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# Bulletin

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## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Firstly, thank you to all of you who have sent in records for our Wildlife Watch project. It will take a while for these to be analysed but you will be hearing more about the results of this survey in the coming year.

A lot of effort goes into drawing up our meetings programme twice a year and it always surprises me how many meetings are held over the year. There is at least one meeting almost every week and the range of topics covered is wide. Section meetings tend to be more specialist and give members the time and opportunity to explore their particular interests in more detail, to visit places which otherwise might not be easy to reach, and to learn from others with perhaps greater specialised knowledge.

General meetings cover the whole range of natural history, archaeology, history and geology and are designed to attract a wider audience. Over the past year we have been treated to some wonderful experiences. It is perhaps invidious to draw attention to a few of these at the expense of others but, nevertheless I will do so.

Our tenth Frazer Memorial Lecture in March was a stunning success. Julian Richards gave a riveting presentation on archaeology to a packed Medina Theatre. Clive Chatters and Richard Reeves led a hugely enjoyable walk around the New Forest in May to look at the landscape and wildlife. The seashore meeting on Bembridge Ledges, led by Becky Cooksley in June, was a most enjoyable and relaxing morning, enlivened by splendid views of the Round the Island Yacht Race. Alan Outen, our guest fungi expert, led an informative and highly entertaining all-day foray in Parkhurst Forest in October in excellent weather conditions with a good range of participants of all ages. In November, Tony Tutton entertained us with a talk of his three month adventures away from work with the National Trust enjoying the landscapes and wildlife of the Iberian peninsular. In December, we were treated to an

in-depth study of the geology, people and biodiversity of Madagascar from Scott Armbruster and Mary Edwards, which proved to be a thought provoking revelation for all of us.

A lot of thought goes into providing a rich and varied programme and if you are reading this and are one of the people who rarely turns out for meetings, I hope you are kicking yourself! Please take time to look at the latest programme of meetings because there are plenty more interesting and informative meetings planned for 2008. You would be more than welcome to come along!

Colin Pope

### **Money for Nothing!**

**Gift Aid on Subscriptions** - We are appealing to any Taxpaying Members who have not so far signed a Gift Aid Form to think about signing the enclosed Form. This enables the Society to claim back 28p for every £1 donated.

From the new tax year in April 2008, the amount we can claim is being reduced, and as we are constantly faced with increased costs for postage, printing etc, the money we can claim is an important bonus.

Our annual subscriptions have not been increased since 1999, nearly 9 years. The money we can claim on the Gift Aids has helped us to keep these costs down. We were able to claim £963.32 in 2006 and hope to claim back £1226.92 in 2007 (due to a donation of £500).

We would be very grateful if you would consider signing and returning the form to me as soon as possible.

Mrs Toni Goodley (Membership Secretary)  
18 Pell Lane  
Ryde  
Isle of Wight PO33 3LW

**NB Please note that if you have already signed a form we will not have included one in your package.**

# NOTICE BOARD

## AN APPEAL

We have such a varied and interesting programme of General Meetings arranged by our Programme Secretary and it is a shame that not all of them have been written up over the last few years. Are there any members prepared to do the write-ups? One person may think it too onerous, so perhaps a few could form an ad hoc group and arrange between themselves to cover the meetings for the Bulletin. In the first place please contact Lynda Snaith on 298162 so that you can be put in touch with one and another.

## SOCIETY LIBRARY

It has been brought to our notice that new members may not always be aware of the excellent library we have at Society HQ at Ventnor. This is a private library for the use of members only and has several hundred books on all subjects covered by our Society's Sections and Groups, most of which are available for borrowing. The Library is open on Thursdays from 10.00 am to early afternoon, or by arrangement with Anne Cahill – tel; 248054

## PIED WAGTAIL SURVEY (see Bulletin Notice Board Aug 07)

If you see a Pied Wagtail with a ring on a leg could you please let us know where and when the bird was seen, and on which leg the yellow and/or red coloured ring is.

With thanks

Dr Anthony Roberts 865420 and Dr Daphne Watson 731114

## A GRATEFULL MEMBER

*Extract from a letter from Mrs Gwynneth der Parthog – Member since 1988*

“Dear Mrs Goodley

I must face it! I left Ventnor three years ago and have decided that it is time to resign.

The latest Proceedings and Bulletin were sent to me by post and they weighed a lot (but how much I am enjoying them). I shall reimburse the postage.

I am so proud of the Society. Its standards have always been of the highest, its work so valuable. As a humble rank and file member, all I used to do was to turn up and learn and feel privileged and delighted with the meetings. I miss you all very much! I shall never forget, but am too old, too far away and failing.

Therefore I send you all my very best wishes and also a contribution to the funds.”

A cheque for £500.00 was enclosed.

Tony Goodley

## Country Notes

**A Sylvan Tour** - Again, I make no apologies for extolling the natural delights of Newport, for they are unknown. A visit to our capital town is almost exclusively for shopping, yet we offer the most diverse and exciting sylvan tour in the Island. The head down, backside up brigade could comfortably encompass the route in under an hour, but we, with a declared interest in our environment could not exhaust its delights in a day long visit.

An excellent starting point is to pick up the former Newport/Ryde rail track at the top of Snook's Hill, this can be accessed from the Riverside Centre or from Victoria Road. Traffic free apart from crossing Halberry Lane and depart from this sylvan haven by a footpath that will take you into the Medina Arboretum based on the former Fairlee House grounds, where the old orchard trees are retained. Plums in variety, Apples, Quinces and Turkish Hazelnuts. Additionally many modern and rare species; Indian Bean Tree, Foxglove Tree, Wellingtonia and Swamp Cypress, putting its knees up out of the water to breathe. An inexhaustible collection that can leave you pondering the day long.

Seaclose Recreation Ground, the Island home of the Horse Chestnut whose future is threatened by a tiny moth, *Cameraria*. Who will emerge victorious only the future will decide. Before leaving identify the Maytenus and Willow-leaved Pear and if the House Martins are in residence on the Travel Lodge, marvel at their ingenuity in overcoming the problem of constructing a nest on a modern building.

Finally into Newport Cemetery, created as an arboretum cum cemetery, approximately 1860, with the objective of winning people away from the tradition of being buried in the shadow of the church.

You may not have identified them all, but you will have passed more than a hundred species of trees and shrubs.

**Rabbit Spoil** - If an archaeologist would look at the spoil removed by rabbits in The Shrubbery (Clarken Lane) on the east side of Carisbrooke Castle. It is neither top nor sub-soil, but would appear to be a deposit and may well indicate past activity by man.

**Stop, Look & Listen** - Warning notices adopted from the days of the Island railway network, to be seen wherever a footpath crossed the track, "Stop, Look and Listen." But the railway ceased along that section between Shide and Blackwater half a century ago. To be told that trolls were living beneath the bridge was someone's flight of fancy until you see the sculpture in stone. ( **Photo**, page 17 ) It is magnificent and enhanced by a nearby picnic table with fish seats. The warnings appear again, one with a picture of a dragonfly and another with a butterfly . A new information board informs you of other wildlife and two tree stumps with mushroom tops and a dragonfly seat, provide rest for the weary. Well worth a visit. ( **Photos**, page 17 )



Information board

What surprises me is that these former rail tracks have never been named. To describe the one under present discussion you need to describe the settlements formerly served by the train. I can think of no more of an appropriate name than "Alder Way," for they accompany you the entire distance.

**Spotted Laurel, *Aucuba japonica*** - Frequently seen as a constituent of a living screen in front of Victorian houses, of which there is an excellent example on Carisbrooke Mall. Introduced in the 18th. century from Japan, it was not realised for more than half a century that these were females and when the plain leaved male was introduced, beautiful scarlet berries were added.

It is not only birds that show colour variation in the sexes.

**An Unnamed Watercourse** - It would appear that a tiny waterway making its way through an urbanised area is beneath the status of requiring a title, but not so the bridges that cross it. What is not realised, but possibly appreciated, is the effect on its accompanying vegetation, some of the finest trees in the West Wight.

A spring appears at Stonewinds Farm, Totland, surrounded by a diversity of species of mature trees. It is possible that the history of the planting is known ?

The course of the waterway is to Sheepwash Farm and by the terrace of cottages in Summers Lane. Is there still evidence of a sheep dip at Sheepwash ?

After leaving Sheepwash Farm the water runs in tandem with Spinfish Lane, certainly an Ancient Trackway. The lane is associated with a public house, first world war vintage, that stood at the eastern end of the lane. It is doubtful if such an important highway was unnamed before the appearance of the public house. Before leaving Spinfish, notice must be taken of the magnificent group of Aspens, *Populus tremula*. Fully fifty, perhaps sixty feet in height, all waving a welcome in the slightest breeze.

At this point the stream passes under Kings Bridge and immediately nurtures the finest avenue of Horse Chestnuts in the Island. Unfortunately, perhaps for not much longer, the moth *Cameraria* has reached this extremity of the Island and if the devastation is similar to that at St. Lawrence, where the trees are brown and beneath are a carpet of dead leaves, it will be a sorry site. Will the Chestnuts survive ? Only time will tell and on present evidence there will be casualties. The trees so weakened that fungus will deal the death blow.

The object of this story is not to draw attention to what is little more than a trickle, but its dramatic effect on its accompanying vegetation.

**Hornets** - A possible sighting of such an insect on the Carisbrooke Estate and in August raises the question are they present in the Island. I am aware of only one authentic record of a hornet's nest in the Island and this was confirmed by Oliver Frazer.

Sightings of this insect are numerous and almost exclusively confined to autumn, when queen wasps are on the wing. Show me a colony of hornets, perhaps in a tree or building and I shall be convinced. After all they are present in the New Forest.

Regarding the sighting in August, is it possible that in this extremely wet summer wasps are producing their queens early to ensure the continuity of the species?

**Robin's Pincushion** - A quite common gall on roses in the countryside, but we have no record of the gall on cultivated roses. A request to see a growth on a rose in a Newport garden proved to be a Robin's Pincushion and would appear to be our first record on a cultivated rose. Close inspection showed that the growth was on a suckering from the rootstock.

**The Cabbage Palm** *Cordyline australis* - This tropical looking plant is amongst the commonest in our gardens throughout the Island. For such commercial success, the advertising must have been extensive and extremely successful. Has anyone information regarding the introduction of this species?

**Trees at Osborne** - Here is the finest collection of trees on the Island, simply because they have space to display their full potential. It would appear that none pre-date the Royal occupation, yet several exceed five metres in circumference measured at one metre height, and the date of planting is shown.

Two Wellingtonia's, one planted by Queen Victoria and the other by Prince Albert, only three years separating their introduction, yet showing a remarkable difference in growth. The Prince Albert tree is sheltered by the house, whereas the planting by Queen Victoria is fully exposed to the cold north easterly winds.

Perhaps issuing a caution regarding the estimating of the age of a tree is a Monterey Pine, dated 1906, yet exceeding five metres in circumference measured as above.

The diversity of species is bewildering, but amongst the sylvan extravaganza there are specimens that command attention, such as the Cedars, *Cedrus libani*, four specimens planted on a single lawn, yet with sufficient space to display their full potential and command attention.

Of course, there are the rarities, such as Ironwood Tree, Handkerchief Tree and Liquidambar, again free-standing and displaying themselves at their best. Anyone with even a casual interest in trees this is worth the entrance fee alone.

**A Flowering Ash** - A rare mature tree in the Island and worth a visit when flowering in late May. The

Common Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, is wind pollinated, but the Flowering Ash, *Fraxinus ornus* is pollinated by insects and is both scented and showy. The specimen at the junction of Orchard Road and Connaught Road, East Cowes, is mature but possibly not of an age to have been planted in the botanic garden era. A second specimen can be seen on the car park of Marks and Spencer, although flowering it is little more than a sapling in comparison.

**A Grand Finale** - On October 17<sup>th</sup> 2007, we decided to walk the ancient highway from Brooke to Compton Farm via Dunsbury. Apart from the spectacular scenery it was far from our most interesting walks until we reached the end of our journey, Compton Farm. Here in the farmyard were two Black Redstarts, three species of Wagtail; Pied, Grey and White, six Stonechats and a late Wheatear.

In the farmyard stands a milestone, reading Freshwater 3 miles, Chale seven miles. Mrs. Phillips informs me that her husband retrieved it from the beach at Brook. Would that location indicate its former position?

Bill Shepard

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### **Bouldnor Cliff Underwater Excavation**

The Society was kindly invited by the Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology to participate in the exciting Bouldnor Cliff excavations, a site which is revealing itself to be of increasing importance for Mesolithic archaeology and which is regularly making it onto local TV news. Several of our members crossed over to Keyhaven in July and August, where they played an important role in sieving and sifting through the sediment from the excavation site. Owing to his strong nautical background, Chris Ratsey, a Society as well as HWTMA member, was invited to participate in the diving itself: he gives a brief account here, while Helen Jackson, one of the land-based volunteers, fills in on some of the finds revealed by the sieving process.

#### **The Dive at Bouldnor**

My day started by being collected by RIB [rigid inflatable boat] from Yarmouth and being taken out to the dive boat anchored off Bouldnor where I was introduced to Garry Momber and Jan Gillespie from the HWTMA. The dive boat was located at the position determined the previous day (this was their second day on site) and soon a pair of divers were in the water checking on the items that had been positioned the previous day. It was soon found that some of the markers on the site had gone astray, so time had to be spent getting the exact position of the area that was to be dived on.

Eventually the archaeology could begin, it was decided to inspect the 'hearth and platform area' and items of wood, which had man-made marks on, were brought up alongside worked flints and flint that had been heated. Garry then requested the divers to take down metal boxes which had been inserted into the cliff at various points and samples of the vertical sections obtained were taken to Keyhaven to be inspected - I believe some very interesting artifacts were found, with a possible early boat which had been 'hollowed out' by hot stones/flints. After a busy day's diving I was then returned to Yarmouth by the dive boat.

Chris Ratsey

#### **The Keyhaven Processing**

I took part in the second week of land-based support work, travelling over to Lymington with four other Society members. We were based at the Scout hut at Keyhaven and spent an enjoyable three days working outside in glorious weather. I think we were really fortunate to have been involved in what should prove to be nationally, if not internationally, important work. Excitement mounted during the week, as two 'hearth' sites were brought to the surface and the news of what may be the remains of a Mesolithic boat reached us. Garry Momber was clearly excited and discussed with us the significance of our work.

Our task was to excavate the chunks of sediment (each about a cubic foot) brought up from the

seabed. We measured, drew plans, photographed and trowelled through blocks, then we sieved the resultant sludge. A few flint flakes were found, some pieces of wood, burnt flint and charcoal and charred material, which disintegrated on excavation. The wood was particularly interesting as it may provide evidence for platforms constructed on the mud and will be examined in the lab for signs of working. Marine wildlife managed to survive in the mud - shrimps, lugworms, piddocks and various wriggling creatures, which were not always greeted with enthusiasm.

Penny Spikins came from York University to begin excavating one of the 'hearths', a loose term for a pit filled with charred stone. It was a privilege to be amongst the first to see these objects so soon after their recovery. (**Photos**, page 18)

Helen Jackson

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### **At Home with Wildlife**

With 21<sup>st</sup> century property developers giving little or no consideration to gardens, the residents of the flats where I live are most appreciative of our grounds. The biodiversity that occurs on the site is quite surprising for a well-developed residential area of Newport.

Grassed areas and boundary hedgerows consist of 86 species of wild flora, including 13 different grasses and 14 species of hedgerow trees and shrubs.

The usual vast array of common garden insects and invertebrates occur, as do frogs, lizards, Field Voles, dragonflies, day-flying moths, eleven species of butterflies and six ladybird species. Tall boundary hedgerows which produce flowers, fruit, berries, hips and haws provide much-needed food and shelter for over 20 species of birds including Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, Blackbirds, Starlings, Collared Doves, House Sparrows, Dunnocks, Robins and Wrens. Mallards and a cock Pheasant are regularly seen taking advantage of seed spillage from bird feeder boxes kindly supplied by thoughtful neighbours.

Buzzards are often observed soaring and circling on thermals directly overhead and on sunny summer days Swifts, Swallows and House Martins can be seen feeding. During most spring and summer evenings several Hedgehogs patrol the hedge bottoms in search of tasty morsels while bats and numerous species of moths go about their nocturnal activities.

All of this wildlife occurring beside a busy road close to Sainsbury's supermarket shows just how well nature can support and maintain itself in built up residential areas – if only left with enough space to do so.

Sue Blackwell

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### **An Excavation at Carisbrooke**

County Archaeologist Ruth Waller invited members of the Society to join her and Island archaeology graduate James Howe for a 10-day community archaeology excavation in Carisbrooke. A broader objective of the dig was to trial a system of community archaeology in advance of applications for external funding for one or more community archaeology projects.

#### **An Initial Assessment by Ruth Waller**

Following a Desk Based Assessment and Geophysical Survey of land at Carisbrooke High School Playing Fields, the County Archaeology Service carried out an excavation in September 2007 to identify the presence of archaeological remains from the Medieval Leper Hospital. The Project was also a Training Excavation for volunteers from the IWNHAS and the IOW Industrial Archaeology Society. Eight trenches were excavated down to the natural clays of the Hampstead Beds and no evidence of the Leper Hospital was found, however a flint layer found in two trenches may be the remains of one of the

pre-18th century roads. Post Excavation work is being carried out at present and a report of the excavation will be published in the Proceedings in due course.

### **Some Personal Views of the Dig**

A rota of at least seven volunteers from the Society per day was drawn up, comprising the following 18 individuals, both long-term as well as newer Society members, some with considerable experience and others for whom this was their first proper excavation: Delian Backhouse-Fry, Alison Broome, David Burch, Pauline Charlton, Karen Cronin, Carol Flux, Helen Jackson, Lydia Jackson, Jan Jarvis, David Low, Jan Peters, Alan Phillips, Renella Phillips, Colin Piper, Chris Ratsey, Dawn Russell (who organised the rota), Robin Whitehead, and Diane Wilson-Greene. Several volunteers have been invited to contribute their personal experiences of the project.

**Chris Ratsey:** On the 3rd September about seven of us 'reported for duty'. After a talk from Ruth Waller about safety and which areas we were going to look at, we set to, using our theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to good use. First we measured out a 30x2 metre trench orientated N/S, but the turf removing machine failed miserably - 'wrong type of turf' we were told by the people from whom it had been rented!! So it was down to good old spades and physical labour. Then over the next two days we removed the topsoil carefully with trowels, going down carefully to a sandy level and finally hitting clay. A sondage (small test pit) went in at the northern end but did not find anything significant. A few items such as bits of Verwood pottery came up, but all out of context. No sign of any buildings so regretfully it was decided to record and close down this trench. The trench looked a bit lumpy when we'd finished but it will flatten out.

We then moved 25 metres or so to the north and opened up two more trenches 2x2 metres in size and another one 4x2 metres. Again we went through the same layers of soil ending up with clay, although the students went down about 2.5 metres, going through the clay and finally ending up with a layer of river sediment. Again relatively few items, pottery and some flint scrapers but still out of context. I found a burnt brick and much to Ruth's delight some bones, but these turned out to be animal bones, possibly cooked on the fire which I'd uncovered.

The students were determined to find something so we moved some distance to the east and dug two more trenches 2x2 metres - again pottery and a piece of early medieval smoked glass, but no signs of the entrance gate to the hospital we had hoped for at this end of the field. Although what we were searching for wasn't found, the positive was that we now know that the leper hospital was not where the early maps showed it might be, but perhaps further excavations might find something.

**David Burch:** The site of the Carisbrooke leper colony may not have been found but at least we now know where it is not! We did however learn about sondage trenches, how to fill in context sheets, and how to level in our trenches with a dumpy level as well as the technique of using a trowel. Next time we carry out an excavation we should know what we are about. Turf cutting and re-laying is best not mentioned. We now look forward to the Yaverland Community Archaeological Project which I understand will go ahead once funding has been granted.

**Helen Jackson:** This was an excellent opportunity for me as a novice to learn a range of excavation techniques. Since we attended on a rota we did not all have the same experiences, but Ruth tried to give members a range of opportunities and always started the day with a site tour and update for those who had not been on site the previous day. She was always patient and didn't mind how often she had to repeat information or teach skills. Over the two weeks I learnt to de-turf, backfill and re-turf, and excavate with a trowel. I also learnt technical skills - siting a trench, reading site levels, measuring and recording stratigraphy. Naturally we became rather despondent as we reached yet another layer of natural clay, but Ruth pointed out that even eliminating this reputed location for the leper hospital provides useful information for the records. Also, she reminded us, "We don't dig for artefacts, we dig for stratigraphical relationships". Ruth is to be congratulated for her patience, cheerfulness and management of this activity (and of all the people involved). I hope such community excavations will become a regular feature. Thank you also to Dawn Russell for organising the rota.



**Alan Phillips:** I don't think anyone would deny that some parts of the dig were really quite tough, but at the same time it provided an invaluable experience from which everyone learnt a lot. Some took to it like ducks to water, but even those less practically inclined such as myself were happy to be part of an actual excavation at last, whatever the result, rather than just talking about it which we do most of the time. We were lucky in having in Ruth a leader who was well organised and thoroughly professional but also full of fun - indeed, there was much humour to be had on site alongside the more serious aims of the excavation. Archaeology graduate James Howe and his small team of students were inspirational, always digging at least twice as far down as the rest of us and coming up with creative ways of solving problems. I think most of us will now want to follow through in assisting him find the leper hospital - if it is to be found at all - as well as being keen for any new projects Ruth may have for us.

### Postscript

Ruth reports that she now believes that a cobbled flint surface that was found in two of the test pits to the east of the playing fields is probably the surface of a military road shown on some early military maps. Though more research will be required, this would indicate that the team *did* find some archaeology after all! (**Photos**, page 18)

Alan Phillips

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### Andy's Nature Notebook

Further to the records of Large Tortoiseshell (**Photo**, page 15) published in the last Bulletin I heard of one other which was seen at Atherfield Farm Reservoir by Graham Sparshot on the 15<sup>th</sup> July.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> July there was a Red-veined Darter in our garden, possibly a migrant.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August whilst filling my petrol tank at Whitwell Garage my wife and I saw a Banded Demoiselle fly across the forecourt and then on down the main road. This is not the first time I've seen this species of damselfly flying along a road; a few years ago I remember one flying up Lake Hill towards the Heights dodging through the traffic which was nose to tail at the time.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> August I saw a Great Black-backed Gull alight on the lower apron of the esplanade at Wheelers Bay. It had a Garfish in its bill which it was attempting to eat but with no success, as the beak of the Garfish stopped it going down the gull's throat. The gull then held the Garfish down with its feet and swiftly chopped it in to two pieces and then swallowed both halves. The interesting question is, how did it catch the Garfish in the first place?

On the 7<sup>th</sup> August I had a telephone call from Mrs Attrill who told me she had seen a Monarch butterfly (**Photo**, page 15) in the Ventnor Botanic Garden late that afternoon. This is a very unusual time of year to see this migrant so it was possibly a release or an escape from a butterfly house. Other reports came in over the next week or so of what were obviously the same butterfly and indeed my wife and I saw and photographed it as well. Its origin may possibly be a bit more interesting than usual as I have since learned that a fellow in Portsmouth is rearing butterflies (including Monarchs) for people who do not know any better to release at wedding celebrations. To say that this is irresponsible is putting it mildly. The butterflies are going to die very quickly but also could cause all sorts of problems for our indigenous butterflies. This is a practice to be condemned forthrightly as it is, in my opinion, unethical and unnecessary.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> August a friend of mine caught a Trigger fish on Mackerel feathers off Ventnor. These fish are usually caught in nets or, more often, found inside Lobster pots. They were unheard of 20 years ago but the numbers are increasing every year.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August I saw a Turnstone on Bonchurch beach.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August Geoff Blake, the Ventnor fisherman, showed me a Crawfish or Spiny Lobster (**Photo**, page 15) that he had caught in a Lobster pot set about a mile off St. Catherine's Point. This is a rare creature to see, and Roger Herbert informed me that two others have been landed this year on the Island.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August a Camberwell Beauty butterfly was seen at Sandford by Zena Cowley.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 1 saw three juvenile Shelduck on Luccombe beach. These could possibly have come from the colony at Culver Cliff.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September Ted Lyons saw and photographed a Swallowtail butterfly on Culver Down. This would definitely have been a migrant from the Continent. Another was recorded at Portland about the same date.

During the months from September to December there have been one or, sometimes, three Purple Sandpipers around the Wheelers Bay area and also a Kingfisher has occasionally flown into the Bay.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October I saw a Clouded Yellow with its upper forewings and hindwings white on one side, ie left hand, and the right hand wings bright lemon yellow. So it looked like half a 'helice' (the pale or white form of Clouded Yellow).

On 20<sup>th</sup> October Alan Clarke saw a Grey Seal at Rocken End, just off the beach.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November I was shown a Little Auk (**Photo**, page 15) by Tony Forster that had come ashore at Bonchurch. I went back next morning and found it dead on the beach amongst the rocks. It was not oiled and so cause of death is unknown but perhaps was exhaustion or starvation.

After the huge influx of Harlequin Ladybirds last October we were expecting a similar event this year. However, a relative few have been reported on the Island.

After the very early emergence of butterflies recorded this year there have been some very late sightings as follows:

Dingy Skipper on 28<sup>th</sup> August

Common Blue on 14<sup>th</sup> October

Wall on 26<sup>th</sup> October

Brown Argus on 26<sup>th</sup> October (National Record)

Sam Knill-Jones saw all these at Afton Down. In addition I saw a late Large White on 22<sup>nd</sup> November at Wheelers Bay and lastly a Peacock on 27<sup>th</sup> November.

Andy Butler

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### **Historic Lanes and Tracks Survey for the Historic Environment Action Plan**

The Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP) is a project of the County Archaeology and Historic Environment Service supported by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund and by LEADER+. The HEAP has produced Historic Environment Action Plan documents for 15 Historic Landscape Character Areas on the Isle of Wight and for several Historic Landscape Character Types, including roads, lanes and tracks.

On appointment as Project Officer in June 2006 I invited the Archaeology Group to carry out a survey of historic lanes and tracks that would feed into the HEAP. Work began with a meeting to decide on the scope and methods of the survey. We agreed to concentrate on rights of way rather than on metalled motor highways, and to use the Council's Definitive Map as the basis for all recording work. Separate forms were devised for desk top survey and field survey. The desktop survey aimed to determine the age of particular routes by reference to historic Ordnance Survey maps and other documents. The field survey aimed to identify the physical characteristics of selected routes. We realised that it would be impossible to complete the desk top survey for all parishes in the time available and that the number of routes we could survey on the ground would be comparatively small. We therefore aimed to sample the various Historic Landscape Character Areas on the Island.

As President of the Society Colin Pope gave his support to the project, attended planning meetings and advised on the survey forms. Alex Russell of the Council's Rights of Way Section also supported the project. Sheila Burch volunteered to act as Co-ordinator and handled the large numbers of completed survey forms.

In September 2006 a meeting was held at the Record Office where County Archivist and Society member Richard Smout introduced potential members of the recording team to historical sources likely to contain information on rights of way. At the end of the month I gave a presentation on the HEAP to the Archaeology Group and a good number of volunteers signed up at that meeting. In October 2006 we held a field survey training session to record Dark Lane, in Carisbrooke Parish.

By the end of 2006 the survey was well underway, with teams of desk top recorders meeting regularly at the Archaeological Centre and at the Record Office, and field survey teams working within a number of parishes. We also wished to record historic or local names for lanes and tracks. At the start of the survey Sheila Burch wrote to the County Press asking readers to contact her with local names for lanes and tracks. The response was limited but names sent in by County Press readers and Society members, or noted on historic Ordnance Survey maps, were added to the other survey data. Unusual names recorded included the following: 'The Gangings' (Seaview), 'Dirty Ditch Lane' (Niton), 'Brumble Lane' (Shorwell), 'Slinks' (Calbourne) 'Tickleberry Alley' (Bembridge), 'Bug Alley' (Bembridge), 'Shitten Lane' (Brook), 'Crittty Crat' (Brighstone) and 'Spinfish Lane' (Freshwater).

In the spring of 2007 the Botanical Section filled in survey forms for Froglands Lane and other routes around Carisbrooke to demonstrate the potential for recording flora as part of the survey. (Most of the Archaeology Group's field surveyors concentrated on identifying trees and shrubs although some added detailed lists of flora.)

By October 2007 desktop surveys had been completed or partly completed for eleven parishes or areas; these being Brading, Brighstone, Calbourne, Freshwater, Gatcombe, Godshill, Newchurch, Newport, Niton & Whitwell, Shalfleet and Ventnor. Field surveys of selected rights of way had been carried out in the parishes or areas of Bembridge, Brighstone, Freshwater, Godshill, Newchurch, Newport, Niton & Whitwell, Ryde (including St Helens) and Shorwell. Several recorders took photographs, many in digital format, and these formed an invaluable record in their own right.

At the end of October 2007 I gave a presentation at the Ventnor Coastal Centre to celebrate completion of the first phase of the survey, aimed at providing information for the HEAP. The survey information collected by the Archaeology Group will inform the HEAP document on Roads, Lanes and Tracks. However, this document will not contain detailed survey information but will provide a general historical overview, character assessment, discussion of conservation issues and suggestions for future management. A first draft of the Roads, Lanes and Tracks HEAP document has been prepared and can be viewed at [http://www.iwight.com/living\\_here/planning/Archaeology/historic.asp](http://www.iwight.com/living_here/planning/Archaeology/historic.asp) along with the other draft HEAP documents. The Roads, Lanes and Tracks document is still incomplete and suggestions for additions or changes to the text are welcomed. All the draft documents are due for completion by March 2008 when the HEAP project ends.

There is scope for the Society to continue surveying historic lanes and tracks after the end of the HEAP Project. I hope to plot the routes surveyed by Archaeology Group members onto a digital map (which will also display HLC Areas, modern parishes and medieval parishes) and to enter information from the survey forms onto a database linked to the digital map. A separate digital map and database could be prepared identifying all modern rights of way that are shown on the 1793 Ordnance Survey map. The record forms and other data compiled by Society members will be retained at the Archaeological Centre to allow this work to be carried out.

It would be useful to carry out field surveys of additional rights of way, carefully selected to further our understanding of the character of historic rights of way within the Island's various Historic Landscape Character (HLC) Areas. The following topics require further research:

- **Distribution.** Do some HLC Areas contain more rights of way than others and are these ancient?

- **Right of Way Types.** Do some HLC Areas contain mainly hollow ways and some mainly flat or undefined tracks?
- **Boundaries.** How many rights of way run along historic estate or parish boundaries?
- **Status.** How many rights of way were formerly significant highways that have declined in importance?
- **Tree composition and management.** What are the dominant species on historic rights of way? Do these vary between HLC Areas? How prevalent is coppicing and pollarding?
- **Flora.** Are certain species associated with ancient lanes and tracks? How much floral variety is there within and between the different HLC Areas?

Obviously there is a great deal of potential for future research and I hope that the Archaeology Group will carry out this work. Meanwhile, I would like to thank everybody who has taken part in the present survey. (Photos, page 16)

Vicky Basford

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## Ruddy Explosion

### Flush of Ruddy Darters at RSPB Brading Marshes

Brading Marshes Nature Reserve was first acquired by the RSPB in 2001. The management of the site has included an increase in water levels so as to create a true freshwater wetland. During 2005/6 a number of small dams were constructed to keep various drains flooded. I was aware of the presence of Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* when I visited an almost dry drain in 2001. On 4<sup>th</sup> June 2007 I made a conservative count of 280 teneral over 550m of flooded drain, part man made and part meander. On 20<sup>th</sup> June the conditions were sunny but very windy. On my approach to the same location I counted 235 mainly immature individuals (only three males showing red), all sheltering by a strip of woodland on the edge of a hay field. The same two sections of flooded drain produced a count of 490 dragonflies, the majority of which were teneral. Only six pairs were seen in tandem.

This event is very much a flush for this species. I estimated the population of Ruddy Darter in the area I visited to be upwards of 3,000 dragonflies. From an ecological point of view the abundance of larvae over the next few seasons will support more predators. It remains to be seen whether similar numbers recur. (Photo, page 15)

[Footnote: A similar article has been published in Dragonfly News (British Dragonfly Society)]

Dave Dana

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## A Hedge Beyond Interpretation

On Castle Hill, the highway leading to the entrance to Carisbrooke Castle, is a short length of hedge less than two hundred yards in length, screening the Shrubbery. Containing some twenty species of trees and shrubs, it is beyond interpretation by the rule of thumb method of one species for every hundred years. Perhaps a solution can be found by looking at the wider picture. The Shrubbery composed almost entirely of Beech, *Fagus sylvestris*, contains magnificent specimens, none of which exceed three hundred years. This hanging with its ancient trackway at its foot, known as Clerken Lane, is of great antiquity and sunken into the chalk strata, but it would appear that this was created not only by erosion, but by the removal of chalk and this takes us wider into a quest for a possible explanation.

The largest Island chalk pits are in the vicinity of Newport. Pan Chalk Pit at Shide, can be explained

by commercial exploitation for the production of cement. A goods train departed from the pit itself carrying a hundred tons of chalk, six days a week. But what of that huge pit in Whitepit Lane, on the floor of which a housing estate has been built. A vast area created entirely by hand, for what?

We know that the common field separating Newport and Carisbrooke was vast, stretching from Cedar Hill in the west, using the Lukely as its northern boundary, to a line through Drill Hall Road, West Street and Nine Acres Lane to Whitepit Lane in the east. To raise the alkalinity of this huge area, chalk was spread on the land until as recent that photographic evidence is available. An operation that can possibly be measured not in centuries, but in millennia.

Urbanisation of this area is comparatively recent and was probably initiated by the construction of a promenade for the citizens of Newport, that extended out of the town like a pier from a seaside town. I make no apologies for repeating Albin's description of that intrusion into the common field, for there is no better illustration of the area in 1796. "The way to Carisbrooke Castle is through the High Street and Castlehold, taking the footpath called the Mall, which joins the western end of the town. It is about two hundred yards in length and eight yards wide. On the left hand, it is partly shaded by lofty elms. On the right it is open to meadows, which are backed by Parkhurst Forest. It possesses also the further advantage of a good view of Mount Joy, Carisbrooke Castle, the village of Carisbrooke and Priory Farm. From its contiguity to the town it is the resort of the gay throng."

Further encroachment of the area created New Village, an area we today call Castle Road and that urbanisation continued until today the only space left of that once "common field" is Nine Acres (much reduced) and allotments.

My quest for an explanation of this intriguing and possibly unique feature of our Island countryside is sadly lost in antiquity.

Bill Shepard

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### On Hedgehog Watch

At a quarter to eleven one night in April 2007 my husband and I answered a knock at the door to find a neighbour with a torch in his hand and an extremely worried look on his face. When he told us of the strange noises coming from behind the garden sheds we immediately suggested Hedgehogs, but he was quite certain it was something far more serious. Confidently I went with him and sure enough there were two adult Hedgehogs snorting, hissing and hooting with much gusto at one another.

Of course we were delighted to see them, so on several subsequent evenings we stood quietly by the sheds in eager anticipation of their appearance.

It was most amusing to hear their unmistakable sounds emanating from beneath a pile of dead leaves which suddenly started heaving up and down, the result of which gave us the added bonus of seeing young ones a few weeks later on!

One night our neighbour cracked a hen's egg, placed it on the ground near the sheds and we waited. It was not long before a Hedgehog emerged from its sleeping quarters and went straight to the egg, which was hastily devoured until the shell was as clean on the inside as it was on the outside.

We discreetly followed the Hedgehog as it wandered along the hedge-bottom on its nocturnal mission. It took an hour to cover approximately fifty metres, stopping along the way beneath birdseed boxes to nibble at seed and corn that had spilled onto the ground. Not wishing to be intrusive, such watches were soon curtailed and we left our spiny visitors in peace to fend for themselves. However, empty snail shells and little black droppings left here and there reassured us of their continued presence.

It is quite likely that these Hedgehogs have been in the neighbourhood, un-noticed by us, for some years and if they have chosen the same sheds for their current winter hibernation then hopefully they will remain undisturbed and productive for many more years to come.

Sue Blackwell

## Natural History of Newport

Yes, Newport, despite the almost grid locked traffic, the hordes of homo sapiens, that one could be forgiven for thinking they are in Delhi, we have to share that densely crowded square mile with a host of other species, despite the obvious eviction order.

We have a colony of Jackdaws, second to none in numbers, occupying all unprotected chimneys in the older style houses, all living rent and council tax free. At least twice a day they leave their territory among the chimneys and fly around like a flock of homing pigeons. The gathering is brief but noisy. No necessity for an alarm clock, Collared Doves and Wood Pigeons will make sure you are aware that dawn is breaking. The roofs of our town buildings have been taken over by an ever increasing number of gulls, forsaking their natural home on the sea cliff. Obviously the easy living is the attraction. Feral Pigeons abound and are more street wise than many of us.

Our main attraction is of course the waterway running through the town with resident Mallard, Mute Swan and Moorhen, all breeding. At least three pairs of Grey Wagtail nested in 2007, but where do they go when the young leave the nest. Shoals of Mullet visit us every summer and can be seen as far upstream as Pan Bridge and the new Lidl store. If you rise sufficiently early you may see a Cormorant amongst them, — having his breakfast.

Much work has been carried out between St. Cross Mill and Town Gate, leaving the water considerably deeper. A fish ladder has been added by the mill so perhaps we can expect more fish in that section. Another innovation is a large rock in mid stream and to regular passers-by a Grey Wagtail and a Kingfisher is a certainty, but wait for winter and spring.

Rooks have not yet joined us in the town centre, but there is a large colony by the Medical Centre at Carisbrooke. A rookery occupied the year round. Carrion Crows have no such reservations. Regular nesters in Litten Park and for two years in the Presbytery in Pyle Street.

Carisbrooke is one place where you can be sure of seeing Carp. There is a viewing platform overlooking the pond behind the Eight Bells public house. A huge Weeping Willow nearby casts a dappled shade on the water and in bright sunshine the Carp are gathered, some at least a length of three feet.

Surely the most spectacular is a long-standing colony of bees at Coppins Bridge, just a few yards from the constant tail-back of traffic waiting for the lights to change. The entrance to the hive, head height in a Poplar, has a footpath at its base and bees and passing humans ignore each other, or perhaps the latter are unaware of the former. The question is, in such a built-up area, how far do the bees travel for the pollen. Whilst I stood watching, a Bumble Bee was busy around the entrance to the hive collecting stray pollen grains.

I have not mentioned the vegetation.

Bill Shepard

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## HEAP Project

Mike and Anne Cahill, Jessie Booth and Jackie Hart decided that we would do desktop investigations into the tracks and footpaths of the Isle of Wight and from that, choose some of the oldest tracks to follow on foot ably assisted by Maureen Whitaker and Beth Dollery who kindly provided the botany expertise. Using the facilities at the County Records Office we traced the tracks and footpaths in the parishes of Newchurch, Niton and Whitwell and Godshell.

One of the walks we chose was to trace the track from the parish boundary of Chale, above Gore Cliff to the parish boundary of Ventnor as this appears on the 1762 Ordnance Survey map. From past experience we have found that about 1 ½ miles is a manageable amount to cover in one session; so this walk was split into three. First of all you walk the length and decide how many forms you need to fill out that will show how the path changes along its length and survey on the return. Mike's GPS came in very handy as it gave instant map references. The first section started near Blackgang and finished at



**Large Tortoiseshell.** Page 9



**Monarch** Page 9



**Little Auk** Page, 10



**Spiny Lobster** Page. 9



**Ruddy Darter.** Page 12



**Skinner's Meadow.** Page 19

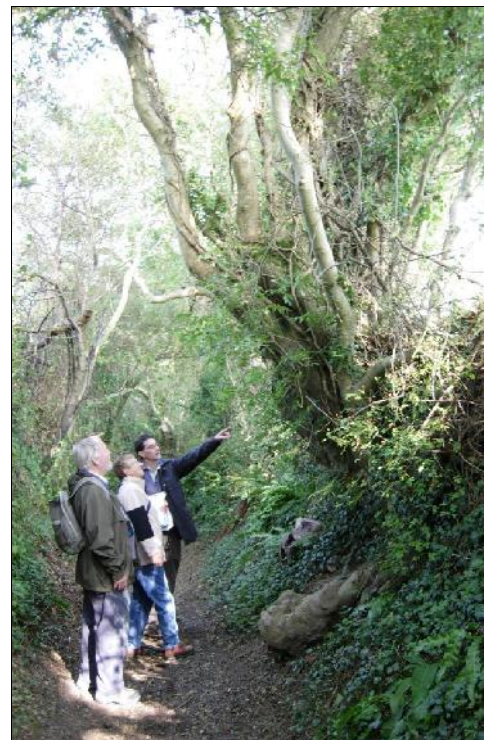




**HEAP Project. Page 14**



**HEAP Project. Page 14**



**Historic Lanes & Tracks, Page 10**





**Pixie ?**  
Fungi, Page 29



**Troll** Page 4



**STOP LOOK & LISTEN**  
Country Notes. Page 4







**Carisbrooke Dig** Page 7



**Haseley Manor** Page 24



**Bouldnor Excavation** Page 6

Niton. Walking along the cliff top above Gore Cliff one wondered if the track we were on was in the same place in 1792 or had that long since crumbled away. It is certainly a very exposed part of the country! Of course, we get distracted: for a start there are the wonderful views and then a butterfly comes along and we spot many spikes of Pyramidal Orchid.

In fact the three sections were very different. The second section, which started at Niton and finished behind the church in Whitwell, was not nearly as exposed to the prevailing weather. We mainly walked through cultivated fields but a couple of footpaths reminded us of its ancient origins. At one stage we had Blackberries, Elderberries and Sloes on one side with Wheat growing in the field opposite. Bread and jam for tea!

The third section took us from Whitwell to the summit of Stenbury Down where many footpaths meet. This was the most challenging part as it was uphill all the way with a very steep section to finish. Another walk was from Redhill Farm to Downcourt Farm and along Downcourt Lane, now mostly impassable. **(Photos– page 16)**

Jackie Hart

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### Skinner's Meadow

There have been some good conservation developments at this traditional hay meadow this year (2007).

To set the scene, Skinner's Meadow is a two and a half acre field on higher ground at Alverstone Mead Local Nature Reserve leased from the Isle of Wight Council and managed by the Wight Nature Fund.

The name, Skinner's Meadow was selected by the Fund in recognition of Elsie Skinner's fundraising work for Friends of the Earth and the Fund over many years: her jam making and other fund raising sales have continued by her son Tim since her illness.

The meadow was originally used by a tenant farmer (Mr Fred Corney) for hay crop in the summer and grazed in the winter until about February each year. As far as we know, no pesticides sprays were used, but a small amount of nitrate fertilizer added until 1993, and none since then: we believe it has not been ploughed since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. This meant we inherited a good flora and many broad leaved herbs, and the wild flowers have since increased by similar traditional management, i.e. late hay cuttings (this year August/September because of the very wet June and July) when the seeds have set. Aftermath grazing with highland cattle is used in some years between November and January.

The mini hay bales from the mini baler have been very popular for animal feed for both cattle and horses, extra minerals of course being present in them compared with those from pure ryegrass fields. In the southern end of the meadow, Southern Marsh Orchid and Yellow Rattle arrived naturally during the last three years, the latter producing a positive reduction of rank grass growth and substantially improving the general flora in this area.

We subsequently advertised at the Wolverton Garden Fair and elsewhere, bales from this extra rich area containing these special seeds for seeding other meadows on the Island as requested. This was taken up we are pleased to say, with 20 bales going to a new conservation area near Blackwater with the help of Mrs Hewitt.

The small round bales are easy to transport singly in the boot of a car, being approximately 18 inches diameter and two feet long. Other species of flora from Skinner's Meadow include Ox-eye Daisy, Autumn Hawkbit, red, white and Meddick Clovers, Birds-foot Trefoil, Meadow Cranesbill, Ribwort Plantain, Autumn Mallow.

The soil is sandy and neutral/acid, we recommend seeding in areas of similar acidity. If anyone requires any of our bales for this purpose in subsequent years, please contact me on 400199.

**(Photo, page 15)**

John Ralph

## **Projects for our Society**

Evidence from the recent past is rapidly disappearing. Our countryside still portrays its use over past centuries; hedges planted to separate cattle from crops, road widening schemes identified by the variation in the hedges on either side. A survey of ancient villages, such as Newchurch and Whitwell can still reveal the way of life of our ancestors.

The West Wight, a classic example of five distinct communities; north south, east and west and the middle community. What connected them and the names of these thoroughfares, for they were surely named.

The industrialisation of the tiny watercourse that rises in Parkhurst Forest, Swallows Gutter, and drains into Dodnor Pond. Two dams and a series of brick-lined inspection pits and perhaps the mysterious brick structure in the pond in Dickson's Copse could be connected. This pond is on high ground with virtually no catchment area, yet mysteriously fills rapidly with the autumn rains. Any information anybody?

Individually we have a vast knowledge of the Island, but much of it is never shared. For instance, butterflies, what is their distribution. How many would know where to see the Dark-winged Fritillary and is it confined to just one or two locations? Glow-worms, I have no doubt many of our members know of a location, but what is their distribution. Where are they and where are they not?

All the above are activities, in which all members can contribute if they so desire, could be promoted on the Website. Other societies interest themselves in some of these activities, but they do not consider the natural history aspect and in consequence the picture is incomplete.

Bill Shepard

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## **Reports of General Meetings**

### **7th July**

### **Bembridge Fort**

I'm sure that many members must, like me, have driven past Bembridge Fort and wished they could explore inside. This was a good opportunity to visit a site not tidied up for the public or sanitised by health and safety regulations. 23 members were taken on a tour by two National Trust staff, Tony Tutton and Heather Bradshaw.

The fort was built, of brick and flint, in the 1860s as part of the Palmerstonian defences against Napoleon III, housing approximately 100 troops and officers. Military presence continued until 1947, leaving evidence of use throughout the period. Subsequent occupation by Micronair, manufacturers of crop-spraying equipment, has left its own mark and the site is still partially occupied by its successor, Micron. The National Trust acquired the fort as part of Enterprise Neptune and is, with the help of volunteers, gradually clearing generations of debris and restoring sections of the site. This is a huge and underfunded task so priorities have to be very clear.

Some features of the tour:

- the maze of tunnels connecting the various areas, originally lit by lanterns
- the salients (single and double) at the points of the hexagonal structure
- the casemates which lodged the officers and troops
- a descent into the caponier, a defensive structure jutting out into the ditch
- the isolated rooms where gunpowder was stored and shells were assembled. To work here troops had to pass through a 'shift lobby' where they changed into hessian clothing to reduce risk of explosions caused by sparks from metal trimmings
- the blast wall on the external wall of the shell assembly 'lab'
- the shell lifts in the corridors to lift shells directly onto the terreplein
- the terreplein on which various structures from the history of the fort were based. These

included the Victorian expense magazines where shells were stored, bases for Moncrieff guns and World War II Allan Williams turrets

- magnificent views from the terreplein
- the effect of post-war industrial use such as plywood partitions and office equipment left in a Victorian fortification.

The Yarborough monument was originally on this site so had to be moved to its current spot near the coastguard cottages. Tony Tutton has been able to interview Wrens who were stationed here during WWII and their anecdotes of manning the ASDIC equipment and watching the D-Day fleet assemble add another dimension to the history of this fascinating site.

In keeping with National Trust policy the site now also serves as a haven for chalk-loving wildlife. A walk round the perimeter fence is much more rewarding with the insight provided by this tour. Many thanks to the National Trust for its support on this occasion.

Helen Jackson

### **11<sup>th</sup> August**

#### **St George's Down.**

Seventeen people meet near the entrance to the Golf Club for a walk lead by Richard Grogan who wore his Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust hat. The meeting was arranged for us to see the management of some 'heath' land that is owned by Bardon Vectis. The Trust has been managing the site for them since 2004. The land is in fact classified as acid soil with Heather, and when they took on the job it was mainly covered with very leggy Gorse. The first winter half the area was cleared by machinery that could grub out the roots. In the second winter the other half was cleared and a shallow pond was created. This dries out most summers. The patches that were not originally covered with Gorse were left to help with regeneration of the area. Later we returned to the cars by walking down the hill at the edge of the site, back through the wood and across the Golf Course. On the way Richard pointed out the call of the Bush Cricket and then the Wood Cricket. We also came across many Hazel nuts that had been eaten by Red Squirrels and a few that had been eaten by Bank Voles. A very enjoyable and informative walk.

Jackie Hart

### **10<sup>th</sup> November**

#### **Holm Oaks in Spain**

Approximately 40 people attended the first indoor meeting of the winter season at Arreton Community Centre for a talk by Tony Tutton on his three-month sabbatical in Spain and Portugal. The Holm Oaks *Quercus ilex* on Ventnor Downs have long been thought to be a problem to control, so about 15 years ago goats were introduced on the downs as they like to browse on the leaves, shoots and acorns – an idea borrowed from Spain as they thought. Soon after arriving in Spain he discovered that the majority of their Holm Oaks were, in fact, *Quercus ilex ballota*. Despite the language difficulties he managed to find the oldest Holm Oak in Spain that was 800 years old and is cherished by the locals. He also saw the oldest Olive tree.

On the vast plains Great Bustard roam, some 52,000 in total, despite their huge size they are surprisingly difficult to spot. There are some two thousand wolves in the country and the government compensates for any livestock lost to them. Some bears can be found in Spain and also Iberian Lynx. Although Tony saw Great Bustard, he saw none of the others. He did see quite a number of Ibex that live on scrub, including Holm Oak and although they are related to goat, they smell more like sheep.

He showed us a photograph of the typical growth of a tree in pastureland and pointed out that you will not see any branches growing upwards. These branches are cut and used for various purposes including firewood and charcoal.

At question time at the end he was asked about the management of the Holm Oaks on Ventnor Downs. In the past the National Trust have tried to clear some areas but in future he thinks that they will clear around trees allowing them to grow older and provide habitat for other species to use. Who knows with global warming maybe we will see Hoopoe nesting there. The Hoopoe use Holm Oak as nesting sites in Spain.

Jackie Hart

**8<sup>th</sup> December**

### **Natural History & Biodiversity of Madagascar**

Many members turned out on a wild and wet afternoon for a very interesting and thought provoking talk on natural history and biodiversity of Madagascar by Professor Scott Armbruster and Professor Mary Edwards. During the course of the afternoon we found out that the island of Madagascar is the centre of the world! Scott showed us an animated map of the breaking up of Pangaea and how Madagascar has more or less remained in the same position in the world since that time.

There is no written history until the missionaries' came when they produced a written language. Scientific investigations have suggested the island become inhabited about 2000 years ago.

The people are mainly of Asian descent but with some input from Africa. It was colonised by France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became a republic in about the 1960's. Madagascar broadly has three climate zones: the wet zone on the east coast, the mountain uplands in the middle and then the dry zone to the west.

The local cattle, the zebu, are highly prized and are revered. The mountain uplands appear to have been managed over the millennia to provide grassland for grazing by the zebu. Burning of this crop providing fertility to the land. Eucalyptus trees are grown to provide wood for charcoal – the main source of heating and cooking for the poorer people of Madagascar. The population for the whole island is about 18 million people with the majority relying on a subsistence economy. This has resulted in a good deal of the woodland being removed with the continuing demand for charcoal.

Much of the stunning fauna and flora are unique to Madagascar that has been proved by molecular studies. As it has been an island from its creation this poses the question how did the fauna and flora arrive? The trade winds blow west across the Indian Ocean therefore not providing a means of transport, some argue that there was a land bridge with Australia and Antarctica millions of years ago.

At the end questions were invited and the discussion that ensued could have gone on for some time.

Jackie Hart

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## **Reports of Section Meetings**

### **Access**

**4<sup>th</sup> July**

We were grateful to Dr. Anthony Roberts for letting us park at Haseley Manor as it allowed us to explore a different area without having to walk too far. We followed the footsteps of Dowsabelle Mill, an extrovert lady of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who, after a party, danced all the way up to the downs along the broad track, which was then the main entrance to the manor. We turned off across the fields where young cattle were grazing. A fine example of Welshed Thistle was found.

Crossing the main Arreton road we entered a delightful area of old-fashioned fields with little bridges crossing ditches. Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Dovesfoot Cranesbill and Meadow Buttercup were found, with the Yellow Irises being past flowering but showing some seedpods.

The cycleway traffic lights provided a convenient road crossing to the track beside the River Yar. Himalayan Balsam was showy here. Now the group split, with some going through the Nature Reserve and a path lined with head-high Hemlock and some taking the bridleway, where a cluster of small black caterpillars was found on the nettles, before arriving back at the manor via an interesting collection of old farm machinery.

**20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> July**

We made our annual visit to St. Helens churchyard to count the glow-worms. The weather was good on both evenings, with a bright moon on Friday and fireworks in the distance on Saturday. There were people from the church as well as from the Society in the groups. The grass was long in many parts but trimmed along the grassy paths. This was where most glow-worms were found. On Friday there were 22 females and on Saturday 28 females including one actually in the car park, making a good start to the evening. No males were identified. On Friday a large toad was found. Do toads eat glow-worms?

### **14<sup>th</sup> August**

The planned walk was to go from Brading Down, led by Tad Dubicki, but the weather was wet and windy. Tad and the one lady who arrived to do the walk decided that walking was not a good idea and the walk was abandoned. We shall try again in the next programme.

### **7<sup>th</sup> September**

The group met at St.Saviours Church, Totland and were grateful to be able to use the parking space there as it reduced the walking distance to Headon Warren, their goal to see the Heather and the views. Jill Nicholls led the group and this is her report. Thirteen members met and walked up the road and on to the National Trust property. It was quite misty at the start but they hoped that it would clear, which it did and became quite hot. The views of Fort Albert and Hurst Castle were very good on the way back. The Heather was lovely, both Bell, *Erica cinerea*, and Ling, *Calluna vulgaris*, going over in a few places but mainly brilliantly excellent. Many other wild flowers were spotted including Stinking Iris, *Iris foetidissima*, Bristly Oxtongue, *Picris echioides*, Centaury, *Centaureum minus* and Yellow-wort, *Blackstonia perfoliata*. A buzzard was circling overhead.

After getting to the highest point and seeing the tumulus there, the group turned and made their way back to the parking place.

### **18<sup>th</sup> October**

Colin Black found a different car park for this walk. The parking place at Nunney's wood, near Hamstead, provided a good starting point and made the walk not too long.

Colin reports that the group started up the lane and across the bridge between Western Haven and Ningwood lake. Little Egrets were seen.

A well way-marked footpath turned off the lane and wandered through the woods to an open meadow and back to Ningwood Lake. Following more stiles we came to a viewpoint towards the downs, Chessell, Westover and Brighstone.

Now a rough road led to a junction where Chris turned off to shorten the walk while the rest of the group went on to look at Ningwood Common, a SINC, Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, and up beside and through broad-leaved woodland to West Hamstead Farm. Following a well-worn path, a wonderful view over Newtown anchorage was seen. Then the route followed a good track past the Piggery, which had a lion in the gate, and Pigeon Coo, on the right, back to the bridge and car park.

### **13<sup>th</sup> November**

A new leader, Pat Ruwaidan, met the group at Carisbrooke Priory car park and led them on a two mile walk to the Castle, Lukely Brook and Froglands. Pat reports that they started off down Froglands Lane and along the footpath to the Castle. Spindleberries had opened beautifully to show the orange seeds.

The footpath from the Castle was lined with Oak, Beech and Field Maple trees with Hartstongue ferns relishing the shade beneath them. A stile led to a little bridge over a lovely little limestone stream where watercress at one time was grown.

Then the route went ahead along the valley with many stops to "just look" at the Tennyson Trail in the distance and the Lukely Brook running along parallel to the path. A buzzard was soaring above.

Leaving Plaish Farm on the right, the route turned left to pass Froglands Farm, with some lovely horses and the "Cow Shed", an antique furniture concern, back to the car park.

### **6<sup>th</sup> December**

The Access Section Christmas event was based on Godshill Scout Hall, where tea and coffee could be made and mince-pies warmed up.

It was a grey and drizzly morning when Chris and five other walkers set off round a tree-lined lane. Scotland Farm was on the right, its name having nothing to do with kilts or bagpipes but was derived from the Middle English "scot" meaning a tax. The drizzle was getting worse as we passed the school with its stone plaque revealing that there had been a school in Godshill since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, started by Lady Anne Worsley. Now, by general consent, the walk beside Deacon's Nursery was abandoned in



favour of a shorter route back to the hall and the mince-pies.

Here, other people had arrived and were puzzling over the "Christmas Songs" quiz printed in a Christmassy way by Tad Dubicki. Beth and Lorna only got one wrong answer, so were the winners. Margaret Burnhill won the Caption Competition with the caption "Where's Snow-White?" for the picture which made everyone look dwarfed. Chris presented her Chocolate medals to all those who had helped with the section and led walks during the year, Jill, John, Tad, Janet, Colin and Margaret and to those who helped with the tea and mince-pies. Everyone seemed to enjoy the morning.

Chris Lipscombe

## Archaeology

**15<sup>th</sup> July**

### **Visit to Haseley Manor**

Perhaps it was the mummified cat and two attendant rats found by a previous owner in a wall cavity that protected us from evil forces, but the thunderstorms forecast for Sunday 15 July passed us by at Haseley Manor without a drop of rain. Over thirty members gathered there to hear Johanna Jones, standing in for Vicky Basford, outline the history of the manor from its beginnings in Saxon times to the present day. We met by kind invitation of the current owners, Drs. Anthony and Vivian Roberts, natural history enthusiasts, who have created a wildlife sanctuary in their extensive grounds comprising several large ponds and a plantation of mixed woodland.

From the early twelfth century the manor belonged to Quarr Abbey and was farmed as a grange for four hundred years, until Henry VIII seized control of the monasteries and all their land. A water-driven fulling mill drove two hammers that rose and fell, beating woollen cloth into felt. The River Yar used to flow right past the house, but was diverted in the nineteenth century for the building of the railway to Sandown.

Changes were made to the house in Tudor times, and in 1609 the Fleming family bought the manor, remaining in possession for almost 350 years. As Lord Chief Justice of England, Sir Thomas Fleming presided at the trial of Guy Fawkes. In the nineteenth century, however, they bought themselves a grander house and tenant farmers moved in. The house, sold in 1952, was neglected for many years and in 1974 abandoned, almost derelict. New owners, the Youngs, were faced with the daunting task of major restoration. Only then did they discover that part of the south wing dated to Medieval times.

Johanna took us on a tour of the exterior of the L-shaped house, pointing out significant architectural features. Only the Great Hall remains from medieval times, as it was the best room in the house. Two huge chimney breasts were added at great expense in Elizabethan times, and in the 1770s or 80s the corn crop was so huge that the owners could afford to extend the house to accommodate servants and redesign some of the Tudor rooms in the Georgian style. Exterior stonework gave way to brick, or was masked with fashionable 'geometric' tiles, and old stone mullioned windows were replaced by large and ornate ones that looked impressive and let in more light.

The house lines two sides of a courtyard. Outside the gates, guarded by stone unicorns, are open working sheds, and behind these is an enormous barn where corn was stored and winnowed, providing work in the winter months. It was once thatched and was probably built on the site of a medieval barn.

Anthony Roberts took us on a tour of the interior of his house. Most memorable on the ground floor are the grand drawing room, modified in Georgian times, with its very high ceiling and fine Palladian window, and the Tudor kitchen, once the medieval hall, with its huge fireplace and side ovens, designed to accommodate a large number of harvest workers at one long table. In the adjacent brew-house 'small' beer was prepared for them.

Upstairs we saw the maids' attic room where a hole cut in the top of the door allowed the cook to see if a candle had not been extinguished. In the light and spacious sitting room, created from two parlours, one of the fireplaces is Tudor, its surround carved with leaf and flower patterns. Mullioned windows and a late fourteenth century cruck-truss ceiling are interesting features in the upper rooms, and a fragment of fifteenth to sixteenth century wall decoration was recently uncovered. In the thick outer walls on attic staircases we found niches for candles and a piscina, a rudimentary washbasin, similar to those found in old churches, that allowed water to drain away into the river below.



Not only were we lucky with the weather, but we are also indebted to the Youngs and the Roberts for making enormous efforts to restore and preserve the house and grounds and to share them with us and the wildlife that find sanctuary there. (**Photos**, page 18)

Margaret Nelmes

## **26<sup>th</sup> August**

### **Discovering the Late Anglo-Saxon Landscape of Ashe**

A cacophany of engine whine and klaxons assaulted our ears and strange fumes tainted the air as a never-ending procession of scooters passed our lay-by. This delayed the start of the Archaeology Group's four-mile walk, led by Landscape Historian John Margham, to discover the tenth century boundaries of an estate in what we now call Ashe. Fortunately the panoramic views from Ashe Down soon revived the spirits of some twenty-five members on this August Bank Holiday weekend.

In the Anglo-Saxon Charter of 982, this area of chalk downland, on the southern edge of the estate, was called "Milk Down", meaning that the grazing was good and produced a lot of milk. The charter was issued by King Aethelred, "the King of Albion", to confirm a bequest, made to the New Minster at Winchester, of a number of estates on the Isle of Wight and in Southern Hampshire. These estates were to be free of tithes, except for payments for bridge-work, fortress-work and military service.

Sheep were grazed on Milk Down. From a contemporary account that John read to us, we learnt that early in the morning a shepherd and his dog would herd the flock up from the farm in the valley below. Their job was to protect the sheep from wolves. Later in the day they would return to the farm for milking and the shepherd would make cheese and buttermilk.

John gave us a boundary map of the estate from the 982 Charter. Spread out before us to the north were the clay vales that John calls the "Northern Lowlands", making up some five-sixths of the estate. In the tenth century this estate was known as "Milkstream and Homestead", taking its name from the settlement now called East Ashe Manor Farm. The valley was divided into open field furlongs of arable land, for growing cereals and other crops, a band of wood pasture, and, on the northern boundary, an area of wet heathland.

From the Down, we descended a steep staircase into a chalk pit. John said that chalk quarrying was carried out in the tenth century, but not at Ashe. We crossed the main road and dropped down into the fields. Our arrival caused great excitement in a herd of bullocks at West Ashe Farm. Despite the heat, they raced along the other side of the hedge. This exuberance transferred to the bullocks in our field that had been lying down. They ran around in disarray, gathered at the far end of the field, and stampeded past us. If anyone was nervous, they didn't show it: John's descriptions of the late Anglo-Saxon landscape so absorbed us, we were hardly aware of our present-day surroundings.

The tenth century inhabitants of Ashe would only have had sheep to contend with, and oxen used to plough the arable land. The ploughman would have been out at dawn to yoke the oxen and plough an acre or more each day. He might have had a boy to help him fill the mangers, water the oxen and clean out the stalls.

Beside the Ashe station level crossing was the "Dirty Gate", presumably meaning that the track was often waterlogged. This gate was on the estate's northern boundary and one of only two marked on the map.

As we stood in a field near East Ashe Manor Farm, a sudden bellow right behind us interrupted John in mid-flow. We laughed. Something shoved my shoulder-bag, then nudged me in the back. A large black and white face appeared at my side, demanding attention. Behind it was a line of smaller faces, all staring at us from a safe distance: young calves following their older sibling, determined to find out what was going on.

We returned to Ashe Down via Eaglehead Copse. This is probably ancient woodland and it may well have extended up the steep slopes of the down in the tenth century. We were glad of the shade to cool us. Our last stop was the site of the "Swing Gate" on the Brading Road, where a sunken lane drops down into the East Yar valley near Alverstoke and a footpath branches off to Knighton. There is still a gate across the lane.

The Anglo-Saxon charter we used as a guide for this walk is one of ten sets of old charters for the Isle of Wight, more than usual, John says, for an area this size. The charter not only tells us about the boundaries, but also what was happening inside the estate.

I didn't know what to expect from this outing; I only went out of curiosity. But studying the landscape from above, seeing it laid out before me, was exciting and made it easier to imagine what the whole estate looked like in the tenth century. Following the boundary map I felt like an explorer. The experience has taught me something of rural life on the Isle of Wight in a period of history I knew little about, and John has inspired me to find out more.

Margaret Nelmes

### **18th November**

### **Voyage to Libya 2007: An Illustrated Talk**

Members met at Ventnor headquarters, located in the Coastal Centre, for what proved to be a most delightful and interesting afternoon. Delian Backhouse Fry, College Lecturer and Education Officer for Wessex Archaeology, gave a captivating talk about her recent trip to Libya, in February 2007, with "Bare Bones Tours". The majority of the lecture was centred on the ruins at *Leptis Magna*. Located 130 kilometres east of Tripoli. The city appears to have been founded by Phoenician colonists, but did not achieve prominence until Carthage became a major power in the Mediterranean in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It stayed part of Carthage's dominions until the end of the Third Punic War in 146 BC, when it became part of the Roman Republic. The Roman emperor Tiberius formally incorporated Leptis Magna into the empire as part of the province of Africa and it soon became a leading city and trade centre in Roman Africa. Leptis achieved its greatest prominence when Lucius Septimius Severus became emperor because naturally he favoured his hometown. This is of particular interest because this is the same Septimius Severus who died at York in AD 211 whilst campaigning in northern Britain. Soon after decline set in and the area remained consumed by the desert for nearly two millennia until 1929, when Italian archaeologists began excavation work in the area. Since 1982 *Leptis Magna* has been a *World Heritage* site. Delian pointed out that Mussolini used many of the artefacts removed by the Italian team to produce the many counterfeit items sold on the antiquities market to support his regime. The ruins include the old forum, the enlarged Severan forum, huge Hadrianic Baths, a theatre, an amphitheatre and circus. Near the shore, the remains of the harbour with lighthouse foundations, as well as numerous markets, temples and triumphal arches may be found. A short distance from the main site is the *Villa Silin*, with many intact wall and floor decorations. Of particular interest to our society's members were the floor mosaics which, although more defined in structure, are very similar in theme (*e.g. Seasons*) to those found in our own Brading Villa. A third site included in the tour was Sabratha, a Punic trading colony and Roman city, famous for its theatre. The carvings are very clear, and include scenes from theatrical performances. Equally interesting are the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC public and religious buildings. The final site included is Roman Oea. Today Tripoli occupies the site that was Roman Oea and little remains, but in the old city centre the "Arch of Marcus Aurelius" can still be seen, although in poor condition. Delian's talk was accompanied by an excellent *PowerPoint* slide show that illustrated the tour beautifully. Not only did it clearly show what one would expect to see of a Roman site, intricate carvings and beautiful mosaic floors, but it also showed the construction technique used (marble veneer over rough mud brick) and the total lack of conservation. Possibly one of the most striking points was how the Italian excavators left rubble in neatly stacked piles so the area could easily be mistaken for a Roman Reclamation Yard. If you would like to follow in Delian's footsteps to see the area for yourself be warned that the facilities are below the standards that westerners have grown to expect, the food is poor with no provision for vegetarians and you will probably be watched by the secret police.

Rick Pratt

### **9th December**

### **The Pre-dynastic Period in Egypt**

A fascinating illustrated talk was given by Egyptology tutor Mark Johnson on the period of time following the Neolithic and before the unification of Egypt under one king, i.e. 4,400-3,300 BC. Sir William Flinders Petrie was responsible for most of the excavations for this period and laboured away in a methodical style at the less spectacular material ignored by others.

The Badarian culture 4,400-4,000 BC was a very simple Neolithic hunting civilisation in Upper Egypt with burials in small oval pits (the arid nature of the burials encouraging good preservation), black-topped redware pottery, bone and ivory combs, and rudimentary figurines. This progressed to the Naqada I culture by 3,750 BC, when the population had begun moving into farming settlements along

the Nile. Finds from this period include a disc mace-head, a portable symbol of power; faience, i.e. crushed quartz covered with natron and suggesting metalworking ability; distinctive red and white pottery with geometric and animal decorations; and beautiful bifacial blades made of flint.

Naqada II from c.3650 BC, also known as the Gerzean culture, was still burying its dead in oval pits, but by now these were usually on the West bank of the Nile, away from the rich fertile agricultural land. Signs of hierarchy and wealth distribution begin to emerge during this period, with larger burials, rectangular in shape and occasionally with multiple chambers. The pottery is pinkish-coloured with natural motifs such as human figures, animals and boats; there are alabaster figurines, finely carved stonework, and palettes for grinding pigments. Copper traded from Sinai is smelted in Egypt for the first time, and some of the human figurines begin to take on bird-like faces, with possibly female deities and male priests emerging. A wall-painting from Hierankopolis with scenes of boats and hunting is thought to be part of a tomb of a ruler-king. Palettes with king-like figures and symbols of power prefigure the royal palettes of the dynastic period.

Mark concluded his talk by asking, why did Egypt evolve into one of the greatest civilisations on earth? Largely because of the environment: each year the Nile flooded the rich alluvial ground and irrigation was overseen by chieftain kings. People were able to store food and the surplus of grain allowed them to diversify. Small towns grew, a bureaucracy began to evolve, and chieftain kings were brought together under a single government. The speaker was warmly thanked for a fascinating talk and the afternoon was rounded off with a move upstairs to the studio to partake of seasonal treats.

Alan Phillips

## Botany

### 21<sup>st</sup> July

#### Upper Dolcoppice

This area has an interesting mixture of unimproved habitats including a damp meadow and a dry sandy hill, which has extensive Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) with Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) cover on the lower slopes.

In the meadow we found Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*) as well as Field Horsetail (*E. arvense*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), a patch of Common Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and *D. praetermissa*) and three species of rush, Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulata*), Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomerates*) and Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*).

On the hill, which has extensive views over the upper Medina Valley, we found Sheep Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Heath Groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*) in the areas kept clear by the grazing activities of rabbits.

### 25<sup>th</sup> August

#### Bleak Down

The area has been the subject of extensive scrub clearance recently, as part of the Wight Quarries Project and we would like to thank Richard Grogan for guiding us round the site. We visited the part, which after mineral extraction, has been allowed to re-vegetate rather than being used as a landfill site. There is a pond, which has plants of Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) at its edge and Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) growing in an unusual way in the water itself, looking quite unlike that on the ground nearby. An area of Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*) also contained an interesting mixture of grasses and sedges including Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*), Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*), Green Ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*) and Common Yellow Sedge (*Carex viridula* subsp. *oedocarpa*). A clump of Water Speedwell was much examined, photographed and debated and was finally declared to be the blue form (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*). There is an extensive area of heathers, Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Cross Leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) that was flowering well but although we searched carefully we were not able to find any dodder growing over it. However there were Grayling butterflies and a Wasp spider to add interest to the afternoon.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> September

#### Little Thorness Farm

The main purpose of our visit was to look at the low-lying grazing marsh that is part of a managed retreat scheme. On either side of the stream, channels have been cut into the ground and the sea is able

to enter on high tides. Over time, the flora in the area is expected to change, with plants characteristic of brackish pastures and upper saltmarshes colonising. With this hypothesis in mind, we carried out timed searches of three areas at different distances from the sea, noting which species were present and how abundant they were. When the results were analysed we did find evidence that the species composition varies over the marsh. The part furthest from the sea has the widest range of species, and they are ones associated with terrestrial habitats. Nearer to the sea, upper saltmarsh species were present in greater quantity. We hope that these preliminary findings may be the basis for a more thorough study that will be repeated in successive years to monitor change more closely.

In the second part of the afternoon we walked along the shore to look for some of the shingle bank specialist plants. Of particular note were Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), Ray's Knotgrass (*Polygonum oxyspermum*) and Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*).

### **13<sup>th</sup> October**

#### **Corf Camp**

Our second visit of the year to this site adjacent to a creek of the Newtown estuary we concentrated on finding galls and leaf miners in both the woodland and saltmarsh habitats. With twenty of us looking for the swollen growths on plants (galls), the damage to leaves caused by larvae burrowing through them (leaf mines) or fungal growths on plants, progress round the site was fairly slow. A considerable number of specimens were taken by David Biggs for microscopic examination later.

In total we found 21 galls (15 new for the site), 20 leaf miners (17 of which were new for the site) and 17 micro fungi, (11 new for the site including one not previously recorded on the Island).

### **27<sup>th</sup> October**

#### **Specimen Trees in Northwood Park**

With Bill Shepard as our guide, assisted by Tina Williamson the 'Histree Trail' Officer, we set off for a leisurely stroll around Northwood Park to look at the wide variety of magnificent ornamental trees. During the course of our visit, we saw all three species of Cedar that are commonly planted in Britain – Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), Cedar of Lebanon (*C. liban*) and Atlantic Cedar (*C. atlantica*)- as well as a very large Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*), and a Murbeck's Oak (*Quercus canariensis*). A Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) was not only interesting in its own right but was found to be hosting a large group of Harlequin Ladybirds (*Harmonia axyridis*), some still in the larval stage.

We saw over 40 species of tree and shrub during the meeting and the most poetically named was probably the Chinese Necklace Poplar (*Populus lasiocarpa*), the name coming from the fruits which have the appearance of a string of beads.

Anne Marston

### **Entomology**

### **5<sup>th</sup> July**

#### **Arreton Down**

This visit took place on an overcast afternoon and was cut short by rain. Our efforts were concentrated on the west end of the down, and along the more sheltered south western edge of the reserve. Few butterflies were seen and the most interesting moths were a Hummingbird Hawk Moth and a *Pyrausta cespitalis*. Among the beetles a single Harlequin Ladybird was found among the Seven and Two Spotted Ladybirds, but the highlight was the Leaf Beetle, *Cryptocephalus pusillus* ... only the second record for the Isle of Wight in the last sixty years. The nymph of a Shield Bug *Sehirus luctuosus* was found on Forget-me-not, the first record for the Island since 1926. Of the other species a Great Green Bush Cricket attracted most attention, deep in the grass in anticipation of poor weather to come.

Richard Smout

### **7<sup>th</sup> July**

#### **Haseley Manor**

A total of 35 species were identified during the course of the evening's moth-trap, and many thanks are due to the Roberts for their hospitality. This was a very good evening, with no fewer than three species of Hawk-moth (Pine, Privet, and Elephant), a Garden Tiger and the Leopard Moth, all offering examples of the more spectacular species. Of other species The Drinker, a number of Peppered Moths, and a

couple of species whose ranges are expanding - Webb's Wainscot, and the European Corn-Borer, were among the highlights.

Richard Smout

### **17<sup>th</sup> August**

### **Ashwood Barns, Whitwell**

This was a poorly attended meeting, but we are very grateful to the owner Mr Jolliffe for letting us trap on his property. The evening was breezy, which reduced the number of species found. The commonest moth was the Flame Shoulder, but no species was found in double figures. Among the more attractive species found were Sallow Kitten, four Spectacles, an Iron Prominent and a Willow Beauty both in very good condition, and a Straw Underwing.

Richard Smout

### **14th September**

### **Totland**

It was a fairly mild and cloudy night when nine of us met for a moth trap meeting at my cottage, 1 Moorside, Totland. Some of the Autumn moths were seen including the Pink-barred Sallow, the Centre-barred Sallow and the Square-spot Rustic. Three migrants were recorded, the Silver T, the Delicate and the Rush Veneer. Another species of note was the Dark Spectacle.

With wine, tea & coffee a most enjoyable evening was had by all.

Sam Knill-Jones

### **25<sup>th</sup> September**

### **Rew Down**

This was a glorious afternoon for a meeting with fine views along the Undercliff. We approached the reserve from Steephill Down Road. A single Redstart and a number of Meadow Pipits provided evidence of migration and there was a steady movement of Swallows overhead. Seven species of butterfly were seen, including three Clouded Yellows, and the moth *Udea ferrugalis* was also present in good numbers. Five Dark Bush Crickets were found as well as a fine example of the Long-winged Conehead. The gall was found of the fly *Dasineura sanguisorbae*, a new species for the Isle of Wight.

Richard Smout

## **Fungi**

### **Fungi Meetings in 2007**

This year we commenced our meetings on 29<sup>th</sup> September and held them every two weeks until our final meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> December. We were delighted to see so many new faces including an enthusiastic young family.

Our first meeting was held at Fattingspark Copse and although the weather had been mainly dry for several weeks we did manage to achieve identification of 39 species. One of the species we are always pleased to see is the green staining fungus Green Elfcup, *Chlorocibora aeruginascens*, and in fact, we saw it at each of our meetings except the last one at Newtown Rifle Ranges – a very late in the season visit. Another fungus we saw was the Beefsteak Fungus, *Fistulina hepatica*, well named for when it is cut open the flesh gradually takes on the colour red just like a rare steak. We also found this at Parkhurst Forest and at Godshill Beech Woods. Particularly well represented at Fattingspark was the Razorstrop Fungus, *Piptoporus betulinus* and the Blushing Bracket, *Daedaleopsis confragosa*, both of these grow attached to dead trunks of trees.

The next meeting was our annual foray and Alan Outen again came over to identify our finds. A break from tradition this year, the identification took place in the woods as we went along. The morning session was held at Mark's Corner end of the forest and the afternoon session from the main car park. Thus we were able to cover both the ancient woodland as well as the more recent plantation. Despite the dry conditions, over the course of the weekend Alan identified a total of 210 species compared to 245 last year. Alan's particular interest is a very difficult group of fungi called *Inocybe* and some of us were able to accompany him to the private woods at Briddlesford where he was able to identify 6 species, only one of these was seen at Parkhurst the previous day. He has stories to tell about many of the fungi and he also points out the features to help with the identification.

Our next visit was to Firestone Copse on 20<sup>th</sup> October where we missed Colin and Jilly Pope, as well as David Biggs, as they were on holiday but Beth Dollery and I did manage to identify 27 species. Again, the weather had been dry and it was difficult to find the fungi, however towards the end of the meeting a lovely sample of the bright red Fly Agaric, *Amanita muscaria*, was found, as well as the

White Saddle, *Helvela crispa*, a particular favourite of Beth and mine. Both of the Deceivers were well represented, The Deceiver, *Laccaria laccata*, and Amethyst Deceiver, *Laccaria amethystina*. One of the fungus found here The Brown Rollrim, *Paxillus involutus*, was also found at Parkhurst, however we usually see far more of them each season.

Our last visit to the Rifle Range at Newtown was in 1994 so this year we arranged two meetings. One at Lock's Copse on 3<sup>rd</sup> November taking in the meadows on the return to the cars, and the December visit which was for the grassland species, but we also visited Robin Wood. We found 53 species on the first visit and on the final one 42 species. We identified eight species of Waxcap during the two visits, the Meadow Waxcap, *Hygrocybe pratensis*, buff coloured, looking rather like a washed out yellow waxcap, was only found in December. Howard Atkins found several huge fungi in the wood, *Tricholoma saponaceum*. On both occasions we found quite a number of Candle Snuff, *Xylaria hypoxylon*. In Robin Wood we found some beautiful, tiny white fungus in clusters on fallen wood that had droplets clinging to the cap. Colin took a sample home and identified this as *Hemimycena tortuosa*, which was subsequently confirmed by Alan Outen.

The other wood we visited was the Beech Wood in Godshill where 56 species were identified including two species that grow high up on Beech: Porcelain fungus, *Oudemansiella mucida*, and *Pleurotus dryinus*. We also found Jelly Ear (previously called Jews Ear), *Auricularia auricula-judae*, this year only seen previously at Briddlesford Copse. Also seen was an Artist's Bracket, *Ganoderma applanatum*, up in a tree and photographed by Ian Boyd, with what appeared to be a "Pixie" sitting on it !!! (Photo, page 17)

Jackie Hart

## Ornithology

### 29<sup>th</sup> July

Ten members met at Fort Victoria with the intention of undertaking a seawatch followed by a walk through the Country Park to Fort Warden and back across the fields. However, Caroline Dudley spotted a 'duck' sitting on the sea and David Biggs an 'auk'. Having scrutinised the bird in our telescopes we debated what it could be and decided to get nearer. This meant walking towards Yarmouth. Eventually, we decided it was a shearwater but which one? Caroline rang Dave Wooldridge who kindly agreed to come down and identified it as a 'Balearic Shearwater'. In all 1½ hours were taken up in seawatching leaving too little time to complete the original walk, so we walked through the woodland of the Country Park to the viewpoint and back. In this case quality not quantity of birds made up our morning. There were several sightings of Gannet, I counted 14, 5 Sandwich Tern, at least 20 Common Tern resting and fishing, the Balearic Shearwater, Herring Gulls, Black-headed Gulls and 2 Great Black Backed Gulls and a Cormorant. In the woods we saw Woodpigeon, Green Woodpecker and heard Jay, Chaffinch, Robin, Wren, Long-tailed Tit and Blue Tit. I, for one, will not forget the Balearic Shearwater having studied it for so long.

### 26<sup>th</sup> August

Seven members met on this sunny Bank Holiday Sunday for a walk on West High Down. The previous Friday there had been a large fall of birds having been grounded by fog in the channel, and a few remained for us to see. This time we started by walking along the valley bottom at the north side of the down where most of the birds were to be found. A selection of migrants were seen including Willow Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and a Pied Flycatcher. During the course of the morning we did see the Raven but the Peregrine did not put in an appearance although Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard did. On our return we walked on the top of the down in the hope of seeing or hearing Dartford Warbler, but for the second year running they did not put in an appearance for us. In all 37 species were seen.

### 8<sup>th</sup> September

Six members met in slight mist on Ventnor Downs for a walk in the area. Early on the birds were identified by sound. In all 19 species were heard or seen, including a movement of Swallows. A Wheatear was spotted as well as a Common Whitethroat and two Chiffchaff. A flock of Linnet and two

Chaffinch were also seen. On most outings these days we expect to see a Buzzard and it did not disappoint this time. We also saw two Raven. A Green Woodpecker was heard five times – five birds or one moving around?

### **8<sup>th</sup> December**

True to the forecast there was very heavy rain although a new member did turn up. As we were near the Hersey Reserve on Seaview Duver we did spend half an hour there before going home. From the hide we could see 153 Barnacle Geese that are free flying from what used to be called Flamingo Park, 11 Tufted Duck, three Lapwing, one Herring Gull, 14 Black-headed Gull, two Mediterranean Gull, two Cormorant, four Little Grebe and four Moorhen.

Jackie Hart

## **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARIES' NOTES**

### **New Members**

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### **Deaths**

### **Society Officers**

<b>President</b>	Dr C. R. Pope, 14 High Park Road, Ryde, PO33 1BP
<b>General Secretary</b>	Mrs. L. Snow, Ein Shemer, Upper Hyde Farm Road, Shanklin, PO37 7PS
<b>Treasurer</b>	Miss J. Hart, 18 Cherrytree Road, Nettlestone, Seaview, PO34 5JF
<b>Membership Secretaries</b>	Mrs T. Goodley & Mr L. Tiller, 18 Pell Lane, Ryde, PO33 3LW

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**Next Bulletin**

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for 1st January 2008  
to 30th June should be sent to:-

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The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 12th July 2008

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