August 2010

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Bulletin

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Contents

President`s Address

The last number of the Bulletin was issued while we were still feeling the effects of the sudden notice to leave our Ventnor headquarters by May 2010. With Christmas intervening it really left only four full months for decisions to be made and action taken. We considered both the long-term accommodation for the Society and the immediate need for an operational office to allow the day-to-day business to continue. A long term solution has still to be found. There is a possibility of finding accommodation at Quarr Abbey but no real discussion can take place for some time and the possibility of having an office in Charterhouse, Newport is equally distant.

A short term solution, however, emerged very rapidly when we were told by a member of the Society that space was available in the Prospect Business Centre at Cowes. This large ground floor room in Prospect Road was considered adequate to house the office equipment, the library and to give storage space for paper records. We have signed a lease for up to three years, at a rental the Society can afford and we moved in on 1st May 2010.

Those of you who have moved house can imagine the amount of work involved in sorting the contents of three rooms and a storeroom at Ventnor and reducing them to a number likely to fit into one room. The members who co-operated in making this possible were many and deserve our united thanks, but again it was the indefatigable 'Thursday Team' who carried the burden cheerfully, having everything ready when Alan Shepard and his team arrived on 30th April to transport our goods and chattels to Cowes. Within two weeks, surrounded by boxes, they had the computers working and life, if rather cramped, was back to normal.

There is no space for meetings but alternative arrangements have already been made for Council Meetings and committees so that we can look forward to the coming year with some confidence.

Wolverton

The annual appeal from Mary Edmunds seeking stewards for this Garden Fair reminds us that we shall again have an exhibition there on Saturday and Sunday 4th and 5th September. This remains the only opportunity for the Society to present itself to the general public and we are grateful to Daphne Watson for undertaking the arrangements for this years display. Do make sure you see it and bring friends with you.

Johanna Jones

NOTICE BOARD

SOCIETY`S NEW ADDRESS

Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society
Unit 16,
Prospect Business Centre,
Prospect Road,
Cowes PO31 7AD Tel: 01983 282596

Email: iwnhas@btinternet.com
Web address: www.iwnhas.org

ANNUAL REPORTS for 2009

Due to a shortage of Papers submitted, the Proceedings, Vol 25, 2010 will be published next year, as a joint publication with Proceedings Vol 26, 2011. The following Annual Reports for 2009, which will appear in the Proceedings, are available for anyone who would like or needs a copy, prior to publication.
If a copy of any Report is needed, please apply to the Editor, Mike Cahill, for an electronic or a hardcopy.

Reports for 2009 available are:
Flowering Plants and Ferns
Bird Ringing Summary
Bat Report
Butterfly Report
Notable Moths

The Red Squirrel Trust, Monitoring Red Squirrels

I started to monitor Red Squirrels in 1991, when numbers had dropped after tree and corridor loss caused by the hurricanes. Since then squirrels have spread back into most parts of the Island. Bembridge village took a long time, but numbers have increased over the last few years and there have even been some road casualties, which although sad is a sign of an increase in squirrel numbers.

Monitoring is important and thanks to the support of the general public, Wight Squirrel Project has nearly 20 years of records. These show how Red Squirrels have spread out and colonised semi urban areas, often relying on garden feeding. People who have squirrels in the garden call them "timewasters" as it's compulsive to watch them. Reporting these observations has allowed the huge variation in colouring and sometimes bizarre behaviour to be recorded as well as the rise and fall in numbers. It also means that sometimes, sick squirrels are found in gardens.

There has been an increase in sick or injured squirrels and we have had 10 so far this year. Squirrels can get over injuries very quickly if they are given antibiotics and kept in a large aviary outside. They become very depressed if kept in a small cage or indoors and this will kill them faster than any injury. Usually it is kinder to leave the animal alone to heal on its own, even if the injury looks severe as they do adjust even to missing limbs very quickly. Illness is far more difficult, but we have had some successes recently, which is encouraging.

In the last Bulletin there was a request for squirrel sightings from The Red Squirrel Survival Trust. This is a national body, but many people get them mixed up with the Isle of Wight charity, The Red Squirrel Trust. If you do wish to send records to The Red Squirrel Survival Trust, please be sure to send them to us as well. It is most important that you support your local groups.

I intend to write a report on the Island's Red Squirrel population over 20 years and it would be a shame if it was inaccurate or incomplete because squirrel sightings had only gone elsewhere. Please, if you do have anything to report, either email: wightsquirrels@hotmail.com or ring 611003.

Helen Butler

(Photos Page 19)

Wight Squirrel Project, The Red Squirrel Trust

The Society Photolibrary

The photolibrary now has very many images relating to both the Society and its activities, together with a large number of images relating to specialist studies of different species' groups. It is probably the largest and most wide-ranging collection of its sort in the community of natural history societies. As of 27/06/2010 it contains 22,949 images comprising 30.2 Gigabytes on disk.

When the Visual Records Group was established the stated intention was that anyone contributing to the photolibrary retained copyright but was agreeing to the use of their images for the purposes of the Society as defined in the Rules.

Increasingly I receive requests for images from outside bodies including, for instance, the County Press, to illustrate Helen Slade's excellent articles, and 'Reticule', a wild plant identification website supported by the BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles). With these it has been my policy to check with the author of an image before making it available outside the Society and to ask, if it is published, that the author be properly acknowledged.

This policy has become too time consuming and difficult to administer and at the end of 2009 the Council of the Society agreed to an amendment of the arrangement. Henceforth therefore the donation of images to the photolibrary indicates agreement that those images may be supplied by the Society to other bodies where they will not be used for commercial gain and will further the purposes of the Society. The authors should always be acknowledged.

This policy is likely to raise the profile of the Society and of our individual members. It will also be of advantage to the natural history and archaeological community as a whole

NB - Will anyone who has contributed to the photolibrary and *does not* want their images used in this way please get in touch with me,

Geoff Toone tel: 403528
email - geoff@toone10.fsnet.co.uk

Bumper BioBlitz for Island

A 24-hour wildlife bonanza to record as many species as possible has put the Island on the National map for wildlife.

Over 300 people gathered at Firestone Copse near Wootton, for Go Wild in the Woods, the first ever event of its kind on the Island - one of a whole host of events across the world to mark the International Year of Biodiversity. Visitors joined in with free activities including pond dipping and wildflower walks, while for the more adventurous there was even tree climbing and canoe safaris.

Experts from the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership were joined by members of the public and enthusiasts on 2nd June for the Island's own 'BioBlitz': which is all about volunteers, scientists, naturalists, wildlife enthusiasts and members of the public working together to find as many species as possible all within a twenty four hour period!

At the end of the 24 hours, a remarkable 447 different species were recorded from Firestone Copse. This is an impressive score for our first ever Isle of Wight BioBlitz - more than were found in the whole of the New Forest at a similar event (415) and quite eclipsing the island of Jersey who identified only 163.

Amongst the more unusual species were a nightjar, red and black froghoppers in the woods, Wild Service trees growing along the water's edge and flounder and grey mullet in the creek.

To view the entire list of species recorded visit www.wildonwight.co.uk and enter '**bioblitz**' in the search box.

A big thank you to the experts from the Society who got involved, shared their knowledge and helped make the day such a success.

Plantlife's Wildflowers Count – surveyors needed

April 2010 saw the successful launch of Plantlife's Wildflowers Count, an updated version of the Common Plants Survey, which has taken place nationally every year since 2000.

The aim is to build up a picture of these common wildflowers, where they grow - either in the countryside or our towns and cities and whether they are declining or increasing as they are good indicators of the health of our environment.

The survey aims to attract anyone with a love of wildflowers, and you don't need to be a skilled botanist, everything is explained in the free survey pack supplied when you register your interest. We allocate each surveyor a 1km square within 5kms of their home where they can choose to walk a wildflower path, or survey two plots, or both, identifying plants from a list of 99 all chosen to be easily identified using the ID guide provided, and all representing different habitats. Those who have good botanical skills can become super-surveyors and record everything that they see.

If you would like to help us to find where our wildflowers are so that we can conserve them for the future then please look at the website www.plantlife.org.uk where you can register online, email wfc@plantlife.org.uk or telephone our hotline on 01722 342755 and leave your name, address and telephone number.

Tina Whitmore

Andy`s Nature Notebook

2nd January – The first butterfly of the year seen today, a Peacock at St Catherines Point seen by Alan Clark.

6th January – Severe snow storms occurred today with disruption right across the Island and Mainland. Ventnor has been quite badly hit **(photo p. 19).** 2 Blackcaps seen in our garden.

7th January – An influx of Fieldfares, Thrushes, Redwings etc all busy feeding on any tree that has berries such as Holly and Ivy. The cliffs are full of Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Goldfinches and Linnets all desperately searching for food. Along the sea wall between Wheelers Bay and Bonchurch there are about 30 Woodlark **(Photo p.22)** at the base of the cliff and further along by Bonchurch beach we saw 3 Golden Plover, 2 Lapwing and a Little Egret. A Buzzard landed in the trees at the back of our house.
Ventnor is virtually cut off and a visit to the local supermarket proved to be a waste of time as all

shelves were empty of milk, bread, meat or veg. No deliveries were expected as all roads in to Ventnor are impassable. On returning home I reached the top of Wheelers Bay Road, which was a sheet of ice, when I saw a lady of advanced years clutching a basket and a stick attempting to go down the hill. I advised her not to as she would almost certainly injure herself, she told me she had to get down the hill as it was the only place there was some Privet growing and she needed some for George, her Stick Insect! Needless to say I had to negotiate the icy road, pick some Privet and return up the hill to where she was waiting. I thought it was a bit ironic that I returned empty handed from the shops but George had his lunch delivered on time.

8th January – There are now 4 Golden Plover on Bonchurch beach and one on the esplanade in front of our house **(Photo p.22)**. All the bushes that had berries on have now been completely stripped.

9th January – Black Redstart in garden and a Little Egret in Ventnor Haven. Local supermarket had first delivery of meat and veg to day.

10th January – There were about 100 Song Thrushes at the base of the cliffs in Wheelers Bay feeding on snails.

12th January – We noticed Hoary Stock in flower along the cliffs – very surprising given the weather.

17th January – Peacock Butterfly on Bonchurch beach.

18th January – John Morris, a local birder, saw 2 Dartford Warblers on Luccombe Down.

24th January – Geoff Blake, local fisherman, said he had recorded a huge shoal of Sprats that stretched from off Puckaster Cove to Luccombe, a distance of roughly 3 miles and about ½ mile in width. The shoal was about 20ft below the surface and must have consisted of millions of fish. Interestingly he said there were no Guillemots feeding on the fish, which is what he would normally have expected.

24th February – The first Small Tortoiseshell seen today in our garden.

11th March – A Golden Eagle has been seen flying around Luccombe Down. **(Photos p.21)**

12th March – Went up on Downs today and photographed the Eagle and when examining the photos closely the remains of a tether could be seen attached to its leg thus proving it was an escaped bird. This disappointed the local birders!

14th March – The first Large White and first Comma in the garden today.

1st April – The first Hummingbird Hawkmoth and first Small White in the garden today.

9th April – We had our first BBQ of the year today. How the weather has changed in a few short months.

10th April – First Holly Blue today. A Large Tortoiseshell was seen in Parkhurst Forest today by S Read.

21st April – 2 Clouded Yellows in Wheelers Bay.

28th April – The first Glanville Fritillary on the wing today at Wheelers Bay.

13th May – 2 Common Sandpipers on the rocks in front of our house.

18th May – My wife caught the first Mackerel of the year today.

20th May – Went up to Mr & Mrs Carters house in Kings Bay Road to see and photograph a freshly emerged Emperor Dragonfly. This is the earliest one I have ever heard of.

21st May – Went to Parkhurst Forest to photograph Pearl Bordered Fritillary, saw 6. While doing this I heard a Cuckoo calling and also a Nightingale singing, both now much scarcer than they ever were. In the afternoon my wife and I went to Whitecliff Bay to follow up on a report last year of Glanvilles on the rough cliffs by the holiday camp. We confirmed the presence of the butterfly there, which was excellent and as it was a hot sunny day my wife had her first swim of the year!

23rd May – We walked along the bottom of Bonchurch Down looking for butterflies and had one of our best days yet. We counted 505 Adonis Blue (a record) 36 Common Blue, 54 Brown Argus, 8 Small Heath, 16 Dingy Skipper, 1 Small Copper and 1 Glanville. Amazing!

30th May – We walked out to Ventnor Botanic Garden to look at the Devil's Tongue (**Photo p.20**), a quite remarkable plant. Also saw 3 Birds Nest Orchids **(Photo p.20)** at the Undercliff Drive site.

4th June – In the early evening I saw a Crow hopping along the base of the cliff by Wheelers Bay taking roosting Common Blue butterflies from the long grass growing there.

9th June – At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon on the path at the back of our house I saw what can only be described as a swarm of about 100 Five Spot Burnet Moths in an area of about 2m by 2m. There were 5 Small Tortoiseshell among them chasing them about, as were Glanvilles, Dingy Skippers, Small

Whites, Large Whites and Common Blues. After about 10 minutes they all dispersed as though it had never happened. I have never seen anything like this before.

This Spring has been remarkable for the number of butterflies seen across the Island and at the time of writing the early Summer is proving just as good. We have also noticed many plants in our garden, that do not normally flower, have flourished this year. Moth trapping has been complete rubbish so far this year, with virtually no migrants seen.

Andy Butler

Jacquetta Hawkes 1910 –1996

Do you remember Jacquetta Hawkes? I have asked many people this question over the last year and found to my surprise that most do not. Some vaguely remember the name, but not who she was or what she did. Some reply: "Oh yes, wasn't she married to someone famous?" I tell them, smiling through gritted teeth, that yes, she was married to JB Priestley, but when they then proceed, as many do, to talk entirely about him, I really have to bite my tongue. Oh dear, what a fate, to be remembered only as 'the wife of someone', even someone famous. As a matter of fact I remember her more clearly than JB Priestley, because she was often on television in the 1950s, first in the popular panel game *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, and later on the news, leading many of the Aldermarston marches. I was a teenager in the 1950s, and not particularly interested in archaeology, but I found *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral,* and Jacquetta Hawkes in particular, absolutely fascinating. For those not old enough to remember the programme, it consisted of a panel of three experts who had to try to identify an object from a museum. Part of the fun lay in the suspense as to whether the experts would actually be defeated, which they quite often were!

This year is the centenary of her birth and it therefore seems an appropriate time to remember Jacquetta Hawkes, and to draw attention to her ideas and achievements. During the 1950s, after she married 'someone famous', she lived on the Island, in Brook Hill House. (I now live in the grounds of that house, in one of two semi-detached cottages which were converted from the original stable block and barn.) I am writing a paper about Jacquetta, based partly on research into her life on the Island, and would very much welcome any information from people who remember her, either personally or from her media work or her writing. My paper will appear in the next issue of *Wight Studies*. In the meantime here is a brief outline which I hope will give some indication of why I think she deserves to be remembered in her own right.

Jacquetta Hawkes was first and foremost a distinguished archaeologist, but also a broadcaster, journalist, novelist, poet, playwright, and peace campaigner. Her first major discovery was a Neanderthal skeleton in Palestine, and her widely acclaimed book *A Land* was based on her work as archaeological adviser to the 1951 Festival of Britain. She was awarded the OBE in 1952. For Jacquetta, the fascination of archaeology lay not only in the way it revealed the continuity between past and present, and the evolution of human consciousness, but also in its power to evoke an emotional response. She was very critical of the prevailing academic view that archaeology should be narrowly scientific, insisting that science, intuition and imagination were inseparable. She said of the Neanderthal skeleton, for example, that she was "conscious of this vanished being and myself as part of an unbroken stream of consciousness"; and that as it was slowly uncovered and then shrouded in plaster of Paris she often looked at it with sorrow. She argued that ancient monuments and artefacts were important for their emotional appeal as well as their scientific significance: "We go to them to make contact with our origins, to be reminded for how long our forebears have been baking bread, ornamenting themselves and their possessions, worshipping and caring for their dead. In that mood, an old shoe, preserved by chance in slime, will seem a wonderful object empowered to move us."

This approach to archaeology was reflected in her literary style, which combined scholarship with lyrical prose. Her writing covered a very wide range, including anthropology, geology, biography,

journalism, fiction, popular guide books, film, poetry and plays, on several of which she collaborated with JB Priestley. In 1956, when she lived on the Island, she and Jack Jones excavated the mound adjacent to the Longstone, confirming that it was a Neolithic long barrow. For three years she was president of the IW Historical Association where she gave several talks on pre-history. She was a great communicator and believed in making use of all forms of mass media to popularize archaeology. As early as the 1940s she produced an innovative film about pre-history, with an Iron Age site reconstructed at Pinewood Studios. During the 1950s she developed a career in broadcasting, through which she was able to communicate her passion for her subject to a much wider audience.

In 1957 Jacquetta and JB Priestley and a number of friends, including Canon John and Diana Collins, founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and she was often to be seen leading the famous Aldermarston marches. In 1958 she organised a major public meeting in Sandown Pavilion to promote the campaign on the Island. Although she was not a feminist she did believe that women brought a distinctive perspective to the issue and organised a separate women's group within CND. Jacquetta's first husband was the archaeologist Christopher Hawkes, father of Nicolas, her only son. She married JB Priestley in 1953 and they lived at Brook Hill House until they moved to the mainland in 1958. She loved walking over the downs and down to the beach, where she would collect fossils, and was also a keen ornithologist. They entertained many friends, including such well-known figures from the arts and sciences as Leon Goossens, AJP Taylor, Iris Murdoch, Julian Huxley, Mortimer Wheeler, Compton Mackenzie, Dilys Powell, Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray, Marghanita Laski, and John and Diana Collins. Jack and Johanna Jones were also frequent guests, and Johanna remembers especially the fun they had at their New Year's Eve parties, and the marvellous musical concerts with famous string quartets and soloists, held for family, friends and people from the village of Brook.

I hope that this 'taster' will jog a few memories and raise awareness that there was far more to Jacquetta Hawkes than being "married to someone famous"! For those who would like more information sooner rather than later there is plenty on the internet, and it is worth trawling second-hand bookshops. If you do have any information or recollections please contact me as soon as possible. I should like to thank Johanna Jones, Nicolas Hawkes and Tom Priestley for sharing their memories with me.

I am also grateful to Daphne Denaro of the Brook Village History Project, and Christine Finn, Jacquetta Hawkes' authorized biographer, for much useful information.

Margaret Jackson
tel : 740015
email marjack@macunlimited.net

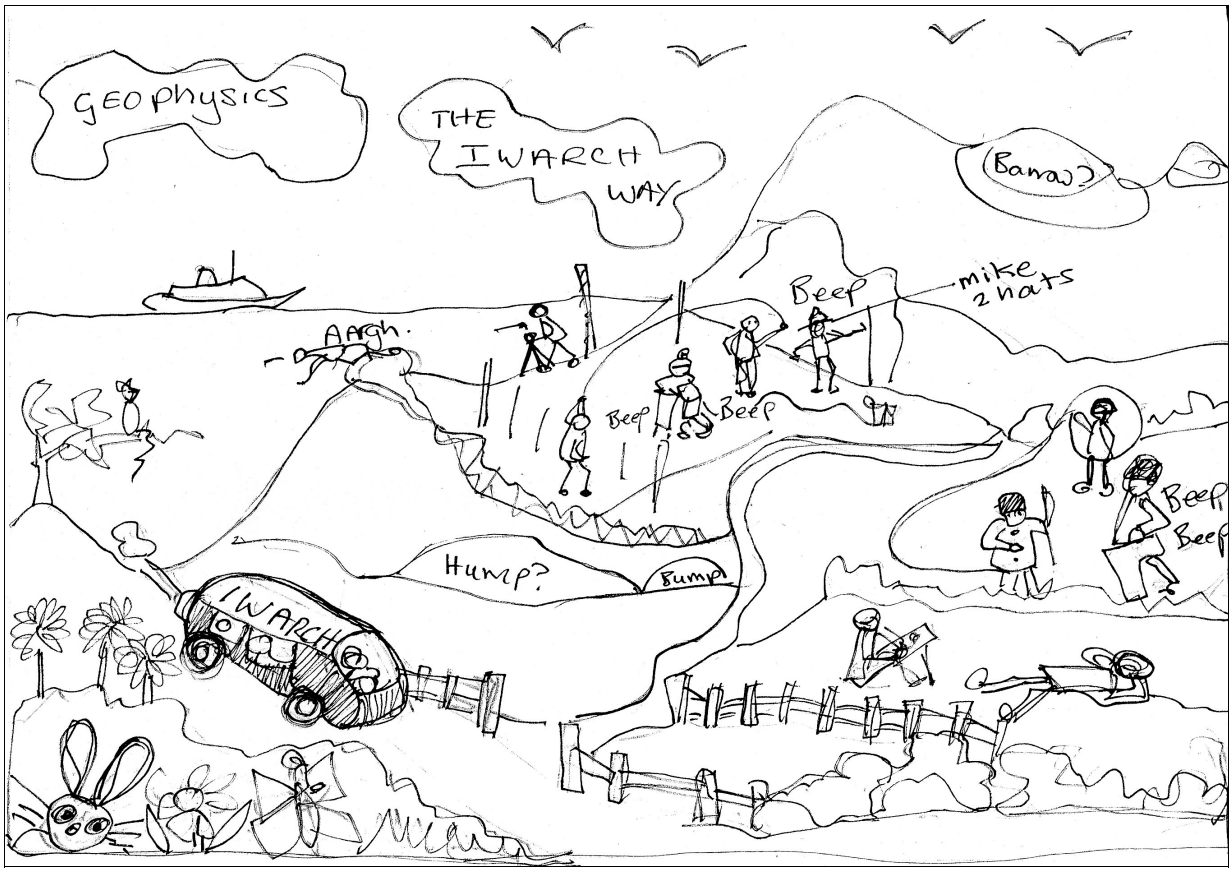
The Hills are Alive…….

Well, nearly a year has passed since we became the proud owners of our State of the Art Geo Physics equipment. Needless to say, there have been occasions where State of the Art knowledge has been far from our minds as we beavered away in sub zero conditions on Yaverland's Gander Down.

Have we learned a lot? I'll say, and have we mastered the ins and outs of Geo Physics? Perhaps. But we have had a lot of fun and games in the process. I often wonder when we are perched on top of some faraway hill, what on earth do people think when they spot us on the skyline? A band of tramps or gypsies? Oddly dressed folks running about with poles and tent pegs. In the distance, some of them are performing some sort of rite. First they turn widdershins then the other way round, with their strange machines tucked under their arms. Then turn them upside down, and do it again.

As some of you know, there are two different kinds of machine that we use. The Resistivity unit is the one you have seen on Time Team, which resembles half an old fashioned desk, and is operated by striding up and down the field, within the grids, making sure you place both the prongs on the ground. Each placement is verified by a bleep. So if you hear a cry across the fields of someone shouting," I've done too many bleeps", or "help, it isn't bleeping anymore", accompanied by a twirling motion, and flapping of arm, it means we have gone adrift somewhere. This activity from afar, looks like some sort of quadrille, with people advancing before the machine, lifting yellow ropes in pairs, to some intricate dance. Sometimes in rough patches of thistles and the like, a few shrieks of pain are heard, as well as the

mosquito flying up trousers war dance.



The other device is the Magnetometer, or the Fluxgate Gradiometer. Sounds like something from Torchwood. This is the machine that is carried under the arm in a classical pose. The pace of walking the grids can be altered to suit the operator. This is most important. We discovered early on, that walking uphill at a brisk pace, carrying the machine, measuring the bleeps and stepping out in the correct manner, is very tiring after a few rows of the grid. Interestingly enough, if the pace of the operators varies too much, or they start to weave about, whilst concentrating on the right number bleeps, chaos ensues. The printouts become most interesting.

The other really important matter, when it comes to the Mag, as we locally refer to it, is that the operators must not wear any metal on their persons. This would seem to be an OK measure, until you see what amazing outfits have appeared over the ensuing months. The girls have had a field day!!! The feet of course, can be encased in non-metal toed wellies. Jogging bottoms are easy to find, but you have to check the toggles!!!. The top half, well what can I say. Just no fasteners anywhere!!! Watches and non gold items have to removed, pockets checked for coins etc, and just to make sure, the operators have to check each other out for personal magnetism, before they start!! Some people for no discernable reason make the machine howl. It could be fillings, or an electric pair of glasses. We do know that the wearing of a watch can be detected on the printout

Over the year we have had - foot in bunny holes, a good round of sore backs, wonky knees and the occasional marker pole in the eye, (sorry Mike). But, we have been rewarded by seeing wonderful countryside, hares springing past us and the amazing blooming of the fields around Calbourne. Learning about flowers, that we had no idea what they were, plus insects, birds, flint tools etc. In short, a fantastic way of learning about the hidden recesses of our Isle.

Our faithful bus, Arthur, trundles up the hillsides, full of us and all our works. One of our important tools to be devised by the technical branch, is a magnificent modified garden fork, for drilling holes for our marker flags. It is called the Cahiller, and if we don't find much this year, we can always patent it and make out fortunes, selling copies in archaeology magazines.

If we have given you all the impression that we are having a jolly good time, well yes we are, and come and join us whenever you are free. We will be redesigning our website shortly, so that it easier to find us and know what we are up to.
Otherwise, a quick call to me, Delian, will be fine. 01983 853 292
Many many thanks once again to the Society for making this possible for our Section.

Delian Backhouse Fry MSc.

Hummet – A Problem Solved?

In a previous issue of the Bulletin, Bill Shepard conjectured in his 'Nature Notes' as to the possible origin of the Island word 'Hummet' (Bulletin Issue No. 46, August 2006). As he pointed out then, there are three copses in the West Wight which share the name – at Porchfield, Calbourne and Wellow – yet with no known explanation of the word, whether in the dictionary or works of dialect.

This set me on a piece of research which revealed that, still without finding any Island etymologies, Hummet appears to be a very old surname, probably of medieval Norman-French origin. There was for instance an Agatha Hummet who died in 1180, daughter of William de Hummet, and a Richard of Hummet round the same period. There are also quite a few references to the surname in Devon in the 17th century; a 'W. Hummet' was among the crew of the *Avalanche*, a ship which sank off Portland in 1877; and the name does survive, though rarely, into modern times: an R E Hummet for instance wrote a science paper in 1985.

None of this of course explains why there should be three occurrences of the name on the Island; it is just possible to imagine one individual or family in the distant past who gave their name to a copse, but not to three. Kökeritz (*IW Place-Names*) simply lists the name among those for which he makes no attempt to give any meaning; Father Hockey likewise appears to have no reference in either of his medieval volumes.

All of which pointed to the probability that 'hummet' was, after all, an old dialect word that had never been recorded. And one that certainly should not be confused with 'hummick', meaning 'cow', as recorded by Jack Lavers in his 1988 dialect dictionary.

So there the matter has rested for the last few years. That is, until a recent visit by the Archaeology Group to Locks Copse and Jersey Camp to view some earthworks, where we were kindly shown round by local landowner Barry Angell, well known to many Society members.

With one of the Hummet Copses being in the vicinity, the word came up in discussion, and Barry said immediately that he recalled it being used regularly by his grandmother to mean 'hump' – thereby combining perfectly with 'copse' to give the sense of 'wood on the hill'. Whether any of the 'humps' might indicate possible barrow sites – as for example in Michal Morey's Hump – would require further investigation. What seems likely is that the prevalence of 'hummet' in the north-west corner of the Island implies that it was largely restricted to use in this area, or at least lasted in use longer here than elsewhere. So after all the head-scratching, the resolution is almost too simple and obvious for words!

Alan Phillips

Canadian Journey

My first long distance journey for over ten years took me back this summer to Toronto and on to Winnipeg, the prairie city in Manitoba. In both cities I stayed in 'old houses' built just after 1900 in leafy roads where woodland trees are planted only feet away from the houses themselves. This gives much needed shade in the hot summers and in Winnipeg, with below freezing winters, creates a glistening skeleton of ice covered branches glistening in the winter sun. They do create domestic problems, however. In Toronto I looked out each morning at a thick black electric cable running above the back gardens and every day the black squirrels commuted along it to rob the gardens. Much larger and more destructive were the raccoons which came marauding by night. Their large claw marks were clearly visible in the cedarwood tiles cladding one wall showing where they clambered onto the roof. In Winnipeg two

small raccoons somehow got lodged in the roof of the house where I was staying and their agitated parents were scrambling about on the roof and walls trying to bring down their young. In the end the Pest Officer brought a large cage, captured the infants and took the family away to more suitable surroundings.

In Toronto a short distance from the busy city lies a long green belt of islands which I had not explored. The looked particularly inviting as an escape from the Mediterranean temperature of the busy streets and I found my way to the ferry terminal. What I saw was a complete surprise. Behind me were the glass and metal palaces of grand hotels and business houses, before me 1940s grey concrete blocks and iron railings, a little piece of history which had escaped the ruthless rebuilding. The little ferry boat arrived, a slightly larger version of the old Floating Bridge between East and West Cowes, and we chugged across for about ten minutes before embarking at a small jetty. The group of islands, connected by bridges, is now a conservation area restricted to walkers and cyclists. I walked through pleasant woodland fringing the lake shore surprised to see lilac bushes growing abundantly among the woodland trees and accompanied throughout by American Robins, the most common bird in this area. I was aiming for a lighthouse built in 1808, not easy to locate as it was now surrounded by trees but I finally found it, a sturdy stone building only 52ft when first built but now 82ft high, the final height achieved in 1832. This was the first light that shone on the Great Lakes. I thought of the first pauper emigrants from the Isle of Wight who would have seen this light when they came to Toronto in 1837 to begin a new life in a very new colony.

Winnipeg was completely new to me and as the aeroplane approached the city rising from the open prairie, the convoluted oxbows of the reddish-brown Red River told its own story of long geological time. Rising in the Dakota mountains, it cuts its way through northern Canada to flow out into Hudson's Bay and it was the trading route by which the Company established a base at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The tribal name, Winnipeg - Muddy Waters, exactly describes the situation and was to make building difficult when the city began to grow. This only began at the end of the nineteenth century when the east-west railway arrived. Then Winnipeg became the centre for transporting cereals to the ports where the grain was exported to Britain. Grand commercial banks were built and a Parliament Building of extra-ordinary size and dignity was opened in 1920. Then came the long drought creating a prairie dust bowl in the 1920s and the financial disasters of the 1930s. All the prospects of a great future collapsed, leaving instead a smaller city but one of great charm where the prairie still lingers at the edge of the suburbs. A family party took me through industrial neighbourhoods to a small housing development and as we turned a corner I saw the untamed prairie before me. I left the party for about twenty minutes to stand beside a deep ditch and look out on tall prairie grass scattered with flowers. In the middle distance was a clump of trees and then nothing but open land until it met the blue sky at a distance so far that only a moving dot on the horizon indicated a vehicle on the road. A few feet away on a scrubby plant a bird with a yellow breast was trilling away in full song. The whole of my long journey had been made worthwhile by that unexpected scene.

Johanna Jones

1982 Diary extract

New Year`s Eve 1982 - It can be little short of a quarter of a century ago when my late ornithological colleague, Ron Machin, enquired if 1 had ever walked from Freshwater Bay to Carisbrooke by moonlight. Replying in the negative, he said "it is an unforgettable experience." Words often recalled, never acted upon.

Christmas 1982 was mild with moonlit nights and as the days crept towards the New Year the weather remained unchanged. Temperatures barely at frost level, windless and a moon that turned night into day. Machin's comments returned and refused to leave. Friday, new years eve would be the ideal date to experience the unforgettable, but the satellite pictures on television showed a great swirl of cloud edging towards the British Isles. Friday the 31st. came, windless, but with an increasing cloud sheet, I decided to make the trip and left Newport by the 8-20 P.M. bus bound for Freshwater Bay, due to arrive at the latter exactly one hour later.

Machin had never elaborated upon the walk and I had no idea what to expect, only that the world I looked out upon from the bus would play no part in my new years celebrations. Newport was busy with people hurrying to dances, most of them in fancy costumes.

The mile-long, leg-aching, exhausting climb up Afton Down was hurried by a knife-edged wind off the sea. It caressed ray neck like a steel collar; my hood was drawn tightly over my head and around my face; destroying, albeit temporarily, one facet of the journey, an ear cocked for night life. A solitary pause in the lee of scrub and a backward glance across the urban sprawl of the West Wight. A community that has doubled itself again and again since the last war. The headlights of cars travelling the Military Road flash as if signalling from various elevated positions. A long string of lights running parallel with the ridge of the downs mark the Thorley and Wellow main streets.

Afton Down gives way to Compton Down, a fence penetrated by a gate marks the division and a marked change in the vegetation. The well maintained grasslands of the golf course become scattered areas of scrub, the turf churned by the hooves of ponderous beef cattle, but the sea breeze is lifted over the scrub. Strange how you can walk through those bushes in daylight without comment, not so at night, for they take on the strangest shapes. Wind sculptured they take on the appearance anything the imagination cares to nominate. The long valley in which Compton Farm is situated runs closely parallel but the farmhouse lights does not appear until one can look back down the valley from the eastern end. A post and wire fence divides the down, but the gate is wide open and the cattle have passed freely, but the soil gives way to downland turf as I climb to the highest point in this section of the walk. The lights of the Brook community is some half a mile distant on the seaward side, showing marked progress inland since commencing. The long descent to the termination of the first section passes without incident and the Brook/Chessell road is reached at 10-15 P.M., fifty minutes from departure.

There are many 19th. Century prints purporting to represent some scenic area of the Island, huge promontories and corresponding dales, reminiscent of the Scottish Highlands, which I have viewed with derision. At night that is exactly how the countryside presents itself and the second stage of the walk over Brook Down towered in front of me. Another mile -long ascent, more arduous than Afton, steeper, muddier and the track confined by heavy gauge mesh wire enclosing sheep on both sides. The track churned by the wheels of the vehicle used by the shepherd. The broad ride through the conifer plantation completing the climb to the summit was a welcome relief, and even more so emerging on to the open short-turfed downland leading to the summit and the highest point along the entire walk.

No pleasant platform in this section, a mile up and a mile down to the car park at the top of Strawberry Lane, but coming over the summit a short pause to look back at the lights of Yarmouth and then on with the lights of Brighstone twinkling away front right. From this distance the illuminations look like strings of fairy lights, overshadowed by two powerful lamps that appear to be illuminating a car park adjoining a road house on the Military Road, but in fact throwing two powerful beams across Brighstone. The aircraft warning lights on the television mast at Chillerton are now plainly visible. Section two completed 10-50 P.M., one and a half hours after setting out.

Section three, by far the greatest distance is commenced by crossing the Calbourne/Brighstone road diagonally, just in the latter`s favour.. Again a long uphill haul, with coniferous plantation screening the northern views, but open to the south with the lights of Brighstone still twinkling merrily. On impulse I decided against continuing the walk to Carisbrooke, but would use the television mast on Chillerton Down as a guide and make for the Bowcombe Valley.

Brighstone illuminations slowly gave way to the less spectacular display of the less developed Shorwell. On Cheverton Down occurred the one incident that marred an otherwise exhilarating experience. A large farm building loomed in the dim light, A Dutch style barn filled with hay and on its eastern side a huge shelter filled with beef cattle. When not sheltering, as now, they spend their time in the proximity of the food supply, treading the ground into a quagmire of deep clinging mud that clung to the boots until it was almost impossible to walk. In good light it may have been possible to have chosen a more acceptable path, but in poor light one piece of ground looked like another. After negotiating the obstacle, which temporarily changed my very relaxed mood, the way to the exit at. the top of Cheverton Shute was uneventful.

11-35 P.M., and the long walk down the Bowcombe Valley, Cheverton and Rowborough farms, Rains Grove reached exactly at midnight when all are raising their glasses and toasting a new year, yet

here, two minutes after the hour was exactly the same as four minutes previous. Nature proceeds unmarked. Only we, self indulgent in out own importance, believe that a line drawn across the march of time brings about changes. On past Idlecombe, through the Bowcombe village, Cow Lane, White Lane, Plaish, Goldens, Bowcombe New Barn, Qatterford, names as familiar to me as those of members of my family. Under the shadow of the Castle, the long walk along Whitepit Lane and home 1-00 A.M., precisely. My Island home is as lovely as ever, even in the shadow of darkness. Not a bird, not a rabbit, only the great hulks of the beef cattle sprawled across the track on Compton Down, through which I had to wend a winding path, and the strange crunching noise as hundreds of sheep tore the grass from its roots. An experience indeed.

Bill Shepard

Some Local Name & Dialect Word Origins

On Bill Shepard's Botany walk round the lanes and tracks of Freshwater in May, a secondary discussion developed, especially between David Biggs and myself, regarding the origins of some local names and dialect words. This resulted in a further exchange of notes which we hope may be of interest to Bulletin readers. A few of the names are related to the immediate Freshwater area and a few extend to the Island more generally.

The Crundles

As we took the path through this area, Bill wondered as to its meaning. 'Marshy depression' seems to be a good overall definition. The *English Historical Review* for 1909 expands on the origin of the term, spelt as 'crundel', 'crundle' or 'crondel', as a Saxon boundary point "but still in common use at villages on the Hampshire/Sussex borders" – and one might add, also on the Isle of Wight! Where heads of little streams cut into the surface for 100-400 yards these cuttings, in the shape of an open V, are/were locally known as 'crundles'.

St Edmund's Lodge

A signpost to this building near Stonewind Farm caused me to wonder how such a name might have come about. David Biggs immediately spotted a possible link with the Ward family of Cowes, and since writes: "As well as harbouring a minimal memory of the Wards, a Catholic convert family, having a particular devotion to St. Edmund (?which, the East Anglian king or Edmund of Abingdon), I now remember that Bernard Ward and at least one Wilfred or William Ward - they seemed to alternate Wilfreds and Williams as family names - was President of St. Edmund's College in Hertfordshire. This was the Westminster diocesan (Catholic) seminary. Perhaps the Wards contributed to its foundation in return for a dedication to their favourite saint. Certainly the Wards – who owned Weston Manor in the Freshwater/ Totland area as well as Northwood House and Egypt House in Cowes – had a strong connection with St. Edmund".

Osman

As we passed a property containing the name 'Osman', this also led to speculation as to the origins of the name, especially given the prominence of this family name in the Freshwater area. Could it possibly have anything to do with the Ottoman emperor? There is certainly a Turkish origin for the name, Osman being the founder of the Ottoman Empire, and the name has since come to be used more generally for 'ruler'. In literal Arabic the word originally meant 'tender youth'.

But there is also a quite separate origin, much closer to home. In Scandinavian and English, the name means 'God's protection, divine protector'. I had known previously that there was a Runic symbol 'Os', associated with Odin, but had never linked it up in any way with this name. So the surname Osman – with variant spellings Osmant, Osmint, Osmer – comes from the Old English, pre-7th century, male personal name Osmaer, *oss* meaning 'god' and *maer* 'fame': hence, 'god-fame'. The names Osmaer and Osmer appear in the Domesday Book for Leicestershire and Devonshire respectively, and the surname follows in the 13C (*Internet Surname Database*).

Chawton

David Biggs raised the question as to the meaning of the name Chawton in Northwood. He has long considered Kökeritz's definition in his *IW Place-Names* to be inadequate. Kökeritz interprets the name as Old English *cealc-tūn*, 'chalk-farm', based on a recorded reference to *Caulketune* in 1248. However, David's research on Chawton in Hampshire has revealed that the form of name was *Chalvedone* in 1230 and *Chaveton* by 1272: these derive from *cealfa-tūn*, 'calf-farm', and he suspects a similar derivation for the Island Chawton. This view is further substantiated by two references I have come across: the likely origin of Chawston in Bedfordshire as 'Cealf's thorn-tree', as well as that of the field-name *Chaw Parke* (1608) in Portland, Dorset, as 'the calves' paddock'. So the Island name seems almost certainly to derive from 'calf-farm' rather than Kökeritz's 'chalk-farm'.

Shickshack Day

This discussion came about as a result of finding some perfectly formed oak-apples on the walk which for once really did look like apples. The connection was made with Oak Apple or 'Shickshack' Day on 29th May, when on the Island as elsewhere children once went to school concealing sprigs of oak about them, which had to be produced when challenged upon pain of being pinched. The day combined elements of Charles II's concealment in the famous oak at Boscobel, on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, in 1651 after his defeat at Worcester, with a celebration of the actual date of his restoration in 1660, when bunches or boughs of oak leaves or oak apples provided essential elements of the celebration.

So why Shickshack Day? The term probably derives its name from the term 'shit-sack', originally a term of abuse applied to Nonconformists and others for refusing to wear the loyal sprig of oak or oak-apple on that day (*Folklore* 1999).

Cheesy Bob & Chissel Bob

Finally, the curious dialect word 'cheesy bob' for the wood-louse, as used in Surrey, came up in discussion. The word is thought of as having originated in Guildford and is "known only to those from the town" (*Urban Dictionary* website). Current use is confirmed by, of all things, an up-to-date Facebook entry: "I'm from Guildford in Surrey and have always called woodlice 'cheesy bobs'. One day sitting round the pool in Portugal I pointed at one and shouted "Cheesy bob!" and my friends looked at me with disbelief". The word has obviously survived well in the Surrey area as one can now buy cheesy bob mugs, t-shirts and magnets!

Further research revealed a list of Sussex and Surrey dialect words in *Notes & Queries* for 1921 – by a contributor born in 1841 – giving the form 'cheese bob', with a note that 'chissel-bob' is/was the form in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Hampshire.

Which brings us back to the Island. The local version for the wood-louse, 'chissel-bob', is not mentioned in Long's *Dictionary* (1886), but Lavers (1988) lists it as having been mentioned in Roach Smith's *Glossary of IOW Words* (1881). Going back to the original reference, Roach Smith expands on the term: "'Chissel Bob' or 'Chessel Bob', the woodlouse, was unknown not only to my brother, but to almost, if not entirely, everybody else; but I well remember its use, and it is too purely Saxon and identical with the modern word, to be lost sight of". He adds for good measure that the insect was formerly also called 'cheeselypp worme, or Robin Goodfellow's louse'.

One can conclude therefore that the dialect word was once used on the Island but had almost died out as far back as the 1880s, whereas the Surrey version has survived well to this day – a graphic example of how old words can adapt or die, according to their context and area of use.

Alan Phillips

Winter Walking. March 15th. 1981.

How does one define winters end; by an arbitrary date or the visual transformation of nature. At this period certainly the re-awakening is visible; the copse floor has turned green, and the roadside bank the appearance of a poor haircut, tuft of growth here and there.

It has been an easy winter to pass, almost entirely free of the nightmare of icy roads and completely so of snow, to date I must quickly add. Another factor making it both enjoyable and remarkable was its dryness. Mild and dry, an unusual combination, promoting thoughts of the inevitable redress of balance with perhaps a wet spring. Nature is unpredictable and decided to send us four inches of rain in the first nine days of March and may yet present us with more than average. Today the land lies sodden, the stench of silage hangs knife-cutting thick. The shallow cultivated soils of the Rowridge valley carpeted with bleached stones.

It is a hundred years ago exactly that my mother, a babe in arms, came to live at the head of the Rowridge valley and I have an inexplicable affinity. Is it genetic or the graphic tales that mother told of her childhood. Only the metalled surface of the road has changed, but the roadside borders are still carpeted with flowers. Primroses so advanced in this sheltered spot. The beautiful deep green leaves of the Arum Lily or Lords and Ladies are everywhere, and amongst them the black spotted leaf variety for which my learned friends can give no satisfactory explanation. The volume of plants in evidence at this time bears no relation to the few scattered flowers that may be seen in spring.

Rowridge Copse overhangs the road on the western escarpment like a heavy curtain.. Monkham Copse is its counterpart on the east but is separated from the road by a meadow in the valley bottom. How nostalgic Mother would have found today with the flock of two hundred sheep and a lamb, sometimes two, by every side. I don't know if mixed marriages work with sheep, but a black-faced one has been amongst the Dorsets.

Entering the footpath that bisects Monkham Copse and takes me up out of the valley, the incessant bleatings of the sheep fade, and other, more individual calls are audible; the 'pink' of the chaffinch, a cacophony of sound from a wren lurking in a nearby pile of brushwood, and away on the hillside a Mistle Thrush claiming its territory, a song even more beautiful when all else is silenced by heavy rain. A Spotted Woodpecker drilling into a tree as hollow as a drum. Only Piccy-close, the B.B.C Rowridge transmitter and the spent cartridge cases date the era. Utopia I am inclined to call it, but would Grandfather see it that way. The copses strewn with fallen debris, the hazel clumps whose limbs reach into the woodland canopy, the chattering Jackdaws squabbling over nesting holes in aged standards would be unacceptable neglect where once he made his hurdles in surroundings as tidy as his own back garden.

From the rim of the valley the whole scene changes, the knife-edge March winds make me seek my pocketed gloves. The colony of Rooks in Highwoods, on the other side of the valley, tower skywards on buffeting winds that I was totally unaware of in the valley below. The experiencing of two seasons in two neighbouring habitats, but one must not compare terrain, but enjoy what each has to offer. The views from Bowcombe Down, as elsewhere across the backbone of the Island, are breathtaking. Wooded valleys, nestling farmsteads, village communities, field patterns, and northwards glimpses of the Solent. That huge cereal field on the summit of Bowcombe Down that I nostalgically remember as a childhood paradise; scrub-covered, pock-marked with trenches used for training purposes in the first world war, the blackberry outings, the frequent confrontation with an Adder, and the occasional rabbit for the pot. Hamstring the back legs, remove your jacket, pass a length of string.through the tied legs and around your shoulder so that the rabbit hung neatly from the armpit. Replace your jacket, leaving the front open and turning the flaps inwards to the side and with an air of nonchalence you could arrive home without questioning. Perhaps we were not even poaching, but it was easier than trying to convince someone.

The track, Down Lane, between Carisbrooke and the summit is in a frightful condition, cut to ribbons by the hooves of horses and ploughed by the wheels of motor cyclists riding the track illegally. The downward slopes are clean with the water washing away the loose soil and leaving only the stones. The uninitiated would swear the path had been laid. That bulbous area of grassland in the lane itself, a mere hundred feet in width at the most, reminds us of the days when all animals brought to market were on the hoof, but to take advantage of such a facility one had to be much closer than the West Wight. The last organised use of the meadow was the Sunday School treats for children of both Carisbrooke and Newport before the advent of trains and the availability of the seaside.

Finally, from that 'meadow in the lane' we could look across the valley to home, but after a day on the Downs how distant it looked, light years away.

Bill Shepard

Return of the Sparrows ?

Several years ago we bought a Sparrow Colony Nest Box and put it up on one of the walls of our house in Pell Lane Ryde. (We used to get plenty of sparrows in our garden, but the numbers have now declined)

Nothing nested in there for year after year and I kept nagging Laurie to move the box around to another side of the house opposite where some sparrows nest in our neighbour's roof. However, this year we kept seeing blue and great tits flying towards our box. Imagine our surprise when we finally realised that all 3 boxes were in use, 2 with great tits and one with blue tits! We did not realise that they liked nesting so close together? They have all now fledged and a male sparrow has taken up residence on top of the box calling loudly most days. Perhaps he will attract some females next year? Watch this space!!!

Toni Goodley

Dinosaur Footprints at Hanover Point

A shallow lagoon by a pine forest, dozing;
He lumbers in: a crash and showering spray,
Stifling croaks, crushing snails, cooling;
Heaves his massive bulk, and sinks,
Leaving deep footprints in the clay.

The sun rages; flames devour
Horsetails, tree ferns,
And flowers the dinosaurs came to eat;
Steam rises; lake shrinks;
And clay hardens, framing the prints.

A shadow blacks out the sun;
The wind shrieks, whips up waves;
Thunder smashes the sky;
Lightning darts, strikes at random;
Clouds explode;
And torrents of silt pour into the lake,
Filling the holes his feet have made.

* * *

A hundred million years have passed
And I am following in his tread:
His heel and three great toes outspread
Imprinted in mudstones on the reef.

A hundred million years from now,
Will they find these prints of mine,
Feet laid bare to sands of time?
The next inheritors of Earth,
Evolved to fill the niche we left,
Will they follow vainly where we lurch?

Margaret Nelmes

(**Photo p.22**)

Reports of General Meetings

23rd January Gondwanaland - A Talk and Slide Show by Colin Pope

Two hundred million years ago the world was a very different shape. What had once been the vast solid land mass we now call Pangaea had divided into two supercontinents: Gondwana and Laurasia. Gondwana, in the Southern Hemisphere, comprised Australia, South America and Africa. These land masses continued to split and drift apart, and by the end of the Cretaceous period, about sixty-five million years ago, when the dinosaurs died out, the continents we know today were forming.

But what, you may ask, has Gondwana got to do with the flora and fauna of Australia that Colin and Jilly Pope studied on their recent travels around that country? They were following in the footsteps of Charles Darwin, who spent two months in Australia towards the end of his five year voyage around the world on the Beagle. Although he did not enjoy his visit as much as he had anticipated, because he was homesick, he did study the geology, flora and fauna, and made many contacts with whom he would later correspond. He was struck by the similarities between some plants and animals that he saw in Australia and others that he had studied in Africa and South America. How could this be, he asked himself, when these continents were so far apart, divided by oceans?

The theme of Colin's talk is the highly distinctive wildlife of Australia and its links to other continents. He and Jilly began their tour at Darwin in **the Northern Territory** in mid July, the winter season. This area has a tropical climate and is always hot, but it has wet and dry seasons. Colin showed us slides of salt marsh and mangrove swamps near Cairns. Mangroves grow very quickly, held together by a network of roots. They have their own flora and fauna. The mud skipper is a remarkable small fish that can climb out of the water onto dry land. Its eyes are on the top of its head to give it all-round vision. Fiddler crabs congregate here in large numbers. The male has one single front claw that is brightly coloured. These are important feeding grounds for birds: spur-winged lapwings, black kites, ibis, magpie-larks. A white-breasted sea eagle dives for fish. At the open-air market in Darwin straw-necked ibis scavenge for food. And in river estuaries salt-water crocodiles lurk, posing a danger to humans, especially when they stray into Darwin Harbour.

In summer there is quite a lot of rain and so in winter some greenery remains. But the vegetation here is adapted to bush fires and dependent on burning. Lakes and ponds often retain water throughout the year. Water-lilies were one of the earliest flowering plants on Earth and Northern Australia has several native varieties. In the dry season especially, a variety of wetland birds, including ibis, pelicans, darters (related to our shag and cormorant) and magpie-geese (a primitive form of duck) flock to fields of crops in such large numbers that farmers call them pests. Long-necked and side-necked turtles just managed to reach Australia before it separated from the other continents. There are tree frogs, too, displaying bright colours.

Notable among the flora are eucalyptus trees, as well as screw palms, producing huge and heavy fruits much prized by the Aborigines. The emu bush has large and showy pink flowers that grow directly on the trunk. Baobab trees belong to Gondwanaland. Their strange barrel-shaped trunks are full of sap, and they lose their leaves in the dry season. Africa, especially Madagascar, is the centre of evolution for baobabs and there are several varieties, but Australia has only one. The cycad, another Gondwana plant, bears a huge orange cone and each bract forms fruit.

Reptiles of note include the frilled lizard. It can inflate loose skin on its neck to scare off predators and is well camouflaged. In the Outback, in Central Australia, the Thorny Devil is a colourful lizard with a singular thorny structure. It is just six to eight inches long and harmless. Bearded dragons are to be found in the south, near Melbourne.

The rainforest was much more widespread at one time, but now only pockets of wet, tropical vegetation remain. The rainbow pitter bird, with its iridescent plumage, runs along the forest floor, and crow butterflies cluster together to roost in trees during the dry season, affording vulnerable individuals protection. Tiger butterflies join them in smaller numbers. Indigenous species of bird include scrap hens that pile up vegetation to form a compost heap in which they lay their eggs. The rotting vegetation produces heat to incubate them. The rainbow bee-eater is widespread in summer, but in winter lives only in the north, where the fig bird feeds on a variety of fig trees. The kookaburra, the iconic Australian species of bird, is a kingfisher, but not aquatic. Instead of fish, it feeds on reptiles. The western bowerbird is re-

lated to the Bird of Paradise. The male, with its distinctive patch of violet feathers behind its head, builds bowers to attract a mate.

The Catherine Gorge is spectacular, but becoming very barren. Even so, it has managed to retain pockets of rainforest vegetation. There is little water flow in winter, but the gorge remains damp. Freshwater Johnson's crocodiles bask in vegetation below the sandbanks, their mouths gaping wide to help cool them down. They are smaller than estuarine crocodiles and not dangerous to man. In the scrubby vegetation some plants, such as the acacia, flower in the cooler months of winter. Splashes of colour are ephemeral, but some, like Sturt's desert pea, have stunning flowers.

In Australia there are very few species of placental mammals. Marsupials are dominant. They also occur in South America, but are not very successful there. The introduction of alien species such as dingoes and foxes into Australia has caused a significant drop in marsupial numbers. And they are not often seen by humans because they are nocturnal. The numbat is an exception. It ferrets about in daylight, eating ants.

The next leg of the Popes' journey took them to **the Australian Outback**, the Red Centre, where the rocks and the earth are red sandstone. Ants of many species abound. There are leaf-cutter ants, and Molger ants that dig a hole and only emerge after dark. They make funnels to prevent rainwater from seeping into their nest. The hawk moth has big caterpillars called witchery grubs that the Aborigines traditionally eat. Salt lakes are the only water in the centre of Australia. Spectacular red sandstone monoliths rise above the desert, eroded by wind and occasional rain. Water courses carve runnels in the soft rock. The bushes and clumps of grass are tough and spiky. Tracks in the sand are evidence of nocturnal activity: a mouse here, a lizard there.

Desert fuchsias of many species display colourful bell-shaped flowers. Desert oaks are deeply rooted to tap into water sources underground. Eucalypts are the dominant tree species, being fire adapted, their oils combustible. River gum is one of several hundred species. The colourful bark peels away to reveal a different colour underneath. The dry bark is highly combustible, but insects find shelter under strips that have fallen to the ground. The red flowering gum has fruit called monkey nuts that some animals eat, and great tassels of flowers. Mimosa is one of a large number of species of acacia in Australia, which has a greater variety than Africa. Many Australian flowers are big, open and brightly coloured with a lot of nectar, to attract not insects but birds. There are not many bee species in Australia and therefore they are not part of the pollination cycle, as they are in Britain.

Western Australia has a different climate: regular rain in winter, hot and dry in summer. Its Mediterranean vegetation fosters biodiversity, just as the Cape of Good Hope has an exceptionally rich variety of species, despite its poor soil. Colin and Jilly hired a guide to take them into the countryside outside Perth. There are many flowering plants unique to Western Australia, including grass trees that look like palms wearing grass skirts. They are fire adapted and burning stimulates growth. Their spikes of flowers are pollinated by bees. The kangaroo paw is a striking plant with a long red stalk. There are many varieties, pollinated by birds. Banksias are named after Sir Joseph Banks, Director of Kew Gardens, who collected them from Australia. They have fern-like leaves and large, showy flowers. You can see them growing in Ventnor Botanic Gardens. Australia is the centre of evolution for sundews, where they are very widespread and diverse. They have sticky glands to catch insects, germinate and grow in winter and dry off in summer.

The vegetation here can be very colourful and many flowers are tough and long lasting, due to the climate. This is attractive to the cut flower industry. Many plants contain toxins that native species of animal have adapted to. Introduced species, such as rabbits, are repulsed, and so the marsupials here are less threatened than in other parts of Australia. There are many varieties of orchid. Wide roadside verges attract vegetation and termite mounds. Termites play a very important role in the recycling process.

In **South Australia** Colin and Jilly saw grey kangaroos. They are widespread throughout Australia, but nocturnal in summer. In winter they come out in daylight. There are many species of kangaroo and wallaby, each adapted to a different niche, such as rock wallabies and tree wallabies. Kangaroos are treated as pests and shot.

The golden hair lichen occurs both in the Northern Hemisphere and in Australia. Now extinct in Britain, it was recorded on the Isle of Wight, at Appuldurcombe and Quarr, in the nineteenth century.

Along the south coast many plants have thick and waxy leaves and the vegetation is scrubby. Sea

lions living here were ruthlessly hunted by explorers. There are also fur seals, and blue fairy penguins venture on land only at night, to avoid predators.

Arriving in Victoria, Colin photographed koalas sitting in trees around Melbourne. They are easy subjects for photographers, as they hardly move. These marsupials feed on eucalypts whose toxins make their livers work hard to eliminate them. It is a nutritionally poor diet and so they have to conserve their energy, but they can run fast from a bush fire.

Noteworthy birds include the Cape Barren goose, once rare, the black swan and the emu, one of the great flightless birds that evolved in Gondwanaland from common ancestral stock. Others are the cassowary, the ostrich and the rhea. In deep valleys that retain some humidity tree ferns grow and here the lyre bird is found.

The Island of Tasmania is very different from the rest of Australia in both climate and terrain. It is mountainous and has an oceanic climate. There is regular snowfall in winter, but only light; rainfall is high and there are many rivers. It is humid throughout the year – cool and damp. Common trees include eucalypts and myrtle. King Billy pines, at least 1,200 years old, rise up above the mostly coniferous woodland. Pines are ancient trees dating back hundreds of millions of years. The biggest heather in the world grows here, up to ten feet tall. Banksia is common, but as the climate does not allow for bush fires, it does not regenerate from burning here. The only species of deciduous tree in Australia, a southern beech, grows in the mountains here.

The high humidity encourages the growth of a wide variety of lichens, many of which are shared by New Zealand. The coral lichen, with its elegant, lace-like appearance, was the first to be identified in Australia. Mosses and liverworts thrive here, too.

The wombat, normally nocturnal, emerges in daylight here in winter. The Tasmanian devil is the largest surviving carnivorous marsupial, as the Tasmanian wolf is now extinct. Dingoes, introduced into Australia by the Aborigines, killed the carnivorous marsupials, but they didn't reach Tasmania. A facial cancer virus has killed many Tasmanian devils. They are messy eaters and bite each other accidentally, spreading the virus.

Returning to the mainland, Colin and Jilly arrived in **New South Wales**, where a huge colony of grey-headed fruit bats is damaging trees in Sydney Botanic Gardens. Fruit bats are one of the few placental mammals to arrive naturally in Australia. They are very important pollinators and dispersers of fruit in the rain forests, but they can also do a lot of damage to trees. Here they are at the southernmost edge of their range, as they normally need a warmer climate. There are many species of parrot, parakeet and cockatoo living here in huge flocks that make a deafening sound.

The final stage of this mammoth journey brought the Popes to **Queensland**. Along the coast there is rainforest, but only on the hillsides, as the coastal strip is cultivated. Believed to be the oldest rainforests in the world, they are a mix of broad-leaved plants, palms and tree-ferns. Many plants, especially ferns, grow on the trunks of trees and lianas climb up them. The strangler fig is a parasite that germinates in the crown of a tree and sends its roots down. It eventually kills the tree. The banyan tree has its own aerial roots that grow down to the ground. Watch out for the nettle tree, one of the most poisonous plants known to man, whose silica stay in our skin for months, causing much pain. Its attractive fruits are not hairy, but the stems are.

The bush-tail possum is one of the most successful of the possums. It lives in parks and gardens, raiding bins. It was introduced into New Zealand where it is considered a pest and killed. Ring-tailed possums are much shyer. They are rarely seen because they are nocturnal and confined to small pockets of rain forest. Colin's slide shows how their eyes reflect the light when a spotlight is shone on them. The duck-billed platypus occurs right along the coastal strip, from Tasmania to Northern Queensland. It is very shy and scrabbles about in the mud at the bottom of rivers and lakes. It only emerges into the open in the evenings. Darwin recorded sightings of this very primitive, egg-laying mammal, believed to have evolved in Australia after the separation from Gondwana. Its strange, rubbery bill emits electronic signals to locate worms in the mud. Colin found it hard to photograph, as it remains only a few seconds on the surface before diving down again.

Aborigines have one of the oldest cultures in the world. They live a nomadic lifestyle that is closely associated with the natural world. They learned how fire could be used to cook raw food, making it more digestible. They discovered which nuts and berries they could eat and how to use them. Their cave art is

Blizzard at Wheelers Bay, p. 4

Red Squirrels at Alverstone -P.3

Skinner`s Flower Meadow, page 31

Devil`s Tongue, page 5

Bird`s Nest Orchid, page 5

Golden Eagle & Buzzard p.5

Golden Eagle showing tether p.5

Woodlark, p.4

Golden Plover, p. 5

Tree Bumble Bee p. 30

Dinosaur Footcast p. 15

believed to be thousands of years old and is periodically repainted. It is difficult to date, but the style has changed over the centuries. It depicts the wildlife with which the aborigines have lived for thousands of years in harmony. Colin showed us a painting of fruit bats roosting. The aboriginal culture is oral, story-telling, and their paintings also tell stories. Every tree has a meaning.

We are grateful to Colin for sharing this fascinating journey of discovery with us. He has managed to photograph many amazing plants and animals, some of which are so reclusive that they are rarely seen by man.

Margaret Nelmes

27th February **Kitbridge Farn – A Lost and Secret Past**
A Talk by Mark Earp

A little metal phalange, a wheel and a spike – what, Mark Earp asked himself, could these be doing in a ploughed field on his family farm on the Isle of Wight? For it was not just one, but many of these metal objects that Mark collected from the fields. Kitbridge Farm is sandwiched between Parkhurst Forest and modern housing developments and schools to the west of Newport. A dairy herd grazed here from the mid-nineteenth century. Then in the early nineteen eighties the land was ploughed and the earth yielded up its long buried secrets. Some eight thousand metal objects, including about a hundred military badges and many ceremonial coat buttons, have since been unearthed, with the help of the Police Metal Detectorists' Club. To Mark's surprise, these badges are not just from one, but from various regiments. Rifle Brigade badges even identify the campaign: Waterloo or the Peninsular War, for example. These finds represent some four hundred years of military history, from Tudor times to the Second World War. What were all these regiments doing here on the Isle of Wight?

Mark began by asking previous owners of the land from as far back as the nineteen-thirties, but no-one could enlighten him. He contacted the Rifle Brigade, whose Headquarters are in Winchester. The metal phalange, wheel and spike form the top of a Wolsey pattern helmet worn by soldiers in the eighteenth century. Mark also found a ceremonial bayonet from this period, similar to a Roman short sword, small bore to large bore bullets made of lead, and pewter spoons, each engraved with the owner's number. He passed around a selection of his finds to our large and fascinated audience at Arreton Community Hall. These artefacts help demonstrate that three-quarters of all the regiments of the British Army, as well as many foreign troops, were stationed here at some time. And the peak period was the war-years of the mid eighteenth century, with up to seven thousand troops at a time. A map of the Parkhurst encampment, dated 1758-59 and naming the various generals' regiments, was recently discovered in the British Library. A coloured engraving on glass, printed the wrong way round, depicts ladies and officers in their finery reviewing the troops at Hunnyhill in 1741, with St George's Down in the distance.

Why were so many regiments stationed at Kitbridge at that time? There are a number of reasons:

1 Firstly the threat of invasion: the British were fighting the French simultaneously in different parts of the world – in India, the West Indies and Canada. The threat of invasion from France or Spain was high. In 1750 a French general planned to invade the Isle of Wight as a diversionary tactic. It was an outlandish scheme, however, ferrying sixty thousand troops across the Channel on six rafts, each powered by four windmills. The British persuaded him to defect and he lived out his days in London.

2 Secondly the Island was well situated to send troops abroad, being close to Portsmouth naval base and having good anchorage.

3. Desertion from the army was extremely high, as many men had been press-ganged into it, but it was difficult to escape from the Island.

4. This land was unfit for arable farming. It was part of a vast area of marshy wasteland that made it ideal as a military training ground.

5. It was situated close to Carisbrooke Castle, so the troops could hold the castle under siege if the French invaded.

The military camp's facilities included: an abattoir, ice pond and well, a mill, tannery, brickworks and brewery, and they had over a thousand livestock and two hundred acres of cereal. The troops brought their families with them, and this enormous increase in the population must have had a huge impact on

the Island's economy and its social life during the war-years of the eighteenth century. Newport, with its numerous water mills, saw its importance as a commercial and industrial centre grow at this time, and Cowes found increased prosperity as a port and ship-building centre. Evidence of a very different kind of trade generated by the military camp has been found in nearby Petticoat Lane: silver buckles, necklaces and sweet-heart rings, where women must have sold their favours.

The camp was closed in 1789 when Albany Barracks was built. No longer were the troops housed in tents in damp fields, sleeping on straw. The military cemetery at Kitbridge is probably much earlier than the First World War, but most of the soldiers stationed here died in combat abroad. A notable campaign for which the troops were trained at Parkhurst was the Conquest of Canada in 1759 when General Wolfe led 3,500 soldiers in the storming of the citadel of Quebec. The British colonies in North America were surrounded by French and allied native American territories that threatened their survival. General Wolfe's regiment is marked on the map of the Isle of Wight encampment dated 1758-9.

Mark is still researching the history of the Parkhurst Camp and has recently received documents from Canada. His enthusiasm for this subject is inspiring.

Margaret Nelmes

13th March "The Island Bees" A Talk by Ian Boyd of Island 2000

Fortunately for bees, they are popular with the British public who are responding well to appeals for help in their struggle for survival. Last year Garden Organic published the results of its survey into our native, declining bumblebee populations which showed that untended areas of garden could attract and sustain bees. The charity therefore urged gardeners to create flower-rich havens for a variety of bee species whose numbers have declined rapidly since the nineteen fifties.

Ian Boyd of Island 2000, who gave a talk about bees to our large and enthusiastic audience at Arreton Community Hall, has used the revival of the Isle of Wight Pop Festival to raise public awareness of the plight of bees and to raise money for bee conservation projects on the Island. Last year "The Hive" information stand at the festival raised a lot of money for the Chine Project on the Island's south coast. And this year Ian and his team plan to record invertebrates along the coast. Owing to their popularity, bees are good ambassadors for invertebrates that in general do not enjoy a good press.

The title of Ian's festival display is "A Taste of Honey – The Honeybee". There is only one species of honeybee indigenous to the United Kingdom, but honeybee populations are in sharp decline all over the world. Upon hearing this shocking news, a lot of people have asked Ian how they can become a beekeeper. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is a complex syndrome rather than a single virus, caused by a combination of factors, such as poor health, the destruction of bee nesting sites and the widespread use of pesticides that destroy wild flowers, their nectar source. Whole colonies are wiped out when worker bees leave the hive and never return. Some colonies do not survive the winter, even though the Queen can live for six years.

Honey and beeswax are not the only reasons for the popularity of bees. Their greatest usefulness to humans is in the pollination of crops, including fruit and vegetables and alfalfa. Without them, our survival as a species could be threatened. So what can Island 2000 do to stop a complex pathology from destroying our bees? Gift for Nature Projects, paid for by public donation, have identified a number of hives on the Island from which to collect data for analysis. Knowing the nature and scale of the problems is the first step towards finding solutions.

It is interesting to note that the bee-wolf, a large wasp predator whose colonies increase in number according to the size of the honeybee population, was quite rare here, but has recently become much more widespread. Bee-wolves excavate tunnels in soft earth and pack live, sedated honeybees into side tunnels where they lay their eggs on them before sealing the tunnels. There the emergent wasp grubs feed on the captive bees.

Bumble bees are large, furry, usually black and gold social bees. There are only two hundred and fifty species globally, of which nineteen were to be found in Britain until recently. Now there are seventeen. Their colonies are generally smaller than those of honeybees: about a hundred and fifty. Only the Queen survives the winter to start a new colony in spring. Bumble bees suffer badly from cold weather in summer because they only have reserves of food for a few days. Half the species of bumble bee are endangered. Yet there are practical ways in which we can help bumble bees to survive. They need

connective habitats: corridors they can track up and down where they can feed. Wildflower meadows are important habitats that have all but disappeared with modern farming methods. The most common species of bumble bee are those that have been able to adapt to habitat changes and move into gardens.

The Isle of Wight is extremely rich in bees compared to other parts of the UK. There are a hundred and sixty-eight species, all of which have a job to do. There are carpenter, mining and leafcutter bees, for example. Some live in chalk, but most in soft, collapsing cliffs. Each has its own nest, but they live in large colonies. Now the bees can no longer sustain themselves from the hinterland which is intensively farmed, destroying the wild flowers. Many bee species are fussy about the colour of a flower and the taste of the pollen.

Parasitic or "cuckoo" bees do not make nests or forage for themselves, but use the nests and food of other species to provide for their parasitic young. There are two kinds of parasitic bee: klepto-parasitic bees and social parasites. The former enter the nests of solitary bees and hide their eggs in the brood chambers before the hosts have laid theirs. The parasitic bee larvae eat the food provided by the host and kill the host's eggs or larvae. Social parasite bees kill the resident Queen and force the worker bees to raise the young parasitic bees. The parasitic bees do not have pollen baskets or brushes with which to forage for food for their young. Ian says that these bees may not be popular, but as part of the biodiversity, they should also be helped to survive.

Bug Life International has conducted a large survey of maritime habitats and concludes that the Island's sandy cliffs and chalk down land is invaluable for invertebrates. Island 2000 will use money donated at this year's Isle of Wight Festival to improve the habitat of *Dassipoda*, a very furry bee with huge pollen sacs that nests in burrows in dry, sandy fields. The next challenge is to help farmers to manage the coastal hinterland for bees. The warm, south facing Upper Greensand cliff terraces are wildflower rich. Blackthorn is an early flowering plant that, by providing nectar out of season, will make a real and long-term difference to bee survival.

Public awareness is the most important way to help bees. One strategy is to encourage consumers to buy locally produced honey from businesses that promote bee survival. Another is the Bee Wick: a piece of string with wildflower seeds stuck to it. Island 2000 gives them away to children, who love to plant them. The seeds include White Clover, a good source of pollen and nectar, and Bird's-foot Trefoil, whose golden flowers emblazon the cliff tops.

I learnt so much from Ian's talk and it has inspired me to find out more about the lives of bees.

Margaret Nelmes

24th April. Retracing the Route of the Society`s First Field Meeting Ninety Years Ago

The 'Excursion to Bowcombe Down', held on Thursday 29 April 1920, is recorded briefly in the Society's Minutes. The weather was 'very inclement': in April 2010 we were blessed with warm sunshine all afternoon. Fourteen members and friends took part: we were twenty-one. They were led by two 'Directors', a Mr J.H. Greenfield for Plants and a Mr HG Jeffery for Birds. Our Leader was Richard Smout, County Archivist for the Isle of Wight for the past fifteen years. In those early days you had to pose your candidature and be elected to the Society, and during this first excursion three more people were duly elected members.

We followed their route from the meeting point near the Council School on Middle Road, above Carisbrooke High Street. The school has long since gone, converted into dwellings, but the founder members of our Society would have noticed the nearby Jubilee (Methodist) Chapel, whose name and date of 1883 are prominently displayed on the front of the building. Opposite this chapel we turned into Nodgham Lane whose houses enjoy splendid views across the valley to Carisbrooke Castle. Then we turned off along a bridle track leading to Bowcombe Down. This is the start of the Tennyson Trail, a long-distance route over the Downs to Freshwater Bay and the Needles. Richard had planned to take us on a circular walk, dropping down into the Bowcombe Valley, through the delightfully named Plaish Farm and back across Lukely Water Meadows. However, despite the recent dry and sunny weather, Richard found the path through the meadows to be very wet and muddy and we voted to stay on high ground and return by the route we had come.

The highlights for us were the wide views from both sides of the ridge, the spring flowers and

budding trees, butterflies and birds. In 1920 mention was made of ‘a fine view... from the Down’ and the Secretary is recorded as suggesting that ‘the woods on the Swainston Estate, stretching away to Newtown, were portions of the old forest which formerly extended to Newport.’ No doubt they were standing beside the same field gate near the site of the Anglo-Saxon Burial Ground where we admired the broad sweep of landscape spread out below us to the north, over fields and woods to the Newtown inlets, the ribbon of shining water that is the Solent and the hazy outline of the New Forest beyond. The landscape north of this chalk ridge was once very similar to the New Forest, someone remarked.

As for plants and trees, only a few of the ‘more interesting’ were noted in the Excursion’s report: Alexanders, Greater Celandine, Spurge Laurel and Spindle Tree. The only one of these our members did not find was Spurge Laurel. Some of us did, however, take an interest in many more common species that grew beside the track. The Greater Celandine was about to flower: it is sometimes known as Swallow-wort and is unrelated to the Lesser Celandine, being a member of the Poppy family. The Hautbois is a variety of wild strawberry, its French name meaning ‘high wood’ is also the name of a medieval musical instrument. Richard pointed out that the Latin name for the Heart’s Tongue Fern is also the French for centipede because the spores look like many legs. We admired arum lilies, some with spotted leaves, and Jack-by-the- Hedge (or Garlic Mustard) beginning to flower, food source for the Orange-tip butterfly. The creamy-white blossoms of the Wayfaring Tree caught our attention, and how could we miss the hedgerows covered in fragrant white blackthorn flowers. We found White Bryony with its coiled tendrils and shapely leaves, Black Bryony, that is no relation and belongs to the Yam family, White Dead Nettle in flower, some with variegated leaves, Red Currant with its tassels of flowers, and even a wild Gooseberry. The Alexander is a tall and bushy Umbellifer. Its leaves and flowers have a strong and aromatic taste and its stem used to be eaten like celery. It has been a good year for violets, as a result of two cold winters; we found Sweet Violets, that are white, as well as the Early Dog Violet along the sheltered bank beside the path. We also saw Cowslips in flower.

Among the birds we recorded were Skylarks, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Swallows, Swift, Lapwing and Yellowhammer. Richard drew our attention to a flock of Black-headed Gulls and one Mediterranean Gull wheeling round and round, agitated by a buzzard. To see a buzzard here in 1920 would have been something to shout about, but now they are everywhere on the Island.
We saw a number of species of butterfly, among them the Speckled Wood, Orange-tip and Small Tortoiseshell.

The narrow track opened up into a wide grassy area and someone suggested that this may have been the site of a cattle pound. In the hedgerow we saw two concrete posts linked by two wooden bars. It was a PLUTO marker and these can be found right across the Island, from Gurnard to Sandown Bay. The “Pipeline under the Ocean” was a whole network of pipelines that criss-crossed England and pipes were laid on the seabed across the Solent and the Channel to supply fuel for the D-Day Landings. Their existence and their whereabouts were, of course, a closely guarded secret. A film about PLUTO is regularly shown at Shanklin Chine, where one of the pipelines can be seen. The film shows an enormous floating drum, towed by a vessel, from which the pipeline was unwound. There is also a book about PLUTO for sale on the Island.

Richard showed us a copy of a map dated 1836 of the farm fields in the Bowcombe Valley. There were many more fields than now and the letters c, d and e denote different owners. The fields on the hillside below us belonged to Plaish Farm: we can see it straight ahead down on the valley floor. But the three fields furthest away belonged to Froglands Farm and this is way down the valley, out of sight. Farms sometimes need to diversify and Froglands bought grazing land when and where it was available. Richard told us that Sir Richard Simeon of Swainston Manor bought Bowcombe Farm in the mid nineteenth century. There was a race-course here in the eighteen-sixties, like the ones near East Cowes and at Ashey.

Returning the way we had come, we turned right instead of left when we reached Nodgham Lane and followed it downhill to the Bowcombe Valley Road. Crossing this, we headed down Clatterford Shute and crossed the ford on the raised walkway. From here we had a good view of the water meadows and the Lukely Brook that flows through them. Yellow Iris were starting to flower. We turned left and followed quiet Millers Lane to the ford. Beyond an assortment of picturesque cottages we arrived back in Carisbrooke High Street.

This proved to be a most informative walk with a great diversity of spring flowering plants and trees and a variety of birds and butterflies to observe. It attracted members with a wide range of interests and expertise in Natural History and Archaeology, who shared information.

Margaret Nelmes

5th June **A Visit to The Beacon, Beacon Alley**

Out of misfortune some good may come. These words rang true for Steve Hutt when he returned to the scene of a car accident eighteen years ago and spotted this house and land for sale. A peaceful retreat, it was just what he was looking for and he bought it. He and his wife, Penny Newbery, are geologists and keen amateur naturalists and they invited us to come and see their meadow situated on the lower, south-facing slopes of Bleak Down, before exploring further afield. The weather was warm and sunny – ideal for observing insects and taking a stroll in the country.

In the meadow Steve keeps the bracken at bay and he has planted some trees on the margins. This is dry, acid grassland. The soil varies from clay to sand. In the meadow we found a variety of flowering plants, including Heath Speedwell, Sheep's Sorrel, Mouse Ear, Common Vetch and Foxglove. Gorse is spreading into the middle of the field, attracting nesting birds. Snakes, mostly Adders, and Slow Worms live behind the house, where there are bramble thickets and large open areas with boards and other things to crawl under. Steve enjoys observing them.

We crossed the meadow and came to a lane which skirts the foot of the down. Here we found debris from a very old 'dump' sliding down the steep hillside. We saw a Golden Ringed Dragonfly in the hedgerow and Green Hairstreak butterflies flying around the canopy of an oak tree. Whitethroat and Chiffchaff were singing. Eventually we reached the top of the Down, which is Open Access Land. In a pond we found Reed Mace and Water-crowfoot growing, and an Emperor Dragonfly darted about hunting insects. On the acid heathland there were many tiny flowering plants, including Lousewort, Heath Milkwort, Tormentil, Heath Bedstraw and Heath Speedwell. I discovered a brightly coloured Cream Spotted Tiger moth resting on a grass stalk and we also saw a Small Heath butterfly and a group of Southern Marsh orchids. Showers of tiny grasshoppers preceded us through the grassland.

Back at the house, we were treated to afternoon tea in the garden. There are lovely views of the hills from here. This was a relaxing afternoon, full of wildlife interest, and we were fortunate to have among us members with varied knowledge of wildlife to help us identify plants, birds and insects. We are especially grateful to Steve and Penny for their hospitality.

Margaret Nelmes

26th June **"The Field of Hope"**

Observing Bees at the Martin`s Wood Nature Reserve, Newchurch

Those of us in the lead rein back as, with a deft flick of the wrist, our expert guide swipes his huge, conical net through the air, thrusts his head and shoulders inside, extending one arm which clutches a small glass phial. A few seconds later Adam Wright emerges with his prize, identifies it in an instant and passes it round.

Ian Boyd, of Island 2000, is at hand with further information. He sets the scene: Martin's Wood is managed by a partnership between The Forestry Commission and Martin and Nora Boswell of Parsonage Farm. Until recently this land, situated behind the huge churchyard, was old fields of maize, very heavily cropped, a sandy wasteland covering the whole of the rest of the hilltop. It was somewhere you had to cross to reach the woodland paths. In 2001 it was transformed into new native woodland under the JIGSAW Initiative (Joining and Increasing Grant Schemes for Ancient Woodlands), 'to form a substantial wildlife link between Lynch Copse and Hill Heath', hitherto isolated pockets of ancient woodland and wood pasture, I read on an information board. Martin's Wood comprises a variety of young deciduous trees, as well as Scots Pine 'to provide a future food source for red squirrels'.

The sandy soil is attractive to mining bees and Ian is using money raised from his bee stand at the Isle of Wight Festival to maintain the woodland rides. He also seeks to identify key areas to keep as open glades for bees. Two bee species new to the Island have been discovered here. Among the heathland, plants we identify are Common Cudweed, Stork's-bill, Common Centaury and Rosebay Willowherb.

Adam catches a variety of bumble bees, relatively large and very hairy social bees of the genus

Bombus. There are two Red-tailed Bees: *Bombus lapidarius* and *Bombus pratorum*. *Lapidarius* has a relatively long abdomen and the male has a broad yellow collar. It often nests under stones. *Pratorum* has a yellow face and bands of yellow on the thorax and abdomen. *Pratorum* may nest well above ground, in a bird's nest or nest box. The next bumble bee to be netted is a White-tailed *Bombus lucorum* with a pale yellow collar and abdominal segment. It nests underground. Adam can tell by size and colour whether a bee is male or female, and the worker bees, which collect pollen and nectar, are all female.

Mining bees are much smaller than bumble bees and solitary. Adam shows us an *Andrena ovacular. Andrena* is a large genus with many species superficially like honey bees. They nest in the ground. Then he catches a cuckoo bee, a parasite, which lays its eggs on the *Andrena*'s pollen store. These hatch out before the *Andrena*'s eggs and destroy them. This bee is very small with orange wings and abdomen. *Nemada*, another cuckoo bee, is tiny and wasp-like. A predator-prey balance has to be maintained for the survival of both the host bee and its parasite.

Next up is a leaf-cutter bee, which lines its nest tubes with pieces of leaf. A digger wasp is tiny, and black with a bright yellow head and yellow legs. Then we're dazzled by the green-gold iridescence of a Spanish Fly. Our shoes crunch over a bed of brittle, faded green lichen. Two more cuckoo bees, then I spot a spider wasp, orange and black, right at our feet, hunting for spiders to drag into its nest. But what is that slung beneath its body? A caterpillar. It drops it, and circles round, trying to find it. Someone flicks the caterpillar with the toe of his shoe, but the wasp has become disorientated, moving further and further away. It seems to be unaware of the circle of humans towering above it. A bee-wolf is homing in on holes in the side of a shallow pit in the sandy ground. It reminds me of caves I saw in the sides of craters on the edge of the Sahara, where Berbers lived. The bee-wolf approaches the holes in a series of hesitant and jerky movements. Another bee lurks in the vicinity. What is its intent? The first bee drops down to the floor of the pit and rests in front of the holes. It singles one out and has to dig to uncover the entrance. It enters, digs a little more and disappears inside. Another bee is dragging something behind it. It drops it: a grasshopper, circles and grabs hold of it again.

I was amazed to discover such a variety of bee and wasp activity in this location, even on a very hot afternoon. After hearing Ian's talk about The Island's Bees in March, many of us were keen to study some bee behaviour for ourselves and Martin's Wood proved fruitful, thanks to Adam Wright's enviable skill at catching and identifying them and Ian's infectious enthusiasm.

Margaret Nelmes

Reports of Section Meetings

Access

28th January **Seaview**

Six members assembled for the walk. The weather was sunny with a strong north wind blowing. It was programmed for 3.5 miles, but owing to the heavy rain fall, the planned paths were a no go area for the older members due to mud and flood.

We started the walk down Pier Road to the sea where the old Chain Pier once stood. It was destroyed in a gale in 1952. The Halland Hotel, another famous part of Seaview's history, now lost to a new development of houses and flats. However the residents did gain a new sea wall. We walked towards the Old Boathouse, now a cottage with good views of Spithead and the Portsmouth and Southsea coastline. Then on to the Coastal Path, an un-adopted muddy road, where again the old houses have been pulled down and new houses built with the much craved for sea views and beach access. At the end of the road we went onto a footpath where an old Cork Oak tree stands. Then to Seagrove Bay where we stopped to admire the views. A number of Gas Tankers were at anchor in St Helens Roads, waiting to discharge their cargo at Fawley Oil Terminal. Only one at a time can unload owing to their very volatile cargo, so there is quite a queue. We moved on to the next footpath to see the pond were we expected to see ducks, but it had been drained to a low level so work parties of local people could start the process of cleaning it up.

We looked for some Frog spawn but saw none.

The path now climbs up hill behind houses with fields on the right hand side. The odd Daffodil was seen in bud, a Primrose was noticed. Winter Heliotrope was in flower at one spot. Out of the wind the sun was warm. Geese were heard on the smallholding but we could not see them. Robins were singing in several places, Greenfinches and Wrens were seen, a Green Woodpecker was heard.

At the top of the hill the coldest football pitch on the Isle of Wight was reached, open to the north wind straight from the sea. The odd seagull was feeding on the field. The footpath now continued down hill across a road to Seaview Green. This is a well managed area, kept clean and no rubbish. Across another road to a footpath through an allotment where plot holders were working, we stopped to chat to several of them, most were digging to get ready for potato planting. Leaving the gardeners we walked to join the Coastal Path back into Seaview along the sea wall and esplanade to the car park.

Colin Black

8th February **Winter Waders**

9 Members met at St Helens Green on a cold, overcast morning for a winter bird walk to St Helens Duver, to the sea and over the causeway to look at the ducks on the Eastern Yar River and flooded area to the east.

The tide was falling after high water some two hours previously. Brent Geese were feeding on the eelgrass. Oystercatchers, Redshank, Greenshank, Curlew, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin were all feeding on the mud. A Great Crested Grebe was seen on the sea but disappeared as soon as we started looking for it with the telescope.

The gulls were represented by Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull and Common Gull. No Mediterranean Gulls were seen during the meeting.

Within the harbour at least four Little Grebes were spotted. Teal were in their usual spot in the Mill Pond.

We extended the usual walk a little to take in the River Yar as a large number of duck had been spotted before the walk started.

A far larger number of Wigeon were gathered there as well as on the flooded field to the east. Probably as many as 300. We also saw two Red Squirrels frolicking in the woodland on our way down to the Duver.

List of birds seen : Mute Swan, Cormorant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe. Pintail, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Shelduck, Brent Geese, Canada Geese, Oystercatcher, Greenshank, Redshank, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Lapwing, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long Tailed Tit, Chaffinch, Pied Wagtail, Rock Pipit, Robin, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Green Woodpecker, Starling, Kestrel and Coot.
40 species.

Jackie Hart.

24th February **Whale chine (Snowdrop Walk)**

Owing to the weather conditions, due to heavy rain over the past weeks, the paths were flooded with deep mud owing to tractor working to harvest cauliflowers. We cancelled the walk.

18th March **Brading (Daffodil walk)**

15 members assembled at Brading car park for a walk to see the Daffodils at Centurion Copse. The weather was fine and sunny after so many wet and cold days, it made a difference to the numbers attending. Leaving the car park we entered the churchyard where we stopped and looked at the new information board, before walking on past the old Gun building to the rear of St Mary's Church, built in the 12th century. We stopped at the plaque where Elecampane (Velvet Dock), a rare plant is seen. It was not yet showing. It is a garden outcast noticed in 1856. The plant was first recorded in the Isle of Wight, in 1770 by Richard Waring.

Passing the old Cattle Pound we walked along Quay Lane to the rail bridge over the Ryde to Shanklin line, then on to the sewage works. We paused here to talk to a man with binoculars, he had a report of a Red Kite earlier that morning and was hoping it would return.

We crossed the old railway line to Bembridge, closed in 1953, then on to Brading Marsh and walked the path by the old sea wall, crossing two bridges over the River Yar.

We now walked along the footpath that leads into Centurion Copse where the Daffodils were. There was a good show through the woods and it made a good walk.

Other plants noted were Lords and Ladies, Lesser Celandine, Sweet Violet, Willow Catkins.

Colin Black

14th April **Ashey Down Layby (Toothwort walk)**

Two members arrived on a dull overcast morning with a cold north wind. After many days of sunshine it was disappointing for what turned out to be an interesting walk.

Leaving the car park we took the footpath over the east side of Ashey Down on what was a bridle path. Wild Plum was in flower and in the hedge further along Blackthorn was in bud, but the flowers not yet out. The Down is improved grassland for cattle to graze, but just off the path on the steep bank, where no fertiliser had been used, many common downland flowers will be found later in the season. Bastard Toadflax is one of them. We admired the view from here of Eagle Head Copse across the valley, looking north to St Helens and Bembridge Harbour.

Walking on to the old reservoir (not in use) for Ryde Water Works, then down the north side of the Down on a steep chalk bridle way used by the farmer to take feed to the cattle and also a service road for Southern Water to a modern large reservoir. We now did a small detour to see the old Ashey water works, its old pump house covered in Ivy, also the new pump house. The old well was reopened 2008. The old cottage is now a super dwelling. Often Red Squirrels can be seen here on the feeders in the house garden.

The water works were built in the early 1800s after Ryde had a cholera outbreak. The land owners of Ryde decided a fresh water supply was needed. The well was dug and the water was piped to Ryde. When the civic opening of the project took place and the tap was turned on, nothing happened, no water, the civic dinner went ahead, the problem to be sorted later.

Down the bridle path towards East Ashey Farm turning off on to a footpath on the manor boundary. Walking east on a good field edge, we admired the mass of Daffodils on the boundary ditch. Further on we noticed Robin`s Pincushion Galls on a Dog Rose. A large Oak nearby was covered on its south side by lichen. It was hard as concrete so no sample was taken.

Crossing a footbridge on to another footpath towards Bloodstone Copse, Primroses, Bugle, and Ground Ivy was seen, Blackthorn was in flower. In the Copse, Hazel was in leaf, the first Bluebell just breaking into flower and Toothwort was spotted. Crossing now into Eaglehead Copse more Toothwort was seen. The spring which starts here was running fast, clear as a bell, no blood in it today !! It is known a little further on as Monkton Mead Brook and enters the sea in Ryde at Cornwall slip. It must be a good year for Toothwort, we have never seen so much. White Violets by the path, Lesser Celandine, Wood Anemone, Dogs Mercury, Primroses, Bluebells in bud and the odd one in flower. Many birds singing Chiffchaff, Robin, Wren, Blackcap, Blackbird, Garden Warbler and Green Woodpecker were heard.

We stopped to chat with the Ranger who, with two students, was erecting a new fence for the Hebridean sheep. These help to clear the scrub and brambles in the restored grassland on the eastern side. Then walking towards the main road we stopped to admire a large area of Primroses, Violets, Bluebells and Wood Anemone, also known as the Wind Flower. Photos were taken. A buzzing in the undergrowth attracted our attention and a Bumble Bee was spotted. It alighted for a short time so we had a good sighting. It was very small, orange thorax, black body, white tail, Elaine Rice identified it as possibly a Tree Bumble Bee, which is quite rare (**Photo p.22**).

A short walk back to the cars where the Bumble Bee identification chart, confirmed our sighting. I have sent an email to the Ranger who will now be on the look out for more sightings.

Colin Black

5th May. **Pelham Woods**

Mary Edmunds, Wight Nature Fund secretary, led a small group of members who met at the former Rare Breeds Car Park, by kind permission of Robert Noyes, to look at Pelham Woods nature reserve, which is managed by the fund.

The group saw a Nunwell Oak planted in memory of Hugh Noyes, whose family had cared for the wood

for many years, then took a path that had been created parallel to the Undercliff Road, enabling walkers to avoid traffic. A zigzag route through the wood revealed some of the work carried out by Ron Dyer the warden, and volunteers, who included Green Gym, IW College students, and the St Lawrence Community Association. Boardwalks and bridges had been repaired, clearings created and some hazel planted to replace diseased elms that had been removed.

The walk continued under an arch of the old Newport-Ventnor Railway and up steeply to Paradise Walk, then along to St Lawrence Bank, managed by the Wildlife Trust and the IWNHAS, and the home of the rare Field Cow-wheat. From High Hat, the group looked down onto the bases of the wartime radar station, and Mary said there had always been rumours that three Germans had come ashore, a story now authenticated by Adrian Searle.

The surrounding banks are an excellent site for Bee Orchids in June. A steep path down to Seven Sisters Road passed the Peace Garden adjacent to the old St Lawrence Church and finished back at the Car Park.

We were fortunate to have Dr David Biggs with us, who noted previously unrecorded species of diptera, lepidoptera and fungi.

Mary Edmunds.

3rd June. Newchurch, and Alverstone.

Seven Members and one visitor met at Newchurch on a glorious summer morning. Jill Green had plotted a 3.3mile walk with two focal points of particular interest. We were pleased to note Swifts wheeling in the cloudless blue sky and Holly Blue Butterflies at our feet.

From the car park we walked into the churchyard where we stopped to admire the community garden created from an old allotment that had not been used for many years. We also paused to admire the downland views from the footpath that headed down hill through a Jigsaw woodland to the valley before climbing through a wood to another footpath leading down to the river Yar.

We walked the riverbank hoping to see the flash of a Kingfisher but we were unlucky, and then into Alverstone.

Crossing the road onto the cycle path, beside the wetlands cared for by Wight Nature Fund where we could see Highland Cattle grazing. It is very important to protect these wetlands as 95% of such areas have been drained. Many birds were seen. Then on to a footbridge, where some young lads were fishing, and on to Skinners wildflower meadow **(Photo p.20)** where again we admired the flora. The next stop was the squirrel hide. A footpath now led us on the other side of the wetlands back into Alverstone over a boardwalk installed by the Ramblers a few years ago.

We crossed the road by the old railway station to the pond, which must have been a very busy place a long time ago. Jill produced pictures of the pond excavation carried out in 2005. The project started when the landowner decided to dig a fishing lake, the digger driver knew he would be digging through deep peat so when cobbles appeared he stopped. His knowledge of the area allowed him to decide this was different, and this is when they called for specialist help. They discovered it had been Iron Age river crossing, 2.5 thousand years ago. It was built by local craftsmen before the Romans came.

We then walked back to Queens Bower via a Bridle Way. Jill pointed out the sign NOT SUITABLE FOR VECHICLES. This has no effect on drivers as it is on their “car sat nav” and they get stuck much to the annoyance of the land owner.

Queens Bower is a hillock with a modern reservoir. In 1260 it was a favourite spot for the Queen of the Isle of Wight, Isabella de Fortibus, for hunting using Hawk on Hand. She was the last feudal owner of the Island.

We now walked down hill to Bretts Meadow and Youngwoods Copse where a seat is in memory of Dave Green, Jill’s husband. He was the Warden. Jill and Dave worked so hard to improve the copse and meadow, arranging cattle to graze, planting new trees, clearing the old to allow more light on to the woodland floor.. This year Orchids have returned, butterflies and squirrels have an improved habitat. Wight Nature Fund own the water meadow and copse. Wight Wildlife, and the Natural History and Archaeological Society, work as a partnership.

We then walked up hill to Hill Farm but no pigs or geese to welcome us, back down hill again past the old thrashing machine to the Jigsaw woodland, then returning uphill to the car park.

Jill Green

Archaeology

Archaeological Activities

We have continued our exploration of the Island landscape to look for evidence of ancient activities, notably between Castle Haven and St. Catherine's Lighthouse. Pottery sherds from a range of periods were found but not in defined contexts.

Below The Ground

We have continued to develop our expertise with the Geophysics equipment despite the extremes of weather experienced this winter. We worked through the bitterly cold weather on Gander Down, a spot particularly vulnerable to the northerly and offshore winds, before the bird-nesting season sent us elsewhere. Through the early summer we have been carrying out a magnetometer survey on a site at New Barn Farm, Calbourne. Cropmarks show up on aerial photography and it is proving to be a fascinating site with potentially significant features. The views to Newtown Creek, Headon Hill and Hengistbury Head, further indicate that this could have been a favoured site in prehistory. Work is continuing.

Thanks go to RSPB and Mr Spence for allowing us access to these sites.

Bouldnor Cliff

Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology again spent a week diving at the Mesolithic site beneath the Solent and several of us travelled to Keyhaven daily for the shore-based work. Photographing, drawing and excavating blocks of mud, sieving sediments and sorting sieved material may not seem glamorous tasks, but Gary Momber is always keen to explain the importance of this work as part of the whole survey. There is now a detailed plan of two distinct sites and evidence of wood working, quite probably boat-building. Gary showed us some of the pieces of wood newly excavated. With only about 100 pieces of worked Mesolithic wood identified in the UK, both the objects and the relatively well-preserved nature of the context is clearly of national importance. But time is not on our side, with the damage caused by currents, shipping and erosion putting pressure on the research. The BBC was filming the dive and this will probably feature in a programme about early landscapes, early next year.

21st February **Viking/Norse Myth and Religion**

That over 30 people braved the wind and rain to attend the meeting at Salisbury Gardens is a testament to the popularity of Alan Phillips' talks.

Alan explained that he planned to cover three aspects: religious belief, mythology and cults/practices. Source material is mainly from the Latin and Greek writers, from the thirteenth century Eddas and from the sagas which were written down in medieval times after generations of oral transmission.

The resulting information can often be confusing or contradictory and it seems there were regional variations in beliefs and practices. We were also warned that much of the information was not for the faint-hearted.

Alan then led us through a description of the various deities, supported by contemporary representations and more modern interpretations, usually Victorian. He also provided useful handouts with notes and a diagram of the Norse world view. These were relevant as they reflected the complex nature of interpretation and personal response. He also talked about fertility cults of the earth mother and how the numerous bog bodies found across Northern Europe seem to link to this.

Alan's talk was wide-ranging, covering Viking cosmology and creation myth, berserks, the afterlife, Ragnarok (the Death of the Gods) and a 10th century contemporary account by an Arab witness of a ship burial.

Death and rebirth is common to ancient religions. Ragnarok will not be the end of the world, as it will be followed by the 'New Order'.

Perhaps this was an appropriate way to end our last timetabled presentation at the Salisbury Gardens Headquarters!

Helen Jackson

Botany

10th January **Field Cow Wheat working party**

Unfortunately we had to cancel this meeting, as heavy snow was still lying.

30th January **Indoor meeting**

The first part of the meeting was the opportunity to receive updates on various activities the Section has been involved in, including news of interesting botanical finds during the last year.

Roger Herbert gave us a short presentation about the ecology and distribution of Peacock's Tail seaweed, which he is researching at the moment. There is the opportunity for members of the Section to be involved at one of this summer's field meetings.

Tina Whitmore gave us a short talk on **i spot**, a new web-based identification project (www.ispot.org) that enables photographs of unknown specimens to be uploaded for comment and identification by experts. It is based at the Open University. The potential of the project was shown by the identification of a slime mould (photographed by Judy and Tony Stoneley) within 24 hours of being put on to the site.

After tea Dave Trevan organised a quiz based on stunning plant photographs he took on a visit to Madeira last year, in which he tested our powers of observation and knowledge of botanical families. Eric Clement was the worthy winner.

7th February **Wood Calamint working party**

At the start of the meeting, we looked at the translocation areas that we began to establish using both scattered seed and transplants in February 2009. Two of these are showing some signs of success. We then put in more small plants grown from seed to reinforce these areas further. The remainder of the time was spent clearing the two laybys of last year's woody growth.

17th April **Locks Copse**

Sixteen members gathered at the Range house at Jersey Camp before setting off to explore Locks Copse. This is ancient woodland, largely Oak with a Hazel understorey. As spring was delayed this year, relatively few species were in bloom but some Wild Daffodils *(Narcissus pseudonarcissus)* remained, the Wood Anemones *(Anemone nemorosa)* were making a good show and a few Bluebells *(Hyacinthoides non-scripta)* were just out. Two species of the genus *Ribes* were found, Gooseberry (*R. uva-crispa*) and Redcurrant (*R. rubrum*) and the latter was well in flower. In total we recorded over 70 vascular plants so we had to use our skills of identifying from vegetative features to the full.

We also found evidence of gall-causing organisms, leaf miners and micro fungi having an effect on various plants. In total there were seven gall causers, four of which were associated with Oak, three leaf miners, one of which, *Cerodontha iridis,* was new for the site, and two microfungi. Other species of note included a Red Squirrel high in the tree tops and Orange Tip butterflies near the creek.

4th May **Newport Golf Course**

This meeting had to be rearranged at short notice, which meant that relatively few people were available. However, we were guided around the Course by one of the officials, who gave us some background to the management of the land, and we were able to make a good list of the species present. Some belts of woodland planting have taken place and a variety of ponds have been constructed on the Course. We were very pleased to discover a sizeable patch (about half a hectare) of acid grassland, which had developed on a former practice area. This contained a good show of Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and a number of other tiny plants which are characteristic of the habitat, such as Subterranean Clover *(Trifolium subterraneum)*, Bird's-foot *(Ornithopus perpusillus)*, Three-nerved Sandwort *(Moehringia trinerva),* Blinks *(Montia fontana)* and Slender Parsley-piert *(Aphanes australis).*

29th May **East Cowes Cemetery**

Although rain was threatening, a group of a dozen or so managed to record 120 species of plant in

this cemetery. Part of the grassland is managed for its botanical interest. The underlying geology is Bembridge limestone, which means there were a considerable number of calcium loving plants recorded, including Dwarf Thistle *(Cirsium acaule)*, Quaking Grass *(Briza media)*, Common Milkwort *(Polygala vulgaris)*, Fairy Flax *(Linum catharticum)* and Common Rockrose *(Helianthemum nummularia)*. Yellow Rattle *(Rhinanthus minor),* which is hemi-parasitic on grass, was just coming into flower in one section of the grassland. The walls provided a habitat for two species of fern, Wall Rue *(Asplenium ruta-muraria)* and Black Spleenwort *(A. adiantum-nigrum).*

Other items of interest included a rose that exhibited phyllanthy – leaves were developing in the centre of the flower, and two Common Blue butterflies that had just emerged. We also looked for the grave of John Saunt, the entomologist, but did not succeed in finding his headstone.

19th June **Castle Hill, Mottistone**

This area of acid grassland lies on dry lower greensand soils just to the west of Strawberry Lane. Common Cudweed *(Filago vulgaris)*, a nationally scarce plant was present in quantity and with some relatively large plants. A conspicuously hairy variety of Bird's Foot Trefoil *(Lotus corniculatus* var *hispida)* was re-found after its discovery last year. The naming of the plant caused some debate between national experts at the time. Other plants of interest included Spiked Sedge *(Carex spicata)* a dry grassland species; and two members of the borage family, Hound's Tongue *(Cynoglossum officinale),* which has maroon flowers and foliage smelling of mice, and Bugloss *(Anchusa arvensis),* which has bright blue flowers. The section of the identification book dealing with the speedwell family was well used as we identified five different species: Wall Speedwell *(Veronica arvensis)*, Germander Speedwell *(V. chamaedrys)*, Heath Speedwell *(V.offcinalis)*, Field Speedwell *(V. polita)* and Thyme-leaved Speedwell *(V. serpyllifolia).*

Anne Marston

Entomology

4th June **Jersey Camp – Moth Trapping**

This evening was well supported by members and visitors. Two traps were run, one on either side of Clamerkin Lake. The mercury-vapour lamp, sited by the education room, had the more powerful light and produced a considerably greater number of species. The room gave us a chance to study our haul of species in considerably more comfort than usual.

A number of very distinctive species were seen, and offered an ideal opportunity to show the range of patterns to be found in this group. Among the species seen were Clouded Silver, Chinese Character (which resembles a bird-dropping when at rest), Orange Footman, White Ermine and Scorched Wing. A Mocha and a Sallow Kitten were also seen, and there were five species of carpet to compare including Broken-barred and Silver-ground Carpets. The most interesting species of the night was probably the Brussels Lace, a new species for many of those present.

Fine though the moths were, the highlight was the evening itself. An awe-inspiring night sky, with at least three Nightingales in full song, made this one of those occasions when you would not want to be anywhere else, although a location some feet away from a very cockchafer and midge-rich moth trap was perhaps the ideal spot.

Very many thanks to David and Stuart at the Camp for arranging and setting up for this very successful visit, the first of three scheduled for this season.

7th June **Brett's Meadow**

This afternoon meeting was arranged to look at the meadow and at Youngwoods Copse, which separates it from Alverstone Garden Village. In the end this grassland, in the ownership of Wight Nature Fund, was so rich for insects that we concentrated all our efforts here. Of the sites visited in recent years by the section this was one of the best for the sheer range of species, on a day that was bright rather than sunny.

Seven day-flying moths were found including Bloodvein, Silver-y, and Silver-ground Carpet. A couple of distinctive micromoths were identified. *Nemophora degeerella* with huge antennae, and golden

yellow stripes on each wing, has been common in the first half of this summer. A rarer species *Batia lomboella* gave us only the third Island record since the Second World War. Three damselflies were recorded, while among butterflies there were a couple of Meadow Browns and good numbers of Common Blues. Among the butterflies identified were a couple of distinctive species *Helophilus pendulus*, and *Dasysyrphus tricinctus*. Another easily identifiable species was the Red and Black Froghopper *Cercopis vulnerata*. Less spectacular but more unusual was a record of *Conosanus obsoletus*, a plant hopper, which was only the fourth record in the last century, although this species was reported by Morey to be very common.

Most of us will remember two other sightings for a long time. There were good numbers of wood-crickets on barer patches in the meadow, and this was an excellent opportunity to study this species in a location which clearly has a healthy population of this interesting species. A truly revolting sight was that of one of our largest Craneflies, *Tipula maxima*, struggling to cope with what appeared to be a giant orange football at the back of its head. Closer inspection, some excellent photos by Dave Dana and an enquiry to the Natural History Museum has shown that this was a large cluster of ectoparasitic larvae of *Trombidioidae* (mites), on a scale, which has rarely been recorded. It is not often that one's heart goes out to a Cranefly, but today was an exception.

22nd June **Mottistone Common**

Six members met for this meeting in glorious sunshine. The group started in the car park by the Manor, and spent a couple of hours looking at insect life on the lower slopes of the Common leading up to the Longstone. Yellow Shell and Speckled Yellow were distinctive moths and once again we noticed *Nemophora degeerella*, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Large Skipper were all in evidence and there were good numbers of Dark Bush Crickets to be seen, and a single Common Groundhopper, as well as the distinctive marked hoverfly *Volucella pellucens*. Among the bugs seen were the Squash Bug, *Coreus marginatus*, and examples of the Gorse Shield-bug and the Forest Shield-bug. At least ten different beetles were observed, including a number of examples of the Click-beetle *Athous haemorrhoidalis*. We were also able to admire a Lace-bug which is specific to Spear Thistle, *Tingis cardui*.

A Great Spotted Woodpecker feather was found on the path in front of us, and a number of Linnets were to be found over the common.

Richard Smout

Geology

17th January **Fossils: collecting, Preparing, Preserving and Recording**.

It is a bright winter afternoon. Those of us who arrive early sit near the tall window at the back of the lecture room in the Coastal Visitors' Centre that dominates Ventnor's Eastern Cliffs, soaking up the sunshine and admiring the wonderful view of the coastline to the west. Paul Newton and Cathy Adamou, of the Geological Society, Isle of Wight, are setting up their fossil samples and tools on one side of the long tables that fill the centre of the room. Huge photographs of Ventnor about a hundred years ago decorate the walls: the Esplanade and beach crowded with people, a carriage driving along the High Street, the Western Cliff before it was subsumed by the Falaise car park. We realise how much we are going to miss these fascinating pictures, this beautiful room with its wonderful views, this fine and unusual building.

But now everything is set out and Paul is ready to begin. He is going to give us some tips on how to make the best of a fossil collection. Preserving fossils has long been a mystery to me, and this is why I have asked Paul to give us the benefit of his long and broad experience. This afternoon he is going to take us through the steps of collecting, preparing, preserving and recording fossils.

COLLECTING: Basal chalk is Paul's speciality. This is to be found from Steephill Cove in Ventnor westward, at St Catherine's Point and at Bonchurch. To extract fossils from the glauconitic marl you need a hammer and chisel. This is the first layer of chalk that was laid down. The East Devon-Dorset border is famous for its basal chalk. Here you can find ammonites, the best specimens being the darker ones that contain more calcium phosphate and are less likely to be damaged. Ninety million years ago, during the Cretaceous period, sea levels were rising and storms often occurred. These ammonites were

washed around in silt and buried quickly. Ammonites are molluscs and closely resemble the squid and octopus. These cephalopods are intelligent: the octopus is known to be good at problem solving. Ammonites were masters of jet propulsion. They could squeeze into very small spaces by changing shape. Their shell consists of a body chamber and many buoyancy chambers. By dispelling water from these chambers to make them lighter, they could rise, and by replacing air with water, they could sink, as they propelled themselves through the sea.

Paul advises that we keep some of the matrix in which the fossil is embedded, though this is hard, as fossils tend to fall out. He showed us an ammonite in jet from Whitby. Fossils in iron pyrite, known as 'Fool's Gold', are very attractive, but they disintegrate quickly when exposed to the air. The pine raft at Hanover Point that we visited with Paul and Cathy is fossilised wood full of iron pyrite. And north of the chalk on the Isle of Wight there are clay beds with a lot of pyrite, golden shells.

PREPARATION: After extracting a fossil from the rock, dry it off and decide whether or not it is worth preserving. If you think it is, you need to decide on the most appropriate method. If the fossil breaks while drying out, you can always glue it back together.

Paul showed us his fossil preserving toolbox. This contains the following tools:

- dental picks for cleaning specimens: this is slow and painstaking work, but worth it where there is fine detail;

- an electrical engraver with a diamond tipped point. You must be very careful, as this is very powerful and can shatter fossils. However, you can adjust its strength. Another problem is the vibration that causes numbness in the operator's hands and arms;

- an air chisel, like a pen, that is far more gentle.

- wet and dry sandpaper and the chemical serum oxide to polish a fossil once it is cleaned, and a felt pad to give it a mirror polish finish.

PRESERVING: To preserve a fossil in iron pyrite, Paul uses 5% Paraloid B72 crystals to 95% acetone, a solvent. Chandleries sell it. Paraloid shows up detail in a fossil and will also glue together a broken specimen. But first remove any of the matrix that you do not want to preserve. Museums frown on the use of chemical preservatives. They use temperature and humidity controlled cabinets instead, but these cost about five thousand pounds each. PVA glue and superglue can also be used to preserve fossils, but Paul does not recommend them for health and safety reasons, and they are also very powerful and cannot be reversed. To unglue something, for example individual ammonite chambers that are stuck together, you can steep them in a bath of acetone. Iron rust on a fossil can be halted using a thin solution of acetone. But the only way to preserve fossilised wood is to keep it in salt water. The pine logs at Hanover point are an example of wood turned into silica. Bacteria may be responsible for breaking down fossilised wood. You can preserve it in white vinegar.

RECORDING: Paul has set up a computer database, using Microsoft Office Access, to catalogue his fossil collection. His data fields include: date found, identification of specimen, type of rock it came from, location. The Isle of Wight could be divided into squares to help identify the location. Each specimen can be labelled and given a classification number that is also recorded on the database. One advantage of keeping a computer database is that you can conduct an instantaneous search for all specimens of a certain type, found in a specific place, or in a particular kind of rock. You could even request records satisfying several criteria: for example, all ammonites in your collection found in glauconitic marl at St Catherine's Point from 01.01.2005 to 31.12.2009. You could include notes on the method of preparation and preservation of each of your finds in separate fields on your database, as well as any difficulties you encountered.

This was a fascinating talk, attended by some twenty of our Society's members. I doubt whether I was the only one to find some of these preparation and preservation techniques daunting, but I can now better appreciate the hard work and skill that has gone into producing the amazingly detailed and polished exhibits that Paul and Cathy brought along to show us.

14th March **Fossil Hunting at St Catherine`s Point**

A mild and sunny afternoon in the Undercliff: green terraces rising up above the rock-piled shore, up and up until they reach the towering wall of sandstone whose summit enters a clear blue sky. The landscape is awe-inspiring. If this were Ireland or Scandinavia, it would be the site of legends, home to giants and trolls. And here we are, dwarfed by this backdrop: fifteen humans and one patient dog, clambering over boulders near the Lighthouse, searching for buried treasure.

Paul Newton, our guide from the Geological Society IW, describes the composition of the cliffs at this western extremity of the Undercliff as horizontal layers of greensand, with a band of gault clay in between, topped by a layer of chalk. Gault clay is the notorious "blue slipper" that helps to produce spectacular landslips in the Undercliff. Paul points out that every rock on this beach has fallen from that towering cliff. And all the land that formed these green terraces fell from there, too. It has been slipping ever since the last Ice Age, some ten thousand years ago. More specifically, the lowest layer of rock and the oldest is glauconitic marl. Above that is grey chalk, then a layer of chalk marl, and at the top white chalk that is almost pure calcium carbonate. The boulders crowding the shore are an assortment of these.

The glauconite marl is clay, ninety million years old, laid down in the Cretaceous period. It is packed with ammonites, gastropods, sharks' teeth and shells. The maximum thickness of a layer is eleven feet. Paul says that this rock is under-studied and he has discovered three new species of ammonite in it. When you break the rock's surface, it turns bright green. Glauconite is a mineral that contains millions of crystals. They are black until broken. It is formed from the organic remains of many sea creatures. The nodules in the rock are composed of calcium phosphate, also from organic remains. It used to be cut out of rocks and crushed, to be spread over fields, but this was uneconomic. This rock is easy to break into with hammer and chisel, but many of the fossils it contains are already broken, or they break during extraction. Paul uses a nail punch, with a sharpened point he made, to cut out small shells. Species of ammonite to be found in these rocks are: *Schloenbachia variens* a common ammonite and *Schloenbachia coupei*

Margaret Nelmes

Ornithology

January

This meeting was cancelled because of the dangerous conditions resulting from the snow**.**

13th February **Seaview.**

Fifteen people met in Bluett Avenue on a cold but bright morning for a sea watch, then a walk along the sea front and along the lanes and footpaths for a circular walk in Seaview. As it was bitingly cold we did not last long with the sea watch although we did spot Brent, Red Breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant. A new member wanted to see Sanderling and sure enough 15 obliged and turned up on the tide line opposite the Hersey Reserve, as did 18 Oystercatcher. There was not much activity on the Reserve although there were at least 5 Little Grebe feeding busily, 2 Mute Swan and the usual Mallard. A Buzzard perched low down in a tree for the entire time we were there. Back along the sea front we saw a Grey Heron and two Little Egret as well as Black-headed Gull and Herring Gull. When we walked up Oakfield Road we stopped and looked at the pond in the field next to Flamingo Park as there was a large number of ducks and geese. Some were obviously escapees from the Park eg: 10 Snow Goose, 3 Bar Headed Goose and at least one Swan Necked Goose. With them were 2 Shoveller, 1 Pintail, Tufted Duck and Mallard and other ducks we were unable to identify. The cold weather we had during January seemed to have reduced the number of the regular small birds however we did manage to pick up on a number of Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long Tailed Tit, a Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Redwing, Robin and Dunnock. Whilst walking along the footpath along side the Westbrook estate we saw a Red Squirrel running about up in the trees. During the course of the morning we saw 43 species of birds.

21st March **Shepherd's Chine**

Fourteen members met at Shepherd's Chine on a lovely sunny morning, the day after heavy rain so the ground was very wet. We took footpaths inland to Samber Hill and Dungewood Lane returning to our cars via Little Atherfield and Compton Fields. At the beginning of our walk we saw a flock of 120 Starling briefly gathering on the telegraph wires and then saw on the farm buildings at Compton Fields a lovely male Black Redstart. In the adjacent field were a Dunnock and Pied Wagtail. At various times during the walk Yellowhammer was heard and a female seen on an overhead power line. A Raven was spotted sitting on the cliff edge and later seen flying near one of the many reservoirs in the area. At one of these we saw a pair of Wheatear on the bank. The first arrivals of the spring had only been reported four days before. A Cormorant, Mallard, Coot and Little Grebe were also seen on the reservoirs. A lone Lapwing was in one of the large fields where we saw two Hares, later another Hare was seen running backward and forwards across a field – a mad march Hare perhaps? Earlier in the walk a Buzzard was seen, however a further two pairs were later seen flying over a flock of sheep, with Rooks mobbing them. During the course of the walk we also saw at least 3 Kestrel and a Sparrowhawk. Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge were in the fields as were many Skylarks and a Meadow Pipit was heard. Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Linnet and Goldfinch represented the finches. A Grey Heron brought the number of species to 36.

23rd May **Hamstead**

Fourteen members met on a beautiful morning at the car park in Hamstead Drive for a walk to Hamstead. Elaine arranged with the National Trust for us to park a few cars at their private car park at Hamstead Quay which enabled us to enjoy a three hour circular walk via Lower Hamstead Farm to Hamstead, Hamstead beach and on to Hamstead Quay. During the course of the morning we saw but mainly heard 38 species of birds. Many Blackcaps were singing throughout our walk as were Common Whitethroat. At a stop in a pine copse overlooking the sea we heard a Willow Warbler singing. Besides hearing and seeing a number of male Pheasant we also saw a Red-legged Partridge. Only one Sandwich Tern was seen fishing in the Solent. In the dense undergrowth beside Hamstead beach a Nightingale treated us to its wonderful song. Two Red Squirrels were also seen.

11th June **Mottistone Common**

Six people met on a lovely mild, still evening at 9.30 pm for a walk on the Common. We could hear the music from the pop festival in Newport but this did not disturb the birds. Having walked under the trees from the little car park at the bottom of Strawberry Lane we emerged into the open and stopped to listen and were soon rewarded with our first churring of the evening. Although there were plenty of moths about the Nightjars were not obliging in flying where we could see them. It is difficult to say how many males we heard during the course of our walk but there were at least four. Also, a Barn Owl was spotted flying towards Mottistone.

Jackie Hart

Sending in your records

Below is a list for those wishing to send in records to the Society, showing who deals with each group of species. In some cases we lack a specialist Recorder, these species and general enquiries can be sent to Colin Pope and Anne Marston at the IWC Countryside Section, who will try to help. When sending records please try to include as much detail as possible; this makes them far more useful. Please include if you can :-

Species = name of species **Recorder** = whoever saw the species (and identified it?)
Date = as nearly as possible **Location** = name of the place
OS grid ref = if possible **Comment** = anything you like!

Species group	Send to	Contact details
Red Squirrels	Helen Butler	PO Box33 Ryde, Isle of Wight PO33 1BN Tel : 611003 E : wightsquirrels@hotmail.com
Bats Flowering plants and ferns Lichen	Colin Pope	Tel : 823099 E : colin.pope@iow.gov.uk
Marine Mammals	Mike Cahill	Tel : 248054 E : cahill@onwight.net
All other Mammals Reptiles & Amphibians	Richard Grogan	Tel : 533180 E : richardg@hwt.org.uk
Butterflies Moths	Andy Butler Ian Fletcher	Tel : 854925 E : ruamoth@googlemail.com
Dragonflies, Damselflies (*Odonata*)	Elaine Rice	Tel : 730187 E : erice73737@aol.com
Beetles (*Coleoptera*) Bees, Wasps and Ants (*Hymenoptera*) Flies (*Diptera*) Grasshoppers and Crickets (*Orthoptera*)	Adam Wright	Tel : 856319 E : aswrightento@yahoo.co.uk
Bugs (*Hemiptera/Homoptera*) Gall-causing organisms	David Biggs	Plum Tree Cottage Albert Road Gurnard, IOW PO31 8JU Tel : 292595
Fleas (*Siphonaptera*)	Bob George	Contact HQ (Thurs a.m.) Tel : 282596
Marine invertebrates Algae (esp. Seaweeds)	Roger Herbert	Tel : 521040 E : rjhh@islewight.freeserve.co.uk
Fungi	Colin Pope / David Biggs	as above
Mosses and Liverworts (*Bryophytes*)	Lorna Snow	Tel : 863704 E : lornasnow@madasafish.com

General enquiries to Parks & Countryside Section, Isle of Wight Council
Enterprise House, Monks Brook, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5WB
Tel : 01983 823893 E : lrc@iow.gov.uk

Membership Secretaries` Notes

New Members

Deaths

Society Officers

President Mrs. J. Jones, Woodlands Cottage, Marvel Lane, Carisbrooke, PO30 3DT
General Secretary Mrs. L. Snow, Ein Shemer, Upper Hyde Farm Road, Shanklin, PO37 7PS
Treasurer Miss J. Hart, 18 Cherrytree Road, Nettlestone, Seaview, PO34 5JF
Membership Secretaries Mrs T. Goodley & Mr L. Tiller, 18 Pell Lane, Ryde, PO33 3LW

Society Address :-

Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society,
Unit 16, Prospect Business Centre,
Prospect Road, Cowes PO31 7AD

Tel:01983 282596 Email: iwnhas@btinternet.com Web address: www.iwnhas.org

Next Bulletin

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for 1st July 2010 to 31st December 2010 should be sent to:-

M. Cahill . 4 Nodes Road, Cowes, IOW. PO31 8AB
Telephone 01983 – 248054
Email - cahill@onwight.net

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be **12th January 2011**