



Bulletin

February 2022

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President's Address

When I wrote last year about how the pandemic was at last easing off, I was looking forward to our Society getting back to the normal busy programme of meetings, field trips and other events. I could hardly have imagined that we would now, at the start of 2022, be facing the second anniversary of that initial lockdown with similar strictures on us. And yet so it is.

So, can we take any crumbs of comfort from these months of seemingly unmitigated bad news? An unanticipated effect of the pandemic across the country appears to have been a renewed interest in local countryside, wildlife and heritage. With the opportunity to travel abroad much diminished, and many of us now working from home and taking daily exercise in our local area, it is apparent that people are in many cases finding a new appreciation of the environment around them. No longer do we focus on the wildlife in rainforests and the arctic regions at the expense of the wonderful species and habitats right outside our doors. Maybe a bit of enforced localism has been to our benefit. Certainly, I myself have seen more wild mammals and birds in my garden, and more fish in the Solent, than I have for many years, and I know others have reported similar observations. No doubt this is at least partly a result of working from my living room, looking out of my window more, and walking to the beach at lunchtime. But we know now that less traffic on the roads during the UK's first lockdown led to large and rapid reductions in air pollution, so there is also the intriguing possibility that reduced travel and other disturbance during lockdown may have benefitted the natural environment.

Certainly, this Society has seen no shortage of support. Once more I am pleased to be able to offer my gratitude and admiration to our busy section leaders and other active members who have kept meetings and recording going as best they can in very trying circumstances. What is more, I am delighted to see that we have had a good number of new members joining us during the pandemic, and I've had the pleasure of meeting some of them. However, because of the limited number of face-to-face meetings we have had, I know some new members might not have had as much interaction with other members as normal. So, if that's you, and you haven't found a way to join in with Society activities yet, please do get in touch with us at Society HQ and we will do our best to introduce you to sections of the Society that might interest you.

Matthew Chatfield, President

Please help with distribution

When the latest Society envelope drops through your letterbox, it is likely to have been delivered by hand from one of our volunteers. We depend on them to help keep our postage costs low.

We are always looking for new people to help deliveries. If you feel you could help in your local area, please get in touch. Deliveries are just twice a year, in February and August.

We are particularly looking for helpers in Newport, Brighstone, Sandown and Alverstone areas. If you can help, please contact our headquarters (iwnhas@btconnect.com).

Thankyou.

Thankyou Jackie

We have been very fortunate to have the services of Jackie Hart as Treasurer for the Society for over 27 years. Throughout this time, Jackie has been very methodical, diligent and fair in carrying out her duties, in addition to helping the Society in lots of other ways.

We are very grateful for everything that Jackie has done. Her retirement as Treasurer is certainly overdue but we have been concerned as to whether we would be able to find a replacement. Societies generally often struggle these days to find treasurers so we are most grateful that Nigel Locke has agreed to take over the post and this has been ratified at our AGM. Jackie has been working with Nigel to ensure a smooth handover. We offer our best wishes to Nigel.

Pink Grasshoppers

Have you spotted a pink Meadow Grasshopper this year? Mike Cotterill spotted one amongst flowering Bell Heather on Headon Warren on 14th July (top). Meanwhile, Andy Butler found one in his garden at Ventnor on 20th August and had never seen one before (bottom). Their photographs are reproduced below.

This is a rare sight. Apparently, Meadow Grasshoppers can carry a recessive gene which give nymphs a vivid pink hue due to an overproduction of pigment. This is known as erythrism. Bright pink grasshoppers often do not survive as they are much more vulnerable to predation. If they do survive, once they reach their final moult to an adult they resume their normal pigmentation.

Colin Pope



What's in a name? *Iris foetidissima* / Stinking Iris



Photo: Dave Trevan

In Greek mythology, Iris was a messenger of the gods. When carrying a message across the heavens, her journey was seen by earthbound mortals as a rainbow. However, the delicate blue-veined coloration of *Iris foetidissima* inflorescence is more like the iris of an eye rather than the spectral colours of a meteorological rainbow.

Foetidissima means most stinking from a Latin verb *foetere* meaning to stink. If crushed, the leaves emit an odour similar to that of roast beef or, as has sometimes been suggested on botanical walks, oxo cubes or a packet of beef-flavoured crisps, hence the alternative English name of Roast Beef Plant.

Archaic English common names of Gladwyn or Gladdon are likely to be derived from the Old English word for sword, which was glaedene, with reference to the plant's long, narrow sword-shaped leaves.

Iris flowers are sometimes referred to as Fleur-de-lys which translates from French as flower-of-the-lily. Variations on fleur-de-lys are fleur-de-luce and fleur-de-loys, loys being another name for Louis. French kings adopted the Fleur-de-lys as their heraldic emblem. The tri-partite perianth segments represented Perfection, Light and Life.

Sue Blackwell

Birds at Sea

It was my privilege to have served in the Royal Navy / Fleet Air Arm for some 23 years. Being in the Fleet Air Arm our time at sea was limited, but I was lucky in that the ships that I was embarked in provided me time to enjoy my ornithological hobby, in particular HMS Albion and HMS Endurance.

However, my first close experience with birds was when serving in HMS Goldcrest at RNAS Brawdy in Pembrokeshire during the 1960's, a truly wonderful location. Manx Shearwaters come to the outlying islands of Skokholm and Skomer to breed and very often juveniles are blown ashore by the September gales. On two occasions I was involved in the rescue of Manx Shearwaters. The first was after a particularly violent night of gales. I was informed of these birds being washed aground onto Newgate beach and struggling in the surf just down the road from Brawdy. I was able to assist an RSPCA man in grabbing the young Shearwaters out of the surf and putting them in a box. It was quite hairy but we rescued something like twenty of them and we also rescued about six young Gannets that had been blown in from Grassholm where they breed. The RSPA man was able to safely release all the young birds at dusk.

The second involvement with a Manx Shearwater, again a juvenile, blown ashore in an autumn gale occurred when one shuffled into the Chief Petty Officer's mess at Brawdy. It was passed onto me and as it was dark I thought it safe to release that night, the bird appearing to be perfectly fit. I got into my Land Rover putting the Shearwater on the seat beside me and off we went heading to where I knew of some cliffs to give it a good launch. Anyway, as we progressed I felt the bird climbing on to my thigh, then it made its way onto my shoulder then onto my head where it stayed until we reached the cliff for release. This was a natural thing for them to do as they require height before launching themselves to fly. I wonder what would have happened if police had stopped me! Anyway, without any further ado I successfully launched the bird into the air and away it flew. I hoped that an uneventful journey out to the Atlantic followed.

In August 1970 I was drafted to the commando carrier HMS Albion, my job being to run the torpedo body room. On joining the ship in Portsmouth, I was pleased to find the workshop was large and I would also have a good-sized office. Little did I know how useful the office was to become for birds. The ship set out early in 1971 for a long deployment steaming as far as Kobe in Japan with many stops in between. With travelling so many miles it was inevitable that many species of birds would be seen, but I didn't expect what was to happen the day we left Durban to travel across the Indian Ocean to Bombay as it was called then. Early in the evening, a junior came up to me carrying a bird that was obviously a Tern but I didn't know which species. The captain had heard and seen the bird fly into an aerial and injure itself and instructed the lad to bring it to me. I took it down to my office and because it was too weak to sit or stand, I made a nest out of rag for the bird to rest on. I was able to give it some water and decided to let it rest until the following day. Meanwhile using Witherby's Handbook of the Birds of the British Isles I was able to confirm its identity as a Sooty Tern. The next morning after giving him more water (although the sex was unknown it's



easier to call it him) on examination he showed a deep gash across the neck. The bird was very weak, so I decided not to attempt feeding that day so he could settle. On contacting the captain's steward, he told me that the captain had some frozen whitebait in his pantry and I could try to feed Sooty (an obvious name for him). On the third day I tried force feeding him on whitebait which he took and soon helped himself when it was offered. I was so pleased when on the third day he had enough strength to get out of his nest and patter around the desk. He had many visitors, as news on a ship

travels fast. As we steamed across the Indian Ocean so Sooty became stronger and on the day we arrived at Bombay he had got down from the desk and was pattering around the workshop. He allowed me to pick him up so I took him out to the weather deck and when I raised him up, he had a quick look around and then flew off strongly out to sea. It was sad to see Sooty go but I was so pleased for him. The surprising fact about Sooty Terns is that although pelagic after breeding they dare not land on the sea for any length of time as their feathers become waterlogged as their oil gland must be almost useless so they spend the entire time flying, probably sleeping on the wing. How strange nature is.

During our Far East deployment, very often birds would land on deck some of which ended up in my office for a rest and recovery before release mainly on the same day. It was quite difficult to name them but usually I could put them into their genus. Some examples include the following:

An Eastern Great Reed Warbler, a powerful warbler that I kept for a day and released successfully.

A Chestnut Bittern, more like a large Corncrake with extremely long toes, again just a day's rest and it was able to be released.

A Sooty Tern, a juvenile this time, that I had to take to Cape Town university to be identified before release.

A Little Bittern which was perched on a Royal Marine Land Rover's steering wheel that was parked on deck as if it were the driver. The bird made its own way off the ship.



We visited the huge American Naval Base, Subic Bay, at Olongapo in the Philippines in mid-September. Whilst it seemed fairly civilised at the Naval Base, Olongapo was something of a shock. My lad, EM Bas Chamberlain, went ashore and came upon a place that was selling little few day-old ducklings for about 10 cents. The idea was that you bought the little ducklings to throw to waiting Alligators in a lake. Well Bas wasn't having this so he bought three ducklings and promptly put them under his uniform cap and thought he would bring them back for me. Nobody suspected a thing as Bas marched up the gangway on his way down to the torpedo body room, they must have known to keep quiet. So, for the few days we were in Olongapo we had these little ducklings following us cheeping away as we carried on with our work. They were lovely but sadly we had to take them ashore just before we left. At least the new owners promised not to feed them to the Alligators.

We returned to the UK and home in late January 1972. After leave and various ship maintenance, the ship was off again taking part in various exercises but my story of birds at sea continues in October when we set sail for Canada. The ship sailed from Portsmouth down to the Bristol Channel to embark Royal Marines. It was while we were there during autumn migration that several birds landed on board including three Chaffinches. Whilst all the other birds left, the Chaffinches remained. I thought, oh yes, they'll be brought to me soon. Sure enough, after a couple days two were brought to me one male one female and they made

themselves comfortable in my office.

Again, water was important and I fed them on scraps and hard-boiled egg. Now we had a long voyage across the Atlantic ahead of us as well as visits to Halifax in Nova Scotia, Montreal and Quebec up the St Lawrence. When we arrived off the Canadian coast, I had another bird brought to me this time a Myrtle Warbler, renamed in recent years as the Yellow-rumped Warbler. My big question was



how would they get on. When the Myrtle Warbler fed on the desk, the Chaffinches would go up to their roost site; just now and again they would mix. It was strange how the Chaffinches changed their time clocks as the ship did in that they were ready to roost and rise when I appeared each day, although I must say they didn't have a lot of choice. The Myrtle Warbler was released in Halifax. After some 14 days or so we left Canada and headed home for Portsmouth all of the time looking after the Chaffinches. When we arrived home, I contacted James Gloyne to ask him if he could ring the Chaffinches which he agreed to do. So, I took them to Barry Angel at Locks Farm, Porchfield, where James ringed them and we released them at the farm never to be seen again. I expect that they must have been the farthest travelling Chaffinches ever!

My birds at sea story whilst embarked on HMS Endurance must be told another day.

John Willmott

Mystery on mouldy plums

One of our newer members, Elizabeth Fox sent in a picture of some strange 'flowers' growing out a mouldy plum fruit picked from her neighbour's garden.



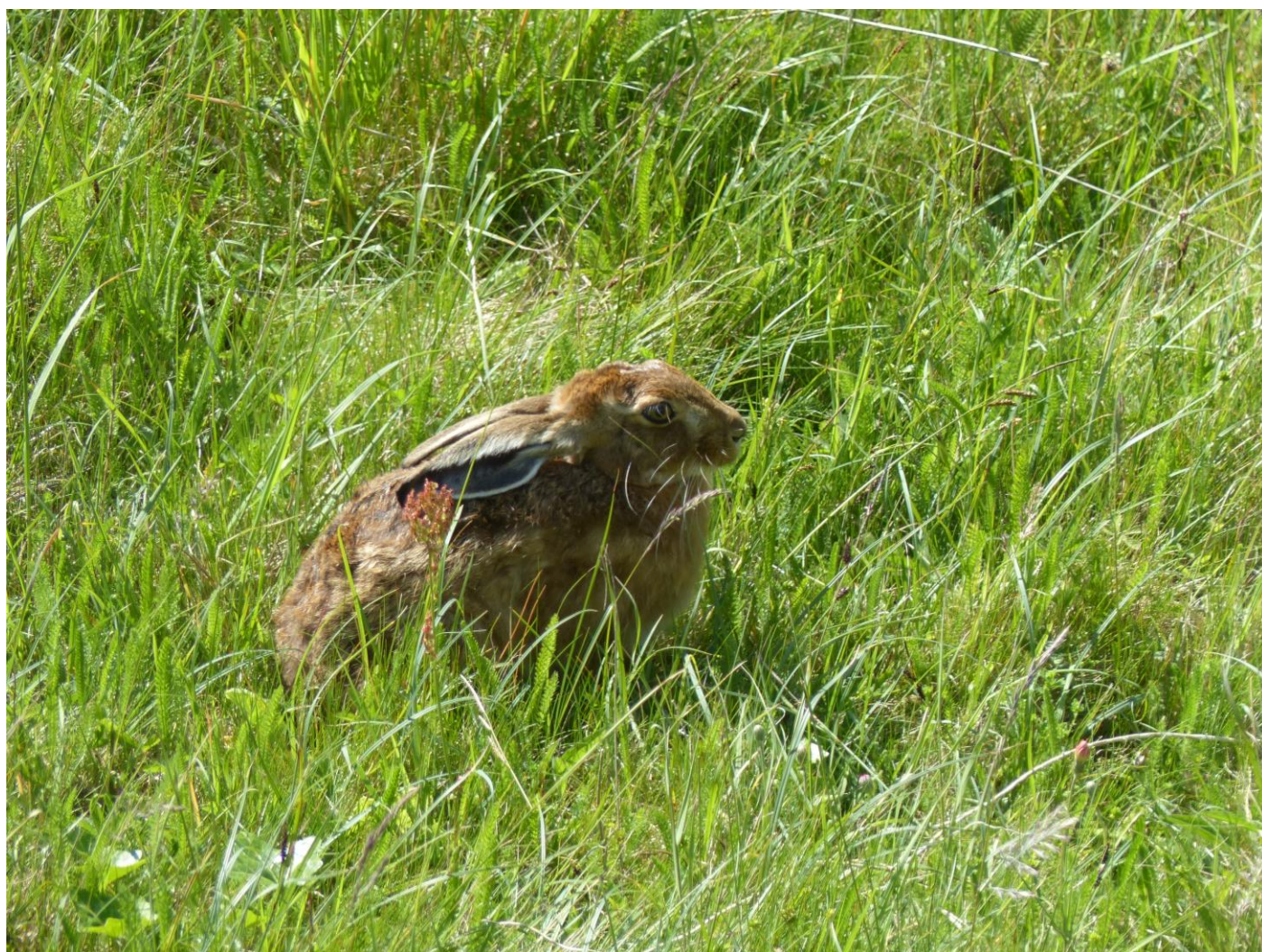
Adam Wright was able to confirm that these are the remains of an egg cluster laid by a lacewing. Lacewings are graceful, fluttering, delicate-looking insects with two pairs of wings with cross veins giving a lace-like appearance.

They lay their eggs at night in small groups. Each egg is hung on a slender stalk about 1cm long. They are usually laid on the underside of leaves close to where aphids are present in large numbers. The larvae hatch and feed on aphids. They are voracious predators.

Contributions please

The Bulletin is only as good as the contributions we receive. Please consider sending in something – an interesting observation, a noteworthy sighting, a story about finding something. Everything welcome.

The deadline for submissions is 2nd July 2022 but you can send things in at any time to iwnhas@btconnect.com or by post to our headquarters, Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeology Society, Unit 16, Prospect Business Centre, Prospect Road, Cowes PO31 7AD



A hare on a garden lawn in Freshwater Bay, photographed by Mike Cotterill.

A survivor at Osborne from before Victoria and Albert

On 31st August, whilst carrying out a botanical survey, I found a bracket fungus which I did not recognise growing on a tree at Osborne. I tried to take a sample to examine at home but it was soft and rubbery in texture and I did not have a knife with me at the time, so I had to content myself with photographs.

The bracket had a pale, yellowish-brown upper surface and whitish pore surface bruising brownish. After examining the pictures which I had taken, I suspected that it could be Oak Polypore, a rare protected species. I sent the pictures to Eric Janke, recorder for the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group and he considered it likely and suggested I show them to Alan Lucas who is an expert in bracket and resupinate fungi. Alan replied that it did look like very like Oak Polypore. Further subsequent examination of the material confirmed that this was indeed Oak Polypore.



Oak Polypore (*Buglossus* / *Piptoporus quercina*) does not figure in many popular guides to fungi. That is because it is very rare in the UK, so rare in fact that it is one of only four species of fungi protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. It fruits exclusively on oak (*Quercus* spp.), principally older and veteran trees in old growth wood pasture and parkland in the midlands and southern England. It mostly appears on wounds in living trees where the heartwood is exposed. Because it feeds on dead heartwood in the core of the tree, it does not lead to the death of the host. It is known to be a sporadic fruiter, with sometimes long gaps between fruiting periods and it fruits in the summer rather than during the autumn. Beyond information on fruit body occurrence, little is known of the ecology of this species.

It is interesting that Oak Polypore is considered to be an indicator of historic wood pasture. The greatest concentration of records is from Windsor Park and Richmond Park but it is also now recorded from Sherwood Forest, and a scatter of historic parks centred on the south-east and East Anglia. In the New Forest, where there is a large concentration of veteran oaks, it has only been recorded (by Alan Lucas) from a handful of trees.

Surprisingly, the Oak Polypore at Osborne was not growing on an English Oak but on a Lucombe Oak, a hybrid between Turkey Oak and Cork Oak. The tree was one of a double avenue of trees planted in the 1850s alongside The Avenue, leading from the Queen's Gate, the Royal entrance to Osborne off

Newbarn Road. The inside avenue comprises Holm Oaks (and Monkey Puzzles, no longer surviving) and the outer avenue, alternate Lucombe oaks and Cedars of Lebanon.

The Osborne Park landscape laid out by Prince Albert does not fall into the category of historic parkland with veteran trees. However, Osborne was in origin a medieval estate. In 1755, Robert Pope Blachford, inherited a fortune and carried out numerous improvements to the estate, practicing the fashionable art of landscape gardening. A new house was begun in 1779, pleasure grounds laid out west of the House, and a park created on the east side, grazed by cattle, sheep and horses. Some sources suggest that this was a deer park, but this cannot be confirmed. The Park was illustrated in Sir Richard Worsley's *History of the Isle of Wight* (1781). The Park was centred on the valley which runs north-eastwards from the house to the sea. Today, a scatter of old and veteran oaks survives at Osborne. A veteran tree is considered to be one that is at least 250 years old. There used to be a particularly good group in the valley but the oldest of these have now been lost.



Certain lichens can be good indicators of historic wood pasture and in 1996, Neil Sanderson carried out a study of the lichens growing on veteran trees at Osborne. However, he found that the parkland oaks were rather poor in lichens which he put down to sulphur dioxide pollution from the urban conurbations across the Solent to the north-east. The best trees were the small group of veterans in the valley near the sea which had a relic community of lichens characteristic of dry craggy bark on ancient oaks. The largest of these trees (now lost) had a girth of 4.70m.

The discovery of Oak Polypore at Osborne provides a link to the pre-Victorian parkland landscape. However, the bracket fungus is growing on a Lucombe Oak planted as part of Albert's Avenue to provide a dramatic royal entrance to Osborne. Although to date, Oak Polypore has only ever been recorded on our two native oaks in this country it is interesting that it is has been recorded from Turkey Oak (one of the parents of Lucombe Oak) on the Continent. It is considered likely that Oak Polypore has swapped host species at Osborne. It may well be that it still survives on some of the old Osborne oaks although a search carried out in September failed to find it. Nevertheless, it remains an elusive species.

Colin Pope

2021 has been another challenging year, both nationally and locally, for the core BTO surveys due to Covid restrictions, although we achieved an overall improved level of coverage in comparison to 2020.

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

There was a total of 19 1-km squares covered in the Isle of Wight in 2021 so thankfully we are slowly getting back to pre-Covid reporting levels. The squares represent a wide range of habitats which gives a more balanced view of the breeding species overall presence in the county. A total of 80 species were recorded from the two visits made to each site with the ten most recorded species as follows:

Position	Species	% of 1-km squares recorded
=1	Woodpigeon	100
=1	Jackdaw	100
=1	Blackbird	100
=4	Wren	95
=4	Goldfinch	95
=6	Carrion Crow	89
=6	Chiffchaff	89
=6	Robin	89
=9	Blue Tit	84
=9	Great Tit	84

While comparison to last year's data is of little value, due to lockdown restricting the survey to a single visit at best, it was noticeable that Blue Tit and Dunnock were not seen in as many squares as normal compared to previous years while Chiffchaff appeared to be more numerous.

Many thanks to the BBS surveyors for their contributions and if anyone is interested in taking part in the BBS for 2022, please contact me.

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

Sixteen sites received coverage for the July 2020 to June 2021 count year. Local analysis of the counts, including trends, would be difficult to interpret as most sites had no coverage for January 2021, one of the priority count months, due to Covid lockdown. Other sites also received less coverage than normal, hopefully coverage will be better in the 2021-22 count year. Special thanks to all the counters for undertaking the counts and for once again following the changing Covid guidelines as requested.

The WeBS office carried out a review of the WeBS Site Priority Status in relation to every site covered in the survey and published their review in September. The four statuses being used are: Very High Priority, Medium High Priority, High Priority and Lower Priority. Sites with a Very High or Medium High Priority are classed as key sites.

Four aspects were used to score each site individually and then combined into a total score that determined the priority. These were:

1. Sites that hold nationally and internationally important numbers of waterbirds, according to the most recent five year mean of peak counts.
2. Sites that strongly influence one or more national species indices and trends.
3. Sites in two environmental strata that are currently under-represented in WeBS when estimating numbers of widespread waterbird species.

4. Sites that are nationally protected for waterbirds.

As a result of this review, there are an additional six key sites on the Island in addition to Yar Estuary (Western Yar), Newtown Estuary and Brading Harbour (Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve and Bembridge Harbour). The additional sites are: Thorness Bay, Medina Estuary, King's Quay, Wootton Creek, Ryde Pier to Puckpool Point (Ryde East Sands) and Foreland.

The full review of the Isle of Wight WeBS sites is as follows:

Yar Estuary (Western Yar)

Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from Medium High Priority status due to the site having a high total trend influence and the site being a SPA (Special Protection Area). Remains a key site for WeBS.

Newtown Estuary

Status: Very High Priority

Status remains unchanged as the site has a high total trend influence. It also hosts important numbers of four species (Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Pintail, Spoonbill and Mediterranean Gull) Newtown is also a SPA. Remains a key site for WeBS.

Thorness Bay

Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from High Priority as the site hosts important numbers of one species (Mediterranean Gull). This site is needed for the nearby SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

Carisbrooke Pond

Status: High Priority

Upgraded from Lower Priority as the site has a high total trend influence.

Medina Estuary

Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from High Priority as the site has a high total trend influence. Site is a SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

King's Quay

Status: Medium High Priority

Upgraded from Lower Priority as the site is needed for the nearby SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

Wootton Creek

Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from Lower Priority as the site has a high total trend influence. Site is a SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

Ryde Pier to Puckpool Point (Ryde East Sands) Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from High Priority as the site hosts important numbers of two species (Sanderling and Mediterranean Gull). Site is SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

Hersey Nature Reserve

Status: High Priority

Upgraded from Lower Priority as the site is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Brading Harbour (Brading Marshes/Bembridge Harbour) Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from Medium High Priority as the site has a high total trend influence. The site also hosts important numbers of one species: (Mediterranean Gull). Site is SPA. Remains a key site for WeBS.

Foreland

Status: Very High Priority

Upgraded from High Priority as the site has a high total trend influence. The site also hosts important numbers of one species: (Mediterranean Gull). Site is SPA. Upgraded to a key site for WeBS.

Towngate Pond, Bathingbourne Reservoir, Ryde Canoe Lake, Sandown Meadows Nature Reserve and Sandown Canoe Lake remain unchanged as Lower Priority sites.

Thanks again to all the counters at these sites for their diligent work. It is your efforts which has enabled the island to have a robust WeBS database and nine key sites for the national survey.

Finally, the fifth review of the **Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man** was released in December. Since the last review in 2015, eleven species have been added to the Red list while only five have been downgraded from Red to Amber. In total, 70 species are now on the Red list showing a continuing decline in the status of our bird populations. Golden Oriole has also been lost as a breeding species during this period.

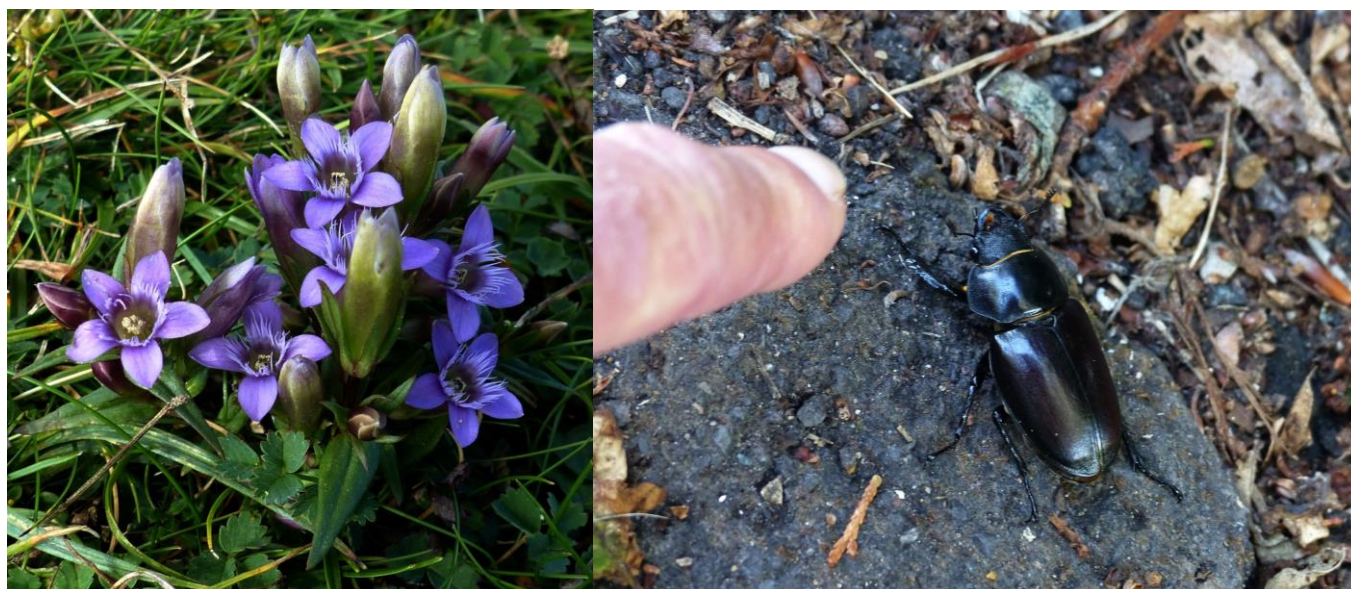
Newly Red-listed species include Swift, House Martin, Greenfinch and the globally-threatened Leach's Storm Petrel.

You can access the Red, Amber and Green lists along with the full report at:

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birds-conservation-concern/status-our-bird-populations-fifth-birds>

Jim Baldwin (BTO Regional Representative)

Tel. 07528 586683, email: wightbto@hotmail.com



Left: A fine specimen of Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*) on 3rd September on Tennyson Down.

Right: A female Stag Beetle in Mornington Woods, Cowes on 26th June. Photos: Mike Cotterill

An antipodean survivor

Over the summer, I met up with George Greiff, who was down from Uni, for a coffee at Ventnor Botanic Garden. George mentioned that bryologists had recently been finding some interesting mosses and liverworts growing on the trunks of Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) in the southwest of England and in southern Ireland and he would like to take a look at the tree fern gulley in the Australian Garden. The tree fern grove was planted in 2005 from trunks imported from Tasmania and others from Logan Botanic Garden in Scotland. Some of the trunks are known to support interesting fern and fern relative epiphytes which must have survived importation from Tasmania.

We went down to the tree fern gulley and very soon found a small patch of moss which caught George's attention. He collected a small quantity for checking and was able to confirm that it was

Leptotheca gaudichaudii, a native of Australia (including Tasmania) and New Zealand. He said that the species has been found by members of the British Bryological Society over the last twenty years on tree ferns in Ireland and the South West of England, but there are not many records and none as far east as the Isle of Wight.



Above left: Tree Fern Gulley at Ventnor Botanic Garden. Right: the Australasian moss, *Leptotheca gaudichaudii* photographed by George Greiff

This moss joins several Tasmanian ferns as an unusual and distinctive community of lower plant epiphytes surviving on the trunks of Tree Ferns in Ventnor Botanic Garden. They all require a humid environment and can only survive our Isle of Wight climate because of the quantities of tree fern trunks in the sheltered gully creating a suitable micro-climate. However, on a return visit in December we could find no sign of the moss so possibly it has now been lost.

Colin Pope

Ramblings of an old fossil

(to be fully appreciated this should be read out loud slowly in an Isle of Wight accent!)

Covid! What a nightmare it's been, and the misery is not over yet, cause here comes another of my fossil collecting yarns!

On 17th January in 1988 it was a real foggy day. I quite like them foggy days, it's all quiet and you can wander along in silence. I got a lift to Fishbourne and I walked along the shore towards Quarr. There is an outcrop of rocks on the clay bed, close to where I found the turtle. Just before I got to the rocks I saw something stuck up out of the clay, pale brown and I thought it was a bit of tree branch. I leaned down and tapped it with my knife; it was bone, about an inch thick and stuck out of the clay about three inches. I carefully removed the leg bone and then I see a line of croc scutes, and thus began a big dig. About four

foot long, this line of scutes and bone, I began digging and kept finding more stuff and filled my tray, covered the rest with newspaper and mud and walked back to phone for a lift and phoned Steve Hutt. He could join me the next day he said, but later had to cancel.

So, on the Monday I went to work in the morning and left at midday. Went home for a cup of tea and to get my digging stuff, two trays, bag etc. then caught the bus to Fishbourne. I uncovered the site and bailed out the water, lay newspaper down to kneel on and began. I filled both trays and bags with mud and bones. The main bulk – parts of thick heavy skull bones, jaws and teeth I stacked in one of those Wray's bread trays - lovely things they were four inches deep, about three feet long and two feet wide. I was like a man with gold fever, I couldn't stop digging. Eventually, it got dark and I had to stop. Two trays full, plus bags and digging gear. I stashed the smaller tray and bags and the tools up in the woods, got my coat on and then attempted to shift the big tray. Yeah Gods it was lumpy – I got it over to some rocks, crouched down, got a shoulder under it and lifted. It must have weighed about a hundredweight. I began walking back – our combined weight sank my feet in ankle deep mud every step. It was bloody hard work. I did what my father used to tell me, "Go as far as you can possibly go and then keep going!" Finally, I put it down on a large rock; it was so heavy that once I put it down, I felt like I could float up into the sky.

I rested for about ten minutes and then go again as far as I could, then rest again before negotiating the shingle bank. I got as far as where the sea wall is now, but back then it was just a raised bank with a bit of scrubby grass and shingle on. Here I put it down and had another rest, and decided to try dragging it along. Two things wrong with this plan! First it was murder on the back and I very soon gave up. Second was unbeknown to me the good folk of Fishbourne Lane, use this area as a dog's toilet and I had dragged the tray through heaps of dog mess! I decided I'd have to carry it again – I try holding it in front, carrying it like the ice cream girls at the cinema, but this does my back in so it's the shoulders again! I stalk up and down, doing deep breaths, like Precious McKenzie the weight lifter – I grab it – I do the lift and jerk and somehow got it up on my shoulder and begin to walk. Then I got a whiff of something nasty – Christ I thought, what have I trodden in? If only! I felt something nasty and clammy sliding down my neck. I could have chucked it down but it was too precious, so I carefully put down the tray and I went off on an awful heaving routine except I'd had nothing to eat and so nothing to bring up. YUK – I go. Sacrificing my handkerchief to wipe my neck and ear and then bin it. I wiped the tray and stagger on up to the oak tree.

Here I decide to ask if I can use a phone – big mistake – I put the tray inside the garden gate and stagger up the path of the only house with a light on and knock at the door. I can now appreciate how it must have seemed to the occupier. It was cold night in January, I was hot, sweating, steam was rising off me, and I was covered head to foot in mud and stinking of dog mess. The woman screamed and slammed the door in my face. I called out, I don't have to come in – just dial this number and ask someone to pick me up. Go away she screamed, I am calling the police. OK, I said, I'll go and use the phone box up the road, but is it all right if I leave my crocodile in your garden? She screamed again. It seems funny now, but I was worried, in case some nutter would be wandering about down there, in the dark on a cold January night and see a box of mud and say "I'm having that!"- as if!

I had to take the following afternoon off. Steve came to help – he was a real professional digger, better organised than me. We dug two crates of stuff out. We returned once more, on the Saturday – it was a bloody awful day – it rained all the time, but we managed to get another tray of bones – lots of vertebrae. It was really muddy, we were sliding about all over the place, trying to dig! It looked great though, its nose had been pointing towards the creek at Fishbourne – and now it's all cleaned up – you can see it's almost impossible to get it back together, thousands of pieces. Eric Milsom had a go; he got the lower jaw back together before he left for Germany.

Andy Yule

iwatch wildlife

It's been a while since we updated you on what's been happening with iWatch Wildlife – The Society's species recording and outreach project. The pandemic restricted our activities somewhat where we switched to an exclusively virtual presence via Social Media. During this time we worked on a range of mini-projects to try and keep up momentum with species recording, however thankfully by June of 2021 we were once again able to participate in outdoor public events which was brilliant news.

We were delighted to take part in the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of Golden Hill County Park led by Gift to Nature – our first public outing in 18 months! Here we displayed a selection of natural history specimens relevant to the site and ran a 'Bioblitz Lite' activity where Recorders and members of the public surveyed for species in the Park. There was a grand total of 153 species recorded including 4 species of orchid plus Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*) - a new site record.

With one event under our belts we began to look forward to the Wolverton Garden Show at the beginning of September. The Society stand was once again located in the Conservation Tent (our thanks to IW AONB for hosting). The ever-popular Wolverton show enables us to showcase many aspects of the Society over the course of the two days, not just iWatch Wildlife. Activities including mini-bug box making and self-service hand sorted seeds for pollinators were available plus our usual natural history specimen displays. This year we were pleased to be joined by the Archaeology group who brought to life a selection of local artefacts with their expert knowledge (left below).

For our third and final event of 2021 we participated in the spectacular 'Hullabaloo Lite' event in October - a heady mix of science, arts, performance, music and carnival plus much more! It was such a busy weekend, and fantastic to meet and chat with so many families and local people (right below). Here we teamed-up with Save Our Hedgehogs Isle of Wight – capturing Hedgehog records as they came in from the public. Special thanks to Rosie Johnson of Young Nature Watch IW and youngest IWNHAS Member for her excellent support at the event leading the 'make a mini clay hedgehog' activity.



On the species recording front during 2021 we continued with our regular 'Species of the Month' campaign featuring the following: Frogs & Toads, Brown Hare, Adder, Glanville Fritillary, Stag Beetle, Glow Worm, Garden Tiger Moth, European Hornet, Kingfisher, Oystercatcher and Mistletoe. We are currently programming for 2022.

Alongside this we ran 'Species of the Year' with Stoats & Weasels being highlighted throughout 2021, plus the ongoing collection of local Hedgehog records as part of the 'Hedgehog Island' project - with records totalling 35.

Though our Species of the Month's don't always generate lots of records in their own right, we hope they help raise awareness and flag up interesting local species. However, one species – the Stag Beetles - a firm fixture in our nature calendar here at iWatch, always produce a good number of records - 14 records were collected in 2021 with increasing numbers reported in East Cowes, which in previous years has only seen the odd report.

In general, there was a downward trend in the number of records collected during 2021 for example 2020 saw 35 x Stag Beetles and a whopping 70 x Hedgehogs. In both cases, these are only records that iWatch has collected, other observations may have been submitted to other recording schemes. Any records submitted to or collected by iWatch are checked, shared with local and national recording schemes and added to the local species database which is held and maintained by the Society – all helping to boost knowledge and understanding of our local wildlife and where we fit with the regional and national picture.

Heartfelt thanks to everybody that has taken time to record, help and support others and share their observations, knowledge and experience during 2021 and of course to our brilliant volunteers without whom the project would not be possible – here's to 2022 being full of wonderful wildlife encounters on our special Island!

iWatch Wildlife would also like to thank the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership, IW Local Records Centre and IW AONB for funding to enable the continuation of the project.

Tina Whitmore, iWatch co-ordinator

Would you like to get involved?

iWatch Wildlife is the Society's species recording and community engagement project. The project is part funded by the IW AONB and IW Local Records Centre and has now been running for 4 years. It is all about encouraging people to look at and enjoy the wildlife of the Isle of Wight, supporting people to share observations with us whilst raising awareness of our incredible local natural history and unique biodiversity here on the Island. This is achieved through a presence on Social Media and at local, public events.

We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved with iWatch. We have a small, friendly team of volunteers who help steer and support the project and the activities it aims to deliver. Without valuable volunteer support we wouldn't be able to deliver these activities and reach audiences in the same way. Any help with organising species data and records, Social Media or getting involved with engagement at public events would be warmly welcomed – please do visit the iWatch pages on the IWNHAS Website or get in touch with Tina on iwatchwildlife@gmail.com to find out more.





Isle of Wight Swifts really need our help



Photo © Robin Pascal 2017

We've all heard how Swifts are in trouble with less being recorded visiting the UK year on year, however as of December 2021 they were officially added to the red list in the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern report, and classified as Endangered in the second IUCN Red List assessment for Great Britain. This translates as a loss of 65% of our Swifts in just 25 years and is set to continue at a rate of 5% per annum – a catastrophic decline indeed. Loss of nest sites is by far the major contributor though falls in the populations of insects Swifts eat may also play a part. It's pretty shocking to think that we could entirely lose these fantastic aerial acrobats and heralds of the great British summer in the not too distant future.

Swifts are very loyal to their breeding sites and usually return to the same nest site year after year. Unfortunately, this is when problems may arise as they require gaps and holes in buildings through which they access their nest. This makes them vulnerable to house renovations such as new fascias and soffits, replacement of wood with plastic covers or cavity wall insulation which blocks up the access holes they need. If a Swift nest site has been covered up or destroyed then the returning Swifts probably won't breed at all that year.

Preserving existing nest sites and providing new nest sites is crucial if we are to prevent Swifts becoming extinct in the UK. Thousands of new nest sites are needed each year to simply to halt the decline and we have an opportunity to help the Isle of Wight's population of breeding swifts.

Swift bricks are desperately needed in new housing developments, but we as individuals can make a difference by installing swift boxes on existing properties thanks to the work of the Hampshire Swift Group. Hampshire Swifts can build new boxes and also install them for no more than £40.00 per box. This is a fantastic deal as installation height needs to ideally be a minimum of 5 metres above ground level and is therefore probably best left to the professionals!

iWatch Wildlife in collaboration with Wight Swifts are co-ordinating the registration effort here on the Island, so if you are interested in having a box/es installed on your property then please do get in touch asap with your name, address and contact email preferably. Hampshire Swifts can then check your property online for suitability. It is anticipated that boxes would be installed sometime during the Spring of 2022.

Find out more about the swift boxes and the work of Hampshire Swifts here:

www.hampshireswifts.co.uk/nesting Follow Wight Swifts on Facebook @Wight Swifts.

Swifts are amazing and beautiful birds. The sound and sight of them racing and screaming over our rooftops is an exhilarating and essential part of summer on the Island. Let's make sure that continues.

Tina Whitmore, iWatch Co-ordinator

Island Recorders

The Society collects species records which are made available to researchers and to the Isle of Wight Local Records Centre. Many of these are processed through specialist recorders. We are always pleased to receive records and encourage you to send them in.

Here are our specialist recorders who would be pleased to receive your records:

Helen Butler



Red Squirrels

Helen runs Wight Squirrel Project which focuses on monitoring, research, caring for squirrels. She is also chair for the IW Red Squirrel Trust.

PO Box 33, Ryde, IW, PO33 1BN
Tel: 611003
e: wightsquirrels@hotmail.com

Colin Pope



Bats, Flowering plants and Ferns

Colin is the BSBI Isle of Wight recorder for vascular plants and he also covers lichens and fungi.

Tel: 611591
e: colinpope@gmail.com

Robin Attrill



Birds

Robin has been an Isle of Wight birder since 1972 as has returned to the recorder role after a short break!

17 Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6BA
Tel: 07487 577 103
e: robinattrill@gmail.com

Richard Grogan



Mammals (except Marine mammals), Reptiles & Amphibians

Richard has spent over 30 years working to increase our knowledge about the mammals on the Island

Tel: 721252
e: rgrogan@hotmail.co.uk

Andy Butler



Butterflies

Andy has a lifelong passion for wildlife and butterflies are a particular interest of his. He carries out surveys monitoring the populations of Glanville Fritillaries.

Tel: 854925
e: a.butler321@btinternet.com

Jim Baldwin

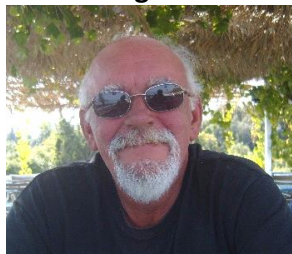


**Dragonflies & Damselflies
(*Odonata*) Beetles
(*Coleoptera*) and
Moths**

Jim hopes to encourage more people to report their records and to help with identification queries. Jim is also the IW BTO Regional Rep

Tel: 721137
e: wightdragonflies@gmail.com
e: wightmoths@gmail.com

Adam Wright



**Bees, Wasps & Ants
(*Hymenoptera*),
Flies (*Diptera*),
Grasshoppers and
Crickets
(*Orthoptera*)**

Adam is a consultant entomologist with particular interests in bees, wasps and flies.

Tel: 856319
e: aswrightento@yahoo.co.uk

Roger Herbert



**Freshwater & Marine groups,
Marine mammals**

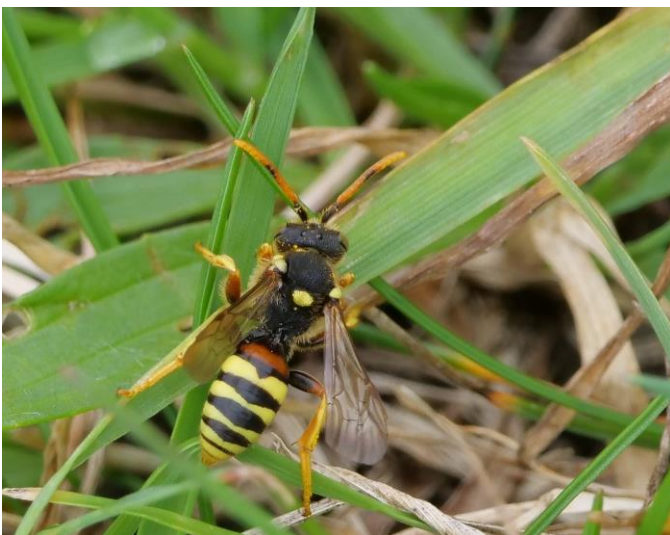
Roger is a marine biologist at Bournemouth University. He has also worked on freshwater invertebrates

Tel: 521040
e: roger.herbert59@btinternet.com

Andy's Nature Notes

July

- 1st. Climbed down into Luccombe Chine for a look round.
- 2nd. Atlantic Rowing Boat towed up in Channel past home early am.
- 3rd. Walked round to Luccombe along the shore this am. Found one plant of Marsh Helleborine and saw 3 Peregrine Falcons (1 adult and 2 juveniles) & one Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly. Carried on round to Shanklin and caught the bus home.
- 4th. A Sandwich Tern on the breakwater in front of my house.
- 6th. 20 Gannets east past home early am. An immature Emperor Dragonfly at Monk's bay, Bonchurch.
- 8th. Met up with Iain Outlaw at Shanklin and walked round to Luccombe along the shore. We found 12 Marsh Helleborines in the Chine plus 10 more high up a cliff nearer Shanklin. Also a single Privet Hawkmoth, 3 Broad-bodied Chasers (all female) and a moth *Epiblema scutulana*.
- 11th. 5 adult Mediterranean Gulls on the sea in front of my house and later one along at Monk's bay. A Large Skipper in the garden and also the Solitary Bee, *Nomada fucata*.
- 13th. Walked along the lower path on Bonchurch Down to Nansen Hill. Saw 10 Dark-green Fritillaries on the Bonchurch side and 3 at Nansen plus c.150 Marbled Whites and 10 Ringlets in total. On Nansen I counted c.200 Six-spot Burnet moths which included an example of one with pale spots instead of the usual red ones.
- 14th. Two Six-belted Clearwings in the garden plus 3 *Nomada fucata*.
- 15th. A Clouded Yellow along the revetment mid morning. A female Peregrine Falcon flew over the garden.
- 16th. Went out to a private reservoir at Atherfield with Pete Campbell this morning. Had 3 male Red-veined Darters (including one immature), 30 Black-tailed Skimmers, 8 Emperor Dragonflies, 3 Small Red-eyed Damselflies and 3 Banded Demoiselles. Also, one Common Sandpiper.
- 17th. A Gatekeeper in the garden.
- 18th. 2 Clouded Yellow along the revetment.
- 19th. Climbed down Whale Chine with my son David and walked east along to an area of low cliff. Many years ago, my wife and I found a large colony of Keeled Skimmer Dragonflies there and I have occasionally checked them out over the ensuing years. This time we could only find 26 but interestingly we also saw at least 8 juvenile Toads, something I had never seen there before.
- 20th. Pete and I walked along the old railway track from Merstone to Horringford and found a single Red-eyed Damselfly and 3 male Scarce Chasers in a lake about halfway along. Also, a form *hutchinsonia* of the Comma butterfly.
- 21st. Returned to Atherfield Reservoir with Iain this morning. A single *Nomada fucata*, 60+ Black-tailed Skimmers, c.10 Emperors, c.10 Small Red-eyed, 4 Common Darters and one male Red-veined Darter. Plus one Painted Lady butterfly.
- 22nd. A male Chalkhill Blue and 2 Clouded Yellows along the revetment. A Painted Lady in the garden.
- 23rd. 4 Whimbrel east close in early am. 'Ron' seal off the bay this morning and a single Rose Chafer in the garden.
- 24th. An adult Green Woodpecker in the garden feeding a young one.
- 26th. Had a swim today! C.15 Silver Y moths in the garden and a Holly Blue.
- 29th. A Fox Moth in the garden and a Leopard Moth up in Wheeler's Bay car park.
- 30th. c.50 Gannets west past the house.



Top left: Luccombe Chine; top right: Marsh Helleborine at Luccombe; middle left: Male Keeled Skimmer; middle right: Toadlet both at Whale Chine terrace; bottom left: *Nomada fucata* in garden; bottom right: Six-spot Burnets including pale form, Nansen Hill.

August

1st. 'Ron' close in off the bay all morning. Clouded Yellow and a Chalkhill Blue along the revetment.

2nd. Torrential rain storm this morning. The cliff slipped down just along from my house causing damage to a boat below. The road down Ventnor Cascade lifted and had to be closed and the paddling pool overflowed.

3rd. 2 Harbour porpoises east early am. A Dark-green Fritillary, Small Tortoiseshell and a Painted Lady in the garden.

4th. A Migrant Hawker dragonfly, 2 Clouded Yellow and 4 Painted Lady along the revetment. A Wall and 2 Painted Lady in the garden. Red Admirals in numbers everywhere. Went out fishing with my son in his dingy for a couple of hours; caught one Bass and 4 Mackerel between us all off Luccombe. All the local Swifts have gone today.

7th. A Willow Warbler in the garden.

11th. A very tame juvenile Sanderling along at Monk's Bay. 4 Chalkhill Blues, 2 Clouded Yellow and one Humming-bird Hawkmoth (HBHM) along the revetment.

12th. The solitary Sanderling still there.

14th. Saw a Thresher Shark churning up the sea surface (like they do) about 200m off Bonchurch. Later on, saw a pod of what was probably Long-finned Pilot Whales heading west past Bonchurch.

15th. Sanderling still present. 4 Jersey Tiger moths in the garden.

16th. A Small Copper, a Clouded Yellow, 16 Common Blues, 7 Chalkhill Blues and a HBHM along the revetment.

17th. A Ringed Plover at Monk's Bay.

19th. A Bloxworth Snout moth in the garden.

20th. A bright pink Meadow Grasshopper in the garden. Never seen one like it before. Also, a Migrant Hawker dragonfly.

22nd. Small Tortoiseshell, Brown Argus, female Common Blue and a normal Meadow Grasshopper in the garden.

24th. Sanderling in Monk's bay.

25th. A male Adonis Blue along the revetment. A Turnstone, a Migrant Hawker and a HBHM in Monks Bay.

26th. 8 Wheatears on the sea defence at Bonchurch.

27th. Pete and I went over to Newtown this morning. We saw 3 White-tailed Eagles, 10 Shelduck, 75 Oystercatchers, 10 Ringed Plover, 40 Dunlin, one Greenshank, 15 Little Egret, c.100 Swallows, c.100 Sand Martins, one Sparrowhawk and a single Spoonbill. 2 Turnstones back at Monk's Bay.

29th. An Emperor Dragonfly and 2 Holly Blue in the garden. A small pod of Dolphins heading east early am.

30th. 2 HBHM along the revetment. A Small Heath in the garden.

31st. Turnstone still there. Male and female Adonis Blue and 2 Migrant Hawkers along the revetment.



Left: Cliff fall at Wheeler's Bay



Right: sea-level rise on the Island!



Left: old Grey Seal at Wheeler's Bay



Right: juvenile Sanderling at Monk's Bay

September

3rd. Went over to Hadden's Pits with Pete to see a Greenish Warbler. Very elusive so fleeting views only and record shot photos only as well. A Fulmar Petrel flew past home in the afternoon.

4th. Early am saw a single Arctic Skua a long way out off home. Later, Pete and I looked round a private lake along St. Lawrence Undercliff. We recorded 6 Emperor dragonflies, one Black-tailed Skimmer, 2 Migrant Hawkers, 6 Common Darters, 10 Spotted Flycatchers, a Whinchat and a single Swift. Moved on to Blackgang Viewpoint and saw 10 Spotted Flycatchers.

6th. Visited Atherfield with Iain Outlaw this morning. c.60 Yellow Wagtails plus Whitethroats, Redstarts etc. One Common Sandpiper on the reservoir and about 350 Canada geese. They have become a real menace to the well-being of the British countryside.

8th. 5 Bottle-nosed Dolphins west past home this morning. A Leaf-cutter Bee in the garden and a HBHM.

10th. *Palpita vitrealis* moth on the window this evening.

11th. 4 Mute Swans across the bay this am heading west. A fine sight. Also a HBHM, a Holly Blue, a Migrant Hawker, 10 Red Admirals and a Painted Lady in the garden.

12th. c.30 Red Admirals, 4 Peacock, one Painted Lady all on a single Buddleja bush along the revetment.

14th. Caught the bus up to Newport this morning. Have to say that there is not much there any more, especially when compared with the 1950's when I went to school there. Very sad. A largish shoal of Mackerel about 200m out in the bay off my house and moving west with the ebb in the afternoon.

15th. A Clouded Yellow along the revetment. Another Mackerel shoal off home early and a large shoal of Bass late in the afternoon, again in front of the house.

16th. A 3rd calendar year Glaucous Gull flew past the house very close in. A fresh Clouded Yellow on the bank at the back of the house. The Atlantic Rowing Boat went by home heading east, presumably practising.

17th. Atherfield with Pete. About 4000 gulls working two large Bass shoals out in Chale bay. c.25 Brent Geese heading west past home early am.

18th. Lots of Box-tree Moths coming into the moth trap recently.

20th. Dave Nordell and I saw 5 Clouded Yellow along the revetment.

21st. An immature/female Black Redstart in Dudley Road, Ventnor this am. 2 Large Dolphin sp heading east late evening. John Caws reports that he saw a Kingfisher on Bonchurch Pond today, possibly the same one from earlier in the year.

22nd. 4 Clouded Yellows along the revetment.

23rd. A Great-green Bush Cricket along at Monk's Bay.

25th. Bought a new telescope which I leave permanently set up in my bedroom bay window. Saw 8 Balearic Shearwaters going west this am 9 (with Pete). A Wall Brown in Monk's Bay.

26th. An Arctic Skua west this am.

27th. A Western-conifer Seed Bug in the house this am.

28th. 20 Balearic Shearwaters this am.

30th. A Sooty Shearwater west at 10.50 this morning.



Top left: Box moth; top right: Box moth, melanic form; bottom left: Spotted Flycatcher at Blackgang; bottom right: Greenish Warbler at Luccombe

October

1st. Western-conifer Seed Bug in the house. Saw the Kingfisher on Bonchurch Pond plus 2 Migrant hawkers Dragonflies. About 200 House Martins around the front of the house and revetment.

2nd. A stream of gannets offshore going west in the morning. A Grey Seal off the revetment (not Ron).

3rd. Many Mediterranean Gulls off home heading west. An adult and juvenile Harbour Porpoise going west and 2 Large Dolphin sp. jumped clear of the sea a long way out. The Grey Seal in close off the bay.

4th. 7 Common Scoter, one Artic Skua and a Razorbill west off home.

6th. Pete and I went to Newtown and recorded 3 White-tailed Eagles plus the usual waders. A Hornet in Town Copse.

9th. Went to Lymington with Pete to see a Western Sandpiper. Saw it okay but it was a long hot day, I very rarely go to the mainland now I'm glad to say!

10th. 5 Chiffchaffs in the garden.

11th. Clouded Yellow along the revetment.

12th. Kingfisher, Buzzard and a Grey Wagtail at Bonchurch Pond. A pair of Stonechats, 3 Clouded Yellow and a Migrant Hawker along the revetment.

13th. A single Harbour Porpoise in very close off the bay. A Guillemot in close swimming and diving round the bay, exactly a year to the day that another one was there. Pete and I went to Shepherds Chine, Atherfield, later and found a large Grass Snake on the path. It was about 3ft long and had a wound near its

head that indicated that it perhaps had been caught by a Buzzard and dropped from the sky. Pete edged it off the path and it slithered away apparently okay. There were two large flocks of mixed gull species out in Chale Bay west of Atherfield Ledge probably on Bass shoals again. Later we saw a Merlin along the cliff top and in attempting to get a photo I slipped down the cliff into a gorse bush; fortunately, the camera was okay!

14th. Ron the Grey Seal turned up and spent the day in the bay in front of my house. The Guillemot also reappeared as well as an Oystercatcher (one usually spends the Winter here). 8 Bottle-nosed Dolphins went down channel later and there was a Ringed Plover, 2 Clouded Yellow and 3 *Eurydema ornata* shield bugs along the revetment.

16th. Went to St. Helens' with Pete to look for an American Golden Plover. We didn't find it! We did see however, 2 Egyptian Geese, 6 Greenshank, one Eagle, 2 Marsh Harriers, one Great Egret, 45 Lapwing and 42 Wigeon. Back home there were 9 Clouded yellow, 2 Small Copper and one Common Blue along the revetment.

17th. An Artic Skua west am of home.

21st. 2 Arctic Skua and 5 Swallows west off home. 8 Clouded Yellow along the revetment.

22nd. HBHM along the revetment and a small seal in close east of my bay.

31st. A Bloxworth Snout moth in my porch this morning.



Top left: Grass Snake at Atherfield; top right: male Stonechat along the revetment; bottom: Bottle-nosed Dolphins off Wheeler's Bay

November

- 1st. A Grey Seal off home all morning (not Ron). Little Egret flew by the house going east.
- 2nd. Seal still about. Female Southern Hawker dragonfly along at Monk's Bay. Good views of the Kingfisher today.
- 3rd. Painted Lady and a Holly Blue in the garden.
- 5th. Clouded Yellow and a Large White along the revetment.
- 7th. Southern Hawker at Bonchurch Pond.
- 9th. Common-marbled Carpet moth on the window this am. Lots of Jays about at the moment, even peering through my front room windows.
- 10th. Pete and I went to Bembridge Down to see a couple of Short-eared Owls. Also saw a male Migrant Hawker dragonfly there.
- 11th. A Purple Sandpiper along the revetment in the afternoon.
- 13th. A Black Redstart on the boathouse roof below my house.
- 16th. A male Brimstone and a Red Admiral in the garden. Purple Sandpiper still in same place.
- 17th. 2 Clouded Yellow along the revetment and the Purple Sandpiper has now gone. A Holly Blue in the garden.
- 20th. Went to Newtown with Pete to see 17 Cattle Egrets flying in to roost over at Brickfields.
- 23rd. Clouded Yellow along the revetment and some of the naturalised Wallflowers are in bloom at the bottom of the cliff at the Bonchurch end.
- 25th. Holly Blue in the garden and a Chiffchaff along the revetment.
- 26th. Gannets and gulls over what was probably a shoal of Bass about a mile out.
- 28th. 2 Purple Sandpipers and 2 Oystercatchers along the revetment. The Stonechats are still there and usually stay for most of the Winter.
- 29th. A Kingfisher flew across Monk's Bay in the afternoon heading east.



Above: Purple Sandpipers at Bonchurch

December

- 1st. A Purple Sandpiper on the slipway bottom of Shore Rd, Bonchurch.
- 2nd. Up to Bembridge Down with my son David to see the Short-eared Owls. Good views.
- 3rd Little Egret in Monk's bay.
- 8th. Red Admiral in the garden.
- 15th. 42 Starlings on two small adjacent Cabbage Palms in Wheeler's Bay car park feeding on the berries.
- 16th. A male and female Blackcap and a Chiffchaff in the garden plus at least 40 Starlings.
- 19th. Pete and I went over to the Sandown Levels to look for a number of reported Glossy Ibis. Thick mist and Pete spotted one but only briefly. Went on to have a look at Sandown Canoe Lake which had 57 Tufted Duck and 6 Shoveler Duck. A Red-green Carpet Moth on the dining room window later that night.
- 20th. Blackcaps still about in the garden.
- 21st. A female Merganser fishing off the bay in front of my house late afternoon.
- 23rd. Over to Brading with Pete for the Ibis. Didn't see them.
- 26th. Winter Moth sp on window in the evening.
- 29th. Brading again early for the Ibis. Got to see them at last! There were 10 together and one on its own (Billy no-mates!) Very wet and misty so record shots only.

30th. To Yarmouth this morning with Pete. Dull, windy and high tide so not ideal conditions. Logged 2 Water Rails, 2 Cetti's Warblers, a Marsh Harrier, 2 Greenshank, 20 Redshank, 2 Little Egrets, c.100 Lapwing, 6 Grey Heron, 10 Shoveler Duck, c. 100 Wigeon and c.200 Teal.
The end of another odd year.



Above left: Short-eared Owl, Bembridge Down; above right: ten Glossy Ibis off Laundry Lane, St Helen's

Andy Butler

New Books in the Library January 2022

The Wrecks of HM Frigates Assurance and Pomone by John Bingeman, Paul Simpson, David Tomalin

An account of the underwater excavations that took place at these sites off the Needles during the 1970s and 80s.

Furthest South – from the Scottish Borders to the Isle of Wight by Robin McInnes.

The latest of Robin's beautifully presented and illustrated books; this covers the story of his mother's and stepfather's Scottish backgrounds and his own upbringing on the Island.

Helen Jackson

Reports of General Meetings

Saturday 31st July

Whippingham and the Medina

Fifteen members gathered at St Mildred's Church, Whippingham, for the welcome return of John Margham's annual historic landscape walks, suspended last year by the pandemic. John explained that the circular tour was originally intended to encompass Barton Manor, but permission had regrettably been withdrawn by the owner at the last minute.

Whippingham's place-name was apparently first recorded in an 8th century charter, and probably meaning 'the homestead of the family or followers of a man called Wippa'. We considered the grant of 22 hides (each hide being an area of land sufficient to support an extended family) to Whippingham by Cuthred, king of the West Saxons, c.750 AD, and why this appeared to have shrunk to just three hides by Domesday Book in 1086.

St Mildred's Church is almost certain to have originated in the Early Medieval period, and three pieces of late Anglo-Saxon sculpture built into the later fabric support this claim, along with a very rare inscription of probable Anglo-Saxon date. This latter text may have been describing a nativity scene carved on an adjoining stone now lost; in any case, the leading expert on Anglo-Saxon inscriptions, Elisabeth Okasha, illness. Whippingham subsequently became one of seven Island churches granted to the Norman abbey of Lyre by William fitzOsbern between 1067 and 1071; and according to Sir Richard Worsley in his *History* (1781), Wootton was a daughter church of Whippingham. In this context, we looked at some reused architectural sculpture from the Norman period, including the lintel now set into the west wall of the porch, depicting two knights on horseback facing a tree.



Following a lane to the Folly Inn, John gave us a brief history of the River Medina, first recorded as such c.1200; the estuary would have been an important resource for fishing, trapping of wild birds and salt production in the Anglo-Saxon period. Documentary evidence from Quarr Abbey would suggest that it was constructing a tide mill in the area now known as Island Harbour c.1250; the ultimate successor to this mill was East Medina Mill, built in 1790 by William Porter (together with West Medina Mill), and demolished in 1950.

We were lucky with a mainly sunny day, but intermittent showers commenced as we passed by Binfield Farm and on to Belmont Lane. Belmont Farm was amusingly named Mount Misery on the 1862/3 six-inch map, no doubt a comment on the soil quality and lack of productivity of a clayland farm here.



A walk along the old Newport to Ryde railway line (1875–1966) brought us to our lunch-stop; then further along the line to Palmers Brook, so named after the Palmer family of Wootton, first mentioned in 1352. John informed us of the contrasting use of 'burn' for longer streams and 'brook' for shorter ones, and considered the use of the local name Fattinpark, probably identical with *Vattyngcroft* recorded in 1440.

Crossing back over the busy main road we arrived at Alverstone Farm, first recorded as *Elwerdeston* c.1200 but originating several centuries earlier and indicating 'the farmstead, settlement or estate belonging to a man called Æthelweard'. It is one of the 67 *tūn* place-names recorded from the Island, Barton being another. Woodhouse Farm in the vicinity was first recorded as *Wodehous* in 1329, reflecting the wooded landscape of the wet clays of the Island's northern lowlands.

A heavy shower brought us to Whippingham Heights, where John explained how the early

medieval use of gravel ‘islands’ such as here provided the focus of *tūn* place-names. The area was also the probable beacon site listed as ‘the hill by the reedy pond’ in the 1324 inquisition held at Shide Bridge, and was most likely originally a ‘look-out’ site in the mid-Saxon period.

The area would also have been within the bounds of Barton Manor. This place-name was first recorded as *Burton* in 1274-5 – ‘*burh-tūn*’ indicating a settlement that had a specialist function in relation to defence, and which may have originated in the 7th century when competition to control the Solent was intense. Barton Manor also became the site of a medieval oratory – a small monastic foundation for Augustinian canons – and in 1274-5 John de Lisle bestowed on the oratory ‘all the land of Burton’; though the oratory was subsequently suppressed as early as 1439 and the land sold to Winchester College.

A final stop in Beatrice Avenue gave us a panoramic view encompassing Carisbrooke Castle, a little over 4.5 miles away and a reminder of how a look-out or beacon site on Whippingham Heights would have had visual communication with the defensive *burh* at Carisbrooke; this look-out site could also have communicated with others such as Nodes Farm on the other side of the Medina estuary, and with a much wider network of such sites in mainland Dorset, Hampshire and Sussex.

With several of the group having tailed off for other appointments, eight of us made it to the finish at the Church at around 3pm. Here John’s summing-up described how Whippingham’s substantial ‘multiple estate’ in the mid-8th century – containing areas of economic specialism such as the production of wood and timber products as well as an important defensive role – had become fragmented by the late Anglo-Saxon period into much smaller individual manors, three of which were named Whippingham in Domesday Book and one of which may have been a site adjoining the church. Although totally rebuilt in the Victorian era as a royal church, some sculpture and a text from the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods had thankfully been preserved.

It only remained for us to thank John for another fascinating excursion into an area of the Island not often visited for its historical connections.

Alan Phillips

Saturday 18th September

Tennyson Down Earthworks

Fourteen members met at Freshwater Bay on a gloriously sunny day for an extended historic landscape walk on Tennyson Down, led by Vicky and Frank Basford. The aim was to seek out some of the more enigmatic earthworks alongside the more well-known ones.

At the bottom of Easton Field – now the start of the route up Tennyson Down since the National Trust purchased it in 2002 – Vicky pointed out that in the medieval period this would have been the common open field of Easton, farmed by manorial tenants in individual unfenced strips. Iron Age and Roman pottery as well as Roman coins have also been found in the field.

Walking to the top of the field we noted the two parallel banks which originally separated the ploughed land of Easton open field from East High Down, once grazed in common by manorial tenants; Frank pointed out that this bank in fact runs right round to the Needles. Then in the post-medieval period the whole area of Easton Field and East High Down became associated with the manor of Priors Freshwater. East High Down is a name which one rarely hears nowadays as it became known as Tennyson Down when the famous poet laureate became lord of the manor from the mid-19th century; it extends up as far as the Tennyson Monument.

Next stop was the earthwork identified by David Tomalin as a mortuary enclosure in 1979. A small excavation by Frank Basford in 1989 obtained a charcoal sample that allowed a radiocarbon date of 2865–2290 BC to be obtained for the enclosure, placing it in the Late Neolithic period but on the cusp of the Bronze Age, later than most mortuary enclosures. The enclosure would probably have had a palisade surrounding it, and can be thought of as a proto long barrow. There are only two other long barrows known on the Island: near the Freshwater golf clubhouse; and the Longstone at Mottistone – maybe on the Island they were limited to this area of West Wight?

Immediately to the west of the mortuary enclosure is the site of an anti-glider trench, one of several to be encountered on the walk. During WWII chalk would have been piled either side of the trench to make it as difficult as possible for an enemy aircraft to land.

Near the Tennyson Monument itself we paused to consider the enigmatic prehistoric earthwork enclosure comprising a substantial ditch and bank and forming an oval shape. David Tomalin's original interpretation of the site was that it formed part of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure: these were thought to have been used as meeting or market places. However, it was only with a Lidar survey in 2014 that the full, surviving extent of the oval enclosure was revealed. Vicky handed round plans and photos from Historic England's 2015 survey, which concluded that the earthwork was likely to be later than Neolithic, probably of Bronze Age or Iron Age date. David Tomalin still considers a Neolithic date for the monument a possibility, but has also speculated that it could be an enclosed Beaker settlement. Unfortunately, a small community excavation by Museum of London Archaeology in 2016 did not provide any definitive dating evidence.

There are also later features within the enclosure area, which Vicky discussed as we examined the interior of the enclosure before walking along the best-preserved section of the prehistoric enclosure bank. These comprise the remains of an alleged 'Celtic' field system; a possible Bronze Age round barrow which Frank and Vicky may have been the first to identify in 1981; and rectangular enclosures which may be associated with the 17th century Nodes Beacon.

In 1638 one of the Island's beacon sites is recorded as being on *Freshwater Downe*, of which Tennyson Down is the most likely candidate. A ward and watch, each of two men, was maintained on the down in 1638 and a beacon symbol is shown on Taylor's map of 1759. The place-name 'Nodes' is in fact derived from the Old English word for a beacon and occurs in several IW locations such as Nodes Farm at Northwood and Nodes Point at St Helens. It is recorded locally in the name 'The Nodes' for the cliffs east of the Tennyson Monument and for Nodewell Farm to the north of Tennyson Down. The site of the Tennyson Monument, erected in 1897, was itself previously occupied by a wooden beacon as shown on both the 1st and 25 inch OS maps. In 1977 a half-size replica of this beacon was erected by some distance to the west to mark Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee, which we encountered later on the walk.

From the Monument we looked out over the Freshwater landscape and observed several medieval and post-medieval features. These included Headon Warren which, despite being called 'Rabbit Common Down' on the Freshwater Tithe Map of 1838, saw much grazing of sheep belonging to the tenants of Weston Manor.

We continued westward to the two Bronze Age barrows said to have been excavated by the ubiquitous Rev John Skinner in 1817 and recorded in his diary as each containing a burial urn; however, Frank has observed that there is no evidence of any excavation holes or trenches penetrating these barrows, suggesting that they have in fact never been excavated! Instead, in 1989–90 two bronze spearheads were found close to the northern barrow as a result of rabbit burrowing.

We proceeded further westward to the boundary bank between the downland of Priors Freshwater (East High Down) and Weston Manor (West High Down). This was our well-deserved lunch stop, before setting off back to Freshwater Bay by way of the historic trackway along the lower northern edge of the down, much of it through woodland. At the start of the track we paused to look at the half-size replica of the Nodes Beacon.

En route Frank mentioned the little-known fact that no less than fifty occupation sites of Romano-British origin had been identified on the Island in connection with finds of Roman coins by detectorists. These would not necessarily have been 'Roman' sites per se, but the local population simply using the currency of the day. He also drew our attention to another section of the bank we had identified higher up the down, which ran all the way to the Needles.

We passed several chalk quarries on the route. These would have been used as building material and also for liming the acidic soils to the north of the chalk ridge. The trackway we were walking along would have served as a route of communication between the fields abutting the downs as well as giving access to the chalk pits.

At the end of the track we turned up a footpath to rejoin the two parallel boundary banks that we met at the start of the walk. From there it remained only to follow the footpath down through Easton Field and back to the car park. Having thanked Vicky and Frank for a fascinating excursion, some of us were tempted by the warm, sunny weather to divert to the bay for ice creams.

Saturday 9th October

Annual Fungus Foray

This year, we met at Osborne House to conduct a foray in the grounds, courtesy of English Heritage. Forays held here in the past have been productive but this year fungi were generally rather thin on the ground as a result of prolonged dry weather.



A keen group of thirty met at the entrance to Osborne including several members from the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group. This year unfortunately, our regular expert from Bedfordshire, Alan Outen, was unable to join us due to ill health but several members of the Hampshire group were very proficient in fungal identification and boosted our list for the day.

We started by examining the fungi on the lawns in front of the house. We were finding quite a range of small to tiny grassland fungi until we came across a bumper crop of boletes, comprising colourful Deceiving Bolete (*Boletus queletii*) and drabber Oak Bolete (*Boletus appendiculatus*). We examined the remains of the very rare Oak Polypore (*Buglossoporus quercinus*) which had been found, new to the Island, earlier in the season. In the adjoining grassland, we enjoyed seeing a crop of Parasol Mushrooms (*Macrolepiota procera*). We made our way down the estate to the beach we stopped for lunch and enjoyed the views across the Solent in pleasant sunshine. Several of our group joined the queues outside the chalet to purchase ice creams.

In the afternoon, we went into the woodlands bordering Valley Walk where we were able to add to our growing list. We found a splendid showy caterpillar of the Pale Tussock moth. Emerging from the woods, we disturbed a roosting Barn Owl from one of the park oaks. Altogether during the day, we recorded 84 species of fungi, not bad considering the rather poor season to date. These included *Volvariella hypopithys*, a first for the Island, and *Rubinoboletus rubinus* and *Lepiota hymenoderma* for which we have very few Island records. Thanks are due to Eric Janke, Alan Lucas and Sue Rogerson from the Hampshire group who were able to identify many critical species.

On the Sunday, a few of us including four members of the Hampshire group who had stayed over, visited Briddlesford Copse, courtesy of the PTES, where we recorded 62 species. This included a resupinate fungus identified by Sue Rogerson as *Cristinia coprophylla*, which is new for the Island and for which there are very few UK records.

Colin Pope

Saturday 13th November Pilgrim Paths to Holy Wells

According to folklore, the White Well at Whitwell was a place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, together with the shrine to St Mary at the nearby church. The water was believed to have healing qualities. The well at St Lawrence in the Undercliff may also have been a destination for pilgrims. They would have come from all walks of life, seeking salvation or miraculous healing. A simple faith and religious fervour drove them to make often hazardous journeys. They may have travelled by land or sea and walked or ridden to the wells. This may have been their only destination, or part of a much longer pilgrimage to Christian centres in France, Spain, or the Holy Land. People still make pilgrimages on foot in the old tradition, to places like Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain.

Our pilgrimage started at St Lawrence well, once standing beside the highway, but now, after the road was rerouted, tucked away in a quiet corner, opposite the walled gardens of a grand villa with tall, decorated chimneys and a magnificent Cedar of Lebanon. A nineteenth century folly stands on the site of the ancient well, and an information board gives an interesting history of this place. This is one of a series of eight information boards along a trail between Whitwell and St Lawrence, created by Ventnor Heritage Society, with a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative. Nine intrepid members of our Society set out to walk a circular version of the linear pilgrim route, adding the spectacular Cripple Path to our itinerary. Our second port of call was the tiny twelfth century St Lawrence Old Church, set on the hillside in the heart of the old village. This church was even smaller, until wealthy Victorians discovered the Undercliff and settled here in grand villas. They added a chancel to the nave, before building another, much larger church on the main road below. The old church has a little bell tower, a fine coved ceiling and hat pegs along one wall. It is still used for services.

On our way up the great rock wall, the original sea cliff before landslips created the Undercliff, we made a detour to the disused railway tunnel on the Newport to St Lawrence 'scenic' railway, completed near the end of the nineteenth century, extended to Ventnor West in 1900, and closed in 1952 because it was uneconomic. An information board on the cliff describes the geology of the Undercliff. We followed St Rhadagund's path to the Whitwell Road where an information board features the life of the saint, after whom one of the chapels in Whitwell church is named. She was a Thuringian princess, captured as a child by the King of the neighbouring Frankish empire when he invaded her country. He made her his queen, but she later founded a religious order in Poitiers, now in Northern France. She was believed to work miracles for those who called upon her for help.

We passed a duck pond and crossed fields to reach the next information board, near the medieval village of Nettlecombe where the population was much bigger than today and there is evidence of strip farming. Until recent decades, many of the small cottages were derelict, but have now been renovated. We crossed the old railway track and, approaching Whitwell, came to a stream with a sheep-wash, resembling a small canal lock, where sheep were dipped. The White Well is just a hole in the ground covered by a grill, with a modest plaque attached to the wall beside it. Close by is one of Whitwell's iconic water hydrants, bearing a lion's head and painted red. They are still dotted about the village. A German philanthropist, William Spindler, who lived at Old Park mansion in St Lawrence in the late nineteenth century, paid half the cost of delivering a water supply to the villages of Whitwell and St Lawrence.

After lunch and a visit to the church of St Mary and St Rhadagund, with its twelfth century origins, we followed the old highway to Niton, now a sunken lane, then a footpath across fields, with fine views of the hills. Climbing up to the top of the old cliff, we headed for the Cripple Path. Alan Phillips suggested we

research the origins of the word ‘cripple’, as he is sceptical of the popular image of people with disabilities struggling up the steep path from the Undercliff to reach the holy well. From the top, we clambered down a steep stone staircase through a cleft in the rock wall to a terrace, overhung by a roof of upper greensand, which is constantly crumbling, hence the sandy ground. You can see tiny shells embedded in the rock, evidence that this was once a sea cliff.



I later scanned several online dictionaries to find the etymology of ‘cripple’: the Old English word ‘crypel’ meant ‘one who creeps’, and the proto-Germanic ‘kripilaz’ meant ‘tending to crawl’. In the eighteenth century, the first recorded use of ‘cripple’ as a term of abuse was applied to things as well as people, things like a ‘much bent and distorted’ sixpenny piece. The chink in the rockface could derive from this wider interpretation of the word: ‘flawed’ or ‘imperfect’. But to confuse the issue, another meaning is a dense thicket in swampy or low land, which aptly describes the spring-fed, blue slipper clay swamps of the Undercliff.

We climbed back up to the top of the wall and continued eastwards, uphill, to a panel with a history of the three lighthouses visible from this point, spanning seven hundred years of maritime safety. The oldest, known as The Oratory or Pepperpot – some say it looks like a rocket - was a medieval bell tower with a beacon alongside. It was built as a penance for a wicked deed. Local ‘wreckers’ lured a ship onto rocks to steal the cargo, altar wine belonging to a monastery in France. A local landowner was ordered to do penance by building a chapel and hiring a priest to say prayers for the souls of the dead and keeping a light shining to warn ships of their proximity to land. It stands on St Catherine’s Down, near the late eighteenth-century foundations of a second lighthouse. This hill is so often shrouded in low cloud that it is unsuitable for a lighthouse. Realizing this, the authorities abandoned the scheme and, in 1838, built the current St Catherine’s Light just above sea level and close to the shore. Even so, the tower had to be substantially reduced in height because of the mist.

We returned down the cliff and into St Lawrence the way we had come, having walked at least six miles. We were lucky with the weather, which was calm and mild, ideal for walking this somewhat exposed route, and clear enough to afford us fine views, especially from the top of the escarpment over the Undercliff. On the way, we exchanged stories about our lives, travels, and work, much as we imagine medieval pilgrims would have done, and I shared local stories of prominent buildings we passed and some of the people who lived in them.

Maggie Nelmes

Archaeology on Wednesdays

As summer progressed the group was able to resume almost normal activities.

Kevin Trott, a former leader of the Archaeology section, is often contracted to carry out surveys on the Island and we were pleased to support him whilst widening our experience. This coincided with glorious June weather. We spent pleasurable mornings sitting in the sunshine at his base at Appuldurcombe House, washing and sorting finds and sorting through sieved debris for minute items. We also spent 3 days excavating near Godshill trying to define ditches which proved to be much deeper and larger than anticipated.

In August and during the autumn we began Geophysics at a new site at Knighton. This field belongs to a member and we were fortunate not to be constrained by a farming timetable so we could work our way steadily across a large field. Final results will shortly be analysed. We expect to have more opportunities to survey nearby sites, all forming part of a long-term survey of an area well known for its Iron Age, Romano-British and Medieval finds.

Walks have included Golden Hill Country Park, Afton Down, and two in the Knighton area to set our Geophysics survey into context.



Sunday 7th November Steephill and Flowers Brook

Seven members met on a glorious autumn morning and enjoyed sparkling sea views as we walked along the coast and the Undercliff. This was a walk about hidden archaeology; apart from random stones from Steephill Castle there were no clues to the sites that have been excavated along this route nor to the stories they suggest.

After talking about the now demolished Steephill Castle and looking at information boards and part of the cascade we walked down to Flowers Brook. Once part of the Steephill ornamental grounds and providing a walkway to the beach for the gentry it is now a delightful peaceful suntrap with no hint of the playground and caravan site that were there at the end of the last century.

Kevin Trott's excavations, between 1998 and 2000, were part of the Sea Clean Wight programme, as at Yaverland. Kevin uncovered the track that was presumably used by those staying at the castle, but the main discovery was a cemetery housing about 43 burials, for which there seem to be no earlier written records. Dating is not certain but medieval seems most likely. Kevin noted that several of the bones, from men, women and juveniles, showed evidence of trauma. Further dating evidence might help us to produce a possible story for this event. (Update: this area is currently part of the planning application for the tidal energy scheme and it is very likely that more archaeological investigation will take place. Hopefully we will get former dating evidence)

We then walked down to Castle Cove, along to Steephill Cove and up to the path that skirts the Botanic Gardens. Then along to Orchard Bay and down the footpath to the main road. We walked up

Steeptill Court Rd past the old nurses' home, now undergoing development, and along the route of the railway line that ran from Newport, via Godshill and Whitwell to Ventnor West Station. This was a fairly late venture that never really flourished and closed years before Beeching wielded his axe. While the railway was being built in 1909 a hoard of about 30 Bronze Age axes was found, some of which are in Carisbrooke castle museum.

Several Iron Age sites along this stretch have been recorded. In a midden was found 'the skeleton of a cat, one of the very few records of this animal, probably semi-domesticated, of the Iron Age in Britain' (Dunning). A burial dated to the Iron Age was found in 1939 near the station and in 1923 the bones of a young woman, a child and a baby were found 'under conditions suggesting that a family had been overwhelmed by a landslide'. A midden noted by David Tomalin and Vicky Basford in 1977 was excavated by Kevin Trott in 1999, providing evidence of occupation from middle Iron Age into the first century. This was a coastal community where fishing, brine-boiling and imported pottery was evidenced along with animal husbandry and spinning / weaving.

Our final stop was by the Old Ventnor West station, now a private house. Two points about the Iron Age arose in our discussions. First was how much evidence for Iron Age occupation has been found all along the coastal stretch from Ventnor to Rocken End. Yet there is a dearth of Roman occupation evidence. Does this reflect a community centred in the world of the Undercliff, looking and trading out across the Channel rather than being part of the wider Island community? It is often commented that this has long been a feature of this area; it is perhaps not surprising if it stretches back over 2000 years.

Helen Jackson



Botany Meetings

Wednesday 11th August Norton Spit

With pleasant sunny weather, 13 members of the botany group met at Fort Victoria to botanise Norton Spit and walk along the seashore. Norton Spit is one of the most important sand dune systems on the Isle of Wight and is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and SAC (Special Area of Conservation.)

Our botanising started along the beach at Fort Victoria where we observed a lovely stand of Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) growing in the shingle. This plant is found in a variety of habitats including coastal shingle. The plant was flowering and fruiting. Further along the shore we found a wonderful example of Yellow Horned Poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) with its leathery, deeply segmented blueish grey leaves which are modified with a water retaining wax, which enables it to grow in extreme maritime conditions. Its yellow flowers are very beautiful and followed by long, horn shaped capsules. One of our personal favourite maritime plants.



Our walk then took us along the shore to Norton Spit but on the way, we observed some good stands of Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) and Hemp Agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*). Colin pointed out a plant that was new to me, Brookweed (*Samolus valerandii*), a plant in the Primula family and found in saltmarshes and wet parts of coastal cliff. It was as pretty plant with white flowers and it is said to be declining on the Island.



At Norton Spit, we were able to observe the coastal lagoons where Common Sea Lavender (*Limonium vulgare*) was flowering along with Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea*) and Cord Grass (*Spartina anglica*). On the dunes, one of Norton Spits star plants was abundant Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*). This Umbelliferous plant with its metallic blue flowers is one of the most distinctive plants of maritime sand and shingle. In Elizabethan times it was believed to be a powerful aphrodisiac! Sea Hollies are very popular with gardeners and other species and forms are widely grown in cultivation. We were hoping to see Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*) in flower, but were too late. After some searching, we did find the fruits of it, which was a first for me. Colin pointed out some interesting grasses including Sea Lyme Grass (*Leymus arenarius*) and Sea Couch (*Elymus athericus*). This is an area very rich in interesting flora. We concluded the morning with a picnic on the dunes!

Dave and Hazel Trevan.

Sunday 5th September St Helen's Duver

Our group of sixteen was the biggest botany gathering post Covid lockdown. We were blessed with a warm, sunny afternoon but unfortunately the Autumn Squills, which had been splendid a week earlier, were past their best. Nevertheless, there was plenty to occupy our attention. After looking at Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*), we looked at the Sea Buckthorn bushes which were heavy with fruit. Some of the group tasted the berries which are rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants and is used for certain medicinal remedies and to make jams and jellies. Sea Buckthorn was introduced onto The Duver in 1858 by the Victorian botanist Alexander Goodman More, who lived in Bembridge at the time. It has since spread. During our visit we also saw quantities of Fragrant Evening Primrose (*Oenothera stricta*), also introduced at the same time by A.G.More. We also saw the bracket fungus (*Phellinus hippophaeicola*), which only grows on old Sea Buckthorn trunks. Sand dune systems are frequently the recipient of introductions. We also saw Tree Lupins (*Lupinus arboreus*), first recorded here in 1952. At one time it was common here but the population, although still surviving, has been much depleted by an outbreak of the large lupin aphid, *Macrosiphum albifrons*, which keep the plants in check. A large flowering bush of Kangaroo-Apple (*Solanum laciniatum*), is a much more recent arrival having been spread by thrushes following its original introduction at Ventnor Botanic Garden. It was first recorded here in 1993.

However, St Helen's Duver is a rich location for native sand dune and saltmarsh plants and we saw many of these. Very many are at their best in early spring. There were huge quantities of Bulbous Meadow-grass (*Poa bulbosa*), but only present as dry, papery bulbils. It was a surprise to find a patch of Suffocated Clover (*Trifolium suffocatum*), one of the rarer sand-dune clovers, in flower; this is generally a spring

flowering species. We enjoyed seeing Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), far less frequent than we had seen at Norton Spit on our previous meeting, but still with many plants. It was good to see following its near extinction here in the 1990s. Some time was spent watching the sand-dune specialist solitary wasp, Beewolf (*Philanthus triangulum*), digging nests in the sand and preying on honey bee workers.

On the saltmarsh, Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritimum*), was looking at its best. It was heartening to see that the plant was spreading around the edge of the marsh. We also saw Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*), growing in its traditional location on the saltmarsh bank. Many of the group had difficulty spotting this rather inconspicuous plant.

Colin Pope



Ornithology Meetings

Saturday 10th July at Fort Victoria.

Unfortunately, this morning turned out to be very wet although eight members turned out. We did do a sea watch using the fort for protection from the rain. We had a good view of a Gannet which flew by close in and we saw a few Common Tern fishing offshore and a Sandwich Tern too. The sea watch was rather disappointing, so we headed up through the woodland along the coastal path as far as the viewpoint but the birdlife was very quiet in the gloom. We were passed by a lot of people partaking in around the Island charity run/walk. In view of the continued wet weather, we decided to retrace our steps and returned to the cars.

Jackie Hart

(August meeting was called off because of adverse weather conditions)

Saturday, 4th September at High Down

There were 9 Members and 2 guests. Dave Fairlamb kindly offered to lead the walk in the absence of Jackie Hart. On the way up to the gate we spotted or heard Buzzard, Green Woodpecker, Wood Pigeon, Jay, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit, & Long tailed Tit. We also had brief sightings of 2 Spotted Flycatchers. We continued with Herring Gull, Swallow and Magpie- followed by Chiffchaff, House Martin and Kestrel. There were Carrion Crow, Jackdaw and Rook in the fields below the path. We finally heard Goldfinch before we reached the gate. After going through the gate, we turned off to the right where we saw 2 Dartford Warbler, Whitethroat and several Tree Pipit and also heard Willow Warbler. We then took a path toward the cliffs when we saw a fall of about 100 Yellow Wagtail. Spectacular! We also had about 5 Wheatear 2 Stonechat 5 Rock Pipit and a Meadow Pipit. A very successful walk which everyone enjoyed.

Toni Goodley

Sunday 24th October at Culver Down.

Although it was very windy 12 members met at the far car park on Culver Down for a walk in the area. A Pheasant was walking along the road as I drove along. However, only a few birds appeared in the blustery conditions with Crow, Rook, Jackdaw and Magpie and two Raven. Great Black Backed Gull and Herring Gull patrolled the cliff top, and a Kestrel hung in the wind. At least ten Skylark were either seen or heard and a Meadow Pipit was heard calling. A small flock of Goldfinches were seen near the old coastguard cottages and Blue Tit were in the bushes further along. Whilst preparing to leave the car park at the end of the meeting I saw three Swallows fly by. We also spotted two Red Admiral butterflies and a Speckled Wood.

Jackie Hart

Sunday, 28th November at Yarmouth

16 members and 2 guests meet on a very cold but sunny morning at the start of the cycle track in Thorley Road for a walk to Barnfield and return. Our only Fieldfare of the morning was seen at the start of the meeting and it was noted that we could not see or hear the Rook which normally frequent the fir trees across the road. They did put in an appearance at the end of the walk. Although there was not as much water on the meadow at Rofford Marsh we did manage to see 3 Snipe as well as some Teal and a couple of Shoveler. A Kingfisher was also seen. Here we saw 16 Moorhen, more than we normally see. Moving on we saw about 20 Mallard in the river opposite 'Off the Rails' café which are fed by children. 10 House Sparrows and a Dunnock were noted as well as a female Bullfinch in the hedgerow along the track. On the estuary we saw Redshank, Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, about 100 Black Headed Gull, 2 Great Black-backed Gull, 4 Herring Gull and 10 Common Gull and 10 Shelduck and many Wigeon and Brent Goose. On the mud and on a field opposite we saw at least 50 Golden Plover, some were near enough to see their lovely golden plumage in the telescope and later 2 Grey Plover was also spotted so that the differences in the plumage could be seen. There were approximately 200 Lapwing both with the Golden Plover in the opposite field and on the exposed mud of the estuary. A total of 5 Little Grebe were seen: 2 near the café and 3 on the estuary. Two Grey Heron and 3 Little Egret were also noted as was a Marsh Harrier. On the Barnfield scrape the Spotted Redshank that has overwintered here for some years was picked out to everyone's delight. In all 46 species were noted.

Jackie Hart

Saturday, 11th December at Seaview

Just 4 members met at Bluett Avenue for a sea watch, visit to Hersey Reserve and walk along the Old Toll Road, up Oakhill Road, Nettlestone Hill and down Pond Lane back to our cars. 2 more members joined us at Hersey Reserve. The tide was low and the sea flat calm so that we had excellent views of any birds sitting on the sea. We counted 7 Great Crested Grebe and a couple of Cormorant, a Mediterranean Gull, 2 Oystercatcher, 2 Common Gull, Herring Gull and Black-headed Gulls and 2 Great Black Backed Gulls. On some buoys we saw 2 Sandwich Terns and another one flying, 13 Brent Geese. On the beach were 2 Crows, 3 Rooks and about 12 Jackdaws. On one of the outflow pipes were 6 Turnstones. In Hersey Reserve we saw 4 Little Egret, 1 Grey Heron, the usual 1 Greenshank and 2 male and 1 female Shoveler, 27 Tufted Duck, a Water Rail, 3 Moorhen, 9 Coot, 1 Teal, 9 Mallard, 2 Mute Swan and 4 Little Grebe. When we sat in the hide we spotted 7 Snipe mainly hiding in the reeds. When I did a reconnoiter the day before there were 42 Tufted Duck, the largest count I have recorded there. Jim and Jane mentioned that there are usually about 30 Tufted Duck on Ryde Canoe Lake and the Reserve birds may have been disturbed from there. There was only 1 Greenfinch, and a handful of other birds during the morning: Robin, Blackbird, Dunnock, Magpie, Chiffchaff, Pied Wagtail, Woodpigeon, Goldfinch, Jay, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Blue Tit. The free flying Barnacle Geese were tracked down to the grass areas at Saltern Holiday Cottages but not all the flock was visible. 94 was counted together with the Swan-necked Goose and Snow Goose. 40 species in all were recorded.



How many Snipe can you find hiding in the vegetation at Hersey reserve? Photo: Jim Baldwin



Fungi Group Meetings

Apart from our main foray event at Osborne, we only scheduled two other forays in this autumn's programme.

Sunday 19th September Martin's Wood, Newchurch

A group of twelve of us met in the carpark alongside Newchurch primary school for our first foray of the season. The weather had been very dry and we were not optimistic of finding very much. It was a surprise therefore to be able to record 31 different taxa. This included remarkable quantities of Death Cap fungi, several bracket fungi and a couple of Milkcap species. Despite the dry weather, it turned out to be quite damp during our visit, so I didn't take any photos.

Sunday 21st November Northwood Cemetery

Our final foray of the season was attended by around thirty people. We were blessed with dry, sunny weather and spectacular shows of fungi. Northwood Cemetery is known to be an excellent place to see colourful waxcap fungi and other grassland species but I have never seen such a splendid display as we were treated to on this occasion. For example, the Pink or Ballerina Waxcap, a species for which the UK seems to be a stronghold, is usually found here in ones or twos. This time we found groups of them in several locations (see below). The biggest and perhaps the showiest of the waxcaps, the Crimson Waxcap, *Hygrocybe punicea*, was present in large quantities (see below).

In addition to colourful waxcaps, we found a variety of grassland club and coral fungi. One of these, Hairy Earthtongue, *Trichoglossum hirsutum*, had a white mould growing on it called *Hypomyces papullasporae*, which was new to the Island. Two of the rare specialities of the site were present in good quantity. These were the Olive Earthtongue, *Microglossum olivaceum*, with striking turquoise stalks, and the violet coral, *Clavaria zollingeri*.

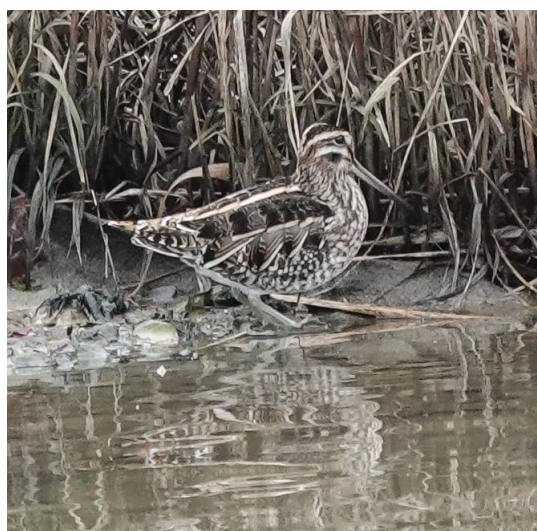




In addition to these, we found unusual numbers of Slender Parasols, *Macrolepiota mastoidea*, and a ring of Beaked Earthstar, *Geastrum pectinatum*, in their usual location beneath conifers. In total, we recorded 59 species.

In addition to these foray events, three other impromptu mini-forays were arranged where some good finds were made.

Colin Pope



Snipe at Hersey Reserve (Jim Baldwin). There were five individuals in the photo in the Bird Report.



Working hard on our fungus foray at Osborne House.

SOCIETY OFFICERS:-

President Matthew Chatfield, 2 Somerville, 17 East Hill Road, Ryde, IOW PO33 1LU
General Secretary Dr. Colin Pope, 14 High Park Rd, Ryde, IOW PO33 1BP
Treasurer Mr Nigel Locke, 81 New Road, Brading, IOW PO36 0AG
Membership Secretary Mrs T. Goodley, 15 The Lawns, Fairlee Rd, Newport, IOW PO30 2PT

Society Address :-

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

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

NEXT BULLETIN

Please send any items for inclusion in the next Bulletin, and Reports of any Meetings for 1st January 2022 to 30th June 2022 to:

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

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 2nd July 2022

Bulletin Editor: Colin Pope, colinrpop@gmail.com



Rough seas off Wheeler's Bay on 31st October. Photo: Andy Butler