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President's Address

I'm delighted to say that we have a lot of material to include in this edition of the Bulletin, so I will keep my piece short. The Society's Council has been working hard recently. For the first time, we have been considering a Forward Plan for the Society, looking at our finances, our aims and objectives, and how we should be moving forwards over the coming years. This will be presented at our forthcoming AGM in March for discussion and, hopefully for ratification. It is important that we have a clearly stated rationale for our Society and it has been a useful process to take stock of our position and how we can work better to further the aims and objectives of the Society.

We have been approached by the Isle of Wight Industrial Archaeological Society to consider incorporating their organisation within our Society as a semi-autonomous Section. Following discussion, it is Council's view that we should support this proposal and it will be brought to our AGM for approval and ratification. I think that this is a very welcome move which will enrich our Society and add further to the breadth of specialist meetings which are available to all our members to take advantage of.

Work is on-going to develop and expand our website. This is taking longer than anticipated but in due course we should have a fresh website which is tailored to supply our Society and its members' needs but also, importantly, to be a shop window to the wider world to promote what we do and to encourage more to join us.

Some of you will be aware of the Heritage Lottery funded East Wight Landscape Partnership project, which has been secured by the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit. Many organisations are involved in a whole range of projects which are currently being worked up. Our Society is one of them. We will be a partner in the project entitled 'Habitat Health Watch'. This is described as project to work with specialists and local communities to improve the recording, monitoring and conservation of the IW Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species and wildlife corridors. Currently, this is at an early stage but you will be hearing more of this over the coming years.

I hope to see many of you at our AGM on 28th March.

Colin Pope

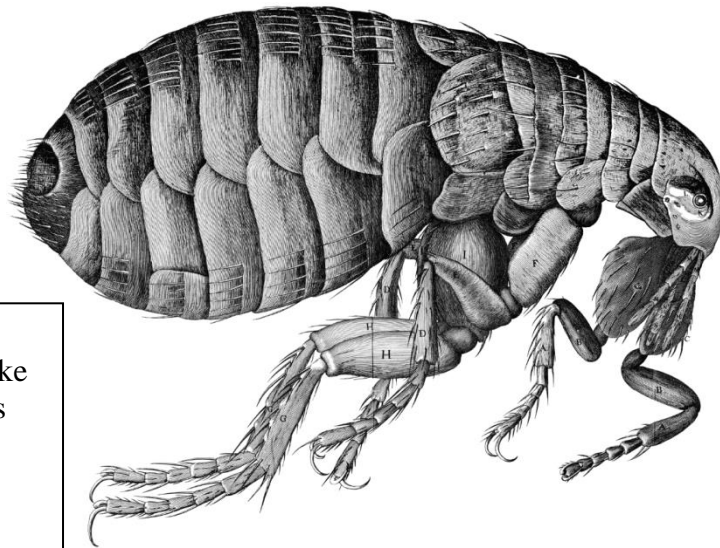
Proposal for a re-launch of a Microscopical Section

350 years ago, a man from the Isle of Wight took London by storm through demonstrating the power of the microscope to reveal the previously hidden exquisite minute detail of the natural world (Hooke, 1665). Over the last decade, digital technology and LED light sources together with generally falling prices have made microscopy much more accessible. Yet, despite this apparent increased availability, the microscope has become an endangered species in schools and undergraduate classes. In the 1900s our Society had a thriving microscopical section with a programme of half a dozen meetings a year; yet sadly interest evaporated.

Bearing the above in mind, (great potential yet not insignificant challenge), it is proposed to re-launch a Microscopical Section to consist of a main annual meeting, that is if short term sustainability can reasonably be assured through agreeing an outline 5 year programme. Each annual meeting would have a theme and where possible seek to engage one of the other sections of the Society. For example, if entomology were the focus for the year (no pun intended), not only might pond dipping be undertaken to study the aquatic stages of insects, but slides might be borrowed to demonstrate insect mouth parts, adaption of legs etc. The proposal is to have the annual meeting at a suitably equipped venue. (I would suggest the Medina Valley Centre which has a laboratory equipped with microscopes). If the subject were suitable, there could be a collecting field trip in the morning and then the afternoon session could include a 'lecture' followed by a series of practical hands-on demonstrations with microscopes, around which the participants could rotate. [For this part volunteers would be needed to lead demonstrations. A briefing sheet, specific to each demonstration, would be available well ahead of the event and then orientation on the day]. Further meetings on the year's allotted topic could be arranged if there was sufficient demand, but the main focus would remain the annual meeting.

The ornithologists may by now be thinking – 'what has this to do with us?' And yet 'bird parasites' could be the subject for a lecture, and slides could be obtained for demonstrations of bird internal structure, chick embryology etc. Also archaeologists need not be left out. By studying a pottery sherd under the microscope, much can be revealed about how the original item of pottery was made, and increasingly, dig soil samples are routinely subject to flotation to check for microscopic evidence that would otherwise be missed. Arguably microscopy is of relevance to all sections of the Society with the potential of taking us beyond the field lens/loupe.

If as a result of this article, enough support is garnered for 5 annual topics, I will ask the Programme Committee to agree a date for a 2015 meeting later in the season.



Flea:

Drawing by Robert Hooke of what he saw under his microscope. Published 1665, in the best-selling book 'Micrographia'.

Paul Bingham

Society Accolades

Congratulations to Anne Marston who, on behalf of the Society, received a cheque from the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust at their AGM in the autumn. The Society was nominated as this year's recipient of the Peter Brough Award, set up to acknowledge and encourage the work of amateur naturalists engaged in nature conservation projects. The award was for the on-going management and survey work at the Wood Calamint site, ensuring the continued survival of this special Island plant. This work has involved a number of members of the Society in different capacities but has been co-ordinated and taken forwards by Anne and her role has been pivotal.

In recognition of our work, the national threat level of this plant has been lowered from 'Endangered' to 'Vulnerable' in *A Vascular Plant Red List for England*, P. Stroh *et al.* BSBI (2014), a recently published re-assessment of the rarest plants in England. The re-assessment of its status is 'as a consequence of positive long-term conservation action....by the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society.'

You will, I hope, have seen our monthly column in the County Press. You may also have seen a new feature entitled 'My Island' where featured guests talk about what makes the Island special for them. These guests are then given the opportunity to nominate a charity of their choice to receive a cheque from the County Press. Alan Titchmarsh was featured guest in a recent edition and he chose to nominate the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society as his chosen charity. The editor of the County Press, Alan Marriott, has also thanked us for our interesting contributions over the past year.

Remember, we are always looking for new people to submit articles for this column. Articles should be around 400 words in length and, if possible, topical for the month or relating to a current news item (they are submitted a month prior to publication). If possible, they should be accompanied by relevant photographs but this is not essential and we can often find suitable illustrative material. Any articles for consideration should be sent to iwnhas@btconnect.com

A Tree Excursion with Hilary Higgins

Bill Shepard describes a tree hunting expedition on 2nd October 2013

Our first objective was a very large beech tree, *Fagus sylvatica*, in Sainham Beech Wood, Godshill. We measured a girth of 5 metres 53 cm at one metre height. In approaching the wood from Godshill village, we noticed a very large Wild Cherry tree, *Prunus avium*, with a trunk circumference in excess of 2 metres.

Our next objective was Flowers Brook, Ventnor, to see what I consider to be the only authentic native Black Poplar, *Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*, in the Island. The tree has fallen but lies on a very steep bank and is very much alive.

Whilst in the vicinity, we took the opportunity to visit the Stone Pines, *Pinus pinea*, at St Lawrence. There are seven of them, with a further specimen in the village. Otherwise, apart from a specimen in Totland churchyard, I am aware of no others on the Island.

Our next location was the pond in front of St Blasius church, Shanklin, where a Wellingtonia, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, is situated. With a copious supply of water, it stands at one hundred feet in height and 4 metres in circumference, and it is still growing.

En route for Bembridge, we stopped at Steyne Cross to examine a Hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus*, with a fluted trunk, for which I have no explanation of this unusual feature. Our objective for visiting Bembridge was to see the giant Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris*, in Love Lane. It is massive in timber volume, possibly the largest in the Island, and a canopy to match that would shade a football pitch. The tree is in private grounds, but close enough to the highway to spread that canopy across the road and over the garden to the far side.

To round off a very successful outing, we visited Firestone Copse to witness the spectacular colony of Californian Redwoods, *Sequoia sempervirens*, the most spectacular living exhibit in the Island, with trees originating from suckers of all sizes. The original trees were planted in two rows and today, towering a hundred feet, can only be described as a living cathedral.

Bill Shepard

Will the Isle of Wight get any Marine Conservation Zones?

A crucial time is approaching for marine conservation around the Isle of Wight. New marine protected areas around the Island could be designated soon, but the decision will rest on the result of a public consultation expected to start in early 2015.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are a type of protected area in the sea. The aim of MCZs is to protect important UK marine habitats and species which weren't previously protected by EU or international legislation. 127 Marine Conservation Zones were recommended to government in 2011, following two years of negotiations with stakeholders, including fishermen, conservationists, divers, shipping companies and other sea users. The government chose to phase the designation of the sites following consideration of the evidence supporting each zone and public consultation. One round of public consultation and designation has already taken place, which led to the designation of 27 MCZs in England and Wales in 2013. None of these sites are near the Isle of Wight. The next round of public consultation, expected in early 2015, will invite responses on the designation of 37 additional sites. Of these, four sites are along the Isle of Wight coast and two other sites are a little further offshore. The sites on the map (see colour plate) with red name labels will be in the next public consultation, plus a site called Offshore Overfalls (southeast of the Isle of Wight beyond the map area).

These sites vary greatly in their geology, habitat and species compositions. The Wildlife Trust believes all the recommended sites around the Isle of Wight should be designated to protect the full range of habitats and species in the area. If the sites are designated, these are some of the habitats and species that would be protected:

- Rocky reefs supporting communities of sponges, soft corals and anemones.
- Seagrass beds, which are important nursery areas for fish and home to seahorses and stalked jellyfish.
- Sheltered muddy habitats, which support native oysters and burrowing critters like the mantis shrimp.
- Limestone ledges which are home to rare seaweeds like the Peacock's tail seaweed.
- Offshore gravel beds which are important areas for rays, sand eels and bass.

If you would like to find out more about local Marine Conservation Zones, I will be giving a talk on the subject to the Society on Saturday 7th March, at Arreton Community Hall at 2pm. To keep up to date on what's happening with the consultation, sign up to 'Become a Friend of Marine Conservation Zones' here: www.wildlifetrusts.org/mcz When you sign up you will receive emails every month with the latest news on Marine Conservation Zones and advice on what action you can take.

Polly Whyte, Making Waves Project Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Recent noteworthy lichen observations in 2014

It is a case of two steps forward and one step back for one rare lichen species this year. *Teloschistes chrysophthalmus* was lost at Newtown by cattle nibbling the twig the lichen was growing on and winter storms. However I found a new site for it at St. Catherine's Point and Robin Lang found another one near Mottistone. The latter one was growing on a dead bramble which is a new substrate for this species.

In August the Botany group had a meeting at Ventnor Down. This site proved to be very good for terricolous (ground-dwelling) lichens. Several of the bushy, grey, beard lichens were found on heather stems that were growing close to the ground due to being blasted by the winds on the top of the downs. *Usnea flammea* was an interesting find; this is a species preferring exposed, coastal sites. This was also a good area for *Cladonia* species (pixie cup lichens) with a total of twelve species seen. The Wessex Lichen Group hope to have a meeting here in spring next year and I have no doubt more will be discovered.

My husband Les and I, together with John Willmott, were lucky enough to be taken by boat from Newtown to National Trust's Brickfield part of the NNR. We were exploring the overgrown garden of the deserted cottage and I was admiring the abundance of lichens growing on an old gnarled apple tree. There were many broken twigs lying on the ground and I noticed an interesting *Usnea* species which I picked up to check on my return home. This turned out to be *Usnea esperantiana* which is another new species for the Island. It is usually found in well lit, windy situations near the coast and has a South West distribution in the British Isles.

The church warden of Niton church requested a lichen survey recently as the church was due to undergo substantial repairs to the steeple and walls. Luckily no sensitive lichens were found to cause concern from any building work but it was good to have an opportunity to look at lichens around the parapet. One very common lichen *Diploicia canescens* was up there. This species is pale grey/green that looks a bit like a squashed brain and has the appearance of being covered in a fine coating of icing sugar, this is called pruina.

Interestingly, it had a lichenicolous fungus growing over it. The fungus growing over it is *Arthonia diploiciae* and is different to the fungus within the lichen.

Sheila Street

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Isle of Wight News

This is, hopefully, the first of a regular article in the Bulletin to inform IWNHAS members of the BTO's surveys on the Island and hopefully to encourage new volunteers to participate in existing and future surveys. As some of you are probably already aware, James Gloyn decided to step down in November as the BTO's Regional Representative after 22 years and has been replaced by myself, Jim Baldwin. James will be a hard act to follow and his legacy in the role is undoubtedly the organization of the excellent Island coverage for the 2007-11 BTO Atlas. This was a time-consuming task to ensure all-year coverage in addition to the other surveys and was acknowledged by Dawn Balmer, Head of Surveys at the BTO and Coordinator/ editorial member of the Atlas who commented: "I will always be very grateful for James's help achieving excellent coverage for the Atlas - it was an area I didn't have to worry about!".

Currently Island members and volunteers are involved in the following surveys:

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

As from January 2015, there will be 16 Island count sites following the inclusion of King's Quay. Thanks to George Rowing and John Lucas for volunteering to count this important wetland site and a special thanks to Anthony Roberts for negotiating access with the landowners.

Peregrine Survey

Thanks to all of the volunteers who took part in the survey during 2014. The results are now being processed by the BTO and will be reported in due course.

Heronries Census

The world's oldest bird survey, first undertaken in 1928, is to be renamed in 2015 as the Colonial Birds Recording Scheme and will also be available online. The rebranding is to highlight that the scheme nowadays also includes Egrets and Cormorants nesting alongside Grey Heron.

Thanks again to the volunteers who contributed to the survey in 2014.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a national volunteer project aimed at keeping track of changes in the breeding populations of widespread bird species in the UK. The survey is designed to be a simple and enjoyable birdwatching exercise and involves two early-morning spring visits (one visit in early April to mid-May and the other visit from mid-May to late June) to a local 1-km square, to count all the birds you see or hear while walking two 1-km lines across the square. Comparing these annual counts enables us to monitor the population changes of over 100 bird species.

Thanks to the Island's BBS volunteers for their participation in the 2014 survey. However there are a large number of 1km map squares on the Island which need coverage for the 2015 survey. If you would like to take part or would like further details please contact me. You can also read more about the survey at the following link; <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>.

Garden Rook Survey

If you have any Garden Rook sightings between July and December 2014, please submit them to the Garden Rook Survey. Your records can be completed online at the following link; <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/about/background/projects/garden-rook-survey>.

Alternatively please contact me for a reporting form.

Garden BirdWatch (GBW)

The Summer Quarter (July-Sept) national results have been published and the extended warm summer was great for multi-brooded birds such as Wren, House Sparrow and Dunnock. Wrens were seen in GBW gardens in their highest numbers since 2008. A bumper autumn for berries, seeds and nuts saw birds abandon gardens in September although Jay numbers increased due to a poor crop of acorns.

If you can spare a few minutes each week counting the birds in your garden, please consider joining the GBW survey. It is a self-financing scheme with the annual subscription currently reduced to £17 (from £19.99) with the Gift Pack including a free copy of “Garden Birds and Wildlife” by Mike Toms and Paul Sterry plus you get a quarterly Bird Table magazine. Further details are available at the following link: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw>. I hope to report on the local data submitted by Island surveyors in future articles.

Thanks to all of the volunteers who took part in the survey during 2014.

BirdTrack

A reminder to all BirdTrack users that records for 2014 need to be entered online before the end of January 2015. This is required to enable the Island’s Bird Recorder, Robin Attrill, to access the data in his preparation of records for the Isle of Wight Bird Report 2014.

Thanks to all BT contributors for their records in 2014. If you have not used BirdTrack you can find further details at the following link; <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about>

House Martin Survey

There will be a UK House Martin Survey, spanning two years, which will commence in spring 2015. House Martins are in trouble, with long-term monitoring revealing a 65% population decline between 1966 and 2012 but the reasons for these declines are unknown. The survey over the next two years will collect more information on population size, breeding ecology and habitat preferences, so we can begin to tackle some key questions about this eagerly awaited summer visitor.

In 2015 the nationwide random square survey will involve volunteers visiting 2,000 – 3,000 ‘random’ (i.e. pre-selected) 1-km squares throughout the UK. By surveying random squares we can produce a robust population estimate to monitor future changes.

The survey will consist of three visits – a recce visit in mid to late May to map the location of colonies followed by two survey visits (an early visit in the first three weeks of June; and a late visit in the last week of June or the first half of July). During the survey visits, volunteers will be asked to record some basic information about the nests and the buildings they are on, and to count the number of complete nests and the number of apparently occupied nests.

I will be advised of the Island’s random squares in January-February so if you are interested in participating in this survey, please let me know as soon as possible.

It is possible to extend this survey on a local basis if the random squares are all allocated and there are additional observers wishing to take part. This will allow us to give a better interpretation on how the Island’s House Martin population is faring.

In 2016 the Nest Monitoring Study will involve volunteers making regular observations at individual nests to collect information about nesting activity. This study will be ideal for observers who have nests on their home or place of work.

Ringling

The BTO is synonymous with bird ringing and no BTO article would be complete without its mention. The Isle of Wight Ringing Group completed a successful 2014 with their final session at Haseley Manor on 30th December. Eleven hardy members of the group attended, despite the frosty conditions, and were rewarded with a good result of 31 new birds ringed and 88 re-trapped birds. The highlights were Song Thrush (4 new and 2 re-trap) and Goldcrest (4 new and 9 re-trap) while the only Redwing seen or heard during the session managed to be ringed. There was also good numbers of Blue Tit (5 new and 24 re-trap) and Great Tit (4 new and 19 re-trap) principally due to the proximity of the feeding station. (Thanks to the Group's Chairman Anthony Roberts for the details).

BTO Membership

I hope the existing members renew their subscription in 2015 – several Island members have been with the BTO for over 50 years! For those of you who are not a BTO member then maybe a New Year's Resolution for 2015?

A key strategy of the BTO is to develop its supporter community and I aim to provide information about the BTO's activities on the Island. In addition for those of you with access to the internet, I will be developing a blog website during 2015 (details to follow) and utilising social media. I have created a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/wightbto>) and a dedicated Twitter feed (@Wightbto) to give you the latest updates from the BTO and the surveys on the Island.

In addition I am producing a quarterly members newsletter (with the Summer and Winter editions also available to non-member volunteers) so for those of you who do not have internet access you have not been forgotten and are just as important.

If you require further information about participating in any of the above surveys or wish to discuss any BTO-related topics please contact myself, Jim Baldwin 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.

Jim Baldwin

What's in a Name?

***Arum maculatum*: Cuckoo-pint.** Why is it so called? My own theory is that the name cuckoo-pint could be a derivation of cucullate pintle. Cucullate means hooded, and would refer to the large green hood-like spathe which surrounds the club-shaped spadix. According to my Chamber's Dictionary, pintile is a bolt or pin. It is also an archaic word for a particular part of the male anatomy, the spadix therefore being representative of a hooded pintile. Any other ideas or interpretations from members of our Society would be most welcome.

Cuckoo-pint tubers are rich in starch. Historically, the plants were grown on Portland Isle where the tubers were gathered and prepared into a kind of farinaceous meal called Portland sago which was used as a dietary supplement for invalids and the sick. (Editorial comment: the arums growing and previously cultivated on Portland are Italian Lords and Ladies, *Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum*). Warning: do not try this at home; botanical guides describe the plant as poisonous!

***Galanthus nivalis*: Snowdrop.** Gal (Greek) = milk; anthos (Greek) = flower; nivalis (Latin) = of the snow/snowy. Milk flower of the snow, or snowy milk-flower? Snowdrop sounds so much better!

Anemone nemorosa: Wood Anemone / windflower. Anemos (Greek) = wind; nemorosa (Latin) = of the woods or grove. Zephyr, God of the west wind, had a wife; he also loved a wood-nymph. Quite naturally, Zephyr's wife was jealous and so transformed the wood-nymph into a flower, rooted forever within woodland's bounds, unable to escape. From then on, whenever Zephyr breathed his presence through the woods in clandestine adoration of his floral sweetheart, she turned westwards and swayed to and fro in loving response.

Looking closely at a wood anemone flower, the absence of green sepals will be noticed. The six white floral segments are thought to be tepals, ie. without the distinction between petals and sepals. The leafy parts below the flower are bracts, which surround and protect the flowering parts while formed but still underground. The plant's leaves are on a separate non-flowering stem which arises from the same root stock as the flowering stem.

There are varying descriptions of *Anemone nemorosa* in botanical field guides eg. 'white flowers with spreading sepals', 'flowers above leaf-like bracts', 'petal-like segments' and 'petaloid sepals'.

Sue Blackwell

Highlights of the autumn foraging season

This autumn was mild and quite damp, making it an ideal season for fungi. With no frost of any significance to curtail the display, the season stretched well into December. Our group had a splendid morning in Northwood Cemetery on 30th November when the display of colourful grassland waxcaps was perhaps the best ever. We were able to identify eleven different species, together with ten types of club fungi in a range of colours. This highlights the importance of this site for its high quality unimproved grassland. Two of the three specialities of the site were putting on a good show: the earthtongue, *Microglossum olivaceum*, with emerald green and date brown 'tongues', and the Violet Coral, *Clavaria zollingeri*, with striking branched purple coral-like clumps. We were unable to find the pink waxcap, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* this year.

Our main autumn foray weekend, where we are joined by Alan Outen from Bedfordshire and members of the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group, was productive this year. Alan Lucas and Sue Rogerson, from the Hampshire group, are particularly good at finding otherwise overlooked crusts and micro-fungi. On the Saturday, Alan found a tooth crust, *Mycoacia nothofagi*, in Firestone Copse which is new to the Island. It is unusual because it has a distinctive fragrant smell. It was growing on oak and is an indicator species of old woodland. On the Sunday, in Puckers Copse, Sue found one crust, *Botryobasidium asperulum*, which Alan believes could be new to Britain. In total we had 119 species from Firestone Copse and 131 species from Puckers Copse, both very respectable totals.

Whilst Sue and Alan were over for the weekend, they took the time to revisit Parkhurst Forest to the old gravel pits south of Signal House where we had found a clutch of rare tooth fungi the previous year. They were able to find an additional species, the Bitter Tooth fungus, *Sarcodon scabrosus*, this time. This is different to the hard and woody tooth fungi which we had previously found. It is fleshy with a distinctive stalk and a scaly cap. This find brings the total number of tooth fungi recorded from these old gravel workings to five, making this a nationally important site for this charismatic group of fungi.

When I returned to photograph these tooth fungi several weeks later, Jillie noticed a distinctive orange-brown fungus growing in patches on a dead willow stem. With the help of the Hampshire Fungus Group, I was able to identify this as *Hypocrea britdaniae*, a very rare species and new to the Island. It transpires that, despite its conspicuous and distinctive appearance, it was first recorded as new to science in 2001. It has been recorded from single

sites in The Mens ancient woodland near Petworth, Baddesley Common in the New Forest, and a wet woodland in Denmark. It seems to be genuinely rare and confined to dead stems of old willow growing within ancient woodland sites.

On 16th November, the fungus group attempted to see these specialities and other things on a foray in Parkhurst Forest. Normally, this would not have been a problem but the torrential rain and flooded gravel pits made this one of the wettest forays we have held. Handlenses, identification books and even waterproofs were all rendered ineffective!

Our final foray on St Helen's Duver in early December proved to be more challenging than we had anticipated as Island Roads had closed the Duver Road to carry out geotechnical road stabilisation works and we had to find an alternative route. However, although we only found 28 species they included some fascinating sand-dune specialists. We saw a bracket fungus, *Phellinus hippophaeicola*, which only grows on old Sea Buckthorn, and the charming little Bird's nest fungus, *Cyathus olla*, growing on dead stems amongst the marram grass. Most specialised, and a first for the Island, was *Psathyrella ammophila* a little brown cap fungus which looks as though it is growing out of bare sand. In fact, if you trace the stem down into the sand, you find that it is attached to buried Marram Grass. Selina found one specimen and Jillie and myself had found another one here a week previous.

There is an interesting and specialised group of fungi which only appear in the spring. They are erratic in appearance and not often recorded but we found two this year on spring Botany meetings. The first was during a meeting to Whitefield Woods when David Biggs found a specimen of the Thimble Morel, *Verpa conica*, on a roadside bank. The second find was during a meeting in East Knighton wood where Dave Trevan found a small, whitish Helvella-type fungus. This proved, with the help of the Hampshire group, to be the rarely recorded *Helvella ephippium*.

I am very grateful to all the members of our group who, with their sharp eyes and investigative skills, consistently manage to find interesting and challenging specimens. In particular, we can always rely upon Natalie, Selena, Mike, Jackie and Jillie to find good things, whilst David is always able to add significantly to the list of micro-fungi.

Colin Pope

ANDY BUTLER'S NATURE NOTES FOR 2014

A feature of the 2013/14 winter was the extreme weather with very strong winds and heavy rainfall.

January

1st to 8th Severe South-westerly gale and heavy rain.

8th Wind gone round to NW. Visited Newtown and saw a Slavonian Grebe.

11th Much warmer today. My first butterfly of the year: a Small Tortoiseshell on the bank at the back of the house.

12th Male Blackcap in garden on the feeders. Wind southerly and getting colder.

14th Two Red Admirals at Bonchurch.

19th Went to Newtown again and saw a Bar-headed Goose and 2 Ruddy Shelduck from the East hide. Then on to Yarmouth to see a Hen Harrier that is wintering there.

21st Back to Newtown yet again and saw an Avocet, always nice to see.

February

2nd Chiffchaff in garden. Wind East and cold.

5th Severe Southerly storm last night with heavy rain.

7th Surprisingly, a Small Tortoiseshell and a Red Admiral in the garden.

10th 4 Purple Sandpipers at Forelands, quite tame and good for photos.

11/12th Severe S-SW gales.

15th Severe SW storm last night, the worst yet. Promenade railings smashed and damage all along through to Ventnor. The seas even reached my bottom steps up to the house! Walked along to Bonchurch beach and found a dead Puffin.

16th Amazing! A Peacock butterfly in the garden.

17th Another dead Puffin, this time at Forelands.

22nd 2 Peregrines over St.Lawrence.

25th 2 dead Kittiwakes, 1 Razorbill and 1 Guillemot on Bonchurch beach. The terrible weather has been too much for them.

March

6th 3 Small Tortoiseshell, 2 Peacock, 1 Red Admiral and a Comma along Wheeler's Bay revetment plus a Double-striped pug moth on the window in the evening.

9th 3 Brimstones along the revetment and 1 Small White in the garden.

12th 6 Commas in Walter's copse, Newtown.

14th Went to Adgestone to see a Glossy Ibis, and a Little Gull at Sandown.

18th Saw my first Wheatear of the year at St.Catherine's Point.

24th The Winter storms have taken out the beach at Blackgang so had a hike round there to see if anything interesting has been uncovered. The last time this happened was back in about 1958 and I remember the beach was completely removed so the sea hit the cliff at most states of the tide. It isn't so bad this time and I didn't find a thing, very disappointing!

26th Glossy Ibis still at Adgestone.

30th First Holly Blue in the garden.

April

1st I had a call to say that a Hoopoe was at a friend's farm in Cockleton Lane, Gurnard. I had good views from her front room, and some reasonable photos.

4th First Orange Tip in the garden, one of my favourite butterflies.

9th First Clouded Yellow and also a Humming-bird Hawkmoth along front. The wind has a Northerly bias at the moment.

14th Saw a Cuckoo at Freshwater this morning, a bird that has become a bit of a rarity.

15th Went over to Mottistone Down and saw 5 Green Hairstreaks, 1 Small Copper, 3 Grizzled Skippers, 1 Clouded Yellow and a Brimstone.

17th 6 Orange Tips and 4 Holly Blue in the garden. Wind Easterly now.

18th Birding on Bembridge Down with Pete Cambell, saw 2 Lesser Whitethroats.

21st First Wall butterfly today on Bonchurch Down.

22nd Back on Bembridge Down with Pete and had 7 Ring ouzels and 1 Whinchat. Pete is attempting to see 300 different bird species in the UK in a year. This is what the Americans call 'doing a Big Year'.

23rd Common Sandpiper in Wheeler's bay.

24th Found *Eurydema ornatum* in the garden, also known as the Red Cabbage Bug or the Ornate Shieldbug. It is a recent arrival in the UK only being found as recently as 2004.

26th 2 Small Blues and 1 Dingy Skipper along the revetment. First this year.

29th Hooray! The first Glanville today along the revetment. Peter Hunt and Dave Nordell with me as well.

May

6th First Adonis Blue today up on Bonchurch Down.

14th 32 Glanvilles from Ventnor to Bonchurch.

15th A Bloxworth Snout moth on dining room window.

18th 46 Glanvilles along the front.

19th 117 Adonis Blue,c30 Dingy Skipper,c20 Common Blue,c30 Brown Argus and 2 Wall on Bonchurch Down.

24th An aberrant Bee Orchid on the slope along from the house.

25th Someone has picked the Orchid. Shame.

29th A visitor told me he had recorded over 100 Glanvilles at Grange Chine. Checked on this and he was correct so this is the best site this year.

June

2nd A Black Redstart on the boathouse roof in front of the house.

6th Saw and photographed a Cuckoo on St.Catherine's Down,with Pete Cambell.

10th Saw a male and female Scarce Chaser on the Sandown Levels. This is a new dragonfly for me.

12th A Lesser Emperor along the revetment this morning. Apparently there has been an influx of them this morning. First Marbled White on the bank at back of house. Went back to the Levels and had 1 immature Scarce Chaser.

13th A Red- veined Darter along the front and 2 Small Blues.

16th Adam Wright was coming down to see me this morning and as he got near my back gate a Swallowtail butterfly flew right past him and on up the back. He shouted out to me to get up there but it was gone.

22nd I thought I would go to Blackgang terrace today and see if the Keeled Skimmer Dragonflies were still extant. I parked in Buddle Road and went down through Knowles to Watershoot, then round on the rocks to Blackgang beach and thus on to the raised area below the Terrace, a tidy step. I found a few Keeled Skimmers but they were a fair way along the plateau towards Whale Chine. It is a bit boggy all along there and not somewhere to go on your own really but.....Anyway, mission accomplished and as I'd taken a light spinning rod I thought I'd fish my way back to Rocken End corner! There was a complete lack of fish which I found a bit surprising as it is usually quite good along there. Got chatting to a chap who was also fishing and he said he hadn't caught anything that year so far which was a bit discouraging. Difficult trying to hold a conversation with someone who is only wearing a hat!

23rd Invited to a private site in the East Wight to look for dragonflies.Saw 2 male Scarce Chasers,1 female and 1 Downy Emerald.

24th Visited another private site, this time in the West Wight. I saw 12 Red-Veined Darters. Also went along the cliff top at Whale Chine and could see 3 *Rhizostoma octopus*, the Barrel Jellyfish. They were close in and slowly drifting with the tide. They are quite large, close to 3ft in diameter.

26th First Ringlet of the year in the garden.

27th Went up to a site near Ventnor where I'd been told there were good numbers of Common Twayblade orchids. There were about 30 plants, never seen so many together before. Also checked out the Fragrant orchid site and found 4, they had not been seen for about 20 years until Colin Pope re-found them.

29th Went over to Walter's Copse, Newtown and saw 4 Silver-washed Fritillaries,10 White Admirals,1 Gatekeeper,1 Broad-bodied Chaser,2 Emperor Dragonflies and 1 Southern Hawker.

July

1st Decided to go to Blackgang again but this time from the other direction and with Peter Hunt. As Whale Chine is blocked off we thought we'd walk from Atherfield. En route we saw a Glanville in Shepherd's Chine. I'd forgotten how far this was but we eventually got there and found about 16 Keeled Skimmers but did discover that all the sites I'd found them in many years ago were now unsuitable and badly slipped. I think they are once again confined to the area below the Terrace and nowhere else. Returning along the beach we noticed a rope over the cliff at Whale Chine and as the time was getting on we climbed up it and got round the barricade at the top and so homeward.

2nd Went round to Luccombe Bay at low tide and climbed up onto the ledge below the cliff to look for Marsh Helleborine. There were about 1000 which is pretty good. In the afternoon, there was a 6-belted clearwing in the garden, a moth I haven't seen for some years there. In the evening Dave Nordell phoned to say he was in Steepledown Road and looking at a Swallowtail. I grabbed camera and shot off up there and sure enough there it was. Magic! Not a bad day all in all.

7th Peter Hunt and I had one last trip to Blackgang but this time played it crafty and went down the rope at Whale and along from there which is much easier. We had about 20+ Keeled Skimmers which isn't too bad but 25 years ago I was seeing 100+ so numbers have dropped.

9th c.100 Marbled White on the bank at the back of the house. I have never seen so many there.

10th 1 Beautiful Demoiselle, 1 Painted Lady, c.10 Silver-washed Fritillary, c.12 White Admiral, 5 Peacock and 1 Migrant Hawker all at Walter's Copse.

16th I had a call from Dave Dana to say he'd seen a Bee-eater at Wydcombe. Dave Nordell and I met up with Ian, the National Trust ranger, to check it out. We saw one straight away, then Dave saw another behind us and then a third! Ian subsequently found the nest site and it all kicked off from there! The following weeks were spent being involved with the bee-eaters on guard duty, logging activity and taking photographs for publicity etc. Quite an experience!

August

3rd 6 Clouded Yellow on the Newtown Ranges.

8th c.40 Adonis on Bonchurch Down.

19th I am seeing at least 2 Humming-bird Hawkmoths and 3-4 Clouded Yellow most days, virtually anywhere suitable. The Bee-eaters have mostly fledged now and are roaming the countryside.

25th Very heavy rain all day, wind Southerly.

September

4th Pete and I saw 4 Grasshopper Warblers on Luccombe Down this morning. Went to Shepherd's Chine later and had 50+ Common Blues, 11 Clouded Yellows, 1 Small Copper and a Green Sandpiper.

9th Saw and photographed a Red-backed Shrike at Shepherd's Chine.

16th In the end, there were a total of 8 Bee-eaters fledged from, as it transpired, two nests. There were 4 adults and all 12 were seen at St. Helen's this afternoon.

23rd Saw and photographed a Wryneck that was reported at St. Catherine's Point. Also a Ring Ouzel and a Common Sandpiper there.

24th Back to Shepherd's Chine where we found 8 Clouded Yellow and 18 Wall butterflies. This is the most I've ever counted in one area at one time. We seem to get plenty of them, whilst on the mainland they have almost disappeared. In fact butterfly enthusiasts are now coming to the Island just to see them as they have become extinct now in some counties.

29th A Kingfisher at the east end of Monk's Bay, Bonchurch.

October

2nd Went to Yarmouth to photograph a Ruff. En route saw a covey of 10 Grey Partridge, the most I've seen for years. Grey Partridge are now very rare in the Island.

8th 14 Pied Wagtails all together along the revetment.

14th Found an Earth Star fungus, *Geastrum*, at Monk's Bay.

24th Went to Castlehaven to look for Galingale, a type of rush. Found only 1 plant but at least it is still there.

30th Off to Yarmouth to see and photograph a Black-throated Diver. It was still in summer plumage and looked very impressive.

November

8th I went to the Hersey hide at Seaview to see a Siberian Stonechat and had very good views.

15th 2 Black Redstarts on St.Catherine's Down.

16th Accompanied Pete to the mainland on his epic quest to see 300 species. We motored down to Hengistbury Head, Dorset, for an Isabelline Shrike that had been seen on the golf course. We saw it okay but the constant rain never eased up so we got a bit wet. Back then to Blashford Lakes near Ringwood for a Franklin's Gull. The problem with this one was it didn't usually appear until just before dark[it had been there for a few days so it's routine was known].Pete reckoned we should get in position in the hide early as a lot of birders would be going for it as it was a Sunday. We were there early and got a good seat and within an hour the hide was jam packed. Fortunately the gull turned up early and in spite of the scrum we got excellent views. Two more for Pete! The interesting thing about these two birds is that the Shrike had come from Siberia and the gull from the central plains of North America and there they were just a few miles apart. Amazing! In spite of the rain a really good day out.

22nd Down at SCP with Pete and saw a Peacock butterfly at the entrance of a rabbit burrow. Apparently they hibernate in them, something I was not aware of.

29th A very late Holly Blue along the revetment.

December.

2nd Pete is now in Scotland chasing the last few on his list.

4th Pete has reached the Isle of Skye and ticked Golden Eagle and Sea Eagle.

7th Pete got his 300th species today, a Lapland Bunting in Norfolk. A marathon effort! A Winter Moth on my window this evening.

10th A Red Admiral flying round the garden today. Wind NW cool but sunny.

13th Over to Newtown to photograph Brent Geese for an article to go in the County Press.

19th A Red Admiral and a Stonechat on the bank at the back of the house. Still sunny.

30th Pete, Dave and I went to Whale Chine and then walked to Shepherd's Chine along the cliff top. A lovely day with bright sunshine, blue sea and no wind. We saw two Little Egrets flying over, a pair of Ravens, good numbers of Common Gulls [not so common in the Island], Med. Gulls, three Stonechats and, most unusually, a Great-crested Grebe fishing in the lee of Atherfield Ledge. A really good day to round off the year.

Andy Butler

Reports of General Meetings

24th May Cowes' Maritime History

Arguably the best view of the Hammerhead Crane is from the Floating Bridge, as it crosses the mouth of the River Medina. This vehicle and passenger chain-ferry, introduced into

service in 1859, was nearly replaced with a two-way tunnel when the Medina Subway Act was passed in 1884. Whites, which owned the famous shipyard on the Cowes quayside beside the Floating Bridge, built two of the chain-ferries. At peak times about five hundred men could be on the ferry at the same time, going to and from home and work. It is one of the last few chain ferries still operating in Britain

Fifteen of our members gathered beside the Cowes Floating Bridge terminus, where we were met by Jon Fisher and Ed Checkley of the Cowes Hammerhead Crane Trust. They showed us plans for the redevelopment of the former shipyard site, instigated by the local community. Consultants were appointed by the Isle of Wight Council and English Heritage seven years ago to conduct an independent survey of the crane, which was feared to be on the verge of collapse, its legs rusting. When the previous owner of the yard, Souter's, went into liquidation, the crane was not included in the fixtures and so the new owner denies responsibility for it. The redevelopment of the waterfront was to have featured a public square, with the crane at its centre, but sadly the recession put these plans on hold, as property prices fell. The owner of the land on which the crane stands would not give the Trust permission to enter the property, so we had to view it from a distance, over the roofs of the yard's dilapidated buildings.

The Cowes Hammerhead Crane Trust was formed in 2006, only two years after the 1912 crane was taken out of service. Although the shipyard was closed in 1965, the crane continued in use, albeit restricted to lifting lighter loads than its 80 ton capacity. It is very strong and weighs 300 tons. Under its legs are big steel structures. The foundations had to be very strong because of the huge weights lifted, and the crane cannot therefore be moved from its site. J Samuel White & Co commissioned it in 1911, on receiving orders to build six destroyers for the Chilean Navy. At first the Trust concentrated on establishing what condition the crane was in and how much it would cost to renovate. English Heritage gave the crane Grade 11 star listed status, placed it on its 'at risk' list and agreed to underwrite costs of up to £90 000, on condition that the Isle of Wight Council contributed twenty per cent of the costs. Unfortunately the recession bit and the Council, under severe financial restraint, refused to pay up. So the Trust set up an Appeal to raise the money itself.

Meanwhile the Trust has raised its aspirations for the crane, which is to be preserved as an iconic reminder of the Island's great shipbuilding heritage, which began at Cowes as long ago as the early seventeenth century, pre-dating shipbuilding at Southampton. Their aim is to inspire local inhabitants, not only to appreciate the important role that Cowes and the Island played in shipbuilding and its many allied industries, but also to encourage young people to take up careers in engineering and heritage related occupations, such as skilled craftsmanship, restoration or heritage tourism. The idea is to help generate local employment. We crossed the river on the Floating Bridge and walked the few hundred yards to East Cowes Heritage Museum, where Sarah Burdett was waiting to receive us. This small, but important museum was set up 22 years ago to create pride in the town. It holds both a permanent and a temporary exhibition and is particularly conscious of the town's industrial past. Sarah, her husband David and other volunteers run the museum and have built up a huge collection of files. Each time they create a temporary exhibition, the contents go into a file. They also have a family history archive and encourage people to research their family tree.

Sarah gave us a slide presentation about Cowes' two great marine engineering works. She started with J S White and the naval ships built there. Before 1880 they were designing torpedo boats on spec. Then the torpedo boat destroyer was invented and during the First World War twenty-seven destroyers were built at White's. Until 1900 each naval shipbuilder had its own designs and the government could choose. When it closed in 1965, Nye's Yard was the longest serving yard on the navy's books. Sam Saunders founded the other marine engineering enterprise at Cowes, with the first two sheds just south of The Folly Inn. In 1913

they built The Bat Boat, the first European amphibious plane. It could land on water, or on grass, using bicycle wheels. Whites also ventured into aircraft building, when Howard Wright, an aircraft engineer, was appointed General Manager, but the enterprise only lasted a few years. The first seaplane, built in gridiron, crashed and had to be rebuilt twice before it flew. They then built a navy plane to accompany a ship and keep it informed as to what was over the horizon. They worked out a way to fold the wings back on deck. The navy was most interested in this invention. Saunders Roe established itself north of The Folly in 1939, mainly producing plywood for planes. The Cockleshell canoes, used in the daring raid on German-occupied Bordeaux in the Second World War, were designed on the Island and can be seen at The Royal Marines Museum at Eastleigh. The East Cowes firm went on to develop sea planes, providing the Navy and Airforce with specialised aircraft through two world wars and into the jet age. They built the largest metal seaplane in the world, *The Princess Flying Boat*. In the nineteen-twenties and thirties they produced some of the fastest speedboats in the world, including Sir Malcolm Campbell's *Bluebird K3*. They went on to develop Britain's first satellite-carrying rockets, the *Black Arrow* and *Black Knight*, which were tested at the Needles. In 1959 the very first hovercraft was built here and launched from in front of the Columbine Shed. The large cross-Channel hovercraft were also constructed here, capable of carrying some forty vehicles and two hundred passengers.

The Polish ship, The Blyskawica, is well-known in Cowes and across the Island for the heroic part it played in the defence of the town in 1942, during a German air raid to destroy the shipyards. It had been built in Cowes and was in for a refit when the incident occurred. It should not have been carrying arms, but luckily it was. The Luftwaffe returned with armour-piercing weapons to destroy the ship, but they missed and hit an air-raid shelter instead. The Blyskawica is still in very good condition. It belongs to the Polish navy, but is now a museum. The Royal Ship Society presented the ship with a medal for seventy-five years of service, including fighting for its homeland's freedom and for rights to the Baltic Sea. After the war the ship returned to Russian occupied Poland with some personnel, but many stayed behind and married local women.

We made our way back to Cowes on the Floating Bridge and walked through the town centre to the Sir Max Aitken Museum, housed in an amazing eighteenth century sail-maker's loft. He was the son of Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper baron, and he worked in the industry for most of his life, as well as becoming an MP. He was a well-known and able yachtsman who represented Britain in many events. He founded the London Boat Show and started the Cowes to Torquay powerboat race. In the Second World War he was a distinguished fighter pilot, credited with the destruction of many enemy aircraft.

Sir Max restored the sail-maker's loft and stayed there when he visited Cowes. In 1979 he set up a charitable trust to preserve his collection of nautical artefacts and open it to public view. Down the centre of the narrow loft is a very long, gleaming Honduras mahogany dining table, and hung from the rafters above, the gaffe of King George's Royal Yacht Britannia that was scuttled in 1936, off St Catherine's Point, because the royal princes would not sail. Sir Max took a keen interest in Lord Nelson and so he acquired and displayed several paintings of The Battle of Trafalgar, Bonaparte's son's cradle and a shrine he made to his hero. From The Royal Yacht Britannia there is Edward VII's chair, so small it must have been for his lady friends, and a gimballed table with a weight in the centre, so that it moves with the waves and will keep cocktails steady.

There is such a variety of fascinating mementoes from sailing ships of past centuries: a cat-o'-nine-tails, serving as a grim reminder of the lives of ordinary seamen, press-ganged into the Navy; beguiling ship's figurehead *The Maid of Guernsey*; a ship's compass and other navigation instruments, a signalling lantern, ships' charts and a beautifully painted chest.

There are tables covered in trophies, medals and cups and a silver plate signed by a bomber pilot in the war, one of the few survivors.

I returned home mulling over all that I had seen and heard during this eventful afternoon. Who would have thought that this small town had such a long history of building naval ships of world renown, or that some of the most inventive marine aircraft, hovercraft and rockets were built here in the twentieth century?

Thanks to Mark Earp, of the Isle of Wight Industrial Archaeology Society, for arranging the talk by the Cowes Hammerhead Crane Society. If you would like to become a Trustee, please see the HHC website for contact details.

Maggie Nelmes

7th June Visit to Alverstone Mead, Youngwoods Copse & Brett's Meadow reserves

Rain clouds glowered as I drove eastwards along the coast, but soon after we arrived at Sandown waterworks, the sun broke through. Butterflies flitted and dragonflies darted as we walked along the track that passes the edge of the golf course and leads to Skinner's Meadow. Mary Edmunds, former Secretary and founder member of Wight Nature Fund led the walk and Richard Grogan, of the Hampshire and Wight Wildlife Trust, came to help us identify wildlife along the track and in the meadow.

Mary told us how Wight Nature Fund began in 1989 when Steve Benstead came to a meeting and informed fellow members of the Isle of Wight Friends of the Earth that the marsh at Alverstone was up for sale and they must buy it. They launched an Appeal on Radio Solent to raise £2 800, divided into lots of £2. Later the marsh was named Benstead's Marsh in his honour. Since then the Fund has acquired other land scattered about the Island, but Alverstone Mead, Youngman's Copse and Brett's Meadow is the jewel in the crown.

For Nathalie, Selena and David Bone this was their first visit to the reserves and they were thrilled to get so close to a red squirrel at the Bird Hide. On the track we saw banded demoiselles, the male with a black stripe and the female green with no band, a beautiful demoiselle with black wings and a blue damselfly. In Skinners Meadow we found a dense mass of black caterpillars on stinging nettle: red admiral, comma or small tortoiseshell, and a small chafer beetle and scorpion fly. The meadow is flower-rich with yellow rattle, parasitic on grass, sorrel, meadow buttercup and creeping buttercup, sorrel, corky-fruited water dropwort, lesser stitchwort, pignut, oxeye daisy and red and white clover. The clover indicates that the land is semi-agriculturally improved. We also found crested dog's tail grass and cock's foot. On trees bordering the meadow we found a variety of galls, identified by David Biggs.

At the bird hide we saw woodland and water birds, including young great tits and blue tits clinging to the feeders, kestrel hovering over the marsh and moorhens feeding young chicks. Mary explained how the tags on the electric wires strung low over the marsh prevent swans from crashing into them. Highland cattle graze the marsh to keep the vegetation in check. Walking through the wood we saw owl nest-boxes, and along the boardwalk across the marsh to the road at Alverstone we admired the rare and beautiful marsh cinquefoil, flowering hemlock and a thick red flowering grass.

The old railway station was flooded this winter, but the river looked tranquil enough in early June. We took the picturesque footpath beside the old mill where a number of wild mallards were resting on the lawn. Along the river we found mugwort aka wormwood, used by the Romans to make beer, and meadowsweet, as well as comfrey and the invasive Himalayan balsam.

Youngwood's Copse is a narrow belt of trees flanked by modern executive housing on the hillside above and by Brett's meadow in the valley below. Wild service trees are dotted about the wood, the saplings taken from an old tree. Mary says they also plan to plant field

maple. Wood avens and enchanter's nightshade were in flower beside the path. There is a problem with garden escapes spreading from nearby gardens or being discarded in the wood. Mary says that public liability insurance costs £3 000 a year in this built-up area. I was impressed by the way in which WNF liaises with local residents and tries to develop good relations with them.

At the far end of Brett's Meadow we found several southern marsh orchids, but the grass was high and wet, so we didn't venture across it. We heard a chiff-chaff call, saw an orange-tip butterfly and found marsh thistles and lousewort. Mary says the bracken needs to be cut back hard to give flowering plants a chance to spread. Rodney, the voluntary warden joined us before we set off back through the wood. At the far end I found a stinkhorn. We returned to Alverstone along the old railway track and continued to follow it all the way back to our cars, finding many clumps of huge horseradish leaves. It had been a lovely sunny day with such a variety of habitat to see. We are most grateful to Mary for leading the long walk and to Richard Grogan and David Biggs for supporting it.

Maggie Nelmes

28th June

Visit to Newnham Farm, Binstead

Some thirty members met at Newnham Farm on a warm sunny morning in late June for an all-day wildlife observation and recording event, by kind permission of John and Diane Cleaver.

Newnham Farm is situated west of Binstead and its land was once part of the Quarr Estate, belonging to the old abbey, destroyed by Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries Act. In the ancient woodland known as Pucker's Copse you can see the remains of the abbey's stew ponds. In 1603 the Mills family sold the estate to Sir Robert Fleming, the judge who tried 'Guy Fawkes' for taking part in the Gunpowder Plot. His descendants lived for a long time at Haseley Manor, but moved their main residence to Newnham in 1850. The farmhouse is an attractive building in a beautiful setting, its lawns sloping down to a large pond. Its age is unknown, but the kneelers and coping on both gable ends and the total lack of symmetry indicated that it was built sometime in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

Diane offered to show us around the farm, taking us first through the woodland to show us the stew ponds. She then took some of the group to the wildflower meadows, and most of us ended up at the largest pond. There Dave Dana was on hand to show us some fascinating dragonflies and damselflies through his telescope. Here is his report:

'We saw eight Odonata species altogether. Red-eyed, Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies were at the main fishing lake along with many Black-tailed Skimmers (some perched on angling stages). Not far from the lake, a female Broad-bodied Chaser was showing a sign of age with a hint of blue on the abdomen.

At the three stepped ponds in the wood, Azure Damselflies were seen ovipositing in tandem. A female Emperor Dragonfly was also ovipositing and a Ruddy Darter was loyal to a perching area amongst the well vegetated pond bank.' - Dave Dana

Meanwhile, David Biggs was scouring the trees around the pond for plant galls and leaf miners, with a little help from his followers. And after lunch in the farmhouse garden, some keen botanists and entomologists set off for the flower meadows to record flowering plants, butterflies and other insects.

May I thank all those who led the recording and made this a relaxed and enjoyable day. We are especially grateful to Dave Dana for his report and to Diane and John for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Maggie Nelmes

26th July

**Bunts Hill, Thorness & Parkhurst:
The Northern Bounds of Watchingwell**

Sixteen intrepid souls gathered in Whitehouse Lane near Porchfield for another Anglo-Saxon landscape history walk led by **John Margham**, this time a distance of 5½ miles. We set off immediately for Bunts Hill, a rather inconspicuous field site to approach but offering panoramic views in all directions, especially of the West Wight, once we had climbed it. This would have made it an excellent *mot beorh*, or ‘meeting place at the barrow-shaped hill or mound’, so described in the 968 charter issued by King Edgar which confirmed the grant of the estate of Watchingwell (*Hwætincg*) to the nuns of Wilton Abbey. The top of the hill would once have provided an area adequate for a large gathering of people to socialise and feast as well as for the more serious business of settling disputes, dispensing justice and organising defence. [See John’s paper on early medieval meeting-places in *Wight Studies* 27 (2013).]

Arriving at Youngwoods Farm – recorded as *la Yengwode* in 1294 – John explained that it would have been part of Watchingwell from the 10th century, but by the 19th had transferred to Carisbrooke parish. At Rodge Brook he pointed out the geographical uses of the Saxon words *broc* and *burna*, indicating shorter and longer watercourses respectively.

As we crossed the road at Porchfield to do a short detour, we were entering the old Calbourne estate, and the boundaries here may well go back to the Romano-British period. The detour brought us to the wooded area known as Corfheath Firs: the name is a bit of a mystery here, as *corf* usually denotes a cutting, gap or pass, such as in Corve Farm (Chale Green) or Corve Hill (Shorwell), but this topographical feature is lacking at Corfheath, which appears to derive its meaning from the funnel-shaped entrance on the edge of a former heathfield, being both a routeway and a ‘gap’ in a boundary. Retracing our steps, John referred to Locks Green deriving its name from a local family from at least the 14th century: it was recorded as *Lokkesland* in 1387. Porchfield itself was first recorded as *Portsfildes* in 1559, ‘fields belonging to the Port family’, a local family which had first been mentioned in the 13th and 14th centuries.

A short march along the main road followed, before we were able to turn off on a footpath to Great Thorness. The name was first recorded as *Torneyam* c.1200 and indicated ‘the thorn-tree hedge or enclosure’; the area became detached from Watchingwell and was taken over by Calbourne parish. A lunch-stop beckoned at Thorness Bay, where John read us extracts from the Old English poems *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer*, emphasising the importance to the Anglo-Saxons of the sea and of naming places from the sea: Gurnard and Bouldnor are both based on *ōra*, ‘an elongated, flat-topped hill’, visible from the sea.

Walking along Thorness beach, we learned that the area was used for salt-making in medieval times, confirmed by the Watchingwell entry in Domesday Book, which specifically mentions ‘a salt-pan without rent’. Then turning inland towards Whippance Farm, John revealed how a 10th-century charter bound refers to the area close by as *stiðes fleotes heafod*, ‘the head of the firm fleet’, indicating it was probably once an estuary.

We proceeded past woodland to Stagwell Farm, recorded as a field-name *Stackell* in 1608, probably meaning ‘the spring or stream marked by a boundary post’. The boundary post may relate to the bounds of Watchingwell; John referred to the convoluted nature of the boundary in this area, about which we needed no convincing. That said, as we arrived at Stagwell Gate, John pointed out that, whereas the pre-19th century Parkhurst Forest was much more extensive to the west, south and east, here on the north side the bounds have remained on the same alignment for hundreds of years.

‘Forest’ was, historically speaking, essentially a legal rather than a landscape term. Clive Chatters’ study in the Proceedings (vol. 11 1991) showed the range of activities supported by

the forest: cattle, deer, sheep and geese, an early commercial rabbit warren, as well as firewood, bracken and broom for bedding, peat, felled timber, and gorse. Documents give a good idea of the forest landscape before its enclosure from 1812, with only about one-third of its actual woodland: wood pasture for the grazing of animals and foraging of pigs meant broad swathes of heathland and grassland as well as woodland proper, a landscape remarkably similar to that persisting today in the New Forest.

As we rounded the north-west corner of the surviving Forest, John pointed to no fewer than five Old English boundary locations in the area, though we are unable to identify them precisely today; in modern English these are: ‘hart wood pasture’, ‘the spring or stream (under the footbridge)’, ‘the hedgerow’, ‘the holy stone’, and ‘the old hart hedgerow’, all of which present an impression of this landscape in the 10th century. We finally crossed the fields to our starting-point close to Whitehouse Farm, an area which was once part of the Forest in the 11th century, the farm however only first being recorded as *White House* on Andrews’ map of 1769.

We had started this walk on a hot day at 10.30 and finally completed it just after 4.30, but we barely noticed the distance, for as always John had managed to follow interesting but little known footpaths, always keeping us intrigued with their historical significance and providing new perspectives on an ancient landscape.

Alan Phillips

14th September Ventnor Downs: a human history and natural history walk led by Richard Downing and Ian Ridett.

Eight people joined this walk, delivered by National Trust volunteer and local historian Richard Downing and National Trust Ranger Ian Ridett. The walk considered the evidence of human activity on the downs from the Bronze Age to the Cold War era and heard descriptions of the National Trust objectives and activities to manage the downs for nature conservation. Opportunities were taken to demonstrate this with suitable observations of flora and fauna. Downs geology was an important factor in both the human and natural history, including pits and quarries for the extraction of chalk, flint, sandstone, marl and gravel. Flint pits on Wroxall Down had destroyed the Bronze Age barrows but several of these clearly remain on Luccombe Down, where a map by archaeologist Christopher Currie indicates ten, with the likelihood of at least three more. Currie also discovered the walls of an early Bronze Age stock enclosure and speculated that the present parish boundary nearby might have Neolithic origins.

A 1617 boundary dispute arising from the enclosure of common land was described in which competing claims by the manors of the Undercliff and the men of Wroxall argued whether the parish boundary or the ancient ridgeway path, known as the Green Way, was the line where the estates joined.

A visit to the sandstone quarry, from which much of Ventnor was built, also considered the arrival of the railway there through a tunnel in the downs. The rapid development of Ventnor as a health resort from 1830 was explained as being due to the microclimate of the Undercliff being identified as beneficial to people suffering from chest conditions, especially TB. The arrival of the railway also had a major impact on Ventnor’s development from 1866.

In Coombe Bottom the remaining evidence of the rifle and pistol butts, established by the Ventnor branch of Isle of Wight Rifles in 1862, was observed.

On top of the downs the origins of the present air traffic control radar station was explained with the establishment there of RAF Ventnor in 1937. This was one of 22 radar stations established on the south coast to warn of air attacks coming across the Channel from

France. RAF Ventnor played an important part in the Battle of Britain and Ventnor was heavily bombed in 1940. An underground nuclear operation room was established, which was later put to civil use in the 1960s as a base for local government in the event of a nuclear attack. Richard made use of many photographs to illustrate this and other historic sites. Although not visited, the legends associated with St. Boniface Well were also described and its location pointed out.

Along the way we looked at the various habitat types and Ian explained the benefits of the feral goats in removing scrub and trees to restore the chalk grassland beneath. In addition to Holm Oak, they also love Ash and Blackthorn but seem to dislike Hawthorn. The difficulties of catching the goats for their annual health check were discussed. This requires up to forty volunteers in a line to shepherd the goats towards the waiting pens. Following the check and tagging of the new goat kids, they are returned to the down.

Among the butterflies, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Wall Brown and Small Heath were observed.

Ian talked about the importance of 'edge' habitats which was demonstrated by the presence of several Speckled Wood butterflies and many unidentified hoverflies near the ammunition store at the western end of the coombe. Edge habitats are often the most diverse for insects, plants, and those that feed on them.

A juvenile Hobby was briefly seen over the coombe before heading north, presumably hunting the many hirundines present, including small numbers of Sand Martins.

On reaching the flint cap of Locombe Down, the differences between Bell Heather and Ling were discussed and patches of Bilberry pointed out. Interestingly, since the New Forest ponies were removed, a recovery in the heather and Bilberry growth has been noted. Ian pointed out the tractor rolled Bracken areas which reduces the vigour of the Bracken rhizome. This leads to shorter growth the next year, allowing the slower growing heathers to compete, eventually crowding out the Bracken, but it is a slow process.

The importance of a rotation of burning/cutting some of the gorse for Dartford Warblers, Linnets, etc. was discussed. The birds like to nest in the very dense young gorse up to 1m high. Once the gorse becomes open and draughty it becomes unuseable for nesting Dartfords, though may be used by Linnets. Gorse grows very vigorously once cut and reaches a density for nesting in about 4 years.

Two Northern Wheatears were noted by the dew pond with small parties of Meadow Pipits overhead. Several Kestrels were hovering over the down and Ian spotted a very distant Osprey beyond St Martins Down, which sadly did not come closer.

Ground nesting birds on Wroxall Down include Skylark among the more common Meadow Pipits, unfortunately breeding numbers are depressed by the volume of dog walkers. During the season of closure for Foot and Mouth in 2001, 4-5 pairs of Skylark and 8-10 pairs of Meadow Pipit attempted to nest on Wroxall Down. In an ordinary year 2 and 4 pairs would be expected.

Richard Downing and Ian Ridett

22nd November King Aethelred & the Isle of Wight, an illustrated talk by Joy Verrinder

I can't help but feel sorry for Aethelred. For very nearly the whole of his long, 38 year reign, England was threatened with Viking invasion. Before he came to the throne in 978, aged only ten, there had been a period of peace, but only two years into his reign, the Vikings renewed their raids, attacking towns as far apart as Chester and Southampton. They were exploiting a situation in which a boy king was ruling with the help of advisors who were often governed by self-interest. The raids were widespread and unpredictable. Aethelred did not grow up to be a good military leader, so he had no choice but to raise taxes, known as the Danegeld, to pay off the attackers. This tribute got bigger and bigger, as the raids intensified. In 991

Aethelred paid the Vikings ten thousand pounds of silver, but by 1012 it was forty-eight thousand pounds. It must have been a huge burden on the people to pay the taxes, but they had no choice.

In 991 the Danes defeated the ruler of Essex at the Battle of Maldon. In 994, together with a Norwegian force, they sailed up the Thames and tried to besiege London. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells how, in 1001, the Vikings intensified their raids, looting and burning nearly everywhere. After many battles in the South of England, they crossed to the Isle of Wight and looted and burnt the estate of Waltham and many other villages.

In 1002, after the death of his first wife, Aethelred married Emma, sister to Duke Richard II of Normandy, a Viking settlement. This was a shrewd diplomatic strategy to deny the raiders safe haven across the Channel from which to launch their assaults on England's south coast. His next move was not so wise. Seeing the Danes who had settled in England as a potential threat, should they join forces with the Scandinavian army, he ordered their massacre. Although the massacre was probably not widespread - the only record of one taking place was at Oxford - the survivors demanded vengeance. Swein Forkbeard, the Danish King, arrived in England at the head of a large army, intent on crushing opposition province by province.

Aethelred tried to stop the Viking ships by sending large fleets to meet them, but either they weren't ready in time, or they failed to set sail. The King did not tackle the raiders himself, by leading his armies into battle, nor could he trust or inspire competent generals. There was lack of co-ordination between his armies, and morale got steadily worse. Historians question whether loss of nerve led to his military failure, or whether it was excessive caution. Although Aethelred paid off the invaders, as soon as they had the money they reneged on their agreement. In 1013 Swein returned to England with a new arm, intent on outright conquest. He set up a base on the Humber and defeated the Danelaw and Northumbria in the North, before marching south to Wessex. Aethelred sought sanctuary in London, with his fleet on the Thames, whilst the English army made a determined effort to force Swein to retreat to the North. Yet, more and more of the men Aethelred had abandoned were deserting him, and even London was sending messengers to Swein to promise allegiance. Eventually the King sent his wife on ahead to Normandy, and he crossed over to the Isle of Wight.

Aethelred used the Isle of Wight as a stepping stone to Normandy and as a refuge. William of Malmesbury, a Benedictine monk and a trusted source, records how the King came to the Island in August 1013 and stayed until the New Year. He writes that Aethelred had been banished from the throne by his own generals, how he felt betrayed, more threatened by his own countrymen than by foreigners.

Swein's sudden death in February gave Aethelred a second chance, as the councillors who had deserted him preferred him to rule, rather than Swein's son Cnut. So they sent for him and he returned from Normandy to buy off the Viking fleet and lead his army against Cnut. Although Cnut was driven out of England, Aethelred's reign was once more threatened by internal conflict. When two leading Anglo-Danes from the East Midlands were murdered at court, Aethelred unwisely took the side of the murderer, Earl Eadric, his deputy, who later quarrelled with the King's eldest son, Edmund, and instead of joining forces with him, deserted the English army. While Aethelred lay ill, Eadric betrayed him, joining forces with Cnut. The following year, in April 1016, the King died.

Having a king to rule the whole of England was a new situation, and the elders did not always agree with the king. In the last few years of his reign, Aethelred became very unpopular, and this gave rise to his epithet the 'Unready'. 'Unrad' is a pun on his own name, meaning 'Noble Counsel', and 'un-raed', meaning 'no counsel' or 'ill advised'. He was considered a weak and easily influenced ruler, with very poor judgement. Yet The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the whole reign was written after his death, and much later, in the

twelfth century, writers blamed him for subsequent events: for initiating foreign invasion and high taxation. We should also take into account that the Scandinavians were a formidable foe: a highly aggressive and militaristic culture that operated as a super-efficient military machine. Joy proceeded to tell us what the Isle of Wight was like a thousand years ago, when Aethelred sought sanctuary here. People lived in well organised communities, whose lands were described by their boundaries. The fortified hilltop at Carisbrooke was one of the first burghs in the country. No Roman buildings have been discovered there, but you can see the remains of an Anglo-Saxon watchtower below the Norman keep. The town gate was not in the same position as the Norman castle's entrance. From their hilltop, the inhabitants could see Newport town and the river, and in another direction they could see where trade was coming from, along the Bowcombe Valley.

An Anglo-Saxon burial site discovered by metal detectorists on a hillside at Shorwell revealed a sword and shield boss. Archaeologists Frank Heap and Becky excavated the site and found a grave, where a warrior was buried with his weapons, and the oldest helmet ever found in Britain. Various textiles were imprinted on it, from very fine cloth. There was a gold coin in his mouth to pay the ferryman. Joy delved in her box and brought out a replica helmet which she modelled for us.

Graves have also been found cut into a hillside at Carisbrooke, above Froglands, with Kentish/Jutish/Frankish connections. People were buried on hillsides so that they could look down on their lands. A young man in his teens was buried with a board game, made of carved walrus ivory, on his lap, which signifies high status. There was also a copper alloy bowl, a bucket that probably held beer for his long journey into the after-life, the silver ring from the rim of a hunting horn and a Kentish glass bowl. This was a very rich burial, dating from the early sixth century. One by one, Joy showed us a reproduction of each of these objects, and invited us to come up and examine them closely at the end of her talk.

She told us how metal detectorists are finding Saxon cemeteries all over the Island, but these are not Christian, but pagan burials, as Christians did not bury their dead with their possessions. She showed us photographs of brooches in different styles, made of silver or gilt, one with garnets, a decorated buckle, silver armlet, fragment of a silver gilt sword, a pommel and sword rings. In the seventh century the first Christian crosses appeared at a time when Island inhabitants were forced to have a Christian baptism. She showed us pictures of the churches on the Island with evidence of Saxon origins in their architectural features, as well as photographs of silver pennies from Aethelred 11's reign, which came from the London mint.

For her final demonstration, Joy produced replicas of the clothes in which a rich woman was found buried. Over a rectangular tunic made of fine-weaved cloth in a plain colour, she wore an over-tunic, topped by a magnificent colourful cloak, which I was only too happy to model, fastened with two brooches at the shoulders and with three heavy square-headed brooches down the front. Her headband was made of gold thread. Buried with her were a grooming kit, containing tweezers and an ear scoop, a knife to take to a feast, a leather sheath, horn handle, perforated spoon (whose purpose is unclear) and a crystal ball to ward off harm.

Members of the audience, which numbered about thirty-five, couldn't wait to come and examine the replicas of all these possessions that were considered necessary to the wellbeing of a warrior or a wealthy young man or woman in the after-life. The original objects are in the British Museum, but these shiny, bright new ones are so much more attractive and representative than objects that have lain in the ground for a thousand years. I would find it tiring to wear that heavy cloak for long, but it is so beautiful that it would make me feel important if I wore it today. The warrior's helmet was very uncomfortable and heavy, but it was not made for my head.

Joy works for the Education Services, bringing history alive for schoolchildren with clothing and objects like these. Thank you Joy, for your fascinating presentation.

Maggie Nelmes

13th December Debate: All species have a right to life, independent of their utility to humans

Richard Smout spoke for the motion and Paul Bingham against. Colin Pope was the chair. Each of the speakers had ten minutes to give their presentation, after which members of the audience were invited to give their points of view. The debate concluded with each of the speakers having five minutes to sum up.

Richard's presentation for the motion

Richard began by mentioning Frank Morey's Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight, published 105 years ago, a real attempt to document the wildlife of the Island. This included common species that are often overlooked because we don't give equal importance to wildlife species. Slugs and snails, silverfish and springtails, for example, are generally considered pests and therefore hunted and destroyed.

We tend, said Richard, to favour species that are useful to us when deciding which species to protect. But does an utterly useless creature that is not even physically attractive have the right to life? Is it up to us to decide? 'Humans have neither the knowledge nor the consistency to decide whether another species should live or die', asserted Richard, giving as evidence the fact that humans have made mistakes in the past, persecuting some species because they believed old wives' tales about hedgehogs sucking milk from cows or nightjars sucking goats' teats. Even today, he continued, 'We don't know enough about food chains' Sometimes we have to make difficult choices between human interests and those of other species. At Castlehaven in Niton Undercliff several years ago, Natural England had to decide which was more important: saving rare mining bees and wasps which live on unstable cliffs or saving people's homes from collapse. Humans can move elsewhere.

When it comes to saving species from extinction, there are now so many on the endangered and critically endangered lists that we are faced with the question: which species do we prioritise? Each of us has our favourite species.

And how do we deal with alien species that humans have deliberately or accidentally introduced into our islands? Some, though not all, can seriously threaten the survival of our native species, such as the grey squirrel, North American mink and the harlequin ladybird. 'We are flawed', said Richard. 'We need to be humbler. We are not in a position to judge.'

Paul's presentation against the motion

Paul began his presentation against the motion by reminding us that this year is the bicentenary of the first Natural History Society of the Isle of Wight, which predated IWNHAS by over a hundred years. On page 14 of that Society's Constitution it states that 'utility is the greatest concern' when deciding on a species' value.

'Look at the fossil record', says Paul. 'Species were coming and going all the time'. There were several big extinctions in prehistory. Extinction is not caused by humans alone. The landscape is not natural. It was shaped by Neolithic man when he turned to farming as a lifestyle. There is an astronomical argument that the sun is getting hotter and hotter, an important factor in global warming.

We face a number of dilemmas. The badger cull is the result of one. What to do about alien species is another. And how about disease pathogens? Does smallpox have a right to life at our expense? 'Man is a special species', says Paul, and as Brian Cox, the popular astrophysicist believes, intelligent life forms are extremely rare in our universe. That being so, 'utility to humans is a suitable yardstick'.

‘We can do better than evolution’ to ensure the survival of our species, says Paul. Man has overcome many problems. Biodiversity of species is essential for humans for various reasons, including agriculture, maintaining our environment and to provide interest and pleasure. ‘If humans are to flourish, we need to be sustainable.’ We must manage human populations, avoid war and control our environment. It is a huge challenge to understand our impact on the environment. To quote from George Orwell’s ‘Animal Farm’, ‘All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others’.

A discussion from the floor then took place, during which a number of interesting and thought provoking topics were raised.

Richard’s summing up

‘I totally agree that this is a very generalised conversation and we need to qualify it’, said Richard in response to a comment from the audience. ‘It is difficult to put ourselves in the position of other cultures.’

In reply to Paul’s assertion that Man is special, Richard said that we are not uniquely special as a species. Besides, as a special species, we have moral responsibilities towards other species. When it comes to the question of prioritising one species over another, Richard said: ‘I don’t think we are qualified to judge’, though he admitted that viruses are a problem. The notion of sentient beings has been around for a long time, he said, quoting from Shakespeare’s play ‘Measure for Measure’, where a character says that the ‘poor’ beetle crushed underfoot is just as significant as the giant who treads on it. Therefore we should be very careful in deciding which species to prioritise, he concluded.

Paul’s summing up

Paul advised us that the last natural history society didn’t last long, as it degenerated into a philosophical society.

For humans to flourish, Paul said, we should reduce our meat consumption in the interests of our health. ‘I believe we could do better than evolution. We can rise above it, can choose to be vegan.’ He added that we are special, but that gives us special challenges and responsibilities. ‘We need to guarantee biodiversity, as it has utility for us. And we should travel beyond our world to other planets’, he concluded.

Colin thanked the speakers for a thought-provoking debate.

Maggie Nelmes

Reports of Section Meetings

Looking at the Countryside

Tuesday 15th July

Brook Down

It was sunny, warm, yet with a nice breeze when 7 of us set out from the road between Brook and Chessel. We went eastwards up the Tennyson trail onto Pay Down. On the way we found many wild flowers notably a very large patch of Rest Harrow by the track, so called because of its woody nature that tangles in the harrow, there were also Harebells and deeper coloured Clustered Bellflowers (*Campanula glomerata*). There are some barrows in the field and also apparently in the woods. These have yielded many high status grave goods some of which are currently on display in the British Museum as part of the new Anglo-Saxon exhibit. We also learned from Dave Harding that the downs are named according to the slope, and that the name changes at the crest of the down, so we were on Pay Down on the south side of the ridge, but to the north in the woods it is Chessel Down. Evidence has been found of a Jutish settlement in what is now woodland on Chessel Down. Two high status female burials have been found one of which contained a crystal ball. On the edge of the woodland where it was

less breezy we saw our first butterflies, Dark Green Fritillaries, and also Meadow Browns. There were also a large number of Burnet Moths. As we entered the woodland we were in a sunlit ride where we saw several butterflies and a large number of tall pale orchids that were probably a hybrid of Marsh and Early Purple Orchids. We descended through cool woodland, where there was enchanters nightshade in profusion, also wild strawberries and currants. David Biggs found a new fungal disease on Sycamore as well as the more common Tar Spot. We crossed the road and walked past Shalcombe Manor, barely visible through the trees. The path went along the wood edge, along the hedgerow on the field side were many blue damselflies, skylarks were singing above the fields beyond the hedge. On the edge of the wood we found a large Dyad's Saddle fungus (*Polyporus squamosa*) and also some Cramp Balls (*Daldinia concentrica*). At the end of the wood we turned uphill onto the down. There were many butterflies, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Small Heath and a few Chalkhill Blues and more Burnet Moths that were identified as Five-spot Burnets, and we found the striped caterpillars of the cinnabar moth on Ragwort. On the top of the down at Five Barrows we admired the views and then went to look at a large disc barrow which is between the barrows on the top of the down and the track. From the barrow we could see Gallibury Hump and Alan told us of the other finds in that area. It was a pleasant walk back to the cars. Just near the gate, David saw some Ringlet butterflies and a Comma was also spotted. I had a close encounter with a large well marked horse fly with a chequer pattern on the wings. I might have quite admired it if it hadn't bitten me! A lovely walk with lots of interesting things to see and talk about.

Wednesday 13th August

Froglands and Lukeley Brook

Thirteen people met at the Priory Viewpoint Car Park near the castle on a beautiful bright and breezy morning. It was a particular pleasure to have Bill Shepherd along; he told us of lots of interesting things about his home area. The first thing he told us was about the group of chestnut trees in the field below the car park. There were twelve trees originally, planted to stop cattle straying into the Priory soak away. The lane towards Froglands farm is bordered by mostly Hazel, and has probably been there for over 500 years. In the lane we saw our first butterfly, a Comma. 150 years ago, wild sour cherries were recorded as growing in the lane and have been seen again in recent years but we failed to find them, though there were plenty of Bullace. There is a magnificent ancient oak tree in the lane. At Froglands farm there is a carved brick in the end of a barn. It reads Jane Stark 1779 and is believed to have been carved when the Stark family arrived at the farm as tenants, having previously been at Idlecombe. Froglands farm is very old and like many of the farms in the area was part of the castle estates. At one time the farm was surrounded by elms, which protected the thatched buildings. Early in the year there are violets in the lane that are a distinctive shade of pink only found in the Carisbrooke area.

We continued down a narrow lane between banks and hedges. This lane goes down to where there was a ford at Plaish and is very old. In the lane, Selina picked up a coin which is believed to be a Charles I farthing. There were a few butterflies around, Speckled Wood being the most common. Some hazel leaves had grey blisters on them, sign of the Nut Leaf Blister Moth. There were festoons of Black and White Bryony, some of the Black Bryony leaves had turned a glossy dark purple. Hedge Bindweed and Greater Bindweed flourished along the side of the path; Sue Blackwell showed us the differences between the two.

To one side of the lane is what appears to be an over grown stile, however it is a marker showing the track of the wartime PLUTO pipeline. There is a matching marker across the fields towards Gatcombe and also another on the Tennyson trail above Carisbrooke. Nearby is a small hill with a man-made cliff. This is where the stone was quarried for the 16th century Castle ramparts. We reached the water meadows at Plaish where we admired the

views in both directions. Across the valley at Plaish Farm, a Little Owl perched on the top of an open barn door. The water meadows used to be grazed and the Lukely Brook was visible but now Willow Herb has taken over and the brook is barely visible for some distance. Where the course of the Brook can be found, it is full of Fools Water Cress. Along the path by the brook we saw Common Blue butterflies, and a Common Red Darter. On a nettle stem there was seething mass of black spiky, Peacock butterfly caterpillars. We also found Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), so called because of its Strawberry-like seed head. A Caddis fly was seen near the Sheepwash

Bill took us to the site of a 18th/19th century paper mill and pointed out the rush of water through the old sluices close to the lane. We then plodded up Constitution Hill to the Castle and strolled along the edge of the moat where there was Wild Parsnip, Ragwort and Scabious in flower. A wild plum tree grows just where the path leaves the castle area. Attempts were made to scrump some plums but most of the fruit was too high to reach. We returned to the cars via a hidden pathway just below the level of the road, having seen lots of interesting things and learning a lot more about the area.

Wednesday 10th September Head Down to Wydcombe

Fifteen people met at Daphne Watson's house on a beautiful sunny and warm morning. As we walked up the drive we admired a large creamy white Clerodendron with a good scent. Also by the drive was the first fungus of the day, a large bracket growing low down on a stump, probably *Ganoderma australe*. As we went along the track towards the higher downs we found several wild flowers and also admired some beautiful necklaces of glowing Black Bryony berries. There were sloes and haws in the hedges. A Robin was singing and Ravens were indulging in aerobatics over the fields. There were wonderful views over the valley and beyond. We left the track on the top of the down and took a descending track on National Trust land. Alongside the track were some magnificent old coppiced hazels. We crossed meadows where we found plenty of flowers, including Greater Trefoil and Water Mint. There were also some thistle stems swollen by Thistle Gall. We paused to look at the restored cottage at Couthey Butts. It is said to be the only remaining 18th century cottage on the Island; it is an attractive little house but does not seem to be occupied.

We continued down a stony and damp track which is a stream in winter. Here we found Enchanters Nightshade, a Hypericum and the leaves of Bugle alongside the track. There were plenty of ferns along this section: Male, Broad Buckler, Soft Shield and Harts Tongue. There were a few fungi: Oak Mazegill, some rather dried out Dryads Saddle, *Amanita rubescens* and several slug eaten Russulas. There were badger slides on the steep side of the track. At Wydcombe we had to leave the main line of the track because it is so overgrown, however the path has re-established along the edge of a field. We saw Robin's Pincushions on the brambles. Swallows were swooping over the field and a Buzzard was mewing high above. There were several very large Parasol Mushrooms (*Macrolepiota procera*) in good edible condition, so one or two were gathered. We arrived at the only waterfall on the Island marked on the OS map. There was some discussion about the difference between a waterfall and a cascade. In this case, it is a waterfall because the water drops straight down rather than tumbling over rocks. There is always water running here but never a great deal, at one time you could walk up the stream to the fall, but now one can only see it from the bank above. We walked up to the road at Bierley, so called because it is where the bier was laid whilst the bearers had a drink in the pub (bier lay) on the way to Niton church. There was a flock of 8 Yellow Hammers, just where we left the road. We took another delightful path that runs back towards Head Down. It is a steady uphill walk, but the woods are lovely and there was plenty of interest. There were more fungi, Sulphur Tufts, Russulas, Oak Milk cap, Common Earthballs and Birch Polypore. The botanists found Wood

Sorrel and Cow Wheat, and by the path was a type of Sorrel that can be used in salads, a few leaves were picked to be added to lunch! We added another fern to the list, Polypody. The sting in the tail of the walk was a short but steep climb up the side of the down back to Crocker Lane. However, to set us on our way we encountered a very large patch of Scarlet Waxcaps growing in the short grazed grass at the beginning of the climb.

At the top we caught our breath and admired the views again before returning to the cars. Thanks to Daphne we were able to get further off the beaten track than sometimes. Several people had not been to the area before. An enjoyable morning with lots of interest and chat.

Wednesday 15th October

Belmont

It was a rather misty morning when we met Mary Edmunds to explore the Belmont area between Newport and Wootton. We started out along the cycle track towards the old Whippingham station where Mary and John told us about the last passenger train that ran on the line in 1966. We saw some photos of how the station had looked in its heyday when it was used as the station for Osborne House. It stopped being used as a station in 1953 because no one used it any more. Along the cycle track we saw hips, haws, bryony, privet berries and hazel nuts. There were also a few wild flowers, hedge woundwort among them. A Norway Maple was beginning to show autumn colour; also some of its leaves had a lot of white discs of fungus.

We then followed a track that follows along an old boundary hedge and ditch that separated Fatteningpark and Belmont through very pleasant woodland where we found several fungi, Turkey tails, Brown Rollrim, Birch Polypore and, just off the track, a fallen branch was covered in the small orange dots of Coral Spot. In the woods were some large hornbeams distinguished particularly by their attractive 'snakeskin' bark. There were also large clumps of Butchers Broom with flowers and all stages of the round red berries. A close look showed the flowers growing out of what look like leaves but are in fact large flattened stems. Belmont farm was two cottages that were built by Henry Pinnock whose initials can be seen on another of his houses along Fairlee Road.

We went along the edge on the woods past Belmont Farm from where there were good views over Newport and the Medina. Eventually we reached the cycle path/old railway again. Just as we joined it we had a glimpse of a local resident's Post Box collection. The walk back along the track yielded more fungi and autumn fruits and also more flowers notably three of the geranium family - Herb Robert, Cut leaved Geranium and Hedgerow Cranesbill all still flowering well, but also Medick, Red Clover, Convolvulus. There was Spindle with its exotic pink berries and some sloes. Some of the group saw a Wood Mouse diving into the verge. Along the way we saw or heard Robins and a Green Woodpecker as well as the usual pigeons. Despite the dull day it was a very pleasant walk with lots of interest, and the promised rain held off until we were all back in our cars. Thank you, Mary for organising the walk. Fungi seen were: Turkey Tails, Brown Rollrim, Coral Spot, Birch Polypore, Common Funnelcap (*Clitocybe gibba*), Crampballs, *Pluteus cervinus*, Common Inkcap, a Mottlegill (*Paneolus* sp) and some very decayed Wood Mushrooms.

Wednesday 17th December

Quarr Abbey

It was a grey drizzly morning when 11 people met in the visitor car park for a short walk in the Abbey grounds. David Biggs had brought a large plan of the old abbey that had been worked out in the 19th century. We had to look at it under the tail gate of my car to keep the old book dry, fortunately Jackie had brought a laminated copy with her which was useful later. We admired the Monterey Pines that grow by the approach to the new abbey; these trees are 100 years old. We followed the route of a woodland walk that has been put through the

woods between the abbey and the main road. It is a pleasant stroll and we found some fungi of interest, in particular a black jelly fungus that was identified by Colin as *Exidia glandulosa*, although it was almost black it had white spores. David found a gall on Spindle that causes the leaf edge to roll, and on the same leaf a scale insect that was new to the site.

We joined the public footpath that runs from the road to the old abbey. This connected the abbey to the extensive system of fishponds that can still be seen in part at Newnham Farm. Along the lane were some trees with many balls of Mistletoe. We passed a large ancient wall that was once the perimeter wall of the old Cistercian Abbey. The modern track between Quarr and Binstead crosses the site of the original church; we crossed the track and went down to the ruins. In a corner of the field is a magnificent oak tree that must have grown on top of a wall. The wall has fallen down leaving the tree standing on three legs forming arches. Close by is the arch of the old infirmary chapel. The walls of the abbey have been recently renovated because ivy had caused a lot of damage. Growing in walls we found Wallflowers, Pelitroy of the wall, Polypody fern (*Polypodium interjectum*), and after quite a bit of searching, Colin found Rue leaved Saxifrage. David Biggs pointed out the marks left by a leaf mining moth on the Polypody.

We returned to the new Abbey by completing the woodland walk where we saw a beautiful patch of Candle snuff fungi. There is a hide just off the path for watching birds and squirrels but so many people together meant that we didn't see anything. By now we were ready for a cuppa so we made our way to the café for refreshments and a quiz. Despite the inauspicious weather at the start we didn't get wet and there was even a glimpse of blue sky so we had a pleasant walk in interesting surroundings.

Lesley Atkins

Archaeology

Archaeology Group Dig at Quarr Abbey; September 2014

After 3 years of planning and disappointment we finally got our trowels into the medieval abbey site at Quarr. Southampton University were unable to continue with this project so it was very fortunate that Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit stepped in. For us it was good that Matt Garner was appointed project leader, as he was a professional and very pleasant person to work with. Without the university students' involvement, it became very much an IWNHAS activity with only three more joining us from the mainland.

The dig, planned to run for 3 weeks annually for 3 years, is part of the Heritage Lottery funded Two Abbeys Project. The overall aim is to provide more information about the medieval Cistercian building and so improve the experience for visitors. This year's work was designed as an evaluation exercise to enable planning for the next 2 seasons.

We were incredibly lucky with the weather, only one day of rain. And what an idyllic place to work – gazing down towards the Solent, absorbing the peace of the surroundings, watching the egrets gather in their favourite tree, tucking into the trays of sandwiches provided by the abbey tearoom. Archaeology is not often like this – a few weeks later I had an Email from Matt describing his latest work in the rain on a muddy building site in the middle of the noisy city. And we weren't just loafing in the sunshine; as always the work was very physical and, at times, tedious but the good company and occasional promising find kept us motivated.

So what about the archaeology? As so often happens, the existing plans based on previous geophysics did not quite match reality and most of our trenches were about 1 metre from the expected features. We had to work within the English Heritage requirements, which

allowed for 2 metre square test pits, with the option to extend by 1 metre if necessary. With between 12 and 18 on site each day we worked in small groups on several trenches at a time. This enabled beginners to learn from the more experienced members.

Whilst it's not appropriate to comment on findings until the report is complete, we found evidence in at least 2 trenches of building or collapsed masonry. We believe we found collapsed masonry from the southern wall of the church as this was an appropriate distance from our dig in the lane earlier in the year. Finds, particularly pottery, indicate activity on the site throughout the late medieval and early modern period.

We spent several days afterwards sorting and cataloguing the finds on to a database. We're now awaiting Matt's report and plans for next year. Hopefully, next year's report will have more specific information for you.

Helen Jackson

Botany

Saturday 12th July

Newtown Woods

After meeting at the car park at the visitor centre at Newtown, the group divided into two, and proceeded to visit two woodlands adjacent to each other, but with their entrances separated by some distance. Between the meeting being arranged and taking place, the Island's revised ancient woodland inventory had been published, and we took the opportunity to survey the woodlands more precisely to look for plants which are considered to be associated with ancient woodland.

The northern part of Walter's Copse is ancient, as it appears as woodland on the earliest maps. With the assistance of archaeologists Vicky and Frank Basford, we made our way into and around this section of the wood to record as many plants as possible. Some of these were in flower but we had to rely on identifying leaves and fruits for some early flowering plants such as bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*) and early purple orchids (*Orchis mascula*). When we had emerged from this section of Walter's Copse we took time to compare notes and tally the number of ancient woodland indicator (AWI) species; we found 22 in total. As we made our way back to the entrance, we recorded the plants in the secondary woodland which is more open and has wide rides and glades cut to encourage insect life.

We had also managed to negotiate access to the adjacent Walter's Great Rew and Pickpockets Field. The group walked through the wood listing all the plants; there were 21 AWI here. Comparing this list with the one from Walter's Copse showed that 11 of the ancient woodland indicators were common to both areas. Further comparison of the species lists from both woods would be an interesting exercise to undertake.

Saturday 2nd August

Ventnor Downs

This meeting gave us the opportunity to look at the heathland on the flint deposits which overlie the chalk of Ventnor Downs. One part of the group concentrated on recording the vascular plant flora and the other, led by Les and Sheila Street, investigated the lichens present.

The acid soils support a relatively restricted range of plants: bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) and ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) dominate. Non-fruiting bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) was present in some quantity and the group responded well to the challenge to find fruits. These were mostly ones and twos, until Natalie happened on a group of plants which had upwards of 30 berries over an area of a couple of square metres. The most unusual plant of the afternoon was umbellate hawkweed (*Hieracium umbellatum*) which was found as single plants in several locations. The only previous record of this plant on Ventnor Down is for 1858 by A.G. More.

The visit proved exciting for lichens and the following two new species were added to the Island lichen list: *Hypotrachyna afrorevoluta* seen growing on flints and *Micarea lignaria*, which, though not rare in UK, had not been recorded before and was found growing on peaty soil amongst the flints. It is recognizable by large globose black fruits. *Usnea flammea* one of the 'beard-lichens' was recorded on rocks and heather stems. It is frequently found in exposed coastal locations but rarely recorded from the Island. A dozen species of *Cladonia* ('golf-tee' or 'pixie-cup' shaped lichens) were recorded on the short-turf heathland. More species may be added at this site as the Wessex Lichen Group will be visiting in spring 2015.

Saturday 6th September St Helens Duver

We walked over the stabilised dune (grey dune) to the west of the road to investigate the grassland which has patches of scrub, and damper areas where there is saline incursion. The edge of the site borders Bembridge Harbour where there is some vegetated shingle and saltmarsh, habitats we do not look at very often.

In the grassland areas, autumn squill (now known as *Prospero autumnale*) was still flowering well, along with sheep sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and buck's horn plantain (*Plantago coronopus*). In areas where seawater enters during high tides or storms we found glasswort (*Salicornia* spp.), annual seablite (*Suaeda maritima*), saltmarsh rush (*Juncus gerardii*) and both lesser sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*) and greater sea spurrey (*Spergularia media*), all characteristic of lower saltmarshes.

We searched unsuccessfully along a raised bank at the edge of Bembridge mill pond looking for slender hare's ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*), a relatively uncommon umbellifer, but were pleased to find several patches of sea wormwood (*Seriphidium maritimum*) on the shingle.

Saturday 27th September Eaglehead and Bloodstone Copses

These are ancient woodland sites on the Island's central chalk ridge, owned and managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Our objective was to look for signs of gall causers, leaf miners and micro-fungi on the vegetation. Galls are characteristic swellings and thickenings of plant tissue caused by the plants reaction to the 'invader'.

Only eight galls were found, a surprisingly low number, though one, *Andricus quercuscalicis* (a knopper gall), was a new record for the site. Out of the 19 leaf miners found, 11 were new records and of the microfungi all but 3 of the 19 species were new to the site. The leaf spot fungus *Ramularia gei* on *Geum urbanum* (Wood avens) was only the second record for the Island.

Anne Marston

Ornithology

Saturday 12th July Fort Victoria

Ten members met on a lovely, sunny and warm morning at Fort Victoria for a short sea watch followed by a walk through the Country Park to Cliff End, part way down Monks Lane and walk back along the fields to our cars. July is a quiet month for spotting birds but the sea watch did produce half a dozen Gannet and at least that number of Common Tern and also a Sandwich Tern. The most common gull seen was Black-headed Gull with the occasional Herring Gull. The Great Black Backed Gull is nesting on a restaurant in Yarmouth and we saw, presumably, one of them sitting on a pole along the sea shore. Feral pigeons were on the remains of the little pier at Fort Victoria together with a Crow. It was very quiet through the woods, Wren were calling and there was the occasional Wood Pigeon along the track. The birds were very elusive, mainly making their presence known by their calls; Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Collared Dove, Greenfinch, Common Whitethroat. When

we arrived at Cliff End holiday bungalows we saw our first House Martin, but not as many as in previous years. Two Linnet were seen in the far distance. In the scrubby area along Monks Lane we saw an immature Robin and some Blackbird. Four Oystercatchers and a Rook were on some playing fields. Rather late in the morning a Kestrel and a Buzzard put in an appearance as did a pair of Bullfinches and a Chiffchaff was heard. In all 28 species were seen. Some butterflies were also noted on the way: Peacock, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Red Admiral and Comma.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 18th August Mottistone Down

Nine members met on an overcast, blustery and cool morning for a walk on Mottistone Down, passed Harboro and back along the lower footpath to the Longstone and Castle Hill and return to the car park up Strawberry Lane. The strong wind was blowing from a westerly direction and, disappointedly, there was a scarcity of birds after the falls of migrants over the previous few days. The only migrants we managed to see were the odd Chiffchaff and a number of Barn Swallows that were hawking for insects. Long-tailed Tits were heard in the car park and a Green Woodpecker was heard on a number of occasions and then seen. A party of three Buzzards were in the vicinity of Grammars Common and two Raven were seen flying. We only managed to see a total of twelve species during the morning. Never-the-less it was a very pleasant walk.

Jackie Hart

Saturday 20th September Whale Chine

Fourteen members met at Whale Chine on a mild, misty morning. We took some cars to Blyth Shute, Chale then walked along Chale Terrace to the cliff edge, overlooking Chale Bay and Blackgang. Starlings, House Sparrows and the first of mainly willow-chiffs were seen, together with Wood Pigeons, Magpies and Carrion Crows.

At the end of the Terrace we turned north-west and walked the cliff path past Walpen Chine, Ladder Chine and back to Whale Chine car park. A family of young Stonechats was seen, together with Meadow Pipits, Sky larks, Linnets, a pair of Common Pheasants and gulls – one Great Black-backed on the beach below, and many Herring Gulls and Black-headed Gulls on the fields. David Harding explained the WW11 use of the strange brick buildings at Walpen. It apparently housed the machinery for a moving target which was used for gunnery practice from Gun Hill.

Needless to say galls were found too, Natalie Bone finding the large gall on Creeping Thistle which was found, on sectioning it, to contain two pupae of a *Tephritid* fly; and Fleabane plants were shown to exhibit the galls of a Red Data Book fly.

We looked in Whale Chine and found Jackdaws using the holes in the wall, looked out to sea and were surprised to find eight Mallard swimming in line ahead, retrieved our cars from Chale and repaired to the Wight Mouse for refreshment. 26 species were seen altogether, some time being taken to look carefully at the willow-chiffs in order to separate the two species.

David Biggs

Sunday 19th October St Catherine's Point

Seven people met at the top of the road to St Catherine's lighthouse on a blustery but dry and sunny morning for a walk down to Knowles Farm, the lighthouse and east to Reeth Bay. Several flocks of Linnets and Goldfinches were flying around and we practised distinguishing the two species by looking for the latter's golden-yellow wing patches. As the wind was from the south-west, the area to the east of the lighthouse was more sheltered and we had good views of one female/immature and four male Stonechats perched up together on the bramble along a hedgerow. We also saw a few Pied Wagtails and Meadow Pipits, some late Swallows,

three Skylarks, two Kestrels, two Ravens and two Goldcrests. The species total for the morning was 26. Caroline Dudley

Sunday 2nd November Medina Estuary

The early morning television weather forecast showed a nasty-looking pulse of precipitation over the Isle of Wight for most of the morning. It came with a vengeance but did not deter ten rain-loving members for a walk beside the Medina estuary to Dodnor millpond, along the cyclepath towards Werrar farm and back along the cyclepath via Dodnor Bridge.

A good variety of birds were listed, 36 species in all, a mix of gulls, ducks, waders and passerines. Most notable were two Stonechats together at Werrar Farm, two Cormorants on Medina Valley Centre's pontoon, one Common Gull among a flock of Black-headed Gulls, ten Wigeon and one Goldcrest. Two flocks of Goldfinches were observed high up on trees at Medina Valley Centre and Stag Lane.

Always guaranteed to cause great delight were three sightings of a Kingfisher. One flew across the Medina estuary from Hurstake to Seaclose, we saw one perched on the pontoon at MVC and the third sighting was on the estuary near Dodnor millpond.

Other species seen were Blackbirds, Carrion Crows, Chaffinches, Coots, two Curlews, Little Egrets, one Great Black Backed Gull, Herring Gulls, House Sparrows, Jackdaws, one Jay, Magpies, Mallards, Moorhens, Mute Swans, Oystercatchers, three Pied Wagtails, Redshanks, Rooks, Starlings, Blue Tits, Great Tit, several Long Tailed Tit, Wood Pigeons and Little Grebes. Heard but not seen were Great Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush and Wren.

Members nominations for 'Bird of the Day' were Stonechat, Long Tailed Tit and Kingfisher; the Kingfisher won convincingly with eight votes out of ten. Sue Blackwell

Sunday 14th December Newtown

There was a good turnout of 16 members for a walk at Newtown National Nature Reserve. We were not quite so inconvenienced by the rain this time. One pulse coincided with a visit to the hide and the second pulse occurred when we were by the boat hut. The tide was low which meant we had good opportunities to study the waders and ducks. From the hide we saw Oystercatcher, Brent Geese, Redshank, Shelduck, Little Egret, Teal, Wigeon, Greenshank, Canada Geese, Cormorant and a pair of Stonechat. Whilst at the boat hut a Peregrine was spotted and then another one joined it. David Bone took a good picture of them both. 14 Red Breasted Mergansers were seen in the river; Sue could not make up her mind whether the Peregrine or Red Breasted Merganser was the bird of the morning and then along came six Turnstone so she changed her mind. On the Marsh we spotted Grey Plover and Dunlin. In the Causeway lake were many Pintail, a very smart bird, and some Black Tailed Godwit and amongst the Black-headed Gulls was a Mediterranean Gull. Two Mute Swan were there as usual. In the fields opposite there was a large flock Lapwing and on scanning we saw Curlew, Black Tailed Godwit and a large flock of Brent. During the morning we saw 43 species.

Jackie Hart

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

New Members

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Deaths

Society Officers

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Next Bulletin

Items for inclusion in the next Bulletin and Reports of Meetings for 1st January 2015 to 30th June 2015 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 **1st July 2016**