **Field Madder** are still flowering with some **Common Fumitory**. A small flock of what may have been Reed Buntings were in the west hedge but left without being clearly seen but a larger flock of at least 40 **Skylarks** got up as I neared the west end of the field and I guess they may have been newly arrived birds from the continent - reports of recent Skylark song are probably the result of overflying migrants provoking residents into song to defend their territories and an entry on the RX website describing a walk around Pett Level on the shore of Rye Bay on Jan 20 included .. " A few Skylark came in high from the south and were perhaps early returning migrants".

The tide was too low around Nore Barn for there to be any birds there but as I approached the area I found **a lone pair of Brent** in the south east field of Warblington Farm around the pond where the eastern stream of the Farm meets the seawall tidal flap. I suspect that one of the Geese which was sitting on the grass was old or sickly and that its mate, grazing nearby, was hoping for its recovery but I could not resist remarking to a passer-by that it looked as if this pair were settling down to nest early!

On the Nore Barn 'saltings' I found lots of fresh growth of **English Scurvygrass** plants, and at the west end of the wood on my way home I had a closer look at the dead tree which is coated with reddish fungi and concluded that it is probably

*Dacrymyces stillatus* while near the base of the trunk there are good examples of what I think is *Stereum rugosum*. Heading over the fields towards Warblington Church I watched a big tractor pulling a tanker of slurry to be spread on the fields but unable to make headway as all its wheels were spinning on the waterlogged ground when trying to pull its load up a slight incline. More interesting to a birder was the emergence of half a dozen *Redwing* from the eastern hedge of the Cemetery extension and on reaching Church Lane I enjoyed the sight, with the cattle in the field west of the lane, of two *Common Gulls* one of which was in smart spring plumage. Further up the lane on the north side of the Pook Lane access road, a *Buzzard* took off from among more cattle (it had probably been breakfasting on worms). Talking of worms and remembering that they are able to survive in waterlogged ground providing the water is fresh, not salt, I was interested to see an entry on the Rye Bay website with photos of the *mass extermination of Leatherjackets (Crane Fly larvae)* which had drowned as a result of recent rainfall in the Brede Valley near Rye Bay (not likely to have been subject to flooding by seawater) - to see this go to

<http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/1/23/leatherjackets-galore.html>

## Thu 23 Jan

### Updates to my Cemetery pages and some good finds on today's walk to Budds Farm

Should you be interested in the finds made during my January visits to St Faith's churchyard and to the Havant and Warblington Cemeteries they are now online - go to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and follow the links to the January entries for each site. The St Faith's entry includes a photo of the first *Ivy-leaved Speedwell* I have seen this year; the Havant Cemetery page reminds you that *Snowdrops* are flowering where Havant Borough will commemorate *Holocaust Memorial day* on Jan 27 and has my first photo of *Common Whitlowgrass* for the year; and the Warblington page shows early *leaf and flower buds on Elder bushes* and asks if a photo of the Natural Burial Area includes an image of a '*Blue Tit on Benefits*'

Today's walk started with the sight of four freshly flowering *Lesser Celandines* in Juniper Square where there had been only one on my last visit but I found nothing else noteworthy until I reached the west end of Mill Lane at Langstone. Here, coming out onto the South Moors, I found the Moors just as flooded as it has been since the tidal surge of Jan 3 but the variety of birds on the water was much less with virtually no ducks - maybe a result of the arrival of at least 25 *Canada Geese*. Also new to this water were two Mute Swan cygnets, possibly the two from Langstone Mill Pond which have decided to leave (or been pushed out by) their parents. At least one *Rock Pipit* was still on the shore but there was no sign of the two pairs of *Stonechat* which John Goodspeed had seen on the southern fence of the Moors last Monday (Jan 20).

At Budds Farm Pools a *Little Grebe* was trilling its song and several *Shoveler* were back now that the water level is back down to normal. The majority of duck were *Teal* but I saw several *Gadwall*, *Mallard* and *Pochard*. Leaving the pools to head north up Southmoor Lane I spotted just one *Cherry Plum flower bud* showing white with the *Goat Willow tree* above the gate into the Moors now crowded with fully open golden 'Pussy Paws'.



Nothing more new until I was back at the Langstone Roundabout where I was very surprised to find a **Spear Thistle** plant carrying at least a dozen fresh flowers. Less surprising was to see the first few **Danish Scurvygrass flowers** open in the grass of the central reservation. Crossing Park Road South I found the white wavy fencing above the remnant of the Havant Town Millpond (opposite the Solent Road junction) had been completed and as I turned onto the footpath, leading through The Parchment housing to South Street, I paused by the pond and was rewarded with a clear view of a **Water Vole**, which had been sitting motionless at the foot of the slope directly below the new white fencing, proving that it was alive and well by entering the water and swimming away.

Just one more surprise before reaching home - cutting from South Street through the Twitten I was passing the small area of private parking on the south side of the road when I noticed a bright yellow flower on a shrub in a Grove Road garden but overhanging the carparking. Although this is purely an ornamental garden shrub I have noticed it flowering through several summers and was pleased to discover its name and the many talents of the 19th Century American General after whom it is named. To see what the shrub and its flowers look like go to

[http://www.magicoflife.org/flower\\_photos/Freemontodendron\\_mexicanum.html](http://www.magicoflife.org/flower_photos/Freemontodendron_mexicanum.html)

(note there are several similar species - the photo is of *Freemontodendron mexicanum* but the most commonly planted species in England seems to be *F. californicum*). To learn about the multi-talented plant hunting General after whom it is named go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_C.\\_Freemont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Freemont) (to go straight to the section of this concerned with his plant hunting go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_C.\\_Freemont#Plants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Freemont#Plants)). I was surprised to see this shrub flowering in January as I associate it with high summer.

## Tue 21 Jan

### Two newly flowering plants

My only outing today was to collect a repeat prescription from Havant Health Centre but I took a slight detour on my way home to check the roadside grass verges of the nearby Petersfield Road where it runs past Havant College grounds for the first flowers of **Danish Scurvygrass** and found more than ten (out of a million!) plants were already in flower. Coming home via Mavis Crescent (a loop off Elmleigh Road) I added my first sight of flowers on **Ivy-leaved Speedwell**

## Mon 20 Jan

### Three more birds for my yearlist and an extraordinarily early butterfly

With a forecast of another sunny day with no rain I decided to wash my sheets before going out and it was while hanging them out to dry that I heard the distinctive calls of a **Coal Tit** (up to now missing from my yearlist) coming from the trees at the end of my garden. To make sure of its identity I dashed indoors to pick up my binoculars and found the bird still searching a Walnut tree at the end of the garden when I came out.

As my intended outing for the day was to the Hayling Oysterbeds when the tide was high just before 2pm I had plenty of time in the morning to make my monthly visit to St Faith's churchyard to photograph the wildlife to be seen there in January. I normally look for wild flowers to form the bulk of my monthly 'report' but the only interesting plants currently flowering were the Sweet Violets so, despite not having a lens for bird photography, I concentrated on birds. Most obvious of the birds

within my range were three smart male **Blackbirds** all searching the grass for food - does that mean that their female partners are already sitting on eggs? A more obvious pairing was between two **Robins** also on the ground in the open - the female silently looking 'uninterested' while the male stood about 30 cms behind her fully occupied with delivering a non-stop sub-song (unlike the bold territorial song we hear everywhere). Elsewhere at various points on the Church roof I watched Jackdaw, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon either posing or singing. Before I left I did have a close look at a few examples of one small plant that will flower soon if the mild weather persists but which so far has no flower buds that I could detect - this is **Ivy-leaved Speedwell** which can, even without flowers, be distinguished from the other species by the long hairs which grow all over it.

After a quick lunch I got on my byke and headed for the Oysterbeds. Normally I would cycle along the west side of Langstone Bridge but bold signs say that it is closed until April - hopefully this major project is to widen the pavement south of the bridge so that there is a continuous cycleway south of the bridge. The east side of the bridge is still open!

At the Oysterbeds I hoped to add the **Long-tailed Duck** to my yearlist but it has not been reported there since Jan 8 and my only new ticks were **Great Crested Grebe** and **Ringed Plover**, the latter thanks to another birder who picked out a group with his scope - this birder also spotted a single **Common Gull**, a species I would not expect here.

As the weather has been so mild I thought I would see if any flower buds were showing on the wild Primroses in the small copse on the harbour shore opposite the start of the West Lane fields - plenty of fresh Primrose leaves but no sign of flower buds. A look at the open fields alongside West Lane showed a huge flock of Brent but too far away to pick out any Brant or White-front Goose that others have seen here recently.

Heading back north I turned onto the path connecting the Billy Line to West Lane and then cycled along Daw Lane in the hope of early flowers but only spotted one flowering plant of Cow Parsley. Continuing to Northney the only other sighting was of another huge flock of Brent in the field immediately north of the Verner Common/Mill Rythe area.

Back at home a look at the internet gave me the news that the **Long-billed Dowitcher** which had been at Pennington (near Lymington) from Aug 2 to Nov 17 last year has been seen again there today (Jan 20). Even more unexpected was the news that an extraordinarily early **Speckled Wood butterfly** had emerged from its chrysalis on Jan 11 in Millbrook (Southampton) - to prove it there is a photograph on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website which you can see at <http://hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/php/upload/9526-image-1.jpg>

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 13 - 19 (WEEK 03 OF 2014)**

**Sun 19 Jan**

### **A sunny walk round Stansted East Park**

This morning, with the sun shining from an almost cloudless sky, I enjoyed a two hour walk round Stansted East Park hoping to hear Woodlark song but I had to be content with **Mistle Thrush song** and with adding **Nuthatch** and **Long-tailed Tit** to my

Yearlist (now 74 bird species). This area normally has breeding **Woodlark** somewhere in it and I see that Michael Prior (the Head Forester) saw one somewhere in the Park on Jan 11 along with a large flock of **Fieldfare** and **Redwing** and a **Red Kite**

I drove to the Main Avenue carpark but then crossed the Forestside road to make my way through the Lady's Walk and up Rosamund's Hill on the east side of the Forest before turning east at the top of the Hill to follow the footpath across the fields to the Lumley Seat area. Here I turned left along the road leading to Broadreed Farm and then right down the west side of Oak Copse to follow the main track which bisects the East Park fields before joining the main vehicle road from Stansted House back to the carpark.

The **Nuthatch** was very vocal in the Lady's Walk trees along with a good collection of other small birds including **Song Thrush** and **Chaffinch** and high overhead two **Buzzards** were soaring on motionless wings. At the north end of the Walk I turned right up to follow the rather wet and muddy track along the outside of the woods - I had hoped for Fieldfare in the large field whose edge I now followed but had to be content with a single **Mistle Thrush** which flew back into the trees to sing from an unseen perch. Nothing more of bird interest until I reached the road passing Lumley Seat on its way to Broadreed Farm - here a small flock of **Long-tailed Tits** made good a surprising omission from my yearlist. At the east end of the large East Park fields I turned south on the track passing Oak Copse and looking away from the wood over the open field I enjoyed a great view of a misty landscape stretching to the Isle of Wight - this is the highest point in the whole Stansted estate. Sadly that was the last sight of interest in this walk.

## [Fri 17 Jan](#)

### **Goat Willow and Lesser Celandine flowering and Turnstone now on my Yearlist**

A brief walk round Havant yesterday gave me the **first Celandine flower** in Juniper Square, three Sweet Violets in St Faith's Churchyard, and a big clump of **Glistening Inkcap fungi** in an alleyway off East Street

This morning I set out early in sunshine to walk to Budds Farm with the intention of checking on the flooding of the South Moors but as I reached the Moors heavy rain started, persisting until I got back home - luckily I had put on waterproof over-trousers so kept reasonably dry. Despite the conditions I was pleased with the addition of **Turnstone** to my yearlist and with the first **Goat Willow 'Pussy Paws'** on the tree overhanging the gate into the Moors from Southmoor Lane which always starts to flower long before any others.

I set out down Wade Lane where there was evidence everywhere of heavy overnight rain having fallen onto already water-logged ground and the eagerness with which a flock of Starlings were pecking at the grass indicated that many worms and insects had been driven to the surface to escape drowning (though I recently learnt from Brian Fellows that worms do not drown in fresh water though they do die in salt water). Also in these fields north of Wade Court were **10 Egrets** (an increase on last winter's mid-winter Langstone population which I estimated at just 7 birds).

South of Wade Court the unsurfaced section of Wade Lane was a running stream (though not deep enough to deter anyone with boots on) and the pony field to the west of the lane had become one single lake over its southern half. One more Egret was here, making a total of 11, as well as both Teal and Wigeon but the best sight by far was a pair of **Grey Wagtails**, both looking smarter than usual but with one (presumably the male though I could not see his black bib) having stunningly bright yellow underparts. Reaching Langstone Pond I noticed a single female Merganser on it, noy the first to be recorded here but the first which I have seen.

At the west end of Mill Lane, just after the entrance to the West Mill, I noticed well developed leaves of the garden escape **Summer Snowflake** plant which has flowered by a tree stump on the left side of the path - they are pretty well hidden in brambles but the white flowers may well soon attract attention. A little further on, overhanging the garden wall of the West Mill, is a great show of the now bright orange seed capsules of **Japanese or Green Spindle (Euonymus japonica)**.

Crossing the bridge over the Langbrook stream I discovered there was more water but fewer birds on the South Moors than on my last visit but there was still a substantial flock of **Black-headed Gulls** with a mixture of **Gadwall** and **Wigeon** (and probably others but the wind and rain made it impossible to scan them). On the shingle at the mouth of the stream was a fairly large flock of **Turnstone**, and looking north from the seawall I saw two large, low flying Pipits which I am pretty sure were **Rock Pipits**, and others, higher flying, which I guess were **Meadow Pipits**.

At Budds Farm pools the water level was high and **no Shoveler** could be seen (I think they do not like water higher than the level at which their paddling on the surface can stir up food items from the bottom of the water to the surface where they can feed on it without diving). The majority of the other birds still present were **Pochard, Teal** and **Gadwall**. Continuing north up Southmoor Lane with the rain still beating down I could not see any Cherry Plum blossom to match that already flowering beside Harts Farm Way but I did see several rain soaked '**Pussy Paws**' on the usual **Goat Willow tree**.

Nothing else new seen on the way home other than the new white, wavy metal fencing now guarding the Water Voles' pond from the Park Road South traffic and pedestrians.

**Tue 14 Jan**

### **First Chaffinch song and four new birds plus flowering Snowdrops for my yearlist**

Yesterday I paid a brief visit to the Havant cemetery where the first **Snowdrops** were flowering, then made a longer visit to the Nore Barn shore where **Spotted Redshank, Stock Dove** and **Linnet** were added to my bird year list. Today, in much better weather, I made my monthly visits to both the Havant and Warblington cemeteries to collect photos for the 'Wildlife in January' posters for the two sites, and in doing so brought my bird year list to 71 with the first **Pheasant** I have encountered since the New Year.

The main interest yesterday was in the Nore Barn/Warblington Farm area where I arrived two hours after high tide but found the water higher than expected, though that had not deterred the **Spotted Redshank** but meant that I had close views of it as the water was only low enough for it to feed in the upper part of the stream. Walking on east through the centre of the woodland the only interest I came on was **a reddish, amorphous fungus** cascading down the branches and trunk of a large, totally dead tree close to the western end of the wood and about half-way between its northern and southern edges. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time but will have a closer look next time I am there.

My objective was to check out the plants in the arable field behind Conigar Point and as soon as I got there I found masses of **Field Woundwort** still in flower together with plenty of **Field Madder** and some Common Fumitory and Sun Spurge. At first there seemed to be no birds present but before I left I had seen a flock of 16 **Stock Doves**, another of around 40 **Linnetts** and a smaller number of **Skylarks** (none of them singing as I see they have started to do at other sites).

Coming back along the southern border of Nore Barn wood when I reached the first post telling Horse Riders to turn in the wood I also noticed (thanks to the low sun streaming into the wood) the biggest plant of **Butcher's Broom** that I can recall seeing anywhere and as I went into the trees to look at it I also noticed two **Sweet Violet flowers** at my feet.

Today's sunshine helped me to take the photos which will eventually appear on my cemetery pages but it also encouraged **Chaffinches to start singing** - I heard one making tentative attempts in the Havant cemetery and another to deliver a fuller version at Warblington where a raucous cock Pheasant in the farm fields allowed me to add the species to my year list.

While at Warblington cemetery I was reminded that I have long been puzzled as to who were the religious Sisters whose graves form a cluster on the right of the main path leading south from the vehicle entrance. If any one else is interested the answer to this and several other questions about the cemeteries may well be answered by **an exhibition currently showing at the Havant Arts Centre** - go through the first hall, on past the Bar into what used to be the Museum and then at the back of that area you will find steps going both down and up - for the current exhibition about the Havant Cemeteries Project go up and among many other exhibits on the walls there is a page about the "Anglican Order of St Anne of Bethany" which was founded in the USA in 1910 but in 1922 some of the Sisters settled in Emsworth. In 1973 four remaining Sisters went back to America but an associated group (The Society of the Sisters of Bethany which had been founded in London in 1866) seem to have moved to Southsea and now look after the Warblington Cemetery site with some of their members now being buried there.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR JAN 6 - 12 (WEEK 02 OF 2014)**

**Sat 11 Jan**

**Avocet added to my bird year list and Cherry Plum to the flowers**



Although I was unable to leave the house until after lunch I enjoyed a cycle ride to the Eastern Road entrance to Farlington Marshes area and back which brought my bird list for the year to 67 with **Avocet** and **Heron** and added **Cherry Plum blossom**, **Dog's Mercury** and **Blue Fleabane** to my flower list.

A bonus on the outward trip was to see what must have been two different **Kingfishers**, the first being close to Tesco in Havant (it was flying along the outflow stream from the pond where Water Voles have been seen recently) and the second was flying down the Hermitage Stream between the A27 and Harts Farm Way. From Broadmarsh I may have seen my first Knot of the year but did not add them to the list as they were distant and my only evidence for their identity was that they looked more 'tubby' and were slower in their movements than I would expect of Dunlin.

Heading west on the cycleway the sun was in my eyes but I pressed on past Farlington Marshes to the road entrance from the Eastern Road from where I could get a view of the Broom Channel which goes under the Eastern Road bridge into Ports Creek, and at the closest point to where I was (with the tide very low) I could see a party of around **15 Avocet** (presumably the same party which John Shillitoe saw yesterday though no one has reported them on the Going Birding website today)

Heading back east with the sun behind me I saw my first **Heron** in the reserve and back in the Broadmarsh area I spotted a couple of the eye-catching seed heads of **Blue Fleabane** so stopped to confirm that there were also several fresh flowers which had not gone to seed. Reaching the roundabout at the end of Harts Farm Way I stopped again to check out the traffic island which always has a show of wild flowers, finding a lot of **Common Storks-bill** and **Charlock** flowers but also a couple of what seemed to be **Hawksbeard** plants with some fresh flowers - despite having a good look at them I was not able to name them with any confidence when I got back to my books but I soon made up for that as I was approaching the Hermitage Stream bridge and found myself under a **Cherry Plum** tree with plenty of blossom already showing.

As the sun was still well up I cycled on down to Langstone Mill, then along the shore and up Pook Lane where I was successful in finding the first **Dogs Mercury** flower 'tassels'. I pressed on to Nore Barn knowing that the Spotted Redshank would have left for its night roost but the view was magnificent and included the spectacle of 1000 or more Brent flying up, silhouetted against the setting sun, from the Northney fields on Hayling for the safety of a night roost on the water of the Emsworth Channel. While there, chatting to people that I knew, the subject of the **Helicopter crash at Cley in Norfolk** came up and someone suggested that it might have been caused by a bird strike - that seems a very possible suggestion and I now have this mental image of a huge flock of Black-tailed Godwits rising in protest at the violation of their privacy and showing the intruder what they thought of it, regardless of the cost to themselves.

## **Thu 9 Jan**

### **Two new flowers for 2014 and a look back at the first week of the year**

Today has been decidedly spring like and a brief walk around Havant this morning discovered fresh flowers on both **Grey Alder** (fully open catkins on a tree at the

entrance to the Prince George St carpark) and tiny white flower buds on at least two of the hundreds of tiny **Common Whitlowgrass** plants which thrive in the moss along the north side of Waterloo Road bordering the private and railway carparks. Two other signs of the spring-like weather concern birds: one is the continuing presence of a **Swallow** hawking insects over the sewage works at Newick (by the A272 a little east of Haywards Heath in East Sussex) from Jan 2 to 8 at least; the other is the less surprising start of **eastward passage by Brent past Dungeness** of which there have been reports on at least two days starting with 362 on Jan 1 and then 200 on Jan 4 with another 93 on Jan 8. Although I have so far only collected reports for the first week of the year it is worth a browse through these and the New Year's Day birdrace results which have been published - the winner on the day seems to have been one **Robin A. who listed 112 species on the Isle of Wight**. Next best score that I am aware of was 101 species seen in West Sussex by four Sussex birders (including Jake Gearty, George Heath and Luke Dray) who went out on Jan 5 and who had the 'tame' Grey Phalarope at Hove Lagoon as their final tick in rain and virtual darkness. I see someone else has seen it there when cycling by at night and on Jan 8 Owen Mitchell posted a photo (see [http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com\\_jobline4/logo/p1020321.jpg](http://www.sos.org.uk/administrator/components/com_jobline4/logo/p1020321.jpg)) showing how tame the bird is.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF 2014 WEEK 1 - ANIMALS**

**Common Seal well inland**. An unusual sight, though not a first, was a Common Seal in the Sussex Ouse at Lewes on Jan 2.

**Weever Fish on Hayling beach**. Weever Fish burrow into the sand around the low tide mark waiting to kill their prey with a lethal injection of poison from spines on top of their head when the prey passes above them - an unintended result is that human bathers who accidentally tread on one of these fish can receive a very painful 'sting' (my advice when bathing in the sea is always to wear plimsolls). Wikipedia has a comprehensive entry on this fish at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesser\\_weever](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesser_weever) but to see the dorsal fin spines, which inject the poison, click on each of the two photos in order to enlarge them from thumbnails. The reason for mentioning them here is that on Jan 5 one was found washed up on Hayling beach with a second specimen of the same species stuck down its throat (probably having killed the outer fish when the poisonous spines of the inner fish injected the outer fish from inside its throat!) For the photo of these two locked in their deadly embrace see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x584-weaver-fish-hayling-RT-01.14.jpg>.

**Sea Mouse**. Also among the many marine creatures washed up on the Hayling beach by the storm was one that appeared to be still alive and which no doubt appreciated being returned to the sea by its finder. This was a type of worm which grows what looks like a mat of hair along its back, thus gaining the otherwise inappropriate name 'Sea Mouse' - for a good photo of the one on Hayling see <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x584-sea-slug-hayling-RT-01.14.jpg>. If you are interested in our marine life check out <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/> and for an example of what they offer see their 'Learning Zone' page giving you basic facts about the Sea Mouse (number 2564 in their list of species on which info

is available) at <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/lzspeciesreview.php?speciesid=2564#>.

Another more local source of marine life information is Andy Horton of Shoreham and you can find out about various projects with which he is involved (principally the British Marine Life Study Society) by visiting <http://www.glaucus.org.uk/Andy.htm>

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF 2014 WEEK 1 - BIRDS**

**Divers.** Jan 5 brought a count of 1589 Red Throated off the Suffolk coast and in Devon the single White Billed Diver was still off Brixham in Torbay where 63 Great Northern were seen

**Grebes.** 265 Great Crested were off Sandwich on Jan 5 with 1070 off the Netherlands on Jan 7; Jersey had 7 Red Necked, 34 Slavonian and 30 Black Necked.

**Storm Petrel.** On Jan 3 one was in Portland Harbour and on Jan 4 one was off Southsea Castle.

**Glossy Ibis.** On Jan 4 RBA had reports of 19 in the UK but few seem to have been in the south. I know of one at Radipole Park in Weymouth, one in the Kent Stour valley, two in Cornwall (Saltash and the Lizard), with none in Hampshire, Dorset or Sussex.

**Whooper Swan.** As in recent winters two of these seem to be wintering in the Chichester area, coming to roost on Ivy Lake at sunset but spending their days elsewhere at an unknown site.

**Brent Geese.** I have mentioned ahead of this summary that the first migrant Brent (a flock of 362) began to head east past Dungeness on Jan 1, followed by 200 or more on Jan 4. This is normal though maybe a few days earlier than usual - more unusual and more spectacular was a video of the collapsing cliffs at Hastings which you can see at

[http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/10913714.VIDEO Amazing footage of cliff falling into sea at Hastings/?ref=var\\_0](http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/10913714.VIDEO_Amazing_footage_of_cliff_falling_into_sea_at_Hastings/?ref=var_0) - maybe this frightened the Brent into leaving (not serious) - note that you have to scroll down past the first photo to reach the video.

**Green Winged Teal.** One has been near the Avon Causeway on the Hants/Dorset border from Jan 1 to Jan 5 at least

**Pintail.** The first to go on my New Year list was one bird among a variety of waterbirds enjoying the flooding of the Langstone South Moors by the tidal surge on Jan 3 although I did not see them until Jan 5 when the storm had abated but the water had not yet drained from the Moors.

**Long-tailed Duck.** One has been 'winter resident' at the Hayling Oysterbeds since Nov 6 and is just one among an unusually large number present on the South Coast this winter. During this first week of 2014 they have been present at Christchurch Harbour, at the mouth of Southampton Water and at the mouth of Pagham Harbour while Hayling Island has at least one more to be seen in Fishery Creek (mouth of Chichester Harbour). In December others were in Rye Harbour and Portland Harbour.

**Smew.** Just one seems to be present on the south coast - at Lytchett Bay in Poole Harbour where it was first seen on Jan 3.

**Common Crane.** The two which arrived near Dorchester in Dorset in mid-December were still there on Jan 6 but are mobile.

**Avocet.** It seems that the large gathering of 60 or more in Nutbourne Bay during December have now abandoned Sussex where the only report of them in January

was of 12 at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool (Pagham Hbr) on Jan 2 when 20 were in Langstone Harbour and 2 dropped in at Christchurch Harbour. On Jan 4 the count at the Exe estuary in Devon was given as 400 and I suspect the only birds to be seen on the south coast now are there or further west (I have not seen any reports from Poole Harbour so far this year)

**Lesser Yellowlegs.** The bird at Lepe (mouth of Southampton Water) was still there on Jan 9.

**Grey Phalarope.** Three of these have sought temporary refuge on the south coast at the start of 2014. One was at Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset from Jan 2 to 4, another was at Falmouth from Jan 1 to 4, and a third arrived at Hove Lagoon on Jan 5 and is still there on Jan 9.

**Common Gull.** The New Year has brought a considerable increase in numbers being reported - on Jan 3 there were 170 in Stokes Bay at Gosport and on Jan 4 127 were at Eastney (mouth of Langstone Harbour) - on Jan 5 they were easy to find along the north of Langstone Harbour in ones and twos. Both **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls** are now being reported on the south coast including one Glaucous flying west past Southsea Castle on Jan 5.

**Kittiwake.** These are not unexpected along the south coast in the winter but Tim Doran was pleased to add the species to those recorded at the IBM Lake in north Portsmouth when one settled on the water there on Jan 1. On Jan 3 unusually large flocks were at Chesil near Portland (500 birds), at Christchurch Harbour (800 birds) and on Jan 4 there were 280 at Stokes Bay (Gosport).

**Sandwich Tern.** These were to be seen during the week in Poole Harbour (2), Lepe at the mouth of Southampton Water (1), mouth of Chichester Harbour (3), and Selsey Bill (3) but there were no repeats of the counts of up to 12 seen in December.

**Black Guillemot.** The bird which arrived in Portland Harbour on Dec 21 is still there on Jan 9 but the rarer **Brunnich's Guillemot** which arrived on Dec 26 has not been seen since Dec 29.

**Swallow.** One has been hawking insects over Newick Sewage works (just east of Haywards Heath) from Jan 2 to 8 at least. There has also been an isolated sighting of a **House Martin** at Par near St Austell in south Cornwall on Jan 5

**Pied Wagtail.** A night roost of 595 birds was reported in Brighton on Jan 4 and 120 were roosting at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Haywards Heath on Jan 2. On Jan 4 a flock of 260 were on flooded playing fields near Eastleigh - maybe after roosting at the nearby airport?

**Fieldfare.** The first 3 were seen in Hampshire on Oct 1 with a flock of 106 seen at Aldershot on Oct 7 and regular sightings in the county from then on, though mainly in the New Forest and north of Hampshire with very few on the south coast. In the past week there has been one flock of 390 birds near the A34 north of Whitchurch plus three sightings near the south coast (the biggest count being 8 at Titchfield Haven) and this supports my personal belief that (in addition to those that cross the North Sea to arrive in eastern England) a considerable number come across the Channel only to fly on north meaning that we do not see them feeding in the south until they are forced back south by bad weather and lack of food further north.

**Magpie.** A report of a night roost of 200 Magpies in trees along the River Alver at Gosport on Jan 3 was unexpected but only, I suspect, because not many birders are out looking for them at dusk.

**Rook.** A much smaller corvid gathering of around 20 Rooks was in and around the small remaining Rookery in the Havant area on Jan 2 (I don't expect any serious nesting activity until mid-February at the earliest)

**Brambling.** The only news of the build up of winter Finch flocks that I have seen so far is of Bramblings. On Jan 2 there were flocks of 25 and 40 respectively at Ashley Warren and Yately respectively in north Hampshire, then of 100 in Ashdown Forest in east Sussex.

**Parrot Crossbill.** Also in Ashdown Forest a flock of 8 Parrot Crossbills has been present since before Christmas and is still there. The best photo I have seen is by Leigh Prevost at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/48896022@N08/11713822355/> and was taken on Jan 2.

**Hawfinch.** On Jan 5 a flock of 25 Hawfinch were seen in the West Dean woods north of Chichester.

**Yellowhammer.** On Jan 3 Laurence Holloway saw a flock of 40 Yellowhammer in his Aldwick garden near Bognor and thinks they must have been evicted from local fields by flooding.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF 2014 WEEK 1 - INSECTS**

**Brimstone.** Seen in both Hampshire and Sussex on Jan 2 - one on Southampton Common and two in Sussex.

**Red Admiral.** Jan 2 brought out at least six in Hampshire and the IOW while Sussex had at least three.

**Small Tortoiseshell.** One at Folkestone on Jan 2

**Peacock.** One at Ropley on Jan 2.

**Comma.** One at Kithurst Hill in Sussex on Jan 2.

**Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*).** On Jan 2, when the sun brought out the above butterflies, Brian Banks found a queen of this species nectaring on Honeysuckle in his East Sussex garden at Northiam. He says this date is eight weeks earlier than the earliest records in the previous two years and he suggests that people should participate in a winter bumblebee recording project which they can learn about at

<http://www.bwars.com/index.php?q=content/winter-active-bombus-terrestris-data-gathering>

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF 2014 WEEK 1 - PLANTS**

The only significant 'first flower' seen in the first week of the year was the opening of buds on **Rhododendron ponticum** in a Langstone garden on Jan 5 but by Jan 9 I was pleased to find both **Grey Alder catkins** and **Common Whitlowgrass flower buds** opening in Havant. I also found a Speedwell flowering on Jan 1 and believe it was Grey Field Speedwell based on the short curled hairs on its calyx lobes though the one flower did not have the expected intense blue.

## **WILDLIFE DIARY AND NEWS FOR DEC 30 - JAN 5 (WEEK 01 OF 2014)**

### **Sun 5 Jan**

#### **Three Gs and three Ps on a flooded South Moors**



With a touch of overnight frost melting as the sun rose on a cloudy but dry morning a Song Thrush was again singing close to my garden and the prospect of a rain-free morning suggested a walk to the South Moors to see what it was like after yesterday's inundation so I set off down the Billy Trail which was still under water where it meets the main road causing me to divert down Langstone Avenue where the purple flower buds of *Rhodoendron ponticum* gave me a pleasant surprise in one garden.

No more surprises until I crossed the Langbrook Stream by the West Mill and immediately saw that it was not possible to cross the Moors as the small footbridge over the central streamlet was well underwater as was most of the land south of the central path down to the seawall.

It was clear that the water was draining as the area was now divided into three or four large pools with ridges of higher ground separating them but those pools were filled with a mass of birds, mainly ducks and gulls but during my first scan I was interrupted by the sharp calls of a *Green Sandpiper* (the first of my three 'G's) and on looking up to watch it fly past I noticed my second 'G' - a *Grey Wagtail* - and then saw a *Green Woodpecker* fly off. The majority of the other birds were already on my Yearlist (*Wigeon*, *Shoveler*, *Mallard*, *Teal* and *Gadwall* plus the odd Curlew and a few Starling) but a lone *Black-tailed Godwit* was an addition as was a single male *Pintail* (the first of the three 'P's). The other two were *Pipits (Meadow and Rock)* and I did not see these until I had crossed the water outlet from the Moors (a raging torrent through the normal stream drainage pipe - luckily the seawall was still intact). Four Pipits flew up from the edge of the flood and made off high inland with one calling to identify itself and shortly after a larger darker bird flew silently onto the wire fence, then down again onto a patch of exposed grass and rushes where I had a good view and was sure it was a Rock Pipit.

On the harbour shore Dunlin and Grey Plover were new for my Yearlist but I failed to see a hoped for Turnstone though I did add *Common Gull* to bring my Yearlist to **65 bird species**. Despite visiting Budds Pools and walking the Budds Farm shore, then the Brockhampton stream on the way back into Havant I saw nothing else new.

Checking out on the internet what others had seen I found that Dungeness confirmed the start of the easterly **departure of Brent Geese** with a count of 200 passing on Jan 4 (confirming the movement of at least 80 past Hastings which I mentioned yesterday) and the Dungeness site also said that a *Hume's Leaf Warbler* had been there since Jan 2. News for Jan 3 was of **200 Magpies** in a nightroost in the Gosport Alver valley while Jan 4 observations included a night roost of **595 Pied Wagtails** at Brighton. Also on Jan 4 a *Willow Warbler* was at the Sidlesham sewage works near Pagham Harbour, the long-staying *Long-tailed Duck* (and one Slav Grebe) were at the Hayling Oysterbeds, with **18 Eider** and a *Little Gull* seen from the Southsea Castle shore. News for today (Jan 5) started with a *Swallow* at Newick (west of Haywards Heath along the A272) and continued with a *Great Grey Shrike* near Alton, a *Grey Phalarope* on Hove lagoon, an immature *Glaucous Gull* flying west past Southsea Castle and a flock of **100 Bramblings** in Ashdown Forest.

Yesterday I said I would complete my 'highlights of December 2013' with news of the wild flowers that I thought were of interest, so here goes...

## **PLANTS**

**Common Fumitory** has recently sprung up as a result of disturbance caused by the building of new houses on the Warblington School Playing fields (this, and flowering **Common Rape**, could still be seen close to the New Lane level crossing in Havant on Dec 28)

**Many-seeded Goosefoot** was a surprise find on the virtually unused pavement round the south west quadreant of the Lngstone roundabout on Dec 16.

**Herb Robert** was another unexpected flower on a brick wall on Dec 16.

**Yellow Flowered Strawberry** was increasingly in flower during the month both in Juniper Square and by the Langbrook Stream near the entrance to the Langstone Techology Park

**Wood Avens**. Occasional flowers seen up to Dec 27

**Spurge Laurel** I was pleased on Dec 27 to see flowers on a couple of plants planted in the Grove Road conservation area as this has been eradicated from Stransted Forest by browsing Deer.

**Hazel Catkins**. I found the first open catkins on Dec 26 and they have now become widespread.

**Cow Parsley** Isolated flowering plants were found during the month with the last seen on Dec 14

**Field Woundwort**. Soil disturbance by the replacement of street lighting seems to be the cause of the flowering of several plants near the junction of the Emsworth and Southleigh Roads

**White Comfrey** A single unseasonable plant was flowering by the Brockhampton Stream on Dec 14 but has not been seen again (probably eaten by Rabbits)

**Winter Heliotrope** In widespread flower at the end of the month especially after Dec 26 when sunshine brought the strong vanilla scent from a cluster of 50 flowerheads at Wade Court.

## **Sat 4 Jan**

### **Highlights of the last week of 2013**

I continue to collect from the internet other people's observations which interest me, to add my own observations to this jumble of random records and, after allowing a few days for them to include late postings, to sort them by species before picking out 'highlights' which may be of interest to others as well as myself (and if no one else is interested I at least have my own databank for future reference). I make no pretence at accuracy or completeness of this data but at least I benefit from getting a broader view of wildlife than my own observations could ever give me and from extending my own knowledge through the expertise of other

observers and by using the internet to try to answer the questions thrown up by the observed data.

So here is what I have picked out for the period Dec 23 - 31.

## **ANIMALS**

The most unusual feature of the very few observations in this category is the huge range of sea creatures that have been washed up on our beaches by the extremely violent seas all along the south coast. Brian Fellows was the first to bring this to my attention with his account of what Chris and Ann Oakley found on the south Hayling beach on Christmas Day - go to

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm> and either scroll down to Dec 25 or 'Find' (CTRL + F) Starfish. For a full introduction to the group of creatures to which the Starfish and Sea Urchins belong go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echinoderm> and for another good account which includes colour photos try <http://www.starfish.ch/reef/echinoderms.html>

## **BIRDS**

**Divers** Not for the first time this winter I have been impressed by the number of Red-throated Divers off the Netherlands and on Dec 28 Trektellen reported one flock of 1231 birds plus what were probably additional flocks of 1046 and 605 at two other sites. On our south coast Torbay in Devon had a total of 40 Great Northern Divers on Dec 24, increasing to 50 on Dec 31. On Christmas Day these birds were joined by a White-billed Diver showing closely off Brixham - for a good photo showing the distinctive bill go to

<http://www.devonbirds.org/images/cache/e20207094ef60fb185a74f224c5bef69.jpg>

**Bewick's Swan** The arrival on Dec 29 of just one at Ibsley Water in the Blashford Lakes complex many not sound like a highlight to present day birders (you had only to cross the Sussex border to find 5 of them at the Adur confluence on Dec 26) but for older birders it is a sad reminder of how different things were 'in the good old days'. Picking out the 1983 HOS report I see that there were 138 of these regular winter visitors in the Avon Valley during December of that year and a little searching pulled out a count of 163 for the second half of 1989, after which numbers began to decline....

**Black Guillemot** One has been in Portland Harbour since Dec 21 and several photos of it appear on the Portland website but as that site prevents copying of URLs I cannot point you directly to one but only suggest you go to the main website (at [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa\\_latestnews.htm](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm) ) and FIND (CTRL + F) Black Guillemot which will take you to the days on which the bird was seen (with any photos of the bird above the text. I was surprised at the amount of white in the bird's winter plumage.

**Ruddy Duck** Cliff Dean has an interesting piece on Britain's expensive efforts to eliminate this species. To read what he had to say after what may have been the last three specimens were shot at Pett Level go to <http://rxbirdwalks.wordpress.com/2013/12/26/flowing-well-2/> and follow his link (in

red) to '2013 update on the cull' or go to it directly at

[http://www.rinse-europe.eu/assets/\\_files/bestpracticepresentation\\_ruddyduck.pdf](http://www.rinse-europe.eu/assets/_files/bestpracticepresentation_ruddyduck.pdf) which has a lengthy summary which tells us on page 12 that no action has yet been taken to cull the substantial population in the Netherlands compared to the 7,300 already killed in Britain.

**Common Crane** Two have been present near Dorchester in Dorset since Dec 6 and several photos have appeared on the Dorset Birds blog (<http://dorsetbirds.blogspot.co.uk/>). For a good flight photo see <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-jYsLPvW-0y8/UqIR8Z1hLRI/AAAAAAAAAqM/7QzI3idOrY0/s1600/CraneCommon4597.JPG> and for a photo of them on the ground see <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-TI1qU77IIqM/UqISCODi2xI/AAAAAAAAAqU/Ry3olqAcxYE/s1600/CraneCommon9552.JPG>

**Black-tailed Godwit** A count of 1600 at Bisterne in the lower Avon valley on Dec 29 caught my eye as higher than usual. My impression was that the birds did not leave coastal sites until winter frosts gave way to spring floods but a look at the three latest Hampshire bird reports shows that numbers in the valley are not governed by the calendar but by the available food (and that is determined by flooding which brings worms to the surface of the riverside meadows). In 2011 the number present in December did not exceed 4 birds with none reported in November but in 2010 after none were counted in November the December count was 2655. The latest year covered (2012) shows that 1725 were present on Nov 23, 3187 on Dec 16 increasing to a Hampshire County all-time record for a single site of 4000 on Dec 27. Figures for this year on the Going Birding website show only two significant counts in the Avon valley (150 at Blashford on Nov 11 and 1600 at Bisterne on Dec 29)

**Lesser Yellowlegs** This interesting oddity has been at Lepe (near Calshot) since Nov 10 and is still being seen on Jan 4. Although many Hampshire birders have been glad of this opportunity to add the species to their life-lists it is at least the 12th to be seen in the county since 1950 (252 have been seen in Britain between 1950 and 2007) This species breeds in North America and winters in South America but is prone to navigational errors on its autumn migration.

**Common Gull** This normally common (in winter) species gets a mention as I have seen fewer than usual mentions of it this winter - possibly because many birders think it is too common to be worth a mention. Whatever the reason a search of the Going Birding website for the month of December returns only five entries but one of those entries hints at one reason for the absence of sightings - on Dec 30 5 of these birds were seen flying south down the River Itchen to spend the night on Southampton Water. This reminds me that if you want to see Common Gulls in Hampshire during the winter the place to go is not the coast but remote inland fields, particularly those where winter ploughing is taking place.

**Sandwich Tern** I expect to hear of around half a dozen wintering birds in the Solent harbours so I was surprised to see, among the 11 Hampshire sightings during December, one of 12 fishing off the Emsworth shore on Dec 7, another of 16 birds seen off Black Point on Hayling on Dec 14, and a third of 8 birds at Black Point on Dec 29 (all seen by reliable observers). My first reaction was that the wintering

population in Langstone/Chichester Harbours had increased to a total of at least 16 though they were normally dispersed and not noticed by birders but on reflection I feel that it is unlikely that the many birders watching these harbour shores would fail to mention sightings of even single birds so my current feeling is that the mild autumn and early winter has encouraged a lot of these birds to stay on longer than usual at sites further east along our south and east coasts, and continental shores, until local conditions remind them that it is time to head south. Thus these three unusual sightings could be caused by parties of late migrants passing through the Solent harbours (though there is no supporting evidence of similar sightings at sites either east or west of the Solent).

**Brunnich's Guillemot** On Dec 26 a bird of this species turned up in Portland and was declared to be not only a first for the Portland observatory but also new for Dorset. BTO Birdfacts (<http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob6350.htm>) tells me that although one bird of this species is normally seen in Britain each year none of the sightings have been south of Northumberland on the east coast or Lancashire on the west despite the species being a common breeder all round the Arctic circle. The reason for the species being rare at coastal sites during the winter is that it prefers to spend the whole time in the oceans far from land. The birdfacts website tells us it is well equipped for this pelagic life by being "one of the deepest underwater divers of all birds, regularly descending to depths of more than 100 m, and occasionally below 200 m; it can remain submerged for more than three minutes". Two photos and a video of the Portland bird appear above the Dec 26 text at [http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa\\_latestnews.htm](http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/aa_latestnews.htm).

**Black Guillemot** One of this species (often referred to by the name 'Tystie') is also in Portland Harbour where it arrived on Dec 21 and photos of it in its mainly white winter plumage can be seen above the Dec 29 entry on the Portland website. By Dec 29 three more of them were in Torbay off Brixham

**Two rare Owls** The first of these was a **Snowy Owl** sadly found dead on the beach at Marazion near Penzance on Dec 28. The second was a much less common **Hawk Owl** of which only 4 have been seen in Britain in the 1950 - 2007 period covered by BTO Birdfacts and which thus required a trip to the Netherlands where Richard Fairbank saw and photographed it on Dec 31. For Richards account go to <http://birdingneversleeps.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/best-ever-year-end.html>. Further info on the Birdfacts page is that .. "The Hawk Owl can detect prey by sight at a distance of up to 800 meters (half a mile) and seize prey under 1 foot of snow." and the Collins Bird Guide has a warning to birders .. "Can fiercely attack intruders when young leave the nest - do not go near, and keep your eyes fixed on the parents while in sight of young just out of the nest!". Another unusual aspect of this Owl's behaviour is that it does most of its hunting by daylight and includes a lot of small birds among its prey.

**Swallow** On Dec 28 one was seen at Christchurch Harbour and two were seen in Cornwall (at Fowey and Roseland near Falmouth). Another very late summer visitor was a **Lesser Whitethroat** in a Plymouth garden for a week before being reported on Dec 22.

## **INSECTS**



**Common Darter** At least one was still flying in Hampshire on Dec 11 - the last of eight December sightings of this species in Norfolk, Devon, Dorset and Hampshire

**Brimstone butterfly** Just one December sighting of a male flying near Fleet in Hampshire on Dec 28

**Red Admiral** At least five seen flying in December with the last (so far!) on Thorney Island on Dec 29

**Small Tortoiseshell** One flying in Brighton on Dec 29

**Peacock** Two December sightings of insects flying in sunshine - one in Sussex on Dec 16 and one in Hampshire on Dec 29.

**Rare beetles and spiders at Rye Harbour** Go to <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2013/12/23/an-antidote-to-the-winter-blues.htm> to read Chris Bentley's list of rare insects found in traps set round areas of newly created saltmarsh and shingle habitat at Rye Harbour.

## **PLANTS**

Details of plants flowering in December will have to wait until tomorrow but in their place I must report that the most recent posting for Jan 4 on the Rye Bay website (see <http://www.rxwildlife.info/sightings/2014/1/4/cliff-fall-images.html>) says that during a 45 minute seawatch there was .. " **a definite and early easterly movement of Brent Geese, with several groups totalling 80**"

## **Fri 3 Jan**

### **Flooding around Langstone Harbour**

Yesterday Bob Chapman put out a warning on the 108Ft Blog (<http://solentreserves.wordpress.com/>) that people should not visit Farlington Marshes today, at least until the midday high tide had passed, as there was a real danger that people could be drowned if the tide overtopped or broke through the sea wall and that there was a real possibility that one of these could happen. So far I have no news of what did happen there but I did make a brief trip to Budds Mound around 12:30 to see what was happening in the north of Langstone Harbour.

When I left home the sun was shining but when I reached the southern end of Southmoor Lane a severe squall arrived there, making it almost impossible to stand on top of the mound without hanging on to the railings round the high point at the centre of the turning circle for cars, and impossible to look into the wind to get a view of the RSPB Islands and Farlington Marshes. It was possible to see the waves breaking high over the South Moors seawall and to see that the whole of the low ground between the ex-IBM Playing Fields and the Langbrook Stream was underwater at least as far inland as the 'Orchid Field' (and probably right up to the SSE Offices though the water there was concealed by the vegetation). As with Farlington we will have to wait to find out if there has been a permanent (or until repaired) breach of the seawall.

The South Moors area has long been expected to become tidal and I can recall at least one occasion within the past 20 years when water must have flowed as far north as it did today, but the only evidence I saw for that was tidal detritus - I wonder

if today's flooding will leave a more permanent water body within the sea wall and if it will still be possible to walk the path round the seawall or across the Moors from Mill Lane to Southmoor Lane? One hopeful sign was that as I cycled back up Southmoor Lane the sun came out and a bright rainbow appeared against the backdrop of the retreating clouds

## Thu 2 Jan

### New Years Day part two in sunshine

Today I spent more than four hours in glorious sunshine and brought my birding Year List up to a reasonable 53 species during a cycle ride via Emsworth and Thorney Island to Prinsted and Nutbourne before heading inland through Hambrook to come home via Marlpit Lane, Aldsworth and Long Copse Lane north of Emsworth.

Today there was no need to be off at sunrise to avoid imminent rain but nevertheless I went out into my garden just before sunrise to listen for bird song and thus was lucky enough to hear the distinctive 'Guk, guk' calls of a lone **Redwing** perched on the very tip of the tallest tree over the Billy Trail at the end of the garden - the light was still poor so I had to wait for several minutes before I could see the bird's eyestripe and be sure of its identity - an excellent start.

I did not get on my bike until 9am when I headed east into Emsworth along Selangor Avenue where I saw a **Collared Dove** on a chimney pot before continuing to the rookery opposite Emsworth Primary School in Victoria Road - here I estimated 20 **Rooks** were present checking out their nests though they are unlikely to start using them this month.

Nothing new in Brook Meadow so a **Cormorant** overflying the Slipper Mill Pond, currently drained to reduce the threat of flooding, was the next addition to the list before I reached Thorney Island and added both **Brent Geese** and **Oystercatcher** flying towards the Great Deeps for which I was also heading, ticking **Skylark** before I got there. At the Great Deeps there were plenty of birds but all at the far end near the Guard Post. With my bins I could be sure of **Lapwing**, **Red-Breasted Merganser**, **Shelduck**, **Great Blackback Gull** and **Canada Geese** (plus a few **Greenshank** in the nearer side creek). I was told by a group of Sussex birders armed with telescopes that there were also Goldeneye and Pintail though I did not count them. Heading back north I saw a male **Stonechat** (no luck with Bearded Tits today) and watched three **Snipe** shoot off from Eames Farm field - their calls also attracted my attention east and gave me a brief view of what must have been a massive **Marsh Harrier** flying south on the far side of the road. Turning east along the old NRA track I added **Cetti's Warbler** and then **Pied Wagtail**, **Curlew** and **Kestrel** in the Prinsted area. Sadly Nutbourne bay was birdless.

I now headed inland to Hambrook where I watched three **Roe Deer** feeding in open fields and a small flock of **Greenfinch** enjoying seed from feeders in a cottage garden. Crossing the bridge over the busy A27 I watched what must have been a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** flying above me but from this point on the clouds began to gather and my luck ran out with one exception - approaching the Horndean Road along Southleigh Road, soon after emerging from Hollybank Lane, I heard the rattle

of a **Mistle Thrush** which continued for long enough for me to stop and pick out the bird in an Oak tree. Shortly before this, when climbing the hill of Long Copse Lane from Westbourne, I spotted two flowering plants of **Cow Parsley** and one of **Butchers Broom**. Altogether a much better day than yesterday!

**Wed 1 Jan**

### **A difficult New Year's Day for birding**

The weather forecast had prepared me for a wet and windy day with a high spring tide but not for the face-stinging wind-driven rain on the exposed harbour shore, the over-flowing of the Langbrook stream making a normally dry section of the streamside path alongside the Southern Electricity offices impassable and the submerging of the seawall passing Langstone Mill Pond and the Royal Oak. Nevertheless I quite enjoyed battling with the elements for three and a half hours during which I listed **30 bird species (including a Kingfisher)** and **24 wild plant species in flower**.

It was not raining when I left home just before the scheduled time of the unseen sunrise (8:07) and Robins had been singing for some time. In my front garden House Sparrows were feeding on cheap birdseed and across the road an unrepresentative **Dunnock which has been singing for several days** could be heard in thick cover (several times recently I have seen him singing from bare branches). Near Tesco's I was surprised to see several plants of **Nipplewort** in flower; from the streamside underpass I heard Wren in full song; and on the cycleway south of the A27 I found **open Hazel catkins** on one side of the path with yellow stamens on the last Ivy flowers on the other side.

Turning off Harts Farm Way to follow the Brockhampton stream down to the harbour I found a small flock of Blue Tits with at least one **Great Tit in full song** and a smart male Chaffinch seemingly in the flock. In the stream here was my first Little Egret and this section also gave me Winter Heliotrope, Scentless Mayweed and Hoary Ragwort in flower plus a cluster of fresh Lords and Ladies (Arum Lily) leaves and a tiny Speedwell of which I took a specimen home where it proved to be **Grey Field Speedwell**. With the water level high in the stream I hoped for a **Kingfisher** and was not disappointed though I only had a back view as it flew off downstream from under the bridge south of the old grain wharf. Continuing down the path beside the Budds Farm fence I surprised two Rabbits making a dash along the path and this suggested why I have been unable to refind the White Comfrey flowers that I saw here a week ago - they have probably been eaten by the Rabbits.

The gravel quay pool added Mute Swan, Mallard and Wigeon to my list while the nearby trees gave me a flock of Goldfinch before I reached the harbour shore on which I was exposed to the wind-driven fusillade of rain bullets which had removed all the birds usually found here. Things were a bit better at the Budds Farm pools where I saw **Mallard, Gadwall, Pochard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Teal plus Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe**. I decided to avoid both the exposed shore and the soggy and probably birdless path across the South Moors and opted for the Penner Road route intending to cut down the final section of the Langbrook path to Mill Lane but I was frustrated by finding the Langbrook had overflowed, submerging the normally dry streamside path and forcing me to turn north through the Langstone

Technology Park - at least this allowed me to tick **Yellow-flowered Strawberry flowers** near where the raging Langbrook flowed under the site approach road, adding them to the single **Common Storks-bill flower** seen beside Penner Road.

Coming out on the main road to Hayling I decided to cross it and follow the footpath south to Langstone Mill but after crossing the decidedly soggy Russell's Field beyond the Billy Trail I reached the seawall path to find the waves had covered it so that its edge was invisible both passing the Royal Oak and beyond the Mill building which had so far kept the path dry between it and the pond (though in braving the water to discover this I found that the planks of the wooden bridge over the stream where it goes under the Mill were floating on the water which had lifted them from their normal seating!!)

Retracing my way over Russell's field I met two ladies heading towards the shore but in intercepting them to advise them to turn back I found they were the remnant of the local HWT group New Year's Day birdwatch heading back to their cars parked at the Ship Inn (and possibly by now with their wheels under water). They roused my hopes of seeing a flock of Redwing by saying that they had seen a large flock of thrush-like birds in the corner of the field we were in so we joined forces and headed towards the area near the main road where the cattle which were recently in the field were fed. We soon had close views of two **Song Thrushes** that were new for my list and then saw the flock which turned out to be **Starlings** (also an addition to my list). Our ways parted on reaching the Billy Trail where I still hoped to see Grey Wagtail in the Lymbourne stream but sadly the Starlings were to be my last new bird. The forecast is for cloudless sunshine and lighter winds tomorrow morning before the rain returns .. hope springs eternal!

Before ending this entry I must add a couple of comments on my previous two Diary entries. Sunday's entry still expressed the view that the unidentified plant at the A27 Emsworth underpass might be related to Blue Fleabane (maybe a hybrid with Canadian Fleabane) but the more I look at the specimen I brought home the more convinced I am that the plant is just **Canadian Fleabane** looking 'different' as a result of the mowing down of the original woody stem and the fresh re-growth of several small shoots on the old stem. My second comment concerns the **old map of the Havant Town Millpond** which I posted last Friday - in that entry I said that the map showed that the Mill building was sited south of the A27 a hundred yards or more south of the reconstructed Water Wheel which is north of the A27. Yesterday I chanced to meet Ralph Cousins (our current historian of Havant though not one of the authors of the 1977 booklet) and he assures me that the new Water Wheel is alongside the original Mill Building - the positioning of the Mill Building on the map is wrong. Finally if anyone is interested I have now **uploaded my December entries for the Havant, Warblington and St Faith's Churchyard pages** and you can see them by going to <http://ralph-hollins.net/Cemeteries.htm> and following the latest links to each of the three sites