



Bulletin

August 2024

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President's Address

At our AGM in March, we were delighted to elect Vivian Roberts as our new President for the Society. Here Vivian tells us something about herself.

I was born in Buckinghamshire and lived in a house with a view overlooking the Chiltern Hills. I remember as a child being grumpy because mother had asked me to cycle the mile and a half to the grocers in Little Chalfont because she needed more supplies such as sugar. By the time I cycled back I was always in a better mood just looking at the beautiful Chilterns and the fields and woods – even as a ten year old, I



was conscious that the countryside moved me. We had an acre of garden, mostly lawn, and my main memory is of Starlings and Blackbirds on the lawn. I have been at Haseley Manor for 23 years now and I have never seen a Starling on the lawn, though there is a flock sometimes to be seen up our lane and they did breed here this year for the first time for many years. Skylarks and Lapwings also were a common sight in the field opposite where we used to glean straw for our chickens - where have they all gone? I pressed flowers as a child and used to be quite knowledgeable but like many things, the knowledge has faded. As a teenager and student, I was lucky enough to have a brother interested in archaeology and I hitchhiked widely with him in Greece and the Near East, in the days when there were few tourists around in those parts and we went round every graeco-roman remains within reach. I then met and married Anthony during my GP training and then worked in many

different parts of the country landing up in North Bucks as Anthony was appointed Plastic Surgeon at Stoke Mandeville in 1985. Over the 52 years of marriage to Anthony, much of his interest in natural history, and birds particularly, has rubbed off on me and I have been happy to travel all over the world with him, always with the most important part of the luggage being our Zwarowski binoculars.

Since retiring here to the Island and Haseley Manor in 2001, Anthony has developed the Haseley Nature Reserve of about 25 acres of lakes and woodland and it has been fascinating to see it develop over the last 22 years. Anthony rings regularly here with his loyal and enthusiastic team of ringers and trainees. To see a kingfisher in the hand is something special. 121 species of birds have been seen, with 49 species breeding and 90 species have been ringed including the first Little Bunting on the Island. Colin and Jillie Pope have found 22 species of fungi. Ian Outlaw is regularly moth trapping here and has recorded 438 species and David and Hazel Trevan have surveyed the flowers. Eight species of reptiles and amphibians and 25 species of mammals, including eight species of bat, have been surveyed. If anyone is interested in doing any other or repeat surveys, do please let us know.

I can't say I am full of knowledge about natural history but will certainly do my best to promote it on the Island and hope to meet many of you over the next 2 or 3 years. It would be very good if we could get more of the school children involved as well, as they are the future -I have to say that our 2 grown- up daughters are less than enthusiastic natural historians but we are hoping to get their children more enthusiastic, though because they do not live on the Island, they are not here very often!

Dr Vivian Roberts

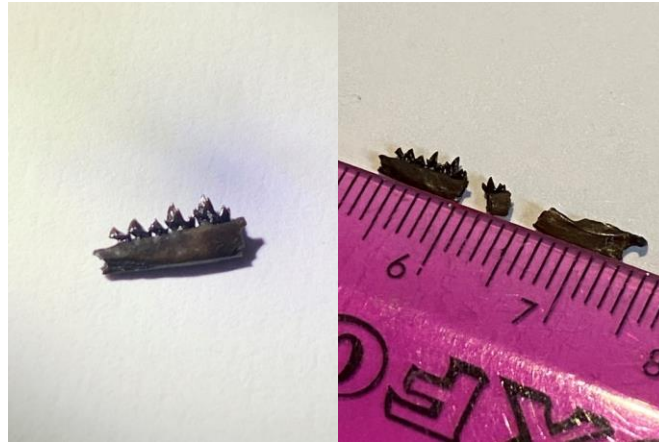
More Ramblings from Andy Yule

5th June 2023. Picture this, the foreshore at Barton Manor. Two old fogies stumble about attempting to dig out a mix of heavy clay and bones. It's like a Laurel & Hardy film, only with two Laurels due to us both being skinny. I am digging with Jerry Hooker, from the Natural History Museum – the man to go to for all things fossil mammal related. Nothing is easy. As we dig, the hole fills up with muddy water, so we can't see what we are digging. We slip and slide, struggling as we dig. Eventually, we manage to fill two carrier bags each. We are expecting bones of crocodile and turtle and hoping for mammals. Jerry starts loading two bags into his rucksack and I wash the tools. Agh! His rucksack is way too heavy to carry with two bags of clay, he can't even lift it! We each remove one bag. We now have to carry the spoils, a bag each, the 500 yards back to his car. It takes about 20 minutes! By the time we walk the 500 yards back to the dig, the tide has crept in further, making things even more difficult. Luckily, we are able to pick up the two remaining bags and tools and walk the 500 yards back to load up. It's not so easy and both of us are worn out!

Jerry takes his samples back home with him to the mainland and I take my bags back home to Cowes. I lay the contents in plastic trays to dry, leaving them for a few months. Taking a small quantity at a time, I soak, rinse and sieve then slowly pick through the residue. There are the usual finds, bits of turtle and fish, several crocodile teeth and maybe a dozen rodent molars all them either rolled or have been eaten and half digested.

On **29th December 2023**, I pick out a small piece of mammal jaw containing five pointed teeth and they all look perfect. I got my niece to take pictures on her mobile and send to Jerry Hooker. Message came back "Ooh, *Nyctithere* lower jaw."

I go back to the shed rinse and sieve more samples, a couple of days to dry and then I pick through and find a piece of jaw with no teeth, it's the back end where it joins the skull. Sadly, it doesn't fit to my original find. Back to the shed – a few hours later I pick out another small piece of jaw with a molar which happily fits between the two. Next day my niece takes the picture and we send it to Jerry.



Here is Jerry's reply: "It's a very nice *Nyctithere* lower jaw. I think it's either *Scraeva hatherwoodensis* or *Cheilonyctia*. Awesome! The differences are subtle and depend partly on size and details of the lower molars, which I'm not sure I can see on your photos. Orientation makes a difference too. The former may be more likely as this is the species of which you found a jaw before from the site. Whichever of these two species it is, it's the most complete piece of lower jaw showing all the premolars together with the first molar! It's odd that some things in this bed, which are so fragile, have survived intact, whereas others like many of the rodent teeth are badly worn and eroded. Even if some of the erosion/etching has been caused by predators' stomach juices, subsequent abrasion has been superimposed on it. I think this must be because the former are indigenous to the clay bed, (i.e. where they were originally deposited), whereas the latter have been reworked from the underlying calcareous sandstone into the clay bed long after being fossilized within the underlying sandstone. If the worn teeth are not from the base of the clay bed but higher within it, it's possible that a sandstone was being eroded following local uplift, somewhere else, probably not that far away, but not actually at Barton".

January 2024. Jerry managed to glue the pieces together, here is the end result:



Update: 5th June 2024 Jerry and I return to Barton. He now thinks the *Nyctithere* jaw is neither of the two species mentioned originally, but it appears to be transitional between these two species. Further investigation and scans to follow.

Spring 2024

I've been visiting the shore at Sticeletts looking for fossil insects throughout the Spring with a couple of visits to Elmsworth. On one such visit **21st March** due to weather, all rocks were wet and muddy. I brought

back a couple of likely looking rocks, about hand sized, to dry. One had nothing in it, but the other piece? Well, it had a pretty insect in it. It looks like an Ichneumon. Martin Munt kindly took this picture on his mobile from an image projected onto a screen using a microscope. Not ideal but not a bad image.



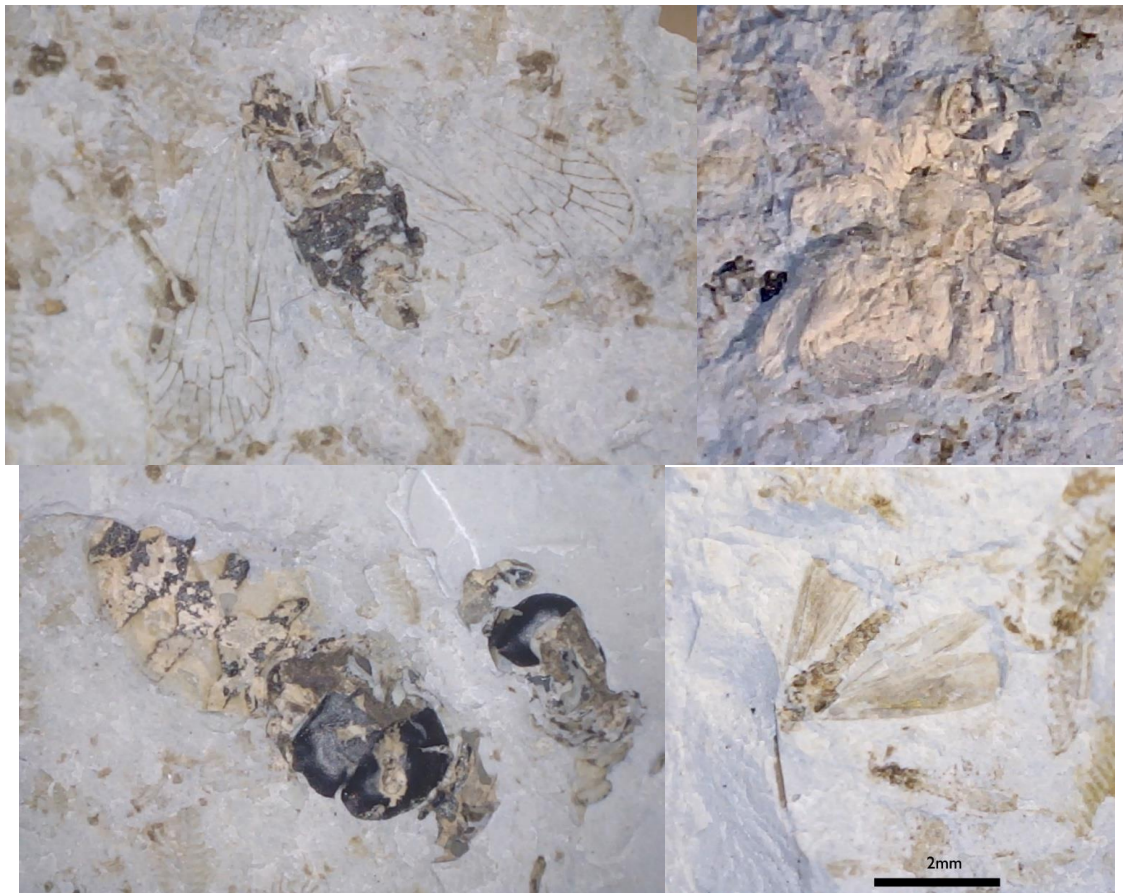
7th May 2024. I visit Sticeletts, I'd been there on the 4th and saw a large chunk of insect stone half buried in the sand. I only had a bag that day, so no way could I carry it back. Today I've got the sack truck and tubs. I hauled the stone from the sand and silt then wash off the sand and mud. Mmm, it's a bit on the big side – can I get it in the tub? I reckon so. I gave it a severe looking at! OK and lift! “Agh” I pop a disc in my lower back. I did manage to get the rock in the tub but how can I get it home? I struggle up to where my jacket is over a tree stump. I find a blister pack of pain killers – they have probably been in my pocket for five years! I swallow two with water and sit on the sand with my back against the base of the cliff. I sat for some 20 minutes pondering the usefulness of a mobile phone that sits on the window sill in the kitchen “Pillock”! Yes, the pain eased and I stand and drag the truck with the rock off the shore. I manage to get to Hillis Corner, have a sit down and take another out-of-date pill. I am about halfway up Pallance Road when a big old van pulled up in front of me. Turned out to be a guy I worked with, underpinning in 1991. He put the rock, tub, trucks and me into the van and took me home! A very uncomfortable couple of nights followed but with hot water bottles and walking as much as I could, the pain eased. A few days later, I split a few bits off the rock. I then tap along a definite line on the rock – a bedding plane and yes, I had shrimp and insects. In one piece of rock I find 2 Soldier flies, an inch apart and between them a spider.

11th May 2024. An early start, I had a coffee at 5.00 a.m. got my gear ready, and my nephew Pete took me out to Whippance Farm. 5.30 a.m. I walk to Mr Peach's hut – shoes off, wellingtons on then on to the shore. I pull out three large head sized rocks. I trundle them to the hut where my shoes are, unload and go and get an even larger rock, strap it the sack truck – so no lifting and wheel it back. I remembered to bring the mobile phone so just have to remember how to make it work! I did like ET and phoned home. My nephew came out to get me and the rocks etc and home by 8.00 a.m. The following day the rocks are drying. On Monday 13th May, it felt cold. I had to put a cardy on, I split a couple of small rocks – nice spider and a soldier fly with colour on abdomen. Thought I'd take a couple of them to Dinosaur Isle the following day, but when I got up, I felt cold and sneezy – I did a Covid test – Positive – won't be going anywhere!

16th May 2024. Split a piece of rock 5” x 5” got it down to about 4” thick. I tap along seam, tap, tap along all sides – find 5 soldier flies. Most have colour on abdomens and under a good magnifying glass you can make out their compound eyes. On one piece I split, later I find insects and shrimps – there must be about 30 insects on it.

17th May 2024. Feeling a lot better, sat up in shed take a large rock and I smote a chunk off it, took as much off as I could then tap along the seam. It parts on a bedding plane of shrimps. I know that I go “Wow” a bit too much, but “Wow” – a soldier fly and superb spider – it has markings on its body.

These are a selection of these recent finds which are yet to be identified yet. My grateful thanks to Colin Palmer for the photographs.



25th May 2024. Left home at 5 a.m. on a pretty morning. 70 minutes to walk out Sticlets to Pete Peach's hut where again I shed my shoes and don my wellies. It was a calm peaceful sunny morning, not exactly quiet though for two Cuckoos were trying to "out Cuckoo" one another. I hadn't heard a cuckoo for a few years and now here's two of them. I went on down to the shore. It was, for me, perfect. 6.15 a.m. and no one but me on the shore.

Andy Yule

Footnote: Please be aware that Barton is a private beach and Andy and Jerry Hooker were given special permission from the owners to dig.

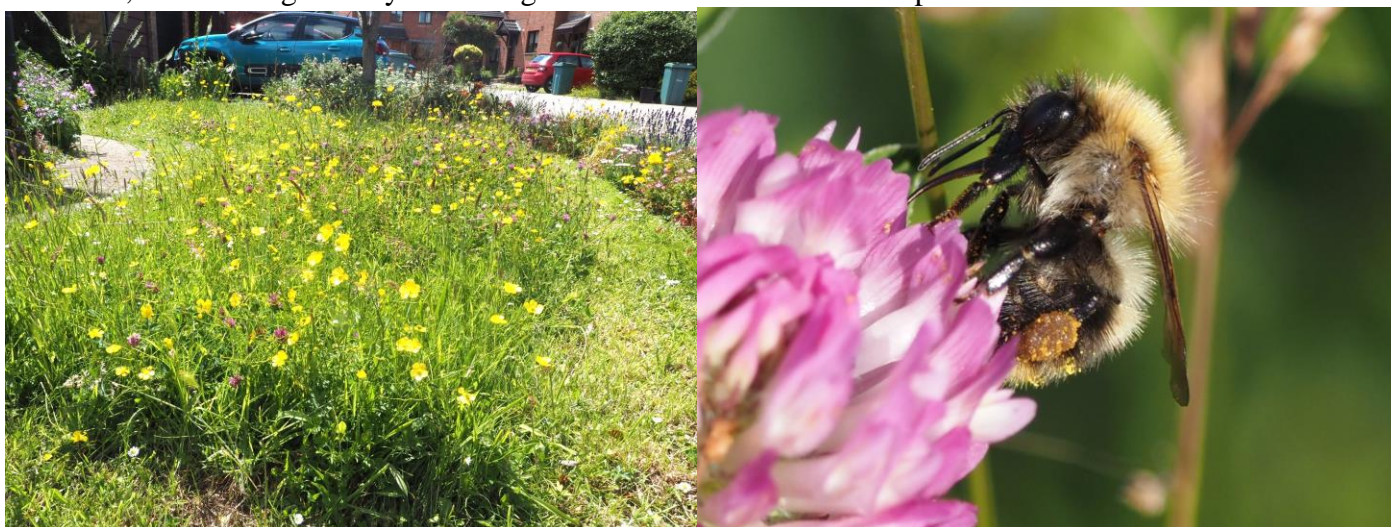
'Wild flower mixes' are increasingly being used to 'brighten up' our countryside. Battalions of poppies, cornflowers and ox-eye daisies are springing up in parks and on roadside verges, frequently mixed in with a variety of non-native showy annuals. Often, they are well meaningly used to compensate for the loss of nectar sources in the landscape. Although these sown areas can look attractive to our eyes, the species selected tend to favour showiness over value to insects and, as summer progresses they can look scruffy and attract complaints. On the other hand, Plantlife's 'No-Mow May' is a simple, neat idea which requires no particular expertise but can bring immediate benefits as described here by Keith and Anne Marston.

No-Mow May

"No Mow May" is Plantlife's annual campaign, begun in 2019, not to mow green spaces during May, thus allowing the grass and wild plants to grow taller so that they flower and set seed. It seems to have taken off all across the Island this year and the sound of mowers and trimmers has been less intrusive during early summer. Pockets of flowery meadows buzzing with insects, have injected splashes of colour back to our roadside verges and gardens in the residential areas.

We have a fairly small lawn at both the front and back of the house in a modern housing estate, constructed in 1995, when the lawn was laid. We haven't mown our lawns, with the exception of a strip about half a

metre wide around the edge, during May (and even June and July) since at least 2012. The trimmed edge gives the appearance of the garden being tended, and the lawn is surrounded by a colourful display of perennial geraniums, poppies, foxgloves and small shrubs. We have listed the plants which have flowered over time, and this is gradually increasing both in terms of number of species and the area covered.



Early in May, the Dandelion provides a food source for early insects including Peacock butterflies emerging from hibernation and the seed attracts Goldfinches.

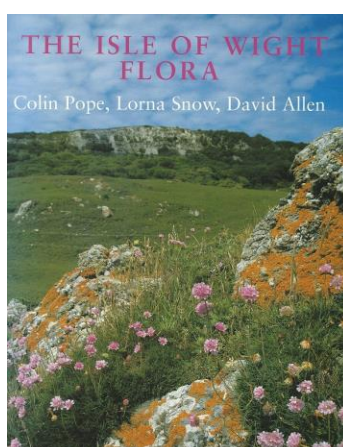
Red Clover and White Clover, when left uncut and allowed to flower, provide both pollen and nectar, a vital forage resource for bees later in the month and into June (*Common Carder Bee on Red Clover, above*). Tall flowering grasses support a range of insects, including butterflies such as Marbled White and the skippers.

What do passers-by think about leaving areas uncut? The grass flower heads are particularly attractive in the early morning and late evening light, especially if ruffled by a light breeze. If we're in the front garden, we often receive complimentary comments from passers-by, and, as for the neighbours, the rest of the terrace has taken up the idea too!

Keith & Anne Marston

The Isle of Wight Flora

The Society published the Isle of Wight Flora in 2003. It received excellent reviews and sold very quickly. As well as descriptions of all plants ever recorded on the Island, there are chapters on geology, climate, paleoecology, and historic botanists. Almost all copies have been sold and it is now quite difficult to get hold of. The BSBI has now kindly made the Flora available as an e-book to download. If you are interested, you can find details on the BSBI website (<https://bsbi.org/publications/ebooks/the-isle-of-wight-flora>).





iWatch is the Society's Recording Project

It's been a mixed year so far in terms of wildlife recording with flowering plants seeming to be doing well – in fact, it's been a fantastic year for foxgloves and pretty good for orchids, however other groups such as birds and insects – perhaps not so much. This has been reflected in some of the flagship species which we champion: Hedgehogs - with only small number reported to date, and the lowest number of Stag Beetle records collected since iWatchWildlife began in 2017.

There are likely to be several factors involved – perhaps observations aren't finding their way through to us, a wet and chilly Spring, a changeable Summer? However, there's no denying that some species are becoming harder to find, or at least this year. Though worrying, it means that wildlife recording is more important than ever, so please do keep exploring, looking and sharing your observations with us. Remember, the Society holds and maintains the IW Species Database and we rely on volunteer records to update the system and keep the data current. Your records are valuable. Not only do they help monitor species, they can also inform and influence conservation and planning policies, and aid study and research. Your records are also fed into national wildlife survey schemes contributing to the bigger picture – keep them coming!

Species of the Month / Year



We continue with our regular 'Species of the Month' campaign. Since the last Bulletin, we have featured Frogs, Toads & Spawn, Hare, Adder, Hedgehog, Stag Beetle, Great Green Bush-Cricket and from August onwards: Tiger Moths, Kingfisher, Curlew, Wax Caps and Mistletoe. Alongside this, Frogs and Toads are our 'Species of the Year' throughout 2024 for which we would welcome your records.

Frogs (Melanie Parr), Toad (Ian Whitmore), Spawn (Keith Marston) / March – Hare by Nick Edwards / April – Adder by Mike Cotterill / May – Hedgehog by Graham Hendy / June – Stag Beetles PTES / July – Great Green Bush Cricket by Allan Jackson / August – Tiger Moths / Sept – Kingfisher by Keith Marston / October – Curlew by Jim Baldwin / November – Wax Caps / Dec – Mistletoe

Events

June proved to be a very busy month for us with three events falling within one week! On Saturday 29th June we supported the first IW BioBlitz to take place for several years. The event was hosted by The National Trust with surveying being carried out over a significant area of the Dunsbury Estate. The event kicked off the previous evening with moth trapping and continued right through to the close of play the following day. There was a fantastic turnout of Recorders bringing a wealth of expertise for which we are very grateful. At the time of writing the tally stands at 191, however, this will rise once all results are verified and collated. The site was intensively farmed up until 2015 and since has been evolving to a more wildlife-rich landscape farmed more sustainably – so all things considered, it was a decent result.



Hot on the heels of the BioBlitz was the inaugural IW Biosphere Festival held the following weekend 29th/30th June Island-wide. The Society was well represented across the weekend with iWatch attending a family nature day at Branstone where we carried out recording of the ponds, woodland, grassland and hedgerows onsite. The same evening, we supported a ‘Swifts of Newport’ walk in the evening led by Caroline Dudley Member and co-ordinator of the IW Swift Box Scheme. Other Society Members also led events with a local nature theme across the weekend including ‘The Nature of Newport’ walk with Matthew Chatfield and ‘A Witness to Change – St. Mary’s Church’ with Richard Smout which included exploring the natural history of the churchyard.

Once again, we warmly thank all our Recorders, Team iWatch Volunteers and Society Members for all their efforts and support.

Tina Whitmore

Contact details: iwatchwildlife@gmail.com Facebook: @iWatchWildlife Instagram: #iwatchwildlife

Isle of Wight Swift Box Scheme 2024 – helping the Island’s nesting Swifts

Some later-nesting Swifts will still have young in August but others will have finished breeding during the second half of July and headed back to overwintering grounds in central and south-east Africa. These incredible birds stay with us for a comparatively short time but they are a quintessential part of summer, treating us to spectacular aerial acrobatics over our towns and villages and zipping low over the rooftops in exuberant screaming parties.

Swifts nest high in roofs and walls of older buildings, which they access through narrow gaps and holes. Sadly, the population has declined by over 50% since the year 2000 as these gaps and holes are filled in during renovation and the birds, which are extremely site faithful, lose their homes. Sometimes, the older buildings they nest in are demolished and replaced with modern structures. Modern building techniques, which include the installation of plastic fascias and soffits, do not provide the access holes that the birds need.

To try to help stem the decline of Swifts here on the Isle of Wight, the IWNHAS set up the IW Swift Box Scheme in 2022 in collaboration with Hampshire Swifts, who had already been making and installing Swift boxes in Hampshire since 2016 and agreed to install boxes on the Island as well. The scheme is co-ordinated by iWatch Wildlife, thanks to funding from Isle of Wight National Landscape.

Caroline Dudley joined Tina on the iWatch Wildlife team this year to provide publicity for the scheme and carry out a large part of the co-ordination between interested parties on the Island and Tim Norriss of Hampshire Swifts.

Publicity was generated in the form of articles for the local *Island Magazines*, the Isle of Wight Ornithological Group newsletter and on the Facebook group Wight Swifts. In addition, a window display on Swifts and the nestbox scheme was produced for the Newport & Carisbrooke Community Council Hub at 64

High Street, Newport, over 2nd–8th April. Grateful thanks are due to the Newport & Carisbrooke Community Council for allowing us to use the space for free. Further publicity was generated by the Council's post about the display on Facebook.



Left: Tim Norriss (holding the ladder) and Roger Maynard of Hampshire Swifts installing a double nestbox on Quay House in Newport in April 2024. *Middle:* The window display at the Newport & Carisbrooke Community Hub, 64 High Street, Newport in April 2024. *Right:* Participants on the Swift Walk organised as part of the IW Biosphere Festival on 29th June 2024 being shown a Swift nest site in the apex of an old building in Newport.

This is the third year of the scheme and it would not be possible without the huge efforts and expertise of the group Hampshire Swifts, particularly Tim Norriss and Roger Maynard, who make the boxes and visit the Island once or twice a year to install them. This year their main visit was between 17th and 19th April and they installed an amazing total of 42 single boxes and 11 double boxes, which will provide 64 new nesting spaces for Swifts. The majority of the boxes were installed on houses but we were very pleased this year that two public buildings at Newport Quay both had a double nestbox. Tim and Roger are planning to return later this year for a daytrip to install boxes on another nine properties that were on the list but for one reason or another couldn't have them installed in the spring.

A Swift walk around Newport town centre was arranged for 29th June as part of the first IW Biosphere Festival and to coincide with the national Swift Awareness Week (29th June to 7th July). A group of 17 people, assisted by five helpers in hi-vis, were shown a range of nest sites from nestboxes to gaps in the soffits and roofs of shops and offices as well as screaming parties. The life cycle and plight of Swifts as they lose their traditional nesting spaces through renovation and demolition of buildings was explained and how to participate in the IW Swift Box Scheme.

A couple of listed churches have expressed an interest in having boxes this year but providing nestboxes for these is more complex as they need to be made specifically to fit the space and would require several trips across the Solent for Tim and Roger, all of which would be time-consuming and costly. We are currently seeking a way whereby we can use Tim and Roger's expertise initially but have the boxes made and fitted by volunteers on the Island. Boxes are due to be installed on Cowes Baptist Church later this year, however, as these can be placed externally and don't have to be hidden away in the tower or under the roof overhang as with most Grade-II listed churches.

We are pleased to announce that Hampshire Swifts have confirmed that they are happy to visit the Island again in 2025 to install more nestboxes. To register an interest in having a nestbox, please e-mail iwswifts@gmail.com.

Caroline Dudley

iWatch Wildlife would also like to thank the IW Local Records Centre and IW National Landscape for funding to enable the continuation of the iWatch Wildlife project.

Birds in Spring



Top left: Dartford Warbler taking food to nestlings, Limerstone Down Keith Marston; Top right: Recently fledged Long-eared Owl on Afton Down Paul Davies; Bottom: Reed Warbler and fledglings, Brading Marshes Mike Cotterill

Coastal Erosion

We are going through an unprecedented period of coastal erosion. Andy Butler has photographed some of these changes around Ventnor.



Left: Surface cliff falls, Wheeler's Bay



Right: Bonchurch landslide



Left: The massive landslide at Bonchurch Landslip from Leeson Road, 5th February. Andy Butler. Right: An engraving of Bonchurch Landslip from H. Englefield (1816). At the time, Bonchurch Landslip was described as ‘an impressive jumble of greensand boulders’.

Andy's Nature Notes: January to June 2024

January

- 1st. Chiffchaff in my garden.
- 2nd. A Peacock butterfly in the garden.
- 3rd. A male Kingfisher on Bonchurch Pond.
- 5th. 3 Goldcrests and the Kingfisher by the pond.
- 6th. A Grey Heron catching fish at low tide along the revetment.
- 7th. 2 Stonechats along the revetment.
- 8th. Very cold and sleet showers.
- 10th. A ringed Ringed Plover along the revetment. Sent the info to Jim Baldwin who found out it was ringed by Graham Giddens at Needs Oar Point on 3rd June 2023, it was a year-old male. Seen on 11th November 2023 at Bembridge by Ian Giles.
- 11th. The Ringed Plover has been joined by another unringed one.
- 19th. There are now 4 Ringed Plovers along the revetment plus male and female Stonechats. A Red Admiral at the back of the house and a pair of Blackcaps in the garden.
- 20th. 5 Rock Pipits along the revetment and the female Stonechat caught a large caterpillar.
- 24th. A *Mompha* species moth on the inside of my bedroom window. A Grey Wagtail on Bonchurch Pond.
- 27th. An Oystercatcher in Wheelers Bay.
- 28th. The Kingfisher, a Buzzard and a Heron on Bonchurch Pond. A very warm almost Springlike day.
- 30th. Blackcaps in the garden.
- 31st A male and 2 female Stonechats along the revetment. 5 Long-tailed Tits on the garden feeder.



Top left: Ringed Plovers at Wheeler's Bay, one ringed; Top right: Kingfisher at Bonchurch pond; Bottom left: Female Stonechat with caterpillar; Bottom right: Long-tailed Tit at Bonchurch pond

February

2nd. 15 Red-throated Divers heading west at 15.00 hrs off Wheelers bay.

3rd. A Firecrest on Bonchurch Pond.

12th. A Red Admiral and a male Brimstone back of Bonchurch Pond.

16th. 3 Glanville Fritillary webs along the revetment.

18th. 2 Brimstones by Bonchurch Pond. The long staying Kingfisher appears to have gone now after contractors cleared fallen trees in and around the pond. A Humming-bird Hawkmoth (HBHM). flying round the pond.

19th. A lot of surface cliff falls along the revetment this winter, more than I have ever seen throughout my lifetime.

20th. A Firecrest at Bonchurch Pond.

29th. Days and days of cold, wet weather. It has been so bad that it hasn't been worth going out. Just starting to improve now.



Left: Firecrest at Bonchurch pond; Right: Heron fishing in Wheeler's Bay

March

2nd. A Chiffchaff in the garden this afternoon. It was a migrant probably as it had pollen on its forehead.

3rd. 3 Oystercatchers in the Bay and a sunny, warm day.

6th. A Little Egret on the rocks in Wheeler's Bay.

10th. 2 Wheatears along at Binnel Bay. 7 Glanville webs along the revetment (seen with Dave Nordell).

13th. A Bloxworth Snout moth by my back door. 2 HBHM in the garden.

16th. A Large White and a Comma in the garden.

23rd. First Bee Fly of the year in the garden, a *Bombylius major*.

24th. A male Wheatear along the revetment.

30th. 8 Peacock butterflies and one HBHM along the revetment. 4 Bee Flies in the garden.

31st. 42 Brent Geese close in off home heading east.



Top left: Chiffchaff in garden; *Top right:* Bloxworth Snout in garden; *Bottom left:* Hummingbird Hawkmoth in garden; *Bottom right:* Wheatear at Bonchurch

April

2nd. A HBHM in the garden.

5th. One HBHM and 4 Oystercatchers along the revetment.

9th. A Rose Chafer in the garden and the first Spotted Bee fly, *Bombylius discolor*.

10th. Went over to Laundry Lane with Pete Campbell, not much about only 2 Egyptian Geese and the usual Marsh Harriers and Cetti's Warbler.

12th. Visited Yarmouth railway track with my son David in the morning. Saw an Osprey over the Mill Pool, which was nice. A Green-veined White in the garden.

12th. Holly Blues and Orange Tips in the garden regularly now.

14th. A Black Redstart in the garden and two Wheatears along the revetment.

15th. Two Common Sandpipers on the rocks in Wheeler's Bay.

16th. One Large Red Damselfly, three Orange Tips, one Large White, one Small White and two Holly Blues in the garden.

18th. Over to Laundry Lane with Pete. We saw six Wood Sandpipers (the most I've ever seen), one Greenshank and two White-tailed Eagles attacking a Great Egret, a sight you would never have thought to see on the Isle of Wight!

19th. Back to Bembridge with Pete and saw 4 Common Sandpipers by St. Helens' Sluice.

20th. Pete and I went to Atherfield reservoir and saw a Green Sandpiper and a single Common Sandpiper.

21st A HBHM along the revetment.

23rd. A Meal Moth in my front room.

24th. A Kingfisher on the groyne by Wheelers Bay. A Glanville caterpillar on the revetment walkway.

27th. A Whimbrel close in off Wheelers Bay and a Common Sandpiper along at Monk's Bay, Bonchurch.

28th. A Wheatear on the boathouse roof in front of my house and 2 Whimbrel close in off the Bay. 2 Chiffchaffs, one Willow Warbler, 3 Orange Tips and a Small White in the garden.

29th. 5 Wheatears on the rocks in front of my house early am.



Wood Sandpipers at Bembridge



Left: Osprey at Yarmouth;



Right: Orange Tip in garden

May

1st. Grey Seal close in off Wheelers Bay. Not Ron! A Silver y moth along the revetment.

4th. A Little Egret fishing on the rocks in the Bay.

6th. Went to Atherfield with Pete in the late afternoon to see 6 Avocets in a pool near the road. There were 2 Egyptian Geese with them as well. 6 Swifts over home early am. A Common Sandpiper round in Ventnor Bay seen by my son David.

7th. 3 Cinnamon Bugs and 2 *Eurydema ornata* shieldbugs in the garden. A Rusty-dot Pearl moth as well. A shoal of Bass off the revetment close in.

8th. A Bloxworth Snout moth in the porch at home.

9th. First Common Blue and Wall along the revetment. 3 Common Sandpipers on the groyne in the Bay plus one at Bonchurch later. Another Bass shoal all morning off the revetment.

11th. Two Common Sandpipers and 2 White Wagtails in Monk's Bay. 3 *E.ornata* and 2 Pyramidal Orchids in the garden.

12th. The first Glanville Fritillary emerged today along the revetment.

14th. At 09.30 saw a White-tailed Eagle high over Ventnor drifting slowly south west. A freshly emerged female Common Blue in the garden and another Glanville Fritillary along the revetment.

15th. Nine Glanvilles, four Painted Lady, one Dingy Skipper, one Small Copper, c.20 Red Admirals, c.25 Silver y and two Common Blue all along the revetment. Five Red Admirals and eight Silver y in the garden.

16th. Ron seal in Wheelers Bay early am. Plenty of butterflies about at the moment including Orange Tips, plus HBHM.

17th. An Azure Damselfly in the garden pond.

19th. Five Bottle-nosed Dolphins off home heading east. They were a fair way out.

20th. An adult, summer plumaged Dunlin along the revetment. It took no notice of people walking by and only flew off when a dog flushed it. Dave and I did a count of Glanvilles behind the revetment and logged 41 which is pretty good for along there. Sea Campion in bloom by Monk's Bay toilets. Two Rose Chafers in the garden.

25th. Another count of Glanvilles and got 42 this time. 2 Grey Seals in close off Wheelers Bay. The two Ronnies! Large Bass shoals reported in Chale Bay.

27th. 25 Bee Orchids on the bank just to the west of my house.

29th. 2 Glanvilles in the garden.



Top: Avocets at Atherfield; Bottom left: Bee Fly, *Bombylius major*, in garden; Bottom right: Iris Weevil, *Mononychus punctumalbum*.

June

- 7th. A yellow form of Ivy Broomrape, *Orobanche hederæ form monochroa* at the back of the revetment. I have never seen this before. 9 Glanvilles along Bonchurch Down seen by my son David.
- 10th. 7 Pyramidal Orchids in my garden. There are now six spikes of the yellow Broomrape.
- 11th. A Sandwich Tern in the Bay.
- 14th. A medium size Grey Seal in close off Wheelers Bay swimming west in the breakers.
- 15th. Round the Island Yacht Race today. Quite rough and only 154 finished out of 900 starters. Good views from home.
- 16th. Lots of ladybird larvae on a single Tree Mallow that had lots of ladybirds on it earlier on along the revetment.
- 17th. 8 Glanvilles, 9 Common Blue and one Dingy Skipper along the revetment.
- 18th. A Brown House Moth on the bedroom window.
- 20th. A Common Darter dragonfly along the revetment. 8 orchids in my garden now.
- 23rd. 2 Glanvilles, 2 Marbled Whites and 8 Common Blues along the revetment.
- 28th. Ron (seal) close in off the revetment near Bonchurch.
- 29th. Pete and I went to a private reservoir at Atherfield this morning. Saw 2 Red-veined Darters which probably emerged there rather than being migrants. Plus c.30 Black-tailed Skimmers, 8 Emperor Dragonflies and also a first for the year Gatekeeper butterfly. A male Emperor Dragonfly along the revetment in the afternoon.
- 30th. A Sandwich Tern off home followed by the Red Arrows later in the afternoon!



Left: Ivy Broomrape *f. monochroa* Wheeler's Bay; Right: Round the Island Yacht Race

Andy Butler

General Meetings

Saturday 10 February Butterflies, Birds and Flowers of Bulgaria by Ian Pratt

It is many years since Ian took us on a virtual tour of the beautiful island of Reunion, in the Indian Ocean, where his son was teaching on Voluntary Service Overseas, but I still recall the photographs he showed us of the varied and dramatic landscapes and the wildlife he encountered there. And so, when Ian Pratt offered to give us a talk about the butterflies of Bulgaria, I knew that we were in for a visual treat. Ian began by explaining how the British Bulgarian Society organises wildlife holidays in Bulgaria and Northern Greece and that he went on several trips with them between 2018 and 2023.

Bulgaria is situated in south-eastern Europe, on the Black Sea coast. It is a country of sharp contrasts, from the iconic skyscrapers of its capital city, Sofia, to the traditional horse-and-cart means of transport in the countryside. Bulgaria has a big port on the Black Sea and two major ski resorts. It has many newly-built churches, as well as old churches with wall paintings and icons. There is some fine scenery: dramatic peaks, capped with snow even in summer, lakes, and rivers plunging through deep gorges. Yet, as he explored the country, Ian saw a different reality – many derelict buildings and fly-tipping in the countryside.

He showed us slides of these contrasting landscapes, and of some of the wildlife that he observed. Over a hundred species of butterfly have been recorded in Bulgaria. There are even butterflies on the ski-runs in summer. In the wildflower meadows, Ian photographed a meadow of field cow wheat, which only grows in one place in Britain, on the Isle of Wight, wild red peonies and yellow irises. There are many species of wild orchid, including ploughshare, early spider and wood cop bee orchid.

Bulgaria is rich in amphibian and reptile species – such as wild tortoise, marsh frog, Eastern green lizard, Balkan green lizard, dice snake, smooth snake and leopard snake.

The birds Ian photographed include Red Kites, Spotted Flycatcher and Black-eyed Wheatear. And on Lake Kokeini, he recorded Dalmatian Pelican, White Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Marsh Harrier, Red-backed Shrike, and Squacco Heron.

But the highlight of the trips for Ian were the butterflies in their great diversity. He showed us close-up photographs of long-tailed blue, oriental marbled skipper, brown argus, large tortoiseshell, clouded apollo with red dots, southern white admiral, little tiger blue, Freya's purple emperor, Queen of Spain, eastern festoon, southern festoon, twin-spot fritillary, scarce copper, false eros blue, arran brown, lesser fiery copper and common swallowtail. We saw silver-studded blues and Glanville fritillaries mating, a yellow-banded skipper ovipositing, and green-veined whites flocking together to get salt from the earth. There was the marsh fritillary, found in Dorset and Hampshire, the heath fritillary, found in North Kent and Devon, the scarce swallowtail, which often loses its tail in dog-fights, a black-veined white and an apollo on knapweed, a very beautiful Cynthia's fritillary, only found at high altitude, and a magnificent blue purple emperor.

Bulgaria is situated where east meets west so butterflies come from both directions on their migrations. It is also a great place to watch migrating birds. There are three national parks and other protected areas, and just over a third of the land is protected by European Union law.

A major threat to wildlife habitats and spectacular landscapes in Bulgaria comes from one of the ten Pan-European Corridors constructed in recent decades, the Via Carpathia, linking Lithuania in the north to Thessalonica in the south, through Bulgaria, with branches leading to the Black Sea coast.

Going on an organized trip, you gain from the local knowledge of the guides and make the most of the time you have, Ian told us. And his multitude of wildlife photographs is testimony to this. We thanked Ian for his beautiful photography and most informative talk.

Maggie Nelmes

9th March Gift to Nature, a talk by Graham Biss, Managing Director of Natural Enterprise.

Since 2002, Natural Enterprise has created and managed a variety of green spaces, both in towns and in the countryside, across the Isle of Wight. In 2016, the Isle of Wight Council handed over most of its countryside estate to Natural Enterprise, which added considerably to its existing Gift to Nature sites. The sites vary from wide open spaces, such as Brading Down, to small urban areas. All are important to people.

Like Wight Nature Fund before it, Natural Enterprise's remit was to protect green areas which could be vulnerable to unsuitable development, for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy. Graham said, "*We are putting community and business together and trying to find the right balance. We try to do what is in the best interests of the Island community, try to make the Island better for residents and tourists, and wildlife.*"

Natural Enterprise's other work includes leading the Island Rivers Partnership, trying to curb invasive species, especially Himalayan Balsam, which harm our streams and rivers and the native wildlife, such as the water vole, that lives in their banks; supporting the County Show, the showcase of the Island's agricultural community and a platform for local businesses; and supporting the Newport to Freshwater long-distance cycleway, bridleway and footpath.

Gift to Nature (GTN) was created in 1997. Two were created in the UK, the other in the Lake District. Visitors to the Island were to pay a levy to be ploughed back into nature reserves. This worked well in the Lake District, but not well here. Graham got involved with GTN in the early 2000s. In 2016, the Isle of Wight Council was cash-strapped so GTN took over their reserves. Now GTN has 32 reserves across the Island. "*We encourage people to visit our sites and enjoy them*", said Graham, "*but it is a delicate balance between caring for the habitat for wildlife and allowing people open access.*"

He showed us a film of GTN's sites around the Island and some of the wild flowers, butterflies and dragonflies found there. There is a common factor to all these sites. Most are next to built-up areas and many are small but important. The largest reserve is Golden Hill Country Park at Freshwater.

These are the challenges:

- All sites are to remain free to access;
- Health and safety standards must be maintained at a high level;
- Isle of Wight Council sites have been subject to under-investment for a number of years;
- Sites are continually changing and need managing;
- Anti-social behaviour is increasing, in its various forms, and repairing the damage takes up half of GTN's two full-time rangers' time;
- Getting the finances – it costs about £110,000 a year to run the reserves.
- Try to invest in their sites by rotation.

Golden Hill Park, opened in 1970, affords wonderful views over the Solent and the Western Yar River, but it had long been neglected when Natural Enterprise added it to their GTN sites. The team managed the ponds, cleared the scrub, opened up the woodland, produced information boards and signage, and created a willow maze, the focal point of the park.

The Reaching Communities Project aims to get a wider range of people engaged with the natural environment. *“It’s amazing how most people living on the Island don’t get out into the countryside”* said Graham. There are 35 geocaches on their website to attract young people who are mobile phone savvy to explore their reserves. And feedback data shows that there are now both more and a wider range of people visiting their sites.

Natural Enterprise takes a positive approach, encouraging people to get out into the countryside and not feel inhibited or restricted. At Merstone Station, the team has created attractive leaflets with pictorial maps to show the cycle routes and footpaths in the area. At Blackgang Viewpoint, they have created attractive information boards.

How can people support us?

- Volunteer – work with the Green Gym. This allows the team to do bigger projects;
- Provide feedback via the website;
- Do fundraising;
- Give donations;
- Become a member of the GTN supporters’ scheme.

Unfortunately, the GTN shop in Holyrood Street, Newport was not financially viable so it had to be closed down. But GTN does receive financial support from town and parish councils.

Questions from the audience:

What is Natural Enterprise’s role in creating a walking, cycling and horse-riding route between Newport and Freshwater?

We have helped the Isle of Wight Council to bid for the £3million funding required and we have been working with landowners to access this route, although two landowners are not co-operating. From Newport, the route connects both north and south on the old railway track-bed between Cowes and Sandown. The money has to be spent by March 2026. Graham thinks that the project will go ahead. The planning application was to be submitted soon after he gave us this talk.

Do you have any forthcoming Projects?

Keith Marsden praised the hard work of the two rangers in creating information boards. Graham outlined two big projects for the coming autumn and winter: clearing scrub in Dickson’s Copse and scrub clearance and the removal of invasive plant species in Afton Marsh, one of their largest natural sites. Graham added that it will look terrible for the next two years.

Does NE have security of tenure on Council land?

Security for the many sites owned by the Council which it manages will not be taken away from them. The Council cannot afford to run these sites any more so unless they are sold for development, they are tied to NE. They have started to work with developers, but they do not comment on planning applications.

Do you have interactions with schools?

Graham said that they do. Young people seem to be connected with nature for their own wellbeing. It’s middle-aged people who are switched off.”

How much fundraising do you have to do?

Graham said that this was about fifty per cent. We hold various events, charge for car parking at two sites and receive grants from town and parish councils. Each year, we break even. Asked how the Lake District GTN group managed to finance their nature reserves from a tourist levy, but not the Island’s GTN, Graham replied that, despite their efforts, they did not get any support from the ferry companies or Visit Isle of Wight. The ferry companies have their own charities.

What were the reasons for the shop closure?

Graham explained that the shop made a loss of about £5,000 a year, but he accepted that because it was in the town centre, at the heart of the historic quarter, the rent and rates were high. It was staffed by a shop manager and volunteers, and the items for sale were a mix of bought and donated goods, including gifts,

clothing, books, cards and garden plants. Our members suggested holding pop-up events, taking the shop to communities, local shows and events, and approaching large retailers to ask for shop space there.

How accessible are sites?

There is a guide to each site on GTN's website and improving accessibility is now a priority. A path through Afton Marsh enables access for mobility scooters, prams and buggies.

Are water levels at Afton Marsh hindering work?

The water levels are higher than usual and the questioner asked whether that is the reason why management work hadn't been carried out there. Graham replied that the Environment Agency controls water courses and that NE is delighted at higher water levels, which keep the marsh functioning as it should be. That is part of the strategy.

We thanked Graham for his comprehensive coverage. Enthusiasm and respect for Natural Enterprise's work among our membership was evident from the larger than usual audience and their many questions. The number of nature reserves that it manages is extraordinary, considering the few staff it employs.

Maggie Nelmes

10th May Tour of Newport Minster led by Hannah Griffiths

Newport Minster had only just reopened after its last stage of renovation, the interior, when some thirty members of our society gathered outside for a special tour. Hannah Griffiths, our guide for the afternoon, is the Public Engagement Officer, serving the second year of a two-year contract. She has observed the transformation of the interior, talked with the architect, archaeologist and local company who carried out the work, and is now training volunteers as guides, as well as leading tours herself.

Hannah led us through the main doors into the interior, and the first thing we saw was the large open space with a pale stone floor, where the dark wooden pews had been. What a transformation! My impression was of a much brighter, warmer and more inviting space. Without the distraction of row upon row of pews, our eyes were drawn straight to the vibrant colours of the stained-glass panels in the great east window, to the choir stalls and altar, to the finely carved, roofed pulpit in the foreground.

We chose to sit down on rows of chairs, while Hannah talked about the history of the churches on this site, the renovations of the interior of this church, the burials unearthed in the process, and the new facilities.

St Thomas Church, the parish church of Newport, was dedicated a Minster in 2008. This is an honorary title, in recognition of the church's important role in Island and civic life.

The original chapel on this site was dedicated to St Thomas of Canterbury. It opened in 1175, just five years after Thomas a Beckett was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by four of King Henry II's knights, and two years after the Pope made him a saint. But several hundred years later, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and declared St Thomas of Canterbury a traitor. Rather than incur the wrath of the King, the church authorities decided to rededicate the church to another saint, Thomas the Apostle, one of Jesus's disciples, known as Doubting Thomas. When the crumbling church was rebuilt in 1854, it was dedicated to both Thomases. Prince Albert laid the foundation stone. Their statues can be found standing either side of the west door.

One of the Minster's highlights is the beautiful statue of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of King Charles I. When he was taken prisoner in Carisbrooke Castle, so was she. She died there of a respiratory infection, aged 14, and was buried under the floor of the medieval church. Her grave was discovered nearly 150 years later when another grave was being dug. During the building of the new church, Queen Victoria insisted on marking her burial site with a commemorative plaque. It was Victoria who paid for the marble statue of the princess and had The Chapel of Our Lady dedicated to her.

Queen Victoria also commissioned a marble bust of her late husband, Prince Albert, which hangs on a wall in the Chapel. But she was not pleased with the result, by an Italian sculptor, and she hardly ever visited this church thereafter. She much preferred St Mildred's, close to Osborne House, at Whippingham, which her beloved husband designed, and where she had a lavatory installed in a cottage she bought.

French stone was used to build the Victorian church and unfortunately it weathers easily. There was water ingress and other damage. The building was put on the At-Risk Register of historic buildings and it needed a huge injection of funding.

The pews not only took up all the space, but the step up was difficult for those with disabilities and the very elderly to access. And pews are uncomfortable to sit on for long, though it is said that they keep you from falling asleep during a long sermon! Hannah explained that the Minster needed to be a welcoming space for community activities, both to serve its parishioners and to pay for its upkeep.

The pews had had to be taken up, anyway, to replace the badly damaged floor and to install underfloor heating, and they simply weren't replaced. The old radiators on the walls had not worked well and the church was always cold and damp. Now there are stacks of chairs instead of pews, which match the stone floor and can be arranged at will to suit the needs of those taking part in each activity, whether it be for a church service, a concert or for the group of parents and toddlers, who were the first to book a regular slot after the Minster reopened. The new floor is made of stone from Germany, which contains marine fossils.

An attractive screen that was hidden from view near the west door now stands at the entrance to the Chapel.

All of the pews were sold or repurposed. Some were sold to private homes for novelty seating, both on the Island and on the mainland. The wood was used to make tables for the Minster. Sheds, the community-led creative movement, also used it to make tables. And artists used it to make picture frames.

Under the floor, several burials were found during these latest excavations. One was found in a badly-built brick structure, which the architect said was probably Victorian. The body was buried facing not towards, but away from Jerusalem. Why? Evidently, it was the custom for church ministers to be buried facing their congregation. This man has not yet been identified. The Archaeologist engaged for the renovation period was Dr Ruth Waller, formerly the head of the Island's archaeology team and now a consultant.

Near the west door there is a new kitchen on one side of the entrance and new toilets on the other. After her talk, Hannah left us to explore the building for a while, before inviting us to take afternoon tea at the tables and chairs set out in front of the kitchen.

We thanked Hannah for a most interesting and enjoyable talk.

Maggie Nemes

Saturday 15th June A Tour of Wilder Nunwell, led by Jamie Marsh of the Hants & IW Wildlife Trust

Six members and one well-behaved dog met Jamie Marsh at Nunwell Farm for a tour of the Wildlife Trust's recently-acquired land. Some fine old oak trees dot the landscape, and Nunwell House is hidden from view close by, nestling in a hollow and screened by trees at the foot of Brading Down. A strong wind was chasing fluffy white clouds across the sky as we set off along a track leading up the lower slope of the down.

Nunwell Home Farm was an old dairy farm, of which there are very few left on the Isle of Wight. In the 1980s, this tenant farm, belonging to the Oglander family estate, changed to arable, and the tenant only made it profitable by working the land - 345 acres on a 100-year lease - very hard. The soils were so intensively farmed that they contained high levels of nutrients, phosphorous and nitrates, and the soil structure was so damaged that it would only have lasted another forty to fifty years. No more fertilizer has been applied since that tenant left so the nutrient levels will have dropped and will continue to do so. Jamie knows this from experience of managing the Wildlife Trust's own farm, Duxmore, which it acquired several years before this land. Fertilizer is bad for the environment, as most of it goes straight into the water courses, polluting rivers, and into the air.

The new tenant farmers at Nunwell Home Farm, have fresh ideas. These two women are intent on improving the soil structure. They are using regenerative farming solutions, rearing rare-breed belted Galloway cattle crossed with Aberdeen Angus and pigs for meat, and Exmoor ponies. They are committed to higher animal welfare standards, letting the animals roam free and grow naturally on natural pasture. This takes longer and incurs greater costs than usual, so the meat, which they sell themselves, is more expensive, but of a higher nutritional value. Although I have eaten only plants for the past 42 years, due to animal welfare, health and environmental concerns, I recognize that while people still eat meat, this free-roaming

model of animal rearing is far better, on all three counts, than intensive farming indoors, in feedlots, the American model.



Jamie led us gradually uphill, through field after field of predominantly thistles, docks and ragwort, all in flower and attracting insect pollinators. Jamie assured us that greater diversity would come in time. This is a rewilding project, taking the land out of production for the benefit of wildlife in general, not for any rare species in particular. Already, it is attracting a lot of wild animals, which can sometimes be glimpsed hiding beneath tall thistles.

Ragwort has been demonised undeservedly for a long time by horse owners, but animals would have to eat very large quantities for the poison to kill them. It is an important nectar source for many species of insect, as it has a

long flowering period. Only the lighter seed is blown about by the wind, not the heavier, productive seed. For these reasons, ecologists' attitude to ragwort has changed in recent years and they no longer think it necessary or advisable to rip it up and burn it.

The hay produced on the Trust's meadows will be fed to the Home Farm's beef cattle. "We're going to put in more ponds and let hedgerows spread", said Jamie.

The number of crops grown on the Island has halved, and the number of farms has also halved, in recent decades. The old rotational farming system worked well for soil health and for wildlife. It produced a lot of good habitats for birds. But now, much of the land on the Island grows crops for the anaerobic digester at Arreton, its products spread on the land.

As we reached the Downs Road, we looked back to admire the panoramic view, from Portsmouth all the way round to Bembridge. We could hear and see skylarks rising above us. In this top field, we saw several species of thistle, fleabane, common vetch, woundwort, hogweed, docks, ragwort and various grasses in flower. Even though the soil here is clay, it should be crumbly, not the big hard lumps that Jamie picked up to show us. Yet, over time, earthworms and other creatures will loosen the soil.

In May 2022, a rare Corn Bunting was seen here. Jamie has a rewilding vision for this land – to graze bison on patches of open grassland on the chalk and woodland scrub.

We had to climb over a locked gate and walk a short distance beside the road to access the public footpath that borders the Trust's land. This took us gradually downhill through Eaglehead Copse, where Toothwort grows in spring. This is a narrow belt of deciduous woodland with an understory of Hazel. Jamie explained how Ash die-back disease, which has spread across the Island in recent years, does not kill Ash trees, but creates lesions which let in secondary disease, such as honey fungus, and this is what kills them. He thinks that up to ninety per cent of Ash trees will die. The best resistance will be in parkland trees; woodland trees are loaded with fungi. Ash trees are particularly good habitat for wildlife so he has not felled the trees at the back of the wood, well away from the path. The loss of ash trees will change the landscape.

We turned into Bloodstone Copse. The wood was named after a spring called Bloodstone Well, itself named for blood-red incrustations on the stones of its bed (A D Mills, *Place Names of the Isle of Wight*, 1966). The spring feeds a large pond. Mike Cotterill, a geologist who was on the walk, and who researched the name Bloodstone for me, also found mention of a similar alga found at an important Mesolithic site at Blick Mead, near Stonehenge. Francis Pryor in *Scenes from Prehistoric Life* (2021) describes how it was used from 9600 BP to 6700 BP and thinks that the alga that lives in the spring there and stains the stones would have made this a special site. Could Bloodstone (Copse) have been a special site for prehistoric people, too, Mike wonders.

We passed a hollow oak with dead branches. Oak holds on to dead branches, rather than shedding them, so there is no need to cut off the branches for safety reasons. But an old ash tree growing beside the path has had to have dead wood removed.

On the steep hillside above the wood, two hectares of chalk grassland are grazed by a flock of Hebridean sheep. They live and eventually die there, keeping the grass short for many species of wild plants to thrive.

We came to a large open area, where willow scrub is forming woodland regeneration. In winter, you can see hen harriers and other birds of prey hunting here. Pigs will make little ephemeral ponds in this heavy clay soil below the downs, an important water source for wildlife.

Emerging from the wood, we spotted the herd of Belted Galloway cattle, grazing in a field near the farm buildings. Very young calves were frolicking among the adults. Twelve kilometres of robust fencing is being erected to enable these animals to roam free. It must be a huge expense, but these pioneers of regenerative farming are dedicated to working with the environment and setting high welfare standards. They use a system known as mob grazing.

The following are extracts from an article in Farmers Weekly (4 August 2020) *A Guide to Mob Grazing Livestock*:

Mob grazing is an intensive rotational system that sees high stocking densities of livestock moved regularly (every one to three days). What are the benefits of mob grazing? Rather than continually grazing the pasture, allowing it to rest enables it to regenerate more quickly. In set-stocking systems, plant leaves can be eaten before they have the chance to produce sugars from photosynthesis and build up root reserves. However, with mob grazing, the plant is allowed to regrow and use photosynthesis to build deeper root reserves and help it deal with challenging weather. This helps boost resilience, improves soil structure and can help extend the grazing period. Storage of sugars in the roots build soil carbon and improve organic matter. The sugars leak out of the roots and help to feed the micro-organisms in the soil. It reduces worming requirements. Grazing tall grass reduces the risk of ingesting larvae, and the rest periods help to break the parasite cycle. However, animals should still be monitored using faecal egg counts.

We returned to the farmyard, where Jamie invited us to use the composted toilet. I expected it to look different from an ordinary toilet, but it didn't; it was a shiny new suite. The difference was beneath the surface. Someone remarked how clean it was.

We thanked Jamie for this fascinating and informative three-hour tour. The Wildlife Trust is making remarkable progress in acquiring land on the Island and restoring it for nature, or, in this case, just leaving nature to restore itself.

Maggie Nelmes

Friday 19th June

Newport Swift Walk

This was a walk for the general public. Seventeen people, plus five helpers in hi-vis, met at the bottom of Quay Street for an evening walk around Newport town centre to see Swifts. The walk was run jointly by the IWNHAS and the group 'Wight Swifts' and was held as part of the first Isle of Wight Biosphere Festival. It also coincided with the start of national Swift Awareness Week. IW Biosphere Festival Producer Martha Henson was among the group and took video footage. The route had been extended from that in July 2023 to include more sites and to give a better chance of seeing screaming parties. It was a perfect evening for Swift watching, being sunny with just a gentle breeze. As we stopped in Upper St James' Street to see the nest site in the side gable at McDonald's, the Swifts were still flying high in the sky. The first screaming parties were encountered around 8.30 pm in the St John's Church/Terrace Road area, where we saw 17 birds together, including a Swift flying out of an occupied nestbox. At the High Street, we stood on the pavement opposite the TUI travel agents shop, where at least two pairs nest in the peak of the gable. Several birds were flying above us along the road and after ten minutes or so a bird flew down lower, twisted and turned in front of us and then swooped up into the gap between the soffit and the wall on the left-hand side of the apex. About five minutes later, it flew out again. Most breeding birds were likely to have young a couple of weeks old so this would have been a feeding visit. We then walked along Post Office Lane to Lugley Street and stood outside the Travelodge. More birds were flying above us, and we saw a breeding bird fly into the open end of the wooden soffit at the front of the WP Recruitment building and out again around five minutes later. On the way back, a couple of younger, non-breeding birds were seen making several circuits up to and then away from the wall below the occupied nestbox in Quay Street.

Caroline Dudley

Looking at the Countryside



Thursday 11th January Newport

This walk on a very cold January day, must be the first in the Society's history where the only stretch of countryside occurred across a park! Newport was a deliberate creation - a medieval new town planned by the Lord of the Wight, Baldwin de Redvers about 1135. The medieval street plan still exists intact but there are no medieval buildings. The French burnt down the whole town in 1377 and such was the devastation that Newport did not recover prosperity for 500 years. Richard de Redvers, grandson of Baldwin gave a charter to the town about 1190 which included the bed of the Newport River as it was then called - a rare example where the Crown does not have any rights. Since 1912, Newport has been an inland harbour where access to the sea passes through another independent harbour, again a rare example. The only medieval building not destroyed by the French was the Church of St Thomas and that was demolished in 1857. The Church for over 700 years was a daughter church of St Mary's Carisbrooke and even though a prominent Town Church, had no parish nor churchyard. The harbour was until living memory a hive of industrial activity, increased by the coming of the railways. The only remnant of the industry apart from some converted warehouses, rests in a painted sign on a house, now partly obliterated stating "Coal Wharf" and the Medina Railway pub, the solitary building left in what was the station yard. The walk looked at the oldest buildings in the town dating from the early 17th century, the former Sun Inn, and the old Grammar School (in disgraceful condition) briefly acting as a Royal palace in November 1648. It proceeded past an obscure building with an Edward VIII Royal dedication to Castlehold, once an enclave of the Castle in the town. The beast, wool, cheese and butter markets were crossed, the wool market being also the site of the medieval fair, finally abolished in 1872 as it disrupted church services. Church Litten park, firstly an archery butt, then a plague burial ground produced 2 different tombstones - the first to John Hamilton Reynolds inscribed "The Friend of Keats" which would have mortified Reynolds as he felt he was a better poet, and the second the obsequious obelisk to Valentine Gray, the climbing boy. The walk concluded at the Guild Hall, the work of John Nash.

John Matthews

Wednesday 27th March Brading

We began the walk at East Ashey lane, the public right of way B25 was very wet and muddy and so I led the group along the field edge to join path B24, where we crossed through some of the rewilding land where we have had some pigs, provided by our neighbours the Nunwell Home Farm, who are a regenerative farming startup business who's aim is to provide IOW communities with nutrient dense, high welfare meat and eggs. The pigs have created large areas of disturbed ground, reversing impacts of soil compaction caused by previous agriculture and helping to develop a diverse habitat to benefit invertebrates, birds and flowering plants. We saw how the vegetation has changed over the last 2 years and there are lots of plants often considered as "weeds" but which provide good sources of nectar and pollen for a large part of the year and how these native species are all part of the ecosystem. We also saw how there is some more woody and scrubby vegetation developing in some areas which will provide cover for birds to nest and feed whilst adding to the diversity of the landscape. Often it is these transitional habitats where the most biodiversity can be found and we must remember that the natural world is dynamic and we should embrace a constantly shifting natural environment.

We then followed bridleway B26 past Nunwell farm and up onto West Down. Here we saw the contrast between the area of continued commercial agriculture where there was substantial run off of rainwater and soil due to the bare ground which was causing a gully to be eroded on the right of way and the rewilding land where runoff was much less, not causing erosion and ran clear as opposed to muddy. On the higher ground, had it not been raining heavily at this point, we would usually find skylarks singing, meadow pipits

and linnets flitting through the rough, open habitats and perhaps a kestrel or short eared owl hunting for small mammals. Sadly, all we saw were rainclouds and all we heard were raindrops on waterproof jackets!

We continued the return leg of the walk following footpaths R26 and B24 through Eaglehead and Bloodstone Copses where we saw some early spring flowers – Ramsons, Moschatel, Wood Anemone, Toothwort, Violets and the first Bluebells beginning to unfurl. We saw some examples of trees impacted by Ash Dieback Disease and discussed how we manage such issues. We also saw some examples of coppicing, both recent and from previous years and how the ground flora differs and how the structure of the woodland changes. We again touched on the dynamic nature of our natural world and how changes can be seen with climate change.

By the time we returned to our vehicles the rain had eased off and there was some time for a short discussion about rewilding principles and how we do that in practice and how it differs from traditional habitat conservation. Despite the weather, a good time was had by all attendees.

Emma Hunt, Reserves Officer, Hants & IW Wildlife Trust

Wednesday 17th April

Merstone

Ten people met at the old station for the Merstone Meander. Merstone junction was once important. The bank of trees was planted to shield travellers from the prevailing wind. The banks of the old station were covered with a fine display of cowslips and the fruit trees in the community orchard were in full blossom. We stopped at the chapel in Chapel Lane feeling sad to see it falling into decay from neglect. Jeff made us welcome on our arrival at the bike place at Perreton farm, where some enjoyed tea and coffee and a nice rest.

At Heasley we looked at the report in our February bulletin with the delightful pictures of the dormice. Anthony Roberts has had amazing success with them in recent years. Our return took us via Stickwoth Hall and Redway, then south for a short distance on East Lane. Spring was all around, newborn calves, birdsong, butterflies and spring flowers. On our return we consulted fungi books and the mushrooms we found were St George's mushrooms. These appear in spring around Saint George's day. Our walk was just a few days before 23rd of April.

Jill Green

Saturday 18th May

Fairlee

Eighteen members enjoyed a fascinating visit to the Isle of Wight collection of postal memorabilia at Fairlee. Arthur Reeder started his collection in 1994 after finding a post box in a skip in North Wales. He carried on collecting for years from all over the British Isles, until moving to the Isle of Wight in 2002. He had hoped to start a tourist attraction but the IW Council would not give permission, so it cannot be called a museum, simply a private collection which now totals over 250 post boxes. The oldest is the same type as the one on Carisbrooke Mall, dating from 1857, the newest 2019. There is a genuine hexagonal pillar box called a Penfold, after the designer, John Penfold, the most iconic of all pillar boxes, also four oval London pillar boxes and an Edward V111. Most are cast iron, some wooden, steel and even plastic. There are some foreign boxes and several lovely green boxes from the Republic of Ireland. After the talk, and time to browse the collection, we wandered around the grounds and Arthur showed us an Irish oak which had red, white and green leaves and in the old orchard an apple tree, which bears a great crop of apples every autumn but has an oak growing out of it. Had we been there earlier we might have seen the red squirrels that visit frequently. We were then kindly invited indoors for tea or coffee and biscuits, a lovely end to an interesting morning.



Photos: Mike Cotterill

Mary Edmunds

Wednesday 12th June

St Lawrence

Although heavy rain was forecast that morning, six intrepid walkers set out on a walk to explore the village of St Lawrence-in-the-Undercliff and not a drop of rain fell.

We began with a tour of Pelham Wood, a mixed deciduous woodland nature reserve, which was managed for over twenty years by Wight Nature Fund (WNF). When that volunteer-run local organisation had to be wound up in 2021, Gift to Nature took over the small woodland reserve. Mary Edmunds, Looking at the Countryside's section leader, took part in our walk and explained how she set up Wight Nature Fund some thirty-five years ago with several other members of the Isle of Wight Friends of the Earth Group. They took on the management of more and more pieces of land over the years, land which protected both wildlife and local communities from unsuitable development, especially urban sprawl. Some of these pieces of land are publicly owned, belonging to the Isle of Wight Council's portfolio, and were leased to WNF for twenty-five years.

Volunteers managed the reserves, and I was a volunteer at Pelham Wood, charged with monitoring it for public safety at regular intervals and reporting back to the WNF committee. This included examining the paths, the rustic seats, the many steps, and the bridge and boardwalk for hazards. I learned how to examine trees for signs of disease, especially ash die-back, and was able to monitor the health of trees bordering the public and permissive paths through the reserve, and especially those bordering the main road and housing estate. In the past few years, since WNF folded, many of the ash trees in Pelham Wood have been felled by the Council, as ash die-back disease took its toll. It is the Council's responsibility to undertake necessary tree work and bear the financial cost.



We crossed the main road to the site of St Lawrence Well, once fed by a spring that originates in Pelham Wood. The water has changed course over the years and now comes gushing out of the ground some yards away. The well is protected by a wellhouse, and the present structure was erected by the First Earl of Yarborough in the early nineteenth century. It stood beside the road through the Undercliff, but the incline there being too steep for carriages, the road was diverted in 1864. It now

stands on the driveway to the most attractive Marine Villa. St Lawrence was a third century AD Roman martyr.

Back on the main road, The Undercliff Drive, we passed Spring Cottage, once an inn notorious for the smuggling activities that allegedly went on there. It was called The Duck because rumours have it that a duck fell into a hole in the ground high up on the downs and emerged from the spring at the roadside here.

We followed Seven Sisters Road as it wound its way up the hillside, passing many attractive cottages, at the heart of the old village. Beside the road, we found one of the late nineteenth century water hydrants, placed there some years ago by the now-disbanded Undercliff Society and in need of some attention. These water pumps once dotted the village, providing the inhabitants with clean drinking water. This life-saving system was possible, due largely to the generosity of William Spindler of Old Park, a German chemist who made his money from inventing indigo dye in Berlin. There was a disease epidemic at Whitwell in the late nineteenth century, caused by contaminated water so bringing clean spring water to the villages was vital. Spindler helped finance the first piped water to both St Lawrence and Whitwell. Old Park is a large Gothic style house at Binnel Bay. Spindler was a philanthropist who also paid St Lawrence men to plant a million trees in the Undercliff to help stabilise the land. He also built a harbour at Binnel Bay, fragments of which remain, and a windmill.

We visited St Lawrence Old Church, tiny and simple, but beautiful. It is unusual for a village to have two churches, but the wealthy Victorians who moved to both St Lawrence and Bonchurch decided to keep the old churches and build themselves new and much larger ones. They did not decommission the old ones, and neither have generations of Christian villagers since.

As we walked down the footpath from the church to the Undercliff Drive, we passed a Victorian villa with a tower, hidden behind the hedge. This was a hotel some twenty or so years ago, where forty Customs men stayed after receiving a tip-off that a smuggling operation was about to happen. They took it in turns to walk along the coastal footpath in pairs and they surveyed the sea from the tower. The former hotel owner told me how she and her husband became suspicious and asked what these men were doing. By coincidence, some of the motley crew recruited in the Caribbean were staying next-door to the hotel in self-catering accommodation. The mastermind was a fifty-something year-old 'businessman' from Southampton who had bought the secluded house in Orchard Bay only months earlier. While he and his team waited there, a large quantity of cocaine was delivered to the wrong place – Woody Bay, a mile away. The customs men smashed down the door and arrested the men. They rounded up all those who delivered the drugs, except one, a Frenchman who escaped into Pelham Wood and was found by a local couple, who I met by chance. They told me how they heard about the escape and suspected that this was the person, so they asked him a question and he replied in a French accent. They alerted HM Customs & Excise and they had him arrested. What a story! The County Press published it in full.

We arrived at the Victorian church, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott and built in 1876. It is Grade 11 listed and celebrated for its stained-glass windows, rescued from the chapel at The Royal Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, after it closed down. It stood from the 1860s to the 1960s on what is now the nearby Botanic Garden's car park. All of the single panels were painted by the three most famous pre-Raphaelite artists. The three depicting saints are by Sir William Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown, and in the light box on the north aisle wall there are two panels by William Morris and one by Ford Madox Brown, depicting scenes of Jesus healing and raising people from the dead, from New Testament stories. They all date from about 1873. The highlight for me is the stunning west window by Sir William Reynolds-Stephens (1892), with its many panels depicting angels playing musical instruments, flying above hospital staff tending very ill patients. This window is dedicated to Dr George James Shaw, doctor at the Royal National Hospital for many years. We also loved one of the church's own windows, The Sower by Walter Tower from 1897.

Photo: Michele van Buren

Maggie Nelmes

Archaeology

Saturday 24th February Building The Roman Aqueducts

Some 15 months after his previous talk about the Piscina Mirabilis, about 30 members gathered to hear David Millar speak about Roman aqueducts, described by him as 'symbols of their age'. Built between the

4th century BCE and the 4th century CE, there were over 200 aqueducts serving towns and cities across the empire. The Aqua Vergine still functions, feeding the famous Trevi fountain in Rome. There were about 50 examples in Britain although these were mostly small, built to serve mines, forts and farms.

David has spent over 5 years researching this subject, applying his background in engineering and project management to his explorations of various sites and studies of both ancient sources and modern research. The ancient sources are scanty: Vitruvius' architectural handbook is not always reliable and other texts have not survived as they would not have been valued by the monks who preserved and copied many of the Latin texts during the middle ages.

However, the basic engineering principles have not changed, water still follows the same 'rules of nature' and David has considered the evidence in the light of what he knows is technically possible

The Romans developed a strong bathing culture and thus a demand for a constant water supply to population centres and military bases; smaller settlements with sites such as villas sometimes received a water supply incidentally. The flow was constant, storage was rare, taps were non-existent or rudimentary and unused water ran to waste, perhaps cleaning sewers as part of the drainage system.

David outlined the enormity of the projects, firstly the planning and preparation that was required, from finding a suitable source to planning a route by which water could be transported at a gradient of about 3% to maintain optimal flow. This involved careful surveying and David discussed some of the tools that would be used.

The channel, or 'specus' might be buried just beneath the surface or be above ground where it would be covered with slabs or vaulting to avoid contamination. To deal with varied topography there was significant use of embankments, tunnelling and aqueducts plus other ingenious solutions such as dropshafts, cascades and inverted siphons. Most of us are aware of the stunning aqueducts such as the Pont Du Gard in France or the one in Segovia. Pot-holers who explore man-made features are known as 'speleologists' and David has worked with the Cocceius group in Italy who have helped with his research.

It could take 10 to 15 years to complete a project and the longest known, serving Constantinople, was over 400km long. Who paid for all this? Sometimes the emperor, sometimes local communities or important citizens. Project management must have been impressive from the planning through the sourcing of materials and labour to the ongoing maintenance. Whereas the labourers for an Egyptian pyramid could be housed in a nearby village, the site for the aqueduct was constantly on the move with attendant logistical problems. Expertise might come from the military or across the empire such as Greek engineers and surveyors. By the end of the 1st century CE there were specialist aqueduct construction and management teams.

This was a fascinating talk giving detailed insights into the scale of the resources and administration that were required to create infrastructure across the Roman Empire.

Helen Jackson

Saturday 20 April

Archaeology of Isle of Wight Woodlands.

Vicky Basford was faced with a huge challenge when the idiosyncrasies of Microsoft prevented her from sharing her planned presentation. She kept calm and carried on, managing to use slides from a previous talk on this subject in 2017 albeit without all her recent additions and references to improvements in technology such as Lidar.

Vicky began by pointing out that woodland can help archaeology survive, for example by saving features from ploughing, but can also cause damage. The archaeology often predates the woodland, for example barrows, boundaries and field systems. In other cases it is related to the woodland, such as wood boundaries, saw-pits, charcoal platforms.

She then shared examples of various sites across the Island. These included:

- Bronze Age barrows in Brighstone Forest. In 2001 Frank Basford confirmed there were 28 scheduled barrows in the forest but probably several others.
- Field systems in Brighstone Forest, probably Iron Age or Romano British.
- Medieval strip lynchets in Kelly's Copse, Brading.
- Boundary bank on the east side of Borthwood copse. This is probably Saxon but was then utilised as a medieval parish boundary.

- Hollow way in Borthwood Copse linking the old manorial farms of Alverstone and Cheverton. One would not expect to find a hollow way in enclosed woodland so it probably predates the wood.

Vicky explained that in medieval times there were 2 systems of woodland management – woodland pasture and enclosed. By the time of the Domesday Book woodland was a limited resource so would be enclosed to denote private ownership and to protect it from foraging animals. Coppicing is evidence of enclosure as it was only possible where animals were prevented from eating new growth. In open wood pasture pollarding would be used as the new growth was then out of reach of animals. Banks, in particular their shape, can be an indicator of age.

Recently Vicky and Frank have been surveying Fattening Park Copse and Vicky had planned to show us photos of features they have noted there. She is, however, working on a paper for Wight Studies, which will include her more recent research.

Helen Jackson

Archaeology Activities

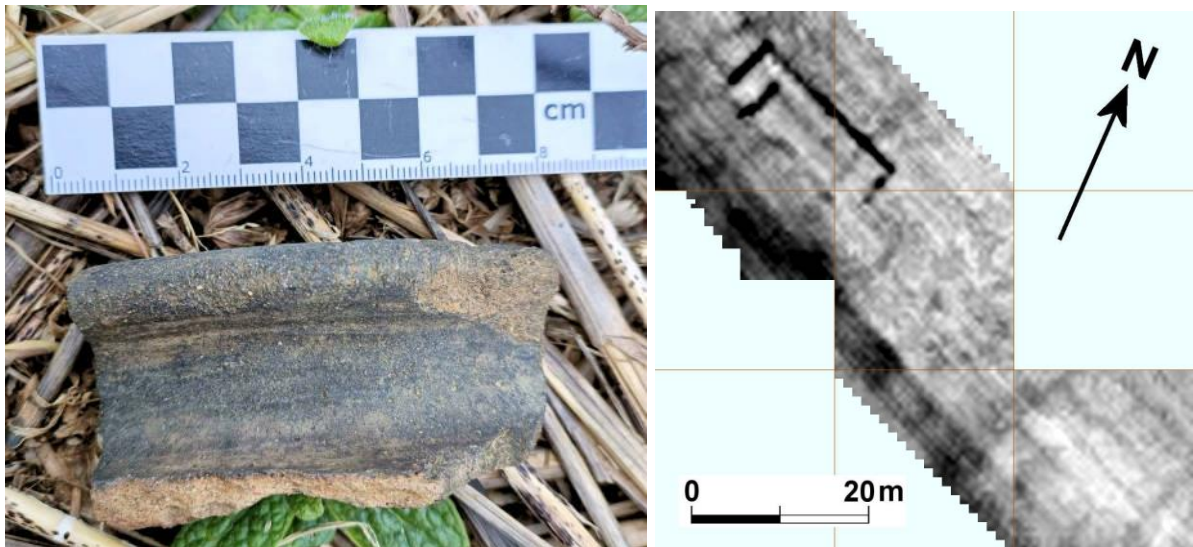
When the weather has allowed us to, we have continued work on the Mottistone estate, including fieldwalking and geophysics. One field has proved to be particularly interesting. We have found various sherds of Romano-British pottery, including Vectis and Black-burnished ware. Our metal detectorists have also found a broad scatter of highly-corroded Roman coins, which has been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme. These discoveries are particularly intriguing as the site is not far from the Romano-British site at Sudmoor described by Hooke in the Proceedings 1951.

We carried out a geophysical survey (Gradiometry and Resistance) on an area of the field where most finds have been made. The survey results show alignments that could be indicative of a rectangular building. We are planning to put in test pits to investigate these alignments with the hope of identifying a building and determining a date for it.

Another activity has been to visit the Bronze Age barrows on top of Mottistone Down to record their condition. Although some of the barrows are scheduled, none of them are protected from both natural or human erosion. Our work should inform any future plans for their long-term protection and survival.

Having ceased work on Longstone Cottage for the winter it was necessary to protect the bread oven from the risk of frost damage. Normally a breathable membrane such as Terram is laid to protect archaeological sites, but we could not justify the expense for a small area for short-term cover. The National Trust came up with an ingenious solution which was approved by their archaeologist. A pile of Jacob sheep fleeces was delivered to the site and a small team spread these over the masonry, leaving a scatter of loose wool that was no doubt appreciated by the birds at nest-building time.

In May we returned to the cottage and removed the fleeces. We cleared some more of the debris inside to try and answer outstanding questions. We discovered the original floor surface comprised slabs of shell-rich limestone taken directly from the local beach. These were laid ‘crazy-paving’ style directly onto the sandy subsoil. It is fascinating to see how locally found materials were put to use as practical building solutions. We had hoped for evidence of a staircase, but we were unable to reach a clear conclusion. It was interesting, but not surprising, to see the extent to which nature was reclaiming the site, with the nettles and brambles growing strongly and a family of voles becoming the latest residents inside the cottage. It is unlikely that we will carry out any further investigations at the cottage.



Top left: bb1 type pottery of Romano-British date; Top right: Results of the geophysical resistance survey; Bottom left: Covering the cottage bread oven with fleece; Bottom right: The original cottage floor

Helen Jackson and Dave Staughton

Ornithology



Sunday 21st January

St Helen's

Six members met at the bottom of Latimer Road for a walk led by Jackie Hart on an overcast morning accompanied by a blustery wind. The meeting got off to a great start with a Kingfisher seen in flight at St Helens Mill Pond. Among the other species seen included five Mediterranean Gulls, excellent close views of three, out of an overall total of five, Great Crested Grebe in the harbour where there was also approximately 200 Dunlin busily feeding on the exposed mud along with other waders. The walk along the footpath to Bembridge Lagoons resulted in views of two Marsh Harrier on Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve, along with the grazing flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese while approximately 110 Lapwing were seen flying over the marsh. Passerines were in short supply, the windy conditions resulting in most of them hunkered down. A small mixed tit flock containing Blue Tit, Great Tit and 4 Long-tailed Tit was seen. 11 Tufted Duck were in the large pond by Harbour Farm, 9 male and 2 female.



In total, 39 species were recorded despite the blustery conditions: Coot, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Curlew, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Great Black Backed Gull, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Canada Goose, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Marsh Harrier, Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Woodpigeon, Robin, Blackbird, Wren, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long Tailed Tit, Chaffinch, Little Egret, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Mallard, Teal, Gadwall and Tufted Duck.

Great Crested Grebe photo: Jim Baldwin

Jim Baldwin

Sunday 11th February

Medina Estuary

Ten members and two prospective new members met at the Island Harbour car park for a walk from Binfield to the Folly Inn, led by Jim Baldwin. Despite a brief shower at the start of the meeting, accompanied by a chilly wind, we set off on the footpath to the Folly. However, a combination of the recent rainfall and an above average spring tide forced a rethink. During this time, we were treated to the sight of approximately 200 Brent Geese flying to the field in front of where we were stood while some sunshine enticed a singing Skylark into the sky. We retraced our steps and opted for the footpath to Newport. In the wooded area, we had a brief glimpse of a male Bullfinch and a Goldcrest. On the way back, the footpath opposite the decaying Ryde Queen was submerged by the increasing high tide resulting, unfortunately, in wet feet for those who were not wearing wellies. Overall, an enjoyable morning.

In total, 32 species were recorded despite the blustery conditions: Canada Goose, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Cormorant, Mallard, Teal, Shelduck, Moorhen, Coot, Little Egret, Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Pied Wagtail, Goldfinch, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Kestrel, Peregrine, Buzzard, Skylark, Rock Pipit, Robin, Woodpigeon, Blue Tit, Wren, Goldcrest, Bullfinch, Stonechat and Long-tailed Tit.

Jim Baldwin

Sunday 21st April

Culver Down

Five members met on a breezy, bright, cool morning. We took our usual route. First thing we noted was the Hebridean sheep contained within an electrified fence browsing on the vegetation. It was notable that although the Skylark were singing no Meadow Pipit were seen or heard during the morning compared with last year. Stonechat were around in force with at least 4 pairs spotted and two Peregrine were seen on several occasions also two Ravens. Later three Buzzard were flying lazily in the thermals. In the bushes Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chaffinch and Chiffchaff also some Goldfinch. Also, Linnet, Dunnock, Blackbird, Magpie, a Pheasant and Green Woodpecker were heard from time to time. Herring Gull were flying over and along the cliff edge and eventually a Woodpigeon put in an appearance. In all 22 species were seen during the morning.

Jackie Hart

Saturday 11th May

Laundry Lane, Brading RSPB Reserve

Nine members met on a lovely, sunny and warm morning. Unfortunately, the meeting had to be curtailed but before then we had a good selection of birds. At the first gate overlooking the marsh we had excellent close views of two Egyptian Geese and, of course, the ever-present Canada Geese some with goslings. Two White Tailed Eagles were perched in the dead tree with the nesting platform. Whilst we were watching one flew over the extensive reeds hotly pursued by Marsh Harriers and corvids. I had hoped to get nearer to the nest platform tree, but we never got that far. Buzzard also was around. We could hear several warblers: Reed, Cetti's, Blackcap, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff. The 'triangular' field had a couple of Grey Herons, two Shelduck, a number of Shoveler and a few Gadwall, pair of Tufted Duck, Coot, Mallard and Lapwing. A few Cormorant were nesting in the trees along the river. A couple of Swallow flew by and we heard a number of passerines: Skylark, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Wren, Long Tailed Tit, Blue Tit and Great Tit as well as Jackdaw, Crow, Rook, Blackbird, Magpie, Dunnock and Woodpigeon. In all 35 species were noted.

Jackie Hart

Sunday 9th June

Alverstone Mead

Eight members of IWNHAS joined Dave Fairlamb of Natural Links for an Ornithology Group outing to Alverstone Mead on 9 June. From the onset we were treated to fine birdsong, with Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Song Thrushes heard from the car parking area. As we began to walk west along the cycle track, other songsters joined the chorus with Common Whitethroats, Wrens, Blackbirds and Dunnocks in the scrub and both Cetti's Warblers and Reed Warblers in the reedbeds.



Song Thrush



Reed Warbler

Overhead, Buzzards soared on the rising thermals and Herring Gulls drifted by. A brood of Mallards swam past close to the track, joined by a juvenile Moorhen bringing up the rear. Several male Banded Demoiselles were on the wing and thankfully a few rested on nearby reed leaves, giving us the chance for fine views of their iridescent colours. Further along the track we encountered Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Greenfinch.



Greenfinch



Banded Demoiselle

We returned back east via the woodland path and had 2 Great Spotted Woodpeckers on entering the wood. The resident Blue Tits, Great Tits and Robins were all around the 'feeding bench' and we saw a red squirrel

in trees nearby and a young rabbit, obviously feeding on the path right beside us all. A Jay was in full view as we crossed the field back to the cycle track and Common Blue Damselflies and Speckled Woods were on the wing as we approached the end of the walk.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Speckled Wood

Dave Fairlamb

Friday 14th June

Mottistone Common

Teresa kindly agreed to lead this walk for Jim Baldwin. We went ahead with the Nightjar walk in spite of the wet and windy weather and competing with Germany v Scotland in the Euros. An intrepid band of me, my husband Steve, Sheena & Will Bridger and Mark Larter donned our waterproofs and warm clothes and trekked up the path. We were delighted to see a cluster of Bee Orchids on the ascent. As we reached the start of “nightjar alley” the heavens opened and we took cover under the trees. It was just a short burst so we carried on up to the bench marking the end of the walk hearing only a brief churring and the ‘coo-lik’ flight call but no sighting. As we turned for our return leg, we finally saw a single male Nightjar flying silently over the trees. Not really a night for insects or insect-hunting birds. We were however treated to a bat show as up to 4 bats (most likely Pipistrelle) gave an acrobatic display over our heads.

Teresa Tearle

Botany Meetings



Saturday 27th January

Identifying trees by Winter Twigs in Northwood Park

14 members gathered at Northwood Park on Saturday 27th January for a walk around the park attempting to identify trees and shrubs by winter twigs. We were so lucky that the weather was reasonably kind to us, no wind and not really cold.

It is possible to identify almost any plant by winter twigs if you know their characteristics and this has been made easier by the 2018 publication of the Field Guide to Winter Twigs by John Poland. The same year a much larger publication Identification of Trees and Shrubs using Winter Buds and Twigs by Bernd Schulz was published. This large book (not pocket sized) enables almost any woody plant native or non-native to be identified including most garden tree and shrubs.

Dave started the afternoon by outlining the main features of a woody twig, using Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) as the classic example. Features readily visible are terminal bud, lateral buds, lenticels, leaf scars, bud scales and dwarf shoots. We then commenced our tour of the park using the excellent leaflet produced by Tina Whitmore as part of the Histree Trail project. We started by a magnificent London Plane

(*Platanus x acerifolia*) with its distinctive peeling bark. This tree is thought to be the tallest London Plane in Cowes.

We moved onto some more recently planted Cherries, including a Weeping one. These were easily identified by their clusters of terminal buds and distinctive horizontal lenticels. Colin Pope pointed out the variety of lichens that could be seen on the bark of the Cherries.

Our next stop was the churchyard where we encountered the first of several fine specimens of *Quercus canariensis* (labelled in the park by the synonym of *Quercus mirbeckii*). The specimens of Mirbecks Oak in Northwood Park are truly magnificent. Some acorns of this semi evergreen species were thought to be given to Queen Victoria as a gift from Louis Phillppe the last King of France. We all marvelled at the size of this tree, with its vast canopy measuring 35 metres across.

The group then continued around the park, there was much to look at including 3 species of Cedar (*C. libani*, *C. deodara* and *C. atlantica*). Discussion took place as to how to identify these species by looking looking at the overall form of the trees, as well as their evergreen needles which are borne on clusters on stout woody pegs.

Further highlights of the afternoon included some fine Cork Oaks (*Quercus suber*) with their deep, fissured barks. This evergreen species, native to Spain and Portugal is grown commercially for the cork which is harvested every 10 years. The use of synthetic cork now means this old tradition of cork harvesting is under threat. Another highlight was a huge Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) thought to be the largest on the Island. Turkey Oak is very easy to identify with its whiskery hairy buds and narrower leaves. Just as we were leaving the park, some of us spotted a rather nice *Eucalyptus* sp., with a wonderful peeling white bark that hung down in long strips. Some discussion took place regarding the fact that in the wild this bark would drop to the ground and provide tinder to help seed germination and thus ensure the regeneration of the species.

We observed many other species too numerous to mention here and came to the conclusion that Northwood Park is an excellent place to visit at any time of year.



Impressive trees in Northwood Park *Left: Mirbecks Oak Right: A London Plane.* Photos: Dave Trevan

Dave and Hazel Trevan

Saturday 13th April

Beech Copse, Godshill

17 members met in Godshill for the first Botany meeting of the year. Beech Copse had not been botanized for many years, although it has been visited by the Fungi Group. Colin Pope had found a letter which stated that the last time Beech Copse was botanically recorded was in 1940 and members heard Air Raid Sirens sounding! Our only hurdle to overcome this time was the excessive amount of mud on the path leading up to the wood, not helped by heavy rain earlier in the week. Members had been warned to wear suitable footwear. The weather was pleasantly warm and sunny. To avoid the mud, paths had been made through bramble patches in some places.

Although most of our recording took place in the woods, several notable species were seen on the walk down, the first being a magnificent specimen of the Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) that was in full flower.

Even from a distance it was possible to see the horizontal rows of raised lenticels that are a feature of Cherries. Also, in this area there was a large conifer, planted at some time ago, most certainly a Spruce or *Picea*, and possibly Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*). Some of the interesting woodland species started to appear here including Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), a delicate perennial with curious flowers that give it the common name of Town Hall Clock.

Once we entered the wood, we followed a footpath to the right where a series of wooden steps made the haul up to the top much easier and less muddy. Amongst the many species we recorded, interest was provided by Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Celandines (*Ficaria verna*), Red Campion (*Silene dioica*), Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) and Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*). Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) was present all over the woods with its beautiful pale lilac blue flowers. Nick Aston identified a subspecies of Ivy Leaved Speedwell, *Veronica hederifolia* subsp. *lucorum*. Also, some good stands of Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*). Ferns observed included Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) and the Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*).

The area around the top path was noticeably drier, and many young Foxglove plants could be seen. Colin Pope found some bright green beetles. Hazel Trevan had also seen these earlier in the week. We think they are Flea Beetles. A lovely stand of Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*) was seen close by.

Some members wandered through the wood and onto the path that leads to Fremantle Gate. We were delighted to observe a Red Squirrel foraging on the ground. Lovely views of Culver Cliff could be seen. Our meeting continued back through the glade of Beech Trees (*Fagus sylvatica*). On some fallen timber we saw we saw some nice patches of the moss *Mnium hornum*, Horn Calcareous Moss. We walked past some Red Currants (*Ribes rubrum*) on our way back to the muddy path that led us back to Godshill. A total of 64 species were recorded.

Dave and Hazel Trevan

Saturday 27th April

St Helen's Duver

17 members met at the National Trust carpark on what had become a typically cold, grey and damp April day. We started off, crouched on the ground, around a patch of typical St Helen's Duver grassland. We could see that it was full of tiny plants that really required a hand lens or magnifying glass to admire. There was Buckshorn Plantain, Autumn Squill, Bulbous Meadow-grass, Sheep's Sorrel, Sand Sedge, Early Hair grass and Parsley Piert. Reference to herb gatherers. We then looked at some rather larger plants: Sea Buckthorn, Spring Beauty and Dove's foot Cranesbill. Unfortunately, this year the clovers and sand dune grasses were rather late and not possible to clearly demonstrate. Indeed, many of the flowers we saw were tiny. Particularly impressive was the huge abundance of Smooth Cat's ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*) a nationally scarce plant of sandy grasslands. Mostly vegetative but we were surprised to find a few in flower with open blooms (they generally shut around midday.)

We walked to the headland at the southern end of the site, stopping to look at a range of specialised sand dune plants. These included Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*) and Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*). However, we were particularly struck by the effect that exceptionally high spring tides had had. Ian Ridett, who accompanied us, explained that large areas of scrub and grassland had been burnt off by the salt water and the National Trust rangers were due to embark on any extensive programme of dead scrub removal, mostly Bramble and Blackthorn. We recorded 60 species.



Left: Examining tiny flowers on St Helen's Duver Right: Birdsfoot, (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), one of the minute but beautiful plants. Photos: Mike Cotterill

Colin Pope

Sunday 12th May

St Helens Green

The Green occupies a large area in the centre of St Helens and is valued by the community as an open space. During our meeting, we produced plant lists in four areas to help inform the Parish Council of the botanical interest that is present and to inform future decisions about how they manage the area. Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) was found in each of the areas we examined and was particularly noticeable in the vicinity of the cricket field, although not flowering as the grass is regularly mown here.

A number of springs run across the area and wet flushes can be seen which give rise to areas where plants characteristic of damper soils, such as rushes, can be seen. We identified the greatest number of plants on the West Green, including lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), lady's-smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) and corky-fruited water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*).

Anne Marston

Sunday 23rd June

Wolverton marsh, Shorwell

It was a shame that our small party only numbered eight members as it was a special treat to visit the wonderful Wolverton marsh at Shorwell. Fine, sunny weather added to the experience. We were delighted to welcome Eric Clement to his first meeting of the year and he was in fine form having recently undergone a very successful cataract operation. When we reached the herb-rich fen everyone was entranced. The marshy grassland was peppered with Southern Marsh Orchids, Ragged Robins, Fen Bedstraw and Tufted Forget-me-not amongst many other species. A particular delight was to see the abundance of low-growing Marsh Cinquefoil. Habitats such as this have become increasingly rare in today's countryside, particularly outside of nature reserves, and this one was well managed by cattle grazing outside the flowering season. We continued the walk around Wolverton marsh returning by the boardwalk through alder carr woodland.

Colin Pope

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTES

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Deaths

We regret to announce the following death:

Toni Goodley

SOCIETY OFFICERS:-

President Dr Vivian Roberts, Haseley Manor, Arreton, IoW PO33 3AN

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

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Entomology meeting, Bembridge lagoons *Photos: Mike Cotterill*



Flint knapping demonstration, Brighstone Village Hall; Presentation to Helen Jackson for leading the Archaeological Section for many years. *Photos: Mike Cotterill*

NEXT BULLETIN

Please send any items for inclusion in the next Bulletin, and Reports of any Meetings
for 1st July 2024 to 31st December 2024 to:

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

The closing date for acceptance of items and reports will be 8th January 2025

Bulletin Editor: Colin Pope - colinrpope@gmail.com



Wolverton marsh, Shorwell, visited by the Botany group on 23rd June with Southern Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*), Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa*). Photo Colin Pope



Naturalised plants: A fine show of Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*) on a garden wall at Rookley and Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) growing epiphytically on a Canary Island Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) in Ventnor. *Photos: Dave Trevan*

