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President's Address

This is my first 'President's Address' for the Bulletin and I would like to start with a huge thank you to Colin Pope who has not only twice served as our President, but has developed the Bulletin into its much appreciated, current form.

A highlight since the AGM has been Bioblitz 2017, (which was contributed to by many organisations in addition to IWNHAS and our iWatch Wildlife project). The location was Parkhurst Forest, and Anne Marston has compiled an informative report (see Recording Matters). I live close by Parkhurst (the forest and prison), and having an interest in non-natural history, I sometimes muse on the fact that the forest was enclosed by an Act of Parliament that excluded members of the public for over a hundred years. The purpose of the Act was to further the military interests of the country (timber for ships). It is fortunate that the outcome has been public access and wood for more peaceful uses.

A big thank you to Maggie Nelmes who organised our very successful coach outing to Oxford. It was much appreciated by those on the trip who were able to visit the Natural History and Pitt Rivers Museums, and New College in the afternoon. Others fitted in the Ashmolean Museum, Christchurch College, the Science Museum and Botanic Gardens!

A sub group has met to advise Council on the desirability and feasibility of holding a Conference during our Centenary year. I am grateful to those who took part and I think the process has been successful. I will be recommending to Council a similar sub group, this time

to consider the issue of an exhibition. Our Council acts as our ‘parliament’ and will take decisions, where appropriate endorsed at the AGM. Process is important and I will be trying not to emulate another President rather more in the news!

Paul Bingham

The Hatt revisited: a Hanging Promontory

In *The Proceedings* for 2013 I published my research I undertook for ‘Landscapes of Governance’ on the Isle of Wight. This was a project based at University College London coordinated by John Baker and Stuart Brookes to record Anglo-Saxon England’s outdoor meeting places. In my paper in *The Proceedings* I identified a site on the eastern flank of St George’s Down overlooking Arreton as being the meeting place for the eastern half of the Island. This area was known as the hundred of East Medine in the post-conquest medieval period. The identification of this site was based on an account written by Sir John Oglander in the earlier seventeenth century. Sir John gave its location as ‘*the Hatt of trees on the East end of Stanum down where the parke gate going into Arreton grounds from the down, but now all the trees are gone*’. This location was our lunch stop on the walk I led from Arreton church in 2013, an appropriate place as one of the probable functions of Anglo-Saxon meeting places was convivial eating and drinking.

Since publishing my work in *The Proceedings* I became aware of a paper published in *The Antiquaries Journal* by John Baker and Stuart Brookes identifying a particular class of Anglo-Saxon meeting place which they refer to as ‘hanging promontories’. Hanging promontories can be described in topographical and administrative terms:

These meeting places are highly distinctive and share a number of common physical attributes. Most striking is their topography, setting them out from the surroundings not as mundane markers of assembly sites but as dominating platforms. Taking the form of domed hillocks of up to 100m diameter they are located on spurs of land protruding below a crest of higher ground. The high ground is often the location of a junction of several parish boundaries and the site is usually marked by a well-worn holloway descending further downslope beside the promontory (Baker and Brookes 2013, 150).

With the exception of the junction of several parish boundaries the above description applies to The Hatt. The site consists of a spur of land to the east of Standen Down, now known as St George’s Down, with a deeply entrenched holloway just to the south of the site running down to Arreton Cross. The Hatt does however overlook the ‘Motkin Boundary’ which lies some 150 metres to the east. Further to the south this boundary, which traverses the Isle of Wight from north to south, forms the parish boundary between Godshill and Arreton. In the vicinity of The Hatt it formed the manorial boundary between Standen and Arreton.

Baker and Brookes identified a total of nine hanging promontories in their paper, mainly in the West Midlands and western England, with an outlier in Kent. The nearest example to the Isle of Wight is Court Farm, Damerham, on the border between Hampshire and Dorset. The Hatt is not listed, although Stuart Brookes has said in correspondence with me that ‘The Hatt sounds suspiciously like an HP [hanging promontory]’.

Since reading Baker and Brookes’ paper I have revisited The Hatt. I have also noticed that the Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1862/3 shows a well some 160 metres to the north of The Hatt. This is on the eastern side of the small valley between The Hatt and the Domesday manorial site of Standen, now known as Great East Standen Manor. This location, which is quite overgrown with vegetation during the spring and summer months in the modern

landscape could very well be of some considerable antiquity as the site of a spring. A reliable water supply would have been of great importance to the relatively large numbers of people gathering at the hundredal centre for the eastern half of the Island in the later Anglo-Saxon period and beyond. These gatherings were held every four weeks as specified in a document known as the 'Hundred Ordinance' dating from the tenth century. A source of water which was accessible around the year was not however available on Bowcombe Down, the meeting place for Bowcombe Hundred at and before the time of Domesday Book, later known as the West Medine.

Another feature which I overlooked during my recording for the 'Landscapes of Governance' project is a small, approximately circular shaped mound, the top of which is now surmounted by a telegraph pole, which is located within metres of the site identified as The Hatt. This mound is approximately 20 metres in diameter at its base, 12 metres in diameter across its top and stands about 1.3 metres high. It would appear to have had a surrounding ditch. Was this a moot mound? Is it big enough? The mound can be seen on Google Earth at 50°40'39.82"N / 1°15'26.47"W [SZ52588673].

Stuart Brookes has said

I think the additional evidence for The Hatt is very compelling. The association with springs is something we have hints for at other sites, but nothing concrete enough to go to print (!) Of course it would be natural, particularly for larger assemblies which I guess these are, to have a supply of water. The putative moot-mound is also very interesting. It is quite small: by comparison the BA [Bronze Age] bowl barrow that is the moot mound of Brightwell (Gloucestershire) is 30m in dia[metre] and 3m high; Bedisloe Tump (also Gl) is 60 feet in diameter and 7 feet high, Mutlow Hill barrow (Cambridgeshire), is 67 ft in diameter and 10-12 ft in height. But that doesn't mean it wasn't a moot-mound; if not for restricted business then more as a form of open air pulpit! (e-mail communication, August 2016)

One further consideration is the possible significance of '*the Hatt of trees*' referred to by Sir John Oglander. This would appear to refer to a circular clump of trees in a prominent position. The only modern place-name on the Isle of Wight containing this name element is High Hat. This minor place-name was recorded on the 1862/3 Ordnance Survey six-inch map in a location some 500 metres to the west of St Lawrence Shute, where St Rhadegund's Path from Whitwell approaches the top of the cliff above The Undercliff. As in the case of The Hatt above Arreton, '*now all the trees are gone*'. The place-name is still current in Hampshire, with Hatt Hill and Hatt Farm in Mottisfont parish, as well as being 'Found in several names in the New Forest for a small tree-crowned hill' (Coates 1989, 88). By the time that Sir John Oglander was writing in the early seventeenth century the trees at The Hatt were no longer standing. A clump of trees in this location may have been of significance at or adjoining the later Anglo-Saxon meeting place. A survey of the meeting place for Botloe Hundred in Gloucestershire has drawn attention to the possible significance of 'a pollarded black poplar, which stands on Botloe's Green, some 50 metres from Hundred Field Could this or a predecessor have been significant as a landmark tree and could it have been used as a later execution site?' (Charlesworth 2010, 13). Hundred Field is a hanging promontory site. Did Oglander's *Hatt of trees on the East end of Stanum down* or its precursor mark a hanging promontory site in the later Anglo-Saxon landscape of the Isle of Wight?

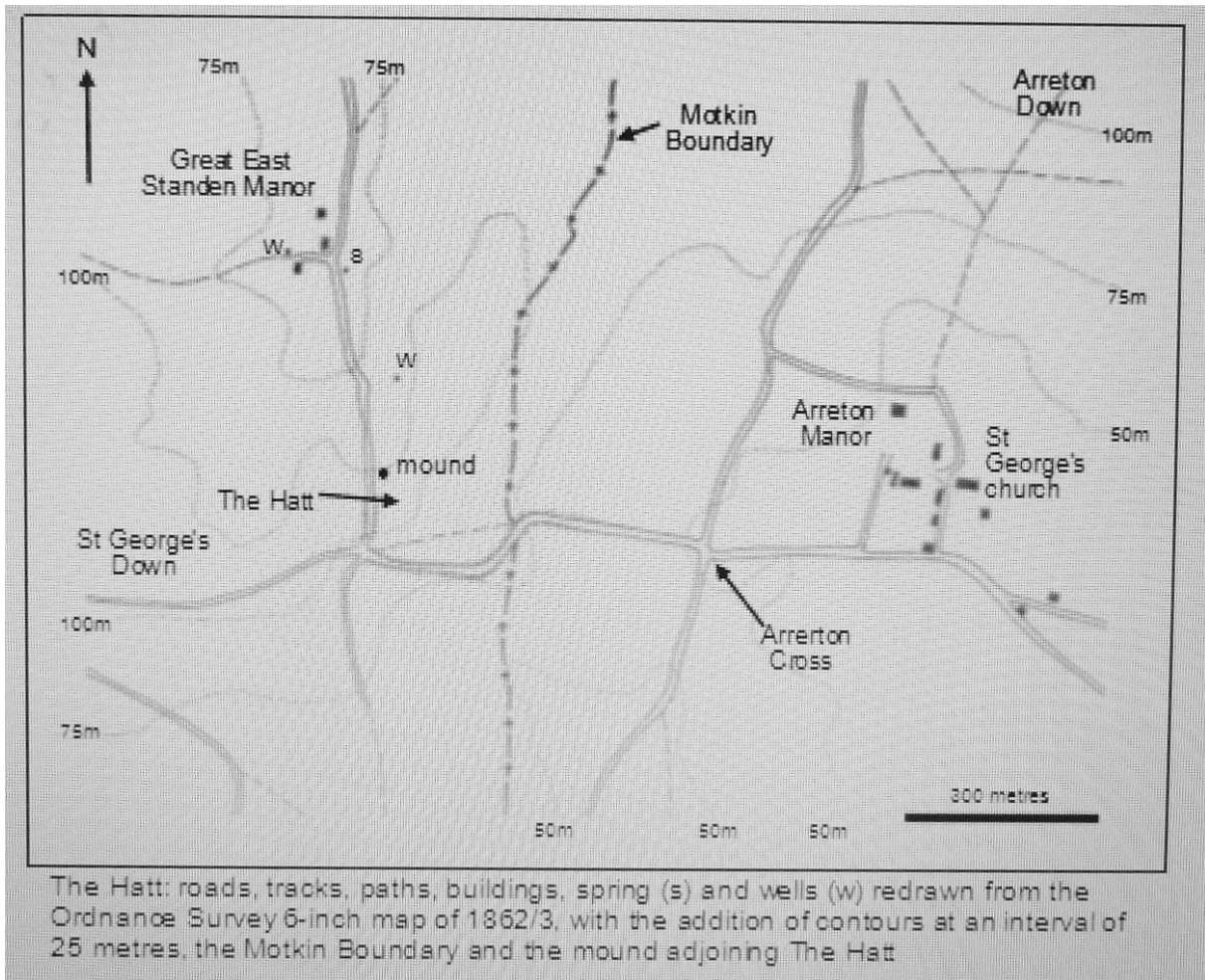
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- Charlesworth, D. 2010 'Survey of the Botloe Hundred Meeting Place', *Glevensis* 43, 11-15
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Margham, J. 2013 'Early Medieval Meeting Places in an Island Landscape', *Proc. Isle of Wight Nat. Hist. Archaeol. Soc.* 27, 5-26

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Stuart Brookes for correspondence about The Hatt and for sending me a copy of Baker and Brookes (2013). Thanks also to Simon Dear and Becky Loader for help in obtaining a copy of the OS six inch map of the area. Vicky Basford assisted in the measuring of the mound and provided the tape measure!



John Margham johnmargham@yahoo.co.uk

Recording Matters

It was good to see many of you at the Parkhurst Forest Bioblitz at the beginning of June. We tried to record as many species as possible within the Forest in a 24 hour time period. The species total was 350 by the end of the afternoon and after all the species had been identified and checked, it rose to 469. This is comparable to the total we recorded some years ago in Firestone Copse which has a similar range of habitats. You can read an account of the day at <http://wildonwight.co.uk/news/index.php/parkhurst-forest-bioblitz-2017-report> or you can request a paper copy by contacting the IWNHAS office.

The recording spreadsheet is constructed prior to the event by extracting records from the last 20 years or so from the IWNHAS database. Parkhurst Forest is a well recorded site for plants, but many species had to be added into the spreadsheet as recording cards came back to the hub. In particular, records for Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*) and Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) were the first since 1978.

A further example of ‘rediscovering’ a species came a few weeks ago when an interested local resident asked for a list of the plants which had been recorded on Colwell Common. The southern part has been largely left unmown this year and she wanted to see what was present. She reported back that she had found a species not on the list - Bog Pimpernel – which is relatively uncommon on the Island. She took photographs and provided a grid reference so the record could be verified. When the database was checked, the last record for this species on Colwell Common was made by William Bromfield (author of *Flora Vectensis*) in 1856.

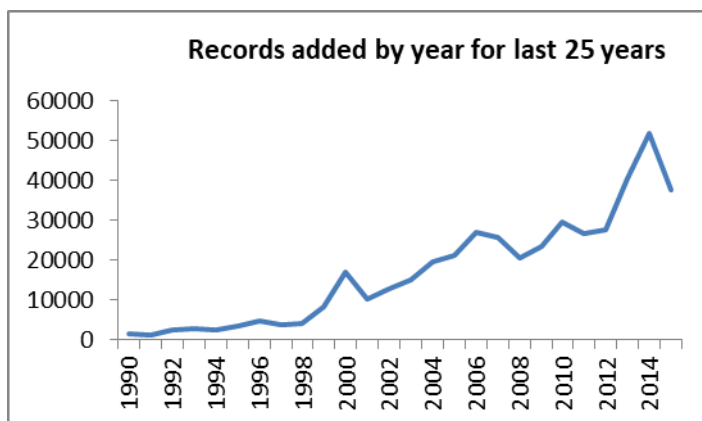
Earlier this year an audit of species on the IWNHAS database was done; below are a few of the figures to come from this process.

Total number of species listed in databases: 7770

Broad group	Number of species
Plants	1801
Lower plants	545
Fungi (including lichens)	1341
Vertebrates	339
Insects	3509
Other invertebrates	235
Total species	7770

It would be interesting to compare the current picture with what was recorded in 1909 when Frank Morey published his book *The Natural History of the Isle of Wight*. What are the extinctions or new arrivals for example?

There are over 460,000 individual observations in electronic format, and nearly 90% of these have been made from 2000 onwards. The chart shows that the rate of information being added is on the whole increasing rapidly.



Once records have been put into electronic format it is possible to analyse them in various ways, from simple species lists for sites, to looking at Island wide distribution and how it is changing. National surveys such as the WeBS water bird counts enable trends to be discovered on a much wider geographical and temporal basis.

The Society's iWatchWildlife project has been giving opportunities to encourage recording of commoner distinctive Island species with the 'Species of the Month' campaign as well as training events to help build our skills. There are examples of individuals in the society carrying out recording of their special interests - have a look at Andy's Nature Notes and Peter Burgess's article on glow worms in his garden. All these activities not only provide interest and enjoyment for the observers - the records are adding to the bigger picture of our natural environment and how species are faring in a rapidly changing world.

Anne Marston, IW Local Records Centre



iWatch Wildlife is our project to encourage people to make a record of the wildlife they see. People notice wildlife around them but frequently don't take the time to record what they see. The Society species database holds plenty of information about rarities but very few records for the commoner species, such as House Sparrows, House Martins or Hedgehogs. Without this data, we are unable to track declines or increases in species.

Tina Whitmore is working very hard with us on this project. Amongst other things, she has set up a facebook page and is encouraging people to particularly record species of the month. These have included Brown Hare, Hedgehog, House Martin nests and Stag Beetle. We have received a lot of records which we would otherwise be unaware of but we are keen to collect more. If you have seen any of these, please let us know. We need a name, a date and a precise location. If you can attach a picture then so much the better. Records can be submitted via Facebook, e-mail iwatchwildlife@gmail.com, or through the on-line recording system called iRecord: <https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/>

You will notice some of our species icons alongside of the Section Reports this time. We have taken part in events such as Bioblitz, Summer Recorders Conference at Dinosaur Isle and public nature walks in Shanklin Chine, and we will be at the Wolverton Show. Do come along and lend a hand and do please submit your records.

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) News

House Martin Survey

Following the appeal in the previous edition of the Bulletin, and promotion by Tina Whitmore as part of the iWatch Wildlife project, there has been increased coverage for this year's BTO House Martin nest survey. Grateful thanks to the heroic efforts by Debbie Hart and Patricia Lockwood who have found a total of 50 occupied nests from their respective surveys at Binstead and Chale Green. It will be interesting to see the results when published.

I have also been running the occupied nest register once again and I would like to hear from anyone who has seen occupied nests during the summer. Last year's results did not provide any conclusive evidence in their nesting preferences. Of the 120 reported nests in 2016, 63 provided further information to identify the age and type of building used plus the location, wall surface and aspect of the nest on the building. The categories used were in line with the BTO House Martin nest survey for consistency.

Based on the sample of 63 nests, 44% were on modern buildings (1945 to 1989) (39% semi-detached two storey houses and 61% detached bungalows), 21% on middle-aged buildings (1919 to 1944) (all semi-detached two storey buildings) and 35% on old buildings (pre-1919) (all detached farmhouses).

Regarding the location of the nest site, the aspect appears less important with 54% situated between north and east and 46% between south and south-west. Similarly the position of the nest site failed to show any clear preference with 51% under the eaves and 49% positioned under the top of the gable end.

The wall surface used was surprising however. Only 56% of the nests were built on the traditional wooden eaves with 44% on replacement plastic eaves and cladding. The latter statistic effectively removes any argument that plastic eaves are responsible for the reduction in nests.

Finally 90% of the nests were mud construction with 10% artificial nests installed by householders.

From personal observation, the age and aspect of the property is of less importance than the construction of the property relating to the particular angle of the gable end and the eaves along with a plentiful food supply close by. This is probably the reason why the majority of nests are now found in villages rather than towns. The House Martin needs the aeroplankton (the tiny air-bound insects found at high altitude) as its main food source as they feed at a greater height than the Barn Swallow which can be seen swooping low over fields during the summer. Unfortunately the aeroplankton has reduced in urban areas, due to a number of reasons, but is still available in the countryside albeit in lower numbers than previous.

I plan to analyse the 2017 results so the more information I receive then a larger sample can be obtained and may provide further clues to this charismatic summer visitor in an effort to stem their decline.

European Breeding Bird Atlas 2

EBBA2 is the second European Breeding Bird Atlas – an ambitious project led by the European Bird Census Council (EBCC) and involving bird organisations across Europe (including BTO, BirdWatch Ireland and RSPB), to map the distribution and abundance of more than 500 species breeding in Europe. Fieldwork is being carried out 2013-17 and there are more than five thousand 50 x 50 km squares to cover.

The atlas will provide up-to-date breeding distribution and relative abundance maps across the whole of Europe and importantly, will be able to show changes in species distribution since the first European Bird Atlas published in 1997. Knowing where birds occur and how distributions have changed is crucial to effective targeting of conservation policies and action. Across Europe, great coverage has already been achieved in countries with few local experts, little regular monitoring and huge accessibility challenges.

At the time of writing this article, at the beginning of July, the 50 x 50 km square which includes the Island required confirmed breeding records (between 2013 to 2017) for the following species; Fulmar, Garden Warbler, Garganey, Grey Partridge, Long-eared Owl, Red-legged Partridge, Shag, Snipe, Spotted Flycatcher, Teal, Turtle Dove, Wheatear and Willow Warbler.

If you have any confirmed breeding records for the above please can you enter them in BirdTrack (you can register for access at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/taking-part/how-register>) or forward them to myself and I will enter them on your behalf. All records in BirdTrack for other species will also contribute to this atlas while any trips abroad to continental Europe between 2013 and 2017 should also be logged in BirdTrack as soon as possible.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

The 2017 survey has now finished and it appears to have received record coverage although a few sites have still to report their data. Many thanks to all new and existing recorders for their efforts and I hope to summarise the results in the next edition of the Bulletin.

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

July sees the start of the 2017/18 reporting year with the Island's contribution continuing to increase. A total of 20 sites were covered during 2016/17, a record for the Island. Two of the sites received reduced coverage; Pritchett's Pond and Priory Farm Pond in Carisbrooke due to the low number of birds present. If anyone would like to take on monitoring either or both of these two sites, making a monthly or quarterly visit depending upon your choice and availability, please contact me.

The 2015/16 national online report is now available at the following link;

<https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs>

You can find out how each species is faring both nationally and locally with access to all of the Island sites and national species trends. The latest report also includes the results of the 2015/16 Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS III) which received good support from Society members both on the Island and as far away as the Isle of Arran (well done Daphne and Mike Watson).

Wader Colour-ringed Sightings

As July marks the onset of waders returning from their breeding grounds, please report any Island sightings of colour-ringed birds. For example a Redshank was ringed by the Farlington Marshes Ringing Group in September 2013 and was reported by James Gloyn at Bembridge Harbour the following month. Since then the only sightings are at potential breeding grounds in Lancashire in April and May for 2014, 2015 and 2017. Where does this

bird winter – does it return to the Solent and in particular the Island? This is why it is so important to report all sightings no matter if you have seen the bird previously at the same location as this information is used for site fidelity etc. To report a ringed bird please use the following link: <https://blx1.bto.org/euring/main/> . Alternatively if you do not have online access, please forward the information to myself and I will enter the record on your behalf.

If you require further information or wish to discuss any BTO-related topics please contact myself, **Jim Baldwin (BTO Regional Representative)** either by phone (01983 721137(home), 07528 586683(mobile)), email (wightbto@hotmail.com) or write to me at 21 Hillcrest Road, Rookley, I.W PO38 3PB.



A new Bryologist arrives

There has been no-one seriously looking at mosses and liverworts on the Island since Lorna Snow ceased to be active and so, for most of the twenty first century there have been remarkably few bryophyte records apart from those made by the British Bryological Society on their field meeting in March 2002. That was until 2016 when George Greiff, a student who had moved back from South Africa and is living on the Island, decided that he would like to take up identifying bryophytes as a hobby.

Since the autumn of 2016, George has been collecting and examining bryophytes with a passion and his identification skills have progressed in leaps and bounds. He has found many species for which there have been no recent records and some which have not been recorded since Percy Long was recording in the 1930s. He has benefitted from taking part in meetings held by the Southern Group of the British Bryological Society and on 31st March he took part in visit by Natural England and National Trust staff to refind the very rare leafy liverwort, *Southbya nigrella* at St Catherine's Point. This species is only known elsewhere in this country from Portland in Dorset and the meeting was successful in its objective.

During the spring and summer months, bryophytes become dessicated and are less amenable to study and so George has been turning his attention to lichens, another neglected group. His observant and discerning eye has led to the discovery of a group of twig lichens which had become rare but are beginning to recolonise this habitat, presumably as a result of changing weather patterns.

You may well meet George at some of our meetings. We are hoping he will discover much more on the Island before he goes off to University in due course.

Colin Pope

What's in a name? Hedge Bindweed, *Calystegia sepium*

Calystegia means 'calyx-cover'. The generic name can be divided into two elements: calys- for calyx and -stegia, Latinised for stegein, the Greek verb meaning to cover, with reference to the green bracts which cover the calyx. *Sepium* means 'of the hedgerow', *sepes* being Latin for hedge.

A local name for *Calystegia sepium* is Granny-pops. Pick a stalked flower and hold the bracts between index finger and thumb whilst saying, ‘Granny-pop, Granny-pop; pop out of bed’ then gently squeeze and see the corolla pop out of its calyx. This infantile practice has often been demonstrated during the Society’s outdoor meetings, much to the amusement or boredom of other members.

In the past, *Calystegia sepium* was classified as *Convolvulus sepium*, as in Nicholas Culpepper’s famous herbal: ‘Scammony or Great White Bindweed / *Convolvulus sepium* grows most frequently in the Isle of Wight

Scammony is a resinous product from roots of *Convolvulus* plants which was historically used as a cathartic medicine. *Convolvulus scammonia* is a plant native to the Middle East. According to Culpepper, larger *Convolvulus* plants from abroad made the best scammony whilst from the smaller roots of England’s *C. sepium*, juice was extracted and used as a milder purgative treatment.

Sue Blackwell

Odonata Sightings – April to June 2017

When I became the County Dragonfly Recorder in March I certainly did not expect to be reporting a new species for the Island in my first year, let alone a new breeding record as well.

There had been no new species of Odonata recorded on the Island since 25th May 2008 when Graham Sparshott had a teneral Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva* at Brading Marshes (proof they had bred the previous year at the site). Therefore it was the highlight of the year to date when one of our regular Odonata recorders, Peter Hunt, found Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus* at one of his sites on, coincidentally, 25th May, initially as a teneral with subsequent visits producing adults. Further investigation produced photographic evidence that the species had been present and bred at this site since at least 2015. The site owners have requested that the location is withheld for the time being. A separate account of Peter’s excellent find is included in this edition of the Bulletin.

The reporting year had started with an intriguing report of a possible Vagrant Emperor *Anax ephippiger* seen in the West Wight area at the end of March (awaiting further details). Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula* is normally the first resident species seen and this year was no exception with the first reports of emergence at ponds in Totland, East Cowes and Ventnor on 9th April while the only other species recorded during the month was a solitary Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum* at Southford on 29th.

May began with three immature male Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* at Shalfleet stream, a favourite site for this species, on 2nd with emerging Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa* seen on the same day at Bouldnor, Laundry Lane, Bembridge Ponds and Ventnor. The first Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella* and Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* was seen at Laundry Lane on 7th while Ian Giles found a Red-eyed damselfly *Erythromma najas* at Stag Lane pond on 13th.

The warmer weather in the second half of the month coincided with an increase in sightings. A male Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* was seen at Thorncross on 18th

while the first Black-tailed-Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum* was reported at Bouldnor on 21st. On the same day Scarce Chaser was sighted at one of its East Wight sites while there were over 100 Beautiful Demoiselle at Shalfleet stream.

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* and Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* were recorded at one of the ponds at Briddlesford Woods Nature Reserve on 22nd and the first Downy Emerald was seen at one of its favoured sites in the East Wight on 24th. On the same day as the remarkable Southern Emerald discovery (25th), Ruddy Darters *Sympetrum sanguineum* were emerging at Bouldnor.

One of the national highlights this year in the dragonfly world is the large influx of Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*. The species is usually found throughout much of central and southern Europe as well parts of the Middle-east, Africa and Asia but at the time or writing they have been reported from over 45 sites in the UK and the Island has been no exception. The first Island sighting was a male at Ventnor Downs on 24th May, followed on 28th by a female at Ventnor revetment and two males at Atherfield. Eight were present at Atherfield on 31st with a further two seen at Compton Pond the following day.

A teneral female Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum* was observed at Bouldnor on 6th June while the same site recorded the first Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* and Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa* on 16th. Two Golden-ringed Dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii* were seen at Walters Copse on 18th and a teneral Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum* was at a private pond in Shalfleet on 20th, the earliest record for this species on the Island.

On the same day there was an interesting record of a Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* at Bouldnor. As the only known breeding site on the Island for this species is Brading Marshes, it is thought likely that this individual had travelled from its New Forest breeding grounds. The species has been recorded away from its main breeding site before with an individual at a Totland garden pond in July 2013 while there have been several national records this year of unusual localities, the best being on an oil rig in the North Sea, some 160 miles east of Edinburgh !.

I have started to assemble a definitive Island database for Odonata records, a task which will continue during the winter months. I was surprised to find that there have been precious few records submitted prior to 1977 so I am extremely grateful to those of you who are submitting records now, both for 2017 or for any prior year. I am happy to accept records in paper format or electronically. I can send you a recording form to enter your sightings manually or a formatted excel spreadsheet via email in the format required by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). Alternatively I can forward you details of how to enter your records directly into iRecord (there is a special BDS input screen).

Please contact me either by phone (01983 721137(home), 07528 586683(mobile)), email (wightdragonflies@gmail.com) or write to me at 21 Hillcrest Road, Rookley, I.W PO38 3PB.

Jim Baldwin (County Dragonfly Recorder)

Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus* – a new Odonata species for the Isle of Wight

Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus* is a Palaearctic species which is found in northern Africa, most of Europe and western and central Asia. It is a relative newcomer to the British list with an initial sighting of several males at Winterton Dunes, Norfolk in 2002. Since then it has been recorded in Britain in most years with most sightings between East Sussex and Norfolk apart from a female located in North Somerset in 2006. However the species has struggled to establish a sustained breeding population over here with confirmed breeding, until now, mainly confined to Norfolk and Kent.

I have visited this particular site on the Island since May 2015. It is interesting to note that the two ponds are surrounded by scrub and dense low vegetation. The water level is low and they seem to be liable to drying out, particularly in the summer. This is a habitat preferred by this species and the Norfolk site is very similar while apparently in Kent it is rather different.

It was here that *Lestes barbarus* was discovered. I recorded and photographed several individuals, including mature and teneral on the 16th June 2016 and again in 2017 on the 25th and 26th May. On the 2017 dates they seemed to be all teneral. On my first visits to the two ponds in question during 2015, on the 17th and 27th June I recorded Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa* but no *Lestes barbarus*. However the presence of teneral *Lestes barbarus* in 2016 means it was present and breeding in 2015.

Count of *Lestes b.* in 2016 unknown as not recorded.

Count of *Lestes b.* on 25th May 2017 ...10.

Count of *Lestes b.* on 26th May 20173.

I must point out that I incorrectly identified the species as *Lestes sponsa* in 2016 and 2017 and it is only due to advice from Adrian Parr of the British Dragonfly Society and Paul Winter that my images were confirmed as *Lestes barbarus*.

Peter Hunt

A Personal Glow Worm Hunt

My wife Sheila had always wanted to see fireflies and during one holiday abroad that ambition was achieved when we discovered that in the darker parts of the hotel grounds there were fireflies each shining for a second or so as they flew around in the bushes. This meant that every evening we were doing what these days would be regarded as something more than suspicious, creeping around in the dark watching for the flashes of light from these intriguing insects. Ever since, if we have been anywhere that there is even the remotest chance the question is asked, are there any fireflies?

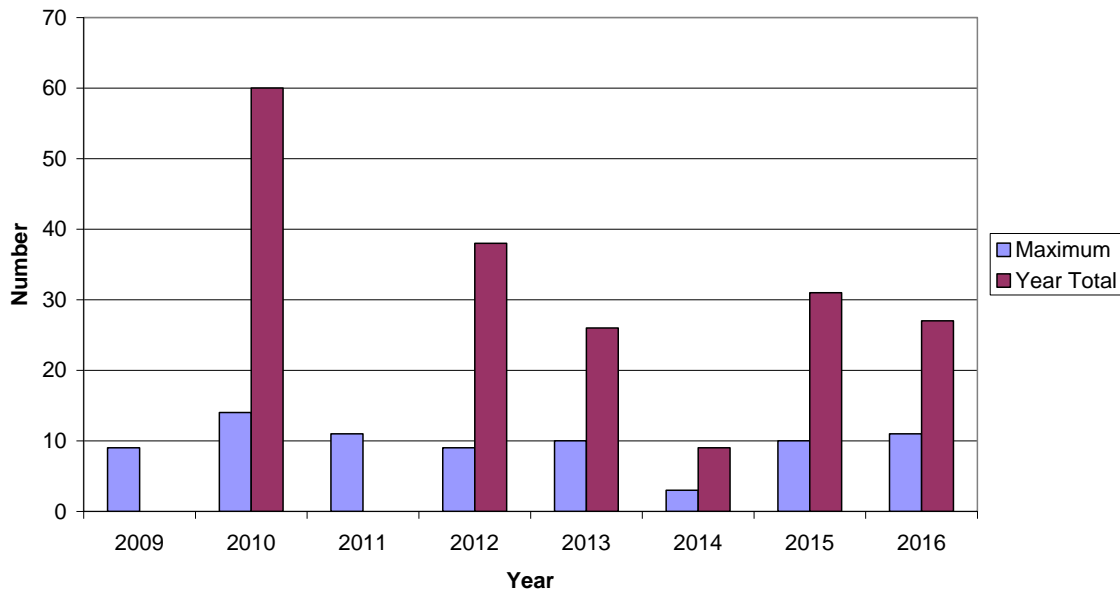
We had been living in Bembridge for a number of years when she heard about the St Helens 'annual glow worm hunt'. Of course we had to go, and for a number of years were regulars scrambling around the church yard in the dark counting the glowing females. We never did see any mating pairs.

Even after we had moved to Fishbourne we continued attending the glow worm hunt. During our first summer in the new house, by chance I found that we actually had glow worms in our back garden. On a trip to the compost heap late one evening I noticed what looked like something glinting off a metal roller on the other side of the garden. It puzzled me because from where I was standing I couldn't work out what the light source causing the reflection could have been, it was the wrong colour for a street light and there was nothing else I could see that would have been bright enough. With the banana skin duly deposited on the heap I went over to check what was causing this odd reflection only to find that it was not a reflection after all but a glow worm on a piece of raised ground behind the roller. I went back to the house and called on Sheila to come see what I had found; I didn't tell her what it was as I wanted it to be a surprise. When she saw it all the complaints about being dragged outside in the 'middle of the night' were forgotten and we started searching for more. We could now have our very own glow worm hunt. Instead of just a one weekend a year snapshot I have been able to record the number of individuals seen on each available evening throughout the summer.

Glow worms have a two to three year life cycle. After hatching towards the end of summer the larvae hunt slugs and snails, killing and eating them by injecting them with paralyzing digestive juices. They hibernate for the winter and re-emerge the following spring to continue feeding until they hibernate for a second winter. When they re-emerge in spring they either continue feeding for another summer or pupate into adults; at this stage they have no mouth parts and do not feed, their sole intention is to reproduce. The flightless females find a suitable vantage point and advertise themselves each evening by displaying the glowing segments in their tails. Not being able to feed they tend to conserve energy by never moving more than a few feet making them easy to count and track. The males being able to fly look very different. They have very good vision and, they are attracted to the green glow of any females they see. During or shortly after mating the females cease glowing, they then lay their eggs which will hatch a few weeks later and die, their adult purpose served. Females that are not mated will have stored enough energy during their larval stage to be able to glow for two to three weeks before their light fades and they die.

In 2010 I tried something different, rather than just a nightly count, I plotted on a simple plan of the garden all the individuals seen each night during the season and created an animation with a green spot representing each glow worm flashing on and off as it appeared and disappeared. I did it to see if there was any discernable trend to where they appeared; there wasn't; it was just green dots appearing and disappearing at random. I found putting together each frame a tedious task and the whole project seemed to take an inordinate amount of time; it was my first and so far only attempt at putting together an animation like this. As a result, not wanting to go through the process again I didn't plot locations in 2011. Looking back on it I should have recorded the data as I now use it to track the total number of individuals displaying each year and to track changes in their distribution. While the maximum daily count does not directly correlate with the annual total, it can be used as a proxy for the missing data indicating that there was nothing unusual about 2011.

Maximum Daily Count & Annual Totals

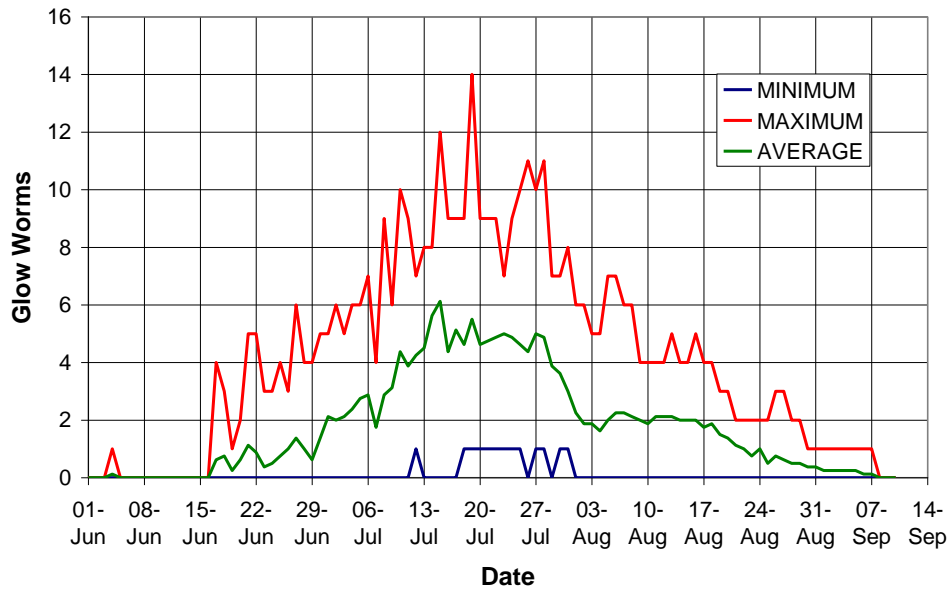


At first glance the total number of females seen each year appears to show a worrying trend that would have sensationalist headline writers saying that glow worms will be extinct in the early 2020s. However the study has not been running long enough as yet to establish whether there really is any decline in the number of glow worms in the garden or whether the large variations seen over the years are just normal fluctuations in the population. I don't yet know if 2010 was an exceptionally good year in the same way that I do know that 2014 was particularly bad because of a series of very wet winters. The winter of 2013/14 was exceptionally wet saturating the ground for several weeks with surface water looking like small lakes over the area where most the glow worms appeared each time it rained. This had a serious effect on glow worm numbers in all parts of the garden, although the season started fairly early in mid June it was very short lasting until the end of July with the greatest number seen on any night of only 3. Around mid July when numbers should be at their peak averaging 4 or 5 a night, there were 5 days when there were no sightings at all. This did give me some concerns over the viability of the population for the coming years. Would there be any at all next year? That fear proved to be unfounded as numbers have bounced back up, but their distribution has changed; there are now fewer sightings in the lowest lying part of the garden that became waterlogged during the winter's deluge. This is also the darkest and wildest part of the garden so hopefully there is a good chance that the population here will return to normal in due course. At around the same time as the population crash there was also a change from sodium to LED lighting, but so far there is nothing to suggest that it has had any effect on numbers. The sightings have been greatest around the house and in the front garden which being near the road is well illuminated by the street lights.

Although the peak numbers occur mid to late July the exact date is somewhat variable. I did wonder whether the peak might be synchronised in some way with the evening visibility of the Moon; glow worms appear for only a few hours in the evening after darkness falls. What I found was that peak numbers coincided with any phase from thin crescent to completely full.

Searching the garden on a nightly basis means that I get to see the regular nocturnal occupants of the garden like the toads, or as has happened on several occasions come face to face with the less regular local fox and badger, but sadly no hedgehogs to feast on the many ravenous slugs and snails that we have here; the glow worms have them all to themselves.

Nightly Glow Worm Numbers 2009 - 2016



As this is being written, by late June, the glow worms are doing exceptionally well. Last night (26th June), there were 10 with 6 new ones, more than we have seen before at this time of year. We are only a few weeks after the first one was seen and the total number is just short of an average year already.

Peter Burgess

ANDY BUTLER'S NATURE NOTES JANUARY TO JUNE 2017

January

2nd. Went to Newtown after a report of a Spoonbill being seen there. Didn't see it, but plenty of Redwings and Fieldfares.

5th. Went to Yarmouth with Pete Campbell. Saw a Spoonbill, presumably the one from Newtown, plus 200 Wigeon, 2 Water Rails, 100 Starlings, 300 Brent Geese, 400 Lapwing, 220 Golden Plover, 3 Kingfishers and 2 Snipe. Watched a Song Thrush smashing a snail shell on the ground before eating it. I haven't seen this for many years now.

7th. A Black Redstart along the revetment at Wheeler's Bay.

13th. A sprinkling of snow last night.

18th. Back to Yarmouth, there are now 2 Spoonbills there, one an immature.

22nd. Went to Appleford near Chale Green to see a Cattle Egret. Good views.

23rd. Went to Newtown. Thick fog, turned round and went home.

24th. Black Redstart still along the revetment plus a pair of Stonechats.

28th. Snowdrops in flower in Bonchurch Old Church.

February

5th. A Black Redstart round town in Albert St.

7th. Went to Yarmouth. More Lapwings to be seen than usual, at least 2000 on the wing in four flocks.

9th. I was told that someone caught 3 Mackerel off Yarmouth Pier recently. This is the second year I've heard of this happening.

17th. Pete and I went to Thorncross after reports of a Glossy Ibis being seen there. We saw it and had very good close up views.

18th. A Peacock butterfly in the garden this morning. First butterfly of the year. Went to Atherfield looking for Glanville webs and drew a blank.

24th. Glossy Ibis still at Thorncross.

March

1st. A miserable wet day.

3rd. Have been unable to find any Glanville webs anywhere so far this year.

4th. Went to Yarmouth early morning and photographed a Cattle Egret.

5th. Found two small Glanville webs along the revetment. Caterpillars quite small, about 7mm with 40/50 in each web.

6th. Contactors started work on the Wheeler's Bay Glanville project. This is a scheme to try and halt the decline of the habitat along the revetment.

8th. A good number of Gannets in close off the Bay, fishing in the rough seas and high winds.

9th. Work finished on the project for the time being. Found 6 webs along the revetment. A Dartford Warbler seen flying through the back of my garden by a local birder.

10th. Thick fog all day.

11th. Went to Shepherd's Chine, Atherfield, to look for webs with Dave Nordell and Peter Hunt. We found about 100 but I slipped off the cliff and fell down into a wet patch of mud and had to retire homeward.

13th. One large Glanville web at Binnel. Comma and a Small Tortoiseshell in the garden.

15th. 7 Dartford Warblers on the Downs.

21st. 10 Glanville webs along the revetment now.

24th. Went over to Brading Marsh with Pete. Saw 5 House Martins and 3 Marsh Harriers. A Small White in the garden.

25th. 21 Glanville webs along the revetment. 2 Little Ringed Plovers at Brading Marsh.

27th. 179 Glanville webs at Atherfield.

30th. Dave and I went to Brook looking for webs but couldn't find any. Glossy Ibis still at Thorncross. Report of a Black-winged Stilt at Brading Marsh. Dave and I shot over there and got excellent views. A really lovely bird.

31st. Back to Brading Marsh with Pete. Stilt still there and got some decent photos. We also saw 2 Cattle Egrets just below Gander Down.

April

1st. Dave and I went over to Walter's Copse this morning. We had 17 Peacock [an unusually high number]. Back home there were 3 Male Orange Tips in the garden.

2nd. 2 Holly Blues in the garden. 5 Wheatears along at Monk's Bay, Bonchurch.

6th. Dave and I saw a Clouded Yellow along the revetment.

7th. Clouded Yellow again in the same place. Probably not a migrant as we have had them emerge at this site before.

9th. First Common Blue along the revetment.

13th. Pete came down the back path in a tearing hurry with news of a Sub-alpine Warbler out near Battery Bay, St. Lawrence. Straight out to see it and got excellent views and lots of photos. It is almost certainly an Eastern Sub-alp, a much rarer bird. The last one I saw [a Western] was at Forelands 25 years ago.

17th. Male Redstart at Orchard's Bay.

18th. A Humming-bird Hawkmoth [HBHM] in off the sea along the revetment.

19th. A Grey Seal in close off Monk's Bay.

20th. Went up to Tennyson Downs with Pete to see and photograph an Early Spider Orchid. 8 Green Hairstreaks in Whiteways car park.

23rd. Pete and I went up to Culver Down but very foggy. Came back to Ventnor Downs and still foggy. Dave and I went out to Atherfield in the afternoon. We had 1 Brimstone, 3 Small Copper, 1 Grizzled Skipper and 1 Wall.

14th. 6 Wheatears and 1 Whinchat along the revetment.

25th. A Whimbrel and a Common Sandpiper in Monk's Bay.

27th. Went to Brading with Pete to see a Pectoral Sandpiper [an American wader].

28th. 4 Common Sandpipers in Monk's Bay now. Late afternoon got a call from Steve Jones to say he'd found a female Serin up in the car park at Wheeler's Bay Road. Good views and plenty of photos.

29th. Dave and I went to Southford, near Whitwell, this afternoon. Saw 1 Common Blue damselfly and 1 Large Red Damselfly. Also c.20 Orange Tips, 2 Wall and 1 Small Copper.

May

2nd. 2 Wall, 1 Small Blue and 1 Cream-spot Tiger moth along the revetment. 1 Wall and 1 Broad-bodied Chaser at Brading and 1 Wall at Atherfield.

6th. First Glanville Fritillary emerged today along the revetment. Also saw a Brown Argus, a Brimstone and 6 Common Blue.

8th. 2 Glanvilles and 1 Dingy Skipper along the revetment. 1 Wall in Monk's Bay plus 6 Wheatears, 3 Common Sands, 1 Dunlin and a Whimbrel.

9th. There are now 2 Whimbrel in Monk's Bay plus 1 Turnstone and 2 Common Sands. 9 Glanvilles on the wing now.

10th. Dave and I went up onto Bonchurch Down this morning. 3 Adonis Blue, 25 Dingy Skippers, 12 Common Blue, 15 Brown Argus, 6 Small Heath, 3 Small Copper and 1 Wall.

14th. 35 Glanvilles along revetment.

16th. 3 HBHM, 3 Painted Lady and 2 Red Admiral along the revetment.

19th. 52 Glanvilles, 15 Painted Lady, 4 Red Admiral, 1 Dingy Skipper and 1 Brown Argus along the Revetment. Dave and I visited a site near Ventnor where we found Glanvilles last year and saw 52. There were also 46 Small Blue, 10 Dingy Skipper and 2 Small Copper.

20th. Out to Atherfield, where we had 12 Glanville and 3 Wall.

21st. Went along to Sandown Meadows where we recorded one imm. male Scarce Chaser.

22nd. Bonchurch Down today: 13 Adonis Blue 1 Wall. A White Helleborine on the upper path in the Holm Oak wood.

24th. Went to Atherfield with Dave. 201 Glanvilles and 2 Wall. On to Grange Chine and counted 89 Glanvilles and 1 Wall.

25th. 85 Glanvilles along the revetment and 2 Small Blue. In the afternoon Dave and I went over to Brading Marsh and saw a remarkable 6 Hairy Dragonfly, I'd only ever seen a maximum of 2 before.

26th. A Clouded Yellow at St.Catherine's Point this morning plus 5 Glanvilles. In the afternoon we went to Chilton and walked through to Brook counting Glanvilles. We had 142.

28th. 1 female Red-veined Darter along the revetment in the morning. Later on went to Atherfield and had a total of 303 Glanvilles.

31st. There has been an invasion of Red-veined Darters into Britain over the last few days so Dave and I went to a reservoir near Atherfield to see if we could find any. We had 8.

June

1st. Went to Compton to count Glanvilles. We had 80 plus 2 R-v Darters on a small pool to the west. Checked the Atherfield reservoir on the way home but there were only 2 R-v darters remaining there.

6th. Severe gale last night and strong winds all day.

7th. Drove over to Walter's Copse, Newtown, in the morning. A Red Squirrel posed for photographs by the car parking area, which was nice. We also saw a Beautiful Demoiselle and an Emperor Dragonfly in the copse but not much else.

9th. 2 HBHM along the revetment. There was also a Grey Seal loitering in front of my house. The people that run the café alongside me have christened him Ron [as in 'Ronseal'].

18th. Back to Walter's Copse. We had 2 Banded Demoiselles, 2 Golden-ringed Dragonflies, 2 Dark-green Fritillaries, 2 Silver-washed Fritillaries and 4 White Admirals. When I was looking in my pond later in the day there was a Grass Snake in it.

20th. The weather has been extremely hot lately to the extent that I went in for a swim, the first for 6 years.

22nd. Had a phone call from Pete who was at work on the mainland to say there was a Lesser-grey Shrike at Brading. Went over there immediately and had good views of it albeit at quite a distance. Pete got there mid-afternoon and saw it as well. While I was watching it there was a chap there who was on holiday in the Island and he'd got a text from a friend on holiday in France to tell him about the bird. He came straight to the site and saw it within 5 minutes, amazing!

23rd. Pete and I went back to Brading for the Shrike but it had moved on during the night.

25th. Holly Blue in the garden.

26th. A hot, sunny day so I went to Walter's Copse looking for butterflies. Had 14 Silver-washed Fritillaries and 4 White Admiral plus a Southern Hawker, freshly emerged.

28th. In the afternoon there were 3 Sandwich Terns sat on the breakwater in front of my house.

30th. Went to Kemphill Moor Copse in the afternoon. Good numbers of Silver-washed Fritillaries about, at least 12 plus 8 White Admiral and 3 Gatekeepers. Outside the wood there was a male Southern Hawker and a Black-tailed Skimmer.

Andy Butler

Reports of General Meetings

Saturday 11 March

Trevor's Clay Project

Twenty-two members attended this initial meeting to hear Trevor speak about his proposal to run a clay project. It would involve collecting clay from different places around the Island's coast, fashioning it into various objects of daily use, firing it in a kiln, and testing the objects by using them. The objects could include floor tiles, tesserae for making mosaics, beads, bricks, bowls and cooking pots. We could record our experiences in a presentation, exhibition or articles, using photographs and film.

The first step would be to research local objects in museum collections from different periods in history and prehistory, looking at the different styles, designs and glazes. We could try to work out what type of clay was used, where it came from, and how it was collected. Trevor ran a similar project with the Young Archaeologists in 2006 and wrote a newsletter article about it. He also held a clay Exhibition at Medina High School.

This is an opportunity for us to be involved in a practical project that uses a multi-disciplinary approach, incorporating geology, experimental archaeology, microscopy, botany and perhaps more.

After the presentation, Trevor chaired a discussion in which members suggested ideas for how to proceed. Carol Jaye, a ceramicist and teacher, brought with her a basket full of samples of pottery she had made from Freshwater clay. She has experimented with producing different coloured glazes. The green colour comes from oxygen starvation. You can use plant material to change the colour, and maybe firing at different temperatures may produce colour variation too. Helen Parry, Manager of Newtown National Nature Reserve, suggested we might visit a former brick-works out on the spit at Newtown, accessing it by boat. Steve Hutt was keen to research kiln design and build one on his land.

There is much enthusiasm for this project and plenty of scope for individuals to follow their own interests. From now on meetings will be advertised in the Geology Section, and Trevor expects the project to span several programmes.

Saturday 22 April Pan Mill Meadow, the new Pan Country Park and Shide Chalk Pit

A group of some thirty members met Matthew Chatfield, Gift to Nature's Manager, for a walk through three nature reserves in Newport. Pan Mill Meadows stretches from here all the way to Matalan beside the River Medina. Shide Chalk Pit is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has been a nature reserve for a long time. Pan Country park has been owned by the Isle of Wight Council since the Second World War and was tenanted out for grazing.

Pan Country Park

This new nature reserve is bordered on one side by Pan Lane, an ancient trackway. This is the best area for dormice. It is protected by law, and the hedgerows on either side must be preserved. The new Asda supermarket development borders the lane on one side. Pan Lane is still a highway, giving access to the country park, but it is no longer a through route and so it is quiet and pleasant to walk along.

In Townfield, the largest of three pieces of land between Pan Lane and Staplers, we found the Pollen Trail, Ecclestone George's giant pollen grains and interpretation benches and

Paul Sivell's dormice and squirrel carved benches. The Bull Head bench depicts a fish. In the three Pan streams, one of the most important features of this land, there used to be a sizeable population of bullhead fish.

The pond was constructed in 2007 and is surrounded by willows. There are a few plants in the water, and Nathalie Bone pointed out a spider running over the surface. The First Field is old arable land, known as the Spider Field because wasp spiders are found here. The new houses come right to the edge of the nature reserve. This has both advantages and disadvantages. While inappropriate activities, such as lighting fires and vandalising trees, pose a risk, this is offset by the pool of people from which volunteers can be recruited. The developer of the housing estate had to replace trees they cut down, and old hedgerows must be preserved.

The Second Field is the biomass field. Higher up, Meadow Hill is south-facing, sunny and sheltered, and therefore good for butterflies. Disease resistant elms, planted by Ian Boyd, now of Arc Consulting in Sandown, may attract the white letter hairstreak butterfly. All the new houses are using a temporary gas supply, to be replaced by a biomass plant that burns wood. This is controversial, as it releases carbon into the atmosphere. As we returned to Pan Lane, we saw speckled wood, small white and peacock butterflies.

Shide Chalk Pit

This spectacular hollow, hidden from view and entered along a narrow path with steps, is flanked by sheer cliffs. It has wet alkaline conditions and attracts chalk grassland species. Twayblade orchids are found here. Cotoneaster, a garden escape, is spreading and Gift to Nature is trying to remove it. Green Gym volunteers have worked hard to keep the scrub under control.

A railway ran into the pit through the tunnel and fanned out. You can see the track indentations in the ground. There is also a shelter-cum-magazine for the men to shelter from the blasts. The railway connected to the main line, transporting the rock to lime kilns at Dodnor on the Medina estuary.

Pan Mill Meadows

In the meadows beside the River Medina we found various species of wild flower, including crossword, comfrey, winter cress, meadow buttercup and mouse ear. Now that the meadow has been cleared of scrub, Gift to Nature is seeking a grazier. Before the clearance, the grazing was too rough for sheep.

Matthew explained that it is a challenge to balance the needs of different users in this reserve, where town meets country. The river's course was changed when the railway track was laid through here. Before the First World War, gravel was extracted. Hubert Poole, a founder member of our Society, came to the gravel pits here in search of flint tools. Paul Bingham, our new President, researched Hubert Poole for a presentation he gave us several years ago. From some eighteen feet beneath blueish clay, Poole found the tooth of a straight-tusked elephant, a species that became extinct before the last Ice Age. The tooth is about seventy thousand years old, dating to the time of the last Neanderthals to live here. A symmetrical hand axe was also found here, and a family found a point from a spear that was a typical Neanderthal tool. It was sent to the Natural History Museum in London for identification and thought to be lost, but Frank Basford, in charge of the Isle of Wight's Portable Antiquities, traced its whereabouts and brought it back to the Island.

In 1977 the main road was built beside the river. In 2012 persistent heavy rain caused a flood that undermined the road, and huge amounts of chalk were washed down into the reserve. Gift to Nature has cleared a lot of scrub and felled a line of trees that were too close to the approach road to St George's roundabout. They have built a pond at this, the town end of the reserve, and by felling the trees and letting in more light, wild flowers are starting to colonise the clearing.

This was a very informative meeting, and most enjoyable in the sunshine. Many thanks to Matthew for guiding us and congratulations to Gift to Nature for taking on the management of existing nature reserves and creating new ones.

Sunday 18 June Day Trip to Oxford

I chose Oxford as our destination for this year's coach trip because the University Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum of Anthropology, together with the Ashmolean Museum, cater for the diverse interests within our Society, and they all house nationally and internationally important collections. Several of our members also found their way to the pioneering Botanic Garden. There are so many fascinating places to visit in Oxford and so many exhibitions and events, that I would happily spend at least a week here.

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History

A cathedral of glass and iron, both cast and wrought – in this museum, science, religion and architecture are combined in one breath-taking Gothic building.

“The beauty of its design, the technology of its construction, the detail of its decoration, are all metaphors for its collections of natural history and the significance that our society attaches to them”, writes Mark Fisher in his book ‘Britain's Best Museums and Galleries’.

I passed through the entrance and suddenly found myself in a great hall, filled with light. Before me rose the skeletons of dinosaurs and whales, suspended over a Nile crocodile, leatherback turtle and giant tortoise. My gaze was drawn up higher to the massive glass roof, and the cast-iron pillars and painted arches that support it. The large central court is surrounded by open arcades on two floors, forming a double-tiered cloister.

In the free souvenir guidebook to the museum, I read:

“The spaces between the cast iron roof girders are filled with a delicate filigree of wrought iron leaves, while the capitals of the supporting pillars sprout vines, shrubs or palm fronds. The arches themselves are painted with stencilled patterns of flowers and leaves in glorious shades of brick red, blue and gold.”

Each column is carved from a different British rock, and each capital is carved into plants that represent all the botanical orders.

This building was designed by the Dublin firm of Deane and Woodward and opened in 1860, the year in which Charles Darwin's seminal work ‘On the Origin of the Species’ was published. A furious argument erupted between the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, and Thomas Huxley, over claims that humans were descended from monkeys. Yet Dr Henry Wentworth Acland, the driving force behind the museum, intended it to represent the great diversity of God's creation and to reconcile science and the divine. Science had long been neglected in Oxford and important collections donated to the university had been left to decay. From a modern-day perspective, and recognising that however life on earth was

created or came into being, it has evolved into the amazing diversity of animals celebrated here.

The museum houses four major collections: mineralogy, geology, zoology and entomology. I was particularly intrigued by the dinosaur casts, skeletons and bones. One large glass case is dedicated to William Buckland's discovery of the first dinosaur to be scientifically described: megalosaurus, or 'giant lizard'. Three other species of dinosaur, all found in Oxfordshire in the nineteenth century by workmen digging for clay and limestone, are on display. They date from 130 to 165 million years ago.

Another display that caught my imagination was The Evolution of Bird Flight. Small dinosaur skeletons from the Late Jurassic, found in Solnhofen limestone in Bavaria, reveal the link between dinosaurs and birds – feathers, or highly adapted scales. The simplest kind is a bristle-like filament used mainly for insulation, recorded in a variety of theropod dinosaurs, including Tyrannosaurs. This stage was followed by down-like feathers, improving insulation. In some dinosaurs, contour feathers in bright colours were used for display.

This led me to examine the many species of stuffed birds from all over the world, some familiar and others I had only heard of, such as the wandering albatross, Cape griffon, Andean condor, shoebill, kiwi, all superb specimens, well preserved. Some species are now extinct, like the Dodo that takes centre stage in the museum, due to its association with Charles Dodgson, aka Lewis Carol, a lecturer at Oxford University. In his famous fantasy books about Alice, he refers to exhibits in this museum that they both visited.

I moved on to explore the many cases of marine fossils, dating from the Jurassic and Cretaceous, when Oxfordshire was covered in a warm and shallow sea. The skeletons of large mammals range from African elephant to polar bear. The Chillingham Bull caught my attention, as many years ago I went to see the herd of wild white cattle enclosed within the walls of Chillingham Castle's park in Northumberland since about the twelfth century. They are the ancestors of domestic cattle and are truly wild. Comparisons can be made between them and today's cattle to show the changes humans have made.

The mineral displays were next to attract my interest, especially Rocks from Space. There were meteorites found as far apart as Ireland and Argentina. Earth's Building Blocks – basalt and granite – was a fascinating display, demonstrating how metamorphism can change basalt into a range of new minerals, and how folding and stretching granite produces intricate textures seen in gneiss. There were displays of Minerals from Fire and Minerals from Water, an impressive ten-million-year-old pyrite and a very fine specimen of a fossil tree trunk two hundred million years old.

In front of the large cases of animals from each of the continents, I tried to identify the individuals before reading the labels, but there were some very unusual specimens. There were also cases of snakes and lizards, and a great variety of insects from all over the world, many displaying dazzling colours.

The Pitt Rivers Museum of Anthropology and World Archaeology

Entering this museum, in an extension to the back of the Natural History Museum, brought instant relief from the heat intensified by the glass and metal structure. What a contrast! The air was cool and the light dim, presumably to create the optimal conditions for the preservation of the man-made artefacts contained within. The entrance is raised above the

floor of the central court, giving the newcomer a good view of the layout of the building. The court is crammed with glass display cases of different sizes, with walkways in between. Around the edge there are two tiers of galleries with balconies, propped up by slender pillars, the whole resembling a Shakespearean theatre.

The museum was built in 1884 to house Augustus Henry Lane Fox's collections. He was also known as Pitt Rivers. Inspired by Darwin and Huxley, he formulated his own theory of the 'evolution of culture', the sequence of ideas by which man has progressed from the condition of 'the lower animals'. This he did by collecting cultural objects of all kinds, through field collectors and other members of the Anthropological Institute, through dealers and auctioneers. He collected these not for their intrinsic beauty, but 'for the light they throw on prehistoric times'. He aimed to educate the people, as he feared that without education, the proletariat could be easily incited to revolution "by demagogues and agitators, who strive to make them break with the past."

The objects in the museum are not arranged by their country or region of origin, but rather by purpose of use, to enable us to compare how people in different cultures have designed the same kinds of objects, or solved similar problems. There are cases dedicated to Looms and Weaving, Model Boats, Magic and Witchcraft, Treatment of The Dead, Masks, Musical Instruments, Toys and Games, Shadow Puppets, and even Trophies of Headhunters! Many of the Nigerian masks were horned and some were scary. By contrast, the Japanese masks were painted white, with innocent features, resembling masks used in Japanese 'No' Drama. All the objects mark rank and status. Some indicate a person's occupation, while others reflect life changes, such as marriage. There are objects that people wear or carry to show which group they belong to, whether it be a trade union or a secret society.

The Oxford Walking Tour

Broad Street is the ideal place to start a walking tour of some of Oxford's historic buildings, with many close at hand. There we met our guides, Stuart and Simon, and divided into two groups. Simon took us to view the exteriors of a group of iconic buildings: the Sheldonian Theatre, The Clarendon Building, The Bodleian Library and The Radcliffe Camera.

The Sheldonian Theatre was Christopher Wren's first architectural commission. It was revolutionary in its time, being modelled on an antique open-air theatre in Rome. Wren was Professor of Astronomy at the time and one of the most brilliant mathematicians of his generation. This theatre was built for university ceremonies, such as degree awards, and it is still used primarily for this purpose today. I particularly admired the large stone heads of emperors and philosophers decorating the exterior.

The Clarendon Building is by contrast a rather severe looking classical building designed by a pupil of Wren. It is noted for its classical Greek proportions. It was built three hundred years ago to provide a permanent home to the Oxford University Press.

The Bodleian Library - The Old Schools Quadrangle was built in the early seventeenth century in the Jacobean-Gothic style, designed to provide lecture rooms downstairs and a library above. The names of the original schools, or faculties of the university are inscribed in Latin above the low doorways. Divinity was the principal subject studied until well into the nineteenth century. In a niche in the gate tower is a statue of King James I. This is called The

Tower of the Five Orders because it is decorated with columns and capitals of each of the orders of classical architecture.

The Radcliffe Camera is a circular building completed in 1748 to house a library of the sciences. In 1860, it became a reading room for the Bodleian Library.

Beyond its green lawn, we crossed the road and walked under the Bridge of Sighs, spanning two buildings belonging to the same college and added in the nineteenth century so that students would not have to break the curfew by going outside. We continued along the cobbled lane, twisting beneath high walls, until we reached the narrow gate tower of New College.

New College was founded by the Bishop of Winchester in 1379 and became the model for all subsequent colleges by being more than just an endowed lodging house for students. Instead it was built to house a community and its buildings were designed to rival the great royal and monastic buildings of the age. The Bishop associated the college with his school in Winchester, the first English Public School. Built around a large quadrangle, all the essential buildings are here: the chapel, dining hall, libraries and sleeping chambers. We visited the cloisters, the chapel and the dining hall and admired their architectural design, stained glass windows and statues. Beyond the Garden Quadrangle, we came to an imposing wrought-iron screen separating the buildings from the gardens. In the centre of the gardens there is a curious mound, typical of formal gardens of the Tudor period. Its purpose was to provide a viewing platform to gaze at the gardens and over the twelfth century city wall that flanks them. The Bishop had to pledge to maintain the city wall in exchange for being allowed to purchase this land to build his grand college, and once a year Oxford's mayor and other city dignitaries come to inspect the wall. The flower borders are beautiful and there are some fine trees.

With the help of our very considerate coach driver, Hannah, the day went very smoothly. Everyone was offered a map, showing them where and at what time the tour was starting and the coach was picking us up, and no-one got lost. We also enjoyed two ferry trips in ideal weather for sitting on deck.

Maggie Nelmes

A visit to Oxford Botanic Garden

The weather was so hot on Sunday 18th June for our visit to The Oxford Natural History Museum that a small number of us decided to head for the Oxford Botanic Garden where at least we could take advantage of the shade afforded by trees. We were fortunate in meeting up with Hugh and Margaret Walding who know Oxford and the Botanic Gardens well and discovered we were about a 20 minute walk away from the Natural History Museum.

We were not to be disappointed. The University of Oxford Botanic Gardens is the oldest Botanic Garden in the UK and one of the oldest in the world. It was founded in 1621 as a physic garden growing plants for medicinal research. Currently on a site of only 4.5 acres (1.8 hectares) it contains over 8000 plant species which includes representatives of 90% of the world's higher plants. For a very modest entrance fee of £5.00 we were able to enjoy the gardens in all their summer glory.

As you enter the garden the first area of note is the walled garden which is surrounded by seventeenth century stonework, and is home to the gardens key collection of hardy plants. These are laid out in order beds (long narrow beds) by botanical family and in the order devised by the famous nineteenth century botanists Bentham and Hooker. We spent most of our time in the gardens perusing these wonderful plantings. Amongst the many plants which we admired were *Coronilla varia*, the Crown Vetch, a plant we had seen growing in the wild in central Europe a couple of years ago. *Galega officinalis* the Goats Rue, an interesting British native, *Trifolium pannonicum* the Hungarian Clover and *Chamaecytisus supinus* a small shrub from southern Europe. These were in the Leguminosae order beds.

Of particular interest to us were beds that are home to the National Collection of Hardy *Euphorbias*, part of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens Scheme (NCCPG).

There are magnificent trees planted all over the site and we were particularly impressed with a huge "Service Tree" *Sorbus domestica f. pomifera* that was planted in 1790. I came across a huge specimen of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* the Dawn Redwood that was planted in 1949 the year I was born so it must have been amongst the first to be planted after its introduction to cultivation in 1948.

In flower at the time of our visit were some fine Tulip Trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). We also saw some old friends, some fairly exotic trees that you rarely see outside Botanic Gardens. These included *Meliosma veitchiorum*, an interesting deciduous tree from China, and *Ptelea trifoliata* the Hop Tree from the central USA with curious hop like fruits. Of the many shrubs I particularly enjoyed seeing *Carpentaria californica*, an evergreen with glossy green leaves and magnificent pure white flowers, regarded by many as one of the most splendid of Californian plants to grow outside in the UK. I was pleased also to see three young plants of *Neolitsea sericea* an evergreen in Lauraceae family grown for its emergent foliage which is clothed in gold hairs. It is very uncommon and there used to be a good specimen in Ventnor Botanic gardens.

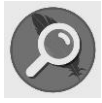
There was such a lot to see that it is impossible to mention them all here but we marvelled at the well-tended herbaceous borders and beds of medicinal plants laid out according to the type of illness they were used to treat.

Another major display was "Plants that Changed the World". These were all cultivated plants that were either edible or of economic use to man.

We really enjoyed walking along the River Cherwell where we saw people enjoying punting. It was far too hot to enjoy the glasshouses, so we gave them a miss this time. In spite of the heat, a memorable visit!

Dave Trevan

Reports of Section Meetings



LOOKING AT THE COUNTRYSIDE

Tuesday 7 February

Brading Town

Fifteen members met on an unexpectedly pleasant sunny morning, after a run of overcast raw days. Richard Smout led the group. We started by looking across to the old primary school, now the youth club, and touring the churchyard. Rusty-back Ferns were seen on the churchyard wall, close to a useful noticeboard which gave details of the plants to be found in the area. We admired the small gun house, and looked at a number of graves. These included the graves of Mary Warder (nee Toms) who brought Bible Christian Methodism to the Isle of Wight in 1823, settled in the town and was buried there in 1850. A little further on, in the same line of graves was the headstone for Jane Squibb, Little Jane, the Young Cottager whose short life was immortalised by Rev Legh Richmond in “The Annals of the Poor” published in 1814. The stone itself was a later addition being erected in 1822, when Legh Richmond returned to the parish where he had been curate. We also looked at a set of graves near the churchyard cross. These included the tombs of a Shropshire ironmaster, of Joseph William Bazalgette (the father of the man with the same name whose engineering works had tackled “the Great Stink” transforming the sewage system of Victorian London), and a relative of Sir Robert Peel.

We moved on to see the pound, off Quay Lane, where stray livestock were kept, being released on payment of a fee, and while we were there learnt about the goods that would have been taken to the quayside at the end of the lane, and the impact of successive attempts to drain Brading Haven, before the process was completed in the 1880s. We then looked at Rectory Mansion and compared what exists now with a Victorian image which showed that some of the gables and the conspicuous chimney stack are 20th century embellishments. We continued via the church porch. Here there were arches on three sides to allow a processional route around the building when the street frontage would have been obstructed with cottages. From there it was only a short distance down the slope to the Old Town Hall, with its lock-up, stocks and whipping post.

At this point the stroll picked up a certain amount of pace, and we went down Cross Street, past a terrace named in honour of Legh Richmond and into West Street, with an attractive set of cottages on the east side of the road. Near the Bull Ring we saw Summers Hall, (originally the church hall); the new town hall, built in 1902-3 and opened by Lady Oglander, as well as the bull-ring itself. Across the road, Cordwainers was the house lived in by the Warders. Their chapel, which no longer survives was nearby.

From here we moved into the Mall. There were a number of houses to admire at intervals along the route. We compared the brick frontages and the stone sides to two properties, Stoneham and Beech Grove. Other houses attracted interest including Hill House, the wooden boarding to Rosebank, and the porch at what is now the Beech Grove surgery. Climbing higher we reached the lane that goes up to the downs. Near the bottom of this is

Little Jane's Cottage. Postcards of the house in Victorian times were compared with the building as it is now. There have been some additions but the house from the outside is instantly recognisable. This was a place of pilgrimage for the sensitive Victorian visitor. Two million copies of the Annals of the Poor were sold in English alone. Victorian postcards almost always feature a venerable elderly inhabitant standing by the picket fence .. nothing was allowed to jar with the image that the visitor had in mind for Little Jane's home.

Back on the Mall we had the chance to compare two late Victorian terraces, Linden Terrace and Woodbine Terrace. The former had narrow windows, arched doors and bow windows at the ground floor, whereas Woodbine Terrace relied on the impact of a line of decorative brickwork to make its mark. We continued on as far as the Congregational Chapel established in 1846, next to the site of the British School set up three years earlier. One of the school's early teachers was a Mr Bully, who gives his name to Bully's Hill which leads up onto the downs. Before the chapel was reached we admired the whitewashed and castellated manse, and Mall Villa, which seems to have been originally built as the home for the teacher at the British School. From here there were excellent views across to Bembridge Down, Sandown and over the Brading Marshes area. By the Mall here we saw a range of early plants including Common Field Speedwell and a Fumitory, and we found a Seven-spot Ladybird, moving in the warmth.

We then retraced our steps back along the Mall, looked at the Methodist Chapel established in the 1860s as New Road was being developed, spoke of the arrival of the railways and the impact that this had on the town, and then walked back along the High Street, considering where the water's edge might have come to before the construction of some of the early sea walls in the Tudor period. There were a number of inns to admire on this final stretch, as well as the town reading room. The latter appears clearly on the front of another Victorian image of the High Street which we were able to compare with what can be seen today. We ended up back at the church, still in the dry after two hours, and feeling fortunate that the weather had added to the pleasure of the visit.

Friday 16 June

Shide Chalkpit

11 people met at Shide Chalkpit, Newport, for a walk led by Hugh & Margaret Walding. Margaret gave us a brief history of the pit, previously known as Pan Pit, and from research by Alan Phillips, believed to have been a meeting place as far back as medieval times. A chalk pit from the 1800s until it closed in 1943, chalk was taken to make cement from the pit to the nearby Shide railway station, through a tunnel still present today, & to the cement works on the River Medina. John Edmunds remembered as a boy watching the chalk being blasted from the pit face with dynamite. The brick building where the men took shelter during the blasting is still there today.

A variety of chalk grassland flora was found including Early Purple Orchids past their best, many Southern Marsh & Pyramidal Orchids, some Bee Orchids, Twayblades, Quaking Grass (known locally as 'wobble-waggles') and rare Marsh Helleborines. Margaret showed us a Broomrape (*Orobanche*). Also noted was a very dark Columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, found every year in the same spot.

The group then moved on to visit the new Pan Meadows nature reserve, managed by Gift to Nature, to admire a display of Grass Vetchling with their tiny cerise flowers. The walk continued along Pan Lane, saved from the Asda development because of dormice living in the ancient hedgerow, and back to the pit, where Hugh & Margaret were thanked for an interesting morning.

Wednesday 3 May

Lee Farm, Wellow

13 members met at Lee Farm, Wellow, the home of Steve and Jill Cowley since the 1950s. We gathered at Orchard Lee, a holiday home built on land that was once a slurry lagoon holding waste from 200 cows. The home is heated by a ground source heat pump, and some of the materials used to build it were recycled from the old farm buildings. Jill told us some of the farm's history, and showed us maps from the 1800s with most hedge lines that can still be seen today. The visit was intended to show how farming has changed over the past years. The cows are long gone and we walked through fields of rye and rye grass which, like most of the crops, are grown to feed the anaerobic digester at Arreton, basically in Jill's words, 'a giant cow's stomach'! The only food now grown is potatoes, 25 mainly heritage varieties, Steve's hobby.

We paused at the solar farm, and were delighted to see three Brown Hares dashing about, the panels being good protection for the animals, especially from Buzzards which were overhead. The land for the solar farm is rented to the electricity company, and the panels are under-sown with wild flower mix.

We crossed the old railway track, with some Cowslips growing in the verge, and passed an area of woodland, part of the JIGSAW programme planted with mixed native trees ten years before. Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, Whitebeam and Cherry were in bloom. A mass of orchids had appeared a few years previously when the trees were planted. Now shaded out by the trees, they could re-appear if clearings are made.

A rough field of permanent pasture, too poor to grow much of a crop, but with a large clump of ragged robin growing, brought us back to the farm, where Jill made us welcome cups of tea and coffee. Jill and Steve were thanked for their hospitality, and a very interesting visit.

Mary Edmunds & Toni Goodley

ARCHAEOLOGY

Saturday 25 February

Mons Claudianus

It was in the 1990s that Dr David Tomalin was able to visit this remote Egyptian site as part of a Southampton University excavation. Situated between the Red Sea and the Rive Nile, the quarries were valued from the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius until the 4th century because of the high quality diorite, some of which had a rare pinkish hue. Conditions and access were so challenging that workers (not slaves) were paid above the normal rate.

The site was first noted in modern times in 1843 by two Englishmen and it is the extraordinary preservation that makes it still worth enduring the conditions and the journey for the hardier archaeologists – such as David!

There are the remains of the settlement – stone buildings for the workers and the soldiers who were probably there as defence against the local tribes, also the donkey lines and the pilae that were probably the base of a food barn. Then are the unfinished pillars and blocks and the slipways along which they were transported. And most amazing – the thousands of ostraka – pieces of broken pottery used for writing messages on. These provided fascinating personal details of daily life and administration. The organisation was immense with about a thousand each of workers and donkeys to be managed and catered for over about 130 quarries.

The finished pillars and blocks were taken by cart on a four day journey to Qena on the River Nile; evidence for the tracks and the staging posts can still be seen. Many of us have seen one result – the stunning pillars of the portico on the Pantheon in Rome. Why go to such trouble and expense when other quality stone was more easily available? Was it status because of the cost or its rarity?

These bare facts do not do justice to the detail of David's talk, the characters brought to life by their written messages, the images showing the unforgiving conditions of the desert. David experienced the heat, but hopefully not the very limited water rations provided to the workers. We were fortunate to hear at first-hand his vivid account of this exceptional archaeological site.

Saturday 18 March

Archaeology and Religion

Alan Phillips began his thought-provoking talk by reminding us that our ancestors' 'thought patterns' were different to ours even though there would have been many similarities. Ideas current today may provide links to the past but we cannot see through their eyes. He recalled how Delian Backhouse-Fry once warned that we perceive the world through 'our own cultural glasses'. And of course archaeologists have to rely on the physical evidence, which can lead to a narrow or simplistic view and has caused some to shy away from tackling more abstruse matters.

Terminology is a good example of this problem; words such as 'ritual' 'cult' 'religion' have been sometimes used as an easy way to explain what we do not understand and so can be misleading. They have connotations in modern society that can affect our judgement.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Aubrey and Stukeley respectively studied monuments such as Stonehenge and began to consider their purpose. Stukeley became obsessed with theories about the druids, despite lack of evidence, and this led to numerous fanciful ideas. In response, most archaeologists wanted to distance themselves from potentially esoteric ideas and it was not until well into the 20th century that they felt able to consider sites for their religious significance.

By this time much had been researched and written in the fields of folklore, anthropology and religion. The growth of the British Empire created opportunities to study tribal traditions and only recently have these comparisons been valued by archaeologists,

It is also useful to consider how our modern secular life is full of ritual, not always connected with religion or continuing from a religious past. So can we assume that rituals in the past were always linked to religion? Or even that everyone in a cultural group shared the same religious beliefs? After all people will often take part in an activity to be part of the group, to fit in. Nor can we assume religions did not change – today we can see how they can

adapt, absorb, alter. The rituals at Stonehenge must have changed during the long years of construction.

Alan then talked about Shamanism, which is a system of beliefs and practices centred on the Shaman, a Siberian word referring to someone with a religious and medical role who communicates with the spirit world on behalf of the community.

There are three main characteristics:

- 1) the trance – the journey into the spirit world
- 2) shape-shifting – into an animal form
- 3) the cosmos divided into spirits / humans / animals / the dead.

Animals are often used for assistance along with costumes and equipment such as figures, sticks, and drums. The siting of rituals is often important with caves for example offering a liminal place between worlds. Variants of shamanism seem to have arisen spontaneously all over the world.

As a case study Alan used a study by Aaron Watson. He used a shamanic ritual still practised in Siberia to consider how the enclosed and dramatic space of Maes Howe could be used for a similar ceremony. The confined space would have restricted the number admitted but many more could have waited outside and may have heard sounds from inside. Restricted space, light and use of acoustics could have played a large part in influencing the perceptions of those witnessing the ritual. For those of us who have visited Maes Howe this was a powerful way to conclude a talk that left me with much to think about. I had the sense that, given time, this talk could have stimulated a fascinating debate.

Archaeology Trip to Dartmoor April 2017

Exeter was a good base for our 4-day trip to explore the archaeology of south-east Dartmoor. Some of the group travelled to the city by train whilst others chose to go by car so they could fit in with other visits. Exeter is a very pleasant and compact city and, with our hotels within walking distance of the centre, we could use free time to explore as we chose. The museum, cathedral, city wall, underground passages and quayside are all well worth seeing. Our party of 18 was too big for a minibus but a small, 33-seater coach was able to cope with the narrow lanes for our two days of outings.

The southwest of England, like Orkney offers plentiful evidence in stone of life in prehistoric times, albeit somewhat later than the Neolithic remains in Orkney. In Dartmoor's case, the Bronze Age is extremely well represented. Whereas wooden structures rarely survive (except for the amazing site recently excavated from the peat in East Anglia) the use of stone on Dartmoor has left stunning evidence in a dramatic landscape. We explored stone circles and alignments as well as hut circles and 'reaves'. The latter are stone boundary walls used variously for field and animal enclosures and as territorial boundaries. There is a complex and widespread network across the moor and the purpose of some of them is still uncertain.

Our first morning took us to Foale's Arrishes near Hemsworthy gate. This was the wildest and most adventurous of our sites. It was also a morning that rain and drifting mist created the typical 'Hound of the Baskervilles' experience as we tramped round or through bogs and rough ground to discover evidence of reaves and hut circles. 'We'll be fine as long as we can see the coach' we thought. And the coach quickly disappeared into the mist. It was

hard to imagine that the climate and conditions were once such that people chose to make their homes and farms in these exposed places. The significance of the views became apparent the next day. It was a treat to then take the coach down into sunny Widecombe where we enjoyed a pub lunch and a visit to the very interesting church.

The afternoon saw us at Hound Tor, the site of a medieval village. With its magnificent situation and remains of stone longhouses and various features there is plenty to mooch about amongst. Fortunately, the mist had cleared and we could appreciate the landscape.

The next day we went first to Grimspound. This is a justifiably famous Bronze Age settlement of about 24 houses within a 150m-diameter retaining wall. Fortunately, the sun came out and we could gaze across the valley at a line of standing stones and ancient track ways.

After lunch in Princetown and a brief visit to the National Park centre with its fascinating small museum we went to Merrivale. The history of this Bronze Age site is complex as it includes an atmospheric double alignment of standing stones, individual stones, a stone circle, two stone burial cists, numerous hut circles and the ubiquitous reaves. As always, the landscape and the views must have been significant and from the uphill end of the stone rows there was a tantalising glimpse of coast. Nearby were the remains of 'blowing houses' and other evidence of the late medieval tin industry.

Dartmoor has much to offer the visiting archaeologist, with some sites accessible and well-documented whilst others need to be sought out and interpreted. With such a friendly group determined to enjoy every moment this a trip I will long remember.

Helen Jackson



BOTANY

Wednesday 4 January

New Year Plant hunt

Eight of the botany group gathered at the top of Appley Steps to start the hunt for native and naturalised plants (not planted in gardens) which were in flower. The definition of 'in flower' requires the anthers to be visible. A male Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) catkin fully open had already been observed and at our feet was a plant of Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) in bloom. We set off along the cliff top and round Rylstone Gardens to find more species, including Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major*).

Next we headed down the steps, looking on the cliff face. A flowering Strawberry-tree (*Arbutus unedo*) was observed through binoculars and nearer the ground, Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) and Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieracioides*). Along the Esplanade, we investigated the Rock Samphire (*Crithmium maritimum*) which was visible, but this was in fruit rather than in flower, so didn't count. Mexican Fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) was well out behind some of the huts. We

continued along to the steps near the cliff lift and added Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) to our list.

Once back on the cliff top, we found flowering Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, among others. We cut through Tower Gardens back to the High Street. A number of plants caused some debate here, as to whether they had been planted; part way down a wall was considered to be naturalised rather than planted, so Sweet Alison (*Lobularia maritima*) and *Sudera cordata* were added.

Crossing the main road we made our way along Pomona Road, adding Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*) and Scarlet Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*) to our list. We returned along the edge of Big Meade to St Blasius's Church, thinking we had now seen everything likely to be flowering, but the last plant of the afternoon was Thyme-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*) on the grassy verge by the road to Ventnor. We dispersed homewards with the backdrop of a fine sunset, and a list of 52 plants in flower.

Saturday 21 January

Indoor Meeting

The indoor meeting gives the opportunity to review last year's survey work and look forward to the coming field season. Members of the botany section carry out monitoring of two of the Island's rarities: field cow-wheat and wood calamint. Weather conditions in 2016 encouraged competing species to flourish on the field cow-wheat site and the plant became completely overgrown towards the end of the summer. Additional ways of estimating growth have been trialled this year, including an assessment of the number of flowering spikes and the production of seed. Further techniques for studying the site were suggested in discussion by other members of the group.

Wood calamint was translocated to additional areas during 2016; it achieved reasonable establishment under light shade but did less well on an open slope. An area planted up in 2014 is showing promise as a long-term establishment site. The review of last year's species recording gave eight new species for the Island list. Most of these have been cultivated or planted but are now naturalised in the wild. One of these, initially named as *Strobilanthes atropurpureus* has led to considerable debate in botanical circles and is now thought to be *Strobilanthes pentastemonoides*.

The recording for Atlas 2020 is on target as a result of systematic recording by a number of people.

Small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) has been the subject of management at its sites in the west Wight and is responding well to the work. A visitor to the Island over Christmas 2016 has surveyed known sites for mistletoe (*Viscum album*) and has confirmed and added to the existing records.

After tea, Colin Pope gave an illustrated talk about the flora of Gotland, an island in the Baltic which he visited in May of last year. This area was investigated by Carl von Linne in 1741, when he discovered more a hundred species of plants that were previously unknown in Sweden.

The island is 90km from the coast of Sweden and is approximately 176 km (north-south) x 52km (west-east). The main town Visby, enclosed by a 3.4km long stone wall has interesting medieval buildings. The countryside is sparsely populated and there are many

windmills, medieval village churches and carved picture stones. Geologically, it has a low limestone ridge running along its length and has habitats such as wood meadows, forests, sandy coastal flats, fens and marshy grasslands.

The flora has considerable overlaps with that of Britain and we could name many of the plants in the photographs in the flower-rich meadows. Some plants which would be considered rare in this country are relatively abundant there, for example viper's grass (*Scorzonera humilis*). The orchid flora, notable not only in the range of species but in abundance, includes military orchid (*Orchis militaris*), burnt orchid (*Neotinea ustulata*), fly orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*), sword-leaved helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*), bird's nest orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*), and elder flowered orchid (*Dactylorhiza sambucina*). On a nearby island there is a large colony of the showy lady's slipper orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*) – to be found by following well-worn tracks through the woods- not signed but not hidden from view, and greatly respected by the local people.

Sunday 12 February & Saturday 1 April Wood calamint conservation project

Our yearly task to clear the remains of rank vegetation was helped greatly this year by some work done by a specialist contractor in one of the lay bys and area above it, as well as to complete some coppicing further upslope. This meant that we could give all our attention to the larger lay by to clear it thoroughly.

At the beginning of April, we had 40 container grown plants to set out in the newly cleared areas in Rowridge Copse itself. We spent some time walking over the site identifying areas previously planted before deciding on the areas to be planted up this year. Individual plants were marked with small stakes and grid references noted. We will look at the site again in late summer to assess how well these new plants have taken and assess how the various plantings in previous year are faring.

Saturday 29 April Barton Manor Woods

The Barton Manor Estate has a wooded area to the north of the house, stretching as far as the sea. It is a site on the ancient wood woodland inventory which has been planted up with both conifers and broadleaves in the past. The present owner is undertaking restoration work and has removed quite a large volume of timber from selected areas. This has led to the woodland floor being opened to more light, which should result in a greater range of plants being found. In total, 27 ancient woodland indicator plants were seen.

Most of our survey was conducted though a conifer wood from the main ride running northwards where Barton Woods border the Osborne estate, although we were also able to find a west-east ride which led us to a beech plantation by a small valley with a stream. A good range of plants was found along the north-south ride including three species of sedge, pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*), remote sedge (*C. remota*) and wood sedge (*C. sylvatica*), as well as yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*) and tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*). At the end of the track, close to the shore was a large stand of coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*). The beech plantation had a fine display of bluebells, wood anemones and early purple orchids.

Saturday 13 May**Six Acres, Clatterford Shute (Plaish Meadows)**

This site is a sheep-grazed wet meadow through which the Lukely Brook and one of its tributaries run. We started by looking at the plants in the channel of the stream and found both fool's-water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) and watercress but a further visit will be needed to determine the species as ripe seed pods must be examined. Hemlock water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*) water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*), common water-starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis* sens. lat) and yellow flag (*Iris pseudacorus*) were also at the edge of the stream.

The meadow had abundant common spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and marsh horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*). The marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) flowering was largely over, but cuckoo flower was still visible (*Cardamine pratense*). We were a little early to see the southern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) in full bloom but there were many budding flower spikes. Floating sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*) was in a damp channel and In the drier parts of the meadow we found a range of grasses including sweet vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), and French oat-grass (*Gaudinia fragilis*).

Saturday 27 May**Rew Down**

The chalk downland site to the west of Ventnor is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a local nature reserve, managed by Gift to Nature. When we arrived, sea mist was swirling round and it did not lift to any great extent during the afternoon. It was on this site in 1878 that Frederick Stratton collected the first specimens of Early Gentian, described then as *Gentianella amarella* var *praecox*, and now known as *Gentianella anglica*. We made a point of trying to re-find the plant and found two small clumps about 40m apart, with a total of 6 plants altogether. The numbers were a little disappointing as the plant seems to have had a good flowering year elsewhere on the Island.

Apart from this, we recorded a further 106 species including one plant of pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) in tight bud. Other chalk grassland plants included horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), bastard toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*), hairy violet (*Viola hirta*), common gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*). The wooded area enabled us to add hybrid bluebell (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*), hart's tongue fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) and wood sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) to our list.

Saturday 10 June**Bembridge Point**

This area of sand dune, beach and shingle on the east side of Bembridge Harbour contains a very interesting range of plants. Some are typical of habitats with nutrient poor soils such as those of the pea family which have the means of obtaining nitrates via nitrogen-fixing bacteria in nodules on their roots. We identified a number of these from the tall pale-yellow-flowered tree lupin (*Lupinus arboreus*) to the much smaller ones which needed close examination using a hand lens. The latter included small-flowered melilot (*Melilotus indicus*), hare's-foot clover (*Trifolium arvense*), lesser trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*), slender trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*) and rough clover (*Trifolium scabrum*).

The area has also as a variety of grasses including four fescues: squirreltail fescue (*Vulpia bromoides*), bearded fescue (*Vulpia ciliata*), dune fescue (*Vulpia fasciculata*) and rat's-tail fescue (*Vulpia myuros*). Hare's tail grass (*Lagurus ovatus*) made a spectacular display in one area (photograph), and within this sward we also found white stonecrop (*Sedum album*) and biting stonecrop (*S. acre*) and quite a few plants of rough dog's-tail grass (*Cynosurus echinatus*).

Balm-leaved figwort (*Scrophularia scorodonia*) was found flourishing at Bembridge Point last year but the site had been destroyed and only a few seedling plants were seen during the meeting.

Anne Marston



ORNITHOLOGY

Saturday 7 January

Seaview

18 members met on a dull morning in Bluett Avenue for a circular walk starting with a sea and shore watch. The tide was retreating, not ideal to spot birds that are on the sea. However, we did manage to pick up a pair of Red Breasted Mergansers and two Great Crested Grebes and Cormorant. Oystercatcher and a few Sanderling were on the beach as were a variety of gulls – mainly Black-headed, but also Herring Gull, Common Gull, Great Black Backed Gull and a Mediterranean Gull. In Hersey Reserve we saw a Little Egret and a Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Mallard, a Lapwing, some Snipe, Teal and a brief view of a Kingfisher. The Greenshank that has been around all winter did not put in an appearance whilst we were there but was later spotted near the hide when we took one last look from Saltern Cottages.

After leaving the old Toll Road we went up Oakhill Road, past the old Wishing Well, up Nettlestone Hill and then turned left down the footpath back to our cars. Along the way we saw Shoveller, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit and Long-tailed Tit, immature Moorhen, Song Thrush and Redwing, Great Spotted Woodpecker and heard Green Woodpecker. We also saw Robin, Wren, Jay, Dunnock Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Kestrel and Buzzard. As the old camp site is now planted with vines the free flying Barnacle Geese no longer congregate there but we did spot some of the flock on a field on the other side of Nettlestone Hill. In all 50 species were identified during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 5 February

Hurstake to Werrar Farm

On a cool cloudy morning, 17 members met at the Medina Park Picnic Site car-park for a walk along the cyclepath towards Werrar Farm; one keen member walked in from Cowes for the meeting. The riverside path was considered too muddy for easy walking but there is a good view of the Medina estuary from the cyclepath.

In the estuary and along the tideline were seven Wigeon, seven Little Grebes, a male and female Gadwall, Brent Geese, Oystercatchers, Mute Swans, Coots, Moorhens, Curlews, Redshanks and a Little Egret. As well as many Black-headed Gulls and Herring Gulls we saw

one Lesser Black-backed Gull and one Great Black-backed Gull. At rest on the pontoon at Medina Valley centre were four Cormorants.

We took a short detour from the cyclepath to Riverside Park, where resident House Sparrows were vociferous, then headed for Dodnor mill pond. With the use of Jackie's telescope everyone admired two Peregrine Falcons, one on the Dodnor pylon and one at the top of Fairlee pylon. Both birds flew to Vestas' building where one perched on the nesting box and the other rested nearby on the roof, so hopefully they will nest there again this year. (NB. They did nest, raising 4 young).

On Dodnor mill pond were several hybrid ducks as well as three male and three female Tufted Ducks; the squeal of a Water Rail was heard from somewhere in the rushes there. Hedgerow birds along the cyclepath were numerous and varied most notably one female and two male Bullfinches, three Song Thrushes in song and three Goldcrests. Other species seen were two Greenfinches, one Chiffchaff, Blue Tits, Great Tits, ten Long-tailed Tits, Robins, Blackbirds, Carrion Crows, Jackdaws, Magpies, Feral Pigeons and Wood Pigeons. At Stag Lane crossing a Kestrel was hovering and a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew south. Heard but not seen were Wren and Jay. Feeding in stubble and weedy vegetation on Werrar Farm was a mix of Linnets, Chaffinches, Goldfinches and Redwings.

On our way back to the car-park we stopped on Dodnor Bridge where in the creek a male Mandarin Duck was consorting with Mallards, The Mandarin is sometimes seen on the pond in St Mary's hospital grounds.

46 species of birds were seen or heard during the morning, a number which surprised and pleased everyone who took part.

Sue Blackwell

Saturday 4 March

Newtown National Nature Reserve

After overnight rain, 22 members met at the National Trust visitor centre car park on a lovely, bright morning. Wellington boots were a must this morning as there were muddy, wet fields and paths to negotiate. Before we had even reached our first port of call – the field overlooking Causeway Lake - we had noted nine species of birds: Dunnock, Robin, Jackdaw, Woodpigeon, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Buzzard, House Sparrow and Pied Wagtail. The tide was way out so there were very few birds to be seen at Causeway Lake but we did see Teal, Wigeon and Black-headed Gull and the field beyond had a vast flock of about 400 Brent Geese grazing. A lone Canada Goose showed itself on the brow of the hill.

We then walked down the road to the flower meadow and on towards Newtown River and walked around the salterns to the boat house. Through the hedge a few of us got good views of four very smart male Pintail. It was unfortunate that the view was very restricted because when we got out into the open overlooking the river we could only see a couple of female Pintail swimming and they are dull in comparison. We could hear Mediterranean Gulls calling and found 82 sitting on the islands in the river – many with their breeding plumage. Later, at the hide, we were to see something like 30 more in the scrape. At both places Black-headed Gulls were also gathered. Three Red Breasted Merganser were seen, two Little Egret, two Turnstone, five Grey Plover and about 37 Golden Plover as well as 44 Black Tailed Godwit, three Mute Swan, many Shelduck and Oystercatcher. On the walk up from the hide six Fieldfare, a Redwing and a Mistle Thrush were spotted in the field. Altogether 43 species were noted during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

Saturday 29 April**West High Down**

12 members met at the chalkpit car park in Totland for a walk led by Nicky Falconar on West High Down on a cloudy and rather windy morning. We were hoping for some migrants and were fortunate to hear or see Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Common Whitethroat as well as Skylark. We heard a Pheasant calling from the fields nearby. We combed the expanse of Gorse for Dartford Warbler but none were seen or heard but the conditions were not ideal. A male Stonechat was showing well and Cormorant and Herring Gulls flew by. On our way back to the cars we could hear a Blackbird in distress and spotted a Magpie flying away from the nest with a nestling in its bill. This was deposited on the ground and the Magpie went straight back to the nest and extract the remaining chick. In all 26 species were identified during the course of the morning.

Jackie Hart

Saturday 20 May**Merstone**

Seven members met at the old railway station at Merstone for a walk to Horrington and led by Anthea Blackwell. It rained briefly at the beginning but it soon turned into a lovely morning. As expected we saw farmland and hedgerow birds with some migrants nesting. As the leaf cover was very dense we mainly identified species by their song and calls although we did see some including the numerous Common Whitethroats. There were a few Swallows flying about. House Sparrows mainly can be found at the beginning of the walk where there are a few houses. Blackcap, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff could be heard or seen in the hedgerows and trees lining the route. Several Sky Lark were heard and a Green Woodpecker was calling persistently on downland but did not show itself. Several Mallard flew over. A number of Herring Gulls flew over and around and landed over a bank to our left probably on a farm reservoir. On some wet land three Canada Geese were grazing, a Grey Heron landed and a Coot was seen. At least ten Wren were heard singing throughout the morning. In all 27 species were noted. Also there were some beautiful specimens of Dryad's Saddle, *Polyporus squamosus* on a dead Horse Chestnut.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 25 June**Mersley**

Nine members met at The Garlic Farm on a lovely but windy morning. A Turtle Dove was seen and heard last year and they have been heard in the vicinity in recent years however, this year we had no luck. Whilst in the car park we saw or heard Herring Gull, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Jackdaw, Swallow, Greenfinch, Rook, Goldfinch, Pied Wagtail and Mistle Thrush. We also saw six Buzzard soaring in the thermals. During the walk around the farm we also saw Jay, House Sparrow, Woodpigeon, Magpie, Crow, Pheasant, Swift and Robin and heard Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Blackbird, Skylark, Wren, Great Tit and Long Tailed Tit. We also saw a Moorhen on one of the fishing ponds. Four of us then crossed the road and walked a short loop taking in a conifer wood. In the wood, we had good views of a Red Squirrel, Coal Tit and Goldcrest. In all we had 31 species of birds. We also had a selection of butterflies: Marbled White, Large White, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell. Comma and Ringlet.

Jackie Hart



ENTOMOLOGY

Tuesday 16 May

Brading Down

Nine members met on a bright but largely cloudy afternoon, which was warm and humid but notable for a strong breeze, which did impact on the number of species that were seen. Swifts and Whitethroat were seen, and a Blackcap heard. Five butterflies were identified including Painted Lady and Brimstone. A number of moths were seen including a couple of longhorn species *Caucha fibulella* and *Nementopogen schwarziellus*. Amongst other species noted were a couple of Dark Bush Crickets, and the Click Beetle *Athos haemmoradius*. By and large bees were in short supply due to the wind, but to the east of the site near the quarries *Bombus lapidarius* were seen in good numbers, along with a couple of *Bombus lucorum*. Some fine examples of Musk Thistle and Common Gromwell were admired.

Tuesday 13 June

Swanmore Meadows / Pig Leg Lane

Unusually, this was an entomological meeting on a warm day with almost non-stop sunshine. There was a good turn out with ten members present. Chiffchaff and Blackcap were heard, Whitethroat seen, and there were views of Kestrel on site, and Buzzards circling to the south. As well as Rabbit, a Mole was also identified. There was a wonderful display of Common Spotted Orchids across many parts of the reserve, including one example of a pure white bloom, a backdrop to the visit which made it particularly memorable. A total of eight butterflies were identified, including Marbled White, a single White Admiral, Ringlet and Large Skipper. Both the Six-spot Burnet, and one of the Five-spot species were recorded, along with Yarrow Plume, Cinnabar, Straw Dot and the pyralid, *Chrysoteuchia culmella*. Among other species seen were Dark Bush-cricket, and at least 15 examples of the hoverfly *Volucella pellucens*. Three species of ladybird were seen including a couple of examples of the 22-spot. The commonest bee by far was *Bombus lucorum*, but four examples of *Bombus hypnorum*, the Tree Bumblebee were noticed. Also recorded was the Squash Bug *Coreus marginatus*. We were grateful to those at Gift to Nature who manage this reserve for their support in organising this enjoyable visit.

CORRECTION

The following table was unfortunately omitted from the report of the Geological ramble on the closed railway from Shide to Newchurch by Professor Stephen K. Donovan and Paul Bingham, published in the last Bulletin (Issue number 66)

Table 1. Distances of closed railway stations from Shide, following the cycle path (modified after Whittington, 1975(?), p. 20)

Shide	0
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Blackwater	1.1 miles (1.8 km)
Merstone	2.9 miles (4.6 km)
Horringford	4.5 miles (7.2 km)
Newchurch	5.5 miles (8.8 km)
Alverstone	6.7 miles (10.7 km)
Sandown	8.2 miles (13.1 km)

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

New Members

Deaths

Society Officers

President	Dr Paul Bingham, 6 Forest Close, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5SF
General Secretary	Ms J. Tolley, 31 Glynn Close, Seaview, IOW. PO34 5JZ
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NEXT BULLETIN

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for 1st July 2017 to 31st December 2017 should be sent to:-

Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeology Society, Unit 16, Prospect Business Centre,
Prospect Road, Cowes PO31 7AD Email - iwnhas@btconnect.com

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 2nd January 2018

Bulletin Editor: Colin Pope



White-letter Hairstreak photographed on a disease resistant planted elm at Towngate Mill, Newport on 16th June by Andy Butler